

Why Hire an Assessors' Agent for Monhegan Plantation?

- 1) Ensures smooth transitions between terms of Board of Assessors members. An outgoing assessor who has done the 'heavy lifting' on assessments during their term does not mean a loss of all knowledge of recent assessments and ability to continue with work uninterrupted.
- 2) Takes undue pressure off the Board of Assessors, meaning that taking on a Board of Assessors position may then appeal to a larger audience. In our current setup, much of the stress and time taken up as an Assessor is due to the need to handle the entire tax assessment process from start to finish. Removing most of this burden would free the Board of Assessors to focus on other community needs.
- 3) Hiring an apolitical, outside assessors' agent to determine property valuation takes away the potential for politically motivated under/over valuations or a community perception of politically motivated under/over valuations.
- 4) Hiring an experienced assessors' agent who has completed the required coursework, exams, and continuing education to maintain their status as a 'Certified Maine Assessor' ensures that the assessment is done in a standardized manner consistent with property valuation best practices.
- 5) Choosing to hire an assessors' agent does not take the ultimate legal authority and responsibility for tax assessment away from the Board of Assessors. While an assessors' agent may do all of the 'work' of assessing, the Board of Assessors still maintains oversight ability and legal authority to determine final assessments.
- 6) Having a hired assessors' agent handle most of the assessment work means that if they are not performing up to standards desired by the community or Board of Assessors, then they can be removed from their position. Whereas, if elected officials are responsible for all of the assessment work, they cannot be removed from their position in the event that they do not perform adequately.
- 7) Once the initial overall reevaluation has been completed, the yearly fee for continuation of assessors' agent services, roughly \$3,000, is minimal compared to the costs in terms of time, stress, and extra pay needed for the Board of Assessors under our current arrangement.
- 8) Out of the 11 unbridged island municipalities in the state, only Monhegan and Matinicus do not hire any form of outside assessment assistance.
- 9) Out of 11 plantations other than Monhegan and Matinicus reached in a survey of their current tax assessment situation, 9 of them either hire outside assessment assistance or have a Certified Maine Assessor on their Board of Assessors

Quotes from an old Maine Townsman article that is particularly relevant to our decision, titled "Assessors' Agent: the first step toward professionalizing and depoliticizing the process of assessing?":

“There comes a time when a board of selectmen, especially if it is also serving as the board of assessors, recognizes that the job of assessing is more than ‘three men in a truck’ can handle and begins to look at its options.”

“If they choose to go the route of the assessors' agent, they retain the responsibility and the authority, ‘keeping their fingers on the trigger,’ so to speak.”

“All agreed, however, that by hiring an assessors' agent, municipalities were taking the first step toward depoliticizing and professionalizing the function of assessing.”

“Those interviewed for this article say that among other things one of the advantages of contracting out the assessing work is the fact that they are ‘the objective outsider’ bringing to the job a non-political, less personal, therefore more professional approach than a municipal appointed or elected board would have. One consultant described his role as agent as being an ‘impartial advocate of the facts.’”

“Those interviewed also point out that they provide continuity, when part-time municipal employees come and go moving on up the career ladder to full-time assessing positions, they are there year after year providing a critical historical perspective. O'Donnell Associates notes that it has been doing continuous assessing work as an assessors' agent for one of its larger municipalities for 16 years.”

“Make sure you hire the most qualified person. By hiring a certified Maine assessor, you at least know they have passed a very comprehensive exam, demonstrating a basic understanding of the law and proper technique. But remember, nothing substitutes for practical experience.”