

PROPERTY TAX | RESIDENT WALKTHROUGH

Memphis & Shelby County | Reviewed September 25, 2026 | Educational, not tax advice

No current rate is asserted in this guide. All numerical rates are fictional teaching assumptions; check the tax year and jurisdiction on the official sources before estimating a real bill.

1. Follow a bill from value to payment

The Shelby County Assessor estimates fair market value and classifies property. Residential/farm real property is assessed at 25% of that value; commercial/industrial at 40% and public utility at 55%. The City Council and County Commission set their respective rates during budget decisions. Rates are dollars per \$100 of assessed value, not a percentage of market value. The County Trustee handles County taxes; Memphis handles City taxes. Relief and exemptions have different rules.

Formula: market value x assessment ratio = assessed value; assessed value / 100 x applicable adopted rate = tax before relief.

2. Work through a fictional home

Assume tax year HYPOTHETICAL, a \$200,000 residential home within Memphis, a 25% assessment ratio, and invented rates of City \$2.00 and County \$3.00 per \$100 of assessed value. No exemptions, special levies, credits, penalties or fees are included.

\$200,000 x 0.25 = \$50,000 assessed. \$50,000 / 100 = 500. City: 500 x \$2.00 = \$1,000. County: 500 x \$3.00 = \$1,500. Combined: \$2,500 before any relief. This is not an official bill or a statement of adopted rates.

A property outside Memphis does not owe the Memphis levy simply because it is in Shelby County. It may owe another municipality's tax or a location-specific levy. Verify parcel location and line items on the actual bills; don't assume every address has the same total rate.

3. Check the real year and jurisdiction

Memphis rate table - Shelby County Trustee: <https://www.shelbycountytrustee.com/245/Memphis-Tax-Rates>

Shelby County rate table - Trustee: <https://www.shelbycountytrustee.com/246/Shelby-County-Tax-Rates>

City tax/bill information - City of Memphis: <https://memphistn.gov/tax-information>

County tax/bill information - Trustee: <https://www.shelbycountytrustee.com/94/Taxes>

The Trustee tables list tax years, not a universal combined bill. Rates, fiscal-year budget dates and bill years are not interchangeable. Find the tax year printed on your bill before comparing numbers.

REAPPRAISAL, RATES & REVENUE

4. What can change a bill?

A bill can change when appraised value, classification, adopted rate, applicable taxing jurisdictions, relief or levy-specific rules change. In a general reappraisal, properties can move at different speeds: one owner's value may rise faster than the jurisdiction average and their bill may rise even if the certified rate falls. Another owner may see a decrease. Appeals can change an assessment. A nominal rate alone cannot show affordability.

5. What Tennessee's certified rate does

Following a general reappraisal, Tenn. Code 67-5-1701 calls for each jurisdiction to calculate a certified rate estimated to produce the same ad valorem revenue as the prior year, apart from new construction, improvements and deletions. The statute also allows specified adjustments; see the law and Comptroller explanation. The calculation uses a jurisdiction-wide base, NOT each household's old bill. It does not provide a built-in inflation or cost-of-living increase to that prior-year revenue baseline.

After publication of notice and a public hearing, officials can vote to adopt a rate above the certified rate. This is a reappraisal-year comparison rule, not a rule that freezes revenues every year. The City and County still consider budgets and adopt tax rates annually. New construction can also affect actual collections, so a certified-rate illustration is not a forecast of total collections.

Official explanation - Tennessee Comptroller:

<https://comptroller.tn.gov/boards/state-board-of-equalization/sboe-resources/certified-tax-rate.html>

Tennessee Code 67-5-1701 (text): <https://law.justia.com/codes/tennessee/title-67/chapter-5/part-17/section-67-5-1701/>

6. Real dollars versus nominal dollars

Illustration only: suppose an existing tax base produces \$100 million before reappraisal and the certified-rate baseline produces \$100 million again. If costs rise 5%, that \$100 million would buy roughly \$95.24 million of prior-year goods and services ($\$100\text{m} / 1.05$). About \$105 million nominal would be needed to preserve the prior year's purchasing power, assuming the same mix of costs. These are arithmetic assumptions, NOT Memphis or Shelby County outcomes, price forecasts, or a proposed rate.

If purchasing power shrinks while service needs persist, maintaining hours, repairs or staffing can become harder without another funding or spending decision. That is a possible constraint, not proof that a particular service was cut by this law. Whether to raise a rate, change fees, shift spending or fund services another way is a public budget choice.

