

County Manager's Recommendations

Goals:

1. Identify and address inequities in neighborhoods
2. Develop a detailed work plan for next revaluation
3. Build a strong culture of customer service within the Assessor's Office

Immediate Board Actions:

1. Approve amending the Pearson's Appraisal Service contract to identify all the neighborhoods where there are major issues of inequity. Estimated cost: \$180,000. Estimated time to complete: 90 days
2. Direct the County Manager to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) to solicit bids to rework all the neighborhoods identified by Pearson's Appraisal Service where there are major issues of inequity. Although the final scope of work will be contingent on completion of #1 above, staff can begin developing the RFP immediately. Estimated cost range: \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million. Estimated time to complete: 12 months from award of contract, including the appeal process.
3. Direct the Assessor to address the minor issues, consistent with the Pearson's Appraisal Service findings and recommendations
4. Direct the County Manager and Assessor to develop a detailed work plan for the next revaluation that would include:
 - a. Updating property record cards
 - b. A strategy to assess value in complex areas, particularly pre—1980 heterogeneous neighborhoods (e.g., field visits, contracting with appraisers experienced with type of neighborhood)
 - c. Project management of areas with a high volume of appeals
 - d. Quality control strategies
 - e. Construction cost and commercial market studies
 - f. Commercial appraisal approach (e.g., emphasis on income approach)
 - g. Informal appeal objectives and standards (e.g., face-to-face meetings with property owners, one appraiser working all appeals in a neighborhood, deadlines for notices and managing informal appeals)
 - h. Procedures for Board of Equalization and Review, including role of Assessor and staff
 - i. Projected organization and staffing model, other resources and associated cost to implement the work plan and maintain ongoing operations of the Assessor's Office.

Note: The detailed work plan will be presented to the Board for any revision and/or concurrence. Prior to presentation to the Board, the detailed work plan will be reviewed by Pearson's Appraisal Service for consistency with recommendations. The plan also will be disseminated to the public for input/feedback. Pearson's review of the plan will be included in the contract amendment referenced in #1 above. The detailed work plan is estimated to be developed by June, 2013.

5. Direct the Board of Equalization and Review (BER) to implement changes to its process for scheduling hearings that are more convenient to both appellants and Board members.

Note: In addition to the other BER-related recommended changes to be addressed as part of the detailed work plan per 4h above, staff will develop recommended changes in the recruitment and appointment process for Board selection of BER members to expand the pool of qualified candidates to serve on the BER.

Legislative Considerations:

Staff believes that all of the Pearson recommendations can be implemented under existing state law. If, in the implementation of these recommendations, statutory barriers are identified, proposed legislative changes will be presented to the Board. Additionally, consideration should be given to seeking legislative changes that offer additional clarity. This could include legislation that specifies how much time property owners have to file an appeal, as well as clarification of current language on deadlines associated with the BER adjournment date. County staff also recommends working with the NCACC and/or NC Assessor's Association to support consistency in the wording used in revaluation notices.

Management Actions:

The County Manager will develop a customer service enhancement action plan that will be initiated by contracting with an outside firm to conduct a customer service assessment of the Assessor's Office. Based on the assessment findings and recommendations, an action plan will be developed to reform and transform the Assessor's Office whereby customer service and satisfaction is a top priority.

It is estimated that it will take 120 days for the County Manager to contract with the outside firm and develop the action plan.