

A Review of Property Tax Assessment Options for Chemung County

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Chemung County

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to New York State's Office of Real Property Services (ORPS), New York is one of only three states nationwide without a statewide uniform level of assessment. Furthermore, it is one of twelve states without a statewide requirement for how often a reassessment must happen. There are over 1100 assessing jurisdictions, 700 school districts and 1000 other special purpose districts that are non-contiguous and serve to make property assessment complicated and confusing to property owners.

In the fall of 2007, ORPS established the Centralized Property Tax Administration Program (CPTAP) to encourage county and local municipal officials to study reform opportunities for their local property tax systems. Chemung County was one of 51 counties to receive a CPTAP grant to explore opportunities for collaborative assessment. Early in 2009, the County engaged CGR Inc. (Center for Governmental Research) to conduct its centralized property tax study.

The study completed by CGR and detailed in this report conforms to analytical and reporting parameters established by the State Office of Real Property Services. ORPS identified a series of specific assessment models to be analyzed and reported on in each county that received a CPTAP grant. The parameters for the collaborative assessment study can be viewed online via the Office of Real Property Services website at

<http://www.tax.ny.gov/research/property/assess/currentpractices.htm>

ORPS' officials have been clear throughout the process that the program is not intended to force change towards a county-run assessment system. Rather, its goal is to have authorities develop assessment models that uniformly affect every parcel within respective counties, and which result in the following performance standards:

1. a common level of assessment for all assessing units within each county;

2. a common database of assessment, inventory, pictures and valuation data for all the assessing units within each county; and
3. consistent assessment administration standards (i.e. regular reassessment cycles; timely verification, correction and transmittal of sales data; and current and accurate inventory collection and maintenance) for all assessing units within each county.

Working to better understand the process, sharing ideas for how to collaborate and moving to a common standard throughout the County could enhance current assessment practices and benefit taxpayers through:

- **equity** - A system that provides a mechanism for obtaining and maintaining equitable assessments;
- **transparency** - A system that is understandable to taxpayers; and
- **efficiency** - A system that functions efficiently and consistently across the County.

Importantly, ORPS notes, “the intent of the program is for counties to chart their own paths to reform. The program does not presuppose a one-size fits all approach to such improvements. By analyzing the particulars of their county, local officials are determining what will work best for their taxpayers and the taxing jurisdictions alike.”

Working within these guidelines, CGR collected data and interviewed key stakeholders in the community to help establish a baseline of operations in the County. Some key findings from within the Chemung County assessment community are as follows:

- jurisdictions struggle with limited resources for staffing and salaries for professional services;
- taxpayers express frustration regarding reassessments and property tax administration;
- assessment valuation and data collection standards vary across the County (including outside contractors);
- standards by which assessors serve the public and conduct reassessments vary by individual;
- there is need for technology improvements and/or Internet access for the more rural assessment offices;

- public officials have a limited knowledge of the property assessment process creating both anxiety and even a lack of interest in actually making any changes;
- local assessors express concern that local budgets and staffing patterns do not necessarily represent the workload that is required to properly carry out the duties and functions of assessment;
- the County has taken significant steps towards adopting common assessment standards and by 2010, eight out of 12 assessing units will have an LOA of 100 percent due to reassessment projects;
- New York State aid is absolutely critical to helping local municipalities upgrade their data and conduct reassessments; and
- New York State may need to adopt a mandatory statewide cycle bill in order to achieve common levels of assessment across the State.

Currently six towns in the County are in the annual reassessment program and annually maintain assessments at full market value. The town of Elmira will complete a reassessment project for the 2009 assessment roll and the town of Veteran will complete a project for the 2010 assessment roll. The towns of Ashland and Baldwin have not done a reassessment in decades. The town of Erin and the City of Elmira completed reassessments in 2002 and 1995, respectively.

The common level of assessment assumed for this report's analysis is 100 percent of market value. To reach this benchmark, Ashland, Baldwin, Erin and the City of Elmira would have to do complete reassessment projects, while the aforementioned eight towns must update/maintain assessments at full market value. Ashland, Baldwin, Erin and the City of Elmira have current levels of assessment ranging from 2.02 to 92 percent of full value.

In documenting the extent of diversity in current assessment process, approach, level and output in Chemung County, this report establishes a baseline foundation for making decisions going forward. While specific reform concepts will no doubt require additional analysis and consideration of detailed components, a full understanding of the baseline delivery of assessment services is essential to beginning any change process.

Using the baseline information, CGR considered the cost/benefit implications of four assessment options in comparison to the *status quo*:

1. County-run assessment system;

2. County-coordinated assessment system;
3. Localized coordinated assessment systems; and
4. Towns contracting with the County.

In addition to these four primary options, CGR also considered intermediate options that would serve as preliminary steps towards building a more robust County assessment operation.

Each option that CGR analyzed is comprised of two primary cost considerations: Transition costs and operating costs. The current assessment operation in Chemung County costs roughly \$530,000, which includes municipal and County budgets along with anticipated revenue. Relative to this baseline aggregate cost:

- the County-run option would cost approximately \$465,000. Thus, a County-run operation would likely yield savings of close to \$65,000 in ongoing operational expense.
 - one-time transitional costs would net to \$427,000 to transition into a County-run option.
 - a County-run option requires two separate public referenda and several other steps to synchronize assessment calendars and upgrade LOAs to 100 across the County.
- the County CAP option would likely cost about \$530,000 in ongoing operations. Thus, while more expensive than the County-run model, it is break-even compared to current operations with some potential benefits in terms of implementation and future efficiency.
 - one-time transitional costs would net to \$41,800 to transition to a CCAP.
 - the CCAP does not require referenda but could be accomplished through action by local municipal boards.
 - similar considerations to the County-run model include synchronizing assessment calendars and achieving a LOA of 100 across all jurisdictions.
- other models, including those just mentioned are detailed in Table A-7 in the appendix and explained in detail in the report.

Other ideas that were explored involved the County being more actively involved in commercial appraisals and exemption services, and

establishing common assessment standards for all assessing jurisdictions. The County could also be more proactive in establishing a synchronized assessment calendar for all jurisdictions as well as a synchronized reassessment schedule.

It is not the intent of the grant or this study to recommend, promote or identify every operational detail of one option or model over other alternatives. Rather, this analysis and report intends to provide County and local officials with a cost/benefit analysis of a series of assessment models identified by ORPS. With that information, County and local officials will be well positioned to make future decisions regarding Chemung County's assessment system. The intent of this report and the information contained herein is, in the most basic sense, *to empower real property tax officials at the County and local level to make decisions regarding the future of assessment administration in the Chemung County community.*

Acknowledgements

CGR acknowledges the assistance of many Chemung County and municipal officials during the course of this project. Lynne Cole-Gott and Evelyn Arnold from Chemung County's Real Property Tax Services Office provided data assistance and insight into Chemung County's assessment process. Local assessors and town supervisors supplied financial and operational data essential to completing a comprehensive analysis. Local assessors and County officials also made themselves available for in-person interviews to discuss the current assessment system and opportunities for improvement.

CGR would also like to thank Catherine Cullivan and Janet Lasell from the New York State Office of Real Property Services Central Region Office for providing data and perspective to help complete our study.

Staff Team

Scott Sittig, Senior Research Associate at CGR, managed this project and completed major data analysis and report writing. Joseph Stefko, Ph.D., CGR's Director of Public Finance, directed the engagement. Additional staff support and research was provided by CGR Research Associate Katherine Corley.

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2007, New York State's Office of Real Property Services (ORPS) established the Centralized Property Tax Administration Program (CPTAP) to encourage county and local municipal officials to study reform opportunities for their local real property assessment and tax administration systems. According to ORPS, New York is one of only three states nationwide that does not have a statewide uniform level of assessment. Further, it is one of twelve states which do not have a statewide requirement for how often a reassessment must happen.

New York has 1,128 separate assessing units, compared to a national per state median of 85 units. It is one of only seven states which have over 500 assessing jurisdictions. By contrast, thirty states have less than 100. New York's assessing picture is further complicated by nearly 700 school districts and approximately 1,000 other special purpose districts (*e.g.* fire and library districts) which can impose property taxes and are not contiguous with the 1,128 assessing jurisdictions.

In an effort to explore reform opportunities, New York State created the CPTAP grant program as a tool for counties to document their assessment and tax administration systems and consider alternative models. ORPS officials have been clear throughout the process that the program is not intended to force change towards a county-run assessment system. Rather, its goal is to have authorities develop assessment models that uniformly affect every parcel within respective counties, and which result in the following performance standards:

1. a common level of assessment for all assessing units within each county;
2. a common database of assessment, inventory, pictures and valuation data for all the assessing units within each county; and
3. consistent assessment administration standards (*i.e.* regular reassessment cycles; timely verification, correction and transmittal of sales data; and current and accurate inventory collection and maintenance) for all assessing units within each county.

Stated differently, ORPS' goal is to enhance current assessment practices statewide on the following standards:

- **equity** - A system that provides a mechanism for obtaining and maintaining equitable assessments;
- **transparency** - A system that is understandable to taxpayers; and

- **efficiency** - A system that functions efficiently and consistently across a county.

Only two counties in New York State, Nassau and Tompkins, operate under a fully county-run assessing system. In all other counties, levels of assessment (LOA) and reassessment schedules vary greatly from one municipality to another. According to ORPS, the discrepancies are large. By way of example, one county has an equalization rate range of 0.83 to 101.3, with some municipalities maintaining 100 percent assessments while neighboring jurisdictions have not reassessed since the Civil War. The resulting disparities create challenges for the State and counties, not to mention confusion for taxpayers, particularly regarding apportionment of school and county tax levies.

A report issued in the spring of 2008 by the New York State Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness highlighted this fragmentation and the disparities in the system, and recommended that assessment functions across the State be consolidated at the county level. The transition to county-run assessment programs was acknowledged to potentially cost more money in some locations, but the Commission believed that a centralized system would be more efficient; make better use of professional expertise; and enhance equity and transparency.

The foregoing is provided as context for this CPTAP study. It is not the intent of the grant or this study to recommend or even promote one option or model over other alternatives. Rather, this analysis and report intends to provide County and local officials with a cost/benefit analysis of a series of assessment models identified by ORPS. With that information, County and local officials will be well positioned to make future decisions regarding Chemung County's assessment system.

THE EXISTING ASSESSMENT SYSTEM IN CHEMUNG COUNTY

The property tax assessment system in Chemung County operates in a decentralized fashion with the County Real Property Tax Services (RPTS) Office providing required services to local assessors. Within the past year, the County created the full-time position of Director of RPTS to replace a part-time Director that was shared with Schuyler County. This new staffing capacity creates new opportunities to provide some more services at the County level that could not have been offered previously. In addition, the County has facilitated for many years the use of a real-time centralized Real Property Services database. Until recently, this database was housed offsite and maintained by an independent contractor. As of

February 2009, the database will be physically relocated in the County office building and maintained by County staff.

In addition to these County actions, several local jurisdictions have taken steps to consolidate their assessment functions. There is one Coordinated Assessment Program (CAP) in the County, and there are many instances of assessors sharing assessment responsibilities for multiple jurisdictions. Further steps have been considered as local jurisdictions struggle with limited resources and taxpayers express frustration regarding reassessments and property tax administration.

Chemung County applied for the CPTAP grant to document its current assessment system in order to provide a benchmark from which to ascertain future opportunities for efficiency. Assessment valuation and data collection standards vary across the County (including outside contractors), and the standards by which assessors serve the public and conduct assessments vary by individual. Complicating the situation in Chemung County is the presence of the City of Elmira, which not only has the most parcels, but also operates on a completely different assessment calendar than the rest of the assessing jurisdictions.

