

**CHAPTER 6**  
**PROPERTY TAX<sup>1</sup>**

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<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
¶ 601 Introduction .....	2
¶ 602 Property Subject to Tax.....	3
¶ 603 Exemptions--In General .....	3
¶ 604 Special Methods of Valuation.....	9
¶ 605 Exemptions--Strictly Construed.....	10
¶ 606 Classification and Rates.....	10
¶ 607 Assessment -In General.....	12
¶ 608 Assessment--Residential, Farm Property and Managed Timberland.....	14
¶ 609 Assessment--Real Property .....	16
¶ 610 Assessment--Personal Property .....	17
¶ 611 Assessment-- Public Utility Property .....	18
¶ 612 Valuation--Public Utility Property.....	19
¶ 613 Valuation--Coal .....	20
¶ 614 Valuation--Producing and Reserve Oil; Natural Gas Liquids; and Natural Gas Properties.....	22
¶ 615 Valuation--Timberland.....	26
¶ 616 Valuation--Other Active Natural Resources .....	27
¶ 617 Valuation--Commercial and industrial Real Property .....	29
¶ 618 Valuation--Commercial and Industrial Personal Property.....	32
¶ 619 Valuation--Unsold Lots Contained in a Recorded Plan or Plat.....	35
¶ 620 Valuation--Vehicles, Watercraft, Aircraft and Heavy Equipment Rental Inventory .....	35

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¶ 621 Return of Property.....	37
¶ 622 Procedure for Contesting Tax .....	39
¶ 623 Exonerations .....	47
¶ 624 [Reserved].....	48
¶ 625 Payment of Tax.....	48
¶ 626 Lien for Tax .....	49
¶ 627 Property Tax Issues in Bankruptcy .....	49
¶ 628 Property Tax Records: Freedom of Information Act.....	49
¶ 629 Specimen Return-Business Property Return-STC 12:32C.....	52
Calendar for Assessment and Collection of 2025 Property Taxes.....	58
INDEX - CHAPTER 6 - PROPERTY TAX.....	63

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## ¶ 601 Introduction

*Background:* The property tax in West Virginia is imposed on all real and tangible personal property situated in the state on the first day of July of each year. Certain types of property are exempted from property taxation by the West Virginia Constitution. Other types are exempted by statute.

Apart from industrial, natural resource and public utility property, property is valued by the elected assessor of each county. The county sheriff collects the resulting taxes. The State Tax Commissioner has oversight authority of the appraisal process. All real and personal property is reappraised by the county assessors according to plans approved by the Property Valuation Training and Procedures Commission, which is chaired by the State Tax Commissioner. The State Tax Commissioner values all industrial and natural resource property and forwards his values to the county assessors. The State Tax Commissioner also provides tentative assessments for all public utility property to be used as a guide by the Board of Public Works in establishing final assessed values for property tax purposes.

The property tax is a local tax with the revenues divided among the county board of education, county government, and, if the property is located within the corporate limits of a municipality, the city government. Less than one percent (1%) of the property tax revenues are spent by state government.

Each property in the State must be reappraised at least every three years; as the revised values generated by the reappraisals are placed on the property books of the counties, all of the levy rates in each county must be adjusted to offset the effect of the increase in property assessments so that total property taxes in any year do not exceed 101% of the previous year's taxes. New construction is not included in that calculation.

## ¶ 602 Property Subject to Tax

Law: W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 1; W. Va. Code §§ 11-5-3, 11-1C-1b

The West Virginia Constitution provides that “. . . all property, both real and personal, shall be taxed in proportion to its value to be ascertained as directed by law.” Consequently, all real and tangible personal property that has acquired a tax situs for purposes of *ad valorem* taxation and not specifically exempted from taxation by provisions of the West Virginia Constitution or West Virginia Code is subject to the property tax. Intangible personal property is exempt by the provisions of W. Va. Code § 11-1C-1b.

In *Ohio Cellular RSA Ltd. Partnership v. Board of Public Works of State of W. Va.*, 198 W.Va. 416, 481 S.E.2d 722 (1996), the Supreme Court of Appeals held that in very limited circumstances, some types of property are not subject to taxation because they do not fit within the definitions of either real or personal property.

## ¶ 603 Exemptions--In General

Law: W. Va. Const. Art. X, §§ I, 1a, 1c; W. Va. Code §§ 11-3-9, 11-5-1 and 11-6B-3

Specific types of property are exempted from property taxation by the state Constitution and by statutes implementing those constitutional provisions. While some of the exemptions are absolute, most of the exemptions are conditioned on either the use to which the property is put or on the exclusive ownership of the property by the exempt entity. Property owned by the United States, for example, is absolutely exempt, except where Congress requires payments in lieu of taxes, while property belonging to the State of West Virginia is exempt only when it is exclusively owned by the state. Still less generous is the exemption afforded property owned by a municipality which must not only be exclusively owned by the municipality but must also be used for a public purpose. The following types of property are exempt from taxation:

*Exemption for elderly and disabled:* An exemption from *ad valorem* property taxes is allowed for the first \$20,000 of assessed value of a homestead that is used and occupied by the owner thereof exclusively for residential purposes, when such owner is sixty-five years of age or older or is certified as being permanently and totally disabled. The owner must have been a resident (domiciled in the state for more than six months of the calendar year) for more than two consecutive years preceding the taxable year. However, when a resident of West Virginia establishes residency out of state and subsequently returns and reestablishes residency in the state within a period of five years, such resident may file a claim for the exemption if he or she was a resident for any two years out of the ten immediately preceding years. Proof of residency may be either a voter's registration card or a motor vehicle registration. If an owner receives a homestead exemption in another state, the owner is ineligible for the exemption. (W. Va. Code § 11-6B-3).

“Low income” taxpayers that are eligible for the homestead exemption as described above may claim a credit against personal income taxes for the amount paid

in property taxes on the first \$20,000 of taxable value. A claim for refund must be filed within three years of the due date of the personal income tax return. "Low income" means a federal adjusted gross income for the taxable year that is less than or equal to 150% of the federal poverty guideline, based on the number of individuals living in the homestead. However, any taxpayer subject to the federal alternative minimum tax may not claim a credit under this section. The amount of this credit must be calculated before that provided by W. Va. Code § 11-21-23 (see below) (W. Va. Code § 11-21-21).

Any "low income" homeowner living in his or her homestead is granted a refundable credit against personal income taxes for the amount of real property taxes paid in excess of four percent of gross household income. Taxpayers must deduct the credit allowed by W. Va. Code § 11-21-21 from the tax paid before determining whether and by how much the taxes paid exceeds the four percent threshold. Any taxpayer subject to the federal alternative minimum tax may not claim a credit under this section. The maximum credit is \$1,000. (W. Va. Code § 11-21-23).

*Property used for charitable purposes:* Property used for charitable purposes and not leased for profit, including property held by nonprofit corporations, is exempt. W. Va. Code § 11-3-9; *Appalachian Emergency Medical Services, Inc. v. State Tax Commissioner*, 218 W. Va. 550, 625 S.E. 2nd 312 (2005) (building owned by a charitable organization that is leased to another charitable organization maintains its exempt status if the lessee uses the building exclusively for charitable purposes and the lessor does not lease the building for profit); *Matkovich v. University Healthcare Foundation, Inc.*, 238 W. Va. 345; 795 S.E. 2nd 67 (2016) (exemption not allowed for a charitable organization that leased property to a non-qualifying organization, despite rental fees being dedicated to the lessor's charitable purposes). In an unpublished opinion in *Glob. Capital of World Peace, Inc. v. Wagoner*, No. 16-1061, 2017 WL 5192491 (W. Va. Nov. 9, 2017), the nonprofit corporation that owned property used for meditation courses and programs appealed from decisions of county tax assessor and State Tax Commissioner denying its application for ad valorem property tax exemption based on use of property for charitable purposes. The Supreme Court of Appeals held that nonprofit corporation's property was not used exclusively for charitable purposes and, thus, was not exempt from ad valorem property taxes.

*Farm equipment, produce and livestock:* The personal property, including livestock, employed exclusively in agriculture (as defined in the section) and the products of agriculture while owned by the producers as defined in the section, may be exempted from taxation. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 1.) All property held for use in the subsistence of livestock at the commencement of the assessment year is exempt. Personal property, including vehicles that qualify for a farm use exemption certificate pursuant to W. Va. Code § 17a-3-2 and livestock employed exclusively in agriculture is exempt if such personal property is used on a farm or in farming operation that annually produces for sale agricultural products. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 1, W. Va. Code § 11-3-9.)

In *Pilgrim's Pride Corp. v. Morris*, 228 W. Va. 596, 723 S.E.2d 642, 643 (2011), the Court held that a poultry manufacturer that contracts with independent farmers to provide the facilities and labor to raise its chickens to maturity is not entitled to rely upon the exemption from *ad valorem* taxation provided in W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(28) for farms or farm operations because it does not qualify as a producer of agricultural products under W. Va. Code § 11-5-3, and that a taxpayer that seeks relief from *ad valorem* taxation pursuant to the subsistence of livestock exemption under W., Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(21) must be able to demonstrate that the personal property for which the exemption is sought and the subject livestock are both in the present physical possession of the taxpayer.

*Public property:* Public property is exempt and includes:

(1) Property belonging to the United States, other than property permitted by the United States to be taxed under state law. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(1).)

(2) Property belonging exclusively to the state. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(2).)

(3) Property belonging exclusively to any county, district, city, village, or town in this state, and used for public purposes. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(3).)

(4) Firefighting equipment, property used exclusively for the maintenance thereof and property for the meeting of fire companies. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(20).)

(5) Property acquired by a county commission or a municipality to be leased, sold, or otherwise disposed of according to the provisions of the Industrial Development and Commercial Development Bond Act, W. Va. Code § 13-2c-1 *et seq.*, is exempt from property taxation as public property so long as the property is owned by the county or municipality. When, however, the county or municipality leases an interest in that property to a private concern for a for-profit enterprise, the leasehold interest is taxable. (*In Re Maier*, 173 W.Va. 641, 319 S.E.2d 410 (1984)).

(6) Municipal waterworks and electric power systems, when acquired or improved pursuant to the provisions of W. Va. Code § 8-19-1 *et seq.*, are exempt from property taxation. (W. Va. Code § 8-19-4).

(7) Property used for area economic development purposes by nonprofit corporations when the property is not leased out for profit. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(14).)

(8) Property located in this state, belonging to a city, town, village, county, or other political subdivision of another state, and used for public purposes. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(4).)

(9) Property which is used for the public purpose of distributing electricity, water or natural gas or providing sewer service when the property is owned by a duly chartered

nonprofit corporation and the property is not held, leased out or used for profit. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(13).)

(10) Property owned by the West Virginia Economic Development Authority. (W. Va. Code § 31-15-17.)

(11) Property owned by the West Virginia Land Stewardship Corporation as provided in W. Va. Code § 31-21-5(g) and 31-21-15. This includes property leased to third parties for commercial purposes when the third-party lessee makes payments in lieu of property taxes.

(12) Property of hospital service corporations, medical service corporations, dental service corporations and health service corporations licensed under W. Va. Code § 33-24-1 *et seq.* (W. Va. Code § 33-24-1.)

(13) Property of a health care corporation licensed under W. Va. Code § 33-25-1 *et seq.* (W. Va. Code § 33-25-1.)

*Church property:* Property used exclusively for divine worship, parsonages, and the household goods and furniture pertaining thereto is exempt. Mortgages, bonds, and other evidence of indebtedness in the hands of bona fide owners and holders thereafter issued and sold by churches and religious societies for the purpose of securing money to be used in the erection of church buildings used exclusively for divine worship, or for the purpose of paying indebtedness thereon are also exempt. Property used exclusively for divine worship and the operation of a pre-K school, primary school, middle school, secondary school, daycare center, or church camp for children, which school, daycare center, or church camp is operated by the church which owns the property or is operated by another not-for-profit organization or entity is exempt. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(5), (6) and (7).)

*Cemeteries:* Cemeteries are exempted without regard to their use. Thus, undeveloped and unsold portions of a cemetery held in reserve for interment purposes until the additional space is needed for burial lots are exempt from taxation under the Constitution and state statutes. However, the reserve of land must be held in good faith and must not be disproportionate to the population of the community to be served. While a cemetery owned and operated by a private corporation is exempt from taxation, the exemption does not extend to furniture and equipment used for corporate purposes. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 1, W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(8), *In re Northview Services, Inc.*, 183 W.Va. 683, 398 S.E.2d 165 (1990).

*Property used for educational purposes:* Property belonging to, or held in trust for, universities, colleges, seminaries, academies, and free schools, if used for educational, literary, or scientific purposes, including books, apparatus, annuities, and furniture is exempt. Any public or private nonprofit foundation or corporation which receives contributions exclusively for educational purposes of a college or university is also

exempt, as are public and family libraries. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(9, 10, 11).) Certain real property and the buildings thereon used exclusively by any college or university as a literary hall, or as a dormitory or clubroom, if not used for profitable purposes, including property owned by fraternities or sororities affiliated with a university or college (or owned by a nonprofit housing corporation on behalf of a fraternity or sorority) when the property is used as residential accommodations or a dormitory. W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(15).

*Property used for health care:* Property belonging to any public institution for the education for the deaf, mute, or blind, or any hospital not leased for profit is exempt, as is a house of refuge, a lunatic or orphan asylum, or home for children or for the aged, friendless, or infirm if not conducted for private profit. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(17, 18, 19).)

In *United Hospital Center, Inc. v. Romano*, 233 W. Va. 313, 758 S.E.2d 240 (2014), the W. Va. Supreme Court of Appeals ruled that “a healthcare corporation, qualified as a charitable organization under federal law, whose construction of a replacement hospital facility is substantially complete on the legal date of assessment and who has significant departmental staff on site working to fulfill the organization's charitable purposes, comes within the spirit, purpose, and intent of the constitutional framers for purposes of entitlement to exemption from *ad valorem* property taxation pursuant to West Virginia Code § 11-3-9(a)(12).

*Household goods:* Household goods and personal effects of the household are exempt unless used or held for profit. “Household goods” means only personal property and household goods commonly found within the house and items used to care for the house and its surrounding property “Personal effects” means only articles and items of personal property commonly worn on or about the human body or carried by a person (W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 1a, W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(22, 24, 25).) Dead victuals laid away for family use are exempt (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(26)).

*Cash and retirement funds:* Money, bank deposits and pensions are exempt. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 1a, W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(23).)

*Property owned by benevolent associations:* All property belonging to benevolent associations not conducted for private profit. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-9(a)(16).)

*Intangible Personal Property:* Intangible personal property, e.g., money, stocks, bonds, and accounts receivable, etc., is no longer subject to *ad valorem* taxation. (W. Va. Code § 11-1C-1b.)

*Tangible personal property in interstate commerce:* Tangible personal property which is moving in interstate commerce through or over the territory of West Virginia, or which was consigned from a point of origin outside the state to a warehouse, public or private, within the state for storage in transit to a final destination outside the state, whether specified when transportation begins or afterwards, but in any case specified

timely for exempt-status determination purposes. While in the warehouse, the personal property can be assembled, bound, joined, processed, disassembled, divided, cut, broken in bulk, relabeled, or repackaged for delivery out of state without losing the exemption, unless such activity results in a new or different product, article, substance, or commodity, or one of different utility. This exemption is provided by W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 1c (known as the Freeport Amendment) as implemented by W. Va. Code §§ 11-5-13 and 11-5-13a. The latter section provides that “Goods which have been moved to a warehouse or storage facility, at which no substantial alteration takes place, to await shipment to a destination outside this state are exempt from *ad valorem* property tax.”

While W. Va. Code 11-5-13a(a) provides that “It is the intent of the Legislature that the provisions of this section are to be liberally construed in favor of a person claiming exemption from tax pursuant to section one-c, article ten of the West Virginia constitution, this section and section thirteen of this article”, the Tax Commissioner has historically been reluctant to grant this exemption. Thus, in *Feroletto Steel Company, Inc. v. Oughton*, 230 W. Va. 5, 736 S.E.2d 5 (2012), the Tax Commissioner took the position that the act of cutting steel coils into narrower widths created a product of “different utility”, since the wide coils had a variety of uses, but the narrow coils that were cut to very precise measurements were suited to only one use by the single customer for whom they were destined. The Supreme Court of Appeals, however, ruled that the Tax Commissioner’s interpretation would render the statutory language “which says ‘[s]uch property shall not be deprived of such exemption because while in the warehouse the personal property is ... cut ... unless such activity results in a ... product ... of different utility’” meaningless, since “if the cutting of the steel coils in the instant case results in a product of new or different utility, under what circumstances would cutting property not so result?” The Court also emphasized that exemption of the inventory of steel coils from *ad valorem* property taxation is consistent with the intent in establishing the exemption that the applicable statute to be liberally construed in favor of a person claiming exemption from tax. The Court did note, however, that the composition of the steel was not changed during the cutting process.

The Supreme Court of Appeals held that inventory of parts used in the construction and overhaul of jet engines was not constitutionally exempt from *ad valorem* taxation under the Freeport Amendment as tangible personal property moving in interstate commerce. *Pratt & Whitney Engine Services v. Steager*, 239 W.Va. 833. 806 S.E.2d 757 (2017)

The Tax Commissioner generally interprets these sections as providing an exemption for finished goods that are bound for out of state destinations, but as not exempting work in progress or raw materials. However, the amount of property tax paid on manufacturing inventory that is not exempt is now allowed as a credit against franchise taxes and corporate net income taxes (W. Va. Code § 11-13Y-1 *et seq.*). See ¶ 303, chapter 3 of this Guidebook.



