



## WHAT IS MARKET VALUE?

Florida law requires that the just value of all property be determined each year. The Supreme Court of Florida has declared “just value” to be legally synonymous to “full cash value” and “fair market value.” The fair market value of your property is the amount for which it could sell on the open market. The Property Appraiser analyzes the market transactions annually to determine fair market value as of January 1. Fair market value must be determined for every piece of property in Lee County each year. This includes 528,000+/- parcels consisting of residential, agricultural, commercial, governmental and industrial properties, as well as +/-72,500 tangible personal property accounts. The Property Appraiser must also oversee 155,000+/- Homestead exemptions as well as Senior’s, Veteran’s, Widow, Widower, and Disability exemptions. In addition, exemption eligibility must be determined for certain religious, charitable, educational, and governmental uses. Agricultural classifications also must be reviewed annually.



## HOW IS PROPERTY APPRAISED?

There are three approaches to value stipulated in the Florida Statutes: 1.) “Direct Sales Comparison”; 2.) “Cost Approach”; and 3.) “Income Approach.” In Lee County, we use a computer assisted mass appraisal system that incorporates elements of all three approaches to value. Please keep in mind, however, that the best evidence of the fair market value is when several properties comparable to your property sell. The property’s fair market value is determined by considering all three approaches to value.

The first method is the *Direct Sales Comparison*. In this approach we find properties like yours that have recently sold. Their selling prices are analyzed carefully to get a true picture of what occurred in the market as of the date of assessment. (One property may have sold for more than it was really worth because the buyer was in a hurry to occupy, and would pay a higher price. Another may have sold for less than it was really worth because the owner needed cash right away and was willing to sell to the first buyer making an offer.)

The second method is the *Cost Approach*. In this approach, the appraiser considers how much it would cost to replace your property with one of like utility. This method utilizes current material and labor costs to determine a building value. If your property is not new, this value is then reduced by an appropriate amount of depreciation. The building value is then added to the estimated value of the land (as if it were vacant) along with the value of any other ancillary improvements on the property.

The final method is the *Income Approach*. This approach is based on the concept that current value is the present worth of future benefits to be derived from the income that is

produced by an asset over the remainder of its economic life. The income approach uses capitalization to convert the anticipated income stream into an estimate of present value. Income information should be submitted annually by the property owner to the Property Appraiser for analysis. This information is treated confidentially.



## WHY DOES APPRAISED VALUE CHANGE FROM YEAR TO YEAR?

When the fair market value changes, so does the appraised (just) value. For instance, if you were to increase the total fair market value of your property by building a swimming pool in your backyard, the appraised value would increase. Similarly, should your property’s fair market value be decreased by fire or storm damage, the appraised value will decrease to reflect the downward effect on your property’s fair market value. The Property Appraiser does not create fair market value; he simply reflects it and appraises the property accordingly. Buyers and sellers set fair market value by their transactions in the marketplace.



## WHAT IS A TRIM NOTICE?

Annually, in August, the Property Appraiser sends the “Notice of Proposed Property Taxes” (TRIM Notice) to all property owners of record. The Florida Constitution and Statutes require that we appraise property at fair market value. If you agree that the fair market value of your property is at least as much as shown in the notice, you do not have to do anything. However, if you have any questions about this value, you can contact this office. Contact information is provided on the TRIM notice. This notice is for informational purposes only and is not a bill.

## WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH THE PROPERTY APPRAISER’S MARKET VALUE?

If you believe that your assessment exceeds the fair market value of the property, you may file a petition before the Value Adjustment Board. This Board is created by State Law and is comprised of three members of the Lee County Commission and two members of the School Board. The Board appoints Special Magistrates who are qualified appraisers or attorneys, independent of the Property Appraiser’s Office, to conduct valuation hearings. The Special Magistrates are appointed only to determine whether the appraised value of the property exceeds its fair market value as of January 1<sup>st</sup>. Petitions to the Board and further details concerning this process can be obtained by visiting the Property Appraiser’s Office or on our website at [www.leepa.org](http://www.leepa.org). Petitions must be filed with the Clerk of Court by the date that appears on the TRIM notice.



