

Revaluation is about fairness, not raising taxes

Save the fight over tax bills for the appropriate time and place.

Posted: Wednesday, Feb. 09, 2011



Chuck Hicks, Revaluation Manager

It's right at the top, in all capital letters: "THIS IS NOT A BILL."

Those five words are key to a basic understanding of the Mecklenburg County property value notices arriving in mailboxes this week.

Your property tax bill isn't decided this week. It's determined in June, when local elected leaders set the property tax rates for the coming year.

Critics like to cast revaluation as some nefarious government plot to raise taxes. It's not. It's about basic fairness, making sure you're not paying more or less than your share.

Market values of properties across Mecklenburg County have changed since 2002. Some have gone down, some have stayed about the same, some have gone up a little bit and some have gone up a lot. If yours has gone down or gone up less than others', you've been paying too much. If yours has gone up a lot more than others', you've been getting an artificial break by paying taxes based on an outdated value.

Revaluation by itself does nothing to the amount of taxes the county collects. That depends on the new tax rate. It just ensures that property owners are paying based on a more accurate value than one that's eight years old. If you end up paying more, it may be because the market value of your home has jumped significantly, which you might consider good news.

Many folks feel the weight of the past three years and can't imagine their property values going up. But property tax values until now have been based on 2002 home sales. A lot has happened since then. Values went up for most folks in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007. That rise more than offsets drops of the past three years for most homeowners.

Values have gone up 6-8 percent on average countywide. If elected officials keep total tax collections the same, your tax bill will shrink if your home has gone up less than the average and grow if your value has gone up more than the average. That's only fair. In fact, the county should be doing revaluations more often, not less. That would keep tax values from getting too far out of whack, and ensure that property owners pay just their share.

To be sure, says revaluation team leader Chuck Hicks, this year's assessment was the trickiest in memory, given the foreclosure rate and other market turbulence. Tax assessor Garrett Alexander expects as many as 40,000 appeals. And by all means, homeowners should appeal if they have evidence (not emotion) that their value is overstated.

But that's a fight over market value. Save the fight over taxes for the time and place it belongs: In late spring, in the city, town and county budget talks.