

Letter from the Cook County Assessor

Dear neighbors of Forest Park:

I want to thank you for taking the time to share your concerns about recent assessments. Many people think that just because I am the Cook County Assessor that I like property taxes. I don't. Experience shows that the property tax burden falls far too heavily on owners of small properties, in contradiction of the law and good practice.

I'm also glad I had the opportunity to attend a town hall this week with your Mayor. It's very clear that people in your community care about not just your own homes, but those of your neighbors. Reforming our property tax system so people like you can maintain affordable communities you love is a priority in my administration.

I know you're concerned that the increases in assessments would lead to significant property tax increases for you or that these increases are out of sync with the area. While I believe we are more accurate than in the past, we won't get it right every time. In those cases, we encourage you to appeal your assessments. In your letter, you state the appeals process is not sufficient to resolve the overassessment but it was unclear as to why. I hope we can address this in further discussions with our office.

It's important to note that a percentage increase in assessment does not result in the same percentage increase in property tax bills. Property taxes start with the local taxing bodies who determine how much it takes to operate schools, first responders, parks, libraries, and other services. Those tax levies are then divided up among all property owners proportionately based on the fair market value of their properties.

As the Assessor of Cook County, my statutory duty is to determine the fair cash value of every property in the county. Property assessments are then appealed at our office and, if necessary, the Board of Review. Once assessments are finalized, a tax rate for each jurisdiction is calculated (by the Cook County Clerk) so that property tax collections will generate enough funds to satisfy the locally-determined tax levy. Tax bills are issued by the Cook County Treasurer, who then distributes the collected funds back to the requesting jurisdiction.

By law, assessments are a measure of what our office determines your home is worth now, rather than a measure of how much your home has increased in value since the last reassessment in 2017. When sale values in an area have increased, assessment increases are likely. The important thing to consider is whether the market value we assigned your home this year is within a reasonable range of what your home could sell for on the market this year. If not, an appeal would be necessary.

The Assessor's geographic boundaries are townships and township neighborhoods, which often don't overlap with taxing jurisdictions. Forest Park most closely overlaps with Proviso Township's Neighborhood 91. In this neighborhood, our office found that of 45 sales of single-family homes, their median sale value was \$355,000. Every home, sale, and estimated market value is different, but overall our data suggests healthy desirability of homes in this area.

Note also that due to a processing error, some homeowners received the office's estimates of their home's value before a COVID-19 Adjustment was applied. We've determined approximately 1,500 homeowners in this neighborhood were affected by the processing error. For these homeowners, the estimated value of their home mailed to them was too high, and they will receive a corrected value in the mail. This correction will take some months in the county's

system, but homeowners can check to see if they were affected by the error (and, if so, see the corrected estimated value they should have received in the initial notice) at <https://www.cookcountyassessor.com/.../thornton-proviso...>

While our assessments determine the distribution of the property tax burden, the other factor to consider is changes in tax levies. If all assessments went up the identical rate, but the levies did not increase, tax bills would stay the same.

A better way to predict whether your tax bill will go up is to determine how much your assessment went up relative to the total increase in assessed value in your community. When my office recently re-assessed values in Proviso Township, we found that the total assessed value of all residential and commercial property in Proviso Township went up \$356.2 million, or 27.4%, from \$1,298,471,568 (2019, finalized values) to \$1,654,687,644 (2020). Most of the growth in Proviso is in commercial, rather than residential, real estate.

When we reassessed the properties in the north suburbs, a similar pattern emerged. Reporting in Crain's Chicago Business found "total taxes billed in the northern suburbs rose 5.2 percent, to \$4.8 billion. The average residential tax bill fell in 13 municipalities, including Northbrook, Rolling Meadows and Inverness. The average commercial and industrial tax bill rose more than 20 percent in 10 suburbs, including Evanston, Wilmette, Franklin Park and Barrington Hills." Levies move independently of assessments, and so it's hard to know how much total is to be raised by property taxes. But if our assessments hold through the appeals process, your share would have fallen even as your assessed value increased, which would mean a reduction in your residential property taxes.

As I hope this letter demonstrates, it's important to ensure everyone's assessment is fair, not just yours. If we get your value correct, