The mission of the Ad Valorem Division of the Oklahoma Tax Commission is to promote an ad Valorem property tax system which is fair and equitable to all taxpayers by implementing standard valuation methodology, tax law conformity, and assessment administration compliance.

Oklahoma Ad Valorem FORUM

Volume XV, Issue I ● January 2006

Director's Notes:

Happy New Year from the Ad Valorem Division! 2005 was a really terrific year and it is my hope that 2006 will be even better. Now all we need is some rain to knock down these terrible fires and provide some relief for the hard-pressed fire departments in all parts of Oklahoma.

We've heard that Greg Harmon, who heads up a volunteer department in Major County, has been out on a few calls. Cyndi Heath's husband with the Harrah Fire Department has been busy, and Dwight Argo, who was working as a volunteer in Seminole County, has a broken arm as his reward for helping his neighbors. We'd like to recognize those guys in their efforts to help other people.

Speaking of recognition-- The Oklahoma Tax Commission has a tradition. Every December the agency newsletter reprints various letters or calls that we've received from taxpayers commenting on good taxpayer service. This year the publication has some really nice comments on Jerry Kirton (one of our Ad Valorem Division alumni) and Johnny Brandon for their service. I'd like to thank again the county assessors who wrote in about our field staff's help on the regional training. Several of those letters were run in the "Kudos" edition.

January is always a busy time of year in the ad valorem system. Many county assessors and deputies are out visiting the cities and towns across the state. I've always felt that the visits are a good positive experience for the county assessor, their staff and taxpayers. Name me one other level of government that goes out to meet the taxpayers in a non-emergency situation to provide assistance and support.

The new Veteran's Exemption is off to a good start. We've had some calls, but most of the hard work occurred during the fall. I think the County Assessors Association has done a good job working with the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs to keep everyone informed.

It is New Years Resolution time again. I hope everyone makes some good ones and keeps some of the best. It's not easy. I'm going to continue with my usual pledges to exercise, but eat better this year. No more junk food.

Paul Greenburg, a newspaper columnist has a few good resolutions for 2006:

1) "Practice what you preach. Better yet, don't preach, just practice."
2) "If you believe you can damage things, remember that you can repair wrongs, settle quarrels, and forget grudges."
3) "Look up old friends. Make some new ones."

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A Look Ahead...

- **February 7-9: CODA Conference, Oklahoma City**
- **February 20: Presidents' Day**
- **February 21-24: Unit I, Intro. To Assessor's Office, Tulsa**

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4) "Love creative work, do not seek to dominate others, and avoid intimacy with the ruling authorities." Pirke Avot 1:10 from the Talmud advice for journalists.

We should have a very busy and eventful legislative session. We'll be watching to see what legislation might come forward this year.

As we move forward into 2006, we're looking forward to the continued good working relations with the State Auditor and Inspector (SA&I) and Center for Local Government Technology (CLGT), Cooperative Extension, the County Assessors' Association, and the Oklahoma Association of Tax Representatives (OATR). A good solid relationship between these groups helps everyone in the ad valorem system and provides better service for state taxpayers.

Thanks to everyone.
And Happy New Year.

Jeff Spelman, CAE Director Ad Valorem Division

P.S. "Now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving Hades with them as usual." Anwar Caddo, Ad Valorem Philosopher loosely based on quote from Mark Twain.

A couple of months ago, I wrote about how Canadian County has been organizing county GIS coordination sessions. The Assessor's office was able to get other county agencies as well as city and regional entities to participate. The local COG (ACOG) was so impressed by the turnout and resulting agreements that they decided to help the Logan County Commissioners to start holding similar meetings. I was asked to attend their first one in Guthrie January 11th.

Several cities, rural fire districts, and county agencies attended. With all the wild fires during the past few months, most of the discussion was how they could get enhanced 911 up and running county-wide. There was discussion on what was readily available and what could be done with time.

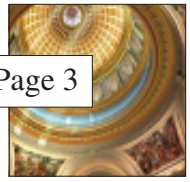
All I can say is GOOD! The more of these types of meetings there are, the more that can be done with what your offices are already collecting and maintaining. Just think—your offices are collecting building features and footprints, ownership mapping, aerial photography, digital house pictures, and ownership information on every property in the county. Many of you have active roles in rural 911 addressing. Why wouldn't these types of meetings be showcasing what you are doing and how it can be used?

If anyone else would like to set up these types of coordination meetings, you might give one of these folks a call: Ron Funck in Canadian County, ACOG, or you own local COG.

Remember: "You, the unwilling, led by the unknowing, have been doing so much for so long with so little that you are now uniquely qualified to anything with absolutely nothing!"

Receive The "Forum" By Email:

To receive the "Ad Valorem Forum" by email, please forward your email address to Cyndi Heath at cheath@oktax.state.ok.us.



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Two New A.G. Opinions Issued

Two recent Attorney General Opinions have been issued that affect County Assessors. The first deals with the issue of authorization for assessors and their deputies to go upon any premises and enter any building or structure to view property for assessment purposes. The second opinion addresses whether certain documents provided to the county assessor in an informal hearing are subject to the Open Records Act.

