**Real Estate Abatement FAQS**

**What is a property tax abatement?**

An abatement is a reduction in your property’s assessment that you can apply for if you believe that assessment does not accurately reflect the property’s market value.

**What grounds may I have to get my assessment abated?**

You should seek an abatement if you believe one of the following applies to your property:

* **Overvaluation:** you believe that your property's assessment exceeds its full and fair cash value.
* **Incorrect Data**: If you believe your property has been incorrectly measured or has incorrect information notify your Assessor’s office with those corrections. Some adjustments do have an effect on your assessed value.

**How does the application process work?**

The 3rd (Actual bill) with the newest tax rate and certified assessments are issued in Harwich by January 1st. If you receive those bills and if you think the assessed value is inaccurate, you must complete, sign and submit an application for abatement (along with all accompanying documents you wish to provide as evidence) with the Assessing office no later than February 1st. If the 3rd quarter actual tax bills are issued after January 1st, the application is due no more than 30 days from the date the bill is issued. If you are mailing your application to us, it must be postmarked no later than February 1st.

Any applications received or postmarked after February 1st, by law, must be denied.

**How should I prepare my abatement application?**

Here are some helpful tips to help you complete the Real Estate Abatement Application process:

Read the application and fill it out completely. Don't feel constrained by the application; feel free to attach any written explanation that you feel helps you explain your perspective more clearly. If you would like to meet with the Board of Assessors indicate so on the application.

* Get a copy of your property's record card from the Online Assessing Database and examine it thoroughly for data errors. Make specific mention of any that you find so we can review them.
* It is imperative to schedule an inspection of your property with the Assessor. Don't refuse the Assessor's request to schedule a property inspection, doing so is grounds for an automatic denial.
* If you're challenging the value of your property is being overvalued, you must provide us with at least three comparable sales of properties similar to yours that sold during the relevant time period. For example, seeking an abatement on your FY2021 assessment would mean that you should be reviewing sales that took place in calendar year 2019. Your value was derived from analyzing comparable sales, so you should be prepared to do the same thing. These should be sales of properties as similar to yours as possible in style, age, acreage and condition.

Here are some common pitfalls you'll want to avoid when filing for a real property abatement:

* Don't apply because you think your taxes are too high. The residents of Harwich are directly responsible for how much spending the town does, not the Assessing office.
* Don't compare your property's value or change in value to your neighbors; your neighbor's larger house being assessed lower than yours is not grounds for an abatement. Different styles, ages, sizes and qualities of homes on a single street *can* *and will* change in value at differing levels depending on which factors the sales market places a higher value on.
* Don't challenge your square footage numbers by measuring the interior size of your rooms. Standard building dimensions require using the exterior wall lengths.
* Don't submit a bank appraisal that is less than six months or more than one year old, or one that is being used for refinancing.
* Don't submit value opinions from Zillow, Redfin, Trulia or any other third-party listing service.
* Don't forget to state your opinion of your property's market value.in dollars. "It’s too high" and "Well I don't know what it is worth but it’s not worth that much" are not acceptable responses.

**What happens after I submit my application?**

The Board has three months from the date in which your application was received by the Assessors office to act on it.

If your application is granted, you will be notified by mail.

If your application is denied, no adjustment will be made to your assessment and you will be mailed a certificate stating that your application was denied.

**What if I don't agree with the Board's decision?**

If you don't agree with the disposition of your abatement application, you may file an appeal with the Massachusetts Appellate Tax Board.