



**FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION  
ILLINOIS PROPERTY TAX APPEAL BOARD**

APPELLANT: Soto Investment Group INC  
DOCKET NO.: 17-31063.001-R-1  
PARCEL NO.: 16-24-408-019-0000

The parties of record before the Property Tax Appeal Board are Soto Investment Group INC, the appellant(s), by attorney Mary T. Nicolau, of Fox Rothschild LLP in Chicago; and the Cook County Board of Review.

Based on the facts and exhibits presented in this matter, the Property Tax Appeal Board hereby finds **No Change** in the assessment of the property as established by the **Cook** County Board of Review is warranted. The correct assessed valuation of the property is:

**LAND:** \$ 3,150  
**IMPR.:** \$ 9,702  
**TOTAL:** \$ 12,852

Subject only to the State multiplier as applicable.

**Statement of Jurisdiction**

The appellant timely filed the appeal from a decision of the Cook County Board of Review pursuant to section 16-160 of the Property Tax Code (35 ILCS 200/16-160) challenging the assessment for the 2017 tax year. The Property Tax Appeal Board (the "Board") finds that it has jurisdiction over the parties and the subject matter of this appeal.

**Findings of Fact**

The subject consists of a two-story dwelling of masonry construction with 1,800 square feet of living area. The dwelling is 112 years old. Features of the home include a full unfinished basement. The property's site is 3,000 square feet, and it is located in West Chicago Township, Cook County. The subject is classified as a class 2-11 property under the Cook County Real Property Assessment Classification Ordinance. The subject is owned by a business entity, and, therefore, it is not owner-occupied.

The appellant contends overvaluation as the basis of the appeal. In support of this argument, the appellant submitted evidence disclosing the subject property was purchased on April 28, 2015 for a price of \$35,000, or \$19.44 per square foot of living area, including land. Based on this evidence, the appellant requested a reduction in the subject's assessment to \$3,500.

The board of review submitted its “Board of Review Notes on Appeal” disclosing that the total assessment for the subject is \$12,852. The subject’s assessment reflects a market value of \$128,520, or \$71.40 per square foot of living area, including land, when applying the 2017 statutory level of assessment for class 2 property of 10.00% under the Cook County Real Property Assessment Classification Ordinance.

In support of its contention of the correct assessment, the board of review submitted information on four equity comparables, and four sale comparables. These sale comparables sold from March 2016 to September 2016 for \$145,000 to \$160,000, or \$73.53 to \$88.08 per square foot of living area, including land. The board of review’s evidence also states that the subject was purchased in April 2015 for \$35,000. The board of review also submitted a supplemental brief arguing that the sale of the subject was a compulsory sale, and therefore, the sale was not an arm’s-length transaction which would accurately represent the subject’s fair cash value. In support of this argument, the board of review submitted a printout from the Cook County Recorder of Deeds’ website showing that a *lis pendens* was filed on the subject by Chase Home Finance, LLC against Maria Diaz on November 4, 2009, and that Hermenegildo Diaz conveyed the subject to the appellant via a warranty deed filed on May 5, 2015. The board of review also submitted a copy of FirstMerit Bank N.A. v. Bridgeview Bank, 2016 IL App (2d) 150364-U. The board of review asserts that this case stands for the proposition that:

[w]here the plaintiff in the foreclosure action is the high bidder at the judicial sale of the foreclosed property, the transaction is not an arm’s-length transaction. Thus, although the price paid by a willing buyer to a willing seller is generally a sound indication of an item’s value when the sale is at arm’s-length—see Walsh v. Property Tax Appeal Board, 181 Ill.2d 228, 230 (1998)—it would be error to use this measure in a situation in which the plaintiff controlled both the offer and the acceptance and thus could set any price it liked.

Id. at ¶ 39.

In rebuttal, the appellant argued that the sale of the subject in April 2015 for \$35,000 was an arm’s-length transaction. In support of argument, the appellant submitted an affidavit naming Gus Valkanas as the affiant. The affiant stated that he is the current owner of the subject, that he was approached by a real estate broker about purchasing the property in March 2015, and that after some negotiations, he made an offer to purchase the subject, which was ultimately accepted, yet contingent on bank approval. The appellant also submitted the Board’s decision in docket number 15-35192.001-R-1, wherein the Board reduced the subject’s assessment to \$3,500 based on the sale of the subject in April 2015 for \$3,500. In that decision, the Board found that “the board of review failed to provide any substantial evidence to challenge the arm’s length nature of the transaction.” The appellant also submitted the real estate brokers dual agency agreement and an affidavit from the bank attesting that the transaction is an arm’s-length transaction.

