

REPRESENTATIVES FOR PETITIONER:  
Renard Keal, President River Birch Development LLC

REPRESENTATIVES FOR RESPONDENT:  
Don Thompson, Madison Township Assessor

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**BEFORE THE  
INDIANA BOARD OF TAX REVIEW**

RIVER BIRCH	)	
DEVELOPMENT, LLC,	)	Petition for Review of Assessment,
	)	
Petitioner,	)	Form 131
	)	
	)	Petition No.: 39-010-03-1-6-00001
v.	)	
	)	County: Jefferson
	)	
MADISON TOWNSHIP	)	Township: Madison
ASSESSOR,	)	
	)	
Respondent.	)	Parcel No.: Personal Property Mobile Home
	)	
	)	Assessment Year: 2003
	)	

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Appeal from the Final Determination of  
Jefferson County Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals

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**February 11, 2004**

**FINAL DETERMINATION**

The Indiana Board of Tax Review (Board) having reviewed the facts and evidence, and having considered the issues, now finds and concludes the following:

## FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

### Issue

1. The issue presented for consideration by the Board was:  
*ISSUE – Whether subject mobile home was assessed correctly.*

### Procedural History

2. Pursuant to Ind. Code § 6-1.1-15-3 Renard Keal, President of River Birch Development LLC, filed a Form 131 on behalf of River Birch Development LLC (Petitioner), petitioning the Board to conduct an administrative review of the above petition. The Notification of Final Assessment Determination (Form 115) of the Jefferson County Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals (PTABOA) was mailed on May 5, 2003. The Form 131 was filed on May 20, 2003, with the Jefferson County Assessor and received by the Board on May 23, 2003.

### Hearing Facts and Other Matters of Record

3. Pursuant to Ind. Code § 6-1.1-15-4 a hearing was held on August 19, 2003, in Madison, Indiana before Paul Stultz, the duly designated Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) authorized by the Board under Ind. Code § 6-1.5-5-2.
4. The following persons were present at the hearing:

For the Petitioner:

Renard Keal, President River Birch Development  
Stacy Imel

For the Respondent:

Gail Sims, Jefferson County Assessor  
Don Thompson, Madison Township Assessor  
James Martin, PTABOA member  
Delores Barnes, PTABOA member

5. The following persons were sworn in as witnesses and presented testimony:

For the Petitioner:

Renard Keal  
Stacy Imel

For the Respondent:

Gail Sims  
Don Thompson  
James Martin  
Delores Barnes

6. The following exhibits were presented:

For the Petitioner:

**Attached to the Form 131 Petition, filed with the Board on May 23, 2003:**

Petitioner's Exhibit 1 - Copy of Bill of Sale

Petitioner's Exhibit 2 - Copy of Indiana Certificate of Title of subject mobile home

Petitioner's Exhibit 3 - Copy of Notice of Assessment of Mobile Home – Form 2, dated February 15, 2003

**Presented at the August 19, 2003, hearing before the Board:**

Petitioner's Exhibit 4 - Opinion of value of the subject mobile home by the Manager of Lady Liberty Homes, dated August 1, 2003

Petitioner's Exhibit 5 - Opinion of value of the subject mobile home by Norman Mills, Manager LUV Homes, dated August 1, 2003

Petitioner's Exhibit 6 - Copy of check from River Valley Development to Vanderbilt Mortgage and Finance, Inc. for \$2,500

Petitioner's Exhibit 7 - Copy of document showing the names of Vanderbilt Mortgage and Finance, Inc., River Valley, and figure \$2,500 dated September 16, 2002

For the Respondent:

**Submitted by facsimile on August 8, 2003:**

Respondent's Exhibit 1 - List of witnesses and exhibits

**Presented at the August 19, 2003 hearing before the Board:**

Respondent's Exhibit 2 - Mobile Home Assessment Worksheet

Respondent's Exhibit 3 - Copy of a page 7 from a presentation given by the Indiana Assessment Academy, August 2001

7. The following additional items are officially recognized as part of the record of proceedings:
  - Board's Exhibit A – Form 131 petition
  - Board's Exhibit B - Notice of Hearing on Petition
  - Board's Exhibit C – Assessment Division of the Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF) Memorandum dated July 2003 regarding Annually Assessed Mobile Homes
8. The subject property is a 1982 Liberty mobile home located at 3523 North Woodside Drive, Madison, Madison Township, Jefferson County. The subject mobile home had been assessed as a 1987 Liberty mobile home, however, at the hearing, both parties agree that the subject mobile home is a 1982 Liberty and the assessment of record should be changed to reflect this agreement. *See* Petitioner's Exhibit 2.
9. The ALJ did not conduct an on-site inspection of the subject property.
10. At the hearing, the parties agreed the year under appeal was 2003 and the Assessed Value of record of the mobile home was: \$9,490.