Personal property of inventories of natural resources, however, is not exempt from property taxation unless required by federal law. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 1c.)

West Virginia Code §11-6-23 allows portions of otherwise exempt property that are being used for nonexempt purposes to be separately assessed and taxed for property tax purposes.

## ¶ 604 Special Methods of Valuation

All taxable property must be assessed at sixty percent (60%) of its value, which is to be ascertained as directed by law. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, §§ 1 and 1b). In general, value means market value. However, special methods of valuation are provided for the following properties:

Managed timberland (W. Va. Code §§ 11-1C-11 and 11-1C-11a)

Owner occupied residential property (W. Va. Code § 11-3-1);

Farms used, occupied, and cultivated by their owners or bona fide tenants (W. Va. Code § 11-3-1);

Pollution Abatement Equipment (W. Va. Code § 11- 6A-1), including wind power projects.

Dealer Vehicle Inventory (W. Va. Code § 11-6C-1);

Specialized manufacturing production property (W. Va. Code § 11-6E-1);

Qualified Capital Additions to Manufacturing Facilities, which now include natural gas processing plants (W. Va. Code § 11-6F-1);

Oil and Gas Drilling Rigs (W. Va. Code § 11-1C-11c)

Interstate Public Service Corp. Motor Vehicle Business Registered Under Proportional Registration Agreement (W. Va. Code § 11-6G-1);

Automobiles (W. Va. Code § 17A-3-3a);

Motorboats (W. Va. Code § 20-7-12a);

Airplanes and helicopters owned or leased by commercial airlines or private carriers (W. Va. Code § 11-6H-1 *et seq.*) and parts and components used in the repair or overhaul of aircraft;

Certain specialized high-technology property (servers, defined as computers or devices on a network that manages network resources) directly used in a high-technology business or in an internet advertising business, and the value of tangible personal property directly used in a high-technology business or in an internet advertising business (W. Va. Code § 11-6J-1 *et seq.* The terms “high technology business” and “Internet advertising business” are defined in W. Va. Code § 11-15-9h.) and

A cellular or wireless signal tower for the first five years following the date of its erection. (W. Va. Code § 11-6L-3).

Critical materials manufacturing property, which is property that processes or manufactures critical materials, as defined by the United States Secretary of Energy pursuant to the Energy Act of 2020. Critical materials includes aluminum, cobalt, copper, dysprosium, electrical steels, fluorine, gallium, iridium, magnesium, natural graphite, neodymium, nickel, platinum, praseodymium, silicon carbide, and terbium. Critical material manufacturing equipment is defined as any personal or real property, which are designed, constructed, or installed primarily for the purpose of processing, concentrating, converting, transforming, or manufacturing critical minerals into a raw material. Personal or real property is not critical manufacturing equipment when it turns raw materials into finished goods. (W. Va. Code § 11-6M-1 *et seq.*)

## **¶ 605 Exemptions--Strictly Construed**

In all claims for property tax exemption, the constitutional and statutory provisions exempting property from taxation are strictly construed. It is incumbent upon the person who claims exemption from property tax to show that such property clearly falls within the terms of the exemption. Any doubt arising as to the exemption is resolved against the one claiming it. (*In Re Maier*, 173 W.Va. 641, 319 S.E.2d 410 (1984); *Pilgrim's Pride Corp. v. Morris*, 228 W. Va. 596, 723 S.E.2d 642, 643 (2011).)

## **¶ 606 Classification and Rates**

*Law:* W. Va. Const. Art. X, §§ 1, 8, 10 and 11; W. Va. Code § 11-8-1 *et seq.*

The tax rates or levies applied to assessed values are capped under a classification scheme added to the West Virginia Constitution in 1932.

*Class I* property consists of certain agricultural personal property and may be subject to a regular levy rate no greater than one-half of one percent (0.5%) of assessed value.

*Class II* property is residential property and farms having a maximum regular levy rate no greater than one percent (1%) of assessed value.

*Class III* property includes all other property not included in Class I or II and which is located outside of a municipality and may be taxed at no more than one and one-half (1.5%) for the regular levy.

*Class IV* property includes all other property not included in Class I or II and which is located inside of a municipality and may be taxed at no more than two percent (2%) for the regular levy.

*Levy rates:* The levy rate applied to the assessed value of property is a composite of the levy rate set by each levying body in the county with jurisdiction to tax that property. Each levying body makes its levy estimate, or sets the proposed levy rate, annually between March 7 and March 28. (W. Va. Code § 11-8-9.) The levying bodies reconvene on the third Tuesday in April to finalize the levy rates. (W. Va. Code §§ 11-8-10a, 11-8-12a, and 11-8-14a.) If the annual appraisal, triennial reappraisal, or general valuation of property produces an increase of 1% or more in the total projected property tax revenues, the regular levy rate must be reduced proportionately as between the county commission and the municipalities for all classes of property from the forthcoming year so the regular levy rate produces no more than 101% of the previous year's projected property tax revenues for counties and municipalities. (See, W. Va. Code § 11-8-6e). The levy rate for the support of the boards of education is set by the West Virginia legislature with a similar provision limiting aggregate taxes to 102% of the previous year's total. In both instances, total property tax revenues can be increased up to 110% following a public hearing. New construction is not included in calculating the increases. (See, W. Va. Code § 11-8-6f.)

**Maximum Property Tax Regular Levy Rates**

*Rates are given in cents per \$100*

<b>Taxing Authority</b>	<b>Class I</b>	<b>Class II</b>	<b>Class III</b>	<b>Class IV</b>
State	0.25	0.50	1.00	1.00
County	14.30	28.60	57.20	57.20
Schools	22.95	45.90	91.80	91.80
Municipal	<u>12.50</u>	<u>25.00</u>	<u>          </u>	<u>50.00</u>
	50.00	100.00	150.00	200.00

*Excess levies:* The levy rates can be increased by referendum to impose special or excess levies. If proposed by a municipality or a county, these special levies can increase the share of that levying body's maximum regular levy rate by up to 50% and remain in effect for up to five years. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, §§ 1, and 11.) If proposed by a board of education, the special levy can increase that levying body's maximum regular levy rate by up to 100% and can remain in effect for up to five years. (W. Va. Constitution Art. X, § 10.) If approved by referendum, an additional bond levy may be imposed to service the bonded indebtedness of local governments. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, §§ 8 and 10.) Excess levies and general obligation bond levies of counties and municipalities must be approved by at least 60% of those voting for and against the levy. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, §§ 1 and 8). Board of education excess levies and general obligation bond levies require a majority

approval of those voting on the question. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 10). The excess levy rates are those specified in the excess levy ballot unless the ballot allows them to be reduced in accordance with the excess levy ballot provision. (W. Va. Code § 11-8-6g(a).

Statewide, the average tax rates per \$100 of assessed valuation for the tax year ending December 31, 2022 (fiscal year ending June 30, 2023) are as shown in the following table.

**Average Actual 2022 Property Tax Rates<sup>2</sup>**  
*Rates are given in dollars per \$100 of assessed valuation*

	<b>Average</b>
Class I	\$ 0.00
Class II	1.20
Class III	2.20
Class IV	2.95

Statewide, the average rate for all property was \$1.90 per \$100 of assessed valuation.<sup>3</sup>

**¶ 607 Assessment -In General**

*Law: W. Va. Const. Art. X, §§ 1 and 1b; W. Va. Code §§ 11-3-1, 11-1C-1 et seq., and 11-3-24a*

Generally, property taxation in West Virginia is to be equal and uniform throughout the state, and all property, both real and personal, is to be taxed in proportion to its value to be ascertained as directed by law. (W. Va. Const. Art. X, § 1.) The term "values" as used in the Constitution means "worth in money" of pieces of property, which is its market value. (*In re Tax Assessments Against Oneida Coal Co.*, 178 W.Va. 485, 360 S.E. 2d 560 (1987), rev'd on other grounds *sub nom.*, *Allegheny Pittsburgh Coal Co. v. County Commission of Webster Co.*, W.Va., 488 U.S. 336 (1989)). All property is to be assessed annually at its true and actual value. The true and actual value of property, both real and personal, is the price for which the property would be sold if voluntarily offered for sale by the owner thereof, upon such terms as such property, the value of which is sought to be ascertained, is usually sold, and not the price which might be realized if such property were sold at a forced sale. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-1.) The foregoing law provides county assessors with little practical guidance to use when determining the value of property that has not been sold recently.

The county assessors appraise all property, except industrial, natural resource and public utility property, at fair market value using the procedures and methodologies

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Fifty-Fifth Biennial Report, Tax Commissioner of West Virginia (2023).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

established by the Property Valuation Training and Procedures Commission and the valuation system established by the State Tax Commissioner. The assessors may use as an aid to valuation any information available on the character and values of such property.

*Methods:* The appraisals of the assessors and the Tax Commissioner are to be conducted pursuant to a reappraisal plan approved by the Property Valuation Training and Procedures Commission. See W. Va. Code § 11-1C-1 *et seq.* Appraisals of all property are on a three-year cycle. All assessors appraise the real and personal property which they are responsible for valuing at fair market value except for the special valuation provided for farmlands and managed timberland. The Tax Commissioner appraises industrial and natural resource properties. The Tax Commissioner forwards each industrial and natural resource property appraisal to the county assessor of the county in which that property is located, and the assessor will take 60% of each such appraisal as the assessed value in the land book or the personal property book. If the assessor does not accept the appraisal provided by the Tax Commissioner, the assessor must show just cause and a plan by which a different appraisal will be conducted to the Property Valuation Training and Procedures Commission. Public utility properties are appraised and assessed by the State Board of Public Works, with assistance from the Tax Commissioner.

In *Collett v. Eastern Royalty, LLC*, 232 W. Va. 126, 751 S.E.2d 12 (2013), a county assessor hired a consultant to review the State Tax Commissioner's appraisals of several natural resource properties within the county. The assessor initially entered the State Tax Commissioner's appraised values on the land books, but then challenged those values in front of the County Commission sitting as a Board of Equalization and Review. In several hearings before the Board, both the consultant and an employee of the State Tax Department testified that the properties were undervalued. The Board accepted the Assessor's recommendation that the values be increased, and the taxpayers appealed to the circuit court, which reversed the Board and ruled that the Assessor had not complied with the statutory requirement that requires the Assessor, if she disagrees with the State Tax Commissioner's values, to show just cause and a plan by which a different appraisal will be conducted to the Property Valuation Training and Procedures Commission. The W. Va. Supreme Court of Appeals affirmed the circuit court and held that "[p]ursuant to W. Va. Code § 11-1C-10(g) (2010), upon receiving the appraisal of natural resources property from the State Tax Commissioner, a county assessor may either accept or reject that appraisal. If the assessor rejects the appraisal, the assessor must show just cause for doing so to the Property Valuation Training and Procedures Commission, including a plan by which a different appraisal should be conducted. If the assessor accepts the appraisal, the assessor is then foreclosed from later challenging the appraisal before either the Property Valuation Training and Procedures Commission under W. Va. Code § 11-1C-10(g) or the Board of Equalization and Review under W. Va. Code § 11-3-24 (2010)". To the extent that it ruled otherwise, the previous case of *In re 1994 Assessments of Property of Righini*, 197 W.Va. 166, 475 S.E.2d 166 (1999), was expressly overruled.

*Assessment date:* All property is assessed as of July 1 of each year. From July 1 until January 30, the assessor conducts a canvass of all property to ascertain the true and actual value of the property.

*Classification and Taxability:* In addition to the duty to assess property, the assessor also makes the initial determination as to the proper classification of property and whether a particular property is exempt from or otherwise not subject to property taxation. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-24a.)

In *Pope Properties/Charleston Ltd. Liab. Co. v. Robinson*, 230 W. Va. 382, 738 S.E.2d 546 (2013). the Supreme Court of Appeals held that “Non-owner-occupied Class III condominium units, owned by a corporation and operated as income-producing property through the renting of the units as residential apartments, constitute commercial property with respect to the valuation and assessment of *ad valorem* taxes.”

*Uniformity:* The Constitution generally requires generally that taxation be equal and uniform throughout the state, except as otherwise permitted or required by the Constitution. All property must be taxed in proportion to its value.

In a decision involving Webster County's assessment of coal lands based on a recent purchase price, the United States Supreme Court held that the county assessor's intentional systematic underassessment of other comparable properties violated the taxpayers' rights under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. A recent arms-length purchase price may be used for assessment purposes, and a general adjustment may be utilized as a transitional substitute for an individual reappraisal of other properties which were not recently sold. However, a general adjustment, to satisfy equal protection requirements, must be such that the differences in proportion between assessments of a class of property are equalized over a short period of time. The Court also held that the injured taxpayers were not limited in remedy to seeking to have the assessments of undervalued properties raised to market value. The Equal Protection Clause requires the state to remedy constitutionally disparate assessments. (*Allegheny Pittsburgh Coal Co. v. County Commission of Webster Co.*, W. Va., 488 U.S. 336 (1989) *rev'g sub nom.*, *In re Tax Assessments Against Oneida Coal Co.*, 178 W.Va. 485, 360 S.E. 2d 560 (1987).

*Assessment ratio:* All property is assessed at sixty percent (60%) of its appraised value, which is determined as provided by law. (W. Va. Const. art. X § 1b).

## **¶ 608 Assessment--Residential, Farm Property and Managed Timberland**

*Law:* W. Va. Code §§ 11-1C-5 and 11-3-1

For three types of real property, the term “true and actual value” has a modified statutory definition. The true and actual value of residential property is arrived at by giving primary, but not exclusive, consideration to the fair and reasonable amount of income which the same might be expected to earn, under normal conditions in the locality wherein

situated, if rented. The true and actual value of all owner or tenant occupied farms is arrived at according to the fair and reasonable value of the property for the purpose for which it is actually used regardless of what the value of the property would be if used for some other purpose, with consideration given to the fair and reasonable income which the same might be expected to earn under normal conditions in the locality wherein situated. The value of managed timberland is arrived at so that all such property is valued in the same manner no matter where it is situated in the state; valuation is based on its use and productive potential as managed timberland. Timberland which does not qualify as managed timberland is valued at market value, except that farm woodlots are valued as part of the farm.

In *Wright v. Banks*, 232 W. Va. 602, 753 S.E.2d 100 (2013), the owners of residential property which they occupied as their primary residence purchased their property on June 23, 2010, for \$234,000. Six months later, on December 30, 2010, the assessor appraised the property and found its fair market value was \$355,200. The Wrights appealed the Assessor's valuation of their property to the Board of Equalization and Review. The Board ruled in favor of the Assessor. Thereafter, the circuit court affirmed the Board of Review's order and held that the taxpayers failed to offer any competent evidence that the Assessor's value was incorrect. The Supreme Court reversed, noting that the taxpayers had testified that the purchase price was an open market arm's length transaction. The Court cited several previous cases in which it had held that the purchase price paid for property in a recent arm's length transaction is a substantial factor in determining the property's true and actual value and that the assessor should consult all relevant sources of information as to the true and actual value of the property. Noting that the assessor failed to introduce any evidence that the purchase price was not an arm's length transaction, the Court reversed the circuit court's holding that the taxpayers did not offer competent evidence and remanded the case for further consideration.

A dissenting justice paid more attention to the assessor's testimony concerning how the computerized Integrated Assessment System ("IAS"), which is provided by the State Tax Commissioner to all assessors in the state, was used to determine the property's value by comparing it to the value of other properties in the same neighborhood; that is, by the market data approach. The assessor testified that ten properties in the same neighborhood were considered, but three were rejected because they were foreclosure sales. The assessor also testified that the actual purchase price was more similar to the price of those in the foreclosure sales. The dissenting justice concluded that the taxpayers failed to meet their heavy burden of proof (see further discussion in ¶ 622 below).

Interestingly, neither the majority decision nor the dissent recognized that W. Va. Code § 11-3-1 (1977) requires that "the true and actual value of all property owned, used and occupied by the owner thereof exclusively for residential purposes shall be arrived at by giving primary, but not exclusive, consideration to the fair and reasonable amount of income which the same might be expected to earn, under normal conditions in the locality wherein situated, if rented", and neither opinion recognized that the market data approach

implemented in the IAS is based only on physical attributes of the property and in no way considers “the fair and reasonable amount of income which the same might be expected to earn, under normal conditions in the locality wherein situated, if rented”.

Also, it is interesting to note that the changes to chapter 11, article 3 enacted by the Legislature were not applicable to this case, since it concerned the value of the property for tax year 2011. The Court directed that “[o]n remand, the parties may introduce all relevant evidence regarding the true and actual value of the property”. *Wright v. Banks*, 232 W. Va. at 607, 753 S.E.2d at 105. This directive is contrary to the applicable version of W. Va. Code § 11-3-25, which provided that “[i]f there was an appearance by or on behalf of the owner before the county court, or if actual notice, certified by such court, was given to the owner, the appeal, when allowed by the court or judge, in vacation, shall be determined from the evidence so certified.”

