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## Lake County establishes assessment help centers

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/mundelein/news/587196,mu-assessments-100407-s1.article>)

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By **JOHN ROSZKOWSKI** Staff Writer

Taxpayers who have questions about their individual property tax assessments or the overall assessment process will be able to obtain some additional help this fall.

The Lake County Chief Assessment Office offers 10 tax assessment help centers over the next two months to assist residents in understanding their assessments.

Staff from the assessment office will be on hand at each of the 10 meetings to explain assessment procedures to residents, assist taxpayers in evaluating their assessment using the county's Internet site and outline recommended steps for filing an appeal if necessary.

"If they want to get one-on-one assistance, these outreach efforts give them that opportunity," said Chief County Assessment Officer Martin Paulson.

The tax help centers will be offered throughout the months of October and November at three convenient locations: The University Center of Lake County in Grayslake, the College of Lake County Southlake Educational Center in Vernon Hills and the College of Lake County Lakeshore Campus in Waukegan.

Residents can visit [www.co.lake.il.us/assessor](http://www.co.lake.il.us/assessor) for more information including specific times and dates of the meetings. The updated Web site also provides other valuable information to residents in evaluating their assessments, including listings of values of comparable properties in their neighborhood and sales prices of properties in their area.

The county assessment office also will host two larger public information meetings where Paulson will provide an overview of the assessment process for residents. The first public information meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Nov. 8 at the College of Lake County in Grayslake, and the second meeting will be held at 10 a.m. Nov. 17 at the CLC auditorium in Grayslake.

### Blue cards

Assessment notices, also called "blue cards," already have been sent out to residents in several townships, including Libertyville, Fremont, Cuba, Moraine and Wauconda, and those notices also were published in local newspapers. Newport Township assessments were scheduled to be published this week.

Paulson said residents in most other townships should receive their assessment notices in mid-to late October. He said residents generally have about a month to file an appeal once their assessment is published.

Paulson said the average countywide increase in assessments is just under 6 percent, which is somewhat lower than the 7 to 8 percent average range typical in recent years. He said that may be due to the slowdown in the housing market nationwide.

"2007 has been a slower than normal year in terms of sales transactions," he said.

Avon Township experienced the largest percentage assessment increases, with average assessments rising by 9.6 percent. Ela Township assessments rose on average by about 7 percent, while Moraine, Shields and West Deerfield townships averaged between 6.6 and 6.7 percent increases.

By comparison, Fremont Township assessments rose on average by only about 4.5 percent, Wauconda Township by 4.8 percent and Libertyville Township by 5 percent.

Average assessments in Antioch Township increased by just over 5 percent, Lake Villa and Vernon Township averaged about 5.5 percent increases, and Cuba Township assessments rose by just under 6.5 percent.

However, Paulson stressed assessments can vary significantly within townships, depending on where one lives and what property values are in a given area.

### 'Lacks accountability'

Steve Minsky is a member of the Citizens Action Project, a Grayslake-based citizens group seeking increased accountability and fairness in the county's tax assessment process. He said while the new help centers are a step in the right direction, he believes other improvements are needed in the assessment process countywide.

Minsky said there's often a wide variation in assessments between townships and even among properties within individual neighborhoods. For example, he said his home is assessed \$6,000 higher than a nearly identical home on his same street.

Minsky said he believes there needs to be more independent oversight for the county's assessment and appeals process. He said their group also believes township assessors should be required to follow state assessment guidelines, and the chief county assessment officer should be an elected rather than an appointed official.

"We need more transparency and accountability in the assessment process," he said.

County Board Member Larry Leafblad, R-6th, of Grayslake, has often been critical of the assessment process in the past, but he thinks the county is moving in the right direction with the new tax help centers that were started last year and other public outreach efforts.

Leafblad said the county and township assessors do a good job in evaluating assessments, but he believes there needs to be changes at the state level to ensure greater uniformity and consistency in the assessment process.

"I think the tax code of the state of Illinois needs to be overhauled, but you can only do so much," he said.

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