### **Jurisdictional Framework**

11. This matter is governed by the provisions of Ind. Code § 6-1.1-15, and all other laws relevant and applicable to appeals initiated under those provisions, including all case law pertaining to property tax assessment or matters of administrative law and process.
12. The Board is authorized to issue this final determination pursuant to Indiana Code § 6-1.1-15-3.

### **Indiana's Property Tax System**

13. The Indiana Constitution requires Indiana to create a uniform, equal, and just system of assessment. *See* Ind. Const. Article 10, §1.

14. The former State Board of Tax Commissioners developed a new manual and guidelines to govern the 2002 reassessment. 50 IAC 2.3-1-1. The new assessment rules were created in response to the holding of the Indiana Supreme Court in *State Bd. of Tax Comm'rs v. Town of St. John*, 702 N.E.2d 1034 (Ind. 1998).
15. At the heart of this new manual is the definition of True Tax Value. The manual defines True Tax Value as “the market value-in-use of a property for its current use, as reflected by the utility received by the owner or a similar user, from the property.” 2002 REAL PROPERTY ASSESSMENT MANUAL at 2, (incorporated by reference in 50 IAC 2.3-1-1(b)).
16. There is a presumption that the value determined according to the rules prescribed in the manual is the true tax value of the subject property. *State Bd. of Tax Comm'rs v. Garcia*, 766 N.E.2d 341, 343 (Ind. 2002). However, the taxpayer shall be permitted to offer evidence relevant to the fair market value-in-use of the property to rebut such presumption and to establish the actual true tax value of the property. *Id.* at 343-344. Such evidence may include actual construction costs, sales information regarding the subject or comparable properties, appraisals that are relevant to the market value-in-use of the property, and any other information compiled in accordance with generally accepted appraisal principles. *Id.* at 344.

### **State Review and Petitioner's Burden**

17. The State does not undertake to reassess property, or to make the case for the petitioner. The State decision is based upon the evidence presented and issues raised during the hearing. See *Whitley Products, Inc. v. State Bd. of Tax Comm'rs*, 704 N.E.2d 1113 (Ind. Tax 1998).
18. The petitioner must submit ‘probative evidence’ that adequately demonstrates all alleged errors in the assessment. Mere allegations, unsupported by factual evidence, will not be considered sufficient to establish an alleged error. See *Whitley Products, Inc. v. State Bd. of Tax Comm'rs*, 704 N.E.2d 1113 (Ind. Tax 1998), and *Herb v. State Bd. of Tax*

*Comm 'rs*, 656 N.E.2d 890 (Ind. Tax 1995). [‘Probative evidence’ is evidence that serves to prove or disprove a fact.]

