

Two sides of assessment issue offer some tips

By Mick Zawislak, Daily Herald (11/8/2007)

As property assessments make their way to Lake County taxpayers, officials in charge of the process will be explaining how it works and offering tips on how to appeal.

The first of two public information meetings will be held at 7 tonight at the College of Lake County's Grayslake campus, Building C auditorium. A second is planned for 10 a.m. Nov. 17 at the same location.

"When property assessment notices are distributed, many residents do not understand what the assessment notice means or how they should evaluate their property tax valuation," Martin Paulson, chief county assessment officer, said in a statement.

"We want to answer questions and provide property owners an opportunity to learn how their property is assessed, their role in the tax process and how to evaluate their property's assessed value."

Those who can't attend the public meetings can meet one-on-one with Lake County assessors at one of five tax assessment help centers. Visit www.co.lake.il.us/assessor for information.

Property assessments, which are supposed to equal one-third of a property's market value, are the basis on which property tax bills are calculated.

Lake County is in the first year of a general assessment, meaning the assessed value of each property theoretically will be updated.

That could mean unpleasant surprises for some homeowners, whose values could jump. So far, the tentative average increases range from about 4.7 percent in Zion Township to 9.6 percent in Avon Township.

Assessed valuations are distributed on what are known as blue cards. Those cards have been received by property owners in 14 of 18 townships with Warren, Benton, Avon and Waukegan townships pending.

Property owners have 30 calendar days to appeal their assessments. So far, 2,672 appeals have been filed by property owners in Cuba, Fremont, Libertyville, Moraine, Newport and Wauconda townships.

Last year, increases of 20 percent or more led a citizens group to study the process. Their findings, released this summer, claimed inaccuracies, uneven treatment of similar properties and other problems. The group describes the assessment process as being "hostile" to taxpayers.

For that reason, Citizens Action Project has scheduled its own public information meeting, "What your township assessor doesn't want you to know." The session is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Nov. 27 at the Byron Colby Barn, Jones Point Road and Route 45, Grayslake.

"Unless there's a real mistake, a blatant error, they don't want you to appeal because it's a waste of their time," said spokesman Steve Minsky.

"There are a couple of things you can do to successfully appeal," he added. "They should know it's not just a frivolous attempt."