

From: Gowrylow, Mike (DOR) [mailto:MikeG@DOR.WA.GOV]
Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2008 11:52 AM
To: jmercier@washingtonpolicy.org
Subject: Re: Department response to your proposal

Jason,

We are fine with using our response in your blog.

Mike

----- Original Message -----

From: Jason Mercier <jmercier@washingtonpolicy.org>
To: Gowrylow, Mike (DOR)
Sent: Wed Aug 20 11:43:50 2008
Subject: RE: Department response to your proposal

Thank you, Mike.

Any calculator, especially for property taxes, would need to have some type of disclaimer on it. If the Legislature were to move forward with this reform the locals would be directed to provide the missing information that would be needed.

I'll be sure to keep you updated on any developments.

Any objections to me adapting your email as a blog post?

Sincerely,

Jason Mercier
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Improving the transparency, accountability and performance of government

From: Gowrylow, Mike (DOR) [mailto:MikeG@DOR.WA.GOV]
Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2008 10:52 AM
To: Jason Mercier
Subject: Department response to your proposal

Jason,

The Department of Revenue considers the web to be a great way to communicate with taxpayers and the public, and it supports the concept of a searchable database of state and local taxes by location. In fact, it already has been moving toward that goal as resources permit. If you go to <http://dor.wa.gov/content/findtaxesandrates/propertytax/lookupataxrate/>, you'll see our progress to date in

providing property tax information by address. This site was developed as part of a strategic plan to streamline the apportionment of centrally assessed properties by county, but it also can serve as the foundation for the type of broader tax lookup system you advocate. Currently, the service shows which taxing districts are within the tax code area. The next step would be to link to the levy rates for each of those districts. For example, see http://dor.wa.gov/docs/reports/2007/Property_Tax_Statistics_2007/2007_Levy_Detail_Pt1.xls for senior taxing district rates. We also could link to the sales tax rates for the same location using our existing sales tax lookup tool at <http://dor.wa.gov/content/findtaxesandrates/salesandusetaxrates/lookupataxrate/>. It might be more difficult to link to municipal taxes, as local governments have no obligation to report those to us. While we support the concept because it fits within our goal of being as open and transparent as possible, we also must recognize that it would be a significant undertaking to create and maintain such a database. Counties would need to report rates to us in a timely manner, and resources would need to be expended to manage the data and ensure its accuracy. This has to be weighed against other priorities and the usual resource limitations.

One challenge is the potential for users to incorrectly calculate their tax liability due to the lag between the time a property is revalued and new property tax rates are set. For example, counties usually send out revaluation notices in the fall, but the rates often aren't set until the end of the year, and taxpayers don't get their tax bills based on those new valuations and rates until the following February. If property owners were to get a revaluation notice, and go to an online system to check their rates, they would be incorrectly multiplying new values against old rates. The results would only be accurate once the new rates are posted. This lag is a problem that would need to be addressed in some way, perhaps by providing warning information online.

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