



# FUNCTIONS OF THE JEFFERSON COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT AND HOW YOUR PROPERTY IS APPRAISED

## **THREE COMPONENTS OF THE APPRAISAL DISTRICT**

### **The Appraisal District Office**

The Appraisal District does not levy a tax for its operations. Instead, it is funded by the taxing entities within its jurisdiction. Each taxing entity pays a portion of the District's budget in direct proportion to the taxes it levies.

The Chief Appraiser is appointed by the Board of Directors to administer the Appraisal District office. The Chief Appraiser is responsible for appraising all property within the District; determining all exemption and special appraisal requests; conducting reappraisals of property; notifying the taxpayers, taxing entities, and the public about matters affecting their property values; and maintaining maps of all property within the District.

### **The Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors of the Jefferson County Appraisal District is comprised of five members who are elected by the governing bodies of the taxing entities within the District. The County Tax Assessor-Collector serves as a nonvoting director if that person is not appointed to serve as a voting director.

The Board of Directors oversees the activities of the Appraisal District. They do not appraise property or make decisions that affect the appraisal records; instead, they select the Chief Appraiser, adopt the budget, appoint the Appraisal Review Board, and make sure the District follows policies and procedures set by law.

Any person wishing to address the Board of Directors concerning a matter under their jurisdiction may do so by submitting a written request to make public comments by noon on the day of the meeting. Persons addressing the Board are limited to a five-minute presentation; however, additional time may be granted at the discretion of the Board Chairperson.

The District will make every attempt to provide an interpreter for non-English speaking persons or for the hearing impaired. The request must be submitted to the District at least 7 days prior to the Board meeting. If the District cannot comply with the request, the Board and requesting party will be properly notified. The person requesting the interpreter must arrive at the Appraisal District office at least 15 minutes prior to the Board meeting in order to meet with the interpreter. The District provides handicapped parking, a ground floor meeting room, doors with no barriers, and restrooms equipped for the disabled. However, if a person has a disability that prevents him from entering the District's office or Board meeting room, he should notify the District in writing at least 7 days prior to the scheduled meeting. The notice should describe the person's disability and how it prevents the person from having access to the Board. Upon receipt of such notice, the Chief Appraiser will determine whether the person can be given access to the Board or if other means must be arranged. Under such circumstances, the Chief Appraiser shall inform the Board of the reasons why the person was not able to address the Board in person.

### **The Appraisal Review Board**

The Appraisal Review Board (ARB) is a group of citizens authorized to resolve disputes between taxpayers and the Appraisal District.

ARB members are appointed by the Local Administrative District Judge. An individual must be a resident of the District for at least two years to serve on the ARB. Officers and employees of the Appraisal District, taxing entities, or the State Comptroller's Office cannot serve on the ARB. ARB members also must comply with special conflict of interest laws.

The ARB determines taxpayer protests and taxing unit challenges. In taxpayer protests, it listens to both the taxpayer and the Appraisal District. The ARB determines if the Appraisal District has granted or denied exemptions and agricultural appraisal properly. The ARB's decisions are binding only for the year in question. The ARB begins hearing protests in early June and finishes by July 20.

## **PROPERTY VALUATION INFORMATION**

### **How the District Appraises Your Property**

The Appraisal District sets the value of your property each year. The appraisal process has four stages: valuing the taxable property, protesting the values, adopting the tax rates, and collecting the taxes. The Appraisal District is responsible for the first two stages:

valuing the taxable property and handling protests on those values. The governing bodies of each of the taxing entities in Jefferson County are responsible for adopting the tax rates which are applied to the taxable value of your property as determined by the Appraisal District. The Tax Office then mails out tax statements and collects the taxes. The Jefferson County Tax Office collects the taxes for all entities in Jefferson County. For information pertaining to the collection of taxes, you may contact the Jefferson County Tax Office at 409-835-8516 or P. O. Box 2112 Beaumont TX 77704.

The appraisal process begins when the Appraisal District places a value on your property reflecting its condition and market value as of January 1. The Jefferson County Appraisal District conducts a complete, countywide reappraisal once every two years. Reappraisals are conducted in odd-numbered years. In between reappraisals, however, the Appraisal District may reappraise certain properties and/or areas of the District as necessary to maintain a level of appraisals reflective of current market values.

To save time and money, the Appraisal District uses mass appraisal techniques to appraise the 150,000+ parcels of property within its jurisdiction. In mass appraisal, the Appraisal District first collects detailed descriptions of each taxable property in the District. It then classifies properties according to a variety of factors, such as size, use, and construction type. Using data from recent property sales, the District appraises the value of typical properties in each class. Taking into account differences such as age or location, the District uses the typical property values to appraise all of the properties in the class.

For individual properties, the Appraisal District may use three common methods to value property: market, income, and cost approach. The market approach is most often used and simply asks, "what are properties similar to this property selling for?" The value of your home is an estimate of the price your home would sell for on January 1. The Appraisal District compares your home to similar homes that have sold recently and determines your home's value.

