

# Real Estate Assessments - Frequently Asked Questions

## Overview of County Process

### How often do you reassess my property?

All properties in Albemarle County are reassessed each year, which is required by County Code.

### Why does Albemarle County Assess at Market Value?

Assessments are required by the Code of Virginia to be at 100% of fair Market Value. Other states may assess at different percentages of Market Value, but generally real property taxation generates the largest local revenue source in many states, thus if Fair Market Value isn't the basis for mass appraisals, localities in those states may compensate with higher tax rates.

### What is Market Value?

Market Value is defined as the most probable price expressed in terms of money that a property would bring if exposed for sale in the open market in an arms-length transaction between a willing seller and a willing buyer, both of whom are knowledgeable concerning all of the uses for which the property can be adapted and for which it is capable of being used.

### What is an arms-length transaction?

This term is used to refer to transactions in which the buyer and seller have no connection. Foreclosures and family sales are not arms-length transactions and are not relied upon to determine Market Value.

### What is a non-market transaction?

These are transactions where the buyer and/or seller is not typically motivated such as an auction, a sale due to divorce, a sale out of foreclosure or a sale that is not listed.

### What information is used to determine the assessment of a property?

Specific information about each parcel and any improvements is gathered through site visits, GIS maps, building permits, surveys completed by the buyer or seller, and even sources on the internet, such as property listings. Sales information comes from the recorded deeds that are typically confirmed by parties involved in the sale, including the buyer or seller or their agents.

### How are property values determined?

Residential properties are typically valued by the sales comparison approach. In this approach, sales of residential properties in Albemarle County are used to create a model that accounts for differences in quality, finish, amenities, size and style of improvements, as well as site influences such as view, topography and location. While the model is calibrated with property sales, it is used to determine the assessed value of all properties. This is referred to as Mass Appraisal and is the standard method for assessing properties throughout the Commonwealth.

### What is the difference between Mass Appraisal and the appraisal I would get when I buy or refinance a house?

The appraisal you would get to refinance your home is called a fee appraisal. These appraisals are completed one at a time and compare a single property to three or more comparable sales. The fee appraiser is also typically able to inspect every detail of a home both inside and out. This method is not feasible for a reassessment and would be excessively costly to the County, which is why mass appraisals are performed. However, both forms of valuation are based on the same appraisal standards and underlying methods.

### What if there are no sales available in my neighborhood?

There are many subdivisions in Albemarle County and these are often referred to as neighborhoods. Many of these consist of very few parcels (less than 10). In mass appraisal, the term neighborhood refers to market areas, groups of similar properties, that might include many small subdivisions. Therefore, for mass appraisal purposes, neighborhoods are not necessarily contiguous properties. While there might be small adjustments for differences between parts of a market area, all properties will have enough similarity to support the overall valuation.

### Why are some properties assessed higher or lower than what they sell for?

While individual sales prices (even on identical homes) can vary, sometimes greatly, due to subjective decisions made in the buying process by either the buyer or seller, large amounts of sales allow us to account for that subjectivity and determine what typically motivated buyers and sellers would do. Even a fee appraisal creates a range of values from which a value is determined.

### How are Land Use values determined?

Virginia law requires the Assessor to consider land rates determined by SLEAC (State Land Evaluation Advisory Council) when assessing properties under the Land Use deferral program. SLEAC rates for Albemarle were used to determine the 2020 taxable Land Use values. The improvements and home-sites of properties in this program are taxed at full market value.

### What are the qualifications of the appraisers in the Assessor's Office?

County appraisers, including the County Assessor, have over 200 combined years of experience in valuing a wide variety of properties for assessments. The appraisal staff attend annual training sessions designed by the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) and can work towards IAAO certification and designation. The IAAO is an organization of assessment professionals that provides guidance, certification, and structured training for assessment personnel. In 2015, 2016 and 2017, the Assessor's Office contracted with the IAAO to review, update, and document office practices, to assist in analyzing the market data from our county, and to validate that the County is utilizing the best mass appraisal practices, ensuring fair and equitable property assessments. Since then we have been implementing the plan developed as a result of those studies.

