

Oklahoma County Assessor is from the government and is here to help



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The Oklahoma County Assessor's Office has the braggingest bunch of public servants you ever saw.

Kind of daring, really, considering that they're on the front line of what most people are huffing and puffing about when they huff and puff about paying property taxes.

They send out news releases like it's a real estate office, which it is, in a way — but it's virtually always the kind of news that causes people — me, anyway — to consider them public servants and not bureaucrats.

Like this:

"The mapping part of the website has just been revamped and updated to make it easier to identify property in the county and to get around on the interactive map," the latest news release said. "These improvements mean first-time visitors can see the entire 720 square miles of Oklahoma County featuring digital images with 6-inch pixels.

"The new images are much clearer and precise than anything offered before, and in some parts of the county there are 3-inch pixels available. Each pixel represents a 9-square inch image of the county."

It really is remarkable. Check out the Web page at assessor.oklahomacounty.org, then try other county assessor websites.

The Oklahoma County Assessor's Office, among county agencies, has been on the leading edge of this kind of taxpayer-friendly technology since then-Assessor Mike Means pushed for digitization of data in 2002.

It took off in 2003, and has kept apace under Sullivan since he was first elected as assessor in 2004. The assessor's office provides free Web-Ucation classes to help familiarize groups with the newest features.

Here's the main thing they brag about, and it's hard to argue:

"While the images are better, the cost is less than when the website was created. Original cost for the images was around \$277 a square mile. Now, through a cooperative agreement with other governmental entities in central Oklahoma, the cost to provide some of the best images available cost only \$14 per square mile," Stein said.

The Oklahoma County Assessor's website has earned international awards from the Environmental Systems Research Institute "and continues to set the standard for having public records for property in Oklahoma and the world," he said.

County assessor is an obscure government office — until it's not. Clarity usually comes to homeowners and commercial property owners with a larger-than-expected assignment of value. Procedures are in place for protesting and gaining a second look.

The latest news release reminds people it's important. Considering the shape the federal and state governments are in, it's nice to know something is working like it should in local government: the annual valuation of 330,000-plus pieces of property worth more than \$60 billion.

The civics lesson: "The majority of the property taxes collected from property owners support local public schools, technology centers, cities and towns, libraries and health departments.

"Oklahoma County receives approximately 10 cents of every property tax dollar to support law enforcement, the county jail, and the operation of the offices of three county commissioners, the assessor, county court clerk, county clerk and the office of the treasurer."

One final boast from the latest release:

"Property taxes in Oklahoma are among the lowest in the nation. Texas property taxes are at or more than double, depending on the location, and New Jersey's property taxes can be more than four times Oklahoma County's for the same value of property."



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