

Frequently Asked Questions

What authority does the City have to conduct a reassessment?

Wisconsin Law requires market value assessment of all property. The City of Berlin's Assessor's Office periodically revalues all property to keep pace with changes in the market. During a reassessment, all assessments are examined and adjustments are made where necessary to guarantee that all property is assessed at market value. This is done to assure that taxes are distributed equitably and uniformly.

What is the role of the assessor?

The assessor is a State certified individual whose duties are to discover, list, and place a value on all taxable real and personal property in the city, in a uniform manner. The assessor is not involved in the collection of property taxes.

How does the assessor value property?

Wisconsin Law requires property assessments to be based on fair market value. Estimating the market value of your property is a matter of determining the price a typical buyer would pay for it in its present condition. Some factors the assessor considers are what similar properties are selling for, what it would cost to replace your property, and the rent it may earn.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT THE ASSESSOR DOES NOT CREATE THIS VALUE, BUT RATHER INTERPRETS WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE MARKET PLACE.

What is market value?

Market value is defined as the most probable amount a typical, well-informed purchaser would be willing to pay for a property. The seller and buyer must be unrelated, the seller must be willing, but not under pressure to sell, and the buyer must be willing, but not under any obligation to buy. The property must be on the market for a reasonable length of time, the payment must be in cash or its equivalent, and the financing must be typical for that type of property. If all of these conditions exist, this would be a market value, arm's-length sale.

Is it true that you determine values by computer?

Just as in many other fields, computers are useful in the assessment process. Assessors are trained to look for relationships between property characteristics and market value. By coding these characteristics and studying sales prices, assessors can estimate value by developing

formulas and models. Computers are much faster and are capable of advanced analysis in this area. Computer generated values are reviewed by members of the assessment staff to ensure consistency between the assessed values and recent sales of similar properties.

Can the assessment on my property change even if the assessor has not been inside my property?

To make a proper assessment on a building, it is desirable for the assessor to see the inside and the outside of the property. The law requires that property be valued from actual view or the best information available. The assessor keeps records on the physical characteristics of each property in the municipality. Even though the assessor may have been unable to go through your property, the assessment will still be reviewed, based on the existing records and the sales of similar properties.

Will I be penalized if I do not let the assessor in when an inspection is requested?

When an interior inspection is not allowed, the assessor will attempt to update the records by looking at the property from the outside and using any other available information. To ensure an accurate assessment, it is to your advantage to allow the assessor inside your property when an inspection is requested. By denying an inspection, you lose the right to appeal your assessment to the Board of Review.

What will happen to my assessment if I improve my property?

Generally speaking, improvements that increase the market value of a property will increase the assessed value. The following are typical items that will increase the assessed value of your property:

Added rooms or garages

Replacing asbestos or wood siding with aluminum or vinyl siding

Substantial modernization of kitchens or baths

Central air conditioning

Fireplaces

Extensive remodeling

[Will my assessment go up if I repair my property?](#)

Good maintenance will help retain the market value of your property. Generally, your assessment will not be increased for individual minor repairs such as those that follow; however, a combination of several of these items could result in an increased assessment.

Repairing concrete walks and driveways

Replacing gutters and downspouts

Replacing hot water heater

Repairing or replacing roof

Repairing porches and steps

Repairing original siding

Patching or repairing interior walls and ceilings

Exterior painting

Replacing electrical fixtures

Replacing furnace

Exterior awnings and shutters

Weather stripping, screens, storm windows, doors

Exterior landscaping including lawns, shrubbery, trees, flowers

[How can my assessment change when I have not done anything to my property?](#)

General economic conditions such as interest rates, inflation rates, supply and demand, and changes in tax laws will influence the value of real estate. As property values change, those changes must be reflected on the assessment roll.

[Do all assessments change at the same rate?](#)

There are differences between individual properties and between defined neighborhoods. In one area, the sales may indicate a substantial increase in value in a given year. In another neighborhood, there may be no change in value, or even a decrease in property values. Different types of properties within the same neighborhood may also show different value changes. For example, one-story houses may be more in demand than two-story houses, or vice-versa. Older homes in the same area may be rising in value more slowly than newer homes. There are numerous factors to be considered for each property that will cause the values to differ. Some of the factors that affect value are location, condition, size, age, quality of construction, bedroom count, number of baths, basement finish and garages.

