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RESPECT: Property owners have until Dec. 9 to file an appeal

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — Administrator Scott Moulder's news conference on reassessment ballooned into a full-fledge town hall meeting Thursday.

Not only did three media representatives attend, so did several dozen taxpayers. It had the feel of a County Council meeting.

After answering questions from the press, Moulder opened the floor to questions from the public. He acted as though he thought the questions would never end. The briefing broke up almost two hours after the mid-afternoon start.

Moulder took about 30 minutes to give an update of the process and share data from the 2010 countywide reassessment being implemented this year.

Among the information Moulder presented was an overview of how values changed in the county since the previous reassessment in 2006. South Carolina law requires all 46 counties to reassess property values every five years.

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Here's the big picture. Of the approximately 62,500 properties appraised in the county, 68 percent of them increased in value.

According to the data from the county, 37,628 properties or 60 percent of the total increased in value from 6 to 15 percent. The other 4,903 properties, or 8 percent of the total increased in value by up to 5 percent.

Conversely, almost 27 percent or 16,870 of all properties decreased in value.

A total of 1,395 properties or 2 percent of the total did not change in value.

The remaining 3 percent or 2,106 properties had no prior value for calculation.

Moulder candidly said he expected more people to be challenging the increase to their property values.

Indeed, many are scratching their heads wondering how they could have been reassessed higher given the economic calamity over the past four years.

However, Moulder said the appeal rate is running at 2 percent, compared to about 4 percent in 2006.

Moulder's message to Oconee County residents is that they should not be afraid to appeal. Moulder said he has heard that people might be afraid to challenge their reassessment out of fear of some kind of retribution by the county.

Moulder made it clear that would never happen during his watch.

"You'll be treated with respect and professionally," he said. "We're not the same Assessor's Office."

"We know errors were made," Moulder added. "Linda (Shugart, the Assessor) and I want to fix anything that was not done right."

Property owners have until Dec. 9 to file an appeal.

The process begins by setting an appointment with Tyler Technology Inc. for an informal meeting. Tyler, which was paid $1.8 million to reassess properties in Oconee, can be reached at (864) 718-1424.

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