To document the current assessment system in Chemung County, CGR obtained data from several different sources. Primary data came from a survey of all town assessors and town supervisors. CGR also obtained and analyzed sales and parcel data for the entire County from ORPS, as well as directly from the County RPTS office. During the process, CGR interviewed the person then serving as the County RPTS Director, the current County RPTS Deputy Director, the Deputy County Executive, the County Planning Commissioner, the City of Elmira City Manager and Assessor for the Town of Southport and City of Elmira. In addition, CGR attended and facilitated a meeting of the County's local assessors' group and the Rural Association of Mayors and Supervisors. These facilitated meetings provided an opportunity to discuss the study, current practices and opportunities to improve the assessment process for jurisdictions countywide.

The following sections detail the current assessment budgets and operations for all assessing jurisdictions in Chemung County. As noted below, a series of tables are included in the appendix with detailed information on each assessing unit in the County.

Structure and Staffing

Property assessment services in Chemung County are divided between eleven towns and one city:

- City of Elmira

- Town of Elmira
- Town of Southport
- Town of Chemung
- Town of Catlin
- Town of Van Etten
- Town of Big Flats
- Town of Horseheads
- Town of Ashland
- Town of Baldwin
- Town of Erin
- Town of Veteran

Several of the assessing jurisdictions have entered into collaborative arrangements in recent years. Pursuant to sections 1537 and 1573 of the Real Property Tax Services Law, in 2008 the Towns of Chemung and Van Etten created a coordinated assessment program (CAP) with the Town of Barton in Tioga County. While this is the only official CAP in the County, 60 percent of the remaining units currently share an assessor with at least one other town. **Tables A-1 and A-2** in the appendix presents staffing and other overview information for each assessing unit.

Municipal Level

There are eight individual assessors and no three-person boards covering the twelve assessing jurisdictions. Of the eight individual assessors, all are appointed to their position. As identified in **Table A-2** of the appendix, there are 22 total assessment staff persons across the twelve assessment units (including the assessors). Not all are full-time, and the 22 positions translate into 11.3 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. Each unit averages 1.8 staff positions, or the equivalent of 0.9 FTE.

There is only one assessor who does not meet the State's certification requirements to be an assessor.¹ The assessor is in compliance with the State Board of Real Property Services as she is in the training process within official timelines to receive her certification. Five assessors in the county have received state designation as "advanced"²; there is one assessor designated as "professional"³ through the Institute of Assessing

¹ State Certified Assessor (SCA) is the minimal certification, requires training in a state certified program and must be completed within three years of the first appointment.

² State Certified Assessor Advanced (SCAA) designation requires extra coursework provided by NYS beyond the SCA certification.

³ Professional designation (SCAP) requires coursework and passing a five-hour exam administered by the IAO. Any NYS assessor can be a member of the IAO without having the "professional" designation.

Officers (IAO) in New York State. Two assessors are also state licensed real estate appraisers.

The average assessing unit in Chemung County reported being open for 26 office hours per week, staffed by the assessor and/or one of the support staff. According to assessment staff, over 59 percent of office hours on average are devoted to customer service issues.

The International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO)⁴ has established benchmarks for average number of staff per parcel. For jurisdictions that have systems supported by computers, the average number of parcels per FTE employee is approximately 2,000. For those without computer support, the average is roughly 1,800. Interviews with assessors from both Chemung County and elsewhere in New York State revealed that it is not uncommon for the parcels-per-FTE ratio to be 3,500 or more depending on the municipality and the type of parcels involved.

Information gleaned from the surveys revealed the range in parcels per FTE was broad – the lowest parcels-per-FTE ratio was 1,460, while the highest was 15,493. It is important to note that this disparity should be interpreted in terms of effort being expended by assessors, not necessarily in terms of actual parcels covered by one FTE staff person. Five Chemung County assessing jurisdiction have a FTE staff person covering more than 2,500 parcels⁵. All other jurisdictions that have ratios in excess of 2,500 parcels-per-FTE have less than one FTE covering all the parcels. Again, this represents a level of effort expended by these local assessors that exceeds the level of effort expended by other jurisdictions with fewer parcels per FTE.

Local assessors did express concern that local budgets and staffing patterns do not necessarily represent the workload required to carry out the duties and functions of assessment properly. The above figures seem to underscore their observation. The assessor with a parcel ratio of 15,493 is likely not able to provide the same quality of service as the assessor who is carrying a parcel ratio significantly less than that.

County Level (RPTS)

The County operates a Real Property Tax Service office currently staffed with three FTE individuals. For many years, the County shared a part-time Director for this office with Schuylar County. As of 2008, the part-

⁴ www.iaao.org

⁵ The City of Elmira, Town of Big Flats, Town of Elmira, Town of Horseheads, and the Town of Southport all have FTE ratios in excess of 2,500.

time Director decided to work full-time in Schuyler County, creating a vacancy for the part-time position in Chemung County. Chemung County transitioned the part-time position to full-time and appointed an interim Director of RPTS. As of the writing of this report, ORPS has determined that the interim Director does not have sufficient credentials to fulfill the role as a permanent Director, thus leaving the County in a position to decide what to do with the current staff person as well as how to staff the Director position. Discussions are under way and subject to change, but preliminary thought is that the County will at least maintain the position as a full-time position.

Two other staff persons (2 FTE) report to the Interim Director. One staff person serves as the Deputy Director and provides clerical support for the office, while the other staff person was recently hired to provide tax-mapping services to all the local jurisdictions.

For 2009, the County has budgeted \$243,000 for the RPTS office. After revenues are subtracted, the RPTS office presents no net cost to County residents (*i.e.* revenues exceed budgeted costs by \$161,000). In other words, even with the new staff addition, the County RPTS office is currently expected to generate net revenue for the County budget.

Some of the services that the County provides in support of the assessment function are as follows:

- tax levy coordination and calculation of tax rates for County and Town tax extensions;
- printing of tentative and final assessment rolls;
- printing and sending out disclosure notices at town's request;
- data mailers at town's request;
- processing and printing of tax rolls for the villages and the City of Elmira;
- processing and printing of tax rolls and bills for the towns and County;
- Board of Assessment Review (BAR) training;
- maintaining tax maps and printing new cards after map changes for the County of Chemung and the County of Schuyler.
- assessor orientation and ongoing RPTL procedural guidance (in conjunction with ORPS);
- printing of assessor annual reports;
- facilitating deed and sales transmittals to ORPS, updating the name and address file of bank codes and adding new bank name and address information.
- New York State RPS V4 'software' updates and database administrative updates;

- preparing agreements and invoices and providing GIS information on CD to various clients.
- providing reports to towns, villages, fire departments, school districts, other County departments, businesses and the public;
- processing applications for corrected tax bills; and
- preparing letters of omitted taxes after exemption removal from parcels.
- preparing and mailing PILOT bills and receiving payment.
- receiving escrow account data and distribute to assessors.
- analyzing and trending data;
- printing enhanced STAR renewal forms for the towns, city and not-for-profits;
- helping abstractors and property owners either in the office or on the phone;
- serving as member of the Agricultural Land and Farm Protection Board.

Many of these services are provided pursuant to state statute.

Parcel Characteristics

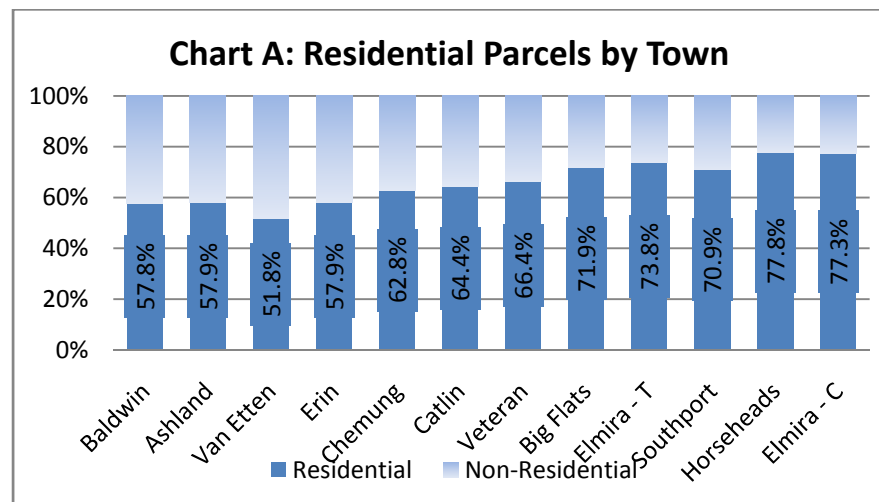
Chemung County contains 39,496 property parcels, over seventy percent of which are classified as residential (see **Table A**). Reflecting the County's rural character, the next highest classification is vacant land. Commercial class parcels are the third most common property class in the County with slightly more than five percent of the total property class designation. Commercial and Industrial classifications combined account for around 5.8 percent of all parcels in the County.

Table A: County Parcels by Property Class		
<i>Property Class</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>%</i>
Recreation & Entertainment	108	0.3%
Industrial	185	0.5%
Wild, Conservation & Public Park	289	0.7%
Agricultural	347	0.9%
Public Services	521	1.3%
Community Service	527	1.3%
Commercial	2,107	5.3%
Vacant	6,899	17.5%
Residential	28,513	72.2%
<i>Total</i>	<i>39,496</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

As shown in **Table B**, the City of Elmira has the most total parcels in the County (9,745, or 24.7 percent of the total). The City of Elmira also contains the largest percentage of residential properties (26.4 percent of all County residential parcels). The Town of Baldwin has the fewest total parcels at 550 (1.4 percent of all County parcels) and the fewest residential parcels (318 parcels or 1.1 percent of the total residential parcels in the County).

Table B: County Parcels by Town		
<i>Town</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>%</i>
Town of Baldwin	550	1.4%
Town of Ashland	730	1.8%
Town of Van Etten	1,162	2.9%
Town of Erin	1,236	3.1%
Town of Catlin	1,396	3.5%
Town of Chemung	1,459	3.7%
Town of Veteran	1,817	4.6%
Town of Elmira	3,794	9.6%
Town of Big Flats	3,917	9.9%
Town of Southport	5,426	13.7%
Town of Horseheads	8,264	20.9%
City of Elmira	9,745	24.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>39,496</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Chart A below displays the percentage of total parcels per town that are classified as residential. The Town of Horseheads and City of Elmira have the highest percentage of total parcels classified as residential; Van Etten has the lowest concentration of residential parcels.



Budgets and State Aid

For the most recent year, Chemung County's local assessment functions reported spending approximately \$760,000⁶. This averaged out to \$63,300 per assessing unit, or roughly two percent of the average municipal budget. The median budget for assessment was \$32,500, revealing the upward pull on the average due to the larger jurisdictions in the County. **Table A-3** in the appendix details the breakdown for each jurisdiction.

The "cost per parcel" of local assessment functions ranges from \$9.21 in the least expensive municipality to \$27.55 in the most expensive. In other words, the municipality with the highest cost-per-parcel ratio in the County is paying almost 200 percent more than the lowest cost municipality. On average, the cost per parcel across all towns in the County is \$19.24. The median value is \$16.20. Full details on this information can be found in **Table A-3** of the appendix.

The municipalities receive state aid for a variety of reasons. Six of the assessing units receive aid annually as part of their enrollment in the six-year reassessment plan. Only the Town of Erin and the CAP of Chemung and Van Etten receive triennial state aid. Chemung and Van Etten also receive aid for being a CAP. Three municipalities received some maintenance aid back in 2004 and two municipalities received attainment aid⁷ dating back to 1991. Aid amounts vary across the units, ranging from \$970 to \$39,298. **Table A-4** in the appendix contains detailed information on the most recent state aid received by each of the assessing units.