### **¶ 609 Assessment--Real Property**

*Law:* W. Va. Code §§ 11-3-7 and 11-4-9

Subject to exemptions, all tangible property, both real and personal, is taxed in proportion to its value which is ascertained as directed by law. A separate leasehold interest is taxable if it has a separate and independent value from the freehold, although under ordinary conditions the freehold estate will not be reduced in value by virtue of the leasehold nor will the leasehold have any ascertainable market value. (*Great A&P Tea Co. v. Davis*, 167 W. Va. 53, 278 S.E. 2d 352 (1981).) The West Virginia Supreme Court holds that “the separate value of a leasehold, if any, is based on whether the leasehold is economically advantageous to the lessee, that is a so-called bargain lease, and is freely assignable so that the lessee may realize the benefit of such bargain in the market place.” *Musick v. University Park at Evansdale, LLC*, 241 W. Va. 194, 820 S.E.2d 901 (2018) (citing *Maplewood Community, Inc. v. Craig*, 216 W. Va. 273, 607 S.E.2d 379 (2004)). Separate interests in property, such as mineral interest, which have been severed from the fee are separately assessed and taxed. (W. Va. Code § 11-4-9.) A taxpayer’s challenge to whether a leasehold has separate, independent value presents an issue of valuation, not taxability, and is properly presented to the board of equalization and review pursuant to W. Va. Code §11-3-24. *University Park at Evansdale, LLC V Musick*, 238 W. Va. 106, 792 SE 2<sup>nd</sup> 605 (2016).

In assessing the value of buildings and structures, the assessor determines the value of attached fixtures and machinery and includes it in the value of the building in which it is located unless the machinery and fixtures are owned by some person other than the owner of the building. In that case, the machinery and fixtures will be assessed as personal property to their owner. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-7.)

Should the assessed value of a taxpayer’s real property increase in any year by more than 10%, or \$1,000, whichever is the greater, the assessor must send the owner a “Notice of Increase in Assessment” not later than January 15<sup>th</sup> of the tax year, unless there is a general increase in the entire valuation of one or more districts, in which case



the notice may be given by publication of a Class II legal advertisement. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-2a(a).)

In *Lee Trace, LLC v. Raynes*, 232 W. Va. 183, 751 S.E.2d 703 (2013), the Assessor issued a Notice of Increase in Assessment informing Lee Trace its property had increased in value. The Notice provided that “[i]f you believe an adjustment in the assessed value is necessary, you should contact the County Commission sitting as a Board of Review and Equalization.” The Supreme Court found this notice to be insufficient under the older version of W. Va. Code § 11-3-2a, which then provided that the notice must “advise the person assessed or the person controlling the property of his right to appear and seek an adjustment in the assessment”. The Court held that the notice was insufficient to “adequately inform the person assessed or the person controlling the property of his or her ‘right to appear’ and seek an adjustment in the assessment,” because no mention was made of the taxpayer’s right to appear by a specified time or at a specific place, and no explanation was provided regarding the role the county commission served in the tax assessment appeals process. The Court also noted that this statute was revised in 2010, and W. Va. Code § 11–3–24(f) now provides, in pertinent part, “[a]ny person who receives notice as provided in subsection (e) of this section may appear before the board *at the time and place specified in the notice* to object to the proposed increase in the valuation of the taxpayer’s property ...” (emphasis in original).

In an unpublished memorandum decision, the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals in *Lee Trace, LLC V Larry Hess*, No. 14-0962; 2015 WL 762-8718 (hereafter Lee Trace II) revisited various issues relating to the assessment and valuation of the Lee Trace property. In its decision in Lee Trace I, the Supreme Court of Appeals remanded the matter to the Circuit Court of Berkeley County for further action. The matter was then transferred to the business court division, which remanded the matter to the Berkeley County Council as a board of equalization and review. Even though, when the matter arrived at the Berkeley County board of equalization and review, it was sitting in a different tax year, the Supreme Court of Appeals upheld the procedure over the objection of the taxpayer. *Lee Trace, LLC V Berkeley County Council*, No. 16-0239, 2017 WL 1535075 (hereafter Lee Trace III) was another unpublished opinion which rejected the taxpayer’s contention that the assessor failed to properly value the property for 2015 taxes and that the presumption in favor of the assessor’s value and the standard of proof denied the taxpayer due process of law.

## ¶ 610 Assessment--Personal Property

*Law:* W. Va. Code §§ 11-3-14, 11-3-14a and 11-5-1

Tangible personal property that has been located in this state for a period of time and has been used in the state and is located in the state on July 1 acquires tax situs in West Virginia and may be assessed, even though the property is removed before the tax is due or even before it has actually been assessed. (*George F. Hazelwood Co. v. Pitsenbarger*, 149 W.Va. 485, 141 S.E. 2d 314 (1965).)

All tangible personal property, unless exempt, belonging to persons residing in this state, whether such property be in or out of the state, unless the property actually in another state is subject to and actually taxed in the other state, and all personal property, unless exempt, in the state although owned by persons residing out of the state is subject to property taxation in West Virginia. (W. Va. Code § 11-5-1.)

#### **¶ 611 Assessment-- Public Utility Property**

*Law: W. Va. Code § 11-6-1 et seq.; § 11-6G -2 et seq.*

The State Tax Commissioner provides tentative assessments based on fair market value of operating property of public service corporations to be used as a guide by the Board of Public Works in establishing final assessed values for property tax purposes. In this regard, the Tax Commissioner uses the “unit rule” where applicable and furnishes tentative valuation estimates for the Board's consideration. The “unit rule” is an appraisal of an integrated property as a whole system without any reference to the values of its component parts.

Public service businesses include airlines, bus lines, railroads, railroad car lines, express and freight companies, pipeline companies, electric power companies generating, transmitting, or distributing electricity, including hydroelectric companies, telegraph, and telephone companies; gas companies, water companies, and any other business that is a public service business. This chapter uses the terms public service business and public utility interchangeably.

Operating property is a utility's property used for purposes immediately connected with providing the respective utility service. The Tax Commissioner's understanding of this definition is consistent with that used by regulatory bodies in constructing the utility rate base for rate making purposes. Accordingly, the Tax Commissioner gives primary consideration to whether properties are included in a utility operating property classification as reflected in the applicable uniform system of accounts when deciding issues as to whether property is operating or non-operating property. For example, to determine what constitutes operating property for an electric utility, the Tax Commissioner will look to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's Uniform System Accounts Prescribed for Electrical Utilities. For state regulated utilities, the Tax Commissioner will look to the appropriate system of accounts of the West Virginia Public Service Commission.

Non-operating property of public service corporations is assessed by the assessor of the county in which the non-operating property of public service corporations is located.

## ¶ 612 Valuation--Public Utility Property

*Law:* WV Code § 11-6-1, WVCSR § 110-1M-1 *et seq.*

*Methodologies:* While the rule provides for the use of the cost, income and market value methods of valuation, for-profit public service corporations are primarily valued using the income approach.

*Tax returns:* Public utility property tax returns must be filed no later than May 1 of each year, although on good cause shown, the State Tax Commissioner may grant an extension of the filing deadline. Based upon these returns of public utilities to the Board of Public Works and other relevant information, the Tax Commissioner makes tentative assessments and provides them to the Board of Public Works on or before September 15 of each year. By October 1, the Board assesses and fixes the true and actual value of all public utility property but may subsequently adjust the value based on the receipt of additional facts and evidence. By law, the assessed value of public utility property is sixty percent (60%) of its appraised value. An appeal from the decision of the Board may be taken to the circuit court of the county in which the property assessed is located.

The State Auditor apportions the assessed values to the counties where the utility property is situated according to the method the auditor deems appropriate and then applies the appropriate levy rate set by the local levying bodies to determine the tax due from public utilities.

*Valuation of interstate commercial motor vehicles:* Interstate motor carrier operating property includes each power unit used as an interstate commercial motor vehicle registered under a proportional registration agreement. The cost approach is used to determine the appraised value of an interstate commercial motor vehicle. The gross capital cost of the interstate commercial motor vehicle is multiplied by a percentage factor representing the remainder of the vehicle's value after depreciation.

The Tax Commissioner annually provides the depreciation schedules used by the West Virginia Commissioner of Motor Vehicles for use in assessing power units subject to proportional registration agreements. The property assessment and tax collection upon interstate power units occurs at the time of registration under the International Registration Plan (IRP). IRP is a method of registering fleets of vehicles that travel in two or more member jurisdictions. All states (except Alaska and Hawaii), Washington D.C., and all Canadian provinces (except Northwestern Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon) are members of the plan. Registration through IRP is required for vehicles that are used for transporting persons or property, travel in two or more IRP jurisdictions (including West Virginia), and:

- (1) Have a registered gross vehicle weight or actual weight in excess of 26,000 pounds (property carrying vehicle); **or**

- (2) Are power units with three (3) or more axles regardless of weight, including buses; **or**
- (3) Are used in combination and the actual weight of the combination exceeds 26,000 pounds.

For each interstate truck, road tractor and power unit registered under a proportional registration agreement, the appraised value is multiplied by an apportionment factor, the numerator of which represents a total fleet miles driven in the most recent taxable year in West Virginia and the denominator of which represents the total fleet miles driven in the most recent tax year everywhere. The mileage amounts are those reported to the West Virginia Division of Motor Vehicles. This scheme results in certain interstate trucks, road tractors and power units that have no presence in the state to be subject to West Virginia personal property taxation. The constitutionality of this system was upheld by the Circuit Court of Kanawha County, West Virginia. *Vacuum Truck Rentals LLC V Bonham, Circuit Court of Kanawha County*, Civil Action Number 16-AA-112; January 8, 2018.

### **¶ 613 Valuation--Coal**

*Law: W. Va. Code § 11-1C-10; WVCSR § 110-11-1 et seq.*

The Tax Commissioner is required to make and maintain accurate values for all natural resource properties, including coal. The methodology for valuing coal properties is set forth in rules that were approved for promulgation by the West Virginia Legislature. Under the rules, coal property ownership is classified into the following four categories for valuation purposes:

(1) *Active*: Active mining property refers to a mind of coal property or portion of a property involved in a mining operation. Each and every bed of coal being mined in a permitted mining operation is a separate active mining property.

The value of active mining property is the sum of the value of active acres and reserves that are included in the active mining property. In no case may the value per active acre on a coal bed be less than the applicable present value per acre on the coal bed. Unmineable, mined-out and barren acres are not included in active mining property.

The valuation formula applicable to an active mining property is based on the actual market to which the coal from the bed is currently being sold, whether it is metallurgical and/or steam. Factors used for the valuation formula include the coal thickness, 1800 tons per acre foot, the clean coal recovery rate, the coal royalty rate, whether the coal is underground or surface, the coal market, a net present value multiplier, and the mine life in years. The factors are different for steam coal and metallurgical coal.

In *Murray Energy Corporation et al v. Dale W. Steager*, No. 18-0018 (April 29, 2019) the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals approved of the methodology of calculating certain coal values for ad valorem tax valuation purposes against the challenge to the use of mass appraisal techniques.

(2) *Reserves*: Reserve coal property means any property for which coal rights are part of the owned estate and which is not part of an active mining property. Reserve coal is valued according to a reserve coal valuation model. The minimum valuation placed on reserves may never be less than five dollars (\$5.00) per acre. Any unmineable, mined-out or barren coal is valued as part of the reserve coal property.

The base market location value is the starting point of evaluating a reserve coal. The base market location value for location is determined by multiplying the coal price per million BTU for location by the royalty rate for the location. The current market location value is then tabulated for each coalbed by multiplying the base market location value by a BTU and sulfur adjustment factor for each coalbed at location. The present value of 1 BTU of each coalbed at a location is then calculated by multiplying the current market location value by one millionth and then multiplying the resulting product by a standard midyear present worth factor calculation.

(3) *Unmineable*: Unmineable coal is coal which is not in a mineable coal bed. It is valued under one of the following circumstances:

Properties in which each and every coal bed is unmineable or where each bed is partially unmineable and the remaining portion is mined out, are valued at a rate of five dollars (\$5.00) per deed acre, and

Properties in which an acre or more of unmineable coal coexists with mineable coal in any bed, are valued at a rate of five dollars (\$5.00) times the amount of unmineable acreage in the bed containing the least amount of unmineable acreage.

(4) *Mined out coal properties*: A mined out coal bed is a bed of coal, or any portion of the bed, which has been depleted by prior mining operations and from which no additional coal is recoverable by generally accepted mining practices and suitable equipment, unless there is evidence to the contrary. Mined out coal property is valued under one of the following circumstances:

Properties in which each and every coalbed is completely mined out, are valued at the rate of one dollar (\$1.00) per deed acre;

Properties in which an acre or more of mined out coal coexist with mineable coal in the bed are valued at a rate of one dollar (\$1.00) times the amount of mined out acreage in a bed containing the least amount of mined out acreage.

(5) *Barren*: Barren coal properties means fee/mineral/coal properties where the coal rights are owned but the coal was never deposited and/or has been subsequently removed by erosion. Barren coal properties are valued under one of the following circumstances:

Properties in which each and every coalbed is completely barren are valued at the rate of one dollar (\$1.00) per deed acre; and

Properties in which an acre or more of barren coal coexists with mineable in any bed, are valued at a rate of one dollar (\$1.00) times the amount of barren acreage in the bed containing the least amount of barren acreage.

*Leasehold interests*: Generally, the values attributed to coal property are attributed to the owner of the coal property. Where the property is subject to a lease requiring the owner to permit the mining of the coal at a royalty rate substantially below current market value, the owner may petition the Tax Commissioner to attribute a portion of the value of the coal to the leaseholder.

Where coal rights are part of a fee estate in which the surface has qualified as an active farm, the coal will not be valued if no royalties are derived from the coal. Only where the annual wholesale value of farm commodities or products is less than 50% of the usual gross income from all uses of the property will the applicable coal values be added to the surface farm use values.

*Property reports*: On or before May 1 of each year, the producer is required to file an Annual Appraisal Report for Production of Coal with the Tax Commissioner with acknowledgement to the coal owners and the county assessors of the counties in which the mine is located. On or before August 16th of each year, the coal owner of any property that is part of a permitted mining operation under lease is required to file an Annual Appraisal Return for Reserve Mineral Properties with the Tax Commissioner. Owners of other coal properties may file an Annual Appraisal Return for Reserve Mineral Properties, on or before September 16th, with the Tax Commissioner; otherwise the properties are valued using the best available information. (WVCSR § 110-11-4.9). The due date of the return from owners of coal property is May 1 preceding the July 1 assessment date, and an informal review process is available to taxpayers.

## **¶ 614 Valuation--Producing and Reserve Oil; Natural Gas Liquids; and Natural Gas Properties**

*Law*: W. Va. Code § 11-1C-10; WVCSR § 110-1J-1 *et seq.*

The State Tax Commissioner is required to make and maintain accurate values for all natural resource properties, including oil and natural gas. The methodology for valuing these properties is set forth in the West Virginia Code and the most recent version of the legislative rule that became effective on April 24, 2023.

Natural gas liquids are now specifically referenced as being subject to property taxation. Additionally, beginning with tax year 2022, the fair market value of oil, natural gas liquids, and natural gas is determined through the application of a yield capitalization model to net proceeds. Net proceeds are actual gross receipts on a sales volume basis determined from actual price received by the taxpayer as reported on the property tax return less royalties and less actual annual operating costs as reported on the taxpayer's returns. The application of actual annual operating costs is a significant change in the methodology for determining the fair market value of producing wells. See *Steager v. Consol Energy, Inc.*, 832 S.E.2d 135 (2019), in which the Supreme Court of Appeals held that the Tax Department's position that gathering, compressing, processing, and transporting expenses are not "directly related" to the "maintenance and production" of natural gas was not "arbitrary, capricious, or manifestly contrary to the enabling taxation statute. Thus, the Tax Department was not required to include such expenses in the calculation of annual industry operating expense deductions for the valuation of both conventional and Marcellus gas wells. Under the old legislative rule, the Tax Department was required to use an annual industry-wide operating expense amount, rather than the actual expenses incurred by individual producers.

West Virginia Code § 11-1C-10 was recently updated to define various terms and codify certain decline rate language. Additionally, House Bill 4850, which was passed and signed during the 2024 regular legislative session, made additional technical corrections and removed the sunset provision that would have made the statutory subdivision that addresses property producing oil, natural gas, or natural gas liquids no longer effective beginning with property tax year 2026.

Oil, natural gas liquids or natural gas, or any combination of the three, are among the several estates in real property which may be owned either separately or in conjunction with other estates. If oil, natural gas liquids or natural gas is owned as a separate estate, either absolute, as a leasehold, or in conjunction with other estates, West Virginia property tax law requires that ownership be listed, valued, and taxed in proportion to its value to be ascertained as directed by law. If oil, natural gas liquids or natural gas is owned in conjunction with an undivided or fee interest in an estate, the value of the oil, natural gas liquids or natural gas is included in the value of the other estate. Oil, natural gas liquids or natural gas may be owned without being produced. Oil or natural gas title may exist where no well or natural gas is known to be present, or where the oil or natural gas is unproducible or depleted. WVCSR § 110-1J-2.

Oil and natural gas properties are divided into several categories:

(1) *Natural gas-producing property.* Natural gas-producing property is property from which natural gas or natural gas liquids has been produced or extracted at any time during the calendar year preceding the July 1 assessment date. Natural gas producing property includes the interest or interests underlying an area of up to one hundred twenty-five (125) acres of surface per vertical well for property with active wells on the parcel; and communitized acres of surface per horizontal well for properties with one or more active

wells. All acreage of a natural gas producing property in excess of one hundred twenty-five (125) acres per vertical well, or the communitized acres per horizontal well, shall be valued at the non-producing rate per acre. WVCSR § 110-1J-3.33.

(2) *Oil-producing property*: Oil-producing property is property from which oil has been produced or extracted at any time during the calendar year preceding the July 1 assessment date. Oil-producing property includes the interest or interests underlying an area of up to 40 acres of surface per well with one (1) or more active wells on the parcel. All acreage of an oil-producing property in excess of 40 acres per well is valued at the non-producing rate per acre. WVCSR § 110-1J-3.38.

