



**2020**

**Property Assessment Appeal Guide  
for Wisconsin Real Property Owners**

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## I. Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to help property owners in Wisconsin understand how to appeal an assessed value.

## II. Property Taxes and Property Assessments

### A. Property taxes

#### Property taxes fund functions of government and education, including:

- Municipalities
- Counties
- Public Schools
- Technical Colleges
- State Reforestation
- Special Districts (sewer and lake rehabilitation)

### B. Property assessments

Property assessments are the values the assessor places on taxable real and personal property. An assessment determines the portion of property tax that is due from the property.

#### 1. Property assessments are based on:

- Amount a typical purchaser would pay for the property under ordinary circumstances. An exception is agricultural property that is assessed based on its value in an agricultural use
- **Note:** Assessments should be uniform "at the full value which could ordinarily be obtained therefore at private sale" ([sec. 70.32, Wis. Stats.](#)). This is considered full value.

#### 2. Classes of property are assessed at different values

##### 100 percent of full value

- Residential
- Commercial
- Manufacturing (state-assessed)
- Productive forest land
- Other (farm buildings and farm sites)
- Personal property

##### 50 percent of full value

- Undeveloped land
- Agricultural forest land

##### Use-value

- Agricultural land

## III. Assessment Process

### A. Municipal assessor is responsible for the assessment process

1. **Discover** – all real and personal property is subject to tax unless exempted by law
2. **List** – property characteristics determine value
3. **Value** – determine the value subject to property tax

### B. Assessment classification

State law requires the assessor to classify land on the basis of use. Classification is important since it affects the assessed value.

**Drainage districts** – beginning with assessments as of January 1, 2017, the [2017 Wisconsin Act 115](#) created the following provision for drainage district corridors: "...the assessor shall assess the land within a district corridor described under s. 88.74 in the same class under sub. (2)(a) as the land adjoining the corridor, if the adjoining land and the land within the corridor are owned by the same person."

Drainage districts are local governmental entities organized under a county drainage board for the primary purpose of draining lands for agriculture. A drainage district establishes a legal mechanism for managing drains and related facilities to ensure reliable drainage. Landowners who benefit from drainage must pay assessments to cover the cost of constructing, maintaining, and repairing district drains. Of the 72 counties in Wisconsin, 31 of them contain one or more drainage districts and can be located on an interactive map on the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection website: [Wisconsin Drainage Districts](#).

### Eight statutory classifications for real property

#### 1. Residential (Class 1) – [sec. 70.32\(2\)\(c\)3., Wis. Stats.](#)

- Any parcel or part of a parcel of untilled land that is not suitable for the production of row crops, on which a dwelling or other form of human abode is located
- Vacant land where the most likely use would be for residential development
- Mobile homes assessed as real property are classified as residential
- Apartment buildings of up to three units are also classified as residential

#### 2. Commercial (Class 2)

- Land and improvements primarily devoted to buying and reselling goods
- Includes the providing of services in support of residential, agricultural, manufacturing, and forest uses

#### 3. Manufacturing (Class 3)

- State law ([sec. 70.995, Wis. Stats.](#)), provides for the state assessment of manufacturing property
- Contact the [manufacturing district office](#) for information on qualifying uses

#### 4. Agricultural (Class 4)

- [Sec. 70.32\(2\)\(c\)1g., Wis. Stats.](#), defines agricultural as "land, exclusive of buildings and improvements, which is devoted primarily to agricultural use"
- Land devoted primarily to the production of crops (excluding forestry operations) or the keeping, grazing, or feeding of livestock
- Buildings and dwellings associated with growing, production, and associated services enumerated above are classified as "Other" (Class 7)
- [Agricultural Assessment Guide for Wisconsin Property Owners](#) provides classification examples

## 5. Undeveloped (Class 5) – [sec. 70.32\(2\)\(c\)4., Wis. Stats.](#)

- Areas commonly called marshes, swamps, thickets, bogs, or wet meadows
- Fallow tillable land (assuming agricultural use is the land's highest and best use)
- Road right of way, ponds, depleted gravel pits
- Land because of soil or site conditions is not producing or capable of producing commercial forest products

## 6. Agricultural forest (Class 5m)

- [Sec. 70.32\(2\)\(c\)1d, Wis. Stats.](#), defines agricultural forest as land that is producing or is capable of producing commercial forest products, if the land satisfies any of the following:
  - » The forest land is contiguous to a parcel that has been classified in whole as agricultural land. The forest land and the contiguous agricultural parcel must have the same owner. Contiguous includes separated only by a road.
  - » The forest land is located on a parcel that contains agricultural land for the January 1, 2004 assessment, and on January 1 of the current assessment year
  - » The forest land is located on a parcel where at least 50 percent of the acreage was converted to agricultural land for the January 1, 2005, assessment year or thereafter
- [Agricultural Assessment Guide for Wisconsin Property Owners](#) provides classification examples

## 7. Productive forest land (Class 6) – [sec. 70.32\(2\)\(c\)2., Wis. Stats.](#)

- Land, which is producing, or capable of producing commercial forest products. Forest land can no longer include buildings and improvements.
- Forested areas which are being managed or set aside to grow tree crops for "industrial wood" or to obtain tree products such as sap, bark, or seeds
- Forested areas with no commercial use made of the trees, including cutover
- Cherry orchards, apple orchards, and Christmas tree plantations are classified as agricultural property
- Lands designated Forest Crop Land and Managed Forest Land by the Department of Natural Resources are entered separately in the assessment roll
- Improvements on Forest Crop Lands and Managed Forest Land are to be listed as personal property (secs. [77.04\(1\)](#), and [77.84](#), Wis. Stats.)
- Forested areas primarily held for hunting, trapping, or in the operation of game preserves, should be classified as forest unless clearly operated as a commercial enterprise or exempt

## 8. Other (Class 7) – [sec. 70.32\(2\)\(c\)1m., Wis. Stats.](#)

Buildings and improvements on a farm (ex: houses, barns, and silos, along with the land necessary for their location and convenience)

## IV. Municipal Assessor

You (the owner) must contact the municipal assessor for your current assessment and classification. DOR publishes the name of each municipality's [assessor and contact information](#). Current year assessments are typically available before the fourth Monday in April. The assessor sends notification to each owner of real property, or an owner with any improvements taxed as personal property, whose total assessment changed from the previous year. The assessor is not required to provide notice if land is classified as agricultural land, as defined in [sec. 70.32\(2\)\(c\)1g. Wis. Stats.](#), for the current year and previous year and the difference between the assessments is \$500 or less. If you do not receive a notice, it does not invalidate the assessment.