### **Conclusion of Law**

The appellant contends the market value of the subject property is not accurately reflected in its assessed valuation. When market value is the basis of the appeal, the value of the property must

be proven by a preponderance of the evidence. 86 Ill.Admin.Code §1910.63(e). Proof of market value may consist of an appraisal of the subject property, a recent sale, comparable sales, or construction costs. 86 Ill.Admin.Code §1910.65(c). The Board finds the appellant did not meet this burden of proof, and a reduction in the subject's assessment is not warranted.

The Board finds that the sale of the subject in April 2015 for a price of \$35,000 is a "compulsory sale." A "compulsory sale" is defined as:

(i) the sale of real estate for less than the amount owed to the mortgage lender or mortgagor, if the lender or mortgagor has agreed to the sale, commonly referred to as a "short sale" and (ii) the first sale of real estate owned by a financial institution as a result of a judgment of foreclosure, transfer pursuant to a deed in lieu of foreclosure, or consent judgment, occurring after the foreclosure proceeding is complete.

35 ILCS 200/1-23. The Board finds that the sale of the subject in April 2015 for a price of \$35,000 is a compulsory sale, in the form of a short sale, based on the printout from the Cook County Recorder of Deeds' website submitted by the board of review.

Finding that the sale of the subject was a compulsory sale, the question then becomes whether the compulsory sale of the subject is an arm's-length transaction such that the sale price reflects the subject's fair cash value. Indeed, "a contemporaneous sale between parties dealing at arm's-length is not only relevant to the question of fair cash market value, [citations] but would be practically conclusive on the issue of whether an assessment was at full value." People ex rel. Korzen v. Belt Ry. Co. of Chicago, 37 Ill.2d 158, 161 (1967). However, "[i]n order for the sale price of property to be used as the market value, the transaction must be between a willing buyer and a willing seller, neither of whom are under compulsion to buy or sell, and no account should be taken of values or necessities peculiar to either party." Id. at 164 (citing City of Chicago v. Harrison-Halsted Building Corp., 11 Ill.2d 431 (1957); Ligare v. Chicago, Madison and Northern Railroad Co., 166 Ill. 249 (1897); and City of Chicago v. Farwell, 286 Ill. 415 (1918), overruled on other grounds by Forest Preserve Dist. of Du Page County v. First Nat. Bank of Franklin Park, 2011 IL 110759). The appellant asserts that the sale of the subject was an arm's-length transaction, while the board of review contends that it is not.

The Board finds that the board of review's reliance on FirstMerit Bank is misplaced, as that case is factually distinguishable from the instant case. In that case, the mortgagor defaulted on the mortgage, and the mortgagee commenced foreclosure proceedings, resulting in the mortgagee purchasing the mortgaged property at a sheriff's sale. FirstMerit Bank at ¶¶ 4-5, 7, 21. On appeal, the mortgagor argued, *inter alia*, that, in determining the deficiency owed by the mortgagor, the trial court used the purchase price at the sheriff's sale in determining the mortgaged property's value. Id. at ¶ 38. The court then pronounced that:

[w]here the plaintiff in the foreclosure action is the high bidder at the judicial sale of the foreclosed property, the transaction is not an arm's-length transaction. Thus, although the price paid by a willing buyer to a willing seller is generally a sound indication of an item's value when the sale is at arm's-length—see Walsh v. Property Tax Appeal Board, 181 Ill.2d 228, 230 (1998)—it would be error to

use this measure in a situation in which the plaintiff controlled both the offer and the acceptance and thus could set any price it liked.

Id. at ¶ 39. Unlike the mortgagor in FirstMerit Bank, the sale price at the sheriff's sale is not the sale price relied upon by the appellant in the instant case. The appellant, instead, relies upon the sale price from the sale of the subject prior to the sheriff's sale. It is the sale by the sheriff that the court found was not at arm's-length, and not the prior sale, which the appellant relies upon. Thus, FirstMerit Bank is factually distinguishable from the instant case.

