

1)--Q What do the Assessors do?

Assessors are required by Massachusetts law to value all real and personal property within their community which includes every property from single-family residences to commercial and industrial enterprises. Every three years, the Assessors must submit these values to the Department of Revenue for certification.

Assessors must also maintain the values at 100% market in the years between certifications. This is done so that each property taxpayer in the community pays their fair share of the cost of local government no more or less in proportion to the amount of money the property is worth. The Assessors also has a responsibility to assess business personal property which is taxed at the same rate as the commercial and industrial rates. Assessors also have the responsibility for the Motor Vehicle Excise (see motor vehicle information link on the Assessors website).

2)--Q What do the Assessors NOT do?

Assessors do not make the laws that affect property owners. Tax laws are enacted by the Massachusetts Legislature. Various guidelines and regulations to implement the legislation are established by the Department of Revenue. Assessors follow the procedures established by others to set the value of property. Value is actually set by buyers and sellers as they establish the worth of comparable properties through their transactions in the real estate marketplace. Assessors do not determine taxes. The level of property taxation is determined by the municipality itself, through the Board of Selectmen and the annual Town Meeting. For example, Assessors follow Department of Revenue guidelines and state law when deciding who's qualified for relief on taxes. (see Real Estate exemption link).

3)--Q What is the Assessment?

The assessed value (or assessment) is the value of property to be used for local taxation, as determined by the Assessors according to Massachusetts law and regulations set by the Commissioner of Revenue.

Since assessments must be set at market value, rising real estate values in the community will be reflected in higher assessments. Conversely, lower property values will be reflected by lower assessments. All properties, however, do not change in value to exactly the same degree. Many factors influence values and the value of some properties may well increase or decrease more rapidly than others.

4)--Q How do Assessors determine assessed value?

In Massachusetts valuation is based on “full and fair cash value” (“market value”) which is the amount a willing buyer would pay a willing seller on the open market. Assessors must collect, record and analyze a great deal of information about property and market characteristics in order to estimate the fair market value of taxable properties in their communities. Religious organizations, hospitals, government and educational institutions are also valued even though they are exempt from taxation. Characteristics of land and buildings contribute to properties’ value. Finding the “full and fair cash value” or “market value” of residential properties involves discovering what similar properties sold for (both improved properties and vacant land). Valuation techniques for commercial and industrial properties also include what the property costs to build today minus depreciation, what financial factors, such as interest rates are affecting real estates and analysis from an investment perspective, since the purchase price the buyer is willing to pay depends in part on the return they expect to receive (Income Approach). Assessors do not create value; rather they have the legal responsibility to discover and reflect the changes that are occurring in the marketplace.

5)--Q How do I know that the information the Assessors used to value my property is correct?

Information is available at the Assessors office on the property record card. The Assessors also have counter access that a property owner may look up, his or any other properties in town, free to the public or a property owner may go online (click back to Burlington Properties). If there is any error on your data, contact the Assessor’s office and a correction will be made after verification.

6)--Q How is the Tax rate determined?

Once the Assessors have calculated and they know the amount of the current total valuation of property, and Town Meeting has voted the amount of money to be raised by taxes (also known as the levy), the Assessors then prepare a document that shows how much of the value and how much of the proposed levy would come from each of the different classes of property (residential, commercial, industrial, open space and personal). They provide this document to the Board of Selectman who must then vote on whether to apply the same tax rate or separate rates to the different property classes.

If the community officials choose to utilize different tax rates, a residential rate could, for example, be \$10 per thousand of value and the Commercial/Industrial/Personal Property rate \$22 per thousand of value. A tax rate of \$22 per thousand then would result in a tax of \$2,200 for a property valued at \$100,000. Next, the Assessors prepare various documentation which is submitted to the Department of Revenue for approval of the tax rate. Once the rate is approved, the tax bills are mailed.

7)--Q What is the fiscal year and what is the effective date for valuation?