Under state law ([sec. 70.365, Wis. Stats.](#)), the notice must be in writing and mailed at least 15 days (30 days in revaluation years) before the Board of Review (BOR) meeting (or meeting of the Board of Assessors (BOA) if one exists). The notice contains the amount of the changed assessment and the time, date, and place of the local BOR (or BOA) meeting. The notice includes information on how to appeal the assessment.

**Note:** The notice requirement does not apply to personal property.

### A. Assessment questions

#### Contact your assessor if you have questions about your assessment

- When you meet with your assessor, review your property records and discuss how your assessment was made
- Assessors maintain a record of your property, which includes a physical description and information on how your assessment was developed
- These property records are considered open records, which means the public has the right to inspect them. This right does not include information gathered under a pledge of confidentiality or where access is restricted by law, such as personal property returns
- You may also view the records for other properties
- Discussing your assessment with the assessor may eliminate the need for a formal appeal to the BOR

### B. Open Book

#### Attend the Open Book if you are unable to meet with your assessor – highly recommended

- Open Book refers to a period of time (before BOR begins) when the completed assessment roll is open for examination
- This period of time is an opportunity to discuss your property value with the assessor and provide reason for changing the value, if appropriate
- Assessor must be present for at least two hours while the assessment roll is open
- State law ([sec. 70.45, Wis. Stats.](#)), requires the municipal clerk (or commissioner of assessments in first class cities) to publish or post a notice specifying the open book date(s) at least 15 days (30 days in revaluation years) before the first day the assessment roll is open for examination
- Instructional materials on appealing your assessment to the BOR should be available at the Open Book
- At Open Book, the assessor is allowed to make any changes that are necessary to perfect the assessment roll
- When Open Book ends, any changes to the assessment roll (your property value) requires formal process in front of the Board of Review or circuit court
- Board of Review starts a minimum of seven days after the assessment roll is open for examination (open book) under state law (sec. 70.45, Wis. Stats.) ([sec. 70.47\(1\), Wis. Stats.](#))

## C. View of property

[2017 Act 68](#) allows the BOR to deny a hearing to a property owner who does not allow the assessor to complete an exterior view. However, the Wisconsin Supreme Court expressed due process concerns regarding a similarly worded statute in *Milewski v. Town of Dover*, 2017 WI 79, 377 Wis. 2d 38, 899 N.W.2d 303. It is DOR's recommendation to allow a BOR hearing even if the property owner denied an interior or exterior view. The lack of access to view, and the credibility of evidence offered can be managed as an evidentiary issue at a BOR hearing, rather than denying access to the BOR.

## V. Board of Review (BOR)

### A. BOR members

The BOR consists of municipal officials and residents, or a combination of the two. In first class cities and in all other towns, cities and villages who pass an ordinance to that effect, the BOR may consist of five to nine residents of the town, city or village. In most cases, the municipal clerk also functions as the BOR clerk.

### B. BOR details

- 1. Holding a BOR** – a BOR cannot be held unless it includes at least one voting member who has attended a DOR approved training session for BOR members within the two years before the BOR's first meeting. The BOR operates like a court; it hears evidence from you and the assessor before making a decision. The BOR can act only on sworn evidence presented at the hearing.
- 2. BOR must correct any assessment errors** – the BOR examines the roll and corrects all apparent errors in descriptions or calculations, and adds any omitted property to the roll. The BOR must notify the property owners concerned and hold hearings before omitted property can be added to the assessment roll and before any other lawful changes can be made.
- 3. BOR cannot address tax issues** – the BOR can only hear evidence relating to the assessment or value of your property. The BOR will not hear evidence or act if your concern is that your taxes are too high.
- 4. BOR can question accuracy of a property assessment** – state law makes no provision for you to appeal another individual's property assessment. However, if the BOR has reason to question the accuracy of a property assessment, which is not appealed, the BOR has the authority to schedule a hearing to review the assessment. The BOR must notify the owner or agent of its intent to review the assessment, and provide the date, time and place of the hearing. The hearing must be conducted according to the procedure established in state law ([sec. 70.47\(8\), Wis. Stats.](#)). The BOR may then adjust the assessment based on the evidence before them.
- 5. BOR is required by law to meet** – during the 45-day period beginning with the fourth Monday in April, but no sooner than seven days after Open Book. If the assessment roll is not completed, the BOR will adjourn to some future date. At least 15 days (30 days in revaluation years) before the first meeting of the BOR, the BOR's clerk must publish a class 1 notice; post a notice in at least three public places and place a notice on the door of the town, village or city hall announcing the time and place of the first meeting. These notices must also contain the requirements for objecting to an assessment under state law ([sec. 70.47 \(7\) \(aa\) and \(ac\) to \(af\), Wis. Stats.](#)).
- 6. Notice of Changed Assessment** – if you receive a Notice of Changed Assessment, the time, date and place of the BOR meeting will be printed on it. Contact your municipal clerk to confirm when the BOR will be held.



**7. BOR can waive the BOR hearing** – state law allows the BOR to waive the BOR hearing and allow the property owner to appeal directly to the circuit court. The BOR determines whether it will waive the BOR hearing. Contact the municipal clerk if you have an interest with an appeal directly to the circuit court.

**Note:** You cannot appeal your assessment to DOR under state law ([sec. 70.85, Wis. Stats.](#)) if the BOR waives the BOR hearing.