The District uses the other methods to appraise types of properties that do not often sell, such as utility companies and oil leases. The income approach asks, "what would an investor pay in anticipation of future income from the property?" The cost approach asks, "how much would it cost to replace the property with one of equal utility?"

Every year the Appraisal District mails out a Notice of Appraised Value to all property owners in the District. This notice indicates the proposed value for the year, any exemptions that may apply to you, and informs you on how to appeal if you do not agree with the valuation.

### **What Do I Do If I Do Not Agree with My Value?**

The right to protest to the Appraisal Review Board (ARB) is the most important right you have as a taxpayer. You may protest if you have a concern about:

- The market value placed on your property:
  - Ask one of the District's appraisers to explain the appraisal. Be sure the property description is correct. Are the measurements for your home or business and lot correct? Gather blueprints, deed records, photographs, a survey, or your own measurements.
  - Are there any hidden defects, such as a cracked foundation or inadequate plumbing? Get photographs, statements from builders, or independent appraisals.
  - Collect evidence on recent sales of properties similar to yours from neighbors or real estate professionals. Ask the Appraisal District for the sales that it used to determine your value.
  - Consider using an independent appraisal by a real estate appraiser. Insurance records also may be helpful.
  - If you decide to use sales information to support your protest, you should:
    - Get documents or sworn statements from the person providing the sales information.
    - Use sales of properties that are similar to yours in size, age, location, and type of construction.
    - Use recent sales. Sales that occurred closest to January 1 are best.
    - Weigh the costs of preparing a protest against the potential tax savings. Preparing a protest may not be worth the time and expense if it results in only a small tax savings.
- Is your property valued unequally compared with other property in the Appraisal District?
  - Determine whether the property value is closer to market value than other, similar properties. A ratio study or a comparison of a representative sample of properties, appropriately adjusted, for determining the median level of appraisal must be prepared to prove unequal appraisal.
- Did the Chief Appraiser deny you an exemption?
  - First, find out why the Chief Appraiser denied your exemption. If the Chief Appraiser denied your homestead exemption, get evidence that you owned your home on January 1 and used the home as your principal residence on that date.
  - If the Chief Appraiser denied a homestead exemption for part of the land around your home, show how much land is used as a yard.
  - If the Chief Appraiser denied you an over-65, a disabled person's, or a veteran's exemption make certain you qualify.

- Did the Chief Appraiser deny agricultural appraisal for your farm or ranch?
  - First, find out why the Chief Appraiser denied your application. Agricultural appraisal laws have specific requirements involving ownership and use of the property. Contact the Appraisal District for information on eligibility requirements.
  - Gather your ownership records and management records or get information from local agencies that provide services to farmers and ranchers.
- Do the appraisal records show an incorrect owner?
  - Provide records of deeds or deed transfers to show ownership. If you acquired the property after January 1, you may protest the property's value. The law recognizes the new owner's interest in the taxes on the property.
- Is your property being taxed by the wrong taxing units?
  - An error of this sort is often simply a clerical error. For example, the appraisal records show your property is located in one school district when it actually is located in another school district.
- Is your property incorrectly included in the appraisal records?
  - Some types of taxable personal property move from place to place quite regularly. Property is taxed at only one location in Texas. You can protest the inclusion of your property in the appraisal records if it should be taxed at another location in Texas.
- Is there any other action the Appraisal District or ARB took that affects you?
  - You have the right to protest any Appraisal District action that affects you and your property. For instance, the Chief Appraiser may claim your property was not taxed in a previous year, and you disagree. You may protest only actions that affect your property.

### **How to File a Protest**

Once the current year values are set (typically the end of April each year), you must file a written Notice of Protest in order to discuss your valuation with an appraiser or to schedule a hearing with the ARB. If you received a Notice of Appraised Value, the Notice of Protest form was enclosed. You may also file a protest by email [protests@jcad.org](mailto:protests@jcad.org) or by using the online appeal system on our website, [www.jcad.org](http://www.jcad.org), for locally-appraised property not represented by a tax agent. If you do not attach a copy of your protest form to your email, then you must include your PID or Account Number, name and mailing address, telephone numbers(s), your opinion of value of the property, and the reason for your protest (value too high, value not equal with other similar properties, exemption denied, etc.). You do not have to file a protest on the form provided. A protest in any written format will suffice providing it provides the requested information. Your protest must be filed with the Appraisal District by May 31 or the deadline date indicated on your Notice of Appraised Value if you received one.

If you file a protest, you will receive written notice of the date, time, and place set for the hearing at least 15 days in advance of your hearing. At the time you receive notification of your hearing date, you will also receive a copy of Taxpayers' Remedies, a copy of the ARB hearings procedures, and a statement that you have the right to inspect and obtain a copy of the data, schedules, formulas, and any other information that the Appraisal District plans to introduce at your hearing. There is a charge of \$0.10 per page for any information you may request in addition to any postage.