*Valuation*: The value of oil producing property or natural gas producing property, or property producing both, shall be determined through the process of applying a yield capitalization model to the net receipts (gross receipts less royalties paid and less actual annual operating costs) for the working interest and a yield capitalization model applied to the gross royalty payments for the royalty interest. Where ownership is split through a lease or royalty arrangement, different values shall be determined for the working interest and the royalty interest. If the well produced for less than twelve (12) months during the first calendar year of production, or during the first calendar year of production after being shut-in during the previous calendar year, the gross receipts and royalties paid shall be annualized prior to the process of applying a yield capitalization rate. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.1

(3) *Non-producing, shut-in wells*: A non-performing or shut-in well is a well which due to the producer's decisions, market reasons, or product performance, or any other reason or combination of reasons, was non-productive during the entire most recent calendar year preceding the July 1<sup>st</sup> assessment date. WVCSR § 110-1J-3.35.

*Valuation*: The value per acre of non-producing acreage, which includes shut-in wells, shall equal the discounted annual lease payment per acre. A valuation schedule for non-producing properties shall be determined annually by the Tax Commissioner for each district within a county, where data is available. The Tax Commissioner shall annually conduct a review of oil or natural gas lease agreements, or lease agreements addressing both, transacted at arms-length in all fifty-five (55) counties to determine the average annual delay rental lease payment per acre, and lease term. The per-acre value for nonproducing property shall be the sum of the projected annual income stream from delay rental during the lease term discounted in each year by a capitalization rate. A valuation of \$1.00 per acre shall be used where property is located in those areas of the State where drilling activity or production have not been established and the property is presumed to be barren. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.8.

(4) *Barren property*: Barren properties are those acres, tracts, and parcels owned in fee in West Virginia where data suggests with reasonable certainty that the presence of oil, natural gas liquids, ~~and~~ or natural gas is very unlikely. WVCSR § 110-1J-3.7.



*Valuation:* The appraised value of oil or natural gas interests in barren oil and natural gas property shall be one dollar (\$1.00) per deeded acre. When two or more persons own the acreage, this appraised value shall be allocated among the owners based upon the percentage of their ownership of the acreage. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.11.

(5) *Plugged or abandoned acreage:* The appraised value of plugged well property acreage shall be valued to the oil or gas owner at the nominal rate of one dollar (\$1.00) per acre. This category includes any plugged and abandoned acreage of up to one hundred twenty-five (125) acres per natural gas well, and the communitized acres per horizontal gas well. In the case of a plugged oil well, this section shall apply to up to forty (40) acres per vertical oil well and the communitized acreage per horizontal oil well. Any additional acreage will be valued as reserve acreage. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.9.

(6) *Valuation of wells producing both oil and natural gas:* The appraised value of wells that produce both oil and natural gas shall be determined by use of the methods described in this rule. These values shall then be summed to result in the overall value of the oil or natural gas producing acreage or acreage producing both oil and natural gas. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.12.

(7) *Valuation of industrial use wells:* Wells used for industrial purposes only are valued based on the actual most recent calendar year preceding the July 1 appraisal date MCF usage times the average West Virginia spot price for that calendar year determined by the "Natural Gas Monthly," published by the US Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.6.

(8) *Valuation of storage well areas:* Storage well areas have a value equal to the discounted annual lease payment per acre that is applied to the reserve oil and gas acreage within the county. The minimum value applied to the acres will not be less than five dollars (\$5.00) per deed acre. The value does not include inventories of natural gas stored within. These natural gas storage inventories are assessed separately to the inventory owner. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.13.

(9) *Farm properties:* The oil and gas rights that are part of the "fee" estate where the use of the surface qualified for farm use appraisal are valued in accordance with the Tax Commissioner's rule on the valuation of farmland and structures situated thereon for *ad valorem* property tax purposes, WVCSR § 110-1A. "Farm fee estate" means absolute ownership of the farmland unencumbered by any other interest or estate. See, WVCSR § 110-1J-4.14.

(10) *Valuation of the producer's personal property at non-producing or shut-in wells:* The appraised value of the producer's personal property that is part of a non-producing or shut-in well's appraisal will be assigned to the producer at the same appraised value applied to machinery and equipment at home use only wells. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.15.

(11) *Valuation of pre-production/permit leaseholds*: Chattel real accounts (personal property) for pre-production/permit leaseholds are valued by the county assessor. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.16.

(12) *Valuation of producing flat-rate royalty accounts*: The appraised value of a producing flat-rate royalty will be valued using a discounted cash flow series of the flat rate. It will not include production decline rates. WVCSR § 110-1J-4.17.

(13) *Valuation of coal bed methane wells*: The Tax Commissioner applies the same methodology to the valuation of coal bed methane wells as he does to natural gas wells. See WVCSR §§ 110-1J-3.9 and 3.31.

*Annual Property Tax Returns*: On or before August 1st of each year, as required by §11-6K-1 of this Code, the producer shall file the West Virginia Oil and Gas Producer/Operator Return with the State Tax Commissioner, with acknowledgement to the county assessors in the counties where the oil and natural gas property is located. This Return form shall be designed by the State Tax Commissioner so that information pertinent to the valuation of the producing property, and the plugged and abandoned well property shall be reported properly by the producer of oil or gas or both. WVCSR § 110-1J-9.1.

*West Virginia Natural Gas Liquids Property Tax Adjustment Act*: The Natural Gas Liquids Economic Development Act and the West Virginia Natural Gas Liquids Property Tax Adjustment Act include a tax credit for eligible taxpayers in the business of the transportation and storage of natural gas liquids in an amount equal to the amount paid yearly in West Virginia ad valorem property taxes on inventory and equipment by an eligible taxpayer. West Virginia Code §11-13-FF-1 *et seq.*

## **¶ 615 Valuation--Timberland**

*Law*: W. Va. Code §§ 11-1C-10, 11-1C-11, 11-1C-11a, and 11-1 C-11b, 11-3-5a; WVCSR § 110-1H-1 *et seq.*

The State Tax Commissioner is required to make and maintain accurate values for all natural resource properties, including managed timberland. The methodology for valuing these properties is set forth in rules that were approved for promulgation by the West Virginia Legislature.

Any person who owns timberland comprising ten (10) or more contiguous acres may qualify for certification as managed timberland for property tax purposes. W. Va. Code § 11-1C-11a.

To qualify for dedication as managed timberland for property tax purposes, the owner must annually certify in writing to the division of forestry, that the property meets the definition of managed timberland and contracts to manage the property according to a plan that will maintain the property as managed timberland. In addition, each owner

certification must state that forest management practices will be conducted in accordance with approved practices from the publication of “Best Management Practices for Forestry.” W. Va. Code § 11-1C-10 (b)(1).

Timberland certified by the division of forestry as managed timberland is valued as managed timberland and it is managed under a cooperative contract with the division of forestry if the certification has not been surrendered by the owner of the property or revoked by the director of the division of forestry.

Property certified as managed timberland which prior to certification was properly classified as class II (residential property) may not be reclassified as class III or class IV for property taxation merely because the property has been certified as managed timberland unless there is some other event or change in use of the property that disqualifies it from being treated as class II property.

The appraised value of managed timberland is determined based on the potential of the land to produce future income according to its use and productive potential. Potential for future net income is discounted to its present value utilizing a discounted cash flow; this is the appraised value. The ability of a stand of timber to produce wood products for sale or use depends primarily on the quality of the soil and certain topographical and climate features which can be expressed as a site index. Site index is the principal criterion influencing the appraised value of managed timberland. These factors are reviewed annually by the Tax Commissioner for necessary updating of the method described in order to properly reflect future changes in the values of managed timberland. WVCSR § 110-1H-2.1.

In *Penn Virginia Operating Company LLC v Yokum*, No. 18-0019 (March 19, 2019) the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals held that a flawed notice of appeal issued by the West Virginia Division of Forestry to a property owner, which missed the deadline for annual application for participation in the managed timberland program, constituted a denial of due process and ordered that the property owner be permitted to appeal the denial to the state director of the Division of Forestry.

#### **¶ 616 Valuation--Other Active Natural Resources**

*Law: W. Va. Code § 11-1C-10; WVCSR § 110-1K-1 et seq.*

The State Tax Commissioner is also required to make and maintain accurate values for all other natural resource properties. The methodology for valuing these properties is set forth in rules that were approved for promulgation by the West Virginia Legislature.

Natural resources, such as limestone, fireclay, dolomite, sandstone, shale, sand and gravel, and salt are some of the several estates in real property. Other natural resources which are not currently being actively mined such as lead and zinc, manganese, iron ore, radioactive materials, and oil shale, are valued according to the Tax Commissioner's rule

when such interests are separate from the fee interest or are being leased and/or actively mined.

These natural resources are divided into five categories:

(1) *Active*: “Active mining property” means a mineable natural resource on a parcel or portion of a parcel involved in the mining operation, as defined by the Tax Commissioner's rule, and permitted by the West Virginia Office of Miner’s Health, Safety and Training/Office of Mining and Reclamation. Each and every mineable natural resource is considered a separate active mining property.

*Valuation*: The value of active mining property is the value per active acre multiplied by the amount of active acres. In no case may the active mining property be valued at less than its value as reserve property. The valuation per active acre is arrived at by application of a valuation formula for active mining property based on the actual quantity of resource produced and sold. Factors used in the formula are: resource thickness in feet; tons per acre foot; clean resource recovery rates; royalty rate; net present value multiplier; and mine life in years. WVCSR § 110-1K-4.1.4.

The maximum active mining portion for each natural resource is fifteen (15) years multiplied by the annual acres mined, except for salt. The active mining portion around each salt production well is a maximum of thirty-five (35) acres. After a well's first year of production, active mining property is derived by subtracting acres mined from the thirty-five (35) acres. If the available mineable acreage is less than fifteen (15) years or thirty-five (35) acres, respectively, the total available acreage will be considered for designation as “Active Mining Property” WVCSR § 110-1K.-4.1.2 g, h.

(2) *Reserves*: Reserves means the natural resource acres or portion of those acres, which: contain the mineable natural resources; are within a permitted mining property; and are not within the active mining portion of the property.

*Valuation*: Reserve valuation rates for limestone, sandstone, clay and shale, sand and gravel, and salt are determined annually by the Tax Commissioner after review of recorded willing seller-willing buyer natural resource, production-specific, property sales that have occurred in the state of West Virginia during at least five calendar years prior to the July 1 appraisal date, through inspection of other appropriate information, and from quantitative data that might reflect current market values.

(3) *Unmineable*: An unmineable natural resource is a natural resource which is so situated that it may not be mined using generally accepted mining practices and suitable equipment.

*Valuation*: An unmineable natural resource subject to this rule is valued at one dollar (\$1.00) per acre.

(4) *Mined-out*: Mined out means a natural resource, or any portion thereof, determined to be depleted by prior mining operations.

*Valuation*. Mined out properties are valued at one dollar (\$1.00) per acre.

(5) *Barren*: Barren means fee or mineral properties where other natural resource rights are owned, a specific natural resource may never have been deposited or may have been subsequently removed by erosion.

*Valuation*: A barren natural resource subject to this rule is valued at one dollar (\$1.00) per acre.

*Resources part of active farm property*: The natural resource rights that are part of the “fee” estate where the use of the surface has qualified for farm use appraisal is valued in accordance with the Tax Commissioner's rule on valuation of farmland and structures situate there on for ad valorem property tax purposes. WVCSR § 110-1K-4.8

*Property reports*: On or before May 1 of each year, the producer must file an Annual Appraisal Report for Production of Other Mined Minerals with the Tax Commissioner with acknowledgment to the natural resource owners and the county assessors in the counties where the mines are located. On or before September 16 of each year, the natural resource owner of a property that is part of a permitted mining operation must file an Annual Appraisal Return for Reserve Mineral Properties with the Tax Commissioner. Owners of natural resource properties may file an Annual Appraisal Return for Reserve Mineral Properties, on or before September 16, with the Tax Commissioner; otherwise, the properties are valued using the best available information. (WVCSR §110-1K-4.9.) The due date of this return is May 1 preceding the July 1 assessment date, and an informal review process is available to taxpayers.

#### **¶ 617 Valuation--Commercial and industrial Real Property**

*Law*: W. Va. Code §§ 11-1C-7 and 11-1C-10; WVCSR § 110-1P-1 *et seq.*

The county assessor determines the appraised value of commercial real property in accordance with rules approved by the West Virginia Legislature for promulgation by the State Tax Commissioner and pursuant to a plan approved by the Property Valuation Training and Procedures Commission. The Tax Commissioner determines the appraised value of industrial property and provides that value to the county assessor. W. Va. Code § 11-1C-10. The Tax Commissioner's rules (WVCSR 110-1P-1 *et seq.*) provide rules for valuing both commercial and industrial real property.

*Valuation generally*: The appraised value (market value) of commercial and industrial real property is the price for which the property would sell if it were sold to a willing buyer by a willing seller and in an arms-length transaction without either the buyer or the seller being under any compulsion to buy or sell. In determining appraised value, primary consideration is given to the trends of price paid for like or similar property in the area or

locality wherein such property is situated. Additionally, for purposes of appraisal of any tract or parcel of real property used for commercial or industrial purposes, including chattels real, the appraisal must consider the following factors:

- (1) Location of such property;
- (2) Its site characteristics;
- (3) The ease of alienation thereof, considering the state of its title, the number of owners thereof, and the extent to which the same may be the subject of either dominant or servient easements;
- (4) The quantity of size of the property and the impact which its sale may have upon surrounding property;
- (5) If purchased within the previous eight years, the purchase price thereof and the date of each such purchase;
- (6) Recent sale of, or other transactions involving, comparable property;
- (7) The value of such property to its owner;
- (8) The condition of such property;
- (9) The income, if any, which the property actually produces and has produced within the next proceeding three (3) years; and
- (10) Any commonly accepted method of ascertaining the market value of any such property, including techniques and methods peculiar to any particular species of property if such technique or method is used uniformly and applied to all property of like species.

Improvements to the land and improvements on the land are considered in the appraisal process. WVCSR § 110-1P-3.1.2

Improvements to the land are land improvements, the value of which is included in the value of land. Some examples of these improvements include privately owned drainage systems, driveways, walks, etc.

Improvements on the land or buildings and structures are valued separate and apart from the land.

In addition to improvements, other important considerations affecting the value of land, excluding farmland, are:

- (1) Location,
- (2) Size,
- (3) Shade,
- (4) Topography,
- (5) Accessibility,
- (6) Present use,
- (7) Highest and best use,
- (8) Easements,
- (9) Zoning,
- (10) Availability of utility
- (11) Income imputed to land, and
- (12) Supply and demand for land of a particular type.

Each of these factors should be considered in the appraisal of the specific parcel. Some, however, may be given more weight than others. WVCSR § 110-1P-3.1.3.

Commercial real property and personal property is valued by the assessor of the county in which the commercial property is located as provided in W. Va. Code § 11-1C-5, while industrial real and personal property is valued by the Tax Commissioner as provided in W. Va. Code § 11-1C-10. Industrial property means real and personal property integrated as a functioning unit intended for the assembly, processing, and manufacturing of finished or partially finished products. W. Va. Code § 11-1C-10(a)(1).

In determining an estimate of the fair market value of industrial and commercial real properties, the Tax Commissioner and the county assessor will consider and use where applicable, three generally accepted approaches to value: cost, income, and market data.

For purposes of valuing active and residual industrial and commercial land in West Virginia, valuing sites are separated into four broad categories: heavy industrial sites, light industrial or commercial sites, industrial parks, and mine sites. These sites are further classified when appropriate into active and residual portions. These classifications are considered when applying and establishing the valuation method to the industrial and/or commercial properties.

“Active industrial or commercial land” means that portion of land used for industrial and commercial purposes.

“Commercial property” means income producing real property used primarily but not exclusively for the sale of goods or services, including but not limited to offices, warehouses, retail stores, apartment buildings, restaurants, and hotels.

“Economic obsolescence” means a loss in value of property arising from “outside forces” such as changes in use, legislation that restricts or impairs property rights, or changes in supply and demand relationships.

“Economic rent” means the rental amount which a space or property would attain in the open market at the time of appraisal, whether it is lower, higher or the same as the actual contract rent.

“Freehold estate” means in the estate in land or other real property, of uncertain duration; that is, either of inheritance or which may possibly last for the life of a tenet at the least. For the estate to be freehold it must possess two characteristics: immobility and indeterminate duration.

#### **¶ 618 Valuation--Commercial and Industrial Personal Property**

*Law: W. Va. Code §§ 11-1C-7 and 11-1C-10; W. Va. CSR § 110-1P-1 et seq.*

This rule provides methodologies for appraising commercial and industrial furniture, fixtures, machinery, equipment, inventory, material, and supplies. The appraisal of commercial furniture, fixtures, machinery, equipment, inventory, material, and supplies is performed by the local assessor. The appraisal of industrial furniture, fixtures, machinery, equipment, inventory, material, and supplies is performed by the State Tax Commissioner.

*Situs:* The situs of commercial and industrial furniture, fixtures, machinery and equipment, inventory, and materials depends upon an analysis of the residence of the owner, and the location of the personal property and whether the personal property is subject to property taxation by another state and is taxed by the state. All commercial and industrial personal property belonging to persons or corporations residing in West Virginia, whether such property is in or out of the state, is taxable as personal property in West Virginia, unless the property is actually and permanently located in another state and is actually taxed as personal property in the other state. All commercial and industrial personal property located within this state, though owned by persons or corporations residing in another state, is taxable as personal property in West Virginia.

