

Homestead Exemptions

(continued)

The Peace Officer or Firefighter Homestead Exemption is available for the surviving spouse of a peace officer or firefighter who was killed in the line of duty. The surviving spouse is exempt from the full value of the homestead with respect to all ad valorem tax.

The Floating or Varying Homestead Exemption is an exemption which is available to homeowners 62 or older with gross household incomes of \$30,000 or less. The exemption applies to state and county ad valorem taxes but it does not apply to school tax. The exemption is called a floating exemption because the amount of the exemption increases as the value of the homestead property is increased.

Property Tax Deferral Program provides for a method for qualified property owners 62 and older with gross household income of \$15,000 or less to defer but not exempt the payment of ad valorem taxes on a part or all of the homestead property. Generally, the tax would be deferred until the property ownership changes or until such time that the deferred taxes plus interest reach a level equal to 85% of the property's fair market value.

Approval or Denial of Homestead: With respect to all of the homestead exemptions, the Board of Tax Assessors makes the determination as to eligibility; however, if the application is denied the taxpayer must be notified and an appeal procedure then is available for the taxpayer.

Specialized and Preferential Assessment Programs

The Agricultural Preferential Assessment program is available for certain property owners of agricultural property. The property is assessed at 30% of fair market value rather than 40% of fair market. The property owner must enter a 10-year covenant with the Board of Tax Assessors and penalties may apply if the covenant is breached.

The Conservation Use Assessment program provides for an assessment based on a statutory "use-value" as opposed to an assessment based on

"fair market value." Qualified properties include certain agricultural land, timber land, environmentally sensitive property, or residential transitional property. The property owner must enter a 10 year covenant with the Board of Tax Assessors, and penalties may apply if the covenant is breached.

Forest Land Conservation Use Assessment provides for an ad valorem tax exemption for property primarily used for the production of trees, timber, or wood fiber products. The property may have secondary uses such as the promotion, preservation, or management of wildlife habitat; carbon sequestration; mitigation and conservation banking; or the production and maintenance of ecosystem products. This 10 year covenant between the taxpayer and local Board of Tax Assessors is limited to forest land of at least 200 acres in aggregate which lies within one or more counties, provided that such forest land is in parcels of at least 100 acres within any given county. Penalties may apply if the covenant is breached.

Rehabilitated and Landmark Historic Assessment includes properties that qualify for listing on the Georgia or National Register of Historic Places. This preferential assessment extends to the building and no more than two acres. Property under this special program must be certified by the Department of Natural Resources as rehabilitated historic property or landmark historic property. The exemption equals the difference between current fair market value and the higher of the acquisition cost or assessment of fair market value at the time the original 10-year covenant was entered.

Brownfield Property Assessment includes property which qualifies for participation in the State's Hazardous Site Reuse and Redevelopment Program and which has been designated as such by the Environmental Protection Division of the Department of Natural Resources. This program effectively freezes the taxable assessment for ten years as an incentive for developers to clean up contaminated property and return it to the tax rolls. It allows eligible owners to recoup certain costs associated with the cleanup.

Assessment Appeals

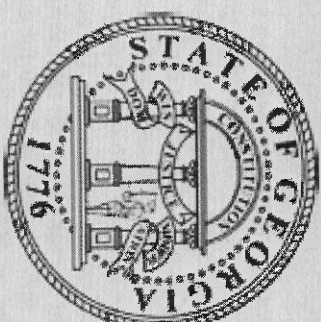
The Board of Tax Assessors is required to issue a notice of assessment for taxable tangible real and personal property. Upon receipt of this notice, the property owner desiring to appeal the assessment may do so within 45 days. The appeal may be based on taxability, value, uniformity, and/or the denial of an exemption. The written appeal is filed initially with the Board of Tax Assessors. The State of Georgia provides a uniform appeal form for use by property owners. In that initial written dispute, the property owner must declare their chosen method of appeal.

The three methods of appeal include:

Board of Equalization: The appeal is filed by the property owner and reviewed by the Board of Tax Assessors. The Board of Tax Assessors may change the assessment and send a new notice. The property owner may appeal the amended notice within 30 days. The appeal of the amended notice or any initial appeal which is not amended by the Board of Tax Assessors is automatically forwarded to the Board of Equalization. A hearing is scheduled and conducted and the Board of Equalization renders its decision. If the taxpayer is still dissatisfied, an appeal to Superior Court may be made.

Hearing Officer: The taxpayer may appeal to a Hearing Officer, who is a certified appraiser, when the issue of the appeal is the value or uniformity of assessment of non-homestead real property with a value greater than \$500,000, or certain wireless property with an aggregate value greater than \$500,000 as shown on the annual notice of current assessment. If the taxpayer is dissatisfied with the Hearing Officer's decision, an appeal to Superior Court may be made.

Arbitration: An arbitration appeal is filed with the Board of Tax Assessors. The taxpayer must submit a certified appraisal of the subject property which the Board of Tax Assessors may accept or reject. If the taxpayer's appraisal is rejected, the Board of Tax Assessors must certify the appeal to the County Clerk of Superior Court for arbitration. The Arbitrator will issue a decision at the conclusion of the hearing. If the taxpayer is still dissatisfied, an appeal to Superior Court may be made.



IMPORTANT TAX INFORMATION

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The duties and responsibilities of this office are many and varied, but our main function is to serve you, the citizens of our community. This brochure has been furnished to help answer some of your questions regarding county taxes.

Please feel free to contact this office if you have any questions on the information addressed in this brochure, or any problems receiving efficient and personal service from our office.

Angie Galloway, Tax Commissioner