Indicators of Assessment Equity and Uniformity

Real Property Tax Law, Section 305, requires that assessing jurisdictions treat all of their respective parcels the same by assessing all real property at a uniform percentage of market value. The following statistical measures illustrate how consistently assessors are treating parcels throughout the County. (Note: **Table A-4** in the appendix contains additional detail on the measures discussed in this section.)

⁶ CGR could not verify if the budget reported from the Town of Veteran included fringe benefits. All other entities reported fringe benefits with their total assessment budget.

⁷<http://www.tax.ny.gov>. Reference this publication for a complete explanation of Maintenance and Attainment Aid. Neither classification currently exists under Real Property Tax Law.

Coefficient of Dispersion

The Coefficient of Dispersion (COD) is a common statistical measure of uniformity (often called “horizontal” equity). According to ORPS, “the COD measures the extent to which the assessment ratios from a given roll exhibit dispersion around a midpoint. It is generally accepted that the median assessment ratio best serves as the midpoint or central tendency measure from which the average level of dispersion should be calculated.”⁸

The lower the COD, the more uniformity there is in assessments within the jurisdiction. The *Standard on Ratio Studies*⁹ produced by the IAAO documents acceptable COD ratios among various parcel classifications. According to the publication, newer, homogenous residential parcels should have a relationship between assessed value and market value where the COD is between 5 and 10 percent. The COD ratio is considered acceptable up to 15 percent for older, more heterogeneous residential parcels. For other parcel classifications such as vacant and/or seasonal land, acceptable ratios can range as high as 25 percent. The general benchmark when all parcels are analyzed together is to have a COD of less than 20 percent. As shown previously in **Table A**, 72.2 percent of Chemung County properties are residential and 17.5 percent are classified as vacant.

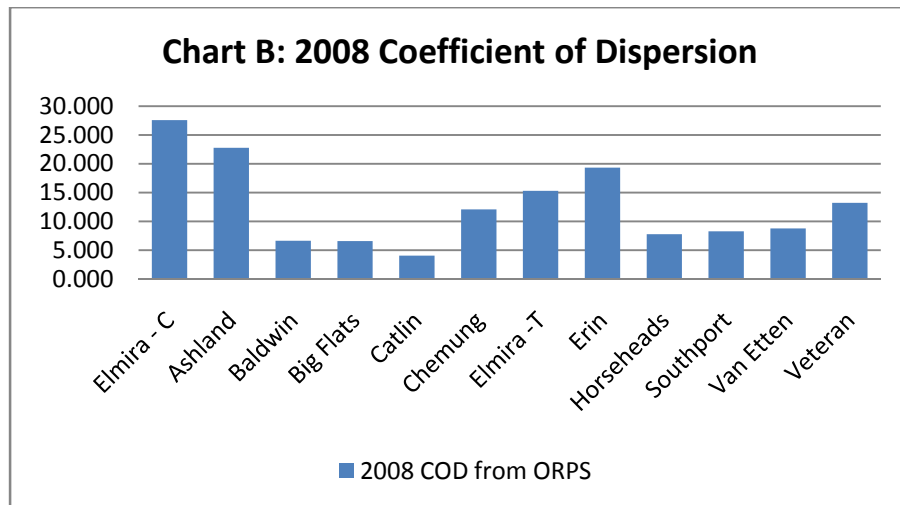
Current Sales CODs¹⁰ for Chemung County municipalities range from 4.053 to 27.596. Four of the twelve assessing units exceed the 15 percent threshold defined by the IAAO. The largest COD of the twelve assessing units is almost seven times higher than the smallest. As might be anticipated, the jurisdictions completing annual reassessments represent the lowest sales CODs, indicating greater uniformity within those jurisdictions regarding assessed and market values.

The one anomaly in the data is the Town of Baldwin. While not having done a reassessment in decades, it has a low COD. The probable explanation for this is a low number of sales in the Town for the period on which data was analyzed. Low sales volume significantly impacts the accuracy of the statistical measures used to produce the sales COD statistic.

⁸ *Assessment Equity in New York: Results from the 2004 Market Value Survey*, Office of Real Property Services.

⁹ Executive Board. (2007). *Standard on Ratio Studies*. Kansas City, MO: International Association of Assessing Officers.

¹⁰ Sales COD data provided by the NYS Office of Real Property Services.



Price Related Differential

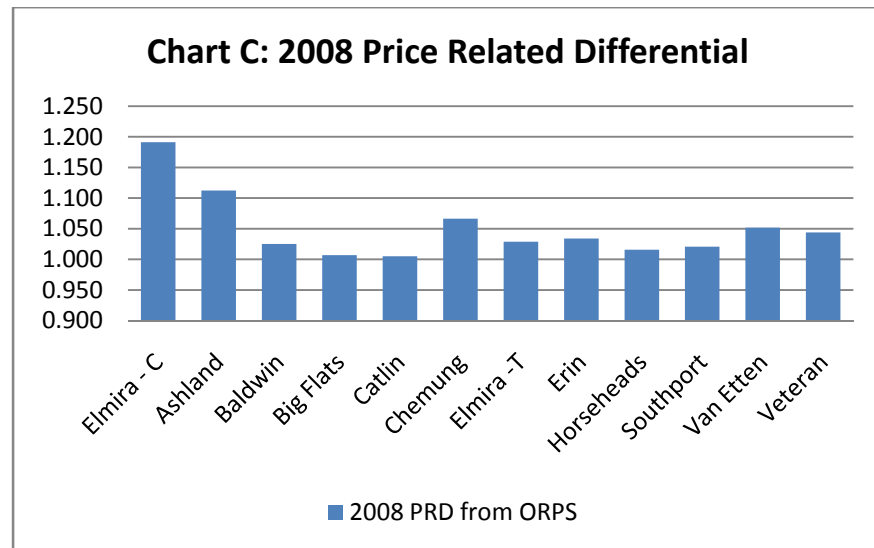
Another measure of assessment uniformity is known as Price Related Differential (PRD). According to ORPS, the PRD “is used to determine if there is a bias on an assessment roll toward systematic over-assessment of either high- or low-value properties in comparison to the average property. In computing the PRD, the simple mean of the assessment ratios is divided by the value-weighted mean ratio. If no bias exists, the two ratios should be close to each other, and the PRD should be near 1.00.”¹¹ PRDs that are significantly greater (or less than) 1.00 show price-related bias – a “progressivity” if higher-value properties are over-assessed and lower-value ones under-assessed, or a “regressivity” if the opposite is true.

The IAAO standard for acceptable PRDs is 0.98 to 1.03. Values below this range indicate progressivity; values above this range indicate regressivity.

As observed by the sales numbers in **Chart C** below, several Chemung County assessing units exhibit some level of bias relative to the acceptable range. All units have values in excess of 1.0, ranging as high as 1.19. Fifty percent of the assessing units are outside the acceptable IAAO range using the sales PRD statistics. According to the IAAO, further statistical analysis¹² would have to be conducted to determine the validity of these PRDs.

¹¹ *Assessment Equity in New York: Results from the 2004 Market Value Survey*, Office of Real Property Services.

¹² IAAO recommends either the Spearman Rank Test or a Correlation or Regression analysis to determine the validity of the PRD calculations.



Level of Assessment

The Level of Assessment (LOA) represents the percentage of full value at which parcels within a particular community are assessed. A LOA of 25 percent would indicate assessments are one-quarter of full market value; a LOA of 100 would indicate full market value assessments.

The current range for LOA across Chemung County is 2.02 to 100. The six assessing units that are currently conducting annual reassessments reported a LOA of 100 for 2008. Of the six assessing units that did not have a LOA of 100, one is planning a reassessment in 2009 and the one other in 2010. The four remaining units have not specified a date when they will conduct a reassessment project.

General Data Quality

The general quality of data in Chemung County varies by jurisdiction. The Supervisor for the Town of Ashland reported that they have never done a reassessment and ORPS has no record of Baldwin ever completing a reassessment. Consensus among peer assessors is that any reassessment project for these two towns would require a complete data collection project. The towns of Erin and Veteran have older data that need to be updated. The Town of Elmira conducted a data collection project in 2008 and will complete a reassessment in 2009. The Town of Veteran is in the process of completing a data collection project and expects to complete a reassessment in 2010. The City of Elmira self-reports having relatively good data, but it has not done a data verification process since the mid-1990s. All the other assessing jurisdictions have moved into annual cycles and are maintaining their data annually.

Reassessment

The towns of Big Flats, Catlin, Chemung, Horseheads, Southport and Van Etten all participate in ORPS sponsored annual reassessment program. As mentioned above, the Town of Elmira plans to conduct a reassessment project in 2009 as part of an application process to move into a six-year plan¹³. The Town of Veteran will conduct a reassessment project in 2010. The City of Elmira, Town of Erin, Town of Ashland and Town of Baldwin did not specify when they anticipated conducting a reassessment project. The assessor for Ashland and Baldwin expressed openness to the idea of reassessment, but noted numerous hurdles that would have to be overcome to make it officially happen. **Table A-4** in the appendix details information regarding reassessment.

Real Property Administration System

Type of System

According to information provided to CGR by local assessors and the County, all assessing units in Chemung County are using Real Property System (RPS) V4 software. RPS is a collection of assessment, physical inventory and valuation programs that assist the assessment community in producing an equitable assessment roll. The RPS application allows the assessor to keep their assessment and inventory data current and produces reports required by ORPS' Rules & Regulations and the New York State Real Property Tax Law.

Local assessors access RPS through Terminal Services, which connects them to a Countywide centralized database. In total, the County reported that assessing units paid \$12,960 in annual license and maintenance fees to the State for use of the RPS software. It is interesting to note that license fees for the towns in the CAP were substantially less than the other towns. A CAP is considered as one unit and thus each participant pays a portion of the license fee as opposed to other units that are charged for the full value of the license fee.¹⁴

For many years, the database was housed at the City of Elmira and the data was accessed via Citrix technology. However, when personnel who managed the software began to retire or move on, the expertise for the system left with them. At that point, the County chose to outsource the database to a company named Sewall. This relationship meant that all data was physically relocated to servers owned by the County but housed

¹³ Although the Town of Elmira has the option, they have not yet officially decided to go into the Annual Reassessment Program.

¹⁴ The value of the license fee is based upon number of parcels.

in Atlanta. This has proven difficult for local assessors who complain of terminal services sessions timing out, trouble with printing, and/or not wanting to change their passwords so often. As of February 2009, the County had made plans to address these problems by letting the contract with Sewall expire and physically relocating the servers to County offices in Chemung County.

According to ORPS, minimum requirements for stand-alone or client/server computers running RPS V4 include a 3.2 GHz processor with 1 GB of RAM.¹⁵ When GIS capabilities are used, they also recommend 80 GB of storage capacity, a 17-inch monitor, external storage for backup and MS Windows XP SP2.

CGR was unable to obtain data on all the stand-alone machines in each jurisdiction. For the seven towns that reported on their equipment, 4 out of 7 machines meet the minimum RAM requirement, but none has a processor speed that meets the minimum requirement. Due to the transition, it is unknown at this time what the final configuration of the County's server(s) will look like.

All of the assessing units in the County use GIS in support of their assessment function, though some with greater success than others. ORPS provides technical assistance to the local assessors to enhance their functional knowledge of how to incorporate GIS into data records and management.

As noted earlier, the County and ORPS together provide IT support for RPS to all of their assessing units upon request. The City of Elmira also has in-house technicians that assist in resolving technical difficulties for the assessor in the City.

Logistics

The presence of a real-time centralized database affords the County access to current data to provide many of the services listed earlier. By May 1 of each year, the County processes and prints the tentative assessment rolls for all the towns. By July 1 of each year, it processes final assessment rolls for the towns and the tentative assessment roll for the City. The City's final assessment roll is processed by August 10.

