

**BOARD OF EQUALIZATION  
WASHOE COUNTY, NEVADA**

THURSDAY

10:00 A.M.

JANUARY 9, 2025

PRESENT:

**Daren McDonald, Chair**  
**James Ainsworth, Vice Chair**  
**Eugenia Bonnenfant, Member**  
**Rost Olsen, Member**

**Janis Galassini, County Clerk**  
**Trenton Ross, Deputy District Attorney**

ABSENT:

**Michael Gratz, Member**

The Board of Equalization convened at 10:00 a.m. in the Caucus Room of the Washoe County Administration Complex, 1001 East Ninth Street, Reno, Nevada. Following the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our Country, Chair McDonald called the meeting to order, County Clerk Jan Galassini called roll, and the Board conducted the following business:

**25-003E** **AGENDA ITEM 4** Public Comment.

There was no response to the call for public comment.

**25-004E** **AGENDA ITEM 5** Oath of Office: Clerk to administer oath of office to new Board members. (Rost Olsen and Michael Gratz)

County Clerk Jan Galassini swore in Member Rost Olsen.

Chair McDonald welcomed Member Olsen to the Board.

**25-005E** **AGENDA ITEM 6** Election of Vice-Chair: Possible election of a vice-chair for the 2025 Washoe County Board of Equalization.

Ms. Eugenia Bonnenfant nominated Member Ainsworth for Vice Chair.

On motion by Member Bonnenfant, seconded by Member Olsen, which motion duly carried on a 4-0 vote, with Member Gratz absent, it was ordered that Member Ainsworth be elected as Vice Chair.

**25-006E** **AGENDA ITEM 7** Swearing In: County Clerk to Administer Oath to Appraisal Staff.

County Clerk Jan Galassini swore in all the Assessor's staff that was present.

**ORIENTATION AND TRAINING:**

**25-007E** **AGENDA ITEM 8A** Washoe County Assessor's Office presentation and overview of the assessment process for the 2025/2026 fiscal year.

County Assessor Chris Sarman welcomed Member Olsen. He stated he did not know Member Olsen's background regarding real estate and apologized that he had not gone through his resume beforehand. He discussed the purpose of the Organizational Meeting and noted it had been beneficial in the past to meet with the Board to outline the role of the Assessors' Office and how it calculated values and presented the information to the Board of Equalization (BOE). He introduced Chief Property Appraiser Howard Stockton and noted Mr. Stockton would discuss the process and answer questions. He introduced Assessment Services Coordinator Lora Zimmer and said she handled many of the appeals that were tied to exemptions. Also present were members from the senior leadership team and the appraisal staff, who he noted, were also learning the process.

Mr. Stockton explained he took over the Chief Property Appraiser position upon Mr. Steve Clement's retirement the previous year and had worked in the Assessor's Office for approximately 18 years. He said the overview he put together was similar to the previous year and outlined the Assessor's Office and its process. He said the Assessor's Office established a total taxable value for every property in Washoe County and noted the County was unique because the total taxable value was not tied to market value. He explained that the total taxable value was calculated by establishing a market land value and an improvement value. He stated that per Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS), the improvement value was calculated using a costing service named Marshall and Swift. He stated that there was a depreciation rate of 1.5 percent per year up to 50 years, or 75 percent. The taxable value of the land and the buildings and improvements made up the total taxable value, which was what the taxes and assessed values were based on.

Mr. Sarman stated it was referred to as a modified cost approach to value because depreciation was fixed by NRS at 1.5 percent. He noted the BOE could encounter appellants wanting to use a market depreciation; however, the Assessor's Office was bound by NRS to use 1.5 percent. He explained that did not mean that staff would not consider an appellant's market depreciation evidence as a market indication. He said the Assessor's Office established the taxable value through a modified cost approach to value and then tested the value because, per State law, the total taxable value cannot exceed full cash value. He clarified the County did not use market value; it used taxable value, but by law, the County could not exceed market value. He said the Assessor's Office examined market value through a sales comparison approach to value and that when staff reviewed cost, they might look at the market depreciation versus statutory.

