

Postcard & Joint Public Hearing - Questions & Answers

Buffalo County's Joint Public Hearing will be held on Tuesday, September 19, 2023, at 6:30 PM in the Extension Building at Buffalo County Fairgrounds
1400 E 34th St, Kearney, NE 68847

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Why am I receiving this postcard?

Since 2022, the Property Tax Request Act (Nebraska Revised Statutes §§77-1630 – 77-1634) requires counties to send out this postcard. The postcard is triggered by the tax requests of certain political subdivisions—cities, counties, school districts, and community colleges—when those requests exceed their “allowable growth percentage” (i.e. their property tax request exceeds their property taxes from the previous year by over a certain amount).

What is “allowable growth percentage?”

According to Nebraska Revised Statute §77-1631, allowable growth percentage means a percentage equal to the sum of (a) two percent plus (b) the political subdivision's real growth percentage. Real growth percentage means the percentage obtained by dividing (a) the political subdivision's real growth value by (b) the political subdivision's total real property valuation from the prior year.

Is this a tax bill?

No, it is not a bill. The postcard is intended to inform the property owner of a potential property tax increase/decrease to certain levies of their property tax bill for next year, and to inform the property owner of the Joint Public Hearing those political subdivisions need to participate in before they can submit their adopted budget for next year.

How does this impact the property taxes that I already paid this year?

This does not impact the property taxes you paid for this year. This postcard is notifying owners of estimated changes to certain levies within their property tax bill for next year.

Keep in mind, property taxes are paid in arrears. During the calendar year 2023, property owners paid their property taxes for 2022. During the calendar year 2024, property owners will pay their property taxes for 2023.

How are property taxes calculated?

The tax rates for the operation of all functions of county government, school districts, cities, community colleges, natural resource districts, fire departments, SIDs, and other local authorities are determined by dividing the political subdivision's annual budget tax request by the current total taxable value within their boundaries. The tax rates are expressed as a percent of \$100 dollars of taxable value.

Property taxes are determined by multiplying the property’s taxable value by the tax rate for the tax district in which the property is located. The tax district for a property includes various local authorities, which levy property taxes for services.

I received a postcard for an estimated tax increase but it looks like my taxes are going down (or there is no estimated change from 2022). Why did I get a postcard?

State law requires a postcard to go to all property owners within political subdivisions that are asking for more in tax revenues, by a certain amount, than they asked for the previous year. That doesn't mean every property in the political subdivision will have increased taxes—depending on the 2023 value of the property and what the political subdivision is planning to do for its tax rate, the taxes on some properties will remain the same or even go down. But the higher tax request from the political subdivision triggers a postcard for all of the properties within the subdivision.

If my postcard is indicating estimated decreases in my property taxes for these political subdivisions, then can I expect my overall property tax bill to be less next year?

Not necessarily. First, these are estimates. Second, this postcard only applies to counties, cities, community colleges, and school districts. The following types of political subdivisions have taxing authority but were not required to be included on the postcard, nor are they required to participate in the Joint Public Hearing, so this postcard does not include any of their property tax requests:

- Villages
- Sanitary and improvement districts - Public building commissions
- Educational service units
- Fire districts
- Learning communities
- County libraries
- Natural resource districts
- Transit authorities

I only see two-to-four political subdivisions listed on this postcard. What about the other political subdivisions with taxing authority?

The Nebraska Legislature determined that only counties, cities, community colleges, and school districts making a property tax request exceeding their allowable growth percentage need to be included on the postcard and participate in the Joint Public Hearing.

(For residents of Elm Creek, Shelton, Amherst, Pleasanton and Miller) Why isn't my city/village listed on this postcard?

Villages, and villages are excluded from having to be included on the postcard (nor do villages need to participate in the Joint Public Hearing).

(For those residing in the school districts of Kearney, Elm Creek, Amherst and Ravenna) Why isn't my school district listed on this postcard?

These school districts are not seeking to increase their property tax request by more than their allowable growth percentage, therefore, they are not required to be included on the postcard nor are they required to participate in the Joint Public Hearing.

Did Buffalo County raise its levy rate?

No, Buffalo County did not raise its levy rate. However, your property taxes may increase/decrease if the assessed value of your property changed. The assessed value of your property and any increase or decrease is shown on the postcard you received.

I have a homestead exemption. Does this change my homestead exemption?

No, the information on the postcard is determined before any property tax exemption or tax credit has been calculated. The final determination of homestead exemption status is made by the State of Nebraska in late October. If you qualify for full or partial homestead exemption, that status will be reflected in any property tax bill you receive in December.

Why are there two different hearing dates/times/locations listed on my postcard?

If you have more than one hearing listed on your postcard, then that means you live in a school district that is headquartered in another county. If you want to attend the Joint Public Hearing that your school district is participating in, then look at the information for “HEARING: 2” on your postcard.

I only have one public hearing listed on my postcard. Are there supposed to be two?

If you only have one public hearing listed on your postcard, then that means all of the political subdivisions listed in your postcard are headquartered in Buffalo County, and representatives from those political subdivisions will be participating in the same public hearing on Tuesday, September 19, 2023, at the Extension Building at Buffalo County Fairgrounds located at 1400 E 34th St, Kearney, NE 68847.

For those who received postcards with two public hearings listed, that means their school district is headquartered in another county, and a representative from that school district will be participating in the Joint Public Hearing in the other county.

Are these political subdivisions voting on their tax rates at this Joint Public Hearing?

No. At the Joint Public Hearing, a representative from each political subdivision will give a brief presentation on that political subdivision's intent to increase its property tax request by more than the allowable growth percentage and the effect of such request on the political subdivision's budget, but there will not be any votes taken after the presentations.

For the political subdivisions participating in this Joint Public Hearing, their participation in this Joint Public Hearing is required BEFORE the political subdivision can file their adopted budget statement. Then on a subsequent date after the Joint Public Hearing, the governing body of each participating political subdivision will pass an ordinance or resolution to set such political subdivision's property tax request.

If I attend the Joint Public Hearing, will I have an opportunity to speak?

Yes, there will be a public comment period after the political subdivisions have finished presenting. Those speaking from the public will be limited to two minutes (the County Clerk [who is charged with organizing this public hearing] may adjust the time limit depending on how many speakers are present).

While the public comment period is the opportunity for members of the public to speak during the hearing, there will not be back-and-forth discussion between members of the public and representatives from the political subdivisions.

I won't be able to attend the meeting, but I would like to submit comments. How can I do that? There are two ways you can submit comments:

1. Send an email to clerk@buffalocounty.ne.gov
Please Include "Joint Public Hearing" in the subject line; or
2. You can mail a letter to the Buffalo County Clerk | 1512 Central Ave, P.O.Box 1270 | Kearney, NE 68848.

The Buffalo County Clerk's Office will pass along your comments to the appropriate political subdivision.