



STATE TAX COMMISSION OF MISSOURI

SEAN RUSSELL,	) Appeal No. 23-112026
	)
Complainant,	) Parcel No. 26L630873
	)
v.	)
	)
JAKE ZIMMERMAN, ASSESSOR,	)
ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MISSOURI,	)
	)
Respondent.	)

DECISION AND ORDER

Sean Russell (Complainant) appeals the St. Louis County Board of Equalization's (Respondent) decision valuing the subject residential property at \$414,300 as of January 1, 2023.¹ Complainant alleges overvaluation and asserts the true value in money (TVM) of the subject property was \$346,440 as of the assessment date. Complainant did not produce substantial and persuasive evidence establishing overvaluation. The BOE decision is affirmed. The TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, is \$414,300.

The evidentiary hearing was held June 25, 2025, via Webex. Complainant appeared *pro se*. Respondent Jake Zimmerman, Assessor, St. Louis County, Missouri, was

¹ 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.

represented by counsel, Kevin Wyatt. The case was heard and decided by Senior Hearing Officer Benjamin C. Slawson.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Subject Property. The subject residential property consists of a 1966 ranch style single-family home on a lot located at 9117 Hatton Dr., Saint Louis, MO 63126. The Parcel ID number is 26L630873. Complainant purchased the subject property in 2021 for \$420,000.

2. Assessment and Valuation. Respondent determined the subject property's appraised value was \$414,300 as of January 1, 2023. The BOE independently determined that the subject's appraised value as of January 1, 2023, was \$414,300.

3. Complainant's Evidence. Complainant offered the following Exhibits which were admitted without objection. The Exhibits are described as follows:

Exhibit	Description
A	2020 B-Dry Solutions Estimate for wall repair
B	May 3, 2024, Summary of Arguments for Overvaluation
C	November 17, 2023, Summary of Arguments for Overvaluation
D	2023 Stark Roofing, LLC Estimate

Complainant and Becky Rockett as owners of the subject testified in the hearing. The purchased the subject for \$420,00 in 2021. Complainant's proposed value for January 1, 2023, is \$346,440 which he derived from looking at a "happy medium" in a range of comparable sales in the surrounding area with criteria such as the number of bedrooms,

bathrooms, and square footage. Complainant and Ms. Rockett testified that the increase in value of \$288,700 in 2022 to \$414,300 in 2023 was a 43.5% increase, a much higher rate of increase than they observed in other properties near the subject and the comparables used by Respondent.

Complainant also testified that the subject suffers from condition issues, primarily those that are described in bids/estimates that were offered in Exhibits A and D. These included, but are not limited to: drainage ditches to avert water in the front yard, issues with the roof shingles coming off, and failing anchors in walls with water seeping in. He and Ms. Rockett do not understand how St. Louis County can rate the subject as “Excellent” given the needed repairs the subject needs. Complainant and Ms. Rockett in their Exhibit C stated they have done no renovations or additions to the subject.² They also testified it has no finished basement like many other area homes do. Regarding the purchase price in 2021 and rate of increase, Complainants proposed that two other properties were recently sold in 2022 but did not experience the rate of increase that the subject did.³

4. Respondent's Evidence. Respondent introduced 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 \$414,300 for the relevant assessment date. Exhibit 1 was admitted without objection.

5. Value. The TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$414,300.

² Exhibit C, p. 2.

³ Exhibit C, p. 3.

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. Sections 137.115.1; 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). The TVM "is a function of [the property's] highest and best use[.]" *Snider*, 156 S.W.3d at 346. "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. 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). “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).

3. Complainant’s Burden of Proof. The taxpayer bears the burden of proof and must show by a preponderance of the evidence the property is 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” on the assessment date. *Id.* See also *Hermel, Inc. v. State Tax Commission*, 564 S.W.2d 888, 897 (Mo. banc 1978). “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").

Property owners are competent to testify to the reasonable fair market value of their property. *Cohen*, 251 S.W.3d at 348. However, if owner's testimony is based on "improper elements or an improper foundation[.]" it is not substantial and persuasive evidence rebutting the presumptively correct BOE value. *Id.* at 349.

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

Complainant did not produce substantial and persuasive evidence to support his \$346,440 opinion of value. Complainant introduced no evidence pertaining to a recognized valuation method. Complainant did not produce any evidence supporting a comparable sales approach, income approach, or cost approach.

The comparable sales approach is typically used to value residential properties improved with a single-family home like the subject. "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 offer testimony of an appraiser, nor an appraisal of the property as evidence of the TVM of the property as of January 1, 2023. Therefore, Complainant did not produce substantial and persuasive evidence showing that the subject

property was overvalued based on comparable sales data analyzed by a professional knowledge and training.

Complainant is not a licensed appraiser. As a non-professional in the industry, Complainant's lay opinion based on a "happy medium" of comparables he found is speculative. Complainant and Ms. Rockett testified that the subject is less desirable than Respondent's comparables because of its lack of amenities (finished basement) and needed repairs. However, Complainant offered no evidence actually quantifying alleged adverse value of these alleged conditions and undesirable features of the subject as of January 1, 2023. Bids and estimates alone do not prove a negative effect on value as of the valuation date. In other words, Complainant offered no professional analysis completed by someone trained to analyze such attributes and to show the deleterious effect they had on the property on the assessment date, January 1, 2023. Complainant also notes the seeming unfairness in the rate of assessment increase with other properties compared to the subject. However, comparative assessment is not a method of valuation for ad valorem taxation purposes.

Complainant purchased the property in 2021 for \$420,000, yet offered no compelling evidence to establish how the subject's appraised value devalued between that sale date and January 1, 2023, where Complainant proposes a value of \$346,440.⁴

In order to prove overvaluation, the taxpayer must not only prove that the assessment is erroneous, but *must also must prove "the value that should have been*

⁴ Complainant and Ms. Rockett actually testified that the problems with the subject existed at the time of the assessment. Tr. Part 1, 3:25 and Tr. Part 2, 0:01 – 0:25. Additionally, Complainant and Ms. Rockett also testified that the property had been updated in 2021, including new countertops, new appliances in the kitchen, and upgrades to the bathroom. Tr. Part 2, 5:58 – 6:29.

placed on the property" on the assessment date. Hermel, Inc. v. State Tax Commission, 564 S.W.2d 888, 897 (Mo. banc 1978). Emphasis added. Complainant did not produce substantial and persuasive evidence showing that the BOE's value was incorrect, nor did he prove the TVM on the assessment date. Because the STC "cannot base its decision on opinion evidence that fails to consider information that should have been considered" under a recognized approach to value, Snider, 156 S.W.3d at 348, the BOE decision is affirmed.

CONCLUSION AND ORDER

The BOE decision is affirmed. The TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, is \$414,300.

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 November 6, 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 November 7, 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