

More online options available: Value Adjustment Board petition e-filing

Electronic access continues to offer practical alternatives to traditional paper filing.

In August 2010, this office implemented a new case management system that captures taxpayer petitions—disputes to property tax assessments filed with the Value Adjustment Board (VAB)—and has the added benefit of a new option for citizens: Online filing.

A Truth in Millage (TRIM) notice is mailed to citizens in mid-August by the Sarasota County Property Appraiser. TRIM notices are not a tax bill, but rather an estimate of taxes based on the new assessed values, the proposed tax rates, and current exemptions. Although traditionally thought of as a method to appeal property taxes that go up, there is a slowly growing trend of filers appealing an adjustment because their property values are steadily decreasing, leaving those property owners to question the appraisal value of their property on the real estate market.

As Clerk to the VAB, this office manages the stream of cases filed when a taxpayer chooses to dispute their property tax assessment. In the past, all records for the case—correspondence, evidence submitted by the citizen or the Property Appraiser to substantiate or dispute the tax assessment, case progress and hearings information—was filed and tracked via paper record.

If a taxpayer has exhausted the options offered by meeting with the Property Appraiser, and still chooses to file a petition to the VAB, the process is now more accessible and convenient. No more driving to the Clerk's office or waiting in line to file; online payment by credit or debit card is available, and the Internet-based system allows a petitioner to file from any web accessible device. Add to that the freedom to track the progress of a request on your own timeline, upload evidence and read documents from the comfort of home, office or on the road—all the inherent benefits of e-filing.

A noted benefit of the new system is increased access to information: Petitioners tend to file a substantial amount of evidence to argue their case, and can now do so electronically, plus review it once filed. And they can read the evidence submitted by the Property Appraiser's office online too.

The Clerk to the VAB processed 1623 petitions in 2009, scheduling and coordinating over one thousand hearings between citizens and the Property Appraiser, special magistrates and the VAB. With an 111 percent increase in filings over the prior year—and the expectation that VAB activity will remain consistent for 2010—the use of electronic filing as an added value to citizens and an efficiency to the Clerk could not have come at a better time.