## DOES THE PROPERTY APPRAISER LEVY OR COLLECT TAXES?

No! The Property Appraiser only appraises property and is neither a Taxing Authority nor the Tax Collector and has nothing to do with the amount of taxes levied or collected. However, this is how your bill is created and calculated: Various separate government entities, each having unique and distinct duties, are involved in producing your November tax bill. First, the Property Appraiser annually appraises all property in Lee County at its fair market value as of January 1<sup>st</sup>. Next, each taxing authority within Lee County sets their own millage (tax) rate based on the amount of tax dollars necessary to fund their annual budget. Lastly, the Tax Collector is responsible for billing and collecting all taxes levied in Lee County. Calculating the amount of taxes due is done by the Property Appraiser prior to sending final tax roll information to the Tax Collector.

*Below is an example using an average home value of \$250,000 with a \$50,000 Homestead Exemption:*

	MILLAGE	VALUE	TAXES
County Levy	5.4389	\$200,000	\$1,087.78
*Schools	6.9600	\$225,000	\$1,566.00
Water Management	0.6634	\$200,000	\$ 132.68
**Mosquito/Hyacinth Control	0.1850	\$250,000	\$ 46.25
**Fire Control	2.0000	\$250,000	\$ 500.00
(City or Other Millages May Apply)			
		<b>TOTAL TAXES</b>	<b>\$3,332.71</b>

The millage rate is multiplied by the value of the property then divided by 1,000 to determine the amount of taxes. The reason: “millage rates” are in dollars per thousand of value. You may also note that certain districts marked with an asterisk do not deduct the homestead exemption value prior to calculating the amount of taxes due. The example shows the calculation for ad valorem taxes only. There are several districts in Lee County that levy non ad valorem assessments for the benefit of the residents in those districts. These assessments are not required to be shown on the Notice of Proposed Taxes, but will appear on your tax bill.



## WHAT IS A HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION?

Homestead Exemption is a constitutional benefit that exempts up to \$50,000 from the assessed value of your property. Additionally, you benefit from “Save Our Homes” which limits increases to your assessed value (not your taxes) to the CPI or 3%, whichever is less. It is granted to those applicants who timely file a homestead exemption application by March 1<sup>st</sup>, possess title to real property and are bona fide Florida residents living in the dwelling and making it their permanent home on January 1<sup>st</sup>.



## HOW DO I QUALIFY FOR HOMESTEAD?

In order to qualify, you must meet the following requirements:

- ✓ You must own your home and reside in it as of January 1
- ✓ You must have a permanent Florida Driver’s License. (A “valid in Florida only” license is not acceptable.)
- ✓ You must provide your Social Security number.
- ✓ Married applicants must provide the Social Security number for their spouse.
- ✓ You must be registered to vote in and provide your voter registration number.
- ✓ Non-voters must complete a declaration of domicile. Domicile forms are available at this office
- ✓ Non-citizens must provide proof of permanent residency – Permanent Resident Alien Card.

All applicants are required to sign an Affidavit stating they have been informed they must relinquish any residency based exemption, tax credit or tax roll back in any other jurisdiction. Only one residency based exemption is allowed for married persons. Applicants may be required to provide proof that they do not receive an exemption in another jurisdiction.

## WHEN AND WHERE DO I FILE?

To better serve the residents of Lee County, you can file for Homestead in person, by mail or on-line – (November 1 – March 1 only). You can download instructions for filing, the application and other required forms by visiting our website at [www.leepa.org](http://www.leepa.org). Widow/Widower, Senior, Portability or Disability Exemption applications may be filed in person or by mail. Applications filed after March 1st are considered late filed, however, if you believe you qualify, you may late file through the last day of TRIM (TRIM Notices are mailed in mid-August and state the filing deadline). If you are married, it is advised that both the husband and wife apply to protect the Save Our Homes Cap status should ownership changes occur in the future.