The County uses RPS data to produce tax bill extract files that are used to print and mail tax bills for the towns as well as for reconciliation purposes within the towns, villages and the City. Tax bill extract files for villages and the City are usually sent to an outside vendor for processing and

¹⁵ http://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/publications/orpts/rps/support/v4_hardware_requirements.pdf

mailing, but occasionally the villages use the extract files to send out bills on their own.

School district tax files are created in August and September and the County sends the files to BOCES for all but three districts. For Horseheads, Corning and Newfield School Districts, the County sends the files directly to the district. All the school districts print their own tax bills. The County does process an assessment roll for the Corning School District and sends them the file while for Newfield they fax them an assessment print. The County adds omitted taxes to the school, village and County/town tax file as well as the school, village, sewer, and water relieves. In addition, refuse and mowing charges are added to the tax files.

The County also maintains an online presence with the help of SDG Associates. SDG uses RPS data to populate the interface, which makes the most current parcel information available to the public on the web. In addition to parcel information, there are links to GIS and tax map information as well as links to ORPS website for useful context on the assessment process in NYS.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE MODELS

As noted at the outset of this report, the NYS Office of Real Property Services established a specific list of options to be analyzed and cost out in each county's CPTAP study. The following sections detail those four primary options:

1. County-run assessing
2. County Coordinated Assessment Program (CAP)
3. Localized Coordinated Assessment Programs (CAP)
4. Towns contracting with the County

Table A-7 in the appendix shows the detailed cost/revenue implications for each of the models considered below.

Collaboration Incentives

In the context of reviewing alternative models, it is important to note the availability of certain collaboration/consolidation incentives for communities. The Office of Real Property Services provides state aid (currently up to \$7/parcel) to groups of municipalities who consolidate their assessment functions, share an assessor and achieve a common level of assessment. Counties are also eligible to receive a separate \$1/parcel in state aid if agreements are reached to provide services under RPTL 1537.

In addition to the aid available to municipalities, counties are eligible for grant money up to \$2/parcel if municipalities consolidate their services at the County level. This grant money is reduced to \$1/parcel if some but not all of the municipalities opt to consolidate in this manner.¹⁶

Besides the obvious municipal cost benefits related to consolidation, the Coordinated Assessing Program (CAP) and/or inter-municipal agreements potentially reduce the number of assessment officials who need to be trained and certified and reduce the number of individual equalization rates that need to be computed by the State. One concern that was repeated several times in CGR's discussions with assessment officials in Chemung County was that fewer and fewer people are in the pipeline to become assessors. While positions are currently filled in all assessing jurisdictions in Chemung County, the possibility exists that there will not be a sufficient number of highly qualified individuals to fill future vacancies. Reducing the number of posts needed to be filled would alleviate this concern.

COUNTY-LEVEL MODELS

According to the state's Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness, the primary benefits associated with a county-level assessment model would be gains in efficiency and professionalism, along with a more streamlined system for applying and maintaining equalization rates across the state. This section projects the costs of transitioning to, and operating, the County-run and County-coordinated assessing models in Chemung County.

Option 1: County-run Assessing

Overview

County-run assessment places the responsibility for property assessment solely with the county government. Since local municipalities would be surrendering their right to conduct local assessments and appoint an assessor, the consolidation to a county model would require a county-wide referendum¹⁷. Since Chemung County contains one city but has no

¹⁶ State Aid and grant numbers mentioned in this study are estimates and there is no guarantee that state aid will not be cut in future budgets. State Aid was reduced for year 2008 by 2 percent.

¹⁷ Article IX, §1(h)(1) of the State Constitution provides that where a transfer of functions to the county occurs, it must be approved by a majority of the votes cast in a referendum. If there are cities in the county it must be approved by a majority of the votes cast in the towns considered as a single unit and a majority in the cities as a single unit.

villages that provide assessment services, the referendum must pass by a majority vote of all eligible city voters and separately by a vote of all eligible town voters (a so-called double referendum).

State Real Property Tax Law, Sections 1530 and 1540, requires that under a county assessing system, the county's Director of Real Property Tax Services would be replaced by a Director of Assessment. The County Legislature appoints the Director, either for a six-year term of office or civil service appointment. All other employees in the department would be civil service staff. By way of comparison, Tompkins County (one of two county-run models in the state) appointed a civil service Director of Assessment that is not subject to six-year term limits.

Once a county became a single assessing unit, the state would calculate a single equalization rate based upon the aggregate assessed value to market value ratio of the entire county, and the county legislature would be responsible for setting the revaluation schedule. Once a full value revaluation has been implemented, Real Property Tax Law authorizes the county legislature to direct an assessment of all property at a uniform percentage of value.

Transition Costs

A precondition to a fully county-run assessing model is uniform assessment levels across the jurisdictions to be consolidated. In Chemung County, six assessment units are on an annual reassessment cycle and have a LOA of 100 (Big Flats, Catlin, Chemung, Horseheads, Southport and Van Etten), while the remaining six units range from 2.02 to 92.00. Of the six units with a LOA of less than 100, the Town of Elmira anticipates conducting a reassessment in 2009 and the Town of Veteran anticipates conducting one in 2010.¹⁸ The remaining four (City of Elmira, Towns of Ashland, Baldwin and Erin) do not have a formal plan for reassessment.¹⁹

The most significant challenge for addressing a common level of assessment will be upgrading the data in the Towns of Ashland and Baldwin. Aside from the challenging political dynamics of encouraging this process, there would also be a significant expenditure involved relative to their respective town budgets. Outside contractor fees to conduct a full data collection and verification process can range between \$40-\$70 parcel depending on complexity and scope of service. Assuming an average project cost of roughly \$55 per parcel for Ashland and

¹⁸ CGR did not include these two towns in our cost estimate for reassessment since they are already planning to conduct a reassessment.

¹⁹For analysis, CGR assumed that the revaluation would occur in 2011 with a possible transition as of 2012 roll.

Baldwin, the full reassessment of these parcels would produce a gross cost of \$70,400. This would be offset by aid available to Ashland and Baldwin of up to \$5/parcel for the reassessment (\$6,400) and then the aid available to them due to consolidation (\$8,960). In sum, the cost to these two communities would net to just over \$55,000.

The next challenge would be for the City of Elmira and Town of Erin to schedule and conduct a reassessment. The data in each of their respective communities is reasonably accurate and clean. A reassessment project in these communities would likely only cost in the \$20-\$50 per parcel range. At an average cost of \$35/parcel, the City of Elmira could expect to spend \$341,000 for a complete reassessment and the Town of Erin could expect to spend around \$43,000. The net cost to the City of Elmira after aid was applied would be \$224,000 while in the Town of Erin the net cost would be approximately \$28,000. In total, gross reassessment costs for the towns of Ashland, Baldwin, Erin and the City of Elmira would be close to \$455,000. When all potential aid is received by these jurisdictions, the aggregate net cost would be \$307,000.

In addition to reassessment, there would be operational transition costs associated with relocating staff, establishing new offices, and buying computers and related equipment. County officials cited that the biggest hurdle would be finding space to house a centralized real property services operation. The current assessment offices reported having approximately 5,700 square feet of combined office space among all their respective units. The current County RPTS office is not large enough to accommodate this or even a significant portion of this. One suggestion that CGR considered was the purchase of a building for sale near current County offices. The building is located at 200 Baldwin Street. It has first floor access with over 8,000 square feet and is already configured for office space, as it used to serve as the site for the Department of Labor. It also has access to a parking lot with additional street parking available in front of the building. The price for the building has recently been reduced to \$350,000. (A specification sheet provided by the realtor can be viewed in the appendix after Table A-7).

Beyond space, the County would have to furnish the office with furniture and equipment. As itemized in the next section (*Operating Costs*), CGR models the addition of 13 new positions to properly staff the centralized office. Based on this number, we model \$3,000 per new staff person, or \$39,000 in additional cost for furniture and equipment for a new office.

In summary, building and office transition costs have been modeled at \$389,000 (\$350,000 plus \$39,000). CGR did not attempt to model a financing plan for the purchase of the new building. Should the County only provide a down payment rather than payment in full, the transition

costs would not only be lower, but ongoing operational (future) costs would increase to accommodate debt payments.

As mentioned above, each community conducting a reassessment will be eligible for reassessment aid of up to \$5/parcel (sum total of \$61,305).

Each parcel would also be eligible for consolidation aid of \$7/parcel and the County may receive \$2/parcel as part of the transition²⁰.

Reassessment, consolidation and grant money would total slightly less than \$417,000. When all potential costs and aid are contemplated, the net effect could be \$427,000 in up-front transition costs.

Operating Costs

Personnel

Operating costs of the county-run model would largely depend on the parcels-per-FTE ratio assumed for the new County assessment office. As noted previously, the general guideline is one FTE staff member per every 2,000 parcels, but the figure can reasonably range up to 3,500. Under these assumptions, the staffing range in the County assessment office would likely be between 12 and 20 FTEs.²¹

The County has no history with running a comprehensive centralized Real Property Tax Services Office and thus it is difficult to estimate the precise size of the department. CGR has chosen to model our assumptions based upon a combined staff size of 15 FTE positions in support of one Director (16 FTE total). The positions would include nine appraisal staff along with three more clerical positions and one additional tax map technician. That would bring total clerical positions to four FTE along with two tax map technicians and nine FTE appraisal staff all under the supervision of one Director of Assessment. At fifteen FTE staff (not including the Director); the parcels-per-FTE ratio would be 2,633. Appraisers would be responsible in general terms for 4,400 parcels per person with four FTE clerical positions to support them.

Based upon a review of current salaries for assessors and CGR's experience with other counties around the state, we have modeled new appraisal positions at roughly \$40,000 with a benefits package of approximately 45 percent of salary. Assuming creation of nine FTE positions at these rates, the total additional cost to the County would be \$522,000.

Clerical and tax map staff could be added for a salary of approximately \$28,000 with a benefits package of 45 percent of salary. Using these

²⁰ The grant providing the \$2/parcel is subject to change according the new NYS Budget.

²¹ These numbers are derived using the 39,496 parcels currently on record.

figures, four new FTE clerical positions would cost the County an additional \$162,400.

The sum total of additional staff would cost the County \$684,400. CGR estimates that the current budget of \$242,547 would need to increase by 10 percent to cover salary adjustments for the new Director of Assessment in addition to other overhead-related cost increases.

Other Operational Considerations

Other operational considerations include whether current revenue will continue, potential annual aid, and costs associated with annual reassessments. CGR has accounted for these numbers as follows:

- CGR reviewed the County RPTS budget and believes that under a County-run model, all revenue currently being received and applied to the RPTS budget would continue (\$403,500).
- CGR models new revenue that would be available to the County because of aid from the state for annual reassessments (\$197,000).
- CGR assumes that there would be increased costs associated with annual reassessments that would total roughly fifteen percent of the current average cost per parcel for municipal budgets within the County (\$2.89 per parcel, or \$114,000 annually).²²

Total Operational Impact

CGR calculates that the current cost of providing assessment services in Chemung County is approximately \$530,000. This includes municipal assessing jurisdictions and the County, less County revenues and annual aid to municipalities. Comparatively, the operating costs of the County-run model are estimated to cost \$465,000, producing a net decrease of roughly \$65,000.

Assessors were careful to caveat that it is difficult to say with certainty what the cost of providing services at the municipal level is currently since many of the budgets are limited to what municipalities can afford, not what they need. Thus, the decrease in cost associated with a County-run

²² Annual reassessments will generate increases in operational costs for printing, processing and mailing notices, rolls, and bills. During interviews, CGR heard from assessors that their current budgets may not accurately capture the “real” cost of doing business as budgets are constrained. For planning purposes, CGR has assumed that adding 15 percent of the average cost/parcel in the county would help offset these increases.