## C. Removal of a BOR member

### 1. Objector can remove a BOR member (except in First and Second class cities), if either of these conditions apply:

- Person objecting to his/her assessment requests the removal of a BOR member for any reason – only one member may be removed for this reason
- Member must show bias or prejudice

### 2. Request to remove a BOR member(s) must meet the following requirements:

- Request must be made at:
  - » The time the objector provides his/her written or oral notice of intent to file an objection
  - » At least 48 hours before the first scheduled BOR meeting or at least 48 hours before the objection is heard if the BOR waived the 48-hour notice requirement
- Notice must identify the member(s) to be removed
- Objector must submit an affidavit stating the objector believes the member has a bias or prejudice and must include the nature of the bias or prejudice

**Note:** BOR members may be removed for other reasons:

- » A municipality must remove a BOR member who has a conflict of interest under an ordinance of the municipality in regard to the objection
- » Any BOR member who would violate the code of ethics for local government officials by hearing an objection, under state law ([sec. 19.59, Wis. Stats.](#)), shall recuse himself or herself from the hearing

## D. Review of assessment by BOR

### 1. To schedule a hearing at the BOR, you must do the following:

- Provide written or oral notice of your intent to file an objection to the BOR clerk
  - » Notice of intent to file an objection must be made at least 48 hours before the BOR's first scheduled meeting
- File an objection form with the BOR clerk during the first two hours of the BOR's first scheduled meeting
  - » Obtain an objection form from your municipal clerk or use the [form](#) in this guide
  - » You must file a completed objection form or the BOR may refuse to act on your appeal

### 2. Waiving the 48-hour filing deadline

- BOR **may** waive the 48-hour filing deadline for the notice of intent. As the property owner, you must show good cause and submit a written objection within the first two hours of the BOR's first scheduled meeting
- A property owner may submit proof of extraordinary circumstances (for failing to meet the 48-hour notice and failing to appear during the first two hours of the first scheduled meeting) up until the end of the fifth day of the BOR session
- It is recommended that you file the notice of intent to an objection with the clerk in writing at least 48 hours before the BOR's first meeting
- You must object to the total value of the property. If the property has an improvement, you cannot object to only the land value or only the improvement value.



## E. Appealing classification: agricultural, undeveloped or agricultural forest land

Classification can impact the assessed value of your property. Contact the municipal assessor before appealing to the BOR and arrange to review the assessment records (often referred to as the open book) and discuss the classification. If you are not satisfied with the classification of your land, you can appeal to the BOR.

### 1. Agricultural land

- a. **Use-value assessment** – assessed value of agricultural land is based on its use in agriculture, rather than its fair market value. This valuation standard is referred to as use-value assessment.
- b. **DOR publishes Use-value Guidelines** – for agricultural land in Wisconsin. Assessors use the values to calculate assessments for agricultural land.
- c. **Agricultural land** – is defined in state law ([sec. 70.32\(2\)\(c\)1g, Wis. Stats.](#)), as "land exclusive of buildings and improvements and the land necessary for their location and convenience that is devoted primarily to agricultural use as defined by rule." Buildings and improvements on a farm (ex: barns, houses, and silos, together with the land necessary for their location and convenience) are separately classified and continue to be assessed at fair market value.
- d. **Verify land use** – if you are appealing the classification of your land that was in agricultural use during the prior year, but not classified as agricultural land for assessment purposes, you should be prepared to present evidence to the assessor or BOR verifying its use in agriculture.
- e. **Evidence of agricultural use may include** – information demonstrating a devotion primarily to a qualifying agricultural use. At the open book and BOR, the assessor should assist the property owner and/or BOR members with the calculations required to determine the use-value of any parcel whose classification in a non-agricultural class is challenged.
- f. **Classification examples** – review the [Agricultural Assessment Guide for Wisconsin Property Owners](#) for classification examples

### 2. Agricultural forest and undeveloped land

- An appeal of agricultural forest or undeveloped land should demonstrate how the land meets the appropriate definition under state law ([sec. 70.32\(2\), Wis. Stats.](#))
- **Note:** Residential class includes most property where the predominant use is for living purposes. It also includes vacant land where the most likely use would be residential development.

## F. Appearance at the BOR

Under state law ([sec. 70.47\(8\)\(i\), Wis. Stats.](#)), the assessor is presumed correct. This means that unless you present convincing evidence proving the assessor's value is wrong, your assessment will not be changed. You cannot appear before the BOR and simply state your assessment is too high. You must present evidence to support your opinion of the value provided on the Objection Form for Real Property Assessment.

It is important to appear at the BOR. Most appeal methods require that you first appear at the BOR. You may designate a personal representative to appear before the BOR on your behalf.

### Appearance details

1. **BOR schedules a time for hearing objections** – during the first two hours of its first meeting
2. **Notices are given to the property owner and assessor** – at least 48 hours before an objection hearing. The property owner and assessor may agree to waive the 48-hour notice requirement.
3. **If you cannot attend the BOR hearing** – you can arrange for a representative to appear on your behalf. Attach a completed Agent Authorization Form to your completed objection form.

4. **If you are sick or disabled** – the BOR can hear your testimony by telephone if you provide a letter from a physician, surgeon or osteopath confirming the condition
5. **By telephone** – state law allows the BOR to accept sworn written statements or testimony by telephone from property owners. The BOR determines whether it will accept information in writing or over the phone. Contact the municipal clerk to determine if the BOR will accept your information in writing or over the phone.

## G. Evidence to present to the BOR

### 1. Value estimate

Under state law ([sec. 70.47\(7\)\(ae\), Wis. Stats.](#)), if you are appealing an assessment, you must provide the BOR (in writing) with a value estimate of the land and all improvements, and specify the information you used to arrive at that estimate. The proceedings are recorded by a stenographer or a recording device. Evidence is presented through sworn testimony. This means that if you have an appraisal of your property, the appraiser should appear before the BOR to present the appraisal and answer questions. It is important for the pertinent appraisal facts to be part of the record. Be sure to read written evidence into the record, or attach it to the Objection Form for Real Property Assessment.

### 2. Evidence

- At the BOR hearing, you should present all the information you believe affects your property's value
- BOR allows time for both the property owner and assessor to present information. During and after your presentation, BOR members may ask questions to ensure the evidence and record are understandable.
- **Note:** If you disagree with the BOR's decision and appeal the decision to the circuit court, you cannot introduce new evidence to the court. The court will make its decision based on the record at the BOR.

### 3. Market value

#### a. Recent arm's length

Under state law the best indicator of market value is a recent arm's-length sale of a property, provided it is in line with recent arm's-length sales of reasonably comparable property.

- Sales should be recent – those several years old may not reflect current market conditions
- Sales must be arm's-length – there should be no relationship between the buyer and seller affecting the sales price (ex: sales between relatives are typically not arm's-length sales)
- Buyer and seller are typically motivated
- Both parties are well informed or well advised, and are acting in what they consider their own best interests
- Reasonable time is allowed for exposure in the open market
- Payment is made in terms of cash in U.S. dollars or in terms of comparable financial arrangements
- Price represents the normal consideration for the property sold unaffected by special or creative financing or sales concessions granted by anyone associated with the sale

#### b. Comparable property – recent arm's length

If you did not recently purchase the property, the next best evidence is recent arm's-length sales of reasonably comparable property.

- Comparable properties are those similar to your property in location, style, age, size and other features
- **Example:** Assume you own a ranch home built in 1962 that has 1,200 square feet, three bedrooms, one full bath and one half bath, a two car garage, and is on a level 7,200 square foot lot
  - » You should try to find recent arm's-length sales of property in your area with the same or similar features
  - » The more features of the sale properties that are the same as your property, the stronger the indication that these sales prices represent your home's market value
- Assessor should be able to tell you what comparable sales he/she used to determine the market value of your property

## c. No recent arm’s-length comparable sales

- When there are no recent arm’s-length comparable sales, the value may be estimated using other available information. This may include sales of less comparable properties, asking prices, cost and income approaches to value, options to purchase, recent appraisals of your property, and insurance estimates.

## H. Witnesses/assessor

- Property owner may have witnesses or experts provide sworn testimony on his/her behalf
- Witnesses and experts must be prepared to provide documentation of their testimony
- After you present your evidence and answer any questions, it is the assessor’s turn to present evidence. The assessor presents evidence to support the assessment and answers questions from BOR members. You will also have an opportunity to ask the assessor questions.

## I. BOR decision

- After the BOR hears all the evidence, it will discuss the issue and reach a decision. This discussion is open to the public. The discussion may occur after each objection is heard, after all objections are heard, or periodically when the BOR is open.
- Decisions are made with a roll call vote by a simple BOR majority
- Before adjourning, the clerk must provide you with written notice of the decision. The notice:
  - » May be given to you (if you are present) or mailed to you, return receipt required
  - » Includes your rights to appeal the BOR’s decision
- Contact the BOR clerk if you do not receive a notice after the final adjournment of the BOR. **Note:** A sample Notice of Board of Review Determination is at the end of this guide (page 19).

## VI. Board of Assessors (BOA)

### A. Cities with a BOA

Most Wisconsin cities do not have a BOA. You should call the city assessor or clerk if you are not certain whether your municipality has a BOA.

- **Only first class cities** (Milwaukee) – are required to have a BOA
- **Second class cities** – may decide to provide a BOA

### B. BOA information

- BOA consists of members of the assessor’s staff
- BOA investigates assessment complaints
- BOA is an intermediate step in the appeal process created to ease the burden on the BOR. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the BOA may review the assessor’s records, talk to you directly and inspect your property.
- You are required to complete an [Objection Form for Real Property Assessment](#) to initiate a BOA review. You must answer all the questions on the form and provide all the information relating to the property’s value, including:
  - » Purchase price of your property
  - » Your opinion of market value
  - » Basis for your opinion

- BOA will notify you of its decision. The time period required for you to receive notification will vary depending on the workload. Once you receive notification, you have 10 days to appear at the Board of Review (BOR). As previously stated, you must complete a Board of Review Objection Form before appearing at the BOR.
- If your municipality does not have a BOA and you feel your assessment is incorrect, your formal appeal begins with the BOR

## VII. Appeal of BOR Determination

### Two ways to appeal a BOR determination

1. Appeal to the circuit court under state law ([sec. 70.47\(13\), Wis. Stats.](#))
2. Appeal to Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR)
  - Individual assessments are appealed under [sec. 70.85, Wis. Stats.](#)
  - Group appeals are made under [sec. 70.75, Wis. Stats.](#)

#### 1. Circuit Court

One method of appealing a BOR decision is appealing to the circuit court by an action for certiorari. Certiorari is the name given to certain appellate proceedings for reexamination of actions of an administrative body (ex: BOR or DOR). It requires filing documents prescribed by the circuit court and paying a filing fee (\$129.50). The circuit court reviews the BOR record. There is no trial for this appeal to the circuit court. There may not even be a hearing. The circuit court solely reviews the BOR record. No new evidence may be introduced. It is important to present all evidence at the BOR hearing.

You must file an appeal with the circuit court within 90 days after receipt of the determination notice (decision) from the BOR. In the appeal, you must clearly state the improper action of the BOR (ex: The BOR failed to consider the recent arm's-length sale of your property).

#### There are several limits on the circuit court's review of the BOR

- a. Circuit court must presume rightful action by the BOR. The valuation placed on the property is presumed correct and binding on the BOR in the absence of evidence showing it to be incorrect.
- b. BOR's determination will be upheld if there is any substantial basis for it
- c. If the taxpayer pursues certiorari review, the circuit court's review is limited solely to review of the BOR record. The circuit court cannot conduct its own factual inquiry or admit any new evidence. On certiorari review, the circuit court can consider "(1) whether the BOR's acted within its jurisdiction; (2) whether the BOR acted according to law; (3) whether the BOR's action was arbitrary, oppressive or unreasonable, representing its will rather than its judgment; and (4) whether the evidence was such that the BOR might reasonably make the order or determination in question." (see *Waste Management of Wisconsin Inc. v. Kenosha County Board of Review*, 184 Wis. 2d 541 (1994))

If the circuit court determines the BOR made an error, it may remand the decision to the BOR and retain jurisdiction until the court's orders are followed.

## 2. Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR)

You may file an appeal to DOR under state law ([sec. 70.85, Wis. Stats.](#)), for the current year only, and only if you contested the property assessment for that year to the BOR.

### a. Appealing a BOR decision under state law (sec. 70.85, Wis. Stats.)

- DOR must receive a written complaint (letter) within 20 days after delivery of the BOR determination or within 30 days after the mailing date on the clerk's affidavit (if there is no return receipt). This date is specified in the BOR Clerk's affidavit according to state law ([sec. 70.47\(12\), Wis. Stats.](#)).
- This appeal process requires a non-refundable \$100 filing fee
- It is not available for properties with a fair market value over \$1 million or properties located in first class cities (Milwaukee)
- DOR may revalue the property any time before November 1 of the assessment year or within 60 days after receiving the appeal, whichever is later. If adjusted, the value is substituted for the original value and taxes are paid accordingly.

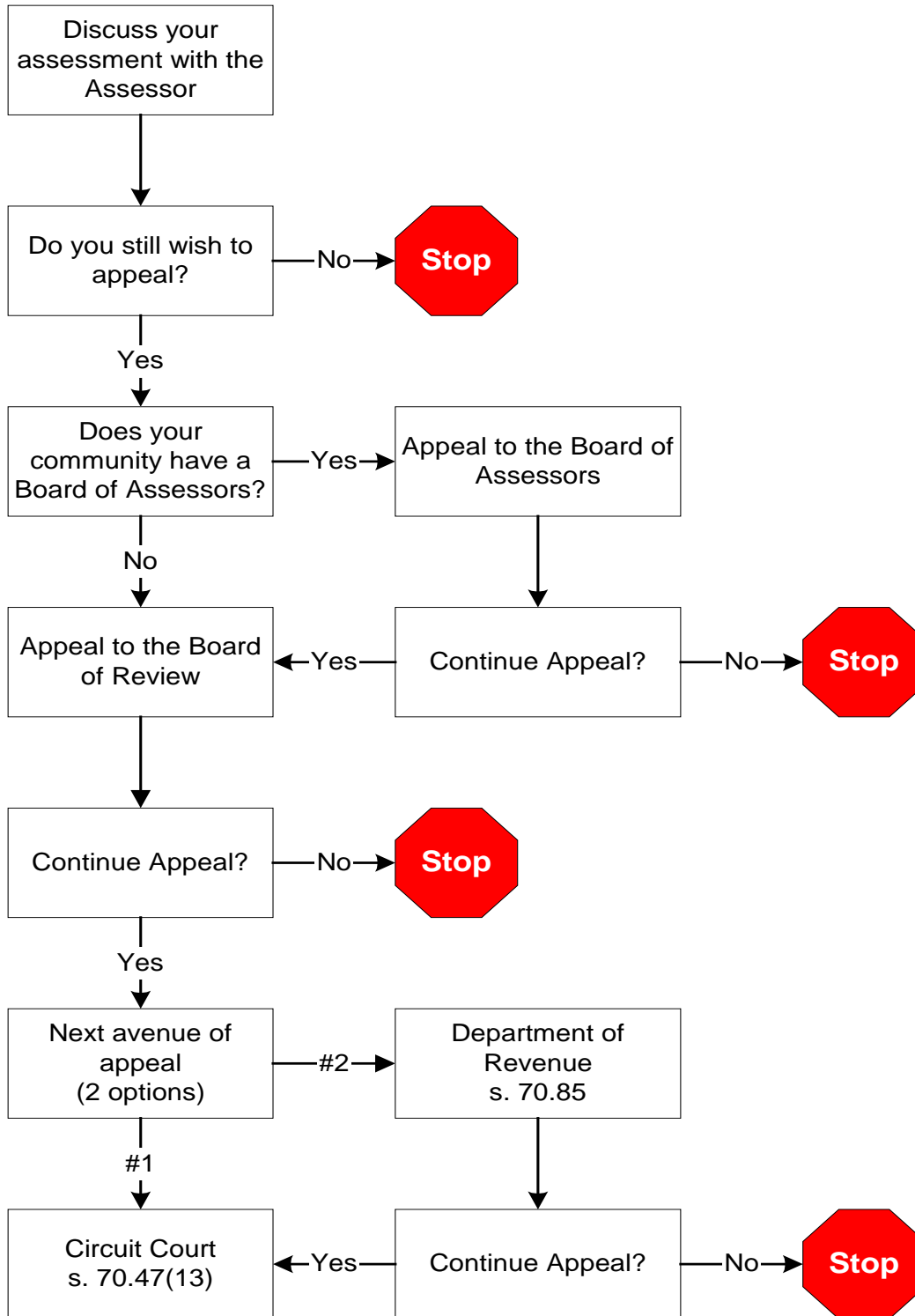
### b. Submit complaint letter to DOR

- State that letter is an appeal to DOR under state law (sec. 70.85, Wis. Stats.)
- Include name of the county and municipality (township, village, city) where the property is located
- Include your name, mailing address and phone number
- \$100 filing fee – make check payable to the "Wisconsin Department of Revenue"
- Send to the appropriate [DOR Equalization Bureau District Office](#)

### c. DOR appeal information

- Both real and personal property may be appealed to DOR
- **10 percent threshold** – DOR will not change an assessment determined to be within 10 percent of the general assessment level of all other property in the municipality
- DOR will hold an informal conference with the property owner and the assessor where each may present evidence:
  - » If DOR feels adequate evidence was presented during the conference, it will make a decision
  - » If DOR does not feel it has adequate evidence, DOR will investigate the appeal. Once the investigation is completed, DOR will make a decision.
- DOR may revalue the property any time before November 1 of the assessment year or within 60 days after receiving the appeal, whichever is later. If adjusted, the value is substituted for the original value and taxes paid accordingly.
- DOR's decision may be appealed by an action for certiorari in the circuit court of the county where the property is located

## d. Flowchart of the assessment appeal process



## VIII. Reassessment

### Reassessment under [sec. 70.75, Wis. Stats.](#)

Under state law (sec. 70.75, Wis. Stats.), (except in first class cities (Milwaukee)), the owners of at least 5 percent of the assessed value of all property in the municipality may submit a written petition to DOR for a reassessment of the municipality. The petition's basis must be that the municipality's property assessment is not in compliance with the law and that the public interest will be promoted by a reassessment. A petition for reassessment may be obtained from the Equalization Bureau District Supervisor.

#### Reassessment details

For a reassessment, the assessment roll in question would be completely redone. The property owners do not have to appear at the BOR to petition for a reassessment.

DOR holds a public hearing once a petition is verified to contain at least 5 percent of the assessed value of all property in the municipality. The public hearing provides property owners and municipal officials an opportunity to present evidence for or against a reassessment.

#### DOR then conducts an investigation of the assessment and can:

- Order a reassessment
- Order special supervision of succeeding assessments
- Deny the petition
- Dismiss the petition

**Note:** All costs incurred by DOR are charged back to the municipality.

## IX. Tax Appeals

### Municipality

#### 1. Excessive assessment claim, state law ([sec. 74.37, Wis. Stats.](#))

- Under state law (sec. 74.37, Wis. Stats.), you can file a claim to recover the amount of general property tax imposed because the assessment of the property was excessive
- To file a claim on excessive assessment, you must first appeal to the BOR and have not appealed the board's decision to the circuit court or to DOR (unless notice, under [sec. 70.365, Wis. Stats.](#), was not given). The claim must be filed by January 31 of the year in which the tax is payable.

#### Claim on excessive assessment must:

- Be in writing
- State the alleged circumstances for the claim
- State the amount of the claim
- Be signed by the claimant or the claimant's agent
- Be served to the municipal clerk

A claim on excessive assessment cannot be filed if the BOR's determination was appealed to DOR or to the circuit court. No claim may be made unless the tax is timely paid.



## 2. Unlawful tax (sec. 74.35, Wis. Stats.)

The property owner does not need to appear at the BOR to appeal. State law (sec. 74.35, Wis. Stats.), provides for the recovery of unlawful taxes when one or more of the following errors are made:

- Clerical error made in the property's description or in the tax calculation
- Assessment included real property improvements that did not exist on the assessment date (January 1)
- Property was exempt from taxation
- Property was not located in the municipality
- Double assessment was made
- Arithmetic, transpositional or similar error occurred

**Note:** An "unlawful tax" does not include judgment questions about the valuation. Valuation issues must be addressed through the BOR appeal process.

### Claim for recovery of unlawful taxes must:

- Be in writing
- State the alleged circumstances for the claim
- State the amount of the claim
- Be signed by the claimant or the claimant's agent
- Be served to the municipal clerk

A claim for the recovery of unlawful taxes paid to the wrong municipality must be filed within two years after the last date specified for timely payment of the tax. All other claims for recovery of unlawful taxes must be filed by January 31 of the year the tax is payable. No claim may be made unless the tax, or any authorized payment of the tax, is timely paid.

## 3. Denial of a claim under sec. 74.35 or sec. 74.37, Wis. Stats.

Under state law (sec. 74.35 or 74.37, Wis. Stats.), you cannot claim excessive assessment unless the tax is timely paid. Claims under sec. 74.35 or 74.37 must be filed with the municipality by January 31 of the year the tax is payable.

If the municipality denies the claim, the municipality must notify you by certified or registered mail within 90 days after the claim is filed. You may appeal the decision to the circuit court within 90 days after receiving the denial. If the municipality does not act on the claim within 90 days, you have 90 days to appeal to the circuit court. If the municipality allows a claim under sec. 74.35 or 74.37, Wis. Stats., it must pay the claim within 90 days after the claim is allowed.

## X. Statutory References

The following are the references to the appeals procedures contained in [state law](#).

### Municipal Assessor

- **State law (sec. 70.365, Wis. Stats.)** – requires the assessor to provide the real property owner a Notice of Changed Assessment at least 15 days (30 days in revaluation years) before the BOR
- **Sec. 70.45, Wis. Stats.** – details the notice requirements and time period the assessment roll must be open for public inspection before the BOR

**Board of Assessors (BOA)** – **state law (secs. 70.07 and 70.075, Wis. Stats.)** – details the members, organization and procedures of the BOA.

**Board of Review (BOR)** – **state law (secs. 70.46 and 70.47, Wis. Stats.)** – details the members, organization and procedures of the BOR.

### Circuit Court

- **State law (sec. 70.47(13), Wis. Stats.)** – (Certiorari) provides for the property owner to appeal the BOR's decision to the circuit court
- **Sec. 70.85(4)(c), Wis. Stats.** – provides for the property owner to appeal DOR's 70.85 decision to the circuit court

### Wisconsin Department of Revenue

- **State law (sec. 70.75, Wis. Stats.)** – provides for property owners to appeal the assessment of the entire municipality to DOR
- **Sec. 70.85, Wis. Stats.** – provides for the property owner to appeal an individual assessment to DOR

### Municipality

- **State law (sec. 74.35, Wis. Stats.)** – provides for the property owner to appeal an unlawful tax to the municipality
- **Sec. 74.37, Wis. Stats.** – provides for the property owner to appeal an excessive assessment to the municipality

## XI. Glossary

**Arm's length sale** – a sale between two parties, neither of whom is related to, or under abnormal pressure from the other.

**Assessed value** – dollar amount assigned to taxable real and personal property by the assessor for the purpose of taxation. Assessed value is estimated as of January 1 and applies to the taxes levied at the end of that year. Assessed value is called a primary assessment because a levy is applied directly against it to determine the tax due. Accurate assessed values ensure fairness between properties within the taxing jurisdiction. (See Equalized value definition on next page, for fairness between municipalities).

**Assessor** – administrator charged with the assessment of property for ad valorem taxes; the precise duties differ from state to state depending upon state statutes.

**Board of Assessors (BOA)** – first level of appeal in first class cities (Milwaukee) and certain second class cities (Madison). It consists of members of the Tax Commissioner's or Assessor's staff who investigate and act on assessment complaints.

**Board of Review (BOR)** – quasi-judicial board charged with the responsibility of raising or lowering assessments proven incorrect as well as correcting any errors in the assessment roll. BOR consists of a clerk and selected municipal officers (other than the assessor) or citizens. It hears all objections to the amount or valuation of property if objections are made in writing and filed with its clerk prior to adjournment of public hearings. The Board examines the assessment roll or rolls and corrects all apparent errors in description or computation, adds all

omitted property to the assessment roll and determines whether an assessor's valuation is correct from evidence brought before it. The Board cannot determine exempt or taxable status of property.

**Certiorari** – judicial review by the circuit court of an allegedly illegal or erroneous assessment. The circuit court reviews only the written record of the BOR proceedings. New evidence cannot be introduced.

**Circuit court** – first level of appeal of the court system. Usually located in each county, the circuit court hears appeals of the BOR, DOR or municipality decisions.

**Comparable property** – property that is similar to your property, including: location, style, age, size and other physical features, depending on specific market preferences.

**Equalized value** – estimated value of all taxable real and personal property in each taxation district, by class, as of January 1 and certified by DOR on August 15 of each year. The value represents market value (most probable selling price), except for agricultural property, which is based on its use (ability to generate agricultural income) and agricultural forest and undeveloped lands, which are based on 50 percent of their full value.

