

# Despite downturn, average Travis home appraisals inch up 3.8 percent

**After years of double-digit increases, though, some school districts see valuations drop.**

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Residential property appraisals rose by an average 3.8 percent in Travis County this year, less than a third of last year's increase and the smallest jump in five years, the Travis Central Appraisal District reported Wednesday.

Countywide, the average home value was \$295,744, the district said. In 2008, the average valuation rose 12.2 percent.

In the City of Austin, the average valuation rose 4.5 percent this year to \$278,027, compared with a 12.8 percent increase last year.

Chief Appraiser Patrick Brown said the increase was the smallest since 1.8 percent in 2004, after the bursting of the tech bubble.

Since 2004, the average valuation has grown by double-digit percentage increases each year, Brown said.

Average values fell in five of the 14 school districts that are all or partly in the county, according to data released Wednesday. The biggest decline was in the Marble Falls district, where values fell 2.3 percent.

Among the other districts, increases were low even in high-end areas such as Eanes, where values rose 2.6 percent, to \$713,763.

Brown said consumers seem to be waiting to see what is happening with the stock market and in the overall economy before buying real estate.

The district already has posted information on its Web site, [www.traviscad.org](http://www.traviscad.org), but taxpayers should expect notices to arrive in the mail this week.

Homeowners who think their valuation is too high can take the first step toward an appeal by filling out and returning the forms found on the back of the notices.

Charles Heimsath, a local real estate consultant, said appraisals are a lagging indicator because they are based in part on the previous year's sales. And in Central Texas, most home sales in 2008 occurred in the first eight months of the year, when prices were still trending higher, he said.

Housing prices locally didn't start to decline until late last year. Median home-sale prices dipped in November, December and January and again in March, according to the Austin Board of Realtors.

"The only consolation is, I believe it will be a short-term, one-year phenomenon," he said of appraisal increases "And next year, the appraisals will reflect the lower home values that people are currently experiencing."

Values on individual homes can rise by more or less than the average. Texas law limits the annual increase on the taxable value of homes with a homestead exemption to 10 percent.

The actual tax bill depends on the tax rates set by school districts and other taxing entities.

Appraisals in other area counties

Williamson County information isn't yet available.

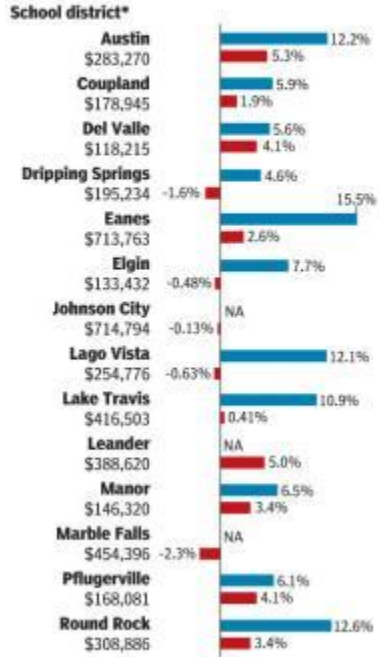
Mark Boehnke, chief appraiser of the Bastrop Central Appraisal District, said appraisal notices will start going out Friday to 21,000 property owners.

Most property owners should see little, if any, change from 2008, unless they added on to their houses or made improvements, Boehnke said.

In Hays County, Chief Appraiser David Valle will be sending notices out May 1.

Although figures aren't final, Valle said, "I would say that the housing market in Hays County is holding steady in a tough economy and so far has managed to avoid sharp price declines plaguing other areas of the nation."

# Travis County property appraisals



\*Some school districts are partly in Travis County  
 Source: Travis Central Appraisal District  
 Linda Scott AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Courtesy of JB Goodwin