²² Currently all assessing jurisdictions outside of the City of Elmira share the same assessment calendar.

model may be larger, but may also reflect a potential upgrade in the quality of service that can be provided.

There are a variety of additional advantages to consider under a County-run model:

- as all staff would be county employees, training and/or educational credentials could be set to standardize quality and professionalism;
- the County would operate on one assessment calendar and conduct annual reassessments; and
- the County would be able to initiate a common standard of service and work towards implementing a higher level of transparency through web-based applications and reporting for County residents.

Implementation Path

Three major steps must occur in order to achieve this option. The first two steps are the most significant and should precede the third.

1. First, reassessments would be required in order to get all assessing jurisdictions to a uniform level of assessment.
2. Second, the City of Elmira *or* all of the other assessing jurisdictions²³ would have to pass local laws amending their assessment calendars such that all calendars in the County would be synchronized.
3. Third, two formal referenda would need to be developed – one for the City of Elmira and one for the residents of all other towns in the County. Public hearings should be held, notices filed, and the referenda officially placed on ballots at designated times for public vote.

The timeline for coordination of reassessments is crucial to allow all units to achieve a LOA of 100 for the same assessment year. Considering the Town of Veteran is not planning a reassessment until 2010, the earliest that all units could be at the same level would be 2010. This is likely too soon for each of the communities needing data collection projects, particularly Ashland and Baldwin, to pass the necessary approvals in their respective municipalities to move forward with a reassessment. The more likely scenario is that by the 2012 assessment roll, each of the assessing

²³ Currently all assessing jurisdictions outside of the City of Elmira share the same assessment calendar.

jurisdictions currently needing data collection and verification projects could complete that work and file updated rolls. The six units conducting annual reassessments and the two units updating over the course of this year and next could maintain their data so that only minor adjustments would need to be made for the 2012 roll. They could then achieve a LOA of 100 on the same roll as the newly updated assessment units.

During the transition, County officials should be educating themselves as to the logistical implications of making this transition, including deciding on assessment standards and when the first official public assessment roll would be filed as a County-run operation.

The County would have to develop a new budget along with new position descriptions, and decisions would have to be made regarding space allocation. Supplies and equipment would have to be identified and purchased, and new staff hired. Allowing sufficient time to work through these details will make a significant difference in a successful implementation.

Option 2: County Coordinated Assessment Program (County CAP)

Overview

Transitioning to a county coordinated assessment program (CCAP)²⁴ consolidates the assessing function at the county level, but does not eliminate municipal assessing jurisdictions. Each municipality would surrender operation of their local assessment function and contract with a county for all assessment services in accordance with RPTL §1537.

Unlike the County-run model, this option does *not* require referenda but can be formed by agreement between a county and each local governing body. A CCAP agreement must be approved by majority vote of each governing body at least 45 days before a taxable status date (usually March 1). A copy of the agreement must be filed with the State Board of Real Property Services (herein after referred to as the State Board) by the taxable status date.

Most importantly, the CCAP model as prescribed by Real Property Tax Law, Section 579, involves the following:

- *a single appointed assessor other than the Director of RPTS, appointed to hold the office in all individual assessing units, with*

²⁴ RPTL §579

the appointment taking effect no later than 60 days after initiation of the agreement;

- *a common standard of assessment*, whereby property is assessed at a uniform percentage in all individual assessing units; and
- *a synchronized assessment calendar*, with all individual assessing units operating on the same assessment calendar throughout the term of the agreement.²⁵

A CCAP program can also be terminated at any time by at least 50 percent of the participating assessing units agreeing to termination through the adoption of local laws or resolutions. Alternatively, a county could adopt a county law terminating the program. Both methods require adoption of local laws by a majority of the governing body and must be filed with the State Board no less than 6 months prior to the taxable status date of the first assessment roll to which it would apply.²⁶

Regarding equalization rates, for any market value survey begun after the first assessment roll conducted under a new CCAP, the State Board would conduct a common market value survey including all the assessing units participating in the program. The State Board would establish the same equalization rate and apply it to all of the assessing units participating in the CCAP.

Transition Costs

The transitional costs in a CCAP related to reassessment are likely very similar to those of the County-run option and have been modeled the same. The significant difference in transitional costs involves the flexibility available in how the CCAP is staffed and where staff are located. CGR has modeled transitional costs that would likely not include the purchase of a new building since staff could be decentralized in existing locations. Thus, transition costs under this model simply involve supplies, materials and equipment to support a new operation.

Most of the transition aid that is available under the County-run model would still be available to the County and municipalities, with the exception that those in the current CAP (Chemung/Van Etten) would not

²⁵ Currently, all town level assessing jurisdictions in Chemung County share the same assessment calendar. The City of Elmira operates on a different calendar.

²⁶ Termination by any entity within 10 years of joining any CAP arrangement would subject the terminating entity to a repayment of a prorated portion of the aid they received for joining the CAP.

be eligible to receive the consolidation incentive²⁷. In addition, an additional \$1/parcel aid incentive may also be received by the County pending the types of services that were offered and agreed to by the municipalities.

One other difference in transition costs between the County-run model and CCAP approach involves the level at which costs and aid would be fixed (*i.e.* County versus municipal-level). Aid that flows into the County could be used to offset the transitional costs experienced by the municipalities and thus reduce the impact. In sum, our model indicates that the County and municipalities in aggregate would incur a cost of more than \$41,800 to transition to a CCAP.

Operating Costs

Personnel

Ongoing operational costs are hard to quantify precisely without knowing the structure that would evolve as part of the intermunicipal agreements between the towns and County. For cost estimation purposes, CGR assumes that the County would hire a single assessor for all participating municipalities to appoint as their assessor. This position has been modeled at \$50,000 plus 45 percent benefits. In addition, CGR assumes that twelve FTE support positions would be added such that total new staff would equal thirteen FTE, similar to the County-run model. CGR modeled the addition of twelve FTE support staff at \$35,000 (plus 45 percent benefits). Lastly, CGR added 10 percent to the current County budget as well as the new staff estimates to account for administrative overhead and potential salary adjustments for current County staff. In sum, these additions total almost \$774,000.

Other Operational Considerations

Other operational considerations include whether current revenue will continue, potential annual aid, and costs associated with annual reassessments. CGR has accounted for these numbers as follows:

- CGR reviewed the County RPTS budget and believes that under a County CAP model, all revenue currently being received and applied to the RPTS budget would continue (\$403,500).
- CGR models new revenue that would be available to the County because of aid from the state for annual reassessments (\$197,000).

²⁷ State law dictates that municipalities that have already received consolidation aid would not be eligible to receive it a second time under a new CAP agreement.

- CGR assumes that there would be increased costs associated with annual reassessments that would total roughly fifteen percent of the current average cost per parcel for municipal budgets within the County (\$2.89 per parcel, or \$114,000 annually).²⁸

Total Operational Impact

The sum total of the personnel and other operational considerations yields a CCAP that costs slightly almost \$530,000. This represents a nearly break-even cost compared to the current operation and a \$65,000 increase over the County-run option.

The primary difference in costs modeled with the CCAP versus the County-run is found in the personnel costs. According to RPTL section 1537(4), the newly appointed assessor for the consolidated units cannot be the current Director of RPTS. The addition of an assessor changes the staff composition to be added, and the corresponding salary and benefits total is different. There are also unknowns for the intermunicipal agreements and what requirements the towns might put upon the County as part of those agreements.

The specifics of the intermunicipal agreements will ultimately dictate personnel costs. For instance, reducing the number of additional support staff by one would save an additional \$56,000. If this same change was combined with a lower benefits ratio of 35 percent, the combined savings would be \$104,000 making it nearly \$40,000 less expensive than the County-run option.

Implementation Path

The first step in implementation of this model involves town assessing units agreeing to the plan through majority vote of their respective governing bodies, and adopting an intermunicipal agreement for the County to serve as assessing unit for the municipality. Once an assessor is appointed for the CCAP, assessing units would likely be integrated in phases. To facilitate the process, it makes sense to incorporate first those assessing units that are already at 100 percent level of assessment. Remaining assessing units could be integrated thereafter, subsequent to reassessment to bring them to 100 percent.

Similar to the County-run option, the CCAP would require that either the City of Elmira or all of the towns who contract with the County change their assessment calendar in order to have them all synchronized. This

²⁸ See Footnote 22.

would be a necessary first step before intermunicipal agreements were signed to allow this option to take effect.

Among the other logistical issues to resolve in transitioning to a CCAP would be synchronization of computer software across the units, and the roles of local office staff. As part of drafting the intermunicipal agreement, officials will need to make decisions regarding the following:

- timelines for filing the first assessment roll;
- locations and hours of local assessment offices;
- whether mobile units might serve local needs better than local assessment offices (please reference the section on “Other Options” later in the report for a more detailed discussion of mobile units);
- the extent to which responsibilities of current County staff will change;
- the process for handling complex property valuation; and
- whether to institute a formal reassessment cycle.

LOCAL-LEVEL MODELS

Aside from the County-run and CCAP models, there are other options available to the County that may yield efficiency, equity, transparency and standardization benefits. The two options presented in this section use intermunicipal agreements between and among assessing units. However, it is important to note their common goals:

- 1) A common level of assessment at 100 percent across all assessing units, qualifying them for state aid of up to \$5/parcel;
- 2) A common reassessment cycle to ensure more standardization across assessing units; and
- 3) A common process for inventory and sales verification to ensure more reliability and accuracy across assessing units.

There are varieties of possible permutations for these options. For example, a localized coordinated assessment program (CAP) may be implemented for two, three, four or more municipalities²⁹. Similarly,

²⁹ It is important to note that the ideas presented in Option Three are not contingent upon all assessing jurisdictions adopting County-wide assessment standards consistent with

local jurisdictions may contract with each other or the County for specific services. In each case, actual costs and aid benefits will be driven by the specifics of the agreement.

Option 3: Localized Coordinated Assessment Programs (CAP)

Section 579 of the Real Property Tax Law allows two or more assessing units located in the same county (or adjoining counties), having the same level of assessment, and having the same assessor, to enter into an agreement to become a Coordinated Assessment Program (CAP). Under this arrangement, the State Board establishes identical equalization rates for all of the assessing units in the CAP. In addition to yielding standardization benefits, the CAP model can be particularly useful in spreading assessment costs between or among jurisdictions. For example, multiple assessing units in a CAP may be able to acquire professional assessment services that would otherwise be cost prohibitive were they acting separately. In addition, licensing fees for the RPS software can be shared between municipalities thus reducing the cost.

According to ORPS, the membership size of a CAP can evolve during the life of the agreement. The agreement can be amended to add new assessing units. On the other hand, assessing units can withdraw from the program if the local law or resolution providing for the withdrawal is approved by a majority vote of the unit's governing body and filed with the State Board at least six months before the taxable status date of the first assessment roll to which it is to apply.³⁰

The CAP model also may represent an opportunity for further collaboration and efficiencies going forward. For example, a CAP (or series of CAPs) may serve as a building block for bringing all assessing units under agreement across the County in a way that enables standard levels of assessment and valuation standards. It may also facilitate more local jurisdictions contracting with the County for particular assessment-related services.

ORPS goals. However, the intent of this grant, and ORPS goal, is that all jurisdictions have common standards and common LOAs. Thus, should local municipalities decide to CAP without the County, the County should still consider adopting common assessment standards as outlined in Option Four that would apply to all the assessing jurisdictions, including the new CAP.

