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Citizens prevail, city benefits

June 27, 2018 | (mailto:)

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An increase in property tax revenue of well over \$600,000 per year is the result of a Ten Taxpayer suit that charged the Springfield Board of Assessors of undervaluing billboards, cell towers and cell antennae in the City. After five years of on-going conflict the suit was settled June 20, 2018. As a result of some earlier efforts and the Superior Court case, the valuation of billboards along Interstate I-91 was raised from \$5,500 to about \$200,000 each and there were comparable increases in the valuation of cell towers and cell antennae.

In 2011-2012, a group of 20 Springfield residents from many neighborhoods banded together because of what they saw as the unjustness of their residential properties being valued at approximately 100 percent of fair cash value (FCV) while these investment assets were valued at only about 2 percent of fair cash value.

The suit was filed in April 2013 and was followed by a Motion to Dismiss, roundly criticized by the Court, then interrogatories and document requests by both sides, and finally an agreement to try to mediate rather than go to trial. Mediation led to the two sides actually negotiating a Settlement that both sides have agreed to.

Representing the Ten Taxpayers was Attorney Jeff Morneau from the law firm of Connor and Morneau, LLP, and Appraiser John Valente who has years of assessor and appraiser experience. This combination was able to convince the Springfield assessors that there was a more accurate and beneficial way to value the above assets. The increased valuations are represented in the 2018 real estate valuations and, in terms of the settlement, those valuations will be carried forward for the financial benefit of the City and its residents.

Billboard valuations for property tax purposes are difficult, in part because of the political and other lobbying influences of the Outdoor Advertising Industry. The billboard companies are also known to be litigious as can be seen in the numerous law suits they file in objection to the various restrictions imposed by all levels of government and, in general, many assessors would rather cave in than be subject to valuation appeals. However, 20 taxpayers in Springfield stayed the course for five years and have prevailed in their effort for greater fairness in valuations.

Russ Seelig
Springfield

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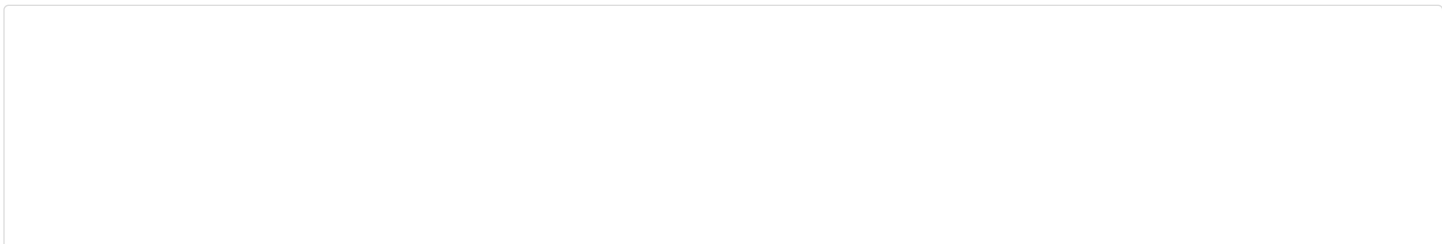
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(Hampshire Regional's Will Hogan is featured in our Facebook photo of the week. Photo by Dave Roback. (<http://reminderpublications.mycapture.com/mycapture/index.asp>)

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