

Everything, including taxes, are up these days. Tax bills have increased a lot in the last two years. For example, three years ago our town's annual budget was \$7 million, and this year is it \$11 million, to provide the same services to the people of Lincoln. By way of explanation, assessments for tax bills are based on market value (sales). The Maine Dept of Revenue Services audits the Town of Lincoln's assessments every year. They look at the assessed values of properties that have sold and compare them to the actual selling prices. Maine Dept of Revenue Services then separates out properties in waterfront, residential, and commercial zones to come up with the percentage each is being assessed at. They also take out the lowest & highest 25%, to get the average percentage. This gives a more accurate picture of where the assessments are town-wide.

The State then issues a report to the Assessor/selectmen of that town/city. The assessor (in our case) then has a decision to make. We have to either make an adjustment in the valuation up by that percentage, or leave assessment as is and wait on a revaluation. If the assessments were left the same (for us 70%), residents would only get 70% of their Veterans Exemptions, and 70% of their Homestead Exemptions. The State would also take away School funding, which then the tax bills would have to make up for which would mean a higher mil rate. We are going out to bid for a revaluation. There currently is a waiting list for revaluations due to the number of Cities and Towns facing this same situation.

The State of Maine does has two tax relief programs that are worth looking into. The "Circuit Breaker" or "Rent Rebate" programs have been replaced by the "Property Tax Fairness Credit Program". It is connected to filing a Maine State Tax Return. The increased income limits will help more residents on a fixed income be able to participate in this tax relief program. Even if someone doesn't usually need to file, they still can go through the process to apply for this relief program. Penquis Cap's local office can help residents with this. The State of Maine also offers a property tax deferral program, similar to a reverse mortgage. It is income-based and the application is available on the Maine Revenue Services website. Both of these programs are worth looking into.

Please contact me if you have further concerns by email at ruth.birtz@lincolnmaine.org