³⁰ Should a municipality withdraw within ten years of joining a CAP, they would be subject to repay to NYS a prorated portion of the aid they received.

Potential CAPs in Chemung County

Chemung County already has one CAP. As previously discussed, the Towns of Chemung and Van Etten formed a CAP with the Town of Barton in Tioga County. However, as also observed in **Table A-1** in the appendix, there are several instances of municipalities sharing assessors. For instance, the same assessor serving the CAP also provides assessment services for the Town of Catlin. The Towns of Ashland and Baldwin share an assessor, and the Town of Southport and City of Elmira share an assessor.

Several CAP possibilities exist in Chemung County. One CAP that has been discussed is that of combining Southport, the Town of Elmira, Big Flats, Horseheads and the City of Elmira. Both the City Manager of Elmira and the assessor expressed interest in facilitating this idea. The Town of Elmira is already considering a six-year plan and Big Flats, Horseheads and Southport already abide by that plan. The City of Elmira would have to amend its charter to modify its assessment calendar, conduct a revaluation and then apply to be part of the six-year plan. There is natural synergy with this CAP due to the proximity of the parcels around the City of Elmira and their general similarities. These municipalities represent 79 percent of the total parcels in the County and the five largest municipalities in terms of total parcels per municipality.

Another natural CAP might be the addition of Catlin into the current CAP of Chemung, Van Etten and Barton. Ashland and Baldwin represent another potential opportunity for a CAP, especially as a means to helping them achieve the longer-term goal of reassessing all parcels in the two towns. Since Ashland and Baldwin share similar LOAs, have similar parcel characteristics and share a common assessor, they are theoretically nearly a CAP already. They would merely need to adopt the same LOA, have their boards sign-off on creating a CAP, and apply to the state to become a CAP. The benefit to this option is that they could receive the state aid for consolidation and apply that towards the cost of a future revaluation.

Cost Implications of a Sample CAP

Quantifying the true cost of a coordinated assessment program would depend on a number of factors that are indeterminate at the present time. Community size, parcel volume, valuation complexity and current costs and staff size would all need to be included in a full analysis of a proposed CAP.

In order to provide guidance to the County and its assessing units on how to think through the cost analysis process, we present a hypothetical example of a new CAP in Chemung County. This example assumes that

the largest five jurisdictions entered into a CAP, and considers the cost implications of so doing.

At present, the City of Elmira and Town of Southport share an assessor while the other three have appointed assessors. The five municipalities represent 31,146 parcels, a FTE staff equivalent of 8.25, and total annual spending of \$630,096.

Shifting to a CAP agreement with a shared assessor could result in a staff configuration of one (1) FTE assessor, three (3) FTE appraisers, and 4.5 support staff members. Were the assessor salaried at \$50,000 plus 45 percent benefits, the appraisers at \$40,000 plus 45 percent benefits and the support staff members at \$28,000 with 45 percent benefits, plus a 20 percent markup for office overhead, the total annual cost of the CAP in this scenario would be \$515,000. Dividing this total cost by the parcels involved yields a cost per parcel of \$16.54. The actual impact to each municipality would be part of a negotiated agreement but would likely be favorable to most of the entities listed due to lower costs and/or increases in annual state aid.

The real benefit to any CAP is the added revenue brought into each municipality because of the state aid that is available.³¹ In the case of Big Flats, aid in excess of \$47,000 would be available as part of the CAP process. Horseheads could receive almost \$99,000. Southport would receive slightly more than \$65,000 and the Town of Elmira would receive more than \$45,000. The City of Elmira would actually receive more than \$116,000. Among all of the communities, more than \$218,000 could be generated in consolidation aid and an additional \$156,000 in reassessment aid by creating this CAP agreement. Table C highlights the possible ongoing operational cost and revenue implications to each participating municipality in this CAP.

Table C: Operational Impact for CAP of the City of Elmira & Towns of Southport, Big Flats, Elmira and Horseheads								
<i>Town</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Current Budget</i>	<i>Current Average Cost/Parcel</i>	<i>* Proposed Cost/Parcel</i>	<i>Proposed Cost</i>	<i>** Aid Available</i>	<i>Proposed Net Cost</i>	<i>Difference from Current Budget</i>
Town of Elmira	3,794	\$104,534	\$27.55	\$16.54	\$62,734	\$18,970	\$43,764	(\$60,770)
Town of Big Flats	3,917	\$84,168	\$21.49	\$16.54	\$64,768	\$19,585	\$45,183	(\$38,985)
Town of Southport	5,426	\$90,000	\$16.59	\$16.54	\$89,719	\$27,130	\$62,589	(\$27,411)
Town of Horseheads	8,264	\$218,060	\$26.39	\$16.54	\$136,645	\$41,320	\$95,325	(\$122,735)
City of Elmira	9,745	\$133,334	\$13.68	\$16.54	\$161,134	\$48,725	\$112,409	(\$20,925)
Total	31,146	\$630,096	\$20.23	\$16.54	\$515,000	\$155,730	\$359,270	(\$270,826)

* Proposed Cost/Parcel is based upon a CAP budget of \$515,000 divided by 31,146 parcels.

** Aid available is based upon \$5/parcel annual reassessment aid.

³¹ \$5/parcel reassessment aid and \$7/parcel consolidation aid is available to each municipality as part of a CAP transition.

Unique to this arrangement would be the requirements placed upon the City of Elmira. They would need to modify their City charter to adopt a new assessment cycle. In addition, they would likely have to conduct a formal reassessment in order to bring their LOA up to 100. As previously noted, a reassessment for the City could cost in excess of \$340,000 and could be offset by reassessment and consolidation aid of around \$116,000.

These hurdles notwithstanding, a CAP of the five largest municipalities could create efficiencies in the process, utilize existing training and certifications of assessors in a cost effective manner and transition over 70 percent of the parcels in the County to a common assessment calendar with a common equalization rate.

Option 4: Towns Contract with County

“Real Property Tax Law, Section 1537 allows an assessing unit to enter into a joint services contract with a county to perform some or all of the assessing function. Under Section 1537 agreements, assessing units remain autonomous, each individually analyzed for equalization rates, residential assessment ratios and reassessment aid.”³² Additionally, the town retains its appointing authority, even though the appointed assessor would become a county employee.

As mentioned earlier in this report, Chemung County Real Property Services currently provides minimal services to the municipalities in support of the assessment function. There are no formal agreements between the municipalities and the County. The other options summarized below are arrangements that could be formally considered as a way of expanding the County’s facilitation role and enhancing consistency, standardization and efficiency.

Commercial & Industrial Assessments

At present, each town’s assessing unit manages its own assessments of commercial and industrial property. As these parcels represent only a small fraction of the total parcel count, and as Chemung County does not have a high number of complex commercial and industrial properties, local control of this function has worked reasonably well.

Under a new model, the County could assume responsibility for all commercial and industrial assessments. This would likely require hiring someone at the County level with expertise in this sort of valuation and

³² *Assessment Administration Analysis Report*, New York State Association of County Directors of Real Property Tax Services.

appraisal technique. Alternatively, the job could be outsourced as is done (or being considered) in certain other counties.

As shown in **Table D**, there are 2,292 parcels in Chemung County classified as commercial or industrial. As a rough estimate of the cost of assessing those properties, the table applies the average assessment budget per parcel for each assessing unit (see **Table A-3** in the appendix) to the number of commercial/industrial parcels in each unit. Using this method, municipalities in Chemung County are spending roughly \$37,084 to maintain the assessments for these parcel classifications.

**Table D: Commerical & Industrial
Assessment Cost by Town**

Municipality	Comm & Indus Parcels	Budget Per Parcel	Total Cost
Town of Baldwin	2	\$10.36	\$21
Town of Erin	17	\$9.21	\$157
Town of Van Etten	31	\$12.65	\$392
Town of Catlin	29	\$15.81	\$458
Town of Ashland	32	\$14.85	\$475
Town of Veteran	34	\$17.61	\$599
Town of Chemung	39	\$22.62	\$882
Town of Elmira	104	\$15.00	\$1,560
Town of Southport	185	\$16.59	\$3,069
Town of Big Flats	189	\$17.91	\$3,386
Town of Horseheads	608	\$19.91	\$12,103
City of Elmira	1,022	\$13.68	\$13,983
Total	2,292		\$37,084

Were each of the municipalities to enter into an inter-municipal agreement for the County to handle all commercial and industrial assessment, the County could explore providing this service in one of two ways. As mentioned, they could hire a commercial appraiser to focus on these parcels full-time. The parcel ratio per FTE would be good, but the cost would likely far exceed what is currently being spent on average, as a starting salary for someone with this expertise is likely \$50,000.

Alternatively, outsourcing the commercial work is an option. In other counties, estimates for this service include an initial up-front cost to clean up the data and get it set up, and then an ongoing maintenance fee. The up-front cost could range from \$50-\$60 per parcel and the ongoing maintenance fee would likely be approximately \$5 per parcel. In total, a transition would cost between \$114,000 and \$138,000, and ongoing maintenance would be approximately \$11,500 annually. Thus, a transition of this sort would pay for itself in aggregate terms in roughly five years based upon the averages involved in this analysis. However, it may pay

for itself sooner if it helped businesses to stop filing grievances on their assessments.

Handling of Exemptions

Assessors in Chemung County repeatedly expressed to CGR that certain times of the year produce an overwhelming amount of paperwork, as exemptions need to be processed. The level of service provided to accomplish this function is highly variable, with some assessors making house calls to complete forms and obtain signatures, and others merely processing paperwork through the mail.

In order to standardize the level of service in regards to exemptions, and in order to alleviate some of the pressure on local assessors to process and maintain these exemptions, one scenario that was discussed was to have the County assume responsibility for receiving and processing all exemptions. It is unknown at this time how many staff would be required to fulfill the responsibility at the County level. Similarly, it is difficult to quantify the actual cost incurred at the local level, especially given its seasonality.

The primary benefit to this alternative would appear to be a standardization of service across the County and a lightening of responsibility on local assessors. This would allow local assessors more time to focus on property valuation and making sure their assessment rolls were clean, accurate and equitable. To facilitate the processing of exemptions at the County level, the County may also be better positioned to leverage technology to make paperwork available to the community.

While local assessors point to the burden placed on them by exemptions, they also point out perceived disadvantages of shifting responsibility to the County level. From the perspective of many local assessors in the County, the primary downside would be the effect on seniors in the community who have come to rely on personal service, including home visitation, in order to maintain their exemptions. Centralizing exemption processing in the County seat of the City of Elmira may inconvenience some residents in outlying parts of the County who would prefer to handle their exemption processing in person. Local assessors also point to the “personal touch” that they are able to provide in processing exemptions. In their view, centralizing the function at the County level may sacrifice that level of service and result in certain residents losing exemptions.

Countywide Common Assessment Standards

Although not a fee-for-service type of municipal contract, assessing units in Chemung County may agree to adopt countywide common assessment standards. Common assessment standards make assessment more transparent throughout the entire system and reduce inconsistencies and

complexity. In addition, common standards address equity concerns system-wide by bringing all jurisdictions equal in areas like levels of assessment, parcel data storage/format, assessment calendar and reassessment schedules.

Synchronize Assessment Calendars

As stated in several of the options above, one of the inhibiting factors to combining assessment operations across the County is the difference in assessment calendars between the City of Elmira and all other assessing jurisdictions. Without initiating any other changes, either the City of Elmira or the other assessing jurisdictions should consider whether synchronizing assessment calendars would be advantageous. A consistent calendar across all jurisdictions helps school districts in their planning and also improves transparency in the system. While there may be no immediate benefit to an individual jurisdiction, it could certainly pave the way for future collaborative opportunities.

