



2006 TRIM NOTICE

(Notice of PROPOSED PROPERTY TAXES) Informational Supplement

Jim Smith, CFA Pinellas County Property Appraiser

Dear Pinellas County Property Owner:

Your 2006 Notice of Proposed Property Taxes (TRIM Notice) shows the estimated market value of your property as of **January 1, 2006**. Market value means the amount in cash a willing buyer who did not have to buy would pay a willing seller who did not have to sell, less costs of sale (i.e. document stamps, broker's and attorney's fees, etc.).

If you agree that the market value of your property was at least as much as shown in the notice, you do not have to do anything. The tax bill you receive in November will be based on this value. If you have any questions about this value, we encourage you to contact our office. One of our appraisers will be happy to discuss your valuation with you, or you are welcome to review our lists of all sales in Pinellas County each year. In this way, you can acquaint yourself with actual local real estate market trends, including what people are paying for property in your neighborhood.

Remember, the Property Appraiser and his staff are at your service to answer any questions you may have about your property value. It is my goal as your elected Property Appraiser to provide fair appraisals for all property owners. We're here to serve *you*.

Respectfully,

Jim Smith, CFA
Pinellas County Property Appraiser

New Homeowner?

- YOUR TAXES MAY INCREASE -

If you purchased your home during 2005, your assessed value this year may be substantially higher than last year due to the removal of the previous owner's Save Our Homes Cap.

The Save Our Homes (SOH) amendment to the Florida Constitution limits the annual increase in assessed value of homestead property to 3% or the amount of the increase in the Consumer Price Index, whichever is lower. The limitation applies **only to your property value**, not to property taxes. **By law, when a property sells or transfers**, the cap and all exemptions are removed as of December 31st after the sale.

If you purchased a home that had a homestead exemption, you should be aware that property taxes will increase this year because the **assessed value must be adjusted to equal current market value**. This may be especially true if the former owner had homestead exemption for many years. If this is your first year with homestead exemption, your SOH cap will go into effect next year.

For more information about VALUES, EXEMPTIONS, and TAXES, please visit

<http://www.pcpao.org>

INFORMATION YOU SHOULD KNOW!

ADDING AN OWNER: IF YOU HAVE HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION, and you change the title to add a new owner other than your spouse to your deed, **the protection of your Save Our Homes Cap will be reset to market value when** the added owner applies for Homestead Exemption. If the new owner intends to make the property his or her permanent residence, filing for Homestead Exemption immediately may save a more costly loss of the Cap in the future. If you are planning a change to your deed, or if you have already made a change, we urge you to call our Exemptions Department at 464-3294 to discuss your options.

DOES VALUE DETERMINE TAXES?

An increase in appraised value will result in a tax increase unless the taxing authorities reduce the millage (tax) rates that fund their budgets. If you are concerned about an increase in taxes, please carefully review the information on the taxing authorities and consider attending the budget hearings listed on your TRIM Notice.

VETERAN'S EXEMPTION NEWS:

The **surviving spouse** of a Florida service member disabled at least 10% by service-connected misfortune is now entitled to a \$5,000 exemption. Please call 464-3294 for more information.

Your hurricane **EVACUATION LEVEL** is printed on your TRIM Notice below your tax district.

DUTIES OF THE PROPERTY APPRAISER

Our office determines the assessed value of your property. We serve the public by providing taxing authorities with accurate and uniform property valuations for their tax purposes. This is our only part in the taxing process. Every year, our appraisers revalue each property in Pinellas County and at least once every three years they physically inspect each property.

The Property Appraiser is independent of city or county taxing authorities and plays no part in their tax policies. This office is not involved with and has no legal responsibility for local government budgets, tax rates or tax bills. The various taxing authorities in which your property lies set the millage rates. Every taxing authority is listed with a brief description of purpose on page four. Your tax bill is based on your assessed value less exemptions, times the millage rates of all districts in which your property is located.

If after conferring with one of our appraisers, you believe your value is higher than market value on January 1, 2006, we encourage you to file a petition with the Value Adjustment Board by the date listed at the bottom of your TRIM Notice.

HOW IS VALUE DETERMINED?

There are three approaches to value referred to in the Florida Statutes: *replacement cost*, *direct sales comparison*, and *capitalization of income*. In Pinellas County, we use a computer-assisted mass appraisal system that incorporates elements of all three approaches to value. For real property, the best evidence of market value is the 2004 and 2005 selling prices of properties similar to yours.

For tangible personal property, while all three approaches are considered, the cost approach is generally used. This method considers the depreciated historical acquisition cost of an item including freight and installation.

Business returns are mailed to owners of tangible personal property around the first of each year. These returns are to be sent back to our office by April 1 to prevent the statutory imposition of penalties. Please check your records to ensure compliance.

HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION (GENERAL)

Homestead Exemption is a constitutional benefit of a \$25,000 exemption. It is granted to those applicants who file by March 1, possess title to real property, and are bona fide Florida residents living in the dwelling and making it their permanent home on January 1.

A homestead exemption is not transferrable. You *must* file a new application in person if you received an exemption last year and established a *new* residence this year *after* January 1, 2006.

Additionally, if you purchased your property after January 1, 2006, and your TRIM Notice reflects a 2006 homestead, this is an exemption which was granted to the prior owner. This exemption ceases on December 31, 2006. If you wish to qualify for a 2007 homestead exemption, you must file an original application in one of our offices by March 1, 2007. However, you are urged to file immediately to ensure you don't overlook this approximate \$500 savings on your ad valorem tax bill.

If you no longer qualify for the exemption, notify our office of the change immediately. If you inherited homesteaded property after January 1, 2006, you are responsible for notifying our office so the homestead exemption can be removed for next year's (2007) property value roll. You will be able to keep the exemption for 2006.

CAN YOU REVERSE A DENIAL OF HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION?

Yes. You may appeal the denial of an exemption to the Value Adjustment Board if you can prove that you qualified for the exemption on January 1, 2006. You may also appeal if your application was denied because it was filed late. To appeal a late filed application you must explain the extenuating circumstances that caused the application to be late. Contact our Exemption Department at (727) 464-3294 for further information.

NON-AD VALOREM ASSESSMENTS

Non-Ad Valorem assessments are applicable in some taxing districts and are based on a rate schedule set by each governing body. They are NOT based on the value of your property. The Save-Our-Homes Cap does not apply to these assessments. Please direct all questions regarding these assessments to the levying authority listed on the TRIM Notice.

THE VALUE ADJUSTMENT BOARD

The Value Adjustment Board is created by State law and is comprised of three members of the Pinellas County Commission and two members of the School Board. Petitions to the Board are available from the Property Appraiser's office. The Board appoints Special Magistrates, who are qualified real estate appraisers or attorneys, to conduct the hearings. These magistrates are independent of the Property Appraiser's office. The Property Appraiser is simply a party before the Board, the same as the petitioner. The deadline for filing a petition to the Board is printed on

the enclosed Notice of Proposed Property Taxes. There is a **non-refundable \$15 fee** upon filing the petition. Supplying all requested information on the petition makes it easier for the Property Appraiser's office to review your request for a lower assessment.

MAKING A CASE

Can you win a reduction before the Value Adjustment Board? Yes, you can if you prove that your appraisal exceeded market value. But if you base your case on a personal hardship, such as living on a fixed income or an inability to pay any more taxes, the unfortunate answer is "no." However, you may be eligible for the tax deferral plan administered by the Tax Collector's office. Information regarding the plan is included with the tax bill you receive in November. The fact that your value increased from 2005 to 2006 is not a basis to reduce this year's appraised value, since each year's assessment stands alone.

The Value Adjustment Board does not set the millage rate and has no jurisdiction over taxes. The only question the Special Magistrates determine is whether the appraised value of a property exceeds its market value as of January 1, 2006. If you plan to file a petition, we encourage you to informally discuss your value with a member of the Property Appraiser's staff. Our goal is not to increase values, but to determine that your property is appraised equitably and accurately. In fact, no taxing authority can pressure us into setting a value higher than it should be.

HEARING PROCEDURE

Hearings before Special Magistrates, which begin in October, are informal. While you don't need an attorney, one can certainly represent you.

The best way to prepare for your hearing is to produce evidence regarding sales (not appraisals) of comparable properties that sold before January 1, 2006. The Special Magistrate will give you the opportunity to present your evidence first. Next, our appraisers will present evidence concerning our determination of your property's market value. You will usually be able to ask questions concerning the appraiser's presentation.

The Board will mail you a copy of the decision on your petition. If you disagree with the Board, you may file a Civil Action in the Circuit Court under section 194.171 of Florida Statutes. If you did not file a petition, you may still file a lawsuit in Circuit Court.

TAX BILLS

The Tax Collector has scheduled the tax bills to be mailed on November 1. If you have any questions for the Tax Collector, you may call (727) 562-3262.



Be sure to view our video, *How to Contest Your Property's Value*, on **Pinellas 18: Your County Connection**.

Consult your viewing guide for air times. The video is also available at all public libraries and Property Appraiser's offices for check out.

You may also obtain property information 24 hours a day, seven days a week at the Property Appraiser's internet site: <http://www.pcpao.org>

This table represents the interaction from one year to the next between a property's taxable value, taxing authorities' millage rate and the outcome on your property taxes.