In Calumet Transfer LLC v. Property Tax Appeal Bd., 401 Ill.App.3d 652 (1st Dist. 2010), the court upheld the Board's decision, wherein the Board allowed the intervenor to challenge the arm's-length nature of the sale of the property, through the submission of sale comparables, pursuant to Section 1910.65(c)(4) of the Official Rules of the Property Tax Appeal Board. Calumet Transfer, 401 Ill.App.3d at 655-56; 86 Ill.Admin.Code §1910.65(c)(4) (“[p]roof of the market value of the subject property may consist of the following: 4) documentation of not fewer than three recent sales of suggested comparable properties together with documentation of the similarity, proximity and lack of distinguishing characteristics of the sales comparables to the subject property.”). Like the board of review here, the intervenor in Calumet Transfer argued that the seller was under duress to sell the property, and, therefore, the purchase price was below fair market value as evidenced by the comparable sales. Id. at 656. The court stated that, “There is no provision in the Property Tax Code that restricts [the Board's] authority to consider such evidence. To the contrary, paragraph (4) of section 1910.65(c) specifically allows evidence of comparable property sales to prove fair market value.” Id.

In looking at the sale comparables submitted by the parties, the Board finds all of the board of review's sale comparables to be most similar to the subject. These sale comparables sold for prices ranging from \$73.53 to \$88.08 per square foot of living area, including land. The subject's sale price reflects a market value of \$19.44 per square foot of living area, including land, which is below the range established by the best comparables in this record. Therefore, the Board finds that the compulsory sale of the subject in April 2015 for a price of \$35,000 was below the subject's fair market value, and, therefore, was not an arm's-length transaction. As such, this sale has been given no weight in the Board's analysis. The Board notes that its decision in docket number 15-35192.001-R-1 merited a different result because, as stated in that decision, there was no evidence that the sale of the subject was not at arm's-length. In the instant case, there is such evidence, and arguments by both parties in support of their respective positions. Thus, the record was fully developed, allowing the Board to make findings of fact and conclusions of law on this issue, which, based on the additional information submitted in the instant appeal, warranted a different result. Since there is no other market value evidence proffered by the appellant, the Board finds that the appellant has not proven, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the subject is overvalued, and a reduction in the subject's assessment is not warranted.

This is a final administrative decision of the Property Tax Appeal Board which is subject to review in the Circuit Court or Appellate Court under the provisions of the Administrative Review Law (735 ILCS 5/3-101 et seq.) and section 16-195 of the Property Tax Code. Pursuant to Section 1910.50(d) of the rules of the Property Tax Appeal Board (86 Ill.Admin.Code §1910.50(d)) the proceeding before the Property Tax Appeal Board is terminated when the decision is rendered. The Property Tax Appeal Board does not require any motion or request for reconsideration.



Chairman



Member



Member



Member

Member

DISSENTING: \_\_\_\_\_

CERTIFICATION

As Clerk of the Illinois Property Tax Appeal Board and the keeper of the Records thereof, I do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true, full and complete Final Administrative Decision of the Illinois Property Tax Appeal Board issued this date in the above entitled appeal, now of record in this said office.

Date:

April 20, 2021



Clerk of the Property Tax Appeal Board

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**

Section 16-185 of the Property Tax Code provides in part:

"If the Property Tax Appeal Board renders a decision lowering the assessment of a particular parcel after the deadline for filing complaints with the Board of Review or after adjournment of the session of the Board of Review at which assessments for the subsequent year or years of the same general assessment period, as provided in Sections 9-125 through 9-225, are being considered, the taxpayer may, within 30 days after the date of written notice of the Property Tax Appeal Board's decision, appeal the assessment for such subsequent year or years directly to the Property Tax Appeal Board."

In order to comply with the above provision, YOU MUST FILE A PETITION AND EVIDENCE WITH THE PROPERTY TAX APPEAL BOARD WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE DATE OF THE ENCLOSED DECISION IN ORDER TO APPEAL THE ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPERTY FOR THE SUBSEQUENT YEAR OR YEARS. A separate petition and evidence must be filed for each of the remaining years of the general assessment period.

Based upon the issuance of a lowered assessment by the Property Tax Appeal Board, the refund of paid property taxes is the responsibility of your County Treasurer. Please contact that office with any questions you may have regarding the refund of paid property taxes.

PARTIES OF RECORD

AGENCY

State of Illinois  
Property Tax Appeal Board  
William G. Stratton Building, Room 402  
401 South Spring Street  
Springfield, IL 62706-4001

APPELLANT

Soto Investment Group INC, by attorney:  
Mary T. Nicolau  
Fox Rothschild LLP  
321 North Clark  
Suite 1600  
Chicago, IL 60654

COUNTY

Cook County Board of Review  
County Building, Room 601  
118 North Clark Street  
Chicago, IL 60602