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PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT APPEALS

Assessed Value. The Pierce County Assessor-Treasurer is tasked with assessing every parcel of real property at 100 % of its fair market value. Generally speaking, fair market value is the amount of money that a buyer willing but not obligated to buy would pay for a parcel of property and that a seller willing but not obligated to sell, would accept for sale of the parcel. The government will determine your property tax based on a percentage of your parcel's assessed value.

Appeal of Assessed Value. Under Washington law, the Assessor-Treasurer's assessment is presumed correct. A taxpayer may appeal the assessment by filing a petition with the Pierce County Board of Equalization (the "Board"). However, the taxpayer faces a difficult task – in order to prevail on a property tax assessment appeal, a taxpayer must demonstrate by clear, cogent and convincing evidence that the assessment is incorrect. This standard is high but not insurmountable.

Each parcel is unique, and evidence that suffices for one appeal may not suffice for another. The most effective evidence will likely be an independent appraisal indicating a lower fair market value. Typically, such an appraisal will cost between \$300 - \$500. Other evidence may include sales prices of comparable properties within the last five years, and photographs and/or documentation demonstrating defects and/or impairments to your property's value.

The Appellate Process. A taxpayer must file his/her petition for review of real property valuation determination with the Board no later than July 1st or sixty (60) days after the mailing of the notice of value change. This year, that means that most taxpayers must file by early August 2008. You must complete in duplicate a petition form provided by the Board, and you may only include one parcel per petition. Thereafter, the Board will set a hearing date, at which time you and/or your attorney may present evidence and argument regarding the true fair market value of your property. Prior to the hearing, the Assessor-Treasurer must respond in writing to your appeal. This will give you an opportunity to understand the Assessor-Treasurer's position. Typically, hearings begin in early October. The Board will continue to hear appeals until they are done. If you prevail at the Board, the assessment will be changed retroactively, and your resulting property tax due will be adjusted to reflect the correct value.

Please contact Ian Bauer or Darren Krattli at Eisenhower & Carlson, PLLC at (253) 572-4500 if you would like to learn more about property tax assessment appeals, or about how Eisenhower & Carlson, PLLC can help you with your other legal needs.