If your Property's Taxable Value	And the Taxing Authorities' Millage Rates	Then your Property's Tax Will:
DECREASES	DECREASE	DECREASE
DECREASES	INCREASE	STAY THE SAME, INCREASE, OR DECREASE*
DECREASES	STAY THE SAME	DECREASE
STAYS THE SAME	INCREASE	INCREASE
STAYS THE SAME	DECREASE	DECREASE
STAYS THE SAME	STAY THE SAME	STAY THE SAME
INCREASES	INCREASE	INCREASE
INCREASES	DECREASE	STAY THE SAME, INCREASE, OR DECREASE*
INCREASES	STAY THE SAME	INCREASE

*Depending on budgetary needs of taxing authority

Mailing Address Changes

The Property Appraiser and the Tax Collector use the same mailing address file. If you notify us of an address change, please provide only one address which is valid throughout the year. The two main mailings are the TRIM Notice in August and the Tax Bill in November. Please remember to include the **property parcel number** or **account number** with your request. Change of Address Request forms are now available online: www.pcpao.org

Pinellas County Taxing Authorities

Every taxing authority will hold a public hearing on their proposed budget for the forthcoming year. The size of the budget determines the millage rate and subsequently the amount of tax you will pay. If you wish to voice an opinion you are encouraged to attend these meetings. Every hearing is listed on your TRIM Notice.

County Aggregate - (This comprises four funds: General, Mosquito Control, Health Dept., and E.M.S.) **The General Fund** operates all the County Services such as: County correctional system; 911 Emergency Communications System; Twenty-two parks and a museum; Air and water quality programs; Dog and cat licensing, immunization and adoption programs; Enforcement of local environmental ordinances protecting wildlife, trees and grounds; Comprehensive planning; Economic and medical assistance to persons in need of basic necessities. The County Aggregate also includes funding for the Sheriff, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Supervisor of Elections and Property Appraiser. **Mosquito Control** sprays and controls mosquitoes. **The Health Department** operates the various County health programs such as screening, monitoring, and immunizing for certain communicable diseases like tuberculosis, measles, flu, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.; and it also administers school health program, family planning, and prenatal care. **The E.M.S. Program** provides the County's Emergency Medical Services (including paramedics).

Pinellas Planning Council - provides countywide planning necessary for orderly growth, development and environmental protection of the county as a whole; coordinates all countywide planning and development with Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council and the Florida Department of Community Affairs.

School Board - operates and maintains Pinellas County's public school system, including academic instruction, administration, and support services.

Cities/Towns (24 Municipalities in the County) - provide police, fire, sewer, garbage collection, street lighting, street repair, school crossing guards and crime watch programs. Operate libraries, municipal golf courses, recreation complexes, parks, cemeteries, wastewater treatment plants, senior citizens' and community centers. Enforces city housing and development codes.

Municipal Services Taxing Units (MSTU) - provide various services to residents in the unincorporated areas of the county, such as: law enforcement (Sheriff's Department); issuing construction permits, enforcing local building codes and the State energy code and providing on-site inspection during all phases of construction; reviewing applications for land-use plan changes, site plans and rezoning.

Fire Districts (15 Districts in the County) - provide fire protection for residents in the unincorporated areas.

Library Services - allows citizens the convenience of one library card for thirteen member libraries and provides broad-based interlibrary loan and information network.

Palm Harbor Community Services District - provides funding for operation and maintenance of a public library facility, recreational facilities/programs, and related land acquisitions.

Feather Sound Community Services District - funds street lighting; recreational and green space acquisition, development and maintenance.

Southwest Florida Water Management District - is one of five regional districts charged by the state to preserve and protect Florida's water resources. Its mission is flood control, water supply, and water quality. SWFWMD covers all or part of 16 counties.

Pinellas-Anclote River Basin Board - is one of eight watershed basins within the Southwest Florida Water Management District. This basin board is responsible for identifying the water-related concerns and problems within the basin, for adopting budgets to support those concerns, and fund resolutions to the problems. Projects funded include reclaimed water, conservation, flood plain analysis, storm water management, and water quality.

Pinellas Park Water Management District - builds and maintains major storm water drainage systems.

Juvenile Welfare Board - the first independent, special taxing district dedicated solely to children's services created by voters in 1946. JWB plans, coordinates, advocates, funds and evaluates programs for children and families. The Board contracts for services with public and not-for-profit agencies and programs countywide. JWB focuses on positive development for children and families and the reduction of risk in the areas of substance abuse, violence and harmful sexual behavior. The focus of services and activities is asset and community based, and emphasizes ages 0-6 and 10-14 using support and youth development principles.

Transit Authority - administers the countywide transit system, including more than 40 bus routes and Demand Response service for 19 municipalities and the unincorporated areas. It advocates mass transportation.