PREFERENTIAL and SPECIALIZED ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

The Agricultural Preferential Assessment program is available for certain property owners of agricultural property. The property is assessed at 30% of its fair market value, rather than 40% of fair market value. The property owner must enter a 10-year covenant with the Board of Assessors and penalties may apply if the covenant is breached.

The Conservation Use Assessment program provides for an assessment based on a statutory ‘use-value’ as opposed to an ‘fair market value.’ Qualified properties include certain agricultural land, timber land, environmentally sensitive property, or residential transitional property. The property owner must enter a 10-year covenant with the Board of Assessors and penalties may apply if the covenant is breached.

The Forest Land Conservation Use Assessment provides for an ad valorem tax exemption for property primarily used for the production of trees, timber, or wood fiber products. The property may have secondary uses such as the promotion, preservation, or management of wildlife habitat; carbon sequestration; mitigation and conservation banking; or the production and maintenance of ecosystem products. This 10-year covenant agreement between the taxpayer and local Board of Assessors is limited to forest land tracts consisting of at least 200 acres in aggregate. Penalties may apply if the covenant is breached.

Rehabilitated and Landmark Historic Assessment includes properties that qualify for listing on the Georgia or National Register of Historic Places. This preferential assessment extends to the building and no more than two acres. Property under this special program must be certified by the Department of Natural Resources as rehabilitated historic property or landmark historic property. The exemption equals the difference between current fair market value and the higher of the acquisition cost or assessment of fair market value at the time the original 10-year covenant was entered.

Brownfield Property Assessment includes property which qualifies for participation in the State’s Hazardous Site Reuse and Redevelopment Program and which has been designated as such by the Environmental Protection Division of the Department of Natural Resources. This program effectively freezes the taxable assessment for ten years as an incentive for developers to clean up contaminated property and return it to the tax rolls. It allows eligible owners to recoup certain costs associated with the cleanup.

EXEMPT PROPERTY

Computer Software may be exempt when it is installed on computer hardware as an operating system.

Farm Products may be exempt when still in the hands of the producer and Farm Equipment used in the direct cultivation of the soil may be exempt from ad valorem taxation when owned by certain persons. This includes farm equipment held under a lease purchase agreement.

Household goods are exempt when not held for sale and when used within the home.

Personal Property valued less than $750 is exempt when the total taxable value of all personal property in the county owned by the taxpayer, as determined by the Board of Tax Assessors, does not exceed $7500. (Calculation does not include the value of mobile homes, motor vehicles or trailers)

Freeport Inventory includes certain raw materials, goods in process and finished goods held by the manufacturer or distributor. Each county or city governing authority may set, by resolution, the percentage of exemption after approval of the qualified categories of inventory by voters. Property owners seeking this exemption must apply annually.

The following property types may be exempt from ad valorem taxation when specific qualifications are met:

- Public Property
- Places of Religious Worship
- Non-Profit Hospital
- Colleges, Academy, Seminary of Learning
- Personal Property held as Endowment for College
- Public Library
- Books, Paintings, Statuary Kept in a Public Hall
- Air and Water Pollution Control Equipment
- Non-Profit Home for the Aged
- Non-Profit Home for the Mentally Handicapped
- Headquarters or Post Home for Veteran Organization
- Certain Historical Fraternal Benefit Association
- All watercraft inventory held for resale by dealer (HB 769)
The County Tax Commissioner, an office established by the Constitution and elected in all counties except one, is the official responsible for receiving tax returns filed by taxpayers or designating the Board of Tax Assessors to receive them; receiving and processing applications for homestead exemption; serving as agent of the State Revenue Commissioner for the registration of motor vehicles; and performing all functions relating to billing, collecting, disbursing and accounting for ad valorem taxes collected on behalf of the county, city, school and State of Georgia.

The County Board of Tax Assessors, appointed by the county governing authority in all counties except one, is responsible for determining what property is taxable and seeing that properties are appraised and assessed fairly and equally so that each taxpayer pays their proportional share of tax. The board notifies taxpayers of their real property assessments annually and when changes are made to the value of personal property; they appraise property included in the appeal process that is submitted by the property owner or any initial appraisal is not amended by the Board of Assessors is automatically forwarded to the Board of Equalization. A hearing is scheduled and conducted by the Board of Equalization renders its decision. If the taxpayer is still dissatisfied, an appeal to Superior Court may be made.

Arbitration: An appeal is filed with the Board of Assessors who must notify the taxpayer of the receipt of the arbitration appeal with the Board of Equalization and then submit a certified appraisal of the subject property which the Board of Assessors must accept or reject within 45 days of receipt of the taxpayer's certified appraisal. If the taxpayer's appraisal is rejected, the Board of Assessors must certify the appeal to the County Appraiser’s Administration for arbitration. The arbitration is authorized by the judge and a hearing is scheduled within 45 days. The arbitrator’s decision may be appealed to Superior Court.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Ad valorem tax, more commonly known as property tax, is a largesource of revenue for local governments in Georgia. The basis for ad valorem taxation is the current use value or in most cases the fair market value, which is established as of January 1 of each year. The tax is levied on the assessed value of the property, which is established at 40% of value. The amount of tax is determined by the tax rate (mill rate) levied by various entities (one mill is equal to $1.00 for each $1,000 of assessed value, or 0.001 per $100 of property value). The basis for homestead exemptions is in the amount equal to $2,000 which is deducted from the 40% assessed value of the homestead. The tax rate is established by the elected county officials and when changes are made to the value of personal property; the standard homestead exemption is available to homeowners 62 and older where the net income of the applicant and spouse does not exceed $10,000 for the preceding year. A portion of Social Security income and certain retirement income are excluded from the calculation of the income threshold. This exemption, which is an amount up to $4,000 deducted from the 40% assessed value of the homestead property, applies to owners aged 65 and older. The surviving spouse, remarried spouse or minor children. This exemption applies to all ad valorem tax levies; however, it is restricted to certain types of very serious disabilities and proof of disability, either from the Veterans Administration or from a private physician in certain circumstances.

The Standard Elderly General Homestead Exemption is available to homeowners who otherwise qualify by ownership and residency requirements and is in an amount equal to $2,000 which is deducted from the 40% assessed value of the homestead property. The exemption applies to the maintenance and operation portion of the mill rate levy of the county and the county school system and the State mill rate levy. It does not apply to the operation portion of the mill rate levied to retire bonded indebtedness.

The Standard Elderly General Homestead Exemption is available to homeowners who otherwise qualify by ownership and residency requirements and is in an amount equal to $2,000 which is deducted from the 40% assessed value of the homestead property. The exemption applies to the maintenance and operation portion of the mill rate levy of the county and the county school system and the State mill rate levy. It does not apply to the operation portion of the mill rate levied to retire bonded indebtedness. The State Revenue Commissioner for the registration of motor vehicles; and performing all functions relating to billing, collecting, disbursing and accounting for ad valorem taxes collected on behalf of the county, city, school and State of Georgia.