A DEEP DIVE ON SOUTH CAROLINA'S PROPERTY TAX SYSTEM

COMPLEX, INEQUITABLE AND UNCOMPETITIVE

Volume 2







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Volume 2¹

¹ Volume 1 summarizes the chapters in Volume 2. Volume 1 also includes key findings, the executive summary, and policy options. Some material, such as the definitions section, appears in both volumes.

DEFINITIONS

Ad Valorem Tax— (Latin for "toward value") A tax imposed on properties in proportion to their values. The most common are the ad valorem taxes imposed on real and personal property.

Appraised Value—The estimate of the value of a property before application of any fractional assessment ratio.

Assessable Transfer of Interest (ATI) —A transfer of an existing interest in real property that subjects the real property to reappraisal. For purposes of this definition, an existing interest in real property includes a life estate interest.

Assessed Property Value—The amount of a property's value that is subject to be taxed, as determined by the assessor. To determine the assessed value, the property tax value (PTV) is multiplied by the appropriate assessment ratio as noted below.

- Owner-occupied and agricultural properties are assessed at 4 percent of their appraised value.
- Commercial and non-owner-occupied residential properties are assessed at 6 percent of their appraised value.
- Manufacturing properties are assessed at 10.5 percent of the appraised value (determined by the S.C. Department of Revenue).

Assessment—The official act of discovering, listing, and appraising property, usually by an assessor.

Assessment Ratio—The ratio applied to the appraised value of property depending on the use of the property. Assessment ratio qualifications are set forth by state law. Real property (excluding manufacturing and utility property) is assessed in South Carolina at either a 4 percent or 6 percent ratio.

Capped Value--See Property Tax Value.

Coefficient of Dispersion (COD)—The coefficient of dispersion is commonly used to measure horizontal uniformity. It calculates the variation in appraisal/sales ratios around the measure of central tendency by computing the variation of each parcel's appraisal/sales ratio from the median ratio and then expressing it as a percent of the median ratio.

Fair Market Value (FMV) —Value as defined by §12-37-930 which states that "All property must be valued for taxation at its true value in money, which in all cases is the price that the property would bring following reasonable exposure to the market, where both the seller and the buyer are willing, are not acting under compulsion, and are reasonably well informed of the uses and purposes for which it is adapted and for which it is capable of being used."

Horizontal Equity— Horizontal equity is the principle that people in similar circumstances should be treated the same by the tax system. In the context of the property tax, horizontal equity means that people with properties of similar value should pay similar property taxes. For example, in the context of horizontal equity, if two houses are each valued at \$100,000, they should pay the same property tax, regardless if one is owner-occupied and the other is non-owner-occupied. (See discussion of Coefficient of Dispersion)

Market Value—The amount that property can reasonably be expected to sell for on the open market with a willing buyer and a willing seller.

Millage Rate—The number of mills levied in order to meet the budget of a school district, county, city, or other political subdivision. One mill equals 1/1000 of a dollar or 1/10 of a cent. If the tax rate is 501 mills, multiply .501 by the assessed value to determine the amount of property tax due.

O & M Exemption—The removal of the school operation portion of a primary homeowner's property tax bill. O & M is shorthand for "operations and maintenance."

Owner-occupied---In South Carolina, often used interchangeably with "primary residence." Otherwise, this term means "used as a dwelling by the owner." Outside of South Carolina, "owner-occupied" is not synonymous with "primary residence" or the legal term for primary residence which is "domicile."

Personal Property—All things other than real estate which have value such as cars, trucks, boats, motorcycles, and airplanes. Also, items used in a business such as furniture, fixtures, and equipment.

Price Related Differential (PRD)—A statistic used to measure vertical uniformity of appraisals. It is calculated by dividing the mean appraisal/sales ratio by the aggregate ratio for an entire group of properties.

Primary residence---That particular locality where a person is legally deemed to have his or her true home or place of abode. A person always has one, and only one, primary residence. Primary residence is synonymous with the legal term "domicile."

Property Tax Value (PTV) or Capped Value—"Each political subdivision shall value real property by a method in which the value of each parcel of real property, adjusted for improvements and losses, does not increase more than fifteen percent every five years unless an assessable transfer of interest occurs." Property Tax Value, according to \$12-37-3155 means fair market value as it may be adjusted downward to reflect the limit imposed pursuant to Section 12-37-3140(B).

Reassessment—Process required by state law to determine the change in market value of property over a certain period of time in order to provide equity among taxpayers. Reassessment is a revaluation of real estate. Presently South Carolina state law requires each county to reassess every five years.

Real Property—All land and the buildings, structures, and improvements on that land.

Sales Ratio Study—A study of the relationship between appraised values and sales values. These studies focus on the level and uniformity of appraisals.

Tax Bill Number—A "Bill Number" identifies an individual tax bill issued for each Tax Year. The "Bill Number" is used to link the billing and payment records for each tax bill. The "Bill Number" appears twice on a tax bill: on the third line of the information listed at the top right corner of the bill, and at the left side of the third line down from the perforation (detach line) at the bottom of the bill.

Tax Year—The year that the tax bill is received, payable by January 15 of the next year.

TMS (Tax Map System), TMS—The "TMS" number links ownership and map location information. This information is maintained by the county assessor's office. This includes "tax maps" that show all the

parcels of land in the county, each labeled with its own TMS number that links to current ownership information for each parcel.