Mr. Stockton stated that land was established at market value, and there were primary appraisal methods staff used to establish land. He explained the first method

was the sales comparison approach, which compared and examined sales of comparable properties to establish what the expected purchase price would be. The second method, allocation, was often used in track neighborhoods and involved allocating a portion of the sales price to the land. He said there were different allocation ratios depending on the age of the home. He stated a new home had an allocation ratio of 18 percent and gave an example of how the allocation would be calculated. The third method, abstraction, was not used often and involved removing the contributory value of improvements to arrive at the land value. He mentioned those three methods were the primary ways the County established land values. He noted commercial properties were heavy on the sales comparison approach and explained that anywhere the Assessor's Office had good land sales data, it would be used for base land values. He reminded that allocation was used mostly in track neighborhoods where the neighborhood was built out and said those properties would be computed based on the total sales price.

Mr. Stockton noted the Assessor's Office established the total taxable value; however, the passage of NRS 489 established a tax cap by stating a person's primary residence could only be increased by 3 percent per year. He mentioned that commercial and rental vacant land had a tax cap of 8 percent. He gave an example of a primary residence with a 15 percent increase in the total taxable value and said the owner would not get a tax bill with a 15 percent increase, they would get a tax bill with a 3 percent increase. He explained that the 12 percent difference was then abated from the tax bill. He gave an example of a person's property value of \$500,000, with a request for it to be lowered to \$400,000 and a tax cap of \$350,000. He noted that if the Assessor's Office were to lower that value to \$400,000, it would not have a measurable impact on the person's taxes due to the tax cap. He noted situations like that occurred often, and the Assessor's Office made an effort to discuss the tax cap with the taxpayers. He believed the tax cap made staff's jobs significantly easier and recalled the BOE season was much heavier in appeals and contention before the tax cap. He shared that most of the time when staff explained the tax cap, people understood it and felt the appeal process was not worthwhile. He noted the deadline to file appeals was January 15, 2025, and there were currently 13 total appeals. The 13 appeals involved 8 or 9 real property appeals, 1 personal property appeal, and the rest of the appeals were tied to exemptions. He opined that, so far, it was a very light year.

Mr. Sarman said that there were 190,000 parcels in Washoe County, and the percentage that came forward with appeals was very small. He believed that compared to the previous year, the current year could be a little lower, but there was still time for applicants to enter petitions. He said the majority of the repeat appellants typically filed on January 15th and were tax representatives from other states who represented companies in the County. He noted that over the last year or two, there were usually about 100 appeals; however, the Assessor's Office was typically able to cut that number down to 50 once the tax cap process was explained. He shared that the Assessor's Office has an open-door policy and works with the appellants to explain the process and work toward a stipulation. He believed that after working with the appellants, only a very small percentage chose to proceed to a hearing. Typically, he explained, when appeals went to a hearing, it was due to an understanding that could not be reached between the appellant and the Assessor's

Office, or the appellant believed the taxable value the Assessor supported was too high. He believed it was important to note that while taxpayers might think the market was flat and stable, it varied in different areas and the overall value needed to be related to the overall market value. He believed his staff had evidence to support his belief that property was not being overvalued. He assured the Board that if a taxpayer brought forward evidence that proved otherwise, the Assessor's Office staff would review it and try to come to a stipulation.

Mr. Stockton said the taxpayers had two reasons or methods to appeal and explained they could appeal that the total taxable value exceeded market value, or they could appeal on equalization, which meant that they felt they were not being treated equally with similar properties in the County. He commented that by the time the appeal went before the BOE, staff had typically already been in communication with the taxpayer, possibly completed an inspection of the property, reviewed data submitted by the appellant, and done an analysis to see how the Assessor's Office total taxable value compared to market value. He said if the total taxable value were less than market value, it would be conveyed to the taxpayer that the Assessor's Office believed the property was not over market value. He stated that equalization issues could be less straightforward, but staff did their best to address those with the taxpayers. He commented that a person could get drastically different tax bills on similar homes depending on the tax cap or for other various reasons; therefore, it was not unusual for there to be some variability. He agreed with Mr. Sarman that the Assessor's Office got many people who withdrew their petition once they understood the data and the process. He informed the Board that stipulations occurred when there were equalization issues the Assessor's Office was not aware of, such as a ditch easement that had not been considered, and an agreement was made to make an adjustment for the taxpayers. He noted that stipulations were typically presented to the BOE at the beginning of the meetings. He explained that the appeals that made it before the BOE were where there was a disagreement in value. He noted that value was not a fact but an opinion, and due to that, staff were advised not to get too attached to what they believed the value was. He reminded the Board that the Assessor's Office's staff were State licensed appraisers and that their opinions were supported by data and professional experience; however, appraisals were not a math equation and staff presented their professional opinions, not facts, which the Board had a right to disagree with or challenge. He assured that staff did not take the Board's disagreement or challenge to staff's opinions personally because it was all part of the appeal process. He said the Assessor's Office enjoyed the dialogue and questions with the Board because it helped staff prepare, learn, and grow. He encouraged the Board to contact the Assessor's Office if they had questions.