A.G. OPINION 05-49

The central question in this opinion is whether the provisions of 68 O.S. 2001, § 2818 (C)(1) provide legal authority for an assessor or deputy to enter the yard of a person when the property is posted with "No Trespassing" signs and the assessor has been advised by the property owner that they are prohibited from entering the property pursuant to 21 O.S. 2001, § 1835.

The Opinion affirms the authority of the county assessor to enter the residential or business premises of a taxpayer for the purpose of viewing, inspecting or appraising personal or real property.

Additionally, the opinion states that county assessors may not enter the private dwelling of a taxpayer unless, if a dispute exists, the taxpayer requests the assessor or his or her deputy to enter the dwelling (68 O.S. 2001, § 2818(C), (D)).

In the case of a commercial or business premises, the assessor must request permission to enter the premises for the purpose of searching for personal property (68 O.S. 2001, § 2818(E)). If permission is refused, a search warrant must be obtained.

Despite trespass statutes, a county assessor may enter the premises of a taxpayer under the authority and within the constraints of 68 O.S. 2001, § 2818.

According to Opinion 05-49, each specific act is a question of fact that is beyond the scope of the Attorney General's Opinion.

A.G. OPINION 05-50

The primary question posed in this Opinion is whether the exemption to the Open Records Act found at 68 O.S. Supp. 2005, § 2835(E) make informal hearings information presented by the taxpayer confidential.

The Opinion states that the exemption to the Open Records Act is limited only to "sworn lists of property" filed by a taxpayer with the county assessor. It does not cover omitted property assessment sheets and notices sent by the county assessor pursuant to 68 O.S. 2001, § 2843.

Additionally, the exemption does not make any records created or received in the informal hearing process confidential (see 68 O.S. Supp. 2005, § 2876(F).

If you have any questions about either of these Attorney General Opinions, you may call the Ad Valorem Division at (405) 521-3178.

Property Tax Rankings By State

(From CNNMoney.com)

Local property taxes vary greatly by state, ranging from nearly $2,000 per person in New Jersey to $331 in Alabama.

The states with the highest property taxes are centered in the Northeast. Every New England state is in the top 10, as is New York and New Jersey. The only exception is Wyoming at number 7.

The states with the lowest per capita property taxes cluster in the South and West. Alabama is followed by Arkansas, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

When comparing property taxes with income, Maine ranks number 1, followed by neighbor New Hampshire. Alabama maintains its status as the least burdensome state for property taxes. The surprise here is Delaware, which comes in right after Alabama.

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According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, property taxes leapt 34.2 percent over the past five years. They have grown three times faster than inflation and about 50 percent faster than sales tax revenues.

Oklahoma per capita property taxes amount to $430, with a ranking of 48th. Oklahoma's property tax per $100 of income is $1.60, also 48th in the country.

Housing Price Index Numbers Detailed

Some interesting Oklahoma housing price growth numbers are available at the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight agency's Web site at http://www.ofheo.gov/HPI.asp.

OFHEO's House Price Index (HPI) is a measure designed to capture changes in the value of single-family homes in the U.S. as a whole, in various regions of the country, and in the individual states and the District of Columbia. The HPI is published by OFHEO using data provided by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

The historical HPI data is available for the State of Oklahoma, and for Tulsa, Oklahoma City and Lawton. These can be accessed and compared utilizing the following links: http://www.ofheo.gov/HPIState.asp and http://www.ofheo.gov/HPIMSA.asp.

The HPI is a broad measure of the movement of single-family house prices. Because of the breadth of the sample, it provides more information than is available in other house price indexes. The HPI serves as a timely, accurate indicator of house price trends at various geographic levels. It also provides housing economists with an improved analytical tool that is useful for estimating changes in the rates of mortgage defaults, prepayments and housing affordability in specific geographic areas.

Annual Percent Changes In MSA House Price Index By Quarter From 1995-2005

(Source: Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight)

Year	Qtr.	Oklahoma City	Tulsa	Lawton
2000	1	3.75	4.06	-2.44
2000	2	3.89	4.39	1.94
2000	3	3.95	4.89	1.84
2000	4	4.30	5.15	2.71
2001	1	5.34	6.63	4.29
2001	2	5.43	7.02	0.69
2001	3	5.08	5.26	0.05
2001	4	5.68	6.44	4.47
2002	1	4.12	3.81	1.79
2002	2	4.12	3.35	4.25
2002	3	4.45	4.04	6.92
2002	4	4.12	3.35	3.21
2003	1	4.59	3.82	3.83
2003	2	4.97	3.77	5.77
2003	3	4.32	2.71	2.80
2003	4	5.26	2.82	2.39
2004	1	5.46	3.77	7.04
2004	2	5.58	2.59	3.60
2004	3	6.15	2.16	6.99
2004	4	6.02	3.08	9.50
2005	1	5.48	2.07	8.84
2005	2	6.97	3.73	11.46
2005	3	8.08	4.17	11.87