## WHAT IS “SAVE OUR HOMES”?

“Save Our Homes” is a constitutional benefit authored by Mr. Wilkinson and approved by Florida voters in 1992. It places a limitation of 3% on annual assessment increases on Homestead properties beginning with the 1995 tax year. For properties granted Homestead Exemption, the initial year’s assessed value will become the base value for the implementation of “Save Our Homes.” Following the initial year, the assessed value will not increase more than 3% or the CPI (Consumer Price Index), whichever is less in any tax year. Exceptions to that limitation include new additions or construction, items that had escaped taxation in the past, and any portion of the homestead property that is rented. When a Homestead property sells, the assessed value returns to the fair market value in the year following the sale. That fair market value assessment then becomes the base value for “Save Our Homes” purposes for the new owner/homestead applicant.

**WHAT IS PORTABILITY?** The Florida homestead "Save Our Homes" benefit (the difference between the assessed value and market value of a homestead property due to the annual limit on increases in assessed value) is now "portable". Portability means that, from now on, you can transfer some or all of your old home's "Save Our Homes" benefit to your new home. You must make application to the Property Appraiser in the county where your new residence is located between January 1st and March 1st to transfer your "Save Our Homes" benefit. Visit our website at [www.leepa.org](http://www.leepa.org) for the application and additional information.

**LOSS OF HOMESTEAD/PENALTY:**

The rental of an entire dwelling previously claimed to be a homestead for tax purposes may constitute an abandonment of said dwelling as a homestead. Please notify this office if the status of your property changes due to rental activity. Any person who knowingly and willfully gives false information for the purpose of claiming Homestead Exemption is guilty of a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable by a term of imprisonment not exceeding one (1) year or a fine not exceeding \$5,000 or both.



**HOMESTEAD FRAUD:**

If you know or suspect that someone is receiving a homestead exemption that they do not qualify for or that they are receiving a residency based exemption from another state in addition to their homestead benefit, you can anonymously report this information to us for further investigation by calling (239)533-6299 or by visiting our website at [www.leepa.org](http://www.leepa.org) and clicking on "Report Homestead Fraud."

**WHAT OTHER EXEMPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE?:**

**Seniors:** If you qualify for the Homestead Exemption, are 65 years of age and you have a limited income, you may be eligible for an additional Homestead Exemption of up to \$50,000 on taxes levied by certain taxing authorities. **Widows/Widowers:** Are eligible for a \$500 exemption. **Total & Permanently Disabled Persons/Blind:** Are eligible for a \$500 exemption and may qualify for total exemption from property taxes. Doctor's/VA certification of total and permanent disability is required. **Disabled Veterans:** If you are at least 10% disabled by service-connected misfortune, you are entitled to a \$5,000 exemption; additionally, if you were a Florida resident when you entered the service and are 65 years of age, you may qualify for a property tax discount. **Totally & Permanently Disabled Veterans** may qualify for total exemptions. Please visit our website for further information and qualifications or read our "Exemption Information Pamphlet."



**WHAT IS AN AGRICULTURAL CLASSIFICATION?** An Agricultural Classification is the designation of land by the Property Appraiser pursuant to F.S. 193.461. The Ag assessment is based on an agricultural use value. **HOW DO I QUALIFY?**

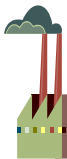
To qualify for Agricultural classification, a return must be filed with the Property Appraiser between January 1<sup>st</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup> of the tax year. Only lands which are used for bona fide agricultural purposes shall be classified agricultural. "Bona Fide Agricultural Purposes" means good faith commercial agricultural use of the land. The Property Appraiser, prior to classifying such lands, may require the taxpayer or the taxpayer's representative to furnish such information as may reasonably be required to establish such lands are actually used for a bona fide agricultural purpose.

**WHAT IS TANGIBLE PERSONAL PROPERTY?**

Tangible Personal Property refers to all assets used in a business or rental activity that are subject to an ad valorem assessment. More specifically, it is furniture, fixtures, tools, machinery, household appliances, equipment, signs, leasehold improvements, supplies, leased equipment—whatever is used to generate income. Florida Statute 193.052 requires that all Tangible Personal Property be reported each year to the Property Appraiser's Office. Anyone in possession of assets on January 1 who has either a proprietorship, corporation or is a self-employed agent or contractor, must file each year. Property owners who lease, loan or rent property must also file. **New for 2008:** Each Tangible Personal Property tax return is eligible for a \$25,000 exemption. Accounts that had a taxable value of less than \$25,000 and that have filed a tax return may be exempted from filing in future years if their value remains under \$25,000. The deadline for filing a timely return is April 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. For untimely filings, Florida Statutes provide guidelines for the penalties that must be applied: 5% for each month the return is filed late, 15% for unreported property, and a 25% penalty if no return is filed. Further information regarding Tangible Personal Property may be obtained by writing or calling our office at (239) 533-6140.

