

## **Article in Walla Walla**

### **Annual property assessments will make local tax payments fairer**

#### **Those who saw their taxes rocket up last year should get some immediate relief from the annual assessments.**

By the Union-Bulletin Editorial Board  
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Property tax assessments in Walla Walla County are going to be a lot more fair in the future. The county Assessor's Office will now do annual assessments.

That means taxpayers will see gradual increases or decreases in their property values, which wasn't the case in the past. Under the outgoing system property was reassessed every four years. As a result, property owners would see their property values shoot up dramatically if, as has been the case, the real estate market was sizzling.

That was particularly noticeable -- and painful -- last year as many homeowners saw their property values nearly double.

The hot real estate market has resulted in a huge increase in the value of homes in the Valley. By law, the assessment for tax purposes must reflect the true market value.

That would have been fair if every piece of property were revalued every year since the amount of property tax collected can only be increased by 1 percent from the previous year. Individual taxpayers would not have seen their tax bill increase dramatically.

But since property in Walla Walla County was assessed once every four years, only one quarter of the property countywide felt the impact of the jump in value. That means three quarters did not, and their taxes didn't go up or went down. Most of the homes that felt the boost were in the city of Walla Walla.

The four-year cycle in assessments created wide swings in the value of property and hefty increases in property tax bills for some, but not all, homeowners. County Assessor Bill Vollendorff, like his predecessor Larry Shelley, has advocated switching to a high-tech system that would allow for annual assessments. The system is now on line and it can't come soon enough.

The new system will use a statistical approach and will recalculate property values annually based on the real estate market. Property will be inspected by an assessor once ever six years with that data being used as part of the annual assessments.

The real estate market is now softer than it was just a year ago. The lower values can now be reflected on tax bills more quickly. Those who saw their taxes rocket up last year should get some immediate relief from the annual assessments.

No, this system won't be perfect. Bad timing is still going to boost taxes for some while good timing will save others a few bucks.

But the ups and downs in the market will be taken into account far more quickly and, as a result, tax assessments will be fairer.