19. The petitioner has a burden to present more than just ‘de minimis’ evidence in its effort to prove its position. See *Hoogenboom-Nofzinger v. State Bd. of Tax Comm 'rs*, 715 N.E.2d 1018 (Ind. Tax 1999). [‘De minimis’ means only a minimal amount.]
20. The petitioner must sufficiently explain the connection between the evidence and petitioner’s assertions in order for it to be considered material to the facts. ‘Conclusory statements’ are of no value to the State in its evaluation of the evidence. See *Heart City Chrysler v. State Bd. of Tax Comm 'rs*, 714 N.E.2d 329 (Ind. Tax 1999). [‘Conclusory statements’ are statements, allegations, or assertions that are unsupported by any detailed factual evidence.]
21. Essentially, the petitioner must do two things: (1) prove that the assessment is incorrect; and (2) prove that the specific assessment he seeks, is correct. In addition to demonstrating that the assessment is invalid, the petitioner also bears the burden of presenting sufficient probative evidence to show what assessment is correct. See *State Bd. of Tax Comm 'rs v. Indianapolis Racquet Club, Inc.*, 743 N.E.2d 247, 253 (Ind., 2001), and *Blackbird Farms Apartments, LP v. DLGF* 765 N.E.2d 711 (Ind. Tax, 2002).
22. The State will not change the determination of the County Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals unless the petitioner has established a ‘prima facie case’ and, by a ‘preponderance of the evidence’ proven, both the alleged error(s) in the assessment, and specifically what assessment is correct. See *Clark v. State Bd. of Tax Comm 'rs*, 694 N.E.2d 1230 (Ind. Tax 1998), and *North Park Cinemas, Inc. v. State Bd. of Tax Comm 'rs*, 689 N.E.2d 765 (Ind. Tax 1997). [A ‘prima facie case’ is established when the petitioner has presented enough probative and material (i.e. relevant) evidence for the State (as the fact-finder) to conclude that the petitioner’s position is correct. The petitioner has proven his position by a ‘preponderance of the evidence’ when the petitioner’s evidence is sufficiently persuasive to convince the State that it outweighs all evidence, and matters officially noticed in the proceeding, that is contrary to the petitioner’s position.]

## Discussion of Issue

ISSUE: Whether subject mobile home was assessed correctly.

23. The Petitioner contends the mobile home should be assessed at \$2,500.

24. The Respondent contends that the assessment is correct at \$9,490.

25. The applicable rules governing this Issue are:

**Real Property Assessment Manual, Book 1, Chapter 4 – Version A, Mobile and Manufactured Homes (50 IAC 2.3)**

Provides the guidelines for establishing the valuation of real property mobile and manufactured homes.

**DLGF Memorandum dated January 27, 2003 regarding Annually Assessed Mobile Homes**

**Assessment Division, DLGF Memorandum dated July 2003 regarding Annually Assessed Mobile Homes**

**50 IAC 3.2 – DLGF rule for assessment of mobile homes**

**50 IAC 3.2-3-1**

Sec. 1. (a) The township assessor of the township within which the mobile home is located shall assess the mobile home for taxation under this article.

(b) A mobile home shall be assessed as real property under 50 IAC 2.3 if the mobile home:

(1) is located on land owned by the owner of the mobile home; or

(2) is located on a permanent foundation even if the land under the mobile home is owned by someone other than the owner of the mobile home.

(c) A mobile home shall be assessed annually in accordance with the personal property rule in effect on January 15 if the mobile home is held for sale in the ordinary course of a trade or business.

(d) The township assessor shall assess mobile homes that do not meet the requirements of subsection (b) or (c), and all exterior features, yard structures, and improvements owned

by the mobile home owner and located on the same parcel as the mobile home in accordance with 50 IAC 3.2-2.

**50 IAC 3.2-4-1**

Sec. 1. (a) Township assessors shall use the standard of true tax value as set forth in the Real Property Assessment Manual for 2002 in the assessment of annually assessed mobile homes.

(b) All annually assessed mobile homes assessed after January 14, 2003, shall be assessed in accordance with the methodology that the county assessor has elected, in accordance with 50 IAC 2.3-1-1, for the assessment of real property mobile homes in the county in which the mobile home is assessed.

(c) If the county assessor has selected to assess real property mobile homes under the Real Property Assessment Guidelines for 2002–Version ‘A’, then the township assessor shall value annually assessed mobile homes in accordance with the guidelines for the assessment of real property mobile homes contained in the Real Property Assessment Guidelines for 2002–Version ‘A’.

(d) If the county assessor has selected to assess real property mobile homes under an assessment method other than that described in subsection (c) and the county assessor has obtained the approval of the department of local government finance in accordance with 50 IAC 2.3-1-1(f) for this assessment method, then each township assessor in the county shall use the alternative approved method for the assessment of annually assessed mobile homes.

