'Sound the alarm'

Oconee resident urges repeal of reassessment

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — A Salem area property owner who calls Oconee County's reassessment an "absolute travesty" is calling on others who feel the same way to let their voices be heard at the next Oconee County Council meeting Dec. 6.



Moulder

Keith Shuler said Tuesday that's he's had to get 2010 comparable sales from a real estate company to challenge the appraisal made on his properties by Tyler Technologies Inc.

Tyler was paid $1.8 million by Oconee for the reappraisal that has left some taxpayers and observers wondering how assessments could go up in a down market.

The deadline for filing an appeal is Dec. 9.

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County Administrator Scott Moulder already has said he would not extend the deadline for filing appeals.

Moulder said Tuesday that the number of appeals filed is approaching 6,000, which is approaching 10 percent of the approximately 62,500 parcels appraised by Tyler.

Shuler is not interested in a deadline extension. He thinks the reassessment should be revoked.

A Duke Energy employee, Shuler is on a campaign to put the heat on elected officials to do something about the reassessment before Dec. 9. He's been taking the message to neighbors, churches and handing out copies of a handwritten letter expressing his disgust with the process.

"They hired an outside company (a lot of our tax money was used to pay them) to do the reassessment," Shuler wrote. "These people do not care about the people of Oconee County and our homes and property, which many of us intend to pass down to our children and grandchildren."

Shuler told The Journal that the reassessment is "so bungled" that the county's only option should be to do it over again.

"The County Council is the governing body that is responsible and they have the authority to stop it," he said.

Shuler said that as a result of his appeal, the county has adjusted values lower on some of his properties.

A South Carolina certified general appraiser recently contacted The Journal to express problems he sees with Tyler's appraisal.

Leslie R. Knoblock said he was asked to review some assessments in Oconee. He said a chief stumbling block is that the Assessor's Office has been unable to provide a factual basis for the values derived.

"Personal requests for information presented to the Oconee County Assessor's Office for this information have not been satisfied," Knoblock said. "The response has been that that information is with Tyler Technologies and not available for review."

Knoblock conceded that the burden of proof for any appeal of fair market value rests on the property owner, but said that becomes an undue burden on the property owner when there is no data available to justify the assessments.

Moulder recently told The Journal that the county does not have Tyler's comparable sales to determine the company's values. He said the county generates its own list of comparable sales to verify Tyler's appraisals.

Knoblock claims that Tyler's reassessment fails to meet the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice that covers mass appraisals. He said that is so because the county has yet to prove that the company developed a statistical model, tested it, and is able to justify the results.

Knoblock suggests that the county has the option to get a refund on all or a significant portion of Tyler's $1.8 million fee that could be used to do a reassessment.

Moulder publicly rejected that option recently as being too costly to the county.

Shuler is adamant that Oconee residents should not be complacent and urged them to show up at the Dec. 6 council meeting.

"Sound the alarm, let's turn out and make a difference," he said.

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