

## Help in appealing tax assessments

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When your home value stagnates, rising property tax assessments get a lot harder to take.

Sure, the tax man has valid reasons for lagging behind the market, but that seems almost beside the point if you're a suburban homeowner wondering if you can make a case, in appealing an assessment, that'll hold your taxes down. A neat little package now before the Illinois legislature would help you find out.

The Homestead Assessment Transparency Act wouldn't itself reduce your taxes or re-arrange how your share is calculated. It would just give you more information upon which to make a credible appeal, and it deserves support.

The bill would vastly increase the amount of information given to homeowners on each year's blue card -- the notice of how their property is valued for tax purposes. Now, blue cards simply tell you the value assigned to your home and land this year compared to last year. "You get six numbers," said state Sen. Michael Bond, a Grayslake Democrat who sponsored the bill along with state Rep. Ed Sullivan Jr., a Mundelein Republican who's also Fremont Township assessor. Even the percentage increase is up to you to figure out.

The proposed legislation, Senate Bill 2820, would add much more, giving you the basic information you'd need to decide whether to appeal your assessment. You'd get the assessed value per square foot, plus comparisons of your property to the median values in your neighborhood and in your township.

And if you are 10 percent above your neighborhood median, you'd be able to get more details explaining why. You'd be armed with information, but still facing the appeal process -- daunting if you've ever been there.

The changes wouldn't occur in Cook County, which has a different property taxation system and laws of its own.

Bond said authors of the bill stopped short of actual property tax reform proposals that would get caught up, and delayed, in the broader work of a separate legislative property tax task force headed by state Sen. Terry Link, a Waukegan Democrat. But this measure, Bond says, stands a good chance of landing on the governor's desk this year.

"This is a first step," he said.

While a flood of new appeals cases could cost the county, Bond says the new blue cards would deflect unfounded property assessment appeals as much as they would encourage others.

We particularly like this proposal's grassroots birth. It is a product of work by the Citizen's Action Project, formed in 2006 after an outcry over property assessment disparities in Grayslake's Prairie Crossing neighborhood. It now claims members across Lake County.

"We made history," the group's president John F. Wasik wrote in a letter last week. "Average citizens

co-wrote an Illinois General Assembly bill that will make home assessments more transparent."

If that happens, we all can join the celebration.