
NEWS

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HISTORIC PROPERTY OWNERS ADVOCATE POST CREATED

It took 150 years, but Los Angeles County finally has its first-ever Property Owners Advocate under an administrative order issued by Assessor Rick Auerbach creating a post to resolve unusual problems facing homeowners and small businesses.

Auerbach, appointed as the 24th Assessor by the Board of Supervisors in February, said one of his first concerns was finding a way to help property owners who don't have attorneys on their side. "Someone described it as an agent for those who can't afford an agent," Auerbach said.

For the position, Auerbach has chosen Linda Aquaro, a veteran of the county's Auditor-Controller and Assessor agencies - and someone he felt sure would "inspire respect and trust by demonstrating an impartial determination to find solutions and confirm the fairness of the process and decisions."

Auerbach said he realized it was time to give someone the job of dealing with unusual situations and complicated disputes - someone working directly out of his Executive Office. "There is such a sense of satisfaction in this," Aquaro said, "and it is a challenge, whether the problem is complicated or very simple."



“Often it is just a matter of making sure the property owner understands why a conclusion was reached and that the taxpayer’s concerns were considered and addressed,” said Auerbach, a 30-year veteran of the Assessor’s Office who was Assistant Assessor when he was recommended to the supervisors for the top spot by retiring Assessor Kenneth P. Hahn.

“Sometimes the property owner simply wants a third party they trust to sit in on discussions and then say, ‘yes, they listened to you and made the right decision,’” he added.

Aquaro has already acted on behalf of sports figures, entertainers, widows, small homeowners and churches: “So many of the problems are just misunderstandings, like a person who thinks they’re being denied an exemption when all we asked for was verification of documents,” she said.

Aquaro also helps property owners deal with the Tax Collector and Auditor-Controller Departments.

In the early 1980’s, Aquaro supervised clerical staff in the Auditor’s Department, where she received an award for public service and learned the intricacies of property tax law. She joined the Assessor’s Department in 1987, where she worked in special investigations and dealt as a liaison with other county agencies and the Board of Supervisors.