**NON-HOMESTEAD 10% ANNUAL ASSESSMENT LIMITATION:**

Florida law requires that all non-homestead residential property and certain residential and non-residential property be assessed at just value as of January 1, 2008. Thereafter, certain non-homestead real property must be reassessed annually and any value change resulting from the reassessment of such property may not exceed 10 percent of the just value of the property in the prior year. 2008 is the base year for the limitation. You do not have to make application in order to receive benefit of the limitation. The limitation is not retained when certain changes in ownership or control occur. Unrecorded changes in ownership or control must be reported to the Property Appraiser by submitting Department of Revenue (DOR) Form DR-430. To obtain the form, visit the DOR website: <http://dor.myflorida.com/dor/forms/2008/dr430.pdf>



**Important Dates to Remember**

- January 1-** Date of assessment-Exemption Applicant must own and reside upon the property as of this date in order to qualify for filing for the current tax year.
- January 1-** Tangible Tax Returns (DR-405) mailed.
- January 1 through March 1-** Filing period begins January 1st and ends March 1st for ALL Exemptions. This includes: Homestead, Widow/Widower, Veteran and Non-Veteran Disability, Senior, Wholly-Total Exempt, Personal, Institutional, Charitable, Agricultural Classifications, Portability of Save Our Homes, etc.
- April 1-** Filing deadline for tangible tax return with no penalty applied. Also, deadline to request an extension of the time allowed to file a return with no penalty applied.
- May 15-** Filing deadline for tangible tax returns with extension requests that were granted.
- \*August-** Notice of Proposed Taxes (TRIM Notice) is mailed in mid-August. Review this document carefully as it contains important information regarding your exempt status and your SOH benefit. If you believe you qualified for an exemption or SOH benefit and the TRIM Notice does not reflect same, contact our office immediately. This Notice provides the statutory deadline for filing Value Adjustment Board petitions.
- \*September-** Value Adjustment Board (VAB) petition filing deadline as stated on TRIM Notice.
- \*November-** Tax bills sent out by Tax Collector's Office on or about November 1st.
- \*Exact date varies on a year-to-year basis**



**Kenneth M. Wilkinson, CFA**  
**Lee County Property Appraiser's Office**  
 2480 Thompson St., 4th Floor  
 Fort Myers, FL 33901  
 website: [www.leepa.org](http://www.leepa.org)

**Office Hours Monday through Friday: 8:30am to 5:00pm**  
**Directions: Downtown Fort Myers at the corner of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. & Fowler Street (4th Floor Constitutional Complex)**

Main Line	(239) 533-6100	Main Fax	(239) 533-6160
Public Service Dept.	(239) 533-6150	Fax	(239) 533-6038
Tangible Property	(239) 533-6140	Fax	(239) 533-6289
Data Services	(239) 533-6185	Fax	(239) 533-6139
Map Services	(239) 533-6159	Fax	(239) 533-6139
Agricultural Dept.	(239) 533-6172	Fax	(239) 533-6091
Technical Services	(239) 533-6194	Fax	(239) 533-6107
Assessment Dept.	(239) 533-6100	Fax	(239) 533-6091

*Revised April 1, 2009—Based on 2007 Final Roll Information*



*Lee County Property Appraiser  
 Honorable Kenneth M. Wilkinson, CFA*

**Welcome to your  
 Lee County Property  
 Appraiser's Office**



My staff and I are at your service to answer any questions you may have concerning the Lee County Property Appraiser's Office. It is my goal as your Property Appraiser to provide fair appraisals for all properties, whether large or small. We're here to serve you.

Respectfully,

**Kenneth M. Wilkinson, CFA**  
**Lee County Property Appraiser**