

## Client Case Study

# Washington County, Pennsylvania

### At a Glance:

- Industry: County Government
- Location: Washington, Pennsylvania
- Population: 207,820
- Tyler Client Since: 2013
- Properties on Assessment Roll: ~117,000
- Tyler Products Used: CLT Appraisal Services™ and iasWorld®

**“We are absolutely satisfied with the services that Tyler has provided and for the time they spent with us. They prepared us and helped us throughout the process. We worked well together.”**

— Brad Boni, Chief Appraiser,  
Washington County, Pennsylvania

## Community Engagement and a Strong Partnership Deliver a Smooth and Efficient Reassessment Process

### The Challenge

Thirty-five years had passed since Washington County, Pennsylvania’s last mass appraisal initiative. Residents were paying their property taxes; however, their tax bills were based on values that were established in 1981. These property values were approximately 10 to 25 percent of the current market value.

Two school systems in Washington County started to feel the budget pinch that resulted from inaccurate property values and the subsequent loss of tax revenue. School district representatives began petitioning county commissioners for a countywide reassessment. Both sides struggled with the issue for several years, until legal action resulted in a court-ordered reassessment.

County commissioners knew the impending reassessment would be met with great taxpayer resistance. The county sought out a firm that had been down this road many times before and had a stellar track record for executing reassessment efforts that resulted in fair, equitable and easily defensible property values.

### Tyler Technologies Is the Solution

Tyler Technologies’ CLT Appraisal Services™ (CLT) — the country’s only national mass appraisal services company — was approached to assist Washington County with its property reassessment effort. Both parties agreed that ongoing public engagement and communication was the key to success. Multiple meetings were held in front of civic groups, chambers of commerce, farm bureaus and more to help prepare taxpayers for the process.

“A reassessment is something that skips generations and no one knows what to expect,” said Washington County Chief Appraiser Brad Boni. “It’s important to prepare your constituents for it. Many of them were concerned they wouldn’t be able to remain in their homes, while others were afraid they couldn’t keep their farms or businesses.”

Residents were reassured that the countywide property reassessment was a good thing and would help adequately fund the public services on which everyone depended, such as law enforcement, fire departments, school systems and more.

Maintaining community engagement and providing public information remained a high priority throughout the reassessment effort to help prevent or address any problems that could arise.



*Approximately 117,000 properties were included on the Washington County assessment roll.*

## The Data Collection Process Begins

CLT data collectors began assembling a visual collection of land and improvement data for approximately 117,000 parcels. The data included exterior photography of each improved property, topographical observations and address verifications.

Data collectors were also tasked with asking an adult occupant of each residence about the number of bedrooms and bathrooms the dwelling had, the year in which it was built and the amount of finished living area in the basement, if applicable.

They also requested permission to measure the exterior of each structure and to verify whether auxiliary buildings and additions had been built or yard improvements made since the 1981 reassessment. Any discrepancies between the official property record and the information collected during the site visit were noted.

When an adult was not at home, a door hanger was left with instructions to provide answers in writing to all of the questions previously mentioned. In cases where an adult resident refused to give permission to inspect the exterior of the property, data was estimated on site from existing assessment records.

CLT data collectors were also required to double-check all entries for completion and accuracy before proceeding to the next property.

Overall, the public was cooperative and respectful throughout the data collection process, which Brad Boni attributes to the ongoing community engagement and public information efforts. One of the biggest testaments to the effectiveness of community engagement was that nearly 70 percent of the 51,000 door hangers left at residences were completed and mailed back to the county.

Data entered at the end of the collection process was audited for omissions and other errors. Any incomplete or inaccurate data was sent back to the collectors to be corrected.

Finally, data mailers were sent to all residential property owners, who were asked to review their property information. Owners could either approve the data or request a formal inspection of their properties.

## Valuation Models Lead to Accurate Property Values

Once all property data was collected and verified, CLT appraisers entered it into Tyler's iasWorld CAMA™ property appraisal software. CLT's appraisal team began instructing county officials on how to use the functionality of the iasWorld® solution to manage comprehensive property data, including assessment administration, property maintenance, and valuation and appeals.

