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# Johnson County appraiser gets quizzed, then reappointed

By JIM SULLINGER  
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Johnson County Appraiser Paul Welcome was appointed to a new four-year term today but not before answering questions about how he comes up with 172,000 home values each year.

Commissioner Doug Wood said he had heard from constituents who were unhappy with the comparable home sales used by the appraiser's office to value their homes.

Wood wanted to know more about how Welcome's office comes up with those comparable homes. Before appointing Welcome to a new term in office, Wood said he wanted a discussion of the "complexities of the office" and how homes are chosen as comparables.

Welcome said his office must appraise about 200,000 properties every year. He said computers look at three levels when looking for comparable properties that were recently sold. The first tier attempts to find properties within a neighborhood or subdivision. The second takes such things as age, style, quality and size into consideration. The third tier analyzes a home's physical condition and basement type.

Welcome told a meeting of the County Commission that finding comparable homes wasn't difficult in about 95 percent of the cases. The other 5 percent can be very difficult, he said. He said examples were dome houses, earth contact homes and residences that were old and run down. "These properties will always be unique," he said.

The Kansas Constitution requires Welcome to appraise property based on its market value. Without good comparable sales, that is hard to determine. Welcome said he was exploring new ways of dealing with those properties in order to improve the calculation of those values.

Residents who disagree with the appraiser's values can appeal. Last year there were 3,632 appeals from homeowners. Of those, 44 percent were readjusted. There were slightly more appeals — 3,811 — on values sent to homeowners this year.

The commission approved Welcome's appointment unanimously.

Welcome was first hired as the county's appraiser in 1991 after the state threatened to take over the office. State officials found that county appraisals were not in compliance with state law.

Annabeth Surbaugh, commission chairwoman, noted that Welcome's work after he was appointed brought the county back into compliance. "I think he's a great asset for the county," said Commissioner Jim Allen of Shawnee.

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