*Methodologies:* The cost, income and market approaches to valuation may be employed. Once generated, the various estimates of value are considered in arriving at a final value estimate. However, of the three approaches to value, the cost approach is most consistently applied to machinery, equipment, furniture, fixtures, and leasehold



improvements because of the availability of data. The market approach is used less frequently, principally due to a lack of meaningful sales. The income approach is not normally used because of the difficulty in estimating future net benefits to be derived except in the case of certain kinds of leased equipment.

*Depreciation:* Physical deterioration, economic obsolescence and functional obsolescence are to be considered in valuing commercial and industrial personal property. However, historically, the Tax Commissioner has only considered obsolescence when requested to do so by the property owner.

In *Century Aluminum of West Virginia, Inc. v. Jackson County Com'n*, 229 W.Va. 215, 728 S.E.2d 99 (May 29, 2012), the Supreme Court of Appeals examined and approved the Tax Commissioner's treatment of functional and economic obsolescence for industrial personal property. In this case, the Court approved the Tax Commissioner's unwritten rule that the allowance for obsolescence for machinery and equipment that is no longer in service cannot exceed 50% of its in-service value. The Tax Commissioner's justification for this rule is that the value of the equipment by the income approach would be \$0 (since it's not in service), so averaging that with the value by the cost approach would yield only a 50% reduction in value.

In *Lee Trace, LLC v. Raynes*, 232 W. Va. 183, 751 S.E.2d 703 (2013), the Assessor used the cost approach, and the taxpayer appeared before the board of equalization and review and sought to adjust the 2011 assessment by using the income approach, thus reducing the tax assessed value of the property. The assessor confirmed at that hearing before the board that some other apartment complexes in the area had assessments reduced by the board upon consideration of income when taxpayers specifically requested it, but that the income approach was not used to assess Lee Trace's property.<sup>4</sup> The board asked the assessor to provide it with a value that took into account the income of the property, and the taxpayer provided income information to the assessor the next day. The assessor used the income approach and came up with a value of about \$5.2 million for the property, significantly below its value by the cost approach of about \$7.6 million. The board then notified the taxpayer that it changed the value to \$6.4 million, which it represented as being the "average" of the results of the two approaches. Lee Trace appealed this result to the circuit court, which held that the Assessor was within her discretion to use the cost approach, but the board was also within its discretion to ask her to request the Assessor to compute a value by the income approach and to revise the final value up or down. It basically approved the Board's value, making only a minor mathematical revision to correctly compute the average value.

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<sup>4</sup> The Assessor also claimed that the income approach was not used to assess Lee Trace's property because the data was not available to develop a "cap rate" used in the calculation due to the lack of any comparable sales in Berkeley County for the period in question – but that seems inconsistent with the fact that other taxpayers had their values reduced upon consideration of their income.

The Supreme Court of Appeals reversed, reasoning that, since the Assessor didn't have any comparable sales from which to develop a capitalization rate, she should not have used the income approach, since W. Va. C.S.R. § 110-1P-2.2.2 states in pertinent part, that “[w]hen possible, the most accurate form of appraisal should be used, but because of the difficulty in obtaining necessary data from the taxpayer, or due to the lack of comparable commercial and/or industrial properties, choice between the alternative appraisal methods may be limited”<sup>5</sup>. It therefore further took issue with the circuit court's finding that it was not an abuse of discretion for the board to utilize the “hybrid income approach” developed by the Assessor and found that the board's value was therefore plainly wrong. Finally, it found that Lee Trace had introduced no evidence that the Assessor's cost approach value was wrong, and it ordered the circuit court to reinstate that value.

Most recently, the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals in a memorandum decision upheld the assessment of a regional shopping mall despite the Mercer County board of equalization review's mandate that the property be appraised using the cost approach by a local appraiser. When the appraisal was produced using the income approach, the board of equalization and review refused to consider it. *Mercer Mall v. Gearhart*, 2019 WL 1110329 (W. Va. 2019).

*Legislative Rule Provisions Regarding Depreciation:*

§ 3.5.1 states that the Marshall Valuation Service shall be used for physical depreciation tables.

§ 3.5.2 states that economic obsolescence can be measured best by either a market approach method or an income method, and states that the income approach is normally used due to a lack of sales data for comparable commercial or industrial properties.

§ 3.5.3 discusses functional obsolescence and recognizes that some functional obsolescence is accounted for in the Marshall Valuation Service. This section divides functional obsolescence into two types: curable and incurable. Curable functional obsolescence is to be valued by using cost to cure methods; incurable by either a market approach or an income approach. Note that valuing curable functional obsolescence by the cost to cure method seems to conflict with an unpublished Memorandum opinion, in which the Supreme Court held that the cost of a planned improvement to obsolete industrial personal property functioning at 85% of its capacity when the property was new could not properly be used as the measure of functional obsolescence for that property, finding that “it would be premature to reduce the value of Alcan's industrial personal property to reflect an intended, rather than an actual, expense because it has not yet been invested in the subject property”. *Alcan Rolled Products - Ravenswood, LLC v. Griffith*, 11-1752, 2013 WL 2443084 (W. Va. June 5, 2013).

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<sup>5</sup> This provision is now found at W. Va. C.S.R. § 110-1P-3.2.2.a.

Section 3.5.3 also recognizes that functional obsolescence can arise from both superadequacy (unnecessary or excess capacity such that a portion of the property adds no value, often caused by decreased demand) or deficiency (capacity less than current market or industry standards, resulting from age, failures of timely maintenance, or capital improvements). Either superadequacy or deficiency may be curable or incurable.

Finally, this section recognizes two special circumstances regarding valuation of plants that are shut down. Plants that are shut down temporarily shall be valued using an income approach based on the anticipated restart data and discounted back to the assessment date; a plant that is shut down indefinitely may be appraised by considering an orderly sale of the property, either piecemeal or as a whole, or, if there is no discernible market value, may be appraised at salvage or scrap value.

#### **¶ 619 Valuation--Unsold Lots Contained in a Recorded Plan or Plat**

*Law: W. Va. Code § 11-3-1b; WVCSR § 110-4-1 et seq.*

The recording of a plat or a plan or the designation of proposed land use by a county or municipal planning authority may not be used by an assessor as the basis for assessment except as specifically provided in this rule.

When a lot or parcel within the recorded plan or plat is sold, or developed and used for a residential, commercial, or industrial purpose, the assessor or the State Tax Commissioner will revalue the sold lot at market value or based upon its actual use. The remaining lots within the recorded plan may not be revalued by the assessor or Tax Commissioner based solely on the sales of the other lots in the plan.

To value the remaining lots in a plan, the assessor or Tax Commissioner first determines the percentage of completion of improvements or infrastructure development that is in place as of the assessment date each year. The assessor or the Tax Commissioner must then obtain data reflecting the most probable selling price of comparable lots. The most probable selling price of comparable lots is then multiplied by the percentage of completion of improvements and infrastructure to yield the appraisal value of the remaining lots. In the absence of the availability of data reflecting the selling price of comparable lots, the total costs or a percentage of expanded costs associated with the development of the potential use as designated in the recorded plan is added to the raw land value yielding the value of the remaining lots.

#### **¶ 620 Valuation--Vehicles, Watercraft, Aircraft and Heavy Equipment Rental Inventory**

*Law: W. Va. Code §§ 11-1C-5, 11-5-15, 17A-3-3a and 20-7-12a; WVCSR § 110-1N-1 et seq.*

*Automobiles:* Automobiles are appraised by local assessors, based on a schedule of automobile values compiled by the State Tax Commissioner, which is based upon the

lowest value shown in a nationally accepted used car guide. The assessor is to use the schedule to determine assessed value of all motor vehicles by applying a sixty percent (60%) factor to the lowest values indicated in the Tax Commissioner's schedule. Older motor vehicles excluded from the Tax Commissioner schedule because of age have their last appraised value appreciated by ten percent (10%) per year until the value of the motor vehicle reaches two hundred (\$200). Thereafter, the appraised value remains at two hundred dollars (\$200) for so long as the taxpayer owns the vehicle.

*Trucks, recreational vehicles, motorcycles, mopeds, and other vehicles:* The local assessor uses a current appraisal guide published by a recognized authority, directed by the Tax Commissioner for the month of July of the current assessment year to ascertain the appraised value of these vehicles, based on the lowest values in the subject guide. Older vehicles not covered by the guides are valued by having their last appraised value depreciated by ten percent (10%) per year until the value reaches two hundred dollars (\$200). Thereafter, the appraised value remains at two hundred dollars (\$200) for so long as the vehicle is owned by the taxpayer.

*Watercraft:* The Tax Commissioner directs the purchase of a nationally recognized comprehensive price listing service for watercraft as the basis for appraised value. The Tax Commissioner supplies this listing to each county assessor for use in determining the appraised value of watercraft. Older watercraft that are not included in the schedule because of age are valued in the same manner as older automobiles for which there is no schedule.

*Aircraft:* Annually the Tax Commissioner directs county assessors to use an aircraft appraisal guide published by a nationally recognized authority. The county assessor determines the appraised value of special radio equipment and radar and other avionic equipment purchased and installed in the aircraft. The total appraised value of the aircraft is based on the retail value of both the aircraft and its navigational equipment. However, airplanes and helicopters owned or leased by commercial airlines or private carriers are now valued at their salvage value, which is defined as the lower of fair market salvage value or five percent of the original cost of the property (W. Va. Code § 11-6H-1 *et seq.*). Special aircraft property, which is defined in part as materials or items used in the construction, maintenance or repair of aircraft which are intended to become affixed to an aircraft or an aircraft engine are valued at their salvage value. (W. Va. Code § 11-6H-2). In *Pratt & Whitney Engine Services v. Steager*, 239 W.Va. 833, 806 S.E.2d 757 (2017), the Supreme Court of Appeals, Ketchum, J., held that inventory of parts was not constitutionally exempt from ad valorem taxation under the Freeport Amendment as tangible personal property moving in interstate commerce.

*Interstate Corporation Motor Vehicles:* Interstate motor vehicles are defined as every truck, road tractor or semitrailer used as an interstate motor vehicle registered under a proportional registration agreement. W. Va. Code §11-6G-2. Fleets of such interstate motor vehicles are assessed an ad valorem fee based on depreciated cost, equalized at 60% and subject to an equivalent levy rate. The value is apportioned among participating

states based upon mileage. W. Va. Code §11-6G-1 *et seq.* The taxpayer may appeal the resulting assessment to the West Virginia Interstate Commerce Appeals Board at its annual meeting conducted on the first Monday in July of each year. W. Va. Code §11-6G-7. The constitutionality of this scheme was upheld by the Circuit Court of Kanawha County, *Vacuum Truck Rentals LLC V Bonham, Circuit Court of Kanawha County*, Civil Action Number 16-AA-112; January 8, 2018.

For additional discussion of the ad valorem taxation of interstate motor vehicles through the International Registration Plan, please see ¶ 612.

*Heavy Equipment Rental Inventory:* Dealers of heavy equipment rental inventory may assign a fee to each item of heavy equipment rental inventory payable by the renter in an amount not greater than 2 ½% of the rental charge for each item of heavy equipment rental inventory. The dealer is obliged to remit the fee to the appropriate County Sheriff. (W. Va. Code § 11-5-15)

### **¶ 621 Return of Property**

*Law:* W. Va. Code §§ 11-3-2, 11-3-3a, 11-3-12, 11-3-14, 11-3-15, 11-3-15a, and 11-6-1

#### *Property Assessed by County Assessor:*

*Individuals:* Noncorporate property owners are to list the real and personal property owned by them and provide the list to the assessor along with the owner's estimate of the worth of the personal property. Any person holding real or personal property in a representative or fiduciary capacity must return that property to the assessor on such forms as are provided by the assessor and must include the owner's value for both real and personal property. The Code does not specify a deadline for this return, but it precludes the assessor from setting the date due prior to July 10. Notices of increase, if required, must be issued by January 15, and the land books must be completed by January 30 and delivered to the County Commission by February 1. Many county assessors require these returns to be filed by October 1.

*Corporations:* Corporations are required to file a verified property tax return with the assessor between July 1 and September 1 of each year in the county in which the corporation's principal office or chief place of business in the state is located or, if its principal office or chief place of business is located outside of West Virginia, in the county in which the property subject to taxation is located. These returns must include the fair market value for both real and tangible personal property.

*Non-corporate businesses:* Any unincorporated firm or individual in any taxable trade or business, except the business of agriculture, must annually, between July 1 and September 1 make a verified, written report as of the first day of the assessment year to the assessor. These returns must include the fair market value for both real and tangible personal property.

*Single-member limited liability companies:* The property of a single-member limited liability company is reported by the owner of that company.

*Improvements:* Where real property, subject to payment of property taxes, is improved so that the value of that property is increased by more than \$1,000, the property owner must give notice of the improvement to the assessor within 60 days on forms provided by the assessor. This notice must provide the following information:

- (1) A statement that improvements are being or have been made;
- (2) The location or address of the property;
- (3) The name of the owner or owners of the property.

Any report filed by any mine, mill factory or other industrial establishment with the assessor before June 15 which discloses with certainty any construction or improvements made during the preceding 12 months complies with this requirement. Also, providing the assessor with a copy of any building permit issued by any county or city satisfies this requirement.

*Penalties for Failure to File:* Failure to list and return property for taxation carries a possible penalty of \$25 to \$100, together with a forfeiture equal to 1% of the property not returned for taxation. Each failure to make a return is a separate offense but the total forfeiture for cumulative failures to return a property may not exceed 5% of the property not returned. The forfeiture may be enforced for any such failure occurring in any year not exceeding five years immediately prior to the time the same is discovered. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-10.) In addition, it is now a misdemeanor for “[a]ny owner, operator or producer, whether a natural person, limited liability company, corporation, partnership, joint venture or other enterprise” to “willfully fail to make a return within thirty days from the day it is herein required.” Upon conviction, the business may be fined \$100 for each month the failure continues.

The most stringent penalty, however, has been somewhat relaxed. Under the prior version of W. Va. Code § 11-3-10, a taxpayer that failed to file a return, refused to answer, or falsely answered a question posed by an assessor or the Tax Commissioner, or that failed to deliver any statement required by law was denied all remedy provided by law for the correction of any assessment. In other words, a taxpayer who fails to file a property tax return has no way to protest the assessor or Tax Commissioner’s assessed value, no matter what it turns out to be. Under the new version of that statute, that harsh sanction can still be enforced, but only after the assessor or the Tax Commissioner “notified such person, firm or corporation in writing that this penalty will be asserted and the requested information is not provided within fifteen days of the date of receipt of the notice.”

In addition to these penalties, at least one county takes the position that the assessor or prosecuting attorney may file a request with the County Commission for correction of the prior erroneous assessments. (W. Va. Code § 11-3-27.) It is not clear for how many previous years the request can be made.

*Property Appraised by State Tax Commissioner:* owners or operators of industrial property, oil-producing property and natural gas-producing property must file by August 1, and owners or operators of other natural resource property must file by May 1 preceding the July 1 assessment date.

When a tract of land, under lease for coal, oil, gas, limestone or other mineral or timber, is sold by the state as forfeited, after having become delinquent for the nonpayment of taxes and purchased by the state at the sheriff's sale, such lease is not extinguished by the delinquency and forfeiture where the lease was separately assessed to the owner thereof as personalty and the taxes thereon were paid for the year of the delinquency of the land. (*State v. Black Band Coal Co.*, 113 W.Va. 872, 169 S.E. 614 (1933).) Conversely, even though a severance of the mineral or timber has occurred, if the separately owned mineral or timber has not been separately assessed but the entire estate has been assessed to the surface owner, the delinquency and forfeiture of the estate charged to the surface owner carries with it the mineral and timber. (*State v. Black Band Coal Co.*, *supra* at 615.)

*Utilities:* By the first day of May of each year, each public utility must file a return with the Board of Public Works covering the preceding calendar year.

## ¶ 622 Procedure for Contesting Tax

*Law:* W. Va. Code §§ 11-3-2a, 11-3-15b, 11-3-15c, 11-3-15d, 11-3-15f, 11-3-15h, 11-3-15i, 11-3-23a, 11-3-24, 11-3-24a, 11-3-32, 11-3-25a, 11-3-25b, 11-3-27, 11-6-12, 11-6-12a, 11-6K-4, 11-6K-5, 11-6K-6, 11-10A-1, 11-10A-7, 11-10A-8, 11-10A-19, 29A-5-4, 51-10-11, 51-11-4(b)(4)

Significant changes to the property tax appeals process were implemented beginning with property tax year 2023. These changes represent the most significant changes to the appeals process in decades.

There are two types of objections that can be raised for property taxes: objections as to the *value* of the property (valuation disputes), and objections as to whether certain property is *taxable or has been properly classified* (taxability or classification disputes). There are separate and distinct procedures specified by statute for each type of dispute. Additionally, the procedures are different depending upon whether the property was assessed by the county assessor, the State Tax Commissioner, or by the Board of Public Works.

Beginning with tax year 2023, taxpayers now have the option of either filing initial valuation appeals with the county commission sitting as a Board of Equalization and Review **or** with the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals. For classification and taxability issues, taxpayers must appeal an adverse decision of the Tax Commissioner directly with the Office of Tax Appeals. Additionally, if a taxpayer elects to have a valuation issue first heard by a Board of Equalization and Review, the first level of appeal following an adverse decision is the Office of Tax Appeals, meaning the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals will be involved in nearly all property tax appeals beginning with tax year 2023. It is likely that the first level of appeal for almost all natural resource and industrial valuation issues will be the Office of Tax Appeals, and the first level of appeal for classification and taxability rulings made by the Tax Commissioner must be the Office of Tax Appeals. Appeals of decisions by the Office of Tax Appeals must be filed in the new Intermediate Court of Appeals, and no property tax appeals will be heard in Circuit Courts beginning with property tax year 2023 and going forward.

