**Property Taxes in Washington State**

**A property tax** is a municipal tax levied by counties, cities, or special tax districts on most types of real estate - including homes, businesses, and parcels of land. The amount of property tax owed depends on the appraised fair market value of the property, as determined by the property tax assessor**.**

Property taxes are collected on a county level, and each county in Washington has its own method of assessing and collecting taxes. As a result, it's not possible to provide a single property tax rate that applies uniformly to all properties in Washington.

The exact property tax levied depends on the county in which the property is located. King County collects the highest property tax in Washington, levying an average of **$3,572.00** *(0.88% of median home value)* yearly in property taxes, while Ferry County has the lowest property tax in the state, collecting an average tax of **$941.00** *(0.64% of median home value)* per year.

Where the property taxes go:

* Schools 55.9%
* Counties 16.2%
* Cities and Towns 13.2%
* Fire 5.3%
* Ports 1.6%
* \*Other 7.4%

\* Other includes regional libraries, parks and recreation, emergency medical services and hospital districts. (Distribution of 2013 tax year).

The maximum rates are expressed in terms of a dollar value per $1,000 of assessed value. For example, the statutory rate limit for the state portion of the property tax levy is $3.60 per $1,000 of assessed value (adjusted to market value), for counties it is $1.80 per $1,000 of assessed value, and for cities and towns it is $3.375 per $1,000 of assessed value.

The total combined regular property tax levies of all taxing districts, other than the state, port districts, and public utility districts, are subject to an aggregate limit of $5.90 per $1,000 of assessed value. If the cumulative total of these levies exceeds the $5.90 limit, the assessor reduces the levy rates according to a statutory formula. See below.

The state Constitution requires all taxes on real estate to be uniform within a taxing district. This requires all taxes imposed by any taxing district to be the same on property of the same value. Since the state is a taxing district for the state property tax levy, the state property tax must be the same throughout the state on property of the same value – equalization (not discussed here).

**Summary of an MRSC summary that indicates we have one of the most complicated property tax structures in the country (an abundance of Special Purpose Districts contributes to this greatly – my comment).**

* Constitutional cap is 1% (without a vote of the people). That is, $10 per $1,000 of Assessed Valuation (AV) – “true and fair value”
  + Limit does not apply to Ports and PUDs
  + May be exceeded by a vote of the people with a super majority 60% and voter turnout requirements to validate
  + If the levy exceeds 1% then there is a system of prorationing [RCW 84.52.010]
* Prorationing:
  + The tax rate for a given property is the sum of levy tax rates imposed by all taxing authorities within which the property lies.
  + The total tax rate for any given property is controlled by the $5.90 (the aggregate regular levy rates for senior taxing districts – counties and cities ***and*** junior taxing districts – fire districts, cemetery districts etc. [see below]).
    - The county general fund levy, county roads levy, city general fund levies, and the state school levy are all protected from prorationing.
  + If the $5.90 is exceeded then the total tax rate is reduced back to $5.90 in the following order:
    - Parks and Recreation Districts (up to 60 cents)

Parks and Recreation Service Areas (up to 60 cents)

Cultural Arts, Stadiums and Convention Districts (up to 25 cents)

* + - Flood Control Zone Districts (up to 50 cents)
    - Hospital Districts (up to 25 cents)

Metropolitan Park Districts formed before 1/1/2002 (up to 25 cents)

All other districts not on this list

* + - Metropolitan Park Districts formed on or after 1/1/2002 (up to 50 cents)
* *Fire Districts* (up to 25 cents)

*Regional Fire Protection Service Authorities* per RCW 52.26.140(1)(b) up to 50 cents

*Regional Fire Protection Service Authorities* per RCW 52.26.140(1)(c) up to 50 cents

* *Fire Districts* the remaining 50 cents

*Regional Fire Protection Service Authorities* per RCW 52.26.140(1)(a) up to 50 cents

Library Districts (up to 50 cents)

Hospital Districts (up to 50 cents)

Metropolitan Park Districts formed before 1/1/2002 (up to 50 cents)

If the levies are reduced to meet the $5.90 cap but the 1% total tax levy is still exceeded for a given property then reductions in other levies, which are outside the $5.90 limit, are made in the following order:

* County transit levy (up 7.5 cents)
* *Fire Districts* (up to 25 cents) RCW 52.16.140

*Fire Districts* (up to 25 cents) RCW 52.16.160

* County Criminal Justice (up to 50 cents)
* Ferry Districts (up to 75 cents except King County 7.5 cents)
* Metropolitan park Districts with a population of 150,000+ which have voted to levy 25 cents outside the $5.90 (up to 25 cents)
* Conservation Futures (up to 6.25 cents)

Affordable Housing (up to 50 cents)

*EMS* (up to 20 cents)

* *EMS* (up to 30 cents)

NOTE: Levies under the 1% limit are termed “regular” levies but does not include port districts and public utility districts regular levies, which are each limited separately by statute to 45 cents. “Excess” or “special” levies require voter approval and are described in total dollars – generally for 1 year, maybe for 2 to 6 years (school districts and fire districts), and as many as 30 years for capital or “bond retirement” levies.