PLACE, NEEDS & FAIRNESS

7. Neighborhoods are not interchangeable

Reappraisal is parcel-based; two homes with the same market value and classification can have the same base tax calculation even if they sit in different neighborhoods within the same taxing jurisdiction. But values, assessment changes, access to relief and service conditions differ. A city-limits boundary matters more to the rate calculation than a neighborhood name. Do not infer a neighborhood's tax burden or reappraisal trend from a single invented example.

The City of Memphis FY2025-29 Consolidated Plan documents housing and community-development needs, including affordable housing supply, rehabilitation and support for lower-income households. It supports asking which neighborhoods need investment; it does not establish that a particular certified rate caused any specific neighborhood condition. For claims about a block's changes, look for parcel-level, comparable-year evidence and account for appeals and tax boundaries.

City of Memphis FY2025-29 Consolidated Plan: <https://www.memphistn.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Consolidated-Plan-FY25-29.pdf>

8. Who bears a tax or fee?

A progressive burden takes a larger share of income from people with more ability to pay; a regressive burden takes a larger share from people with less. Property value is not household income: a lower-income owner can have a valuable home, and different property classes have different assessment ratios. A renter may indirectly face property-tax costs through rent, but the amount passed on is not fixed. Owners' relief, exemptions and appeal access can also change effective burdens. Property tax is not universally progressive or regressive.

Fictional fee comparison: a \$300 annual flat fee is 1% of \$30,000 income but 0.2% of \$150,000 income. That makes this fee regressive relative to income in this illustration; it does NOT prove all local fees have identical rules or incidence. A value-based levy on a more expensive property may produce a larger dollar bill, but to judge fairness compare income, housing security, relief and services too.

9. Questions for a budget meeting

What does a proposed rate buy, and whose costs rise? What share falls on low-income owners or renters? Are fees waived or scaled? Which services reach areas with long-standing disinvestment? Are the proposed spending and revenue figures from matching years and funds? These are value judgments to discuss publicly, not conclusions dictated by the tax formula.

HELP, SOURCES & NEXT STEPS

10. Get the right kind of help

For market value or property class, consult the Shelby County Assessor. For an assessment dispute, check the Comptroller's appeal process and deadlines; tax-payment questions go to the relevant billing office. The County Trustee explains tax relief; the state explains eligibility and credits. Do not assume you qualify from a short description. Exemptions are separate from homeowner tax relief; the State Board of Equalization describes exemption applications.

Shelby County Assessor - property records/contact: <https://www.shelbycountyttn.gov/1916/Assessor-of-Property>

Tennessee Comptroller - assessment appeals: <https://comptroller.tn.gov/boards/state-board-of-equalization/value-appeals.html>

County Trustee - tax relief: <https://www.shelbycountytrustee.com/106/Tax-Relief>

Tennessee Comptroller - tax relief program:

<https://comptroller.tn.gov/office-functions/pa/property-taxes/property-tax-programs/tax-relief.html>

State Board - property tax exemptions: <https://comptroller.tn.gov/boards/state-board-of-equalization/property-tax-exemptions.html>

11. Try your own numbers, then act

Find your tax year, market value, classification, jurisdiction(s) and bill line items. Multiply value by the assessment ratio; divide by 100; apply each official rate separately. Check any relief with the administering office. What changes if you use your actual assessed value rather than this guide's invented one? This calculator is exploratory, not an official billing or eligibility tool; check its rate year and inputs against official sources.

Free app calculator (no account to explore): <https://moralbudget.com/property-tax/calculator>

Explore budget choices (no account to explore): <https://moralbudget.com/budget-simulator/select-path>

You can also contact City Council or County Commission about the level and distribution of public investments. Any organization can use these questions; no campaign affiliation or particular rate position is required.

Source notes and terms

Mechanics and certified-rate rule: Tennessee Comptroller certified-rate page; Tenn. Code 67-5-1701. Rate and bill locations: Shelby County Trustee's City/County rate tables and City of Memphis tax information. Housing/community needs: City FY2025-29 Consolidated Plan. Links above were reviewed September 25, 2026. Confirm current rates and program rules directly before relying on them.

Market value: assessor's estimate of fair value. Assessed value: taxable percentage of market value. Rate: dollars per \$100 assessed. Certified rate: reappraisal-year jurisdiction-wide revenue baseline. Nominal: unadjusted dollars. Real: dollars adjusted for changing purchasing power. Relief: assistance subject to program rules; not the same as exemption.