

S.M.A.R.T.

Steve Miller Assessment Rescue Team

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Assessor Candidacy Announcement Op-Ed / “Soapbox”

I am running for the office of Larimer County Assessor this year to do some things. I know about the office. I served as Assessor from 1989 through 2002 and managed six reappraisals from 1991 through 2001. I was honored as the first *Assessor of the Year* in Colorado in 1992 for ‘ ... his interpretation of the effects of Amendment 1 on property tax administration and for helping simplify the appeal process for property owners’. I served as President of the Colorado Assessors Association in 1997.

For the past few years I’ve been in private practice helping property owners correct problems with their property valuations. That wasn’t what I planned to do when I left office, it just happened that way. I now have experience working with the Assessor’s Office from the outside, which is helpful. Here’s what I propose to do:

1. De-mystify the “model.” The valuation models that have received so much attention lately are nothing more than equations with variables representing common property characteristics. That’s all a model is. Is there math involved? Yes. One has to know a little bit about math to design a model and test a model, or to understand a model but it’s not that hard to do or explain.
2. Use more data. Extend the data collection period used for gathering sales data from 18 months to 48 months. Currently, one-quarter of the sales that occur in the county are never used in any reappraisal. Extending the period would use every sale in two different reappraisals. That would help stop the too-high-to-too-low “whip-sawing” in valuations that has happened lately.
3. Use the appraisal staff. Residential property comprises 86% of the real property in the county. There is no need to pay \$156,000 to an outside consultant to do what the office should do – especially since the same outside service could be arranged for \$30,000 were it needed, which it is not.
4. Let independent appraisers help. Incorporate independent appraisals of properties submitted during protest into the database. That’s simple professional courtesy.
5. Encourage audience participation. Forming citizen groups to help improve the Assessor’s Office was a good idea. I attended both citizen group meetings: the one last May and the one last July. Contrary to what the Assessor claimed in meetings with the commissioners later, the concerns expressed by the citizens were not issues that would take more money to fix. Having citizens involved in the office’s website design and in formatting comparable downloads would be helpful. Citizens use the website, the Assessor doesn’t. Having citizens analyze protest traffic flow and prepare informational materials would be great. Giving citizens lists of preliminary valuations in neighborhoods before notices of valuation go out and asking those citizens to go have a look would be good feedback. The real reason to have a citizen’s group is because the citizens want to have a citizen’s group. Just keep the commissioners out of it and make the Assessor be as independent and accountable as he should be.

6. Remember that frugality is reality. By virtue of the position, the Assessor has to be especially frugal in budget management. That's just the way it is. It does no one a service to continually complain about not having enough stuff and to claim that nothing can improve until you get more stuff. Besides, constant complaining is annoying.

Is the job of the county assessor difficult? Yes, but it can also be made to seem more difficult than it is. I have the right experience and perspective to do the job. I ask for your support, and please visit www.stevemiller.org.

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