



Ashburnham Land Values Explained

The Need for Greater Uniformity in Land Valuation

The main goal of an assessor's office is fairness and uniformity in taxation. While assessors play little or no role in determining how many tax dollars a municipality raises, we strive to distribute the tax burden equitably. Property valuations are the means by which the town's total property tax collections, known as the "Property Tax Levy", are distributed. The higher your valuation - the greater your share of the property tax burden.

Property assessments are most fair when they meet two fundamental tests; they are reflective of market value, and are equitable (based on a uniform and accepted valuation methodology).

Most assessors' offices rely upon a market-related cost method when estimating property values. Valuations developed using this approach use localized building costs in conjunction with land value estimates to yield a property's approximate market value. The assessors' CAMA (Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal) system holds a collection of rate tables for the valuation of both land and buildings. These tables when applied to a property's listed data yield the valuations used in calculating the share of taxes assessed to a property.

Land Valuation – Past Practices

Over the years, assessors have experienced mounting complaints over the question of land value equity. These complaints have caught the attention of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue and the agency responsible for certifying taxable valuations – the Bureau of Local Assessment. Understandably, the BLA is now requiring assessors to show that land valuations and the system of tables that generate them have market support, as well as, demonstrated uniform application of a simple and standard valuation method.

Without a uniform and transparent method for valuing land, assessed valuations are difficult to defend and even more difficult to explain. Common practice over the decades has seen assessors introducing all sorts of special adjustments, usually to accommodate an individual property owner's complaint. Over time, land records became cluttered with hundreds of special adjustments – many undocumented and unable to be explained.

Land valuation mandates have resulted in fundamental changes in the way our office values land. This document is intended to help taxpayers understand how their land values are estimated.

Affected Land Types

Ashburnham's recent revaluation has resulted in substantial land value changes aimed at addressing past over-and-under valuation problems. Notable land types that have realized greater than normal valuation changes include the following.