

NFB General Meeting
8/2/17

Called to order at 7:14PM by president Julie Jones, who introduced Erroll Williams, Assessor, Orleans Parish Assessor's Office.

Mr. Williams graciously thanked the packed room for allowing him to be there. He spent several minutes going over the formulas, expectations and oversight that is part of his job. The use of slides and graphs was helpful, since some of what was shared cannot be accessed on the official Orleans Parish Assessor's Office. Louisiana law requires that neighborhoods be re-assessed *at least* every four years. Bywater is split into three assessment areas: Poland Avenue Corridor, Bywater South, and Bywater Railroad Corridor.

One point that was revisited in a number of ways throughout the evening was the approach of using sales over the past 3 years as a standard for comparables. This is especially problematic, as sales on most blocks reaching back as far as five years (writer's block is an example of this: 3100 Block of Royal) have not resulted in neighbors, but more businesses (such as AirBnBs). To use full time income makers as comparables to tax those who do actually live full time in the homes is wrong. There are no laws regarding special taxes for homes used as full time STRs. A handout was distributed showing some examples of property sale prices in Bywater, some with alarming increases in value over the last few years.

Mr. Williams was happy to share other points about the official website, such as the yearly fly overs of all of the 393 neighborhoods that provides detailed views of homes and lots. He noted that this does not show the interior of structures, which can affect value. One attendee mentioned the problematic nature of the railroad in the SE section of Bywater and asked if there were adjustments for these types of problems, and Mr. Williams told him to call the office. He noted that these are the kinds of things they cannot see from their flyovers.

About 13,650 properties in the parish are non-profit and tax exempt. About 6000 are owned by non-profits, such as churches, and the rest are government owned, such as hospitals.

It was difficult to ascertain where Bywater stood in relation to the rest of the city in terms of the steady increase in taxes, as much as 300% and more, that have been seen by the majority of attendees, steadily over the past 4 years.

What to do if you disagree with the assessment:

Assessment Rolls are open through August 15th

Take a day off work to go to one of the offices listed at the bottom of your assessment notice between 8:30AM and 4PM, or file an online appeal of taxable valuation at <https://nolaassessor.modria.com/>. **Online appeals are said to be particularly effective.**

Challenges must be submitted by August 18th.

Photographs, preferably time and date stamped, can be used to support a claim. If you can afford an official appraisal, that could help as well.

What is the home insured for? Is that in line with the increase? Document it.

Provide estimates for repairs, such as roof or foundation. Changes in square footage is something that can be documented and filed for a reduction.

And of course, comparables - however the actual neighbors do not get to identify the comparables - its all on selling price of the home/property and not the actual use of the home (such as one that has become a business property) that matters.

Here are links to informational brochures on the assessment process provided by the assessor's office, including a comic strip explaining the appeal process:

<http://nolaassessor.com/flyers.html>

The question of how to change these blatantly unfair and neighborhood destroying trends was also part of the evening's discussion. Longtime residents, some on fixed incomes, cannot afford the extreme jumps in property tax. Some attendees were upset their taxes had doubled and then doubled again in the last few years alone. Mr. Williams said the only way to prevent that is to change the law, which is set by the state. Go for caps - or as in Texas, property empowerment. He has advocated for these changes in the past, he says. He related that he could not change these particular laws and encouraged us to contact the appropriate state officials or vote for state officials that will work to have them changed. He said tries to be on the side of the residents, when possible, if a property assessment falls in the gray area.

Mr. Williams is up for re-election. The other candidate for assessor is Anthony Brown.

Mr. Williams was thanked for his time and efforts several times when participants were asking questions, and again at the close of his presentation.

Despite significant noise and disorder Mr. Troy Henry, a candidate for mayor, was then introduced. He said New Orleans does not have a revenue problem, it has an allocation problem. He was critical of NOPD response times, and mentioned his "pro business" approach, when he was questioned about his thoughts on protecting historic neighborhoods. He said it was important but "just because it is old doesn't mean it's good". The statement did not go over well with many attendees, many upset about the controversial destruction of a salvageable, nineteenth-century house on St. Claude and Music by Mr. Henry's Sterling Farms chain of convenience stores and gas stations. The meeting became difficult to moderate and Mr. Henry headed for the exit.

Kristen Palmer, candidate for City Council District C, was then introduced. She spoke very briefly, mentioning the need for changes to the current state tax laws and assessment process.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:49PM.