



# STATE TAX COMMISSION OF MISSOURI

LAURANCE M. HOWE,	)	
	)	
Complainant(s),	)	
	)	Appeal No. 23-110155
v.	)	Parcel No. 22M640295
	)	
JAKE ZIMMERMAN, ASSESSOR,	)	
ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MISSOURI,	)	
	)	
Respondent.	)	

## DECISION AND ORDER

Laurance M. Howe (Complainant) appealed the St. Louis County Board of Equalization's (BOE) decision finding the true value in money (TVM) of the subject property on January 1, 2023, was \$573,000. Complainant alleges overvaluation and proposes that the TVM of the subject as of that date was \$475,000.<sup>1</sup> The BOE decision is affirmed. The TVM of the subject property on January 1, 2023, was \$573,000.

The evidentiary hearing was held on May 20, 2025, via Webex. Complainant appeared *pro se* via phone and Respondent was represented by counsel Kevin Wyatt who

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<sup>1</sup> Complainant timely filed a complaint for review of assessment. The State Tax Commission (STC) has authority to hear and decide Complainant's appeal. Mo. Const. art. X, sec. 14; Section 138.430.1, RSMo 2000. All statutory citations are to RSMo 2000, as amended.

appeared via Webex. The appeal was heard and decided by Senior Hearing Officer Benjamin Slawson.

## **FINDINGS OF FACT**

**1. The Subject Property.** The subject residential real property is located at 872 Renderer Dr., Saint Louis, MO, 63122, Parcel No. 22M640295. The subject property is a 1955 ranch-style home consisting of a three-bedroom, two and a half-bathroom, kitchen, family room, dining room, living room, and covered front porch. The house has 2,529 square feet of living space. Complainant purchased the property in 1990.

**2. Assessment and Valuation.** Respondent determined the TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$573,000. The BOE independently determined the TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$573,000.

**3. Complainant's Evidence.** Complainant offered the following documentary evidence all which were received without objection:

<b>Exhibit</b>	<b>Description</b>
A	Howe Rear Yard Slope – photograph of back yard slope
B	Howe Bathroom 1 – photograph of bathroom of subject
C	Howe Bathroom 2 - photograph of bathroom of subject
D	Howe Kitchen – picture of kitchen of subject
E	Howe Reassessment Notes Appeal # 23-110155 – comparables and calculation of opinion of value

Complainant testified that he presented this evidence to the BOE. Complainant testified that he believes that his property was overvalued due to the land value being inflated. Complainant testified that a portion of the lot (26% of the area) of the subject (featured in Exhibit A), is unusable due to a steep slope. Complainant's opinion is that a

lot of Respondent's comparables use to assess the subject were not comparable at all given that their lots are flat or gently sloped and are extensively renovated. Complainant argues that the subject was not professionally renovated as all the upgrades were completed by himself.

Complainant in Exhibit E calculated his opinion of value asking for discount of the land valuation by 21% to \$192,681 and the improvement valuation to \$266,986 based on what he believes to be the best comparable, 835 Edlin. Complainant looked up how that property was assessed in 2023. Complainant's opinion of value is based on a price per square foot adjustment between the subject and 835 Edlin taking into account the larger square footage of the subject due to an addition. Complainant testified that he knows 835 Edlin well because his nephew lives there.

**4. Respondent's Evidence.** Respondent submitted Exhibit 1, consisting of the October 17, 2023, BOE decision letter for the subject property. Exhibit 1 shows the BOE valued the subject property at \$573,000. Exhibit 1 was admitted without objection.

**5. Value.** The TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$573,000.

## **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

**1. Assessment and Valuation.** Residential real property is assessed at 19% of its TVM as of January 1 of each odd-numbered year. Section 137.115.5(1)(a). The TVM is "the fair market value of the property on the valuation date[.]" *Snider v. Casino Aztar/Aztar Mo. Gaming Corp.*, 156 S.W.3d 341, 346 (Mo. banc 2005) (internal quotation omitted). The fair market value is "the price which the property would bring from a willing buyer when offered for sale by a willing seller." *Mo. Baptist Children's Home v. State Tax*

*Comm'n*, 867 S.W.2d 510, 512 (Mo. banc 1993). "True value in money is defined in terms of value in exchange not value in use." *Tibbs v. Poplar Bluff Assocs. I, L.P.*, 599 S.W.3d 1, 7 (Mo. App. S.D. 2020) (internal quotation omitted). "Determining the true value in money is an issue of fact for the STC." *Cohen v. Bushmeyer*, 251 S.W.3d 345, 348 (Mo. App. E.D. 2008).

"For purposes of levying property taxes, the value of real property is typically determined using one or more of three generally accepted approaches." *Snider*, 156 S.W.3d at 346. The three generally accepted approaches are the cost approach, the income approach, and the comparable sales approach. *Id.* at 346-48. The STC has wide discretion in selecting the appropriate valuation method but "cannot base its decision on opinion evidence that fails to consider information that should have been considered under a particular valuation approach." *Id.*, at 348.

The comparable sales approach "is most appropriate when there is an active market for the type of property at issue such that sufficient data are available to make a comparative analysis." *Snider*, 156 S.W.3d at 348. For this reason, the comparable sales approach is typically used to value residential property. "The comparable sales approach uses prices paid for similar properties in arms-length transactions and adjusts those prices to account for differences between the properties." *Id.* at 347-48 (internal quotation omitted). "Comparable sales consist of evidence of sales reasonably related in time and distance and involve land comparable in character." *Id.* at 348.