For all property tax appeals filed with the Office of Tax Appeals on or after January 1, 2023, the following rules apply: 1) In all cases involving appeals to the Office of Tax Appeals from a property tax valuation pursuant to W. Va. Code § 11-3-15i (Informal petitioner's right to appeal denial of informal petition request) or W. Va. Code § 11-3-23a (Informal review and resolution of classifications, taxability, and valuation issues) or from an order of a County Commission sitting as a Board of Equalization and Review pursuant to W. Va. Code § 11-3-24, the appeal petition must be filed with the Office of Tax Appeals by March 31 of the property tax year to be considered timely filed. If a petition of appeal is not filed with the Office of Tax Appeals by March 31 of the property tax year, then it shall be dismissed as untimely. (A failure of a taxpayer to file a petition in writing, register a complaint, or request an informal review with the assessor of County Commission sitting as a Board of Equalization and Review does not jurisdictionally bar the Office of Tax Appeals from hearing an appeal.) 2) In all other valuation appeals, the taxpayer must file its petition for appeal on or before February 20 of the property tax year. 3) In all cases involving appeal to the Office of Tax Appeals from a property tax ruling on taxability or classification by the Tax Commissioner, the appeal petition must be filed within 30 days after receiving written notice of the Tax Commissioner's ruling. If a petition of appeal is not timely filed with the Office of Tax Appeals, then it shall be dismissed. Property tax hearings before the Office of Tax Appeals are heard *de novo*.

Additionally, as reflected throughout this chapter, the burden of proof for property tax appeals that has consistently been applied over decades of appeals is a "clear and convincing evidence standard. Recent statutory changes lower the standard to a "preponderance of the evidence" standard.

*Valuation disputes: Commercial and residential property valued by the county assessor:*

If the assessor increases the value of a taxpayer's property by certain thresholds (\$1,000 or 10% increase for real property, \$100,000 or 10% increase for business



personal property, whichever is greater), the taxpayer must receive a notice of the increase by January 15. Even before any required notice of increase is issued, however, the Code provides that at any time after the required returns have been filed, a taxpayer may “apply to the assessor of the county in which the property was situated on the assessment date for information about the classification, taxability or valuation of the property for property tax purposes for the tax year following the July 1 assessment date.” W. Va. Code § 11-3-23a(a).

If a taxpayer that applies to the Assessor for information regarding its real or business personal property is dissatisfied with the Assessor’s response, and the taxpayer receives a notice of increase for real property or business personal property, the taxpayer may (but is not required) use an informal review process wherein the taxpayer files a Petition for Review with the Assessor. For either type of property, the taxpayer must provide the taxpayer’s opinion of the true and actual value of the property and must support that value with “substantial information.” For business personal property, the term “substantial information” is not defined; for real property, it means identifying which of the three approaches to value (cost approach, income approach, or market data approach) the taxpayer used to value the property, together with specified information for each approach. This Petition must be filed within eight business days (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays) after the date the taxpayer receives the notice of increased assessment under W. Va. Code § 11-3-2a or W. Va. Code § 11-3-15b or the notice of increased value for real property was published as a Class II-0 legal advertisement as provided in that section. The Assessor must meet with the taxpayer if the taxpayer so requests and must respond in writing by February 10.

If the Assessor grants the requested relief, the taxpayer may not further appeal the Assessor’s decision. If the taxpayer and the Assessor reach a negotiated settlement, neither may appeal. However, if the assessor denies the taxpayer’s petition in whole or in part, or if the assessor does not respond by Feb. 10, or if the taxpayer elects to forgo the informal Petition for Review process, the taxpayer may file a protest with the county commission sitting as a board of equalization and review or the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals. The written protest must be filed with the county clerk or the Office of Tax Appeals by February 20<sup>th</sup> and must identify the amount of assessed value the taxpayer believes to be in controversy.

*Valuation disputes: Property Appraised by State Tax Commissioner:*

The Tax Commissioner is required to provide the amount of his tentative appraisals to the taxpayer for oil-producing property, natural gas-producing property, and managed timberland by December 1, and for other property appraised by him or her by October 15. W. Va. Code § 11-6k-4. Final appraisals of industrial and natural resource property are required by December 15. W. Va. Code § 11-6k-6. There is an informal process by which a taxpayer who receives a Notice of Tentative Assessment from the Tax Commissioner can petition the Tax Commissioner requesting a review of the tentative appraisal. In addition, the assessor where the property is located also receives a copy of the tentative

appraisal and can request this informal review. The Tax Commissioner must meet with the taxpayer if the taxpayer requests a meeting and must rule on the request by January 15. If the Tax Commissioner agrees with the petition the tentative appraisal is modified accordingly. W. Va. Code § 11-6k-5. However, whether the Tax Commissioner grants the relief requested, the taxpayer may still appeal to the county commission sitting as a Board of Equalization and Review or the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals. W. Va. Code § 11-6k-6.

Additionally, the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals recently held that the Assessor is the “necessary party” on appeals of Board of Equalization decisions to the Circuit Court. Syl Pt. 4, *Berkeley County Council v. Government Properties Income Trust LLC*, 247 W. Va. 395, 880 S.E.2d 487, (2022). The Court noted that the County Commission sits as a “deliberative body” and that the “party defending an assessment before the County Commission is the appropriate party, and thus a necessary party, to an appeal of an assessment to circuit court.” The matter was based on the old procedure of first filing a protest with the County Commission, and then with the Circuit Court, but the decision will apply to appeals of county Board of Equalization and Review decisions to the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals, or protests that skip the county level review and begin at the Office of Tax Appeals. The Office of Tax Appeals may not be made a party in any judicial review of a decision or order that it issues. The “necessary parties” for appeals will be either the assessor (for commercial or residential appeals) or the Tax Commissioner (for industrial and natural resource appeals).

Prior versions of this chapter have noted that taxpayers had justifiable concerns with the requirement that their appeals be heard by a tribunal that relied on property tax revenues that flowed from the matter that was before it. Those concerns grew even more acute following the decision in *Rissler v. Jefferson County Bd. of Zoning Appeals*, 225 W.Va. 346, 693 S.E.2d 321 (2010). There, the Supreme Court of Appeals repeatedly cited prior case law to demonstrate that they fully understood that due process demands an unbiased tribunal. Those concerns have been addressed largely with the option to initiate appeals with the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals.

#### *First Level Adjudicative Review for Valuation Disputes: The County Commission or the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals*

For property appraised by the county assessor or by the State Tax Commissioner, and whether or not the taxpayer has availed himself of the informal review procedures, unresolved valuation disputes may be presented to the county commission for review.

Each February, the county commission, the county governing body, meets as a Board of Equalization and Review to review and equalize assessments made by the assessor or State Tax Commissioner. The Board must meet no later than the first day of February, must not adjourn for longer than three days at a time until this work is completed, and cannot remain in session for a longer period than twenty-eight days, and cannot adjourn *sine die* before the fifteenth day of February.

Any unresolved dispute with the assessor over valuation of property may be presented to the board of equalization and review by the property owner by February 20, even if the board has already adjourned *sine die*. Any person, whether having property interest in the property assessed or not, who is aggrieved by any assessment has standing to appeal that assessment. *Tug Valley Recovery Center, Inc. v. Mingo County Commission*, 164 W.Va. 94, 101, 261 S.E. 2d 165, 170 (1979). See also *EQT Production Company v. Irby*, 2023 WL 8663543 (W. Va. Intermediate Court of Appeals, December 15, 2023). The protest must be filed in writing and must identify “the amount of the assessed value the taxpayer believes to be in controversy and state[] generally the taxpayer’s reason or reasons for filing the protest.”

As noted above, beginning with tax year 2023, a taxpayer may skip the Board of Equalization and Review step and elect to have its valuation protest heard by the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals.

Hearings on valuation disputes before a board of equalization and review are informal, and do not demand extensive due process procedures. The formal rules of evidence are not applicable. *In re Tax Assessments Against Pocahontas Land Co.*, 172 W.Va. 53, 303 S.E.2d 691 (1983). “The burden upon the taxpayer to demonstrate error with respect to the State’s valuation is heavy in these adjudicative proceedings: “‘It is a general rule that valuations for taxation purposes fixed by an assessing officer are presumed to be correct. The burden of showing an assessment to be erroneous is, of course, upon the taxpayer, and proof of such fact must be clear.’” In challenging a tax valuation, ‘[t]he burden [of proof] clearly falls upon... [the taxpayer] to demonstrate through clear and convincing evidence that the tax assessments were erroneous.’ *In Re Tax Assessment Against American Bituminous Power Partners, L.P.*, 208 W.Va. 250, 539 S.E.2d 757 (2000) (internal citations omitted).

However, the burden of proof in all property tax appeals before the Board of Equalization and Review or Office of Tax Appeals is now a preponderance of the evidence standard. See W. Va. Code §§ 11-3-23a, 11-3-24, 11-3-24a, 11-10A-19. If a taxpayer proves that a taxing authority’s value is not accurate, the burden of production falls upon the taxing authority to prove that his assessment is accurate; in the case of commercial or industrial property, the taxing authority must also show that it properly evaluated each and every factor listed in the Tax Commissioner’s legislative rules. *In re Tax Assessments Against Pocahontas Land Co.*, 172 W.Va. 53, 61, 303 S.E.2d 691, 699 (1983); see also *Stone Brooke, supra*, 224 W.Va. at 701, 688 S.E.2d at 310; *Pope Properties, supra*.

Failure to timely protest an assessment to the board of equalization or West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals is a waiver of the protest for that year.

*Valuation of Interstate Trucks, Tractors and Power Units Pursuant to the International Registration Plan*: Objections to the valuation of an interstate truck fleet valued pursuant to the International Registration Plan are heard by the West Virginia Interstate Commerce

Appeals Board, a troika consisting of the auditor, state tax commissioner, and commissioner of the division of motor vehicles, which meets, when there is a protest, on the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of July of each year. Appeals from decisions of the West Virginia Interstate Commerce Appeals Board are taken to the Circuit Court of Kanawha County. Whether the appeal goes to the circuit court as an appeal or for de novo hearing is currently in dispute. West Virginia Code §11-6G-7; §11-6G-8.

*Constitutional Issues with the Review by the County Commission:* Two due process issues with this first level appeals process heard by County Commissions have been raised repeatedly in the Supreme Court of Appeals. In *In re Tax Assessment of Foster Foundation Woodlands Retirement Community*, 223 W.Va. 14, 672 S.E.2d 150 (2008), the Court held that it was not unconstitutional for the county commission sitting as a board of equalization and review to act as the first level adjudicative tribunal to hear these appeals and upheld the imposition of the clear and convincing burden of proof on the taxpayer. This holding was immediately reaffirmed in *Bayer MaterialScience LLC et al. v. State Tax Commissioner, et al.*, 223 W.Va. 38, 672 S.E.2d 174 (2008).

In *Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal Co., Inc.*, 129 S.Ct. 2252 (2009), the United States Supreme Court appeared to directly contradict the West Virginia Supreme Court's portrayal in *Foster* (see *Foster*, 223 W. Va. at 24, 672 S.E.2d at 160). that "[w]hen faced with cases questioning the impartiality of a hearing tribunal, the Supreme Court of the United States generally has found a hearing tribunal to be partial when there exists a direct pecuniary interest in the outcome of the litigation.... However, when no such pecuniary interest is present, the Supreme Court of the United States typically has found the tribunal to satisfy the requirements of due process."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, in *Mountain America, LLC v. Huffman*, 224 W.Va. 669, 687 S.E.2d 768 (2009), cert. denied 130 S.Ct. 2377 (2010) without even mentioning the holding in *Caperton* decided almost six months earlier, the West Virginia Supreme Court reaffirmed its decisions in *Foster* that W. Va. Code § 11-3-24 is facially constitutional as to whether the county commission may impartially sit as the board of equalization and review. There, the Court also rejected several other challenges to the overall process by which taxpayers are required to protest property tax assessments, including what the taxpayer described as "the cumulative effect of multiple prejudicial aspects of West Virginia's property tax appeals system,"

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<sup>6</sup> The United States Supreme Court summarized its own cases this way: "In *Ward v. Monroeville*, 409 U.S. 57, a conviction in another mayor's court was invalidated even though the fines assessed went only to the town's general fisc, because the mayor faced a " ' possible temptation' " created by his "executive responsibilities for village finances." *Id.*, at 60. Recusal was also required where an Alabama Supreme Court justice cast the deciding vote upholding a punitive damages award while he was the lead plaintiff in a nearly identical suit pending in Alabama's lower courts. *Aetna Life Ins. Co. v. Lavoie*, 475 U.S. 813. The proper constitutional inquiry was not "whether in fact [the justice] was influenced," *id.*, at 825, but "whether sitting on [that] case ... ' would offer a possible temptation to the average ... judge to ... lead him not to hold the balance nice, clear and true,' " *ibid.* While the "degree or kind of interest ... sufficient to disqualify a judge ... '[could not] be defined with precision,' " *id.*, at 822, the test did have an objective component. *Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal Co.*, 556 U.S. 868, 869 (2009).

which, according to the taxpayer, “weighs heavily against the ‘appearance of justice’ required under the Due Process Clause.”

*Appeals to Intermediate Court of Appeals:* Upon receiving an adverse determination from the Office of Tax Appeals, a taxpayer, the Tax Commissioner, or a county assessor has a statutory right to judicial review before the Intermediate Court of Appeals. The appeal to the Intermediate Court of Appeals must be filed within 30 days after entry of the Office of Tax Appeals’ final decision or order. To date, the Intermediate Court of Appeals has not addressed the standard of review for property tax matters appealed to that tribunal. However, in the *American Bituminous* case, the Supreme Court addressed the standard of review for appeals of board of equalization and review decisions by circuit courts: “The statute provides little in the way of guidance as to the scope of judicial review, although it does expressly limit review to the record made before the county commission. Given this limitation, we have previously indicated that review before the circuit court is confined to determining whether the challenged property valuation is supported by substantial evidence or otherwise in contravention of any regulation, statute, or constitutional provision. As this Court’s previous cases suggest, and as we have recognized in other contexts involving taxation, judicial review of a decision of a board of equalization and review regarding a challenged tax-assessment valuation is limited to roughly the same scope permitted under the West Virginia Administrative Procedures Act, W. Va. Code ch. 29A.” (Internal citations omitted).

All taxes levied and assessed against the property for the year on which a protest or an appeal has been filed by the taxpayer shall be paid before they become delinquent. If the taxes are not paid before becoming delinquent, the governing body having jurisdiction of the appeal, as appropriate, shall dismiss the appeal unless the delinquent taxes and interest due are paid in full within 30 days after taxes for the second half of the tax year become delinquent.

In the event the order of a court or other governing body becomes final and the order results in an overpayment of taxes levied for the tax year that have been paid to the sheriff, the amount of the overpayment shall be refunded to the taxpayer if the overpayment is \$25,000 or less within 30 days after the time for appealing the decision or order expires or, if the decision or order is appealed, within 30 days of the date the appeals court or other governing body turns down the appeal. If the overpayment is more than \$25,000, a credit in the amount of the overpayment shall be established by the county sheriff and allowed as a credit against taxes owed up to the following two tax years. Provided, That the county commission may elect to refund the amount of overpayment rather than having a credit established as provided in this section. If any portion of the overpayment remains unused after the date on which taxes payable for the second half of the second tax year following the tax year of the overpayment become delinquent, that portion shall be refunded to the taxpayer by the county sheriff no later than 30 days after that date, or 30 days from the date that the order becomes final, whichever date occurs later. Whenever an overpayment is refunded or credited, the county shall pay interest at the rate established in W. Va. Code §§ 11-10-17 and 11-10-

17a for overpayments of taxes collected by the Tax Commissioner, which interest shall be computed from the date the overpayment was received by the sheriff to the date of the refund check or the date the credit is actually taken against taxes that become due after the order of the court becomes final.

In several cases, the Supreme Court has held that the Assessor or the Tax Commissioner has wide discretion to choose among the methods (cost, income, or market data approaches) to be used to value the property. “Title 110, Series 1P of the West Virginia Code of State Rules confers upon the State Tax Commissioner discretion in choosing and applying the most accurate method of appraising commercial and industrial properties. The exercise of such discretion will not be disturbed upon judicial review absent a showing of abuse of discretion.” Syllabus point 5, *In re Tax Assessment Against American Bituminous Power Partners, L.P.*, 208 W.Va. 250, 539 S.E.2d 757 (2000); see also Syllabus Point 4 in *Stone Brooke Ltd. Partnership v. Sisinni*. The virtually unlimited nature of this discretion is illustrated in *Pope Properties, supra*, in which the Assessor’s selection of the market data approach for valuing condominium units was upheld even though the Assessor incorrectly classified the properties as non-commercial property.