(e) The procedure for submission and approval of the alternative method shall be in accordance with the 2002 Real Property Assessment Manual, Approval of Mass Appraisal Methods. (*Department of Local Government Finance; 50 IAC 3.2-4-1; filed Sep 23, 2002, 10:04 a.m.: 26 IR 327*)

**Appendix C – Residential and Agricultural Cost Schedules**

Mobile Home Cost Schedules

26. Evidence and testimony considered particularly relevant to this determination include the following:
- a. The Petitioner submitted into evidence two (2) appraisals on the subject mobile home:
    - 1. By Norman Mills, manager of LUV Homes for \$1,000. *Keal testimony and Petitioner’s Exhibit 5.*
    - 2. By the manager of Lady Liberty Homes for \$1,890. *Keal testimony and Petitioner’s Exhibit 4.*
  - b. The subject mobile home was purchased for \$2,500 from Vanderbilt Mortgage and Finance, Inc. Petitioner contends this purchase price represented the true



market value given the condition of home at the time of the purchase. *Keal testimony and Petitioner's Exhibit 1.*

- c. The National Automobile Dealer's Association (NADA) book does not consider the condition of the subject property. The subject mobile home did not have working air conditioning or furnace, and did not have windows. *Keal testimony.*
- d. Respondent claims the sale submitted by the Petitioner was not a good indicator of market value because the sale does not represent an arms length transaction. *Sims testimony.*
- e. The Real Property Assessment Guidelines for 2002 - Version 'A' (Guidelines), Chapter 4 was used to value the subject mobile home along with referencing the NADA values, to determine a reasonable value. *Sims testimony.*
- f. A sampling of 10 to 15 mobile homes were taken and compared to those values found in the NADA pricing book. It was determined that the values per the NADA pricing book were about 50% lower than the values found in the Guidelines. *Thompson testimony.*

#### Analysis of ISSUE

27. The Petitioner submitted into evidence a Bill of Sale (Petitioner's Exhibit 1) and two (2) appraisals (Petitioner's Exhibits 4 and 5), to show that the value placed on the subject mobile home was excessive.
28. The Respondent testified that mobile homes were valued in the following manner:
  - a. Based on the size of the mobile homes, values were determined from the Real Property Assessment Manual for 2002 – Version A, Chapter 4 and Appendix C.
  - b. A sampling of these mobile home values was then compared to the values found in the nationally recognized NADA pricing guide. It was determined that the NADA values were approximately 50% of the values found in the Manual.
  - c. After applying the physical depreciation, the determined True Tax Values were then reduced by 50% for every mobile home in Madison Township.

29. Before applying the evidence to reduce the contested assessment, the Board must first analyze the reliability and probity of the evidence to determine what, if any, weight to accord it.
30. The Petitioner submitted two (2) exhibits, Petitioner's Exhibits 4 and 5, as "appraisals" of the subject mobile home. These exhibits are, in essence, two (2) letters from local mobile home dealers.
31. Petitioner's Exhibit 4 is from the manager of Lady Liberty Homes stating "that in our opinion" the subject property is valued at \$1,890. The appraisal method used by Lady Liberty Homes, is identified as the *physical appraisal method for the retail local market value*. There was no additional evidence offered to the Board to explain what constituted the *physical appraisal method*. The Board is not aware of this type of appraisal method and cannot determine this method's ability to establish market value, or any other value. Whether the method used in this "appraisal" conforms to generally accepted appraisal practices is not given. This "appraisal" is a statement of opinion of the value of the subject property and is conclusory at best. Unsubstantiated conclusions do not constitute probative evidence. *Whitley*, 704 N.E.2d at 1119.
32. Similarly, Petitioner's Exhibit 5 is a letter from a Mr. Mills, Manager LUV Homes, stating the subject property's "mortgage value" is \$1,000. The method used to obtain this value is again not given. Whether the method used in this "appraisal" conforms to generally accepted appraisal practices couldn't be determined. There was no additional evidence offered to the Board in order to examine the correctness or quality of the appraisal. Mr. Mills' "appraisal" is a statement of opinion of the value of the subject property and is conclusory. Unsubstantiated conclusions do not constitute probative evidence. *Whitley*, 704 N.E.2d at 1119.
33. The Petitioner also testified about and submitted evidence regarding the purchase of the subject mobile home from Vanderbilt Mortgage and Finance, Inc. for \$2,500 (See Petitioner's Exhibit 1).

