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# Clarity sought for Lake County property owners

By Mick Zawislak | Daily Herald Staff

Contact writer

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Taxpayers would get more information on how their property is assessed under proposed state legislation.

Introduced by state Sen. Michael Bond, a Grayslake Democrat, the Homestead Assessment Transparency Act would require assessors in all counties except Cook to include much more detailed information on the so-called blue cards.

Among other requirements, the measure would compel assessors, on request, to provide a "plain English" explanation of the factors that led to an assessment that was 10 percent or more than the median in the neighborhood.

"This is really a homeowner bill of rights," said Bond, who unveiled the measure Sunday at a fundraiser hosted by the Citizen's Action Project.

Martin Paulson, Lake County's chief assessment officer, was not immediately available for comment Monday.

The Grayslake-based project formed in 2006 in response to assessment increases of 30 percent or more. It claims the process is inconsistent and at times inaccurate.

"People are at least entitled to see if there's equity in their township and fairness in their neighborhood," Bond said.

The assessed value is supposed to represent one-third of the market value of a given property and is the basis for calculating property tax bills.

The blue card currently includes the assessed value for land, buildings and a total for the current and previous year. Bond says that isn't enough.

His proposal would expand that information to include a comparison between an individual property and others in the neighborhood and township based on the assessment rate per square foot. It also would note the percentage an individual amount differs from the median in both areas.

A "second level of disclosure" is triggered if the rate per square foot deviates 10 percent or more from the median, Bond said.

Under the plan, if a taxpayer asks, the chief assessment officer has 14 calendar days to provide a detailed explanation for the difference that includes "all of the information and methodology" used to determine the assessed valuation.

That would include a description of the sample used to determine assessments within a neighborhood, which properties were used and the formulas that were applied both for land and buildings.

Should a taxpayer challenge the assessment, the county board of review within five days would have to provide that person with a detailed description of the rules and procedures, including burden of proof and timelines to "allow the taxpayer to effectively present his or her case before the board," according to the proposed legislation.

"It's going to be so much easier for a citizen to look and say, 'This isn't fair,'" said Steve Minsky, a spokesman for the citizen group.

The bill is co-sponsored by state Rep. Ed Sullivan Jr., a Mundelein Republican who also is the Fremont Township assessor.



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