



NEWSLETTER

HOLIDAYS 1994

Serving the Allentown Community for Over Thirty Years

Is Your House Over Assessed?

If you haven't appealed your assessment in the past two years, there's a good chance that your home is over assessed.

The Allentown Association has obtained sales data for all single, double, multiple-dwelling and condominium units sold in the neighborhood in 1993 and 1994 and compared the sales price for each property with its assessed value.

The picture that emerges from the data is not of a blanket pattern of over assessment in Allentown, but rather of some startling inconsistencies. Some homes were assessed much lower than they sold for, some much higher, and some were pretty much on target.

It would be worth your while to check out the data and see how the assessment on your home compares with the sales prices and assessments of similar homes in the neighborhood. If your house is assessed higher than similar homes or higher than what similar homes are currently selling for, you have grounds to appeal your

assessment. You have to act fast, though. Appeals must be filed during the month of December. The Allentown Association is ready to assist you (see related story.)

Here are a few examples of homes that were sold within the past two years at prices well below what the assessor thought they were worth:

> 47 Days Park, assessed at \$57,300, sold for \$20,000.

> 120 Mariner St., assessed at \$95,700, sold for \$68,000.

> 151 Mariner St., assessed at \$142,900, sold for \$120,000.

> 30 College St., assessed at \$50,000, sold for \$21,500.

> 109 Park St., assessed at \$196,000, sold for \$132,000.

Of course, there are plenty of other homes that garnered a market price well above what the assessor thought they were worth. The point is, you have to check the data to see how your house compares.

We all have a responsibility to pay our fair share of property taxes, but the city has a responsibility to assess our homes fairly. What is the fair assessment? It is the market price of the property multiplied by the city's "equalization rate." The equalization rate is a factor determined by the state for each community that is supposed to make county taxes equitable when applied to the differing assessed valuations in each city, town and village. Buffalo went through a reassessment in 1992, but Amherst hasn't had one in ages. Since the assessed values in Buffalo are therefore much higher than those in Amherst, the equalization rates assure that the county tax rate is higher in Amherst than in Buffalo to make up for assessment differential.

Getting back to what is "fair," the state has determined that the equalization rate for Buffalo is 99.19. This means that if your home is worth \$100,000, the proper assessment on it is \$99,200.

Continued on Page 3

Association Will Help You Appeal Assessment

Anyone can go to the assessor's office in city hall to examine the tax rolls and obtain a complaint form to appeal an assessment. To make it easier for Allentown residents, we have obtained assessment data for every property in the neighborhood along with sales data for the past two years from the Greater Buffalo Association of Realtors, and complaint forms.

All homeowners -- whether members or not -- are invited to stop in at the Association's office at 234 Allen St. from **11 AM to 2 PM on Saturday Dec. 17 and Monday Dec. 19** to view the data and obtain the forms. Volunteers will be there

to explain the procedure. Before you come, think about which houses on your street are similar to yours and note their addresses so that you can compare assessments.

As a special courtesy to current 1994 members and to new members for 1995 who have just joined, we will send the neighborhood sales data, assessment listings for your street and a complaint form to your home if you cannot come by the office at the above times. Call 881-1024 and leave your name and address on the answering machine or drop us a note.

ASSOCIATION'S OFFICERS

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Pitch in and Do Your Part

By **BOB FINK**

Allentown Association President

If you have taken the time to walk throughout Allentown, you have noticed the major improvements last year in Arlington Park brought about by the work of residents in conjunction with the city.

Another job equally well done and with the same cooperation is the wonderful restoration carried out in Days Park.

Take a look at Sisti Park and see that renovation at the corner of North and Franklin streets. This is another joint effort by neighbors, local business people and the city. When people pool their efforts, great things are possible.

I hear a lot of grumbling about the state of the city, the appearance of the neighborhoods and the Allen Street business district, but I do not often see people pitching in to change things. Of course, many residents rake their leaves, shovel their snow and pick up trash, but very often one or two doors away you will find the homeowner or business person who seems never to do any of the necessary upkeep.

If our neighborhood is to remain a stable, safe and livable area, it will take the work of all the residents. It is difficult to preserve an area that is strewn with rubbish and overgrown and underkept.

This plea goes out to homeowners, tenants, shopkeepers and absentee landlords: Pitch in and do the right thing.

If you have a neighbor who fails to

keep up his or her property, perhaps you could pass this newsletter on to them and circle this article. If the problem is with an absentee landlord, phone the Association office and we will send that person a reminder.

On to some other topics. Drive down North Pearl Street between Allen and Virginia streets this Christmas season for a lovely sight. Nearly every home has a single candle in the window, a real Victorian holiday streetscape.

Many people have asked why the Police satellite station hasn't opened yet. Don't fear. It's coming soon. A reminder: Volunteers are needed to help man the station. If you are interested in helping out, call the Association and leave your name and telephone number on the answering machine.

Special thanks to all who worked on the 1994 Tour of Homes, especially Linda Violino, Nancy Fix, Bark Kurtzman and Tina Grady, and the numerous people who assisted in various ways.

Thanks to Dick Haynes, our treasurer and newsletter editor, for leading the recent membership campaign, and to all who assisted. Dick is also coordinating the "Operation Assessment" that you're learning about in this edition of the newsletter.

If you haven't returned your 1995 membership form, please do so now. For your convenience, we're printing one on the back page of this newsletter.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, warm wishes for a Happy Holidays.

Another Great Restaurant to Open

Two top chefs, Paula Danilowicz and Robert Curreri, plan to open Fiddle Heads restaurant at 62 Allen St. at Franklin Street by Feb. 1. Among specialties will be organic coffee and cranberry and black walnut muffins at breakfast; Roman pizza and roast turkey sandwiches at lunch, and grilled lobster at dinner. They plan to push "after-work catering," providing prestige entrees for takeout by busy people.