Common Revaluation Schedule

A significant step the County could take to improve equity and transparency would be to facilitate a common revaluation schedule. Half (50 percent) of the assessment jurisdictions operate on an annual reassessment cycle. The County could help the remaining six units achieve this within the next 10 years. Initially, it could set a goal of getting all non-annual units through a revaluation and to a common level of assessment in the next five years. Once that is achieved, each unit could apply to be on the triennial aid program and work towards maintaining their rolls on an annual basis. At the end of the next three years, each unit would conduct another reassessment. By that point, each unit should be in a position to apply to be on the six-year plan for an annual reassessment cycle. Thus, by 2019, every remaining assessment unit could be operating on an annual reassessment cycle.

Other Common Standards

Other standards could include agreements for a common level of assessment and common practices for valuation of all parcels. Levels of assessment that are consistently held at 100 can significantly improve transparency and reduce complexity in the system. Transparency has the benefit of increasing taxpayer understanding and confidence.

CGR observed that currently all assessing jurisdictions have different valuation practices, and interviews with city and other municipal officials reveal there remain some inconsistencies in the data among jurisdictions. For instance, some data have been updated regularly and gives a fair representation of current property inventory, while other data bear no resemblance to the inventory that exists today. Resolving these inconsistencies and formally agreeing to value properties in the same

manner will improve equity and enhance taxpayer confidence in the assessment system.

There may also be efficiencies gained through the adoption of countywide data collection standards. One example regards reassessments. To the extent that outside vendors are used in the reassessment process, the County purchasing department could play a more active role in bidding out this service and screening for reputable, reliable contractors that could service all jurisdictions equitably and efficiently. There may also be economy of scale benefits in contract costs from using this approach.

OTHER OPTIONS

City CAP

CGR briefly explored the option of creating a City CAP similar to a County CAP. Conversations with the City Manager for the City of Elmira indicated that this option would likely only be viable if the City were to be held harmless financially. After analyzing the cost of running a County-run and county CAP system, CGR determined that a City CAP is unlikely to hold the City harmless and thus would not be a viable option to pursue.

Beyond the cost to the City, several other issues make this option a challenge. First, the County is required by statute to provide certain services. There would be little to no cost savings involved in centralizing services within the City of Elmira since the County would continue to provide certain services. Second, under current statute, the state aid available to municipalities who CAP with the County would not be available under a CAP agreement with the City. Third, there would likely have to be State legislative changes for the City to provide assessment services through intermunicipal agreements with other assessing jurisdictions.

Mobile Units

Under either a County-run or County CAP model, County officials could consider offering mobile units to service local towns. These mobile units would go to different towns on different days of the week and take applications and/or answer questions for local taxpayers. This type of service may add cost for transportation, computer equipment and potentially space depending on the arrangements worked out with town officials. The added cost for this service could range from \$10,000 - \$20,000 annually.

Privatizing Assessment

CGR briefly researched the possibility of privatizing the assessment operation for Chemung County. The only viable model for completely privatizing assessment that we found is in the province of Ontario, Canada. In 1998, the Government of Ontario transferred responsibility for property assessment from the Ministry of Finance to what is now known as the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC), a non-share capital, non-profit corporation with its own board of directors.

The organization is held accountable to the public through a 15-member board. Eight of the board members are municipal representatives, five members represent property tax payers, and two members represent provincial interests. The Minister of Finance appoints all members of the board.

In addition to administering a province-wide property assessment system based on current value assessment, it provides municipalities a range of other services, including preparation of annual assessment rolls used by municipalities to calculate property taxes. More detail can be found by looking at their website at www.mpac.ca.

A strong concern was expressed by the assessors of Chemung County (and reiterated by ORPS) regarding the quality of outside contractors and the variability that exists in the standards that they apply to the work they are contracted for. Should the County consider finding further detail about privatizing assessment, it should pay careful attention to the quality of the service providers and the complexity of the work that would be involved. In addition, ORPS and the NYS Board would have to provide counsel on the parameters involved in holding outside contractors accountable and meeting all state mandated requirements.

Create CAPS through Attrition

Finding new people interested in becoming professional or even part-time assessors is increasingly difficult across the state. Professionalizing these positions and creating salaried opportunities with benefits may help to attract interested individuals. However, another means to cope with fewer people is to create coordinated programs between municipalities as current assessors retire. Not only could it create efficiencies through shared service arrangements, it would alleviate the necessity in some cases of trying to fill vacant positions. Over time, there would be better coordination throughout the County, more municipalities would be partaking in aid available to them through the state, and the County would be further along in the process of centralizing services should it ever consider that as a viable option.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the implementation strategies discussed as part of the options above, there are general guidelines that should be considered. First, if any option for collaborative assessment is to work, efforts must be directed toward building consensus among participants regarding the need for assessment equity. This should not be construed as an obstacle, but an issue to be deliberately addressed by leaders within each community. It is clear to CGR through our interviews in Chemung County and in other counties that most public officials have a limited knowledge of the property assessment process. This creates both anxiety and even a lack of interest in actually making any changes. Through working to better understand the process and then sharing ideas for how to collaborate, new ideas will emerge that will enhance the quality of the assessment process.

Second, if Chemung County and/or its assessing units desire to move towards any of the options presented, individual jurisdictions should begin taking steps to coordinate their reassessment plans. They should also formally agree on a date by which all LOAs across the County will equal 100 percent. The State could assist in this process by considering the adoption of a mandatory three or four-year cycle bill. The bill would have the effect of synchronizing the assessment calendars across the State while continuing to provide incentives through state aid to conduct reassessment projects annually. In addition, a mandatory cycle bill would eventually raise the statewide equalization rate to 100 percent.

Third, the new strategies are likely to be cost prohibitive if municipalities do not take advantage of state aid available for conducting reassessments and/or consolidations. Aid options should be considered as part of any reform discussion. Factoring these incentives in, municipalities can generate revenue, offset certain transition costs and reduce the overall cost of the assessment function.

CONCLUSION

The Centralized Property Tax Administration Program (CPTAP) began as an effort to address the complexity and confusion inherent in New York State's property tax system. As one of only three states without a statewide standard of assessing, and one of twelve without a mandated reassessment cycle, New York contains an incredible diversity of assessment levels, practices and approaches. From a financial standpoint, the result is a system in which property owners may (or may not) be taxed equitably simply because of where they live in a community. From a public accessibility standpoint, the result is inordinately complicated, not always easily accessible or transparent, and difficult to understand.

In that context, the CPTAP program was established to build a foundation for charting reform. Importantly, ORPS notes, “the intent of the program is for counties to chart their own paths to reform. The program does not presuppose a one-size fits all approach to such improvements. By analyzing the particulars of their county, local officials are determining what will work best for their taxpayers and the taxing jurisdictions alike.”

The assessment system in Chemung County is largely decentralized but functional. The presence of a centralized database represents a significant commitment to a well run system that is cost effective and efficient. The intent of this report and the information contained herein is, in the most basic sense, *to empower real property tax officials at the County and local level to build on this foundation and make decisions regarding the future of assessment administration in the Chemung County community.* While specific reform concepts will no doubt require additional analysis and consideration of detailed components, this report establishes a baseline foundation for making those decisions going forward.

APPENDIX

Table A-1: Municipal Overview

Table A-2: Staffing, Certification and Office Hours

Table A-3: Budget and Parcel Overview

Table A-4: Indicators of Assessment Quality

Table A-5: Municipal Assessing IT Capacity

Table A-6: FTE Personnel Analysis

Table A-7: Comparative Cost Analysis of Options

Realtor Specification Sheet for 200 Baldwin Street

Table A-1: Chemung County

Municipalities		Assessment Offices		Existing Collaboration		
SWIS	Municipal Name	Assessor or 3 Person Board?	Assessor Name	Part of CAP?	Assessor Works for Multiple Municipalities	Contract with County for Asmt Services?
70400	City of Elmira	Sole Assessor	Bruce A. Stanko	No	Yes-Southport	No
72000	Town of Ashland	Sole Assessor	Joseph M Leonardi	No	Yes--Town of Baldwin	No
72200	Town of Baldwin	Sole Assessor	Joseph M Leonardi	No	Yes--Town of Ashland	No
72400	Town of Big Flats	Sole Assessor	W.R. Torp	No	Yes-Town of Wayne (Steuben Co.)	No
72600	Town of Catlin	Sole Assessor	Catherine J. Edwards	No	Yes-Town of Berkshire, Town of Barton, Town of Van Etten, Town of Chemung	No
72800	Town of Chemung	Sole Assessor	Catherine J. Edwards	Yes--Town of Barton (Tioga Co.), Town of Van Etten	Yes-Town of Berkshire, Town of Barton, Town of Van Etten, Town of Catlin	No
73000	Town of Elmira	Sole Assessor	Theresa R. Murdock	No	No	No
73200	Town of Erin	Sole Assessor	Mary Jo LeClaire	No	No	No
73400	Town of Horseheads	Sole Assessor	Cindy Brand	No	No	No
73600	Town of Southport	Sole Assessor	Bruce A. Stanko	No	Yes-City of Elmira	No
73800	Town of Van Etten	Sole Assessor	Catherine J. Edwards	Yes--Town of Chemung; Town of Barton (Tioga Co.)	Yes-Town of Berkshire, Town of Barton, Town of Catlin, Town of Chemung	No
74000	Town of Veteran	Sole Assessor	Terry Brown	No	No	No

Table A-2: Chemung County

Municipalities		Assessment Offices						
SWIS	Municipal Name	Type of Assessor	Assessor Name	IAO or Other Professional Designation	# of Staff (including Assessor)	Staff FTE Equivalent	Office Hours Per Week	% of Office Hours for Cust. Serv.
70400	City of Elmira	Sole Assessor	Bruce A. Stanko	Licensed R.E. Appraiser, SCA	3	2.50	40	50
72000	Town of Ashland	Sole Assessor	Joseph M Leonardi	SCAA	1	0.50	20	40
72200	Town of Baldwin	Sole Assessor	Joseph M Leonardi	SCAA	1	0.25	20	40
72400	Town of Big Flats	Sole Assessor	W.R. Torp	Licensed Res. Appraiser, SCA & IAO	2	1.25	35	40
72600	Town of Catlin	Sole Assessor	Catherine J. Edwards	SCAA	1	0.25	3	75
72800	Town of Chemung	Sole Assessor	Catherine J. Edwards	SCAA	2	0.70	18	75
73000	Town of Elmira	Sole Assessor	Theresa R. Murdock	SCAA	2	1.50	35	90
73200	Town of Erin	Sole Assessor	Mary Jo LeClaire	SCAA	1	0.25	30	100
73400	Town of Horseheads	Sole Assessor	Cindy Brand	None	3	1.00	40	30
73600	Town of Southport	Sole Assessor	Bruce A. Stanko	Licensed R.E. Appraiser, SCA	3	2.00	40	50
73800	Town of Van Etten	Sole Assessor	Catherine J. Edwards	SCAA	2	0.08	3	75
74000	Town of Veteran	Sole Assessor	Terry Brown	SCAA	1	1.00	32	45
Total					22.0	11.3	316.0	
Average					1.8	0.9	26.3	59.2