Mr. Sarman said the opinion of value did not stop at the County BOE because there was an option to appeal to the State BOE. He stated that Walmart had appealed every year for the past ten years and the Assessor's Office had been successful in providing documentation to support their property values to the State BOE up until the previous year. He informed the Board that in 2024, there was a new State BOE member with a difference of opinion, and reductions were given to Walmart. He explained the values were not dropped down to the values seen in Clark County. He said the Assessor's Office felt that their data was strong and noted that, by law, the data had to be reviewed

each year. He thought with the 2024 Walmart appeals, it was possible that the Assessor's Office put more weight on a decision previously made by the County BOE, which caused them not to change values the following year. He believed 2025 was a bit different and staff had brought Walmart values back up. He stated that, for the first time, the Assessor's Office hired a Fee Appraiser to provide an analysis of the market value for Walmart. He noted it had been costly to hire the Fee Appraiser, but he felt that it might help avoid the discussion of dark store theory, which justified the cost. He wondered, from an equalization standpoint, what Walmart, as a retail box store in the County, would mean for all other box stores in the area. For that reason, he thought the Fee Appraiser was much needed. Mr. Stockton said the appraisal from the Fee Appraiser was included in the Walmart hearing packets.

Member Olsen said he had not closely read the NRS prior to the meeting. He recalled that when something went to the State BOE, generally the taxpayer had a right to a petition for judicial review. He wondered if the Assessor's Office had a right to appeal. Deputy District Attorney (DDA) Trenton Ross replied that the State BOE had the only appellant right for both sides. Mr. Sarman said the County had a right to appeal, although it happened very rarely. Member Olsen said when he used to work at the Attorney General's (AG) Office and represented the Department of Taxation, it was a point of frustration that they did not have appellant rights after the tax commission. He wondered what the standard of review was when considering the appeals, specifically if the Board was looking at the appeal De Novo or giving deference to the Assessor's Office. DDA Ross said it was not specifically addressed in the NRS, so it was up to the Member's interpretation. Mr. Sarman said the Assessor's Office would identify the property, present their evidence to the Board, and guide the Board through how their value was supported. He explained that the appellants would then give their evidence; although, sometimes, appellants did not have evidence, despite NRS stating they should. Next, the appellant had a chance to rebut, and then the Board made its decision. Chair McDonald noted it functioned similarly to a De Novo standard. DDA Ross explained it functioned that way because the Assessor's Office typically presented more evidence, so he understood how it could appear the Board deferred to the Assessor's Office. He recalled a hearing a few years prior when an appellant asked if the Board ever went against the Assessor's Office. He said for that hearing, the appellant had not presented much evidence, while the Assessor's Office had an entire packet of information. He advised it was De Novo as an approach that could appear like deference, but only because the Assessor's Office typically provided more evidence.

