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NEWS

State says local property appraisals were accurate

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Wichita County residents had severe sticker shock this past April when they got their property appraisals in the mail.

The appraisals hit record highs, meaning many county residents faced significant increases in the tax on their homes. Although several studies showed the county had some of the cheapest housing costs in the country, many property owners marched to the Wichita Appraisal District office to voice their anger.

The appraisal district got a report card from the state recently saying the local appraisals were spot on. The state comptroller's office conducts its own appraisals and examines appraisal district's performance. The local district passed on both counts.

Appraisal districts were established in 1982, to ensure local school districts were getting their proper share of local property tax money. Other entities – such as cities and the counties themselves – also contract with appraisal districts.

“Every taxing entity did its own appraisals. It was inefficient government at its finest,” Chief Appraiser Lisa Stephens-Musick said, explaining appraisals were all over the map before the establishment of the appraisal districts.

Stephens-Musick said if school districts are not getting the proper level of funding from local property taxes, Austin will cut their state funding. Likewise, if her office doesn't perform correctly, the school districts can get dinged. That won't happen this year in Wichita County.

“All of our school districts fell within the acceptable range, so they are not in jeopardy of losing their state funding. If we don't do the job we're supposed to do, then the schools suffer,” she said.

Stephens-Musick said the appraisal process can be confusing to taxpayers.

“It’s very, very difficult to understand because they (the state) change the rules all the time,” she said.

She also hinted her office may see more irate property owners during the 2022 appraisal period because property prices have continued to soar in Wichita County.