*Subsequent appeals:* In a second *Mountain America* case, the Supreme Court of Appeals ruled that “[t]he judgment of a circuit court rendered in a statutory proceeding brought by a taxpayer for the purpose of testing the validity of an *ad valorem* property tax is not *res adjudicata* of the same questions raised by the same taxpayer in a like proceeding for the purpose of testing the validity of a similar tax for a subsequent year, the demand for the tax in the subsequent year being a different demand from that for the former.” *Mountain America, LLC v. Huffman*, 229 W. Va. 708, 735 SE2d 711 (2012). That outcome seems only fair: a taxpayer who has an issue for a particular year must file separate appeals for subsequent years while the original appeal is litigated, and a taxpayer who bears that expense shouldn’t have the appeals for subsequent years barred once the first is finally resolved. However, Justice Ketchum filed a dissenting opinion indicating that he believes that subsequent appeals should be barred under both the doctrines of *res adjudicata* and collateral estoppel.

#### *Valuation disputes: Utility Property*

The State Tax Commissioner must communicate his tentative assessment, together with his work papers, to the Board of Public Works and must communicate his tentative assessment to the taxpayer by September 15. The taxpayer is entitled to review the worksheets. W. Va. Code § 11-6-9. The Board of Public Works then finalizes the assessment by October 1. In doing so, the Board may consider the tentative assessment, the return filed by the taxpayer, the worksheets prepared by the State Tax Commissioner, and such other evidence as the taxpayer offers. The taxpayer has the right to appear before the Board and offer evidence. W. Va. Code § 11-6-11.

If the taxpayer disagrees with the value set by the Board of Public Works, he may file a verified petition for appeal in the circuit court in the county in which the property assessed is located, or, if the property is located in several counties, in the circuit court in the county where that taxpayer's assessment was largest for the previous tax year. The Secretary of State, as secretary to the Board of Public Works, must be served with a copy of the petition for appeal. The State Tax Commissioner may also appeal the value as set by the Board. In either case, notice of the hearing in circuit court is required on the adverse party at least 15 days before the hearing. The circuit court hears the case *de novo* and can either confirm the value set by the Board or may ascertain and fix the true and actual value of the property. The Board's value is presumed to be correct, and the taxpayer bears the burden of proving the Board's value to be excessive by clear and convincing evidence. *Western Md. Ry. Co. v. Board of Public Works*, 90 S.E.2d 438, 141 W.Va. 413 (1955).

*Classification or taxability disputes:* W. Va. Code § 11-3-24a requires a taxpayer who is dissatisfied with how his property has been classified or who disputes whether it is taxable to object in writing to the assessor at any time after property is returned for taxation and up to and including the time the property books are before the Board of Equalization and Review. The assessor must either sustain the objection and make the proper corrections or explain, in writing if requested, why the objection was not sustained. The assessor may, and if the taxpayer so requests, shall certify the question to the State Tax Commissioner for instruction as to how the property must be treated. If the objection is certified to the Tax Commissioner, the taxpayer and the assessor must supply verified descriptions of the property and other facts, either jointly or separately. The Tax Commissioner has the authority to pursue any inquiry and procure any information which may be necessary for the disposition of the issue.

The Tax Commissioner must instruct the assessor no later than February 28<sup>th</sup> as to how the property is to be treated, and this determination is binding on the Assessor. Either the assessor or the taxpayer may seek review of the Tax Commissioner's decision, which is commonly referred to as a "Property Tax Ruling" or a "Taxability Ruling," by filing an appeal with the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals within 30 days after notice of the Tax Commissioner's ruling is received. The standard of proof which the taxpayer must meet at all levels of review is a preponderance of the evidence standard.

*Appeal to the Supreme Court:* Either party to the Intermediate Court of Appeals valuation, classification, or taxability matter may appeal the Court's decision to the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court has discretion to grant or deny the petition for appeal.

## ¶ 623 Exonerations

*Law:* W. Va. Code § 11-3-27

*Wrong entry in tax books:* Any taxpayer, or the prosecuting attorney or Tax Commissioner on behalf of the state, county, and districts, claiming to be aggrieved by

any entry in the property books of the county, including entries with respect to classification and taxability of property, may apply for relief to the county commission of the county in which such books are made out. W. Va. Code § 11-3-27 provides that in order to grant the application for relief, the county commission must make two findings:

- (1) The entry must be one “resulting from a clerical error or a mistake occasioned by an unintentional or inadvertent act as distinguished from a mistake growing out of negligence or the exercise of poor judgment,” and
- (2) The request must be made “within one year from the time the property books are delivered to the sheriff or within one year from the time the clerical error or mistake is discovered or reasonably could have been discovered.”

In *State ex rel. Prosecuting Attorney of Kanawha County v. Bayer Corp.*, 223 W.Va. 146, 672 S.E.2d 282 (2008), the Court held that a *de novo* review in certiorari of a county commission’s decision in an exoneration case by a circuit court did not violate the separation of powers provision in the West Virginia Constitution and held that, the taxpayer bears the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that he is entitled to his requested exoneration. (Despite recent statutory amendments that impose a lower preponderance of the evidence burden of proof on taxpayers for appeals of valuation, classification, and taxability appeals, no such statutory change was enacted for exonerations.) The Court also held that, while the terms “unintentional,” “inadvertent,” “negligent” and “poor judgment” are synonymous when not given specific definitions, “the ‘duty of care’ element of negligence found in [West Virginia’s] tort cases should be used to distinguish an unintentional or inadvertent act from that of a negligent act or exercise of poor judgment” and that “relief under the statute may not be granted if it is shown that a taxpayer breached its duty of care.”

## ¶ 624 [Reserved]

## ¶ 625 Payment of Tax

*Law:* W. Va. Code §§ 11A-1-3 and 11A-1-8a

Property taxes are collected by the sheriff of the county and are payable in two installments. The first installment is due on September 1 of the tax year. The second installment is due on March 1 of the following year. Prepayment discounts of 2 1/2% and delinquent payment interest of nine percent (9%) per annum are applicable.

The sheriff may, with the consent of the county commission, contract with one or more banks doing business in the county to receive property tax payments.

*Public utilities:* The auditor collects the property tax from the public utility and deposits it in the State Treasury, which, in turn, pays the appropriate sums to the sheriff of each county where the public utility is located.



## **¶ 626 Lien for Tax**

*Law:* W. Va. Code §§ 11-6-23 and 11A-1-2

A lien for taxes assessed and interest and other charges attaches to real property on July 1st for taxes payable for the ensuing fiscal year, unless the taxes are assessed on operating public utility property. W. Va. Code § 11A-1-2. A lien for taxes on public service business property attached on December 31<sup>st</sup> following commencement of the July 1<sup>st</sup> assessment year. W. Va. Code § 11-6-23.

Although there is no lien denominated as such on personal property after assessment, the sheriff may distrain for delinquent taxes any goods and chattels belonging to the person assessed and the goods and chattels may be distrained even though they have been transferred to another person (W. Va. Code §§ 11A-2-3 and 11A-2-5; *George F. Hazelwood v. Pitsenbarger, supra*, at ¶ 610).

Additionally, if a business is delinquent in paying personal property taxes for a calendar year, the Tax Commissioner may suspend the business registration certificate of the business until they are paid, as provided in W. Va. Code § 11-12-5(b).

The legislature recently amended Article 3, Chapter 11A dealing with sale of tax liens and non-entered, escheated and waste and unappropriated lands, and clarified what parties can redeem delinquent property and limited those entities that can bid. Recent amendments were also made to West Virginia Code §31-18 E-9 relating to the right of first refusal by land reuse agencies and municipal land banks on tax-delinquent properties.

## **¶ 627 Property Tax Issues in Bankruptcy**

In *In re Columbia Gas Transmission Corp.*, 37 F.3d 982, 986 (3d Cir. 1994), the US Circuit Court of Appeals for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit held that, for the purposes of bankruptcy, property taxes are incurred as of the assessment date, even though the amount of tax due is not yet determined at that time.

## **¶ 628 Property Tax Records: Freedom of Information Act**

*Hurlbert v. Matkovich*, 233 W. Va. 583, 760 S.E.2d 152 (2014) involved a request from an out-of-state information technology company made to the State Tax Commissioner for “a copy, on CD or similar electronic media, of both the assessment files and the CAMA files for all real property in all counties.” The requestor enclosed a six-page itemization of the fields of data from the CAMA files they were requesting. All county assessors in West Virginia perform input data collected during their assessment functions into a statewide Integrated Assessment System (“IAS”) maintained and administered by the Tax

Commissioner.<sup>7</sup> The Tax Commissioner has access to the information in the IAS (and therefore the CAMA files) for purposes of supervision, auditing, and oversight; however, only the county assessors can input or change the data therein.

As part of the real property assessment process, the county assessor is charged with “mak[ing] out the land books” which contain the tax ticket number, taxpayer name, map, parcel, deed book/page, property description, assessed value, and tax for each parcel of property in the county, as more particularly described in W. Va. Code § 11-4-1 *et seq.* This information is publicly available in the county offices. This information was referred to by the Court as the “assessment files.”

By contrast, the CAMA files include more detailed information about properties and may include sketches/photos of the property, floor plans, number of bathrooms/bedrooms, type of construction material, type of heating, topography, etc. In addition, the CAMA files may contain information which the Tax Commissioner and the Assessor of Kanawha County (the “respondents”) characterized as “sensitive and personal information”, such as whether the residence has a security system, whether the resident is home during the day, whether the resident has a disability, whether the residence is unoccupied due to nursing home stays or otherwise vacant. With regard to commercial properties, the CAMA files contain information regarding profits/losses, blueprints, photographs, business income, and other information that could ostensibly provide a competitive advantage. The CAMA files for industrial properties contain similar information but also include the names of buildings and types of storage/operation in each, which respondents alleged presented homeland security issues.

The Tax Commissioner granted the FOIA request for the assessment files in exchange for payment of \$9.23 in copying expense; and denied the request for the CAMA files on the basis that the assessors, not the State Tax Commissioner, were the custodian of the CAMA records. At no time prior to the litigation did the Tax Commissioner claim any statutorily enumerated FOIA exemption; rather, it claimed simply that it was not the custodian of the CAMA files. The requestor brought a declaratory judgment action in the Circuit Court of Kanawha County, which granted summary judgment in favor of the respondents. The circuit court ruled that the CAMA files were exempt from production under FOIA. Because it found that 1) certain of the CAMA data is exempt from disclosure as “return information” and security system information specifically exempted by W. Va. Code § 11-1A-23(a) and “trade secrets” exempted by West Virginia Code § 29B-1-4(a)(1); 2) the CAMA files contained “information of a personal nature,” the disclosure of which constituted an unreasonable invasion of privacy pursuant to the five-factor test in Syllabus

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Assessor’s Manual prepared by the State Tax Division, the IAS is divided into three modules. The Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal (“CAMA”) System, also known as the “CA” system, appraises all surface and fee real property. The Computer Assisted Natural Resource (“NR”) System appraises all mineral properties, both severed and unsevered. The Computer Assisted Personal Property (“PP”) System appraises all tangible personal property.

See <https://tax.wv.gov/Documents/TaxForms/CountyAssessorsGuide.pdf>

Point 2 of *Child Prot. Grp. v. Cline*, 177 W.Va. 29, 350 S.E.2d 541 (1986); and 3) because of the foregoing, the issue of whether the Tax Commissioner was the “custodian” of the CAMA files was moot.

The Supreme Court of Appeals reversed this decision and held that for FOIA purposes, the State Tax Commissioner is, in fact, the custodian of the CAMA records and that the CAMA records in total do not constitute either “returns and return information” which the State Tax Commissioner is required to treat as secret under W. Va. Code § 11-1A-23(a), or “personal information” exempt from disclosure under W. Va. Code § 29B-1-4(a). It then remanded the case to the circuit court with directions that the circuit court require submission of a *Vaughn* index containing the specific exemptions claimed by respondents as to the specific fields of data in the CAMA files, whereupon the circuit court is to evaluate the specific categories of information sought in accordance with the exemptions delineated in West Virginia Code § 11-1A-23(a) and West Virginia Code § 29B-1-4.

Under this ruling, FOIA requests may be directed to the Tax Commissioner for both assessment files (that is, the limited information that is contained in the land books), and for CAMA data. If the Tax Commissioner believes that specific fields of data should not be disclosed, he is required to produce a *Vaughn* index showing specifically which fields of data should not be produced.

**¶ 629 Specimen Return-Business Property Return-STC 12:32C**

**STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
Office of County Assessor  
Commercial Business Property Return**

For Internal Use  
Use \_\_\_\_\_  
NAICS

THIS RETURN IS TO BE FILED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER JULY 1, BUT NO LATER THAN SEPTEMBER 1. IF YOU ARE THE OWNER OF INDUSTRIAL BUSINESS PROPERTY YOU NEED NOT COMPLETE THIS FORM. CONTACT THE PROPERTY TAX DIVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TAX AND REVENUE CONCERNING FORM STC 12:32I FOR INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY. FILING LATE OR FAILURE TO FILE MAY RESULT IN A PENALTY OF \$25 TO \$100.

The following is a complete and accurate report of all property owned by the undersigned at this location on July 1, \_\_\_\_\_.

This business is in the County of \_\_\_\_\_; District of: \_\_\_\_\_; Town/City of: \_\_\_\_\_.

**BASIC BUSINESS INFORMATION**

(PP11) BUSINESS NAME AND MAILING ADDRESS ADDRESS	(PP51) AGENT OR PREPARER'S NAME AND ADDRESS
NAME _____	NAME _____
ADDRESS _____	ADDRESS _____
CITY _____	CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____	STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____
PHONE ( ) _____ EXTENSION _____	PHONE ( ) _____ EXTENSION _____

Federal Employers Identification Number (FEIN) REQUIRED: \_\_\_\_\_ PLACE WHERE RECORDS ARE KEPT \_\_\_\_\_

BUSINESS REGISTRATION ACCOUNT ID: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PRIMARY OWNER NAME AND ADDRESS (IF NOT SAME AS MAILING ADDRESS) PHONE ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
 NAME \_\_\_\_\_ (PP11) PHYSICAL LOCATION OF BUSINESS IN WEST VIRGINIA  
**(IF NOT THE SAME AS MAILING ADDRESS)**  
 ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHONE ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ EXTENSION \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

Return is to be filed by all non-utility businesses; incorporated and unincorporated, except Railroad, Telegraph and Express Companies, Telephone Companies, Pipe Line, Car Line Companies and other Public Utility Companies. The Law provides that every incorporated or unincorporated Company, foreign or Domestic liable to taxation shall make a report of his property, in writing, to the Assessor whether called upon by the assessor or not. West Virginia Code Chapter 11, Article 3, Section 12, and Chapter 11, Article 3, Section 15 as amended. **PERSONAL PROPERTY NOT OWNED** - If you have possession, charge or control of any personal property as executor, administrator, guardian, committee, trustee, receiver, bailee, agent, attorney or in any representative or fiduciary capacity, you must file a separate report with the assessor. Banks, Realtors, Property Managers or others in charge of leasing or renting real estate are required to make a complete list of all furniture, fixtures and other personal property and an itemized list of the items.

**REPORT OF PROPERTY YOU LEASE FROM OTHERS**

This space is provided for the reporting of property "in charge of but not owned by" the entity completing this form (as Agent, Bailee, Lessee or other representative capacity) such as, but not limited to, leased machinery, business or data processing equipment, vending machines, etc. Indicate the name and address of owner, the property leased, the gross annual rent, estimated value. Attach additional sheets if needed.

NAME, ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER OF PROPERTY OWNER	TYPE OF PROPERTY	GROSS ANNUAL RENT	ESTIMATED VALUE	ASSESSOR'S USE

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**REAL ESTATE**

List Real Estate situated in this county as required. The value estimate is your opinion of market value as of July 1, this year.

ITEM 1 - DESCRIPTION SHOWN ON SURFACE MINERAL In QUANTITY OWNER'S OWNER'S TOTAL OWNER'S ASSESSOR'S  
 LAND BOOKS OR TAX STATEMENTS Only (?) Only (?) FEE (?) IN ACRES VALUE LAND VALUE BLDGS VALUE USE

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ITEM 2 - If you have added or deleted buildings (if deleted, identify as such) whereby the value of the real property has been altered by more than \$1,000 since last return, describe the improvement or deletion and the location. Owner's value should reflect both material and labor. If work is in progress on July 1 of this year, then report on Schedule E.

DESCRIPTION OF IMPROVEMENT OR DELETION LOCATION OWNER'S VALUE ASSESSOR'S USE

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(PP 13 or PP17)

**BUILDINGS ON LEASED LAND**

Building permanently fixed or intended for permanent fixture to land which is not owned by entity which owns the building(s). The lease must be a contract which transfers all or part of the right to use of the land, exclusion and disposition from owner to tenant in exchange for a promise to pay rent.

NAME AND ADDRESS OF LAND OWNER OWNER'S VALUE BUILDING ASSESSOR'S USE

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Note: Other leasehold improvements, to be reported on SCHEDULE A, are improvements and/or additions exclusive of buildings, to leased property which have been made by the lessee.

**SCHEDULE A**  
(PP13 or PP17)

**MACHINERY, EQUIPMENT, FURNITURE AND LEASEHOLD IMPROVEMENTS**

Enter all property owned with the acquisition cost by year installed. Begin with the current year and each previous year, as required. Acquisition cost, including the cost of machinery, equipment, furniture and fixtures intended for rent or lease, is defined as 100 percent of the cost new as shown by books and records and is to include freight, installation charges, trade-ins, federal tax allowances and credit. If equipment was purchased in one year and installed in the following year, the full cost is reportable in the year installed. PROPERTY OWNED AND STILL IN USE BUT WHICH HAS BEEN FULLY DEPRECIATED OR WRITTEN OFF BUT STILL IN POSSESSION BY THE TAXPAYER MUST BE REPORTED. Machinery and Equipment which has been fully depreciated and is no longer in use as part of a production process should be reported in "Schedule F." Property which is intended for rent or lease must be reported at 100 percent of acquisition cost regardless of period of rent. IF LEASEHOLD IMPROVEMENTS ARE REPORTED, PLEASE INCLUDE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE ITEMS TO ASSURE THEY ARE NOT VALUED AS PART OF THE REAL PROPERTY.

YEAR PURCHASED	ACQUISITION COST	MACHINERY & EQUIPMENT		ACQUISITION COST	FURNITURE & FIXTURES	
		OWNER'S VALUE	ASSESSOR'S USE		OWNER'S VALUE	ASSESSOR'S USE

CURRENT YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 20

PREVIOUS YR. 19

PREVIOUS YR. 19

PREVIOUS YR. 19

PREVIOUS YR. 19

PREVIOUS YR. 19

19\_\_\_ AND PRIOR

TOTALS

YEAR PURCHASED	LEASEHOLD IMPROVEMENTS			COMPUTER EQUIPMENT		
	ACQUISITION COST	OWNER'S VALUE	ASSESSOR'S USE	ACQUISITION COST	OWNER'S VALUE	ASSESSOR'S USE
CURRENT YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 20						
PREVIOUS YR. 19						
PREVIOUS YR. 19						
PREVIOUS YR. 19						
PREVIOUS YR. 19						
PREVIOUS YR. 19						
19___ AND PRIOR						
TOTALS						

West Virginia Code Chapter 11, Article 6J provides that the value of servers and tangible personal property directly used in a high-technology field of interest advertising business shall be its salvage value. The term "High-technology business" and "Internet advertising business" are defined in West Virginia Code §11-15-9h. In order to be eligible to receive salvage valuation treatment, the primary business activity of the company must be High-technology or Internet advertising. If you have reported equipment on "Schedule A" which you believe to qualify, please enter the dollar value of the property at 100% acquisition cost.

Acquisition Cost: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Owner's Value: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Assessor's Use: \_\_\_\_\_

**SCHEDULE B**  
(PP13 or PP17)

**INVENTORY, CONSIGNED INVENTORY, PARTS, SUPPLIES**



West Virginia Code Chapter 11, Article 6H provides that the value of special aircraft property shall be its salvage value. Special aircraft property is defined to be "all aircraft owned or leased by commercial airlines or private carriers." Private carrier means "any firm, partnership, joint venture, joint stock company, any public or private corporation, cooperative, trust, business trust or any other group or combination acting as a unit that is engaged in a primary business other than commercial air transportation that operates an aircraft for the transportation of employees or others for business purposes." If you have reported aircraft on "Schedule H" which you believe to be special aircraft property, enter the dollar value of the aircraft at 100 percent of acquisition cost.

Acquisition Cost \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Owner's Value \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Assessor's Use \_\_\_\_\_

**SCHEDULE F**  
(PP13 or PP17)

**INCOMPLETE CONSTRUCTION**

Material costs for these buildings, additions or improvements which are incomplete and hence have not been assessed as real property must be reported here. A rider must be attached to this statement showing the address of such buildings by year of construction.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY BUILDINGS, ADDITIONS, OR IMPROVEMENTS NOT FINISHED AT MATERIAL COST	ACQUISITION COST	OWNER'S VALUE	ASSESSOR'S USE

**SCHEDULE G**  
(PP13 or PP17)

**SALVAGE VALUE MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT**

This is machinery and equipment which has been fully depreciated and is no longer used as part of a production process. Do not report these items on "Schedule A". If you need additional space, please attach a list with acquisition date, acquisition cost and owner's value.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY	ACQUISITION DATE	ACQUISITION COST	OWNER'S VALUE	ASSESSOR'S USE

**SCHEDULE H**  
(PP13 or PP17)

**POLLUTION CONTROL FACILITIES**

If required, provide additional copies for each location. List all pollution control facilities installed after July 1, 1973 and approved by either the Office of Water Resources or the Office of Air Quality, both of the Division of Environmental Protection, as a pollution control facility. If the pollution control facility is not on the pre-approved pollution equipment list, a letter from either the Office of Water Resources or the Office of Air Quality, as the case may be, must accompany this form.

LOCATION OF PROPERTY	DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY	YEAR INSTALLED	ACQUISITION COST	ASSESSOR'S USE

**OTHER INFORMATION REQUIRED WITH THIS RETURN**

Type of Business Entity (Check One): Corporation  Partnership  Sole Proprietor  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Business Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

Enter Federal Employers Identification Number (FEIN) REQUIRED: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Registration Account ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Please insert North American Industry Classification System Code (NAICS), if known: \_\_\_\_\_



DEPRECIATION SCHEDULE Attached?    Yes     No     (Explain)

BALANCE SHEET Attached?                Yes     No     (Explain)

In lieu of a balance sheet, a Profit or Loss Statement (Schedule C) from your Federal Income Tax Return may be submitted. Failure to attach these items will be grounds upon which the County Assessor may reject this return. If you need forms or assistance, contact the County Assessor.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, (president, treasurer, manager, owner or other title) \_\_\_\_\_

of \_\_\_\_\_, do affirm that the information on this return, to the best of my knowledge and judgment, is true in all respects; that it contains a statement of all the real estate and personal property, including credits and investments belonging to the business; that the value affixed to such property is, in my opinion, its true and actual value, by which I mean the price at which it would sell if voluntarily offered for sale on such terms as are usually employed in selling such property, and not the price which might be realized at a forced or auction sale; and said business has not, to my knowledge, during the sixty-day period immediately prior to the first day of the assessment year converted any of its assets into nontaxable securities or notes or other evidence of indebtedness for the purpose of evading the assessment of taxes thereon.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**ASSESSOR'S USE ONLY**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Deputy

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **WEST VIRGINIA AD VALOREM PROPERTY TAXES**

### **Calendar for Assessment and Collection of 2025 Property Taxes**

All real and tangible personal property, except exempt tangible personal property and operating property of public service businesses, is assessed annually, as of the first day of July, for ad valorem property taxes levied for the next property tax year, which is the next ensuing calendar year after the July 1<sup>st</sup> assessment day. The county sheriff mails property tax tickets or statements to property owners beginning July 15<sup>th</sup> of the property tax year for which the taxes are levied. These taxes are payable in two installments. The first-half installment payment is due September 1<sup>st</sup> of the property tax year and becomes delinquent if not paid before October 1<sup>st</sup> of that year.<sup>8</sup> The second-half installment payment is due March 1<sup>st</sup> of the next calendar year and becomes delinquent if not paid before April 1<sup>st</sup> of that year. A 2.5% discount is allowed when property taxes are paid on or before the date they become due. Interest at the rate of 9% per annum applies to taxes paid after they become delinquent.

Operating real and personal property of public service businesses is annually assessed on the first day of January of the year preceding the property tax year by the Board of Public Works for the next property tax year. Taxes levied are collected by the State Auditor and apportioned among the levying bodies in which the operating property is located. Taxes levied may be paid in two installments as described above.

The following illustrates the property tax cycle for property assessed by the county assessor or the Board of Public Works for 2025 property taxes:

January 1, 2024	Public utility property is assessed as of this day.
May 1, 2024	Due date for public service businesses to file property tax returns with the Board of Public Works, covering their operations during preceding calendar year.  Due date for owners and operators of actively mined coal property or other minerals, except natural gas, oil, and managed timber, to file reports with the Tax Commissioner.
July 1, 2024	Property is assessed as of this day. Lien attaches to real property. (Different rules apply for public utility property.)
August 1, 2024	Due date for owners of producing and reserve oil and natural gas properties and owners of industrial real and tangible personal property to file property reports with Tax Commissioner.
September 1, 2024	Due date for corporations and unincorporated businesses, including sole proprietors, to file annual reports with county assessor. This

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<sup>8</sup> First-half taxes on public service businesses become delinquent if not paid before September 1, 2025. Second-half public service business taxes become delinquent March 1, 2026.

includes public service businesses that own non-operating real and tangible personal property.<sup>9</sup>

Unincorporated businesses and sole proprietors engaged in the business of agriculture are not required to file the report required by W. Va. Code § 11-3-15. Corporations engaged in the business of agriculture are required to file the report required by W. Va. Code §11-3-12.

Individuals who receive a property tax report form from the county assessor must complete the form and return it to the assessor on or before September 1 of the assessment year.

September 15, 2024	Due date for the Tax Commissioner to furnish to the Board of Public Works tentative assessed values of the operating property of each public service business.
October 1, 2024	Approximate date that the Board of Public Works begins meeting to fix the assessed value of the real and personal operating property of each public service business.
October 15, 2024	Due date for the Tax Commissioner to issue notices of tentative appraised values to owners of industrial property and to owners of natural resource real property, except for owners of oil, natural gas, or managed timberland property.
November 15, 2024	Due date for owners of industrial tangible property and owners of natural resource real property, except for oil, natural gas, and managed timber land, may seek informal review of the tentative appraised values by filing a petition for informal review with the Commissioner and serving a copy on county assessor. County assessors may also seek informal review of these tentative appraised values.
December 1, 2024	Due date for the Tax Commissioner to complete appraisals of oil, natural gas, and managed timberland properties.
December 15, 2024	Tax Commissioner must finalize appraised values of property appraised by his office and furnish values to county assessors.
December 31, 2024	Lien for 2025 property taxes attaches to operating property of public service businesses.
January 15, 2025	Due date for county assessors to mail notices of increases in assessed values to real property owners, when the increase in assessed value exceeds \$1,000 or is greater than 10% of last year's assessed value, whichever amount is greater. This notice is not required when there is a general increase in the tax district and notice is given by publication.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Due date for county assessors to mail notice of increases in the assessed value of a business's tangible personal property to property owners, when the aggregate increase is 10% greater or the increase is more than \$100,000, whichever is greater.

Due date for the Tax Commissioner to complete review of the petitions for informal review filed with his office by owners of industrial property and by owners of natural resource real property and notify the owner and the county assessor of any changes.

- January 20, 2025      Within 5 days of receiving notice from the assessor of an increased in the assessed value of real property or business tangible personal property, the owner may file a petition for informal review with the county assessor. Generally, if notice is mailed January 15<sup>th</sup>, the 5<sup>th</sup> day will likely be January 20<sup>th</sup>. After the petition is filed, the assessor's office may meet with the owner and must meet if the owner requests a meeting.
- January 30, 2025      County assessors must complete land and personal property tax books and deliver them to the county commission.
- February 1, 2025      County commissions must begin meeting as boards of equalization and review.
- February 10, 5      Due date for assessors to rule on a petition for informal review.
- February 16, 2025      Boards of equalization and review may adjourn *sine die* if they have completed their work any time after February 15<sup>th</sup>.
- February 20, 2025      Last day to file a written protest for valuation matters with a board of equalization and review or the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals. of owner's decision to protest an issue before the board of equalization and review. If the board has adjourned *sine die*, the notice of protest is filed with the Office of Tax Appeals. See March 31, 2025, for discussion of timeline for filing appeals with the Office of Tax Appeals for classification and taxability appeals, and certain valuation matters in which the taxpayer first filed a petition for review with the assessor or had its valuation appeal first heard by the Board of Equalization and Review.
- February 28, 2025      Boards of equalization and review must complete their work and adjourn *sine die* by the last day of February.
- Last day for Tax Commissioner to issue taxability and classification rulings under W. Va. Code § 11-3-24a. An adverse ruling of Tax Commissioner may be appealed to circuit court within 30 days after receipt of the written ruling. Either county assessor or the taxpayer may appeal.

March 3, 2025	County assessors must provide levying bodies and State Department of Education with the aggregate assessed value of all real and personal property in each class of property for tax year 2025.
March 7, 2025	Local levying bodies begin meeting to set their budgets for the next fiscal year. Work must be completed by March 28, 2025.
March 31, 2025	Last day to file a property tax appeal with the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals for matters where the taxpayer files a petition for review with the assessor and has its request denied or first has a hearing before the Board of Equalization and Review and receives an order from the Board denying the requested relief in whole or in part. For classification and taxability appeals, the deadline for appeal the Tax Commissioner's decision is 30 days after receiving notice of the Tax Commissioner's ruling, which will generally be approximately March 31.
April 15, 2025	<p>County commissions, county boards of education and municipal governing bodies meet on the third Tuesday in April to set property tax levy rates for the current property tax year. The levy rates are then certified to the county assessor and to the State Auditor. However, the regular levy rate of boards of education is set by the West Virginia Legislature.</p> <p>State Board of Public Works meets to fix State levy on taxable real and personal property and certifies same to each county assessor.</p> <p>As soon as possible after the assessment of public service business property is completed, and the levy rates are certified to the State Auditor, the Auditor mails to each operator of a public service business a statement of all taxes and levies assessed.</p>
June 7, 2025	After the levy rates are certified to the county assessor, the assessor applies the appropriate levy rates to the assessed values of property entered in the land and personal property books for current property tax year, and the completed land and personal property books must be delivered to the county sheriff by this date.
July 15, 2025	County sheriff begins collecting 2025 property taxes by mailing property tax tickets or statements to owners of property listed in the land and personal property books for the current property tax year.
September 1, 2025	<p>Due date for first-half installment payments of 2025 property taxes.</p> <p>A 2.5% discount is allowed if first half 2025 property taxes, or taxes for the full year, are paid on or before September 1st to the county sheriff, or to the State Auditor in the case of property assessed by the Board of Public Works.</p>

	For public service businesses, the first-half installment payment of 2025 property taxes is delinquent if not paid by this date.
October 1, 2025	First-half installment payments of 2025 property taxes not paid by the end of September become delinquent on this date for all non-public utility taxpayers.
March 1, 2026	Due date for second-half installment payments of 2025 property taxes.  A 2.5% discount is allowed if second half 2025 property taxes are paid on or before March 1 <sup>st</sup> to the county sheriff, or to the State Auditor, in the case of property assessed by Board of Public Works.  For public service businesses, the second-half installment payment of 2025 property taxes is delinquent if not paid by this date.
April 1, 2026	Second-half installment payments of 2025 property taxes not paid by the end of March become delinquent on this date for all non-public utility taxpayers.
April 2026	Sheriff prepares and publishes a notice stating in effect that unpaid property taxes assessed for the 2025 property tax year (calendar year) have become delinquent and that unless paid by this date will be included for publication as provided in W. Va. Code §11A-2-10a. (Delinquent taxes of public service business are collected by the State Auditor,)
May 1, 2026	Due date for the sheriff to prepare a list of delinquent property taxes, on both real and personal property, for the preceding property tax year (calendar year), as provided in W. Va. Code §11A-2-11.  The list must be posted on the front door of the courthouse and published as a Class 1-O legal advertisement at least two weeks before the meeting of the county commission at which the list is presented for examination. W. Va. Code §11-2A-13.
June 15, 2026	Due date for the sheriff to present the list of 2025 delinquent property taxes to the county commission for examination. After review by the county commission, the sheriff may begin using remedies provided in the West Virginia Code to collect delinquent personal property taxes from those who owe the tax. W. Va. Code §11-2A-14.
July 1, 2026	Due date for the list of 2025 delinquent real property taxes to be certified to the State Auditor as provided in W. Va. Code §11A-2-15.

## INDEX - CHAPTER 6 - PROPERTY TAX

appeals ¶ 622, 624

assessment ¶ 607-611

assessment date ¶ 607

assessment ratio ¶ 607

classification of property ¶ 607

farm property ¶ 608

methods of assessment ¶ 607

managed timberland ¶ 608

personal property ¶ 610

public utility property ¶ 611

real property ¶ 609

residential property ¶ 608

uniformity ¶ 607

bankruptcy ¶ 627

calendar of assessment and collection of 2025 property taxes -- Appendix A

classification of property ¶ 606

exemptions

bonds ¶ 604

construction of exemptions ¶ 605

exemptions from property tax ¶ 603

cash and retirement funds

cemeteries

church property

economic development property of non-profit corporations

education property

exemption for elderly or disabled

farm equipment and livestock

firefighting equipment

household goods

intangible personal property

personal effects

property of benevolent associations

property used for charitable purposes

public property

economic development property of county commissions

local government property used for public purposes

municipal water and electric power systems

property of the State

tangible personal property in stream of interstate commerce

Freedom of Information Act ¶ 628

in general ¶ 601

lien for tax ¶ 626

payment of tax ¶ 625

procedure for contesting tax ¶ 622

classification disputes

valuation disputes

taxability disputes

property subject to tax ¶ 602

property tax records ¶ 628

rates of tax ¶ 606

excess levy rates

levies for bonded indebtedness

regular levy rates

returns and reports ¶ 621

individuals

corporations

improvements to real property

non-corporate businesses

penalty for failure to return property

specimen business property return ¶ 627

senior citizen tax deferment or credit ¶ 603

special method of valuation ¶ 604

airplanes and helicopters

automobiles

certain specialized high-technology property

farms

dealer vehicle inventory

interstate motor carriers registered under proportional registration agreement

managed timberland

motorboats

owner occupied residential property

pollution abatement equipment

qualified capital additions to manufacturing facilities

specialized manufacturing equipment



vehicles registered under International Registration Plan

valuation ¶ 612

coal ¶ 613

commercial personal property ¶ 618

commercial real property ¶ 617

industrial personal property ¶ 618

industrial real property ¶ 617

motor vehicles ¶ 620

oil and natural gas property ¶ 614

other active natural resources ¶ 616

public utility property ¶ 612

timberland ¶ 615

unsold lots contained in recorded plan or plat ¶ 619

vehicles, watercraft and aircraft ¶ 620