

## Williamson appraiser to use last-minute sales prices

*Sun City resident persuaded district to look at data being submitted by fellow protesters.*

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Don Mohr has protested the appraisal of his house every year since he retired to Texas 11 years ago.

This year, he might skip it.

The Sun City Texas retiree hasn't given up. Just the opposite: Mohr finally exceeded his wildest expectations this year by persuading the Williamson Central Appraisal District to tweak its system to include last-minute sales figures from his fellow protesters in its final calculations of property values.

Now Mohr is talking to his legislator about what he sees as the larger problem: a state that doesn't have mandatory disclosure of real estate sales prices.

"An engineer says, 'That's a flaw in the system,'" said Mohr, an engineer by training. "It's inherently flawed."

Texas appraisers long have lobbied for disclosure of prices, saying it would lead to fairer and more accurate appraisals. But they are considering giving up their perennial faceoff with the Texas Association of Realtors, which sees disclosure as a potential precursor to a tax on real estate transactions.

Dallas County Chief Appraiser Ken Nolan is vice chairman of the Texas Association of Appraisal Districts' legislative committee.

"It's a brick wall," Nolan said of the Realtors' opposition. "The people who are against it are never going to give up."

And they have clout: During the 2008 election cycle, the real estate association spent \$7.2 million on candidates and issues, according to a study by Texans for Public Justice.

After failing to change state law, Nolan said appraisers are now playing defense at the Capitol.

The 2009 Legislature passed House Bill 8, which broadens the state comptroller's review of appraisal districts. Last fall, voters approved constitutional amendment Proposition 3, allowing the comptroller to enforce uniform appraisal standards for property tax purposes. The Legislature didn't approve enabling legislation, so lawmakers still must address the final direction of the Proposition 3 changes.

For now, Mohr can celebrate his local victory.

When he moved from Austin to Sun City in 2007, Mohr bought a house for \$365,619. His 2009 appraisal was \$393,466, which Mohr protested.

There were 10 sales of houses like Mohr's that year in the Georgetown subdivision. The appraisal district had sales prices for only four. Mohr said he lost his protest because of the incomplete data.

Mohr talked to the owners of the other six houses like his. That's when he discovered that three homeowners had provided sales prices when they protested their appraisals.

In such a small sample, three additional sales made a huge difference — \$30,000 in his house's taxable value, Mohr estimated.

It was too late to change Mohr's value for 2009, but the appraisers agreed to look into it further. His 2010 appraisal is \$327,931. "We're back to where we should be," he said.

**Because of Mohr's experience, Williamson appraisers for the first time this year will include sales prices they learn during the protest period in their final calculations. If that information significantly lowers values, they will change the numbers in the final certification. They won't raise values based on the last-minute information.**

Chief Appraiser Alvin Lankford said he thinks Mohr's experience is tied to the small sample of 10 houses like his. Applied countywide, Lankford doubts including last-minute sales information will have a significant effect. But he's willing to try it.

Mohr credits Lankford for listening: "We were blown away by the final outcome."

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**