The CLT team transliterated a good portion of the county's property data from an older legacy system into iasWorld. Their unique contributions significantly streamlined the implementation process and provided added benefits and enhancements to drive Washington County's reappraisal process.



For more information, visit [www.tylertech.com](http://www.tylertech.com)

**“The entire process went very well with a limited number of issues. These areas were handled in an efficient and professional way by the representatives of Tyler. Their knowledge and ability to work with our County Assessment Office contributed to the overall completion of the project.”**

— Harlan Shober, County Commissioner,  
Washington County, Pennsylvania

Multiple valuation models were formulated, developed and tested within the software itself. Local economic data, such as sales, construction costs and rental property income and expenses, were included in the mix to help ensure the results accurately reflected the current Washington County market.

The comparable sales method was primarily used for Washington County’s urban residential properties. However, nearly all rural properties were valued using the cost approach due to a lack of comparable sales information.

Ultimately, the fair market value of each parcel was determined by:

- Reviewing recent transfers of real estate within the neighboring area
- Analyzing the exterior appearance of each property
- Researching other unique factors (location, access, traffic, topographical) that may affect the valuation of the property

The county was able to establish clean, baseline property data and achieve fair and accurate property valuations. Old and incomplete property records, including tax maps, public records and old forms and documents, were organized and updated electronically. Conducting future reassessments will be a far easier process.

### Concerns Are Addressed During Informal Appeals

Once the final valuation was determined and a fair market value calculated for each property, CLT and Washington County sent out “Notice of Tentative Value” letters to property owners. Taxpayers could appeal the new values assigned to their properties.

CLT worked side-by-side with Washington County throughout the three-month informal hearings period and also trained the board members who would review the 15,543 parcels that were part of the appeals process. Those parcels represented 13.17 percent of the total taxable parcels, which is a low number for a nearly 35-year gap between reassessments.

Appeals were most often registered by those who owned multiple parcels throughout the county and by property owners who introduced evidence of heavy interior or structural damage to appraised structures. Each appeal was considered and, if the taxpayers’ objections were valid, adjustments were made.

Throughout this informal appeals process, Boni noticed that there was a large number of property owners who simply wanted to know how the reassessment was going to affect them financially.

“Much of the apprehension involved real estate taxes,” Boni noted. “Property owners just wanted you to look them in the eye and tell them they were going to be okay.”





*Washington County's commercial and industrial properties were included in the reassessment project.*

### Washington County Is Prepared for the Road Ahead

The mass appraisal of approximately 117,000 parcels of property was successfully accomplished through the careful and methodical collection and analysis of data. The property values assessed during this project were the most equitable possible, and provided a solid foundation for maintaining a fair and equitable assessment roll for Washington County, Pennsylvania.

The county and Tyler worked together to complete the reassessment. In the process, Tyler reorganized and refreshed county records and helped train Brad Boni's appraisal office staff how to use their new iasWorld CAMA software.

Boni felt comfortable going into the formal appeals process because he worked so closely with Tyler throughout informal appeals.

"Tyler was there with us side-by-side," he noted. "That has helped prepare us for the formal appeals process. We'll continue to work together."

Ultimately, the experience Boni and his team gained during informal appeals and their continuous community engagement efforts paid off. Washington County enjoyed a smooth, successful and controversy-free formal appeals process.

### About Tyler Appraisal & Tax Solutions

Tyler's CLT Appraisal Services' participation in the appraisal and tax industry began in 1938 and has been going strong ever since. Today, CLT remains the oldest and only national mass appraisal services company in the United States. We have conducted appraisal services in 46 states and 23 state capitals, as well as in Canada and The Commonwealth of the Bahamas. CLT has provided quality, precise data collection and verification services to Pennsylvania counties for nearly 50 years.

With our rich history, CLT offers experience and expertise in appraisal services, property valuation modeling and analysis that's unmatched in the industry.

If Tyler software implementation is part of your solution, CLT won't just collect and input your property data. We will help you make adjustments to your Appraisal & Tax Solutions to meet the unique needs of your jurisdiction. Our team also understands the industry and all brands of software better than anyone else. That means we can work with any line of software to ensure you have the smoothest and most efficient reassessment process possible.

### Contact Tyler to learn more about these and other leading Appraisal & Tax Solutions



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