Vertical Equity—Vertical equity, in the context of the property tax, means that high- and low-valued properties should be appraised in the same relationship to actual sales prices. To the extent appraisal/sales ratios for high- and low-valued properties are not the same, vertical equity is undermined. (See discussion of Price Related Differential.)

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Individuals Interviewed

Adkins, Deborah, Real Property Services Manager, Greenville Assessor Office Barfield, James, Assessor, Sumter County Assessor's Office Berger, Anna, Director of Research and Training, SC Association of Counties Boheler, Amy, Auditor, York County Auditor's Office Brown, Ryan, Chief Communications Officer, SC Department of Education Christ, Brock, Tax Director, Michelin North America Cleland, Meredith, Deputy Director, Government Services Division, SC Department of Revenue Cone, Thomas, Chief Counsel, SC House of Representatives Dawkins, Hunter, Director of Development, Natural Resources Division, Johnson Development Associates Epps, James, Superintendent, Fort Mill School District Farris, Mark, President & CEO, Greenville Area Development Corporation Glennon, Toy, Assessor, Charleston County Assessor's Office Hardin, Edgar, Deputy Assessor, York County Assessor's Office Hottel, Donald, Director of Research, SC House of Representatives Jantzen, Richard, Assessor, York County Assessor's Office Johnston, Robert, Chief Strategy Officer, The InterTech Group Jolliff, Lisa, Division Manager, Fiscal Analysis, SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office Kibler, H. Haskell, Asset Manager, Wilson Kibler Commercial Real Estate Kinsey, Bryan, Assistant Director, Tennessee Comptroller's Division of Property Assessments Lockwood, David, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Colliers International Ludwig, Benjamin, Director of Community Relations and Economic Development, Southern Current Maybank, Burnet, Tax Attorney, Nexsen Pruet McDonald, Elizabeth, Assessor, Richland County Assessor's Office McLean, James, Assessor, Orangeburg County Assessor's Office Miller, Mary Katherine, Property Tax Specialist, SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office Mishoe, Michelle, FILOT Advisor, Property Division, SC Department of Revenue Monroe, Cooper, Tax Director, Duke Energy Morrell, Real Estate Broker, Stephen Cooley Real Estate Group Paradice, William, Local Government Services Supervisor, Property Division, SC Department of Revenue Parlock, Paul, Senior Tax Consultant, Dominion Energy Phibbs, Bethany, Executive Director, SC Association of School Administrators Powell, Allyn, Director of Budget Development, Fiscal Analysis Division, SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office Rhodes, Joshua, Deputy General Counsel, SC Association of Counties Richardson, Wayne, Deputy Auditor, Richland County Auditor's Office Roscoe, Lawrence, Assessor, Horry County Assessor's Office Rouse, Harvey, Assessor, Allendale County Assessor's Office Ruple, Amelia Furr, Training and Research Coordinator, Local Government Services, SC Department of Revenue Russell, Jean, External Tax Policy Advocate, AT&T Smith, Sandra, Executive Director, SC Association of School Business Officials Smoak, Nancy, Lower State Property Field Supervisor, Property Division, SC Department of Revenue

Sosebee, Jane, South Carolina President, AT&T

Spinks, Steven, Chief Executive Officer, The Spinx Company Stokes, Lisa T., Special Projects Coordinator, Local Government Services, SC Department of Revenue Swenson, David, Director, York County Economic Development Tecklenburg, Peter, Auditor, Charleston Auditor's Office Turkopuls, Senior Research Associate, SC Association of Counties Ulbrich, Holley, Professor Emerita of Economics, Clemson University Wells, Tigerron, Director of Governmental Affairs, SC Municipal Association Williams, William, President & and CEO, Economic Development Partnership Winslow, Timothy, Executive Director-Elect, SC Association of Counties Yarborough, Jonathan, Director of Governmental Affairs and Economic Development, Dominion Energy

Authors

Alvayay Torrejón, Camila, Graduate Research Assistant, Michigan State University

Anderson, John E., Baird Family Professor of Economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Bell, Michael, President, MEB Associates, Inc.; Research Professor, George Washington Institute of Public Policy, George Washington University

Kenyon, Daphne A., Resident Fellow in Tax Policy, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

Merriman, David, James J. Stukel Presidential Professor, Department of Public Administration and Institute of Government and Public Affairs, University of Illinois

Munteanu, Semida, Associate Director of Tax Policy and International Initiatives, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

Paquin, Bethany P., Senior Research Analyst, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

Shute, Alannah M., Research Assistant, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

Skidmore, Mark, Professor and Morris Chair in State and Local Government Finance and Policy, Michigan State University

Reviewers

Bell, Michael, President, MEB Associates, Inc.; Research Professor, George Washington Institute of Public Policy, George Washington University

Harpel, Ellen, Founder and CEO, Smart Incentives

- Langley, Adam, Associate Director of Tax Policy and Data Initiatives, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
- Rakow, Ronald, Fellow, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy; Former Commissioner, City of Boston Assessing Department
- Reschovsky, Andrew, Professor Emeritus of Public Affairs and Applied Economics, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Ullrich, Laura, Regional Economist, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond
- Youngman, Joan, Senior Fellow and Chair, Department of Valuation and Taxation, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy