

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF PROPERTY TAX IN WASHINGTON STATE

1853 – Territorial government established; all taxes to be assessed uniformly; exemption for property of the United States, churches, and benevolent institutions.

1889 – State Constitution adopted -- property to be assessed uniformly. Legislature may grant exemptions.

1929 – 14th Amendment to state constitution: classification of property allowed. All real estate is one class; taxes to be uniform on the same class of property.

1935 – Revenue Act exempted all household goods and personal effects.

1944 – 17th Amendment to state constitution: added 40 mill limit. Property to be assessed at 50% of true and fair value.

1955 – Property revaluation cycle established -- 4-year interval.

1965 – 47th Amendment to the state constitution allows senior citizen exemption.

1967 – Senior citizens exempt from first \$50.00 of real property tax. *Barlow v. Kinnear* provided the state with assessment equalization power.

1968 – Current use assessment provided for open space, timber, and agricultural lands.

1969 – State revaluation plan instituted to realize the 1955 revaluation act. *Carkonen v. Williams* mandated a 50% ratio of assessed to market value.

1971 – \$50.00 senior citizen exemption replaced by varying exemptions from special levies depending on income. Annual increase in regular levies of taxing districts limited to 106% of the largest prior levy. Annual update of values permitted.

1972 – Home improvement exemption created. Constitutional limit of 1% of market value enacted for all regular levies.

1973 – Assessment level increased from 50% to 100% of true and fair value, for 1975 taxes.

1974 – Ten-year phase-out of property tax on inventories authorized.

1975 – 100% assessment ratio implemented. Statutory rate limit reduced to \$9.15 per \$1,000 assessed value. Deferral of property taxes and special assessments allowed for senior citizens with income of less than \$8,000.

1976 – 64th Amendment to state constitution permits school districts to seek voter approval of two-year special levies.

1978 – *Seattle School District v. State* requires full state funding of K-12 education.

1979 – State levy for common school support subject to 106% limitation.

1981 – Interest rate on delinquent property taxes increased from 8% to 12%. New penalty of 11% for first year delinquencies.

1982 – Physical inspection may take six years, if values updated annually.

1983 – Business inventories eliminated from property tax and assessment rolls, effective in 1983 for 1984 collections.

1984 – Legal requirements for payment of penalties and interest on delinquent taxes relaxed. Senior citizen exemption qualifications revised.

1985 – Provision made for special valuation of eligible historic property. Benefit rating system authorized.

1986 – Limited waiver of the 106% limit may be placed before the voters. Levies for school capital purposes may be made for up to 6 years with voter approval.

1987 – Interest rates on property tax refunds increased.

1988 – New construction valuation date of July 31 upheld. State school levy removed from \$9.15/\$1,000 limitation for proration purposes. Local appeal date set at July 1. Personal property affidavit filing deadline set at April 30.

1989 – Business personal property exemption raised to \$3,000. Deadline changed for determining boundaries of newly incorporated cities. Washington Condominium Act passed.

1990 – Regular levy limitation of \$5.55/\$1,000 of assessed valuation increased to \$5.90/\$1,000 and proration procedures modified. Personal property equalized based on assessment level of preceding year.

1992 – Appellants may appeal directly to State Board of Tax Appeals, bypassing local appeals board. Manifest errors no longer reviewed by the county Board. Assessor may stipulate to value of appealed property with concurrence of appellant. Four-year renewal required for senior citizen exemption.

1993 – Voter-approved regular levy for low-income housing authorized for cities and counties (above statutory and \$5.90 limits).

1994 – Tax bill required to show percent of voted and non-voted tax. Certain deadlines for providing information in valuation appeals altered.

1995 – Senior citizen income limit raised; values frozen as of 1/1/95. Deferral income, age, and parcel size limits changed. New exemption created for multi-unit dwellings in designated urban centers.

1996 – Revaluations out-of-cycle and error corrections allowed for value-affecting changes in land use restrictions.

1997 - All intangible personal property made tax exempt. Appeals allowed up to 60 days after notification of value change. Referendum 47 imposes additional requirements on the 106% limit.

1998 – The value averaging portion of Referendum 47 is ruled unconstitutional by the Washington State Supreme Court. Senior exemption eligibility and benefits were liberalized.

2000 – I-722 passed in November mandating a rollback of assessed values to January 1, 1999, levels and limiting future increases of taxable value to 2% per year. The initiative was not implemented because the Washington State Supreme Court unanimously ruled it unconstitutional on September 20, 2001.

2001 – I-747 passed in November which restricts taxing districts to a 1% monetary aggregate increase over their prior highest lawful levy. Effective for the 2002 tax year.

2002 – Annexations by petition ruled unconstitutional in March 2002 by the State Supreme Court. The basic method by which cities may annex territory is now by election – by approval of the voters in the area proposed for annexation.

2004 – Senior citizen income limit raised for taxes due in 2005. Exemption is extended to those eligible who are confined in a boarding home or adult family home.

2005 – Several changes occurred to the veterans program. A 10-year special tax exemption is now offered for nightclubs that install sprinkler systems. Fire protection districts can impose up to a total of 25 cents of its property tax levy outside the \$5.90 limit on regular levies if the district's levy would be otherwise prorated.

2006 – Establishment of Regional Fire Protection Service Authorities for participating jurisdictions to provide adequate private ambulance services. A financial plan must contain the property tax and/or benefit charge proposed by a regional fire protection service authority and requires 60 percent voter approval for the tax and benefit charge. Property Tax Deferral Program: The legislation lowered the interest rate on pay back of taxes from 8% to 5% when senior citizens, retired persons, and veterans with 100% service connected disability with disposable incomes of \$40,000 or less have deferred property

taxes and special benefit assessments imposed on their residence. The reduced rate will apply to taxes and special assessments after January 1, 2007. Personal Property Head of Family Household Tax Exemption: Amendment of the Washington State Constitution to change the exemption from \$3,000 to \$15,000 for a head of family who owns, operates, and is a sole proprietor of a business that meets certain qualifications effective January 1, 2007. Property Tax Exemption for Reasons of Disability: Increases the one-acre limitation on residence size up to five acres if the larger parcel size is what is required by local zoning for the Senior Citizen and Disabled Person Exemption Program and the Widows/Widowers of Veterans Property Tax Assistance Program. Local Infrastructure Financing Tool (LIFT) was created to promote community and economic development by revenue allocation of local excise tax and local property tax (use of new construction dollars). LIFT is effective July 1, 2006, and expires June 30, 2039.

2007 – Forest fire protection flat fee assessment was increased from \$14.50 to \$17.50 per parcel, and the assessment on excess acreage increased from 25 cents to 27 cents on each acre exceeding 50 acres. All taxing districts are now allowed to impose a lid lift allowing the levy to exceed the 101% limitations in each of up to six consecutive years. The legislation extended the authority to all taxing districts, not just counties, cities, and towns that have had the ability to exceed that limit since 2003. Taxing district boundaries: The date to establish taxing district boundaries is changed from March 1 to August 1 of the year in which the property tax levy is made. New provisions have been established related to the disposition of taxes levied on property within fire or library districts that have been annexed to a city or town. Also, new city or town notification requirements pertaining to annexation of property within a fire or library district are established. School District Capital Project Funds for Technology: School districts are allowed to impose 2-year levies to fund costs associated with the application and modernization of technology systems. These levies are in addition to other maintenance and operation levies imposed by the school district and are not subject to the limitation found in RCW 84.52.053.

2007 – During a special session in November, the maximum 1% levy increase over the prior year's highest lawful levy (first seen as I-747, 2001) was reinstated.

Source: <http://www.metrokc.gov/assessor/AnnualReport/PropTaxHistory.pdf>

Contact your local county Assessor's office for current programs and laws.