Chair McDonald questioned what happened to the tax cap when a property changed owners. He asked if the new owner of a property that previously had a tax cap would receive the same tax cap. Mr. Sarman noted that the issue had been discussed many times, most recently with the leadership team at the City of Sparks. He wondered if there would be a bill that year to change the regulations surrounding tax caps. He explained the current tax caps were implemented in 2004 or 2005 to prevent a homeowner from being taxed out of their home. He said nobody had anticipated the recession that would cap every property lower. He noted that the hardship stayed with the property and not the owner, which he believed led to pros and cons. He said his opinion was that the hardship should

end when the property was sold; however, that was not the case because the hardship stayed with the property. He recalled that a few years ago, there was a fire in Washoe Valley, and the Assessor's Office reduced the values there significantly. He said the Board, at that time, reduced the values further with the opinion that the fire was a detriment and devaluation to the property; however, those reduced values were now capped in perpetuity. He said it was important for the Board to understand what happened when values were reduced. Mr. Stockton clarified the value was not capped forever, but it was the new base and could go up 8 percent per year and take a while to get back to the original value.

Member Ainsworth asked if the property went back to what the sales price was when it sold. Mr. Sarman replied that it did not go back to the sales price because the tax cap was fixed to that property. He thought it was important to understand that while there might be a detriment to the property at that specific time, it was possible that the detriment could be absent in the future. He suggested the Board view it from a cost-to-cure standpoint. Mr. Ainsworth said he assumed that when the property sold it went back to the original price. Mr. Sarman said staff had done a tremendous job addressing the issues and damage incurred to properties from the two big fires that happened recently. He noted staff used the Little Valley Fire as a model to see what the market originally was and how it fell. He felt the Assessor's Office was proactive in changing values for the people affected by the two big fires.

Mr. Stockton informed the Board that staff had a very productive meeting with the St. James Village Homeowners Association (HOA) President and the HOA's Fee Appraiser. He noted the Assessor's staff presented its analysis to the HOA and made adjustments to the land values. He explained everyone was in agreement with those values, so he did not anticipate many appeals as a result of the Davis Fire. He believed there was one appeal from someone in the Galena Forest. He opined there would not be many appellants from the areas affected by fires.

Member Bonnenfant asked how the value could be temporarily lowered for a period of time. Mr. Sarman replied that he was unsure of the exact answer to that question, but he viewed it as a cost to cure. He asked if there was a cost to fix something on a property in the first year of the damage and if the Assessor's Office could pick that up as a new value the following year. He was unsure of the answer because due to NRS, the Assessor's Office was limited in what they could do. Member Bonnenfant surmised the fix was to get a bill passed although she did not want to appear to be like California. Mr. Sarman clarified that California used Proposition 13, which limited property taxes to one percent of the assessed value. Member Bonnenfant said that California did resets upon sale.

DDA Ross recalled Mr. Sarman said Walmart had been overturned and wondered how many other County BOE decisions were appealed the previous year. Mr. Sarman said he was only aware of Walmart being overturned. He believed Walmart and one residential owner appealed to the State BOE and thought the residential owner had failed to appear for the State BOE hearing. County Clerk Jan Galassini opined the State BOE requested documentation for five to six separate appellants. Mr. Sarman noted that people would file an appeal and then not show up for their hearing with the County BOE.

Mr. Sarman believed overall values had increased slightly that year. He acknowledged that there had been high inflation over the last few years; however, that year was quite a bit lower. He believed land values had gone up 5 to 10 percent, but a drastic increase was not seen.

**25-008E**      **AGENDA ITEM 8B** Washoe County Clerk's Office presentation and overview by Washoe County Clerk's Office of statutory responsibilities as Clerk of the Board and administrative and clerical practices; distribution of State Guidelines to County Board of Equalization Members.

County Clerk Jan Galassini introduced Chief Deputy Clerk Cathy Smith, Board Records and Minutes Manager Evonne Strickland, Deputy Clerks Elizabeth Tietjen and Heather Gage, Senior Business Technologist Jonathan Lujan, and Technology Systems Technician II Joshua Neuman. She referred to the Member roster located in the handout and asked if the information and terms were correct. She indicated that the Chair was appointed on December 17, 2024. The two vacant seats were filled; however, Member Michael Gratz would likely not attend any meetings due to other obligations. Per District Attorney (DA) advice, Member Gratz would stay on the Board. County Assessor Chris Sarman asked if there would be an alternate member. Ms. Galassini noted there would not be an alternate member.