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## Individual Assessments

### No improvements have been made to my property, so why has the improvement value changed?

The notice of change of assessment reports a value for land, a value for improvements (Fair Market Imp.) and the total value for each parcel. The word "improvement" in this sense refers to any building, outbuilding, or other structure on your property. This value can change with the real estate market. A change in improvement value does not necessarily mean that anything has physically changed on your property, but may represent the appreciation or depreciation of the property over time.

### Why was my value change different from the reported average change?

Albemarle County consists of diverse properties and locations ranging from pastoral farm settings to close-set urban subdivisions. Even within the same type of property, different areas can be more sought after in the real estate market than other areas. Assessed values are derived from a number of market

factors that are indicated and supported by recent property sales. Those sales may show values going up and down in different areas at differing rates at the same time. The average is a simple calculation of the overall change for the entire County and should not be counted on as a guide for the change in Market Value of any individual property or neighborhood.

### How can my property's value change so much in one year? Isn't there a limit?

There is no statutory limit to the amount a property's value can change. There are times when the market changes quickly and significantly. However, there are also circumstances where little or no sales can be found to support a change in value over a period of several years. At times we find that our property data is out of date and the corrected description causes a large change in value. Since the County is required to assess properties at 100% of fair Market Value, we must report the value indicated by the market.

## Appeals

### What do I do if I have any questions regarding my assessment?

We would be glad to confirm the description of your property with you, since this is the basis of the valuation. Please call the Assessor's Office at **434-296-5856** if you would like to speak to an appraiser. The appraiser will confirm your property information and explain the valuation process. There may be a large volume of calls to our office, so if you have any trouble getting through, please leave a voicemail message with your name, telephone number, and parcel identification or include that information in an email to [countyassessor@albemarle.org](mailto:countyassessor@albemarle.org). Our goal is to return all calls or emails within 48 hours.

### What is the appeals process?

If after speaking to an appraiser you still want to request an official review of your assessment, you can fill out a review request form. The form is available on our website [www.albemarle.org/assessor](http://www.albemarle.org/assessor), or in our office. Written requests for the County Assessor's review of your assessment must be made to the Assessor by close of business on February 28, 2020 (at 5:00 p.m.) or postmarked by that date. We will consider any information you provide with your request, visit your property (an interior inspection is required) and respond to you in writing as soon as possible after a decision is made regarding your property review.

### What is the Board of Equalization?

The Board of Equalization (BOE) consists of six members, each appointed by one of the elected members of the Board of Supervisors and representing each of the magisterial districts. The BOE holds hearings in which the property owner or their representative can present information to show that the current year assessment is not correct. The County Assessor also explains to the BOE how the assessment was determined. The members of

the BOE then decide to either affirm the assessment or change it. The deadline to file an appeal form with the BOE is March 30, 2020, or if a review request has been made to the County Assessor, within thirty (30) days from the County Assessor's response to the review, whichever date is later. You may file an appeal form for the BOE even if you have a pending request for assessment review by the County Assessor. Your appeal form must be postmarked by the applicable deadline as outlined above. Appeal forms are only available by contacting the Real Estate Assessor's Office.

### Who determines if the Assessor's Office is doing a good job?

Each year, localities submit a list of all arms-length transactions that took place in their jurisdiction to the Virginia Department of Taxation (TAX) and a ratio is calculated that shows how closely a composite of the sales is to 100% valuation. The most recent report released by TAX (as of Jan. 2019) was for the 2017 assessment year and indicated a median ratio of 93.35% in Albemarle. The study used in the Assessor's Office for the 2020 reassessment included over 2,000 sales with a median ratio of 100% based on our own calculations, but not yet validated by TAX.