

OPINION: Shouldn't New Bedford's Assessor live in New Bedford?

Many have noticed their properties being assessed at higher and higher values, especially recently. New Bedford assesses all properties each year by the first day of January. Every three years this information is sent to the Department of Revenue and certified.

The City of New Bedford prides itself on its in-house staff of assessors. The City's website states: "While most communities hire professional appraisal firms to perform this task, we in New Bedford have a full-time in-house staff to conduct this ongoing effort."

While most cities hire professional appraisers, New Bedford relies on staff. But many may be surprised to hear that the department head of New Bedford's assessor's office does not live in New Bedford. The individual in charge of the valuation of all the city's properties, who is essentially responsible for determining the value of each and every property and also each tax bill, does not live in the very city that he is responsible for putting the valuation on.

The only reason I could understand the benefit of having a full-time assessor's office staff, rather than hiring appraisers when needed, is if those employees somehow had a greater understanding of the market within the city because they were privy to the current trends and tribulations experienced by our property owners here. Aside from that benefit, I can't understand why we would ever not want to hire appraisers when necessary; when contracted out our costs become much less.

Not only do we have to pay the department head's annual salary

of over \$91,000 but we are also responsible for his medical insurance and his pension. So, rather than hiring professional appraisers, when necessary, we choose to employ an entire staff of 12 full-time and 3 part-time employees, costing us roughly \$670,000 in salaries alone. That does not include health insurance and pensions, because we need to pay our full-time employees forever.

So Mr. Motta, the head of the assessor's office, who does not live within the city of New Bedford, who determines the value of our homes and thus finalizes the amounts we pay in property taxes, is being paid over \$91,000 a year, and will continue to be paid for the rest of his life.

Yeah, those private appraisers are sounding better and better. It must be nice for Mr. Motta, to never have to pay one of his own tax bills in the city!