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Meeting: How to appeal assessments

November 22, 2007

By **JOHN ROSZKOWSKI** Staff Writer

Fed up with rising property tax assessments, a group of Lake County residents is fighting back, pointing out problems in the assessment process and telling citizens what they can do to appeal their assessments.

The Grayslake-based Citizens Action Project is holding a one-time public informational meeting titled, "What Your Township Assessor Doesn't Want You to Know."

The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 27 at the Byron Colby Barn on Jones Point Road and Route 45 in Grayslake.

Steve Minsky, vice president of the Citizens Action Project, said the group was formed by like-minded individuals who felt they were not being treated fairly by their township assessor or county assessment officials.

"We don't have a problem with paying taxes," said Minsky. "That's not the issue. The problem is nobody can tell us how the assessment process works or why assessments go up."

In July, the citizens group published a report citing serious problems in the assessment system countywide, such as inaccurate assessments, lack of due process and uneven treatment of similar properties. Minsky said in some areas of the county, residents have seen assessment increases of between 20 and 50 percent despite a dramatic slowdown in the housing market nationwide.

Martin Paulson, chief county assessment officer for Lake County, said he believes the county has been responsive to homeowners who have concerns about assessment procedures or their individual assessments.

Paulson said this fall his office held three public information forums on the assessment process, and 10 tax help centers to assist residents who had questions about their assessments or wanted to file an appeal.

"I think we've provided some good service to taxpayers this fall with regard to their assessments," he said.

But Minsky said he believes those meetings did not tell taxpayers the full story of what they can do to successfully appeal an assessment if they feel their properties have been inaccurately valued. He said several citizens who have successfully appealed will be on hand at next week's meeting to answer questions and offer advice to homeowners.

"What we're going to do is tell Lake County residents that they should appeal if they feel they have been assessed improperly, or if they are not satisfied with their assessment and feel they're being overtaxed," he said.

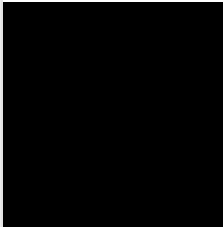
Minsky said the group has invited several public officials to attend the meeting, including state senators Michael Bond, D-31st, of Grayslake, and Susan Garrett, D-29th, of Lake Forest, State Rep. Sandy Cole, R-62nd of Grayslake, and County Board members Larry Leafblad, R-6th, and Therese Douglass, R-11th, both of Grayslake.

Bond, who plans to attend the meeting, said he is currently drafting statewide legislation in an effort to address the group's concerns about the need for improvements in the assessment process.

Bond said specifics of the legislation have not yet been determined, but the goal will be to improve the transparency and fairness in the assessment process statewide. He hopes to introduce the legislation during the spring session of the General Assembly.

"We have to think very carefully about what are the best practices to adopt moving forward," he said. "It can't just be a solution for Lake County. It has to be a solution that creates value across the entire state."

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