The Fiscal Year for the Town of Burlington runs from July 1st to June 30th and the effective date for valuation is January 1st. Therefore, if a house is constructed after January 1st, then it is not included on the tax bill for that fiscal year. Conversely, a property damaged or demolished after January 1st is liable of the tax for the entire fiscal year since it was in place on the assessment date of January 1.

8)--Q Why is the residential rate rising and the commercial rate going down?

Residential values in the recent years have been appreciating at a greater percentage than Commercial and Industrial properties. Massachusetts law only allows certain percentage of the shift in the tax rate to be borne by the Commercial Industrial and Personal (also known as CIP) classes. In Fiscal years 2005, 2006 and 2007, Burlington has shifted to the maximum allowable under the law.

9)--Q The news says that the market is slow in home sales, but my house assessment has not declined and in some instances has gone up, why is that?

The assessments are based on sales that occurred in the previous calendar year when the market was still actively going up or if all sales are still declining in calendar year on a significant level, then the assessments will also decline. If calendar sales decline for 2006, change would then be reflected in assessments for FY 2008.

10)--Q At the selectmen's meeting, there was discussion of the "CIP". What is it and how does that influence my tax bill?

CIP stands for Commercial/Industrial/Personal Property. When the Board of Selectmen votes at the classification hearing how much the amount of levy the CIP will bear, that will determine how it will influence the residential tax bill.

11)--Q How is the town able to raise my taxes by more that 2 ½ %?

Proposition 2 ½ pertains to the total amount of monies raised by taxation also known as the tax levy. Generally speaking, the tax levy may not increase greater than 2.5 percent over the prior year's levy plus growth (such as new construction) however, this limitation does not pertain to individual tax bills. Your bills may increase or decrease by any amount in any given year.

12)--Q My third quarter taxes looks like it is more than the increase that was stated. Why is that?

When we discuss quarterly billing we are **not** talking about four even bills. The first and second quarter bills (called Preliminary Tax Bill) are based on the previous year taxes (the first and second preliminary quarter bill for FY 2007 is based on the entire Fiscal 2006 divided by four). After the assessments have been approved by the Department of Revenue and the tax rate set by Town Meeting, any adjustment to the tax bill is reflected on the third and fourth quarters.

13)—Q When are the tax bills due?

The Town Of Burlington issues tax bills on a quarterly billing cycle. The cycle begins with the determination of the Preliminary Tax Bill. The Preliminary bill is based upon one-half of the prior year's net tax bill. This amount is divided into two payments (Quarter 1 and Quarter 2). The third quarter or actual bill contains the property assessment for the fiscal year and the new tax rate. Applying the rate to the assessment, results in the total taxes for the year. The first two quarter bills (providing they have been paid) are then deducted from the total bill and this amount is in turn divided into two quarterly bills. The process is summarized below:

Quarterly bill Due Dates:

First (preliminary bill)	August 1
Second (preliminary bill)	November 1
Third (actual bill)	February 1
Fourth (actual bill)	May 1

14)--Q I recently purchased my home. When will the tax bill be sent in my name?

By law, the real estate tax bill must be addressed to the owner of record as of January 1st for following fiscal year, which starts July 1st. As a courtesy, the Assessors Office put an "in care of" as soon as the office receives a deed. For Example: if you buy a house **after** January 1, 2006, the old owner's name will appear on the bill until the end of the fiscal year, which is June 30, 2007. Your name will be on the bill for the July 1, 2007 bill. Regardless of whose name appears on the bill it is the responsibility of the **current legal owner** to make sure that the tax bill gets paid on time, whether or not they receive a tax notice.

15)--Q I am senior on a fixed income, is there any help for me with my taxes?

The Assessors Office has information on a number of exemptions that are available to Burlington residents. The qualifications for an exemption include age, income and assets restrictions. You may contact your assessors' office to find out specifically what the qualifications are as well as when to apply. (Check out the Assessors web site to see what the qualifications are).