



BERMUDA - October 2018

WORKING TO HELP VALUE BERMUDA 1

Working To Help Value Bermuda

“We Value Bermuda” is the motto for the Department of Land Valuation — and one meant to be taken both literally and figuratively — according to Diane Elliott, who is the Director of the Department of Land Valuation.

Mrs. Elliott and her team are responsible for maintaining a fair and equitable Valuation List, which forms the basis for Bermuda’s land taxation regime. The department also ensures that the 36,000 valuation units in the Valuation List are up-to-date and correct and that the Annual Rental Values [ARVs] in the Valuation List reflect changes or alterations to properties, such as additions, splits, mergers and demolitions.

Recently the Minister for the Cabinet Office with responsibility for Government Reform Lovitta Foggo expressed the importance of showcasing the public service as an employer of choice, noting, “One of the goals of this Government is to change the perception of careers in the public service. We want to attract, develop, motivate, and retain a quality talent pool that is committed to the highest standards of excellence.”

Mrs. Elliott, has had a passion for land valuation and taxation since 1989 when she accepted her first full-time role as a Junior Estates Surveyor within the Department of Works and Engineering.

Mrs. Elliott began her career in Government over 30 years ago as a student. She notes that Surveying is historically a male-dominated profession and while the number of women in the industry is increasing, more still needs to be done to encourage more women into the profession. And she is proud that she was one of the first Bermudian women to enter the field.

In 1996, upon returning to Bermuda after being seconded for two years to the Valuation Office in Sheffield, England, she moved from the Department of Works and Engineering to the Land Valuation Department and has progressed from an entry-level trainee to now being the Director.

Mrs. Elliott shared, “After four months of working as a Junior Estates Surveyor, which was my first real job, the Chief Surveyor was so impressed with my work that he asked me if I wanted to pursue a career in surveying.

“I then went on to complete my Bachelor’s degree in Urban Land Economics with Honours at Sheffield Hallam University, England and was granted a year to come home for the third year work placement programme.”

“I worked six months in the Estates Section of Works and Engineering and six months at Land Valuation Department. That was my first introduction to the Department, and I immediately knew that this was what I wanted to do.”

In 1996, Mrs. Elliott was seconded to the Valuation Office in Sheffield and sat the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors [RICS] Assessment of Professional Competence in 1995. She passed on the first attempt, attaining the designation of chartered surveyor, specializing in valuations.

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Mrs. Elliott shares, "Our Department is one of the smallest within Government with only eight employees. Therefore, when I took over the as Director five years ago, it was important to me that I continued to move the Department forward by capitalizing on each members' strengths and talents.

"I am a firm believer in embracing new technology, increasing efficiencies and being customer-centric," she said.

"The Department, for example, can proudly call itself a 'paperless' office for not only are emails and every piece of paper that comes into the office scanned into our database, but over the course of the last year, all the historical property surveys have also now been scanned into our database against the relevant assessment numbers. "

According to Mrs. Elliott, this facilitated the Department transitioning last year to a completely new way of keeping the Valuation list current.

By leveraging technology and comparing aerial imagery against the scanned property surveys, the Department can now, for the very first time, identify property alterations right at the desk. This not only creates operational efficiencies but allows the Valuation List to be updated more quickly in regards to property alterations.

In a drive to continuously improve the Department's service delivery, a monthly customer service feedback survey was also implemented as a means of gathering anonymous and regular feedback from taxpayers. The driving factor for this was to garner regular feedback from the public, and their suggestions continue to be incorporated into our day-to-day operations.

Mrs. Elliott goes on to say, "Taxation is a thankless task, and we aim to make the complex subject of land valuation simple and easy to understand by members of the public. Consequently, with each of our statutory notices that are sent out, the Department now includes informative brochures, which are also available for viewing and download on the Department's website."

As the Director of Land Valuation, Mrs. Elliott is making a concerted effort to raise awareness of the surveying profession to our young Bermudians as an excellent career choice.

The Department works closely with the Ministry's Training Coordinator, attending school fairs, partaking in radio broadcasts promoting the bursary scheme, the numerous opportunities within the Ministry of Public Works [which has the bulk of chartered surveyors] and the surveying profession in general, of which there are over 100 different specialist areas within Property, Construction, the Built Environment and Land.

When asked about the importance of the Bursary Programme, Mrs. Elliott credits the programme as a key component in helping her reach her career goals.

Mrs. Elliott notes, "I encourage anyone to find their passion and pursue it hard with tenacity and resolve, for your gift will always make room for you. The Bursary programme not only makes tertiary education affordable but even more importantly, the programme employs entry-level positions within Government. I, as well as many of my fellow Government colleagues, are a testament to the success of the programme."

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