Both are graduates of the Culinary

Institute of America and have held primary chefs spots at some of the nation's finest restaurants, including Arizona 206, La Colomb d'Or and La Regence in New York; and Biba Food Hall, Olives and Fig's in Boston. The Buffalo natives each gave up the opportunity to take head chef positions at new restaurants in Boston to open their own fine restaurant in Allentown. Joining them at Fiddle Heads will be Martin Danilowicz, formerly of Cafe Cosmos.

Please Shovel This Winter

Winter in Allentown can be postcard-pretty, but drivers negotiating our narrow streets may be too frazzled to notice. While the Masiello administration says it will make snow clean-up a priority, there are several ways we as residents can help. A Streets Department representative offers the following reminders:

PARKING -- City ordinances prohibit parking on bus routes overnight from the hours of 1:30 AM to 7 AM from Nov. 15 until April 1.

Side streets have various parking restrictions year-around, clearly stated on street signs. Please obey them. Illegal parking hampers plowing.

Residents blessed with driveways are urged to park cars there rather than resorting to parking on the street during heavy snows.

SHOVELING -- City ordinances require that sidewalks be cleared of snow by 9 AM! And we don't mean by 9 AM July 4.

Please be considerate. Shovel your own sidewalk after every snowfall, and if your neighbor is elderly or infirm, help the neighbor, too. Anybody with a snowplow could earn his place in heaven by running it up the entire block, or at least by plowing out the old lady next door and the guy recovering from a heart attack up the street.

By the way, the ordinances apply to businesses as well as to residences. It doesn't help the business climate in Allentown if pedestrian traffic is challenged by snow and ice. Business people must do the basic things to help themselves and their fellow business owners.

And nothing is more infuriating than the businesses that clear their parking lots by plowing snow onto the sidewalk. This is strictly illegal as well as arrogantly selfish and monumentally inconsiderate. If you have a complaint about uncleared sidewalks in front of commercial establishments, call the Streets Department at 851-5945 or 851-6979.

GARBAGE PICKUP -- When there are snow mounds at the curb, residents are urged to leave their trash in an accessible place, but not right in the street. A little common sense and consideration is in order here: Sanitation workers are not Alpine spelunkers, and the drivers of city snow plows are not demolition derby contestants.

Assessments (Continued) . . .

Continued from Page 1

Get it? Your home should really be assessed slightly lower than its actual market value.

Applying the formula is easy. Establishing market value is the hard part. Even the city's experienced assessors make mistakes on that. It's why you need to gather all the data you can to help make your case.

The city's revaluation of 1992 was based in part on data from 1991. Then there was a series of informal hearings followed by formal grievances, and finally the new numbers -- often revised lower in the end -- went into effect for city tax bills of July 1993 and for county tax bills of January 1994.

In the three years since 1991, however, home values in the city have fallen. According to the Greater Buffalo Association of Realtors, the median single-family home price in the city has slipped 8.3% from 1991. For the West Side (a big area as defined by the Realtors of which Allentown is a small

part), values have plunged 17.7%.

From 1992, the median price has edged 0.6% higher citywide but fallen 8.3% on the West Side.

Here are the citywide data from the Realtors' Multiple Listing Service for median single-family homes for each year, the number of sales, and the median price:

- > 1991 -- 1160 sales, \$65,535.
- > 1992 -- 1035 sales, \$62,890.
- > 1993 -- 1058 sales, \$68,507.
- > 1994 -- 1054 sales through Nov. 14, \$63,256.

Here is the same data for the West Side:

- > 1991 -- 147 sales, \$99,600.
- > 1992 -- 115 sales, \$89,400.
- > 1993 -- 159 sales, \$102,900.
- > 1994 -- 143 sales through Nov. 14, \$82,000.

All this certainly doesn't mean that your house -- or the average Allentown house -- has fallen in value by 17.7% since 1991 or by 8.3% since 1992. The

raw aggregate data don't show exactly where sales occurred, or what the mix of housing stock on the market was in any year. It is possible that declines could be concentrated in certain neighborhoods or in houses in a particular price range.

But it does indicate a definite possibility that your home is over assessed.

The appeals process isn't difficult. It involves research and the filing of a four-page complaint by Dec. 31. You also have the right to request a hearing, but if you are precise and concise in preparing documentation, a hearing really isn't necessary. They're perfunctory anyway.

You will receive notification of the results of your appeal in March. If dissatisfied, you have 30 days to file a lawsuit in small claims court. If you succeed in winning a lower assessment, the new valuation will be reflected in July 1995 city tax bills and January 1996 county tax bills.

Coming Up in the Next Issue:

What U.S. Census Data Tells Us About Allentown



Serving the Allentown Community for Over Thirty Years

M E M B E R S H I P A P P L I C A T I O N

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Best time to call _____

- Renewal
- Rejoining
- New Member

Type of membership

- Student / Senior Citizen \$5
- Associate \$15
- Individual \$15
- Household / Family \$20
- Business \$25
- Sustaining \$50
- Contributing \$100
- Patron \$250

Total amount remitted \$ _____ All membership contributions are tax deductible.

To better serve our members, the following information would be helpful:

What do you feel the Allentown Association could be doing to improve the community? _____

What skills, talents, services, or hobbies can you offer to share with others? _____

Are you a block club member? _____ If not, would you like information about joining one in your area? _____

The success of the Allentown Association is dependent upon community involvement. Your membership on the Association's Board or any of the committees can make a difference, Please check the committee of interest to you:

- Board of Directors
- Action (Ad Hoc crises oriented committee)
- Membership
- Special Events (Assist with community and fund-raising events.)

Additional comments: _____

Please forward to the Association office...thank you

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