

## Understanding Assessments in Vestal

---

The Town of Vestal is credited with maintaining 100% Equalization for 15 years following a 2009 town-wide reassessment by an outside contractor at the cost of over \$650,000.

As a part of an agreement and the collaborative program with New York State Office of Real Property Tax Services, the Vestal Assessor's Office must track, trend, analyze and report on the real estate market, study the state of the local and national economy and monitor all property types annually to determine the ratio of assessments versus the market.

The Town of Vestal has earned the **Excellence in Equity Award** from New York State every year since 2009 in recognition of maintaining 100% Equalization.

### Benefits of Current Assessments (100% Equalization)

Current assessments stay in line with the level of the market, are more reflective of current market value, are more equitable, are more transparent and allow tax rates to remain lower. The Town of Vestal has one of the lowest tax rates in the County.

The longer it has been since a municipality has updated assessments, the more likely it is that some taxpayers are paying more or less than their fair share of taxes every year. Up-to-date assessments eliminate such unfair assessments and the "sticker shock" that taxpayers experience when assessments are adjusted after years of neglect.

Over time, the market value of properties change due to changes in the real estate market. The value of some properties may increase, while the value of some properties may decrease. Frequent reassessments ensure that each property is assessed based on current market values, rather than on market values from 20 years ago or more.

Taxes are a zero-sum game - what one property owner doesn't pay will be picked up by someone else. So, if one property or one neighborhood is significantly underassessed, not only are they paying too little in taxes, but other property owners are subsidizing that taxpayer's or neighborhood's share of the bill.

Ideally each property should be assessed every year at 100% of its market value, according to the State Tax Department. That is the best way to ensure that owners of different types of property pay their fair share of taxes. Towns that do not assess at 100% of market value risk significant inequities within their tax rolls.

### Statutory Requirements

New York State Real Property Tax Law (*RPTL*) requires all properties in each municipality (except New York City and Nassau County) to be assessed at a uniform percentage of market value each year.

#### What does this mean in simpler terms?

*RPTL* §305 requires that all assessments be at a uniform percentage of value, i.e., the same "level of assessment" (LOA). The only way to ensure that all properties are assessed at the same LOA is to analyze each assessment with respect to the current market at a specific point in time (the valuation date), and then to adjust the assessments as necessary to achieve equity. It does not necessarily mean that all assessments will increase, or even be changed -- for example, in 2012 and 2013 many Vestal assessments decreased in order to maintain 100% Equalization and in many other years no reassessment changes were necessary.

**Assessments are driven by the level of the market, not the assessor.** Most Vestal property owners seem to understand – out of almost 7,500 residential reassessment increases in 2023 only 63 residential assessment challenges were filed. Municipal-wide reassessments are the best way to ensure that assessments are fair and accurate.

#### What if I think my assessment is not accurate?

Assessing is not an exact science. Current assessments reflect medians in the marketplace, not simply one selling price. Keeping assessments current is essentially reporting on the level of the market – whether it is rising, declining or stable.

There are statutory procedures in place (*RPTL* §524) to challenge an assessment annually in May.

In addition, the Vestal Assessor's Office offers informal assessment reviews annually between October and the following January – just give us a call to schedule a review of your property's assessment.

More often than not a productive exchange of information between a property owner and the Assessor or Deputy Assessor results in the property owner being satisfied with their assessment. If a decrease in assessment is justified it can be made immediately thus eliminating the need for a formal challenge through *RPTL* §524.

The bottom line is that the Assessor's Office has many duties and responsibilities, but serving and educating the public is foremost.