

Property Assessor's Staffing

At the Board's March 20 meeting, questions were raised about the staffing levels in the Property Assessor's Office and whether staffing was sufficient to conduct a quality revaluation process. Currently, there are 73 permanent full-time positions in the Property Assessor's Office, which is exactly the same number of positions in FY03 when the last revaluation was conducted. However, due to a reallocation of positions, the Property Assessor's Office has three more appraiser positions than it did in FY03.

Between FY03 and FY12, other staff changes have occurred as well. At its staffing peak in FY09, the Property Assessor's Office had 82 permanent full-time positions, nine more positions than the current level. In FY10 and FY11, nine positions were eliminated in the Property Assessor's Office in areas unrelated to the revaluation process, as follows:

- Three of the nine positions eliminated in FY10 were appraisers from the "new construction" team. The positions were eliminated because new construction had declined by more than 50% from FY07. The positions have not been restored because the volume of new construction has not warranted additional appraisal resources.
- Another three of the nine positions eliminated were administrative positions in the customer support area. These positions were eliminated

as a result of a reorganization of processes that allowed fewer staff to provide the same level of service.

- In FY11, two additional positions were eliminated in the business personal property audit section of the Property Assessor's Office because discovery work and business property audits were contracted with a private company (Tax Management Associates).
- The ninth position eliminated was a GIS Technician position that managed the building photo program. This position was eliminated because funds to support the maintenance of that program had previously been reduced.
- The seven-member Revaluation Team formed in FY2007 was not impacted by FY10 or FY11 cuts.

All budget requests from the Property Assessor's Office for the revaluation were contained in the County Manager's Recommended Budgets and were approved for funding by the Board. These included funds for temporary staffing, contracted services, technology improvements and additional attorney fees.

As was mentioned at the Board meeting, permanent staffing levels of the Property Assessor's Office had no impact on the quality of this revaluation. However, despite hiring nine additional temporary staff to support permanent staff in the customer service area, the magnitude of the appeals process has resulted in problems

An update to the Board of County Commissioners from the County Manager

with timeliness of customer service and instances of inconsistent and inaccurate information being provided. To address these challenges throughout the remainder of the appeals process, additional temporary staff is being hired to improve the quality of customer service.

Looking forward to FY13, a few areas may increase service demand within the Property Assessor's Office. First, as the economy improves and drives new construction, there likely will be increased need for appraisal services. An improved economy also can result in increased individual and business personal property listings. Also, changes in state law regarding motor vehicle registration will place new requirements on property assessment at the local level, resulting in the need to operate duplicate vehicle assessment processes for a significant portion of FY13.

Therefore, addressing these issues may require additional full-time staff in FY13 to support the increased workload, finalize the 2011 appeals, and handle new 2012 appeals.

Board members with questions should contact LUESA Director Cary Saul at Cary.Saul@MecklenburgCountyNC.Gov or 704-336-3725.

Chuck Hicks Retires

Effective April 1, 2012, Chuck Hicks will retire from his position as Real Property Appraiser Manager for Mecklenburg County. Chuck's key

role over the past several years has been directing the 2011 revaluation of all real property in Mecklenburg County.

Chuck applied for retirement in December 2011 after spending the past 23 years in the Assessor's Office and 25 years total in the real estate appraisal field as a county appraiser, private fee appraiser, and NCAB certified appraisal instructor. Many of his former students are now private appraisers in this community.

Chuck is taking early retirement to help expand his family's local organic farming business. In addition to appraisal classes, he will be devoting more time to teaching high school level courses in civics, economics and essay-writing for homeschooled students and expanding his role in ministry at his church.

We want to thank Chuck for his devoted professional service to Mecklenburg County and wish him the best in his new career.

Cecil Jackson, who is currently the Real Property Appraiser Manager over new construction assessment, will assume the duties of directing the revaluation process.

-- Harry L. Jones, Sr., County Manager