

Testimony to Senate Government Operations Committee regarding H.480
April 19, 2023
Presented by: Cristina Tardie, Hartford, VT

Please note that my testimony is my own opinion, having the experience as Assistant Assessor in Town of Hartford for the last 5 and half years. My opinions do not represent my employer's opinions.

Attached see full "Study of Equalization Procedures" (1999) Almy, Gloudemans, Jacobs & Denne"

Why don't we work together to review the system in a new study and take legislative action AFTER the recommendations are laid out?

- The Study of Assessment and Revaluation practices in VT needs to be independent.
- Many parties need to be involved: PVR Directors, DAs, System Analyst, Tax Examiner, Attorney, Tax Policy Analyst, VALA member, Lister/Assessor's comments, etc.

What long-term improvements from 1999 Study still need to be addressed today? See below:

Hire or train utility and complex property valuation specialists to:

- (1) increase the accuracy of the appraisals of utility property and large, complex properties and
- (2) increase consistency of approach (which especially in utility appraisal currently).

The state should assume responsibility for valuing railroad, utility, complex properties, difficult-to-appraise properties (such as larger industrial facilities, ski resort properties), because local assessment districts find it difficult to maintain the required specialized valuation skills and acquire the required databases. The resulting appraisals could be presented to the municipalities for the listers' consideration.

(In ratio studies) When sales samples are inadequate, use appraisals to supplement samples.

The intention is to increase the use of appraisals in ratio studies to ensure samples are representative. Appraisal procedures should conform to standards.

Implementation of this recommendation will imply the building of a market database, the development of mass appraisal models, and the training of appraisers.

"We recommend that PVR take steps to develop a credible appraisal program" to include market monitoring, mass appraisal models, Model Application, Field Review, and Documentation.

Strengthen training of advisors ensure that each advisor has the requisite appraisal... skills.

Should District Advisers be required to have the same qualifications as Listers and Assessors?

PVR should revise the abstract of grand lists

PVR should monitor the pattern of changes in assessments made by the various towns.

The assessor's abstract should summarize the changes in the roll due to physical changes such as new construction and demolition, changes in taxable status (from taxable to exempt and vice versa), and changes in estimated value.

Such data facilitates the monitoring of both assessment equity and sales chasing.

Work with listers to develop a new hierarchical set of property use codes to replace existing category and property use codes.

– First, property is classified for purposes of valuation, so that like properties are valued similarly. See suggested list of codes that ARE NOT CURRENTLY IMPLEMENTED

- Area as a determinant of a category. Given the emphasis placed on “highest and best use” in determining a property's category, it is incongruous that six acres be the dividing point between the two residential and vacation categories. Clearly, the six acre cut-off now serves no useful purpose. It conflicts with the two acre homestead break point.

Funding

What is a correct way to calculate funding?

Does VT compare favorably to other New England states in compensation?