



THE WATCHDOG

Keeping a watchful eye on taxation

A Publication of the Dickinson County Taxpayers Association

A 501 (C) (3) non-profit organization

JANUARY, 2021 VOLUME 19 ISSUE 1

Mark Your Calendar

Annual Meeting
June 4, 2021

Monthly Meetings
Second Thursdays
8 AM
April through
December
Normally at Arnolds
Park City Hall
Currently by Zoom
Public Invited!

Officers

President
Phil Petersen

Vice-President
Mark Sullivan

Treasurer
Jan Bowles

Executive Director
Lissa Potter

Board of Directors

Jan Bowles
Bill Carmichael
Darrell Mergan
Phil Petersen
Owen Primavera
Amy Schlueter
John Shanafelt
Mark Sullivan
Robert Zylstra

P.O. Box 598
Spirit Lake, IA 51360
www.dctaxpayers.org

Property Revaluations Coming in March

Iowa law requires that in odd numbered years each Assessor must revalue all of the property in their jurisdiction. For the 2019 revaluation year lakeshore land on West and East Okoboji (south of the Highway 9 Bridge) received a 20 percent increase – one of the largest increases in the County. This unexpected large increase issued in March 2019 was a significant surprise to the Dickinson County Taxpayer Association (“Association”) and the taxpayers.

The fact that only 55 sales on West and East Okoboji were used to justify the 20 percent increase for all of the 1,896 properties on East and West Okoboji was particularly troubling to the Association. During April, May, and June 2019 we made numerous inquiries to the Assessor asking for more information. In June 2019 we filed a protest with the Dickinson County Board of Review and in July we appealed to Iowa Property Assessment Appeal Board (PAAB). We were hampered by our lack of knowledge of the process and that we were trying to change tax valuations that already been issued. More information can be found in the June and October 2020 WATCHDOG newsletter and at our website www.dctaxpayers.org

Based on our 2019 experience we have been researching the Iowa property tax valuation process. During the past year our primary focus has been on the 2020 sales on East and West Okoboji Lakeshore property. Most of the high priced residential sales occur on these lakes. This fall we requested a meeting with the County Assessor to discuss the 2020 sales and their impact on the March 2021 property tax revaluation notices. We felt that discussing the revaluation process before March 2021 notices were sent would be more effective than trying to change the notices after they are issued.

DECEMBER ASSESSOR MEETING

The Assessor meeting took place on December 17, 2020 at the Dickinson County Courthouse. Attending from Dickinson County were the Assessor (Stephanie Sohn), Deputy Assessor (Jill Burgeson), and the Assistant County Attorney (Lonnie Saunders). The Association was represented by its Executive Committee: Phil Petersen, Mark Sullivan, Jan Bowles, and Lissa Potter. The objectives of the meeting were to (1) better understand the County's property assessment process and (2) offer some insight/suggestions to the County in an effort to head off any negative surprise that might occur in the 2021 revaluation process.

In preparation for the December meeting, the Association had been tracking 2020 residential sales data for lakeshore properties in Dickinson County. We shared those results with the County prior to the December meeting. We were informed by the County they will not begin their research on the impact of the 2020 sales until after the first of the year. Our discussions included these general topics:

- Iowa law requires that a Declaration of Value (DOV) statement be submitted to the County Recorder at the time of sale. The Assessor's Office reviews the DOV to be sure it properly reflects the net sales price of the property by adjusting for multiple parcel sales, the sale of personal property (e.g., furnishings, boats, docks, hoists, etc.) and other considerations. Data from the DOV document is crucial to the process because the Assessor wants to be sure the value of the land and dwelling are properly reflected in their records. After the Assessors evaluation of the data the DOV is sent to the Iowa Department of Revenue for their review.
- Land and dwelling are assessed separately. The County uses an algorithm that allows for the assessment of land (lake front footage, depth, total square feet, elevation, etc.) and adjusts lot value accordingly. Dwellings are assessed separately.
- Only "normal" arms-length sales are used in the analysis. For example, the County Assessor disregards intra-family sales that would not be considered a normal sale.
- Median values are used in the County's analysis. By using a median value (i.e., the middle value of an array of values) as opposed to an average/ mean, large swings in data can be mitigated.
- New homes and homes with extensive remodeling that make the home "move-in ready" often command a premium sales price potentially driving up future assessed values. There are only a handful of high-quality builders in the lakes area whose homes command a larger sale price based on their high quality materials and workmanship. In our opinion, this means the high sales price over assessed value cannot be applied to hundreds or thousands of homes that did not have the extensive remodeling or new construction.
- Building Permits for new and extensive remodeling are issued by each jurisdiction in the County. A copy of the Building Permit is reviewed by the Assessor to be sure it properly reflects the dwelling value. New construction is priced using market values and the Real Property Appraisal Manual issued by the Iowa Department of Revenue.

assessor meeting cont.....