### **Informal Review**

Once the District receives your protest, an appraiser will contact you for an informal review. The informal review is intended to allow you to provide more detailed information on your property that may not have been discovered due to mass appraisal restrictions. It is the intent of the appraisers to make any necessary value adjustments at the informal hearing to avoid the necessity of a formal protest hearing before the ARB. If you are able to resolve your protest during the informal review, your hearing with the ARB will be canceled.

### **Review by the Appraisal Review Board**

If you cannot resolve your problem informally with the Appraisal District staff, you will have your case heard by the ARB at the date and time scheduled.

The ARB is an independent board of citizens that reviews problems with appraisals or other concerns allowed by protest. It has the power to order the Appraisal District to make the necessary changes to solve problems.

The ARB meets on the half-hour between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., with the last appointments scheduled at 4:30 p.m. The ARB will hear protests on a first-come, first-served basis. Protest hearing registration will be open for the first hour of each session. Protest hearings can be conducted in person, by telephone conference, or by written affidavit.

The hearing will be informal and will last approximately 15 minutes, or longer if the protest covers 3 or more properties or involves complex property. You or a designated agent may appear in person to present evidence or you may send notarized evidence for the ARB to review at your hearing instead of appearing in person. The Appraisal District representative will then present evidence about your case, and you may cross-examine the Appraisal District representative. The ARB will then make its decision based on the

evidence presented. The Appraisal District has the burden of establishing the property's value by a preponderance of the evidence presented.

You should not try to contact the ARB members outside of the hearing. The law requires the ARB members to sign an affidavit stating that they have not talked about your case before the ARB hears it.

## **EXEMPTION INFORMATION**

### **Homestead Exemptions**

A homestead exemption removes part of the value of your residence from taxation and lowers your taxes. In order to qualify for the homestead exemption, you must own your home as of January 1 of the tax year and use the home as your principal residence. If you have more than one house, you can only get exemptions for your main or principal residence. There are four types of homestead exemptions:

- **General Homestead:** For all homeowners.
- **Over-65 Homestead:** In addition to the general homestead exemption, once you become 65 years of age, you are entitled to the over-65 homestead exemption that exempts an additional amount from the value of your home. This exemption becomes effective on your date of birth and applies to the taxes for the entire year in which you turn 65. Please contact our office once you turn 65 to ensure that you are receiving this exemption. Once you receive the over-65 homestead exemption, you get a tax ceiling for your school taxes. In addition, Jefferson County and the City of Port Arthur also grant a tax ceiling. The taxes on your home for the entities granting the tax ceiling cannot increase above the lesser of the amount of taxes you would have paid the year you turned 65 based on a full year with the over-65 exemption or the amount of taxes paid in the following year. Should you move into a new residence after turning 65, this tax ceiling is transferable. Please contact the Appraisal District for more information on this matter.
- **Surviving Spouse Over-65 Homestead:** If your spouse who was receiving the over-65 homestead exemption dies, this exemption will transfer to the surviving spouse providing the spouse is 55 years of age or older and maintains ownership of the home. The surviving spouse must apply for this exemption.
- **Disability Homestead:** A person with a disability may get an additional exemption. A "disability" means either (1) you cannot engage in gainful work because of a physical or mental disability or (2) you are 55 years of age, blind, and cannot engage in your previous work because of your blindness. If you receive disability benefits under the Federal Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance Program administered by the Social Security Administration, you will qualify. Disability benefits from any other program do not automatically qualify you for this exemption. You may need information on disability ratings from the civil service, retirement programs or from insurance documents, military records, or a doctor's statement. You may receive the disability exemption in addition to the general homestead exemption but not in addition to the over-65 homestead exemption. A tax ceiling is also offered on the disability exemption by the school districts, Jefferson County, and the City of Port Arthur, and it is transferable.
- **100% Disabled Veteran Homestead:** If you are a disabled veteran who receives from the US Department of Veteran Affairs (1) 100% disability compensation due to a service-connected disability; and (2) a rating of 100% disabled or of individual unemployability, you are entitled to an exemption from taxation of the total appraised value of your residence homestead. Beginning in 2012, this benefit has been extended to the surviving spouse upon the veteran's death with certain restrictions.

### **Disabled Veteran Exemption**

Another type of exemption granted is the disabled veteran exemption. You may qualify for this exemption if you are either (1) a veteran who was disabled while serving with the US armed forces or (2) the surviving spouse of child (under 18 years of age and unmarried) of a disabled veteran or of a member of the armed forces who was killed while on active duty. You must be a Texas resident. This exemption can be applied to any one property; the property does not need to be your homestead. Contact the Appraisal District for additional information on this exemption.

### **How to File for a Homestead Exemption on Your Home**

You must use the District's application form, and you must file your application between January 1st and April 30th. Once an application is granted, you do not need to file again unless requested by the District. Be sure to include a copy of your driver's license or state-issued personal identification card with your application. Provide all the information and the documentation requested. For example, if you are claiming an Over-65 or Disability Homestead, you need to show proof of age or disability.

You may file late for a homestead exemption and a disabled veteran's exemption up to one year after the date taxes would become delinquent. You will receive a new tax statement with a lower amount or a refund if you have already paid your taxes.