**2. Evidence.** "Although technical rules of evidence are not controlling in administrative hearings, fundamental rules of evidence are applicable." *Mo. Church of*

*Scientology v. State Tax Comm'n*, 560 S.W.2d 837, 839 (Mo. banc 1977). The hearing officer is the finder of fact and determines the credibility and weight of the evidence. *Kelly v. Mo. Dep't of Soc. Servs., Family Support Div.*, 456 S.W.3d 107, 111 (Mo. App. W.D. 2015). "It is within the purview of the hearing officer to determine the method of valuation to be adopted in a given case." *Tibbs v. Poplar Bluff Assocs. I, L.P.*, 599 S.W.3d 1, 9 (Mo. App. S.D. 2020). The hearing officer "may inquire of the owner of the property or of any other party to the appeal regarding any matter or issue relevant to the valuation, subclassification or assessment of the property." Section 138.430.2. The Hearing Officer's decision regarding the assessment or valuation of the property may be based solely upon his inquiry and any evidence presented by the parties, or based solely upon evidence presented by the parties. *Id.*

**3. Complainant's Burden of Proof.** The taxpayer bears the burden of proof and must show by a preponderance of the evidence that the property was overvalued. *Westwood P'ship v. Gogarty*, 103 S.W.3d 152, 161 (Mo. App. E.D. 2003). The BOE's valuation is presumptively correct. *Tibbs*, 599 S.W.3d at 7. The "taxpayer may rebut this presumption by presenting substantial and persuasive evidence that the valuation is erroneous." *Id.* (internal quotation omitted). The taxpayer also must prove "the value that should have been placed on the property." *Id.*

"Substantial evidence is that evidence which, if true, has probative force upon the issues, and from which the trier of fact can reasonably decide the case on the fact issues." *Savage v. State Tax Comm'n*, 722 S.W.2d 72, 77 (Mo. banc 1986) (internal quotation omitted). Evidence is persuasive when it has "sufficient weight and probative value to

convince the trier of fact." *Daly v. P.D. George Co.*, 77 S.W.3d 645, 651 (Mo. App. E.D. 2002); *see also White v. Dir. of Revenue*, 321 S.W.3d 298, 305 (Mo. banc 2010) (noting the burden of persuasion is the "party's duty to convince the fact-finder to view the facts in a way that favors that party").

#### **4. Complainant Did Not Produce Substantial and Persuasive Evidence of Overvaluation.**

Complainant did not produce substantial and persuasive evidence to support his \$475,000 opinion of value and claim of overvaluation.

Complainant did not produce substantial and persuasive evidence rebutting the presumptively correct BOE value. Neither Complainant's exhibits nor his testimony utilized the comparable sales approach, income approach, or cost approach to support his proposed value. The lack of evidence relating to a recognized valuation method renders Complainant's proposed value speculative and unpersuasive. *See Cohen*, 251 S.W.3d at 349 (holding an opinion of value loses probative value when based on an improper foundation). Complainant did not produce substantial and persuasive evidence showing the BOE overvalued the subject property and "the value that should have been placed on the property." *Tibbs*, 599 S.W.3d at 7.

Although reasonable to assume that two similar properties should be valued similarly, comparative assessment is not the method used to find a TVM for a property.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Complainant in his testimony admitted that he did not have knowledge of the 2023 market value of properties in his neighborhood when discussing the comparables he listed in Exhibit E: "***I believe that my knowledge of the market in this area, and not market value but assessed value***, I believe that my knowledge is far more extensive than the County's rudimentary search of records and plugging in some data points and coming up with what the County believes to be suitable comparables." Tr. at 13:00 – 13:29. Emphasis added.

The comparable sales approach is the usual method used to determine the TVM of residential real property. “The comparable sales approach uses prices paid for similar properties in arms-length transactions and adjusts those prices to account for differences between the properties.” *Snider*, 156 S.W.3d at 347-48 (internal quotation omitted). Complainant did not provide an appraisal report from an independent appraiser determining value as of January 1, 2023, based on market-based adjustments to sales prices of comparable properties at the time of the assessment date.

While a property owner’s opinion of value is generally admissible, the opinion “is without probative value where it is shown to have been based upon improper elements or an improper foundation.” *Shelby Cty. R-IV Sch. Dist. v. Herman*, 392 S.W.2d 609, 613 (Mo. 1965); see also *Cohen v. Bushmeyer*, 251 S.W.3d 345, 349 (Mo. App. W.D. 2008) (noting a property owner’s opinion of value loses probative value when it rests on an improper foundation). Complainant’s alleged valuation is based on improper elements and therefore is speculative.

### **CONCLUSION AND ORDER**

The BOE decision is affirmed. The TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$573,000.

### **Application for Review**

A party may file an application for review of this decision within 30 days of the mailing date set forth in the certificate of service for this decision. The application "shall contain specific detailed grounds upon which it is claimed the decision is erroneous." Section 138.432. The application must be in writing, and may be mailed to

the State Tax Commission of Missouri, P.O. Box 146, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0146, or emailed to Legal@stc.mo.gov. A copy of the application must be sent to each person listed below in the certificate of service. ***Failure to state specific facts or law upon which the application for review is based will result in summary denial.*** Section 138.432.

### **Disputed Taxes**

The Collector of St. Louis County, and the collectors of all affected political subdivisions therein, shall continue to hold the disputed taxes pending the possible filing of an application for review, unless the disputed taxes have been disbursed pursuant to a court order under the provisions of section 139.031.

SO ORDERED June 27, 2025

Benjamin C. Slawson  
Senior Hearing Officer  
State Tax Commission

### **Certificate of Service**

I hereby certify that a copy of the foregoing has been electronically mailed and/or sent by U.S. Mail on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025, to: Complainant(s) and/or Counsel for Complainant(s), the County Assessor and/or Counsel for Respondent and County Collector.

Stacy M. Ingle  
Legal Assistant