

Deadline to file property tax grievances in Suffolk County coming up May 17

by Denise Civiletti
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Taxpayers who believe their properties are overvalued for tax assessment purposes have until May 17 to file a grievance with the town.

May 17 is tax grievance day in Suffolk County. The day is both the deadline for filing tax grievances and the day on which the local board of assessment review sits to hear

grievances in a public forum. Taxpayers can file grievances at any time before or on that day.

Members of the boards of assessment review are appointed by the town board. In a typical year the local board of assessment review receives and acts on between 1,400 and 1,600 grievances. A relative handful are successful each year, according to Laverne Tennenberg, chairwoman of the Riverhead Board of Assessors — the entity that calculates the assessed valuations reviewed by the board of review.

Last year in Southhold, just 13 properties had their assessments reduced± out of the 1,592 grievances filed, according to Kevin Webster, chairman of the Southhold Board of Assessors. The board of review's decision are "based on what is what is submitted (or not submitted) with their claim," Tennenberg said.

To successfully support a grievance, a taxpayer must demonstrate that the assessors have miscalculated the value of his or her property. That's done by an appraisal that analyzes recent comparable sales near the property in question.

That takes research and a certain amount of expertise — one reason why many property owners turn to professionals for help.

Tax Reduction Services in Greenport is one local company that prepares and files grievances for taxpayers. Its founder, Paul Henry, says his company has a 95-percent success rate. It works on a contingency fee basis — taxpayers pay the company a fee only if their grievance is successful — and will only take on grievances it believes will succeed.

Tax Reduction Services launched an [online tool](#) for taxpayers this year to help taxpayers understand their tax bills, their property's tax history — and see the savings their neighbors have realized through grievances.

“We’ve noticed people don’t have a clue what their property taxes are and how they’re increasing,” Henry said. Most people pay through escrow accounts held by their mortgage lender or its servicing company, he said.

The [My Tax Snapshot](#) tool allows a user to access their property tax history and also ask Tax Reduction Services to file a grievance, though the tool is free and there is no obligation to sign up for the company's services.

If the company agrees to take the grievance case, its fee is half of the first year's savings, plus expenses: a \$30 filing fee to the court for an appeal of the board of assessment review's decision and an appraisal fee of \$50 if the client hasn't provided a usable appraisal, Henry said.

The average savings is \$1,200 to \$1,500 per year, he said.

There's “no down side” to signing up, he said. “Unless we're successful, the client pays nothing. You can't get your taxes raised as a result of this process. The the only down side is missing the deadline.”

Grievances currently being filed are against the tax bills that will be issued by Suffolk County in December.

“It's important to emphasize that not everyone is over-assessed,” Henry said.

“Everybody deserves a fair assessment. We can determine if they are over-assessed and if they are, we can get them a reduction.”

Grievance Day hours (held in town hall) for the board of assessment review:

Riverhead: 10 a.m. to 12 noon and 6 to 8 p.m.

Southold: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m.