

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1576

As Reported by House Committee On: Local Government

Title: An act relating to creating greater efficiency in the offices of county assessors by allowing notification via electronic means.

Brief Description: Creating greater efficiency in the offices of county assessors by allowing notification via electronic means.

Sponsors: Representatives Springer, Kochmar, McCoy, Habib, Upthegrove, Fitzgibbon, Ryu, Maxwell, Riccelli and Moscoso.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 2/12/13, 2/21/13 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes county assessors to send via electronic means any assessment, notice, or other information that would otherwise be sent via regular mail, as long as the person entitled to the information agrees to receive information electronically, and the assessor takes measures to protect confidential information from unauthorized disclosure.
- Exempts from disclosure under the Public Records Act information obtained by the assessor for purposes of this section, such as taxpayer electronic mail addresses, waivers, and passwords.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Takko, Chair; Fitzgibbon, Vice Chair; Taylor, Ranking Minority Member; Kochmar, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buys, Crouse, Lias, Springer and Upthegrove.

Staff: Michaela Murdock (786-7289).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

County assessors (assessors) determine the value of all taxable real and personal property in the applicable county for the purpose of determining the tax liabilities of property owners. The assessor also calculates the tax rate necessary to raise the correct amount of property taxes for each taxing district and administers a variety of tax exemptions.

The assessor is required to send certain notices and information by mail. This includes notices sent to taxpayers regarding:

- any change in the true and fair value of taxpayers' real property;
- the assessed value of taxpayers' personal property;
- the imposition of an additional tax or penalty in cases of disqualification for valuation of historic property; and
- the amount of a compensating tax owed when a designation of land as forest land has been removed.

The assessor is currently authorized to mail or electronically transmit notices related to valuing personal property. Assessors may send electronic notice to persons in the county with personal property that must be assessed and who must make and deliver to the assessor a correct list and statement of his or her personal property.

Summary of Bill:

Assessors are given the authority to send by electronic means (*i.e.*, by electronic mail (e-mail) or other electronic means reasonably calculated to apprise the person of the information) assessments, notices, or other information that they would otherwise be required to send, or would customarily send, by regular mail. To send notice electronically, assessors must:

- receive authorization from the recipient to send any such assessment, notice, or other information electronically; and
- use methods reasonably designed to protect certain confidential information from unauthorized disclosure, unless the taxpayer has executed a written waiver.

Authorizations to receive assessments, notices, or other information electronically remain in effect unless or until revoked in writing. Information that is electronically transmitted is deemed to have been mailed on the date that the assessor electronically sends the information or electronically notifies the person that the information is available and accessible.

Information obtained by the assessor for purposes of providing electronic notice and protecting taxpayer information, such as taxpayer e-mail addresses, waivers, or passwords are not subject to disclosure under the Public Records Act.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The bill will decrease assessors' costs and provide greater efficiency with regard to sending assessors' notices to taxpayers. It is a double "opt-in" process. The assessor has to opt-in and the individual taxpayer has to opt-in before notice may be sent electronically. This is not forcing electronic notice on anyone that does not want it. Specifically, electronic notice will help reduce assessors' mailing costs. For example, the King County Assessors' office currently has an annual mailing budget of approximately \$500,000.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Monty Cobb, Washington Association of County Officials.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.