**Excessive assessment** – an appeal to the municipality under state law ([sec. 74.37, Wis. Stats.](#)), claiming a property assessment is excessive. The property owner files a claim against the municipality to recover the amount of property tax imposed as a result of the excessive assessment.

**Market value** – most probable price which a property should bring in a competitive and open market under all conditions requisite to a fair sale, the buyer and seller each acting prudently and knowledgeably, and assuming the price is not affected by undue stimulus. Implicit in this definition is the consummation of a sale as of a specified date and the passing of title from seller to buyer under conditions whereby:

1. Buyer and seller are typically motivated;
2. Both parties are well informed or well advised, and acting in what they consider their own best interests;
3. Reasonable time is allowed for exposure in the open market;
4. Payment is made in terms of cash in U.S. dollars or in terms of financial arrangements comparable thereto; and
5. Price represents the normal consideration for the property sold unaffected by special or creative financing or sales concessions granted by anyone associated with the sale.

**Objection form** – form you complete prior to BOR. If you do not answer all of the questions, the BOR may refuse to act on your appeal.

**Open book** – period the assessment roll is open for public inspection prior to BOR.

**Real property** – under most circumstances, real property includes the land, all buildings and improvements on it; and all fixtures, rights and privileges relating to it.

**Reassessment** – revaluation of all properties within a given jurisdiction for the purpose of establishing a new tax base. When a written complaint is made to the Wisconsin Department of Revenue by the owners of 5 percent or more of the assessed valuation of the property within a municipality stating that the assessment of property in the municipality is not in substantial compliance with the law and that the interest of the public would be promoted by a reassessment, the department can order such actual doing over of the assessment roll (reassessment) of all or part of the taxable property in municipality.

**Revaluation** – placing new values on all taxable property for the purpose of a new assessment. The previous year's assessment roll is not affected. The term is often used in conjunction with [sec. 70.055, Wis. Stats.](#), where expert help can be hired to work with the assessor in revaluing the district.

**Unlawful tax** – appeal to the municipality under state law ([sec. 74.35, Wis. Stats.](#)), claiming a tax is unlawful because a clerical error was made in the property's description or calculation of the tax, the assessment included improvements which did not exist on the assessment date, the property was exempt from taxation, the property was not located in the municipality, a double assessment was made, or an arithmetic transposition or similar error occurred.

## XII. Form Examples

### Notice of Board of Review Determination

Under state law (sec. 70.47(12), Wis. Stats.), your property assessment for the current year 20\_\_\_ as finalized by the Board of Review (BOR) is listed below.

#### Property owner

#### General information

Date issued - -  
 Parcel no.  
 Address  
 Legal description  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Town     Village     City  
 Municipality \_\_\_\_\_

#### Assessment information

20___ Original Assessment		20___ Final Assessment <small>(determined by BOR)</small>	
Land	\$	Land	\$
Improvements	\$	Improvements	\$
Personal property	\$	Personal property	\$
Personal property	\$	Personal property	\$
Personal property	\$	Personal property	\$
Total personal property	\$	Total personal property	\$
Total all property	\$	Total all property	\$

#### Appeal information

If you are not satisfied with the BOR's decision, there are appeal options available. **Note:** Each appeal option has filing requirements. For more information on the appeal process, review the Property Assessment Appeal Guide. Visit [revenue.wi.gov](http://revenue.wi.gov) and search keyword "Assessment Appeal."

#### Appeal to:

**Department of Revenue (DOR)** – must file within 20 days after receipt of the BOR's determination notice or within 30 days after the date specified on the affidavit if there is no return receipt. A \$100 filing fee is required. The fair market value of the items or parcels cannot exceed \$1 million dollars. DOR may revalue the property any time before November 1 of the assessment year or within 60 days after receiving the appeal, whichever is later. If adjusted, the value is substituted for the original value and taxes paid accordingly. (sec. 70.85, Wis. Stats.)

**Circuit Court - Action for Certiorari** – must file within 90 days after receiving the determination notice. The Court decides based on the written record from the BOR. You cannot submit new evidence. (sec. 70.47(13), Wis. Stats.)

**Municipality - Excessive Assessment** – must first appeal to the BOR and have not appealed the BOR's decision to Circuit Court or to DOR. You cannot claim an excessive assessment under sec. 74.37, Wis. Stats., unless the tax is timely paid. A claim under section 74.37 must be filed with the municipality by January 31 of the year the tax is payable.



## Objection to Real Property Assessment

To file an appeal on your property assessment, you must provide the Board of Review (BOR) clerk written or oral notice of your intent, under state law (sec. 70.47(7)(a), Wis. Stats.). You must also complete this entire form and submit it to your municipal clerk. To review the best evidence of property value, see the Wisconsin Department Revenue's *Property Assessment Appeal Guide for Wisconsin Real Property Owners*.

**Complete all sections:**

Section 1: Property Owner / Agent Information				* If agent, submit written authorization (Form PA-105) with this form			
Property owner name (on changed assessment notice)				Agent name (if applicable)			
Owner mailing address				Agent mailing address			
City	State	Zip		City	State	Zip	
Owner phone ( ) -	Email			Owner phone ( ) -	Email		
Section 2: Assessment Information and Opinion of Value							
Property address				Legal description or parcel no. (on changed assessment notice)			
City	State	Zip					
Assessment shown on notice – Total				Your opinion of assessed value – Total			

If this property contains non-market value class acreage, provide your opinion of the taxable value breakdown:

Statutory Class	Acres		\$ Per Acre	Full Taxable Value
Residential total market value				
Commercial total market value				
Agricultural classification: # of tillable acres	@		\$ acre use value	
# of pasture acres	@		\$ acre use value	
# of specialty acres	@		\$ acre use value	
Undeveloped classification # of acres	@		\$ acre @ 50% of market value	
Agricultural forest classification # of acres	@		\$ acre @ 50% of market value	
Forest classification # of acres	@		\$ acre @ market value	
Class 7 "Other" total market value			market value	
Managed forest land acres	@		\$ acre @ 50% of market value	
Managed forest land acres	@		\$ acre @ market value	

Section 3: Reason for Objection and Basis of Estimate	
Reason(s) for your objection: (Attach additional sheets if needed)	Basis for your opinion of assessed value: (Attach additional sheets if needed)