Will I be notified if there is a change in my assessment?

Wisconsin law requires that whenever an assessment is changed, the owner must be notified.

How do I know if my assessment is correct?

You should determine what your property is worth. This can be done by looking at area sales or by contacting a real estate professional (an appraiser or a realtor.) Additionally, property information is available on the Assessor's web page or from the Assessor's Office.

What do I do if I don't agree with my assessment?

If you don't understand how your assessed value was calculated, or disagree with your assessed value, contact the Assessor's Office. For any given year, you can request that the assessor review your assessed value. The assessor will inspect your property to ensure that the information contained in our files is correct. Each year, the assessment staff will hold informal meetings with property owners before the Board of Review meets. Property owners will be able to discuss how their assessed values were determined at these informal meetings.

What is the Board of Review?

The Board of Review is a quasi-judicial body that operates under State of Wisconsin Statutes and decisions reached in previous court cases. If you feel your assessment is not correct, you can appeal your assessment to the Board of Review. While you can appeal your assessment directly to the Board of Review, it is highly recommended that you first contact the Assessor's Office. Minor errors and misunderstandings can often be corrected at an informal meeting with the Assessor's Office first.

To appeal your assessment to the Board of Review, you must be able to demonstrate in a factual and meaningful way, that there is an error in the assessor's valuation. Only actual sales of comparable properties are accepted as evidence. The Board of Review does not recognize a comparison of the assessed value of your property to those of other properties as a basis to change an assessment. Wisconsin Case Law precludes this type of comparison since it is impossible to determine that the assessed values of the comparable properties used are correct. People interested in appealing their assessment to the Board of Review need to contact the City Clerk's Office.

[How will my taxes change as a result of the new assessment?](#)

Though the value of your property affects your share of taxes, the actual amount you pay is determined by the budget needs of the schools, city, county, technical college, and to the state. All of these taxing units decide what services they will provide in the coming year and how much money they will need to provide those services. Once this decision is made, a tax rate is adopted that will generate the needed dollars. Your property taxes are then determined by dividing the tax rate by 1000 and multiplying by your assessment.

$$\text{Tax Rate}/1000 \times \text{Assessed Value} = \text{Taxes}$$

[What are the important assessment related dates?](#)

January 1st - The official assessment date - All property is assessed as it existed on this date.

March 1st - Last day to file the Statement of Personal Property return & last day to file the Property Tax Exemption Request form.

April - May* - Assessment notices mailed to property owners and assessment roll available for inspection.

Mid-May to Mid-June*- Board of Review meets.

*NOTE: In a year when a city-wide revaluation is conducted, the dates on which assessment notices are mailed and the date on which the Board of Review convenes, may occur later in the year.

[What is the difference between Assessed Value and Estimated Fair Market Value \(Equalized Value\)?](#)

The assessed value is the value placed on each parcel of real property by the local assessor. Assessed values are used to distribute a municipality's tax burden among the individual property owners. Assessed values do not change annually unless changes have been made to a property (new garage, room additions, substantial remodeling of a kitchen or bath, adding central air conditioning or a fireplace, extensive remodeling) that affect its market value. Assessed values create equity among individual taxpayers within a municipality after a revaluation is conducted. The "Estimated Fair Market Value" (or "Equalized Value") as shown on your tax bill is not necessarily an estimate of what your home would sell for as of January 1st of a given year. The equalized value changes yearly to reflect changes in the City's overall real estate market. The

main function of the equalized value is to create a uniform value to be able to apportion county property taxes, public school taxes, vocational school taxes, and to distribute property tax relief. Equalized values are used not only to distribute the state levy among the counties, but the county's levy among the municipalities within that county. Equalized values maintain equity between municipalities and counties.

What is the difference between real and personal property?

For property tax purposes, "real property" refers to land and buildings and the rights associated with ownership, while "personal property" is the furniture and equipment owned and/or used by businesses.

Where do my tax dollars go?

Although your tax payments are made to the Treasurer, a large share of your tax dollars are turned over to other governmental units such as the schools, county, technical school and the state. City services such as Public Safety including Police, Fire and Emergency Management, Public Works, Administration, Grant and Aid Projects, Public Library, Senior Center, Aquatic Center, and Recreation are also bought with your tax dollars.