- Areas are reviewed and assessed separately. For example, property on Triboji Beach – that can include DNR property - carries a lower value per front foot than other, more desirable beaches. (See **Lake Value Maps** on our website).
- Real Estate Fees are included in the sales price as per the guidance from the Iowa Department of Revenue. According to the Assistant County Attorney any change to this policy would have to be made through legislative action.
- In two cases – one on East and one on West Okoboji – the same property was sold twice in the 2020 calendar year. The Assessor stated that Iowa Department of Revenue guidance was that both sales should be included in the calculations. We asked the Assessor for information as to which state authority (agency, regulation or law) regulates that calculation.
- Assessed values, tax history, sales history and current ownership for any property in the county can be found on the “Beacon” website by entering the state and county name: www.Beacon.Schneidercorp.com.

The meeting adjourned with the understanding that the Association would communicate the meeting discussion to its membership. And, that we would continue to monitor this changing situation. Our intent is to follow the revaluation process with the Assessor during January and February. Finally, the DCTA Executive Committee thanked the Assessor and her staff for the open and candid discussion we experienced.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SCHOOL MEETING SCHEDULES

Government meetings are open to the public, unless the agenda specifically states “Closed”. By attending these public meetings, you can become a better-informed citizen.

****Dickinson County Board of Supervisors ****

9:00 a.m., Tuesdays,
Courthouse Community Room
Bill Leopold – Chairman
<https://dickinsoncountyiowa.gov>

****Okoboji School Board ****

5:30 p.m.,- Varied -The Okoboji School Board is currently meeting virtually.
Brad Droegmiller – School Board President
Todd Abrahamson - Superintendent
<https://www.okobojischools.org>

****Harris - Lake Park School Board****

6:00 p.m., 3rd Monday of the month, HS/MS Cafeteria
Arin Elser – School Board President
Andy Irwin - Superintendent
www.harris-lp.k12.ia.us

****Spirit Lake School Board ****

5:30 p.m., 2nd Monday of the month
Teresa Beck – School Board President
Dr. David Smith - Superintendent
www.spirit-lake.k12.ia.us

****Graettinger-Terril School Board****

Meeting time - Varies – contact Angie Woods at 712-853-6111
Kevin Jensen – School Board President
Marshall Lewis - Superintendent
www.gtschools.k12.ia.us

****Lake Park City Council****

7:00 p.m., 2nd Monday of the month
Matt Carstensen - Mayor
Marie Matthiesen – City Administrator
www.lakeparkia.com

****Okoboji City Council ****

6:00 p.m., 2nd Tuesday of the month, City Hall
Mary VanderWoude – Mayor
Michael Meyers, MPA - City Clerk/Administrator
www.okobojicity.com

****Spirit Lake City Council****

5:30 p.m., 2nd & 4th Tuesday of the month
Bruce Keenan – Mayor
Gregg Owens - City Administrator/City Attorney
www.cityofspiritlake.org

****Terril City Council****

6 p.m., 2nd Monday of the month
Julie Theisen. – Mayor
City Clerk Ann Van De Walle
<https://www.facebook.com/CityofTerril>

****Arnolds Park City Council****

5:30 p.m., 2nd Wednesday of the month, City Hall
Jim Hussong – Mayor
Linda Nase - City Clerk
www.arnoldsparkcity.com

****Milford City Council ****

6:30 p.m., 2nd and 4th Monday, Milford Community Building
Steve Anderson - Mayor
LeAnn Reinsbach - City Administrator/City Clerk
www.milford.ia.us

****Orleans City Council****

7:00 p.m., 2nd Monday of the month
Bill Maas – Mayor
Vrenae Daly, CMC/MMC – City Clerk
www.orleans.govoffice.com

****Superior City Council****

6:00 p.m., 1st Tuesday of the month
Julie Nelson - Mayor
Deanne Bueltel – city clerk

****Wahpeton City Council ****

5:00 p.m., 2nd Monday of the month now meeting virtually
Phil Johnson – Mayor
Bonnie Tielbur, City Clerk/ Administrator
www.wahpetonia.govoffice.com

****West Okoboji City Council****

6:30 p.m. 2nd Monday of the month
Barb Lynch - Mayor
Derrick Miner - City Administrator
www.cityofwestokoboji.org



The Watchdog

Dickinson County Taxpayers Association
P.O. Box 598
Spirit Lake, IA 51360