

## WHAT YOUR PROPERTY APPRAISER'S OFFICE DOES FOR YOU



### MARSHA M. FAUX CFA, ASA POLK COUNTY PROPERTY APPRAISER

#### Bartow Office

255 N. Wilson Ave  
Bartow, FL 33830

Phone: 863-534-4777  
Fax: 863-534-4753  
Hours: 8:00am-4:30pm (M-F)

#### Lakeland Office

930 E. Parker St.  
Suite 272  
Lakeland, FL 33801

Phone: 863-802-6150  
Fax: 863-802-6163  
Hours: 8:00am-5:00pm (M-F)

#### Winter Haven Office

3425 Lake Alfred Rd.  
3 Gil Jones Plaza  
Winter Haven, FL 33881

Phone: 863-401-2424  
Fax: 863-401-2428  
Hours: 8:00am-5:00pm (M-F)

Website: [www.polkpa.org](http://www.polkpa.org)

## THE JOB OF THE PROPERTY APPRAISER

The Property Appraiser is responsible for determining the value of all property in the county on the appraisal date of January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

In addition to appraising over 300,000 parcels of real estate and 25,000 business accounts, the Property Appraiser administers 120,000 homestead exemptions, and must determine property entitled to Agricultural Classification.

The Property Appraiser and staff are at the service of the public and will be glad to assist in all matters pertaining to property values and exemptions.

## HOW THE PROPERTY APPRAISER DETERMINES FAIR MARKET VALUE

The Property Appraiser must know what properties are selling for, cost to replace improvements, rent and operating expenses, and numerous other factors impacting value.

Comparing the selling prices of comparable properties to your property is one method for estimating **MARKET** value. Another way is based on **REPLACEMENT COST** in its current condition.

A third method is used for properties that produce a rental **INCOME**. Consideration is given to market rents, operating expenses, and the return most people would expect on a similar investment.

## WHY PROPERTY VALUES MAY CHANGE FROM YEAR TO YEAR

When changes to your property occur, the Property Appraiser's values are adjusted to reflect these changes. For instance, if you build a swimming pool in your backyard, the market value would increase proportionately based on the contributory value of the pool.

Similarly, should your property's value be decreased by fire or the marketplace indicates a decline in your area, the value would decrease to show the downward effect of those changes.

## PROPERTY VALUE AND TAX RATE

The Property Appraiser is responsible for determining the value of all property on January 1 of each year. The taxing authorities (Board of County Commissioners, School Board, Cities, etc...) are responsible for the tax rates and issuing tax bills which represent the result of property values calculated by those rates. The resulting taxes are referred to as *ad valorem taxes* meaning taxes according to value.

For example, let's say the Property Appraiser estimates the market value of a property at \$75,000 and the tax rate in the area has been set by the taxing authorities at 20 mills. This millage rate reflects \$20 of taxes per \$1,000 of taxable value.  $\$75,000 \div \$1,000 = 75$ ;  $\$20 \times 75 = \$1,500$ . This represents the *ad valorem taxes* without any exemptions.

Taxes due are discounted for prompt payment – if paid in Nov. 4%, Dec. 3%, Jan. 2%, Feb. 1%.

## DIFFERING WITH THE VALUE SET BY THE PROPERTY APPRAISER

If your opinion of the market value of your property differs from the Property Appraiser's value, please contact us to discuss your concerns. We welcome the opportunity to review all the pertinent facts with you.

After talking with us, if there is still a difference between our value and your opinion of value, you may appeal to the Value Adjustment Board. The Value Adjustment Board's function is to hear evidence and discern whether properties are assessed at market value. The Board also hears appeals on denial of exemptions and denial of Agricultural Classification.

A petition may be obtained from the Property Appraiser. The completed petition must be filed with the Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners. A \$15.00 filing fee is required.

## HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION

Every person who has legal or beneficial title to real property and resides there permanently or maintains it as the residence of a legal or natural dependent is entitled to Homestead Exemption **up to \$50,000**. Non citizens may apply on behalf of their children who are citizens.

**YOU MUST APPLY BY MARCH 1<sup>st</sup>  
TO QUALIFY FOR ANY EXEMPTION.  
FILE ONLINE AT [WWW.POLKPA.ORG](http://WWW.POLKPA.ORG)**

**Calculating Homestead Savings:** In our previous example, a property valued at \$75,000 had taxes of \$1,500 without exemptions. If the property owner applies for and receives Homestead Exemption, \$25,000 is deducted from the value, leaving a taxable value of \$50,000.