Table A-3: Chemung County

Municipalities		Municipal Characteristics										
SWIS	Municipal Name	Total Budget for Assessment Function	% of total Municipal Budget	Office Sq. Ft.	Total Number of Parcels	Assessment Budget Per Parcel	FTE	Parcels per FTE	Parcels per Sq. Ft. of Office Space	Staff Per Sq. Ft. of Office Space	Number of Residential Parcels	% of Parcels That Are Residential
70400	City of Elmira	\$133,334	0.00%	800	9,745	\$13.68	2.50	3,898	12.2	266.7	7,535	77.3%
72000	Town of Ashland	\$10,838	1.88%	300	730	\$14.85	0.50	1,460	2.4	300.0	423	57.9%
72200	Town of Baldwin	\$5,700	1.50%	300	550	\$10.36	0.25	2,200	1.8	300.0	318	57.8%
72400	Town of Big Flats	\$84,168	3.80%	200	3,917	\$21.49	1.25	3,134	19.6	100.0	2,726	69.6%
72600	Town of Catlin	\$22,070	0.50%	140	1,396	\$15.81	0.25	5,584	10.0	140.0	940	67.3%
72800	Town of Chemung	\$33,000	4.00%	512	1,459	\$22.62	0.70	2,084	2.8	256.0	877	60.1%
73000	Town of Elmira	\$104,534	1.68%	266	3,794	\$27.55	1.50	2,529	14.3	133.0	2,889	76.1%
73200	Town of Erin	\$11,382	1.00%	88	1,236	\$9.21	0.25	4,944	14.0	88.0	716	57.9%
73400	Town of Horseheads	\$218,060	3.00%	1960	8,264	\$26.39	1.00	8,264	4.2	653.3	6,432	77.8%
73600	Town of Southport	\$90,000	1.79%	800	5,426	\$16.59	2.00	2,713	6.8	266.7	3,848	70.9%
73800	Town of Van Etten	\$14,700	0.50%	84	1,162	\$12.65	0.08	15,493	13.8	42.0	602	51.8%
74000	Town of Veteran	\$32,000	1.50%	280	1,817	\$17.61	1.00	1,817	6.5	280.0	1,207	66.4%
Total		\$759,786		5,730	39,496		11.28				28,513	
Average		\$63,315.50	1.8%	478	3,291	\$19.24	0.94	4,510	9	235	2,376	65.9%
Min		\$5,700	0.0%	84	550	\$9.21	0.08	1,460	2	42	318	51.8%
Max		\$218,060	4.0%	1,960	9,745	\$27.55	2.50	15,493	20	653	7,535	77.8%

Table A-4: Chemung County

Municipalities		Indicators of Assessment Equity							
SWIS	Municipal Name	Latest Eq. Rate (2008)	2008 Overall LOA of Various Property Types	2008 Sales COD from ORPS	2008 Sales PRD from ORPS	Latest Reassessment	Latest State Aid	Aid Type *	Planned Reassessment
70400	City of Elmira	92.00	92.00	27.596	1.191	1995	\$18,512	maintenance	unknown
72000	Town of Ashland	2.02	2.02	22.768	1.112	Unknown	\$1,396	attainment	unknown
72200	Town of Baldwin	2.14	2.14	6.637	1.025	Unknown	\$970	attainment	unknown
72400	Town of Big Flats	100.00	100.00	6.570	1.007	2008	\$18,345	annual	annual
72600	Town of Catlin	100.00	100.00	4.053	1.005	2008	\$6,625	annual	annual
72800	Town of Chemung	100.00	100.00	12.086	1.067	2008	\$17,224	CAP & Triennial	annual
73000	Town of Elmira	76.00	76.00	15.316	1.029	1992	\$7,302	maintenance	2009
73200	Town of Erin	78.50	78.50	19.333	1.034	2002	\$5,870	triennial	unknown
73400	Town of Horseheads	100.00	100.00	7.770	1.016	2008	\$39,298	annual	annual
73600	Town of Southport	100.00	100.00	8.286	1.021	2008	\$25,994	annual	annual
73800	Town of Van Etten	100.00	100.00	8.765	1.052	2008	\$13,631	CAP & Triennial	annual
74000	Town of Veteran	89.00	89.00	13.217	1.044	1998	\$3,462	maintenance	2010

❖ Attainment Aid: aid to defray the costs of equitable assessment administration to munis made in four (4) payments based on specific criteria. Availability terminated in 1996.

❖ Maintenance Aid: created to help assessing units preserve the system of improved real property tax administration they had already achieved through regular updating of rolls based on specific requirements. Availability terminated in 2005.

❖ Annual/Triennial Aid: changed the Maintenance Aid program creating a new annual aid program of financial assistance, supplemented by a program of triennial aid payments for those localities having completed a recent reassessment.

❖ CAP Aid: consolidated incentive aid program that offers local governments aid if two or more assessing units unify their assessing functions based on certain criteria.

Details at: <http://www.orps.state.ny.us/ref/pubs/2008report>

Table A-5: Chemung County

Municipalities		Assessment Administration System											
SWIS	Municipal Name	System Used		Annual Fees/License Assoc. with System	Processing Responsibility			Databases		Communication		Is GIS Used?	IT Support Who
		Assessment & Inventory	Analysis / Valuation		ORPS' Reports	Rolls & Bills	Analysis / Valuation	Location	How Updated	Speed (GHz)	Capacity (MB of RAM)		
70400	City of Elmira	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$1,750	County	County, City, School	City	County	Real Time	2.7 GHz	2 GB	Yes	City, County, Shared Service
72000	Town of Ashland	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$850	County/Assessor	County	Assessor	County	Real Time	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	County
72200	Town of Baldwin	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$850	County/Assessor	County	Assessor	County	Real Time	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	County
72400	Town of Big Flats	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$1,300	Town	County	Town	County	Real Time			Yes	County
72600	Town of Catlin	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$1,000	County	County	County	County	Real Time	2.8 GHz	500 MB	Yes	County
72800	Town of Chemung	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$330	County	County	Assessor	County	Real Time	2.8 GHz	500 MB	Yes	County
73000	Town of Elmira	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$1,300	County	County/BOCES	Assessor	County	Real Time	1.7 GHz	256 MB	Yes	County
73200	Town of Erin	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$1,000	State	County	Town	County	Real Time			Yes	County
73400	Town of Horseheads	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$1,750	County	County	Assessor	County	Real Time	2.6 GHz	1.5 GB	Rarely	County
73600	Town of Southport	RPS v4	RPS v4	\$1,500	County	County, Town, School	Town	County	Real Time			Yes	County
73800	Town of Van Etten	Excel & RPS v4	RPS v4	\$330	County	County	Assessor	County	Real Time	2.8 GHz	500 MB	yes-some	County
74000	Town of Veteran	RPS v4	RPS v 4	\$1,000	Assessor	Assessor	Assessor	County	Real Time	1.81 GHz	1 GB	Rarely	County

Table A-6: FTE Personnel Analysis

		Single Assessing Unit Models		Multiple Assessing Unit Models		
		Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Other
FTE Personnel Count	Existing Assessment System within Chemung County	County-run Assessing	County CAP Managed by County	CAP of City, Towns of Elmira, Big Flats, Horseheads, Southport	Towns contract w/County for assessment services under RPTL 1537	Current Structure w/additional consolidation and inter-municipal agreement
County	3	16	4	3	Variable	Variable
Towns	11.3	0	12	11.3	11.3	11.3
Total	14.3	16	16	14.3	Variable	Variable

Table A-7: Chemung County Cost/Aid Comparison of Options						
		Single Assessing Unit Models		Multiple Assessing Unit Models		
		Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Other
Start-up Costs	Existing Assessment System within Chemung County *	County-run Assessing	County CAP Managed by County	CAP of City, Towns of Elmira, Big Flats, Horseheads, Southport	Towns contract w/County for assessment services under RPTL 1537	Current Structure w/additional consolidation and inter-municipal agreement
Establish Equitable assessments at a common level throughout the County	\$0	\$454,735	\$454,735	\$341,075	\$0	Variable
Transitional costs for County Run or County CAP managed by County (Computers, telephones, supplies, furniture)	\$0	\$389,000	\$25,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Available State Aid for reassessment - Muni Aid	\$0	(\$61,305)	(\$61,305)	(\$155,730)	\$0	Variable
State Consolidation Aid - Muni Aid	\$0	\$0	(\$258,125)	(\$218,022)	\$0	Variable
State Consolidation Aid for County Run Assessing, RPTL 1573 - County Aid	\$0	(\$276,472)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
State Aid for County Run Assessing Referendum Approval - County Aid	\$0	(\$78,992)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
State Consolidation Aid for County providing services, RPTL 1573	\$0	\$0	(\$39,496)	\$0	(\$39,496)	(\$39,496)
State Aid IF County Managed County wide CAP	\$0	\$0	(\$78,992)	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total One Time Start-up Costs	No Change	\$426,966	\$41,817	(\$32,677)	(\$39,496)	(\$39,496)
Cost Per Parcel - County	\$0.00	\$0.85	(\$0.37)	\$0.00	(\$1.00)	(\$1.00)
Cost Per Parcel - Town	\$0.00	\$32.09	\$11.04	(\$2.67)	\$0.00	Variable
Combined Cost Per Parcel	\$0.00	\$10.81	\$1.06	(\$0.83)	(\$1.00)	(\$1.00)

Table A-7 continues on the next page.

Table A-7 (Continued): Chemung County Cost/Aid Comparison of Options

Operational Costs					***	
Town Assessment Depts.	\$759,786	\$0	\$0	\$644,690	\$569,840	\$759,786
County RPTS	\$242,547	\$951,201.70	\$266,802	\$242,547	\$363,821	\$242,547
Less Revenues	(\$403,500)	(\$403,500)	(\$403,500)	(\$403,500)	(\$403,500)	(\$403,500)
Cost of a County Consolidated Assessing Unit	\$0	\$0	\$749,650	\$0	\$0	\$0
Additional Cost of annually maintaining assessments at a common LOA throughout the County	\$51,571	\$113,968	\$113,968	\$96,704	\$113,968	\$113,968
State Aid for Annual Reassessment **	(\$121,117)	(\$197,480)	(\$197,480)	(\$191,080)	(\$197,480)	(\$197,480)
Total Annual Operational Costs	\$529,287	\$464,190	\$529,440	\$389,361	\$446,648	\$515,321
Cost Per Parcel - County	(\$2.77)	\$11.75	\$13.40	(\$6.46)	(\$3.12)	(\$6.19)
Cost Per Parcel - Town	\$19.24	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$16.32	\$14.43	\$19.24
Combined Cost Per Parcel	\$13.40	\$11.75	\$13.40	\$9.86	\$11.31	\$13.05
Difference from Current Structure	No Change	(\$65,097.05)	\$152.95	(\$139,926.15)	(\$82,638.75)	(\$13,965.75)

* This column represents the baseline costs of the current assessment system in Chemung County.

** Annual Reassessment Aid of \$197,480 may be available under the current structure if all towns reassessed in the same year (39,496 x \$5).

*** CGR modeled a decrease in cost to Towns of 25% and an increase to the County of 50%

Assumptions		Salary Per Person	Total plus Benefits
Appraisers	9	\$40,000	\$522,000
Clerical & Tax Map	4	\$28,000	\$162,400
Fringes	45%		
Annual State Aid	(\$5)		
Triennial State Aid	(\$5)		
Consolidation Aid	(\$7)		
County Aid - \$2	(\$2)		
County Aid - \$1	(\$1)		
Maintenance of LOA			
Cost/Parcel	\$2.89	= 15% of Average budget/parcel for Chemung Co.	
Total Parcels	39,496		
Parcels Needing Reassessment	12,261	= City of Elmira, Towns of Ashland, Baldwin, Erin (Costs would vary by municipality)	
Parcels Receiving Annual Aid	21,624	= Catlin, Chemung, Van Etten, Horseheads, Big Flats, Southport	
Reassessment Cost/Parcel	\$47.5		
Transitional Costs			
County Run	\$389,000	= Buy a new building to house the RPTS operation and add \$3000 per new employee	
Transitional Costs			
County CAP	\$25,000	= Buy equipment for a mobile unit and supplies and materials to accommodate new office	
Average Budget/Parcel in Chemung Co.	\$19.24		



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