**Section 4: Other Property Information**

A. Within the last 10 years, did you acquire the property?  Yes  No  
 If Yes, provide acquisition price \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Date  - -   Purchase  Trade  Gift  Inheritance  
(mm-dd-yyyy)

B. Within the last 10 years, did you change this property (ex: remodel, addition)?  Yes  No  
 If Yes, describe \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of changes  - -  Cost of changes \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Does this cost include the value of all labor (including your own)?  Yes  No  
(mm-dd-yyyy)

C. Within the last five years, was this property listed/offered for sale?  Yes  No  
 If Yes, how long was the property listed (provide dates)  - -  to  - -   
(mm-dd-yyyy) (mm-dd-yyyy)  
 Asking price \$ \_\_\_\_\_ List all offers received \_\_\_\_\_

D. Within the last five years, was this property appraised?  Yes  No  
 If Yes, provide: Date  - -  Value \_\_\_\_\_ Purpose of appraisal \_\_\_\_\_  
(mm-dd-yyyy)  
 If this property had more than one appraisal, provide the requested information for each appraisal. \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 5: BOR Hearing Information**

A. If you are requesting that a BOR member(s) be removed from your hearing, provide the name(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
**Note:** This does not apply in first or second class cities.

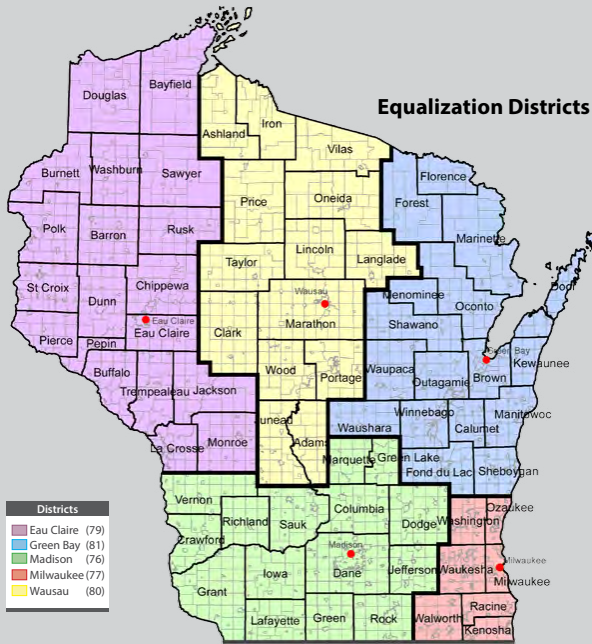
B. Provide a reasonable estimate of the amount of time you need at the hearing \_\_\_\_\_ minutes.

Property owner or Agent signature	Date (mm-dd-yyyy)
_____	_____



## XIII. Contact Information

### Department of Revenue - Equalization District Offices



#### Wisconsin Counties - Alphabetical List

County Code	County Name	District Office Code	County Code	County Name	District Office Code	County Code	County Name	District Office Code
01	Adams	80	25	Iowa	76	48	Polk	79
02	Ashland	80	26	Iron	80	49	Portage	80
03	Barron	79	27	Jackson	79	50	Price	80
04	Bayfield	79	28	Jefferson	76	51	Racine	77
05	Brown	81	29	Juneau	80	52	Richland	76
06	Buffalo	79	30	Kenosha	77	53	Rock	76
07	Burnett	79	31	Kewaunee	81	54	Rusk	79
08	Calumet	81	32	La Crosse	79	55	St. Croix	79
09	Chippewa	79	33	Lafayette	76	56	Sauk	76
10	Clark	80	34	Langlade	80	57	Sawyer	79
11	Columbia	76	35	Lincoln	80	58	Shawano	81
12	Crawford	76	36	Manitowoc	81	59	Sheboygan	81
13	Dane	76	37	Marathon	80	60	Taylor	80
14	Dodge	76	38	Marquette	81	61	Trempealeau	79
15	Door	81	39	Marquette	76	62	Vernon	76
16	Douglas	79	40	Menominee	81	63	Vilas	80
17	Dunn	79	41	Milwaukee	77	64	Walworth	77
18	Eau Claire	79	42	Monroe	79	65	Washburn	79
19	Florence	81	43	Oconto	81	66	Washington	77
20	Fond du Lac	81	44	Oneida	80	67	Waukesha	77
21	Forest	81	45	Outagamie	81	68	Waupaca	81
22	Grant	76	46	Ozaukee	77	69	Waushara	81
23	Green	76	47	Pepin	79	70	Winnebago	81
24	Green Lake	76	48	Pierce	79	71	Wood	80

#### Equalization Bureau

#### Contact Information

##### Eau Claire District Office (79)

610 Gibson St, Ste. 7  
 Eau Claire, WI 54701-2650  
 eqleau@wisconsin.gov  
 Ph: (715) 836-2866 Fax: (715) 836-6690

##### Green Bay District Office (81)

200 N. Jefferson St, Ste. 126  
 Green Bay, WI 54301-5100  
 eqlgrb@wisconsin.gov  
 Ph: (920) 448-5195 Fax: (920) 448-5207

##### Madison District Office (76)

Mailing Address  
 PO Box 8909 #6-301  
 Madison, WI 53708-8909

##### Street Address

2135 Rimrock Rd #6-301  
 Madison, WI 53713-1443  
 eqlmsn@wisconsin.gov  
 Ph: (608) 266-8184 Fax: (608) 267-1355

##### Milwaukee District Office (77)

819 N. 6th St, Rm. 530  
 Milwaukee, WI 53203-1682  
 eqlmke@wisconsin.gov  
 Ph: (414) 227-4455 Fax: (414) 227-4071

##### Wausau District Office (80)

730 N. Third St  
 Wausau, WI 54403-4700  
 eqlwau@wisconsin.gov  
 Ph: (715) 842-5885 Fax: (715) 848-1033



## Certification Statement

As the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR), I have reviewed this guidance document or proposed guidance document and I certify that it complies with secs. 227.10 and 227.11, Wis. Stats. I further certify that the guidance document or proposed guidance document contains no standard, requirement, or threshold that is not explicitly required or explicitly permitted by a statute or rule that has been lawfully promulgated. I further certify that the guidance document or proposed guidance document contains no standard, requirement, or threshold that is more restrictive than a standard, requirement, or threshold contained in the Wisconsin Statutes.

DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE



Peter Barca

Secretary of Revenue