Ms. Galassini said page two of the handout referred to a calendar that indicated seven possible meeting days for February. She asked the BOE Members to let Ms. Strickland know if there were any conflicting dates to avoid quorum issues. She said the first meeting would likely be on the 7th or 10th of February, with the Clerk's Office preference being the 10th or 12th due to Board of County Commissioners' (BCC) meetings. She informed that February 28th would be designated for continuances because all hearings needed to be concluded by February 29<sup>th</sup>, and March 28th was reserved for approval of the meeting minutes.

Ms. Galassini read from page four of the handout regarding the Assessor's Office and Clerk's Office responsibilities. She explained that in addition to the details in the handout, the Clerk's Office marked and distributed the exhibits and maintained the record of the meeting. She said the hearings and documents were provided to the State BOE by the Clerk's Office once appeals were processed. She discussed the BOE website which explained the purpose of the BOE and listed the member biographies. She asked the Members to ensure their biographies were accurate.

Ms. Galassini said she understood that motions were confusing; however, after reviewing motions with the DA, the Clerk's Office created tabbed motion menus for each Member to ensure accuracy. She noted the BOE could review the State BOE's guidelines in the handout if needed. She explained that Mr. Lujan had laptops and the Clerk's Office had thumb drives available for checkout upon request, but the backup material would be distributed via email and located digitally. She said thumb drives would be brought to hearings in case there were internet issues.

Ms. Strickland indicated she would email the Members no later than the fourth working day before the meeting day. The email would contain a link for access to the agenda, petition, and exhibits. She noted thumb drives would not be provided to members unless requested and stated she was willing to help members who needed assistance accessing the website.

Ms. Galassini mentioned snacks, coffee, and water would be provided during the meeting.

**25-009E**      **AGENDA ITEM 8C** Washoe County District Attorney's Office training on Nevada Open Meeting Law and Ethics in Government Law.

Deputy District Attorney (DDA) Trenton Ross noted that the Assessor's Office prepared the agenda and the Clerk's Office posted it. He indicated that all discussion must follow the agenda and be held at the time of the meeting. He advised that discussion should not occur amongst Members off the record. He reminded the Members not to use reply all to agenda emails to prevent discussions from occurring and recommended any conflicts of interest needed to be addressed ahead of time for the District Attorney (DA) to give appropriate advice regarding recusals and disclosures. He explained that, while recusals were unlikely, they could happen. He said if a Member knew a petitioner, disclosure of that to the DA should happen before the meeting. He referred to the State Board of Equalization (BOE) guidelines in the Clerk's handout for more details regarding Open Meeting Law (OML).

**25-010E**      **AGENDA ITEM 9** 2025 Hearings: Discussion and possible adoption of rules and procedures to be used by the Board for hearings during the 2025 Board of Equalization meetings, including but not limited to discussion and direction to staff on petitions filed after the deadline date, and determination of method of holding future meetings (in-person, virtual, or hybrid options).

Chair McDonald believed the Board of Equalization (BOE) had historically been flexible with late petitioners and asked how other Members felt. Vice Chair Ainsworth believed late-filed petitions should be accepted. Assessment Services Coordinator Lora Zimmer indicated that the policy for late-filed petitions required the petitions to be sent to the District Attorney (DA) for review, and if extenuating circumstances were determined, the DA would advise on how to handle those petitions. Chief Property Appraiser Howard Stockton noted the appeal date was a statutory deadline.

Deputy District Attorney (DDA) Trenton Ross mentioned the petition needed to be postmarked by January 15. He did not recall any extreme circumstances from previous years that would warrant late acceptance. County Assessor Chris Sarman believed the appeal deadline was on a Wednesday that year, which gave a clear deadline for mailing. Chair McDonald indicated the Board had determined a process for late-filed petitions.

Chair McDonald asked about hybrid versus in-person meetings. He noted that historically, the Board of Equalization (BOE) experimented with hybrid meetings with



difficulty and recommended appellants attend in person. Vice Chair Ainsworth said the hybrid meetings were problematic.

On motion by Vice Chair Mr. Ainsworth, seconded by Member Olsen, which motion duly carried on a 4-0, with Member Gratz absent, it was ordered that all participants must appear in person for the 2025 Board of Equalization hearings.

