



# Frequently Asked Questions

## What is the role of the Assessor?

The Assessor is charged with several administrative and statutory duties; however, the primary duty and responsibility is to assess all real property within Union County, except that which is otherwise provided by law. This would include residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural classes of property. Real Property is revalued every two years. The effective date of the assessment is January 1 of the current year. The Assessor determines a full or partial value of new construction or improvements depending on the state of completion as of January 1.

### General misconceptions about the Assessor's Work

The Assessor DOES NOT:

- Collect taxes
- Calculate taxes
- Determine the tax rate
- Set Policy for the Board of Review

The Assessor is concerned with value, not taxes. Taxing jurisdictions such as schools, cities, counties, and townships adopt budgets after public hearings. This determines the tax levy, which is the rate of taxation required to raise the money budgeted. The taxes you pay are proportionate to the value of your property compared to the total value of the taxing district in which your property is located.

## General Information About the Assessor

Assessors are appointed to their position by a Conference Board consisting of the members of the Board of Supervisors, the Mayors of all incorporated cities and a member from each school district within the jurisdiction. Assessors are required by statute, to pass a state examination and complete a Continuing Education Program consisting of 150 hours of formal classroom instruction with 90 hours of hours tested and a passing grade of 70% attained. The latter requirement must be met for the Assessor to be reappointed to the position every six years. The Deputy Assessor also must pass a state examination as well as successfully complete 90 hours of classroom instruction of which at least 60 hours as tested. The Conference Board approves the Assessor's budget and, after a public hearing, acts on the adoption of the budget. The Assessor is limited, by statute, depending upon the value of the jurisdiction, to a levy limitation for the budget.



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## **How does the Assessor determine the value of my property?**

Depending on the classification of the property, the assessment is to represent the market value of the property unless otherwise provided by Iowa Code. Residential, Agricultural Dwellings, Commercial, and Industrial classed properties are to be assessed at market value. Changes in the market value as indicated by research, sales ratio studies and analysis of local conditions as well as economic trends both in and outside the construction industry are used in determining your assessment. Agricultural land and buildings are valued on productivity and net earning capacity.

## **How Does the Assessor Estimate Market Value?**

To estimate the market value of your property, the Assessor generally uses three approaches. The first approach is to find properties that are comparable to yours and which have sold recently. Local conditions peculiar to your property are taken into consideration. The assessor also uses sales ratio studies to determine the general level of assessment in a community, to adjust for local conditions. This method is generally referred to as the *Market Approach* and usually considered the most important in determining the value of residential property.

## **How often is my property reassessed?**

State law requires all properties to be reassessed every two years. Current law requires the reassessment to occur in odd numbered years. If necessary, assessors may reassess property every year by receiving a notice of change from the owner, or the Assessor's office discovering a change to the property.

## **My assessment has not changed, why have my property taxes increased?**

Each year, assessed values are subject to a rollback factor determined by the Director of Revenue creating a taxable value. Property tax is calculated by applying a levy rate to the taxable value. Levy rates and rollbacks change from year to year therefore adjusting the amount of property tax. (Levy Rates are not determined by the Assessor, but by the taxing entities within the jurisdiction.)



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## **How is an equalization Order Determined?**

The Iowa Department of Revenue is responsible for “equalizing” assessments every two years. The Department compares the assessor’s abstracts to a “sales assessment ratio study” it has completed independently of the assessors. If the assessment (by property class) is 5 percent of more above or below the sales ratio study, the Department increases or decreases the assessment. (There is no sales ratio study for agricultural and industrial property.) Equalization occurs on an entire class of property, not an individual property. Also, equalization occurs on an assessing jurisdiction basis, not on a statewide basis. Equalization is important because it helps maintain equitable assessments among classes of property and among assessing jurisdictions. This helps to equally distribute the total tax burden within the area.

- If an Equalization order is received, the County Auditor shall give notice on or before October 8 by publication in an official newspaper to any class of property affected by the equalization order, and the county auditor will also give notice by mail postmarked on or before October 8 to each property owner or taxpayer whose valuation has been increased by the equalization order.

## **What do I do if I disagree with the Assessed Value of my property?**

If you disagree with the Assessment of a property, you have two basic options. One option is to have an informal review with the assessor’s office. If an agreement can be reached between April 2 through April 25, a signed document will change the assessment to the mutually agreed to value or classification. The second option is to file a formal appeal with the Board of Review between April 2 and April 30. Appeal forms for the Board of Review may be obtained from the assessor’s office and must be returned by the deadline above.

## **Tax Levies and Assessed Values**

There are several different taxing districts in a jurisdiction, each with a different levy. Each year the County Auditor determines for that district a levy that will yield enough money to pay for schools, police and fire protection, road maintenance and other services budgeted for that area. The tax levy is applied to each \$1,000 of a property’s taxable value. The value determined by the Assessor is the assessed value and is the value indicated on the assessment roll. The taxable value is the value determined by the Auditor after the state ordered “rollback” percentages for the various classes or property and is the value indicated on the tax statement. When comparing the value of your property with other properties always compare with the value on your assessment roll or the Assessor’s property record cards and not the value indicated on your tax statement.