An Additional Homestead Exemption up to \$25,000 will also be applied toward any assessed value between \$50,000 and \$75,000. This Additional Homestead Exemption, however, does not apply to the school board portion of the millage rate. So, in this example, the non-school board taxable value would be \$25,000 ( $\$75,000 - \$50,000$ ) and the school board taxable value would be \$50,000 ( $\$75,000 - \$25,000$ ).

If your homestead property has an assessed value less than \$75,000 you will only receive the Additional Homestead Exemption on the value above \$50,000 up to the assessed value. So, if the assessed value is \$65,000 you will receive an Additional Homestead Exemption in the amount of \$15,000 (difference between \$50,000 and \$65,000). The Additional Homestead Exemption will not apply to any property with an assessed value below \$50,000.

**Qualifying for Homestead Exemption:** To qualify, applicants must present proof of legal residence which may be established by the following. If you are married, the same information will be required from your spouse.

- Florida Driver License—with current address
- Florida Vehicle Registration—with current address
- Utility bill—showing name and address
- Voter Registration—with current address
- Local employment

NOTE: Under Florida law you are required to update the address on your driver license and vehicle registration within 10 days of moving.

You must provide your social security number. You must provide your Permanent Visa or Resident Alien Card if you are not a United States citizen. A Temporary Visa such as an E-2 Visa is not sufficient to qualify for Homestead Exemption.

**Under certain circumstances, additional information may be required to complete your application.**

## ADDITIONAL EXEMPTIONS

The following exemptions are available to those who qualify and provide supporting documentation. Detailed information and online applications are available on our website: [www.polkpa.org](http://www.polkpa.org).

**Senior Exemption** is available from the county and certain municipalities. School board taxes and taxes for independent districts are not covered by this exemption. You must have the regular homestead, be 65 years old on January 1st, and have a previous year total household adjusted gross income that does not exceed the set limit. An additional exemption is available to those who have lived in their home for 25 years when the home's market value does not exceed \$250,000.

**Disability Exemption** up to \$500 will be allowed to every blind person or totally and permanently disabled person.

Property owned and used as homestead by a paraplegic, hemiplegic, or other totally and permanently disabled person who must use a wheelchair for mobility or who is legally blind may be exempt from taxation if they meet certain income limitations.

The homestead property of a quadriplegic will be exempted from taxation.

**Granny Flat Discount** is available to property owners who build additions onto an existing home or perform extensive renovations to provide living quarters for a parent or grandparent who is at least 65 years old.

**Widow or Widower Exemption** is available to those who are widowed and provide a copy of the death certificate for their spouse. Divorced or remarried persons do not qualify.

**\$5,000 Disabled Veterans Exemption** is available to any ex-service member, who has been disabled to a degree of 10 percent or more while serving during a period of wartime service or by misfortune, is entitled to a \$5,000 Veteran's Exemption. An un-remarried surviving spouse is also entitled to the exemption under certain conditions.

**Disabled Veteran Discount** may be applied to the homestead of a partially or totally permanently disabled Veteran who is 65 years old and was honorably discharged. The percentage of disability must be service-connected and combat-related.

**Veterans Total Exemption** is available on property owned and used as homestead by a Veteran, honorably discharged with a SERVICE-CONNECTED total and permanent disability. An un-remarried surviving spouse is also entitled to the exemption under certain conditions.

**Deployed Military Exemption** is available to service members who were deployed in the preceding calendar year outside the continental United States, Alaska, or Hawaii in support of designated military operations.

**Surviving Spouses of First Responders** who died in the line of duty qualify for exemption from taxation. First responders include law enforcement officers, correctional officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, or paramedics.

**Total or Partial Exemption** may be allowed if property is owned by a qualified exempt organization and used for charitable, religious, educational, literary, or scientific purposes.

**Conservation Exemption** applies to real property dedicated in perpetuity for conservation purposes. Requirements to file for lands subject to a conservation easement, environmentally endangered, or land used for outdoor recreational or park purposes can be found on our website.