34. The Petitioner contends that the subject mobile home required considerable work to bring it up to standards. The Petitioner stated that the mobile home was without heating or air conditioning, lacked windows and was in poor condition.
35. The Petitioner also contends that the condition of the mobile home was not taken into consideration in its valuation. However, nothing about the condition of the structure appears on the Bill of Sale for the mobile home. The Bill of Sale only indicates that the “home is sold as is . . . with no warranties either expressed or implied.” The Petitioner did not submit any photographs of the subject mobile home for review.
36. The Petitioner’s allegations that the subject mobile home did not have a working furnace or air conditioning, lacked windows, and was in poor condition, was not supported by any evidence. Mere allegations, unsupported by factual evidence, will not be considered sufficient to establish an alleged error. *Whitley*, 704 N.E.2d 1113 (Ind. Tax 1998).
37. Adjustments for conditions of sale usually reflect the motivations of the buyer and the seller. In many situations the conditions of sale significantly affect transaction prices; these are not considered arm-length transactions.... When non-market conditions of sale are detected in a transaction, the sale can be used as a comparable but only with great care. The circumstances of the sale must be thoroughly researched before an adjustment is made, and the conditions must be adequately disclosed in the appraisal. Any adjustment must be well supported with data. If the adjustment cannot be supported, the sale probably should be discarded. One has to question whether the sale was an arm’s length transaction since financial institutions are not in the business of buying and selling mobile homes. Sales involving financial institutions should be viewed with care to determine if the sale involves market conditions. The purchase of the subject property from a financial institution may be a typical sale that, at best, should have been researched and adjusted, or should have been discarded.

38. The Petitioner could have submitted comparable mobile home assessments of mobile homes similar to the subject, showing that the subject property was being treated differently. However, the Petitioner did not submit such information for consideration.
39. A Memorandum from the Assessment Division of the DLGF dated July 2003, entitled ANNUALLY ASSESSED MOBILE HOMES, allowed assessors to adjust a value of an annually assessed mobile home if there should exist a better indication of true tax value than that found in the schedules in the 2002 Manual. *See also*, 50 IAC 3.2.
40. The amended method used by the local assessors to value mobile homes in Jefferson County is explained in ¶29. As stated in 50 IAC 2.3 and 50 IAC 3.2, assessors may amend their selection of method of assessment or consider additional factors not provided for in this rule or the Manual. In the case at bar, the Respondent used the NADA guide to compare values of mobile homes determined from the Manual and make adjustments.
41. It was the Petitioner's burden to prove that the assessment of the subject mobile home was incorrect and to prove that the assessment he sought was correct. The Petitioner failed on both provisions.
42. For all the reasons set forth above, there is no change in the assessment of the mobile home.

### **Other Findings**

43. As stated in ¶8, the parties at the hearing agreed that the subject mobile home was a 1982 Liberty and not a 1987 Liberty and that the assessment of record should be changed to reflect this agreement. A change in the assessment is made as a result of this agreement.
44. With the change agreed to above, and using the Respondent's methodology to value the subject mobile home, as well as a review of the Mobile Home Worksheet - Form 3 (Respondent's Exhibit 2), it is determined that the physical depreciation applied to a

mobile home that was built in 1982, in “average” condition with a grade of “good,” should be reviewed.

### **Summary of Final Determination**

Determination of ISSUE: *Whether subject mobile home was assessed correctly.*

45. The Petitioner failed to submit probative evidence that proved the assessment of the mobile home was incorrect and to prove that the value it sought was correct. Accordingly, there is no change in the assessment as a result of this issue.

### **Other Findings**

46. The parties agreed that the mobile home was a 1982 Liberty and not a 1987 Liberty and should be valued as such.
47. The physical depreciation for a mobile home built in 1982, in “average” condition, with a grade of “good,” needs to be re-evaluated.

The Indiana Board of Tax Review issues the Final Determination of the above captioned matter on the date first written above.

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Commissioner, Indiana Board of Tax Review

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

### - APPEAL RIGHTS -

You may petition for judicial review of this final determination pursuant to the provisions of Indiana Code § 6-1.1-15-5. The action shall be taken to the Indiana Tax Court under Indiana Code § 4-21.5-5. To initiate a proceeding for judicial review you must take the action required within forty-five (45) days of the date of this notice.