Chair McDonald indicated that time limits were a problem last BOE season. He noted that approximately 80 percent of the appellants presented their case in 20 minutes; however, there were complex hearings that went over 20 minutes. Vice Chair Ainsworth agreed with a 20-minute time limit. Chair McDonald felt the appraisers typically presented in less than ten minutes. Member Olsen believed 20 minutes allowed appellants to get their point across. He was unsure if there was a policy that allowed for reserved time during the rebuttal. Chair McDonald confirmed there was a rebuttal period. He noted that the appellant and the appraiser would provide a presentation then the BOE would ask questions. He felt the initial presentation should be no more than 20 minutes with the rebuttal limited to 10 to 15 minutes.

Member Bonnenfant agreed to limit the rebuttal to ten minutes. She indicated there were instances when the appellant became frustrated during the rebuttal, and repetition occurred. Chair McDonald clarified 20 minutes for the petitioner's initial presentation, 20 minutes for the Assessor's Office's initial presentation, and 10 minutes for the rebuttal.

Member Bonnenfant asked DDA Ross if there were legal issues with the time limits. DDA Ross indicated the State BOE allowed a 15-minute presentation and 5-minute rebuttal while the courts allowed 30 minutes to present an argument. He noted that the Chair and Vice Chair had discretion regarding time during the meeting; however, there was no legal obligation regarding time limits.

County Clerk Jan Galassini explained that the agenda would include a paragraph notating the time limits. She indicated she typically set a 10-minute timer for staff presentations during the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) meetings; however, if the BCC had questions, that presentation time could be extended. She noted it was up to the Board how much time they wanted to allow. Chair McDonald felt that, considering the amount of time the BCC allowed, 20 and 10-minute limits were lenient. DDA Ross recommended informing the appellants of the time limit, so they were prepared to condense their argument. He noted it did not mean there had to be a hard cut-off on time.

On motion by Member Olsen, seconded by Member Bonnenfant, which motion duly carried on a 4-0, with Member Gratz absent, it was ordered that the time schedule allow 20 minutes for the petitioner to present, 20 minutes for the Assessor's Office to present, and 10 minutes for the petitioner's rebuttal which was not inclusive of the time the Board asked questions.

Ms. Galassini indicated withdrawals would be announced at the beginning of the meeting, continuances would be heard at the last meeting of the season, and late petitions would be sent to the DA for discretion.

Mr. Sarman asked if the BOE would like the appraisers to present their exhibits when the appellant did not attend the meeting. He did not mind giving the staff the experience. Chair McDonald asked if appellants who did not attend their hearing ever appealed to the State BOE. Vice Chair Ainsworth said that situation had happened in the past. Mr. Sarman noted the appellant was allowed to appeal to the State BOE if they did not attend the hearing. He indicated staff could still present the exhibit for the record even if the appellant did not show up to the hearing.

DDA Ross believed the appraisers had still presented some exhibits the previous year when the appellants did not attend the hearings. He believed that was due to the uniqueness of those situations.

Mr. Sarman asked if the BOE would oppose staff presenting the evidence for special circumstances. The BOE wanted the appraisers to present and testify regardless of whether the appellant was absent.

Chair McDonald said he wanted to have the staff presentation for cases where the petitioner did not submit an exhibit and did not show up. He mentioned that occasionally petitioners submitted letters. He asked that the letter be read into the record for consideration. Member Bonnenfant recommended only presenting the important points and not the whole packet. Ms. Galassini believed that if the information was agendized, it should be discussed during the hearing. Member Bonnenfant noted she wanted the Assessor’s response to the concerns of the petitioners to be on the record.

**25-011E      AGENDA ITEM 10 Board Member Comments.**

Chair McDonald welcomed Member Olsen to the Board. Member Olsen replied that he was happy to be on the Board.

**25-012E      AGENDA ITEM 11 Public Comment.**

There was no response to the call for public comment.

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**10:58 a.m.**      The meeting was adjourned.

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DAREN MCDONALD, Chair  
Washoe County Board of Equalization

ATTEST:

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JANIS GALASSINI, County Clerk and  
Clerk of the Washoe County Board of  
Equalization

*Minutes Prepared by:*  
*Evonne Strickland, Deputy County Clerk*  
*Lizzie Tietjen, Deputy County Clerk*