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## ASSESSMENT REDUCTION FOR PROPERTY USED FOR LAND CONSERVATION

Legislation amended Florida Statute 193.501, requiring an application to be filed with the Property Appraiser for property to be assessed at a reduced value if used for conservation. An application can be accessed through our website.

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## AGRICULTURAL CLASSIFICATION

To qualify for Agricultural Classification, the property must be used primarily for "Bona Fide" Agricultural Purposes. Bona Fide Agricultural Purpose means "Good Faith Commercial Agricultural use of the Land". "Agricultural purposes" includes, but is not limited to, horticulture; floriculture; viticulture; forestry; dairy; livestock; poultry; bee; pisciculture, when the land is used principally for the production of tropical fish; aquaculture; sod farming; and all forms of farm products and farm production.

An Agricultural Classification application must be filed with the Property Appraiser by March 1<sup>st</sup> of the tax year. More information may be obtained on our website.

## REPORT EXEMPTION FRAUD

**THE STATE OF FLORIDA HAS SEVERE PENALTIES FOR RECEIVING A HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION YOU ARE NOT ENTITLED TO. UNQUALIFIED EXEMPTIONS WILL RESULT IN A 50% PENALTY OF UNPAID TAXES AND 15% INTEREST FOR UP TO 10 YEARS.**

If any of the following unreported situations applies to you, contact our Exemptions Department immediately.

- You have moved from your homestead property.
- The homestead property owner is deceased.
- You are renting your homestead property.
- You and your spouse own separate properties and both are receiving homestead exemption.
- You and your spouse own a second home in or out of state and both are receiving homestead exemptions or residency tax credit.
- You have remarried but are receiving a widow/widower exemption.
- Your income exceeds the statutory limit for qualifying for a Senior Exemption.

Any property owner who knowingly received an unqualified exemption is subject to a fine plus penalties for any or all of the prior ten years.

You may report fraud through our website or report fraud anonymously by telephoning (863) 534-4788 Ext.1850.

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## MOBILE HOME AND RV ASSESSMENTS

A mobile home will be taxed as real property if the owner of the mobile home is also the owner of the land on which the mobile home is permanently affixed. A mobile home taxed as real property must display an RP (real property) series decal. Homestead Exemption may be allowed if the mobile home owner is also the owner of the land and the property owner meets the qualifications for homestead. Registration to the mobile home must be presented at the time of filing for Homestead Exemption.

If a mobile home does not display a current RP or MH decal, and the Property Appraiser is unable to determine the owner of the mobile home, it will be assessed as real property to the land owner.

A mobile home owner who does not own the land must have a current mobile home (MH) series decal properly affixed to the

home. Any mobile home without a current MH decal will be presumed to be tangible personal property.

Any attachments (air conditioning, skirting, aluminum rooms, carports, etc.) to the mobile home are considered to be tangible personal property and are exempt from taxation.

Information on registrations, renewals, and title transfers is available through the Polk County Tax Collector's office.

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## TANGIBLE PERSONAL PROPERTY

Tangible Personal Property is everything other than real estate that has value by itself. It includes such things as furniture, fixtures, tools, machinery, household appliances, signs, equipment, leasehold improvements, supplies, leased equipment, and any other equipment used in a business or to earn income. Tangible Personal Property also includes attachments to mobile homes located in mobile home parks or on rented land. Attachments include cabana, carports, screened rooms, and utility rooms.

Every **new business** must file an initial Tangible Personal Property tax return by the **DEADLINE of April 1st** of the year after the business opens. The initial return, which can be filed online at [www.polkpa.org](http://www.polkpa.org), is required if the business owns or leases any personal property, without regard to the value of that property. In subsequent years, no return is required unless the combined value of all the business' equipment is more than \$25,000.

**In order to qualify for exemption, a return must be filed timely.** After the deadline, Florida Statutes provide that penalties will be applied at 5% per month or portion of a month that the return is late. A 15% penalty is required for unreported property and a 25% penalty if no return is filed at all (unless filing requirement was waived).

Failure to file a return or otherwise properly submit the property for taxation does not relieve the taxpayer of any requirement to pay all taxes assessed against the property.

Tangible personal property is assessed to the person owning the property on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Selling a business during the year requires a settlement between the owner and buyer as to who is responsible for the taxes due in November. The tax liability is a lien on the equipment, and may extend to other assets owned by the new owner.