


BUSINESS



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PROPERTY TAX

Owners may have new way to challenge taxes

BY MONICA HATCHER

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Following an appeal from a downtown Miami commercial property owner, the Miami-Dade County Value Adjustment Board has reduced the assessment of a property on Flagler Street by more than \$11.5 million — nearly 40 percent — potentially paving the way for developers and other commercial land owners to challenge how their property is appraised for tax purposes.

Downtown property owner Fatima Jebai, whose property lies at 251 E. Flagler St., stands to get a roughly \$260,000 tax refund from the county as a result of the appeal, if county officials do not themselves appeal the decision of the VAB.

A spokesman from the property appraiser's office said the department was still reviewing the VAB's findings.

When county property appraisers assess commercial property, they value the underlying land and the structures on the land separately. Typically, land is assessed uniformly, say, per square-foot, on a given block, with the biggest variances in property value coming from improvements on the land such as buildings.

Barry Sharpe, a property tax consultant and contractor who presented Jebai's case, said the crux of their appeal rested on the premise that the land underlying the older buildings on the property was actually worth less than similar, undeveloped parcels.

Sharpe argued that the cost and time associated with demolishing the existing buildings, relocating existing tenants, as well as zoning, construction and permitting issues reduced the value of the land.

Sharpe said owners of older buildings could offer similar arguments to the appeals board.

"My argument is that there should not be across the board value for all lots, which is what typically they are doing in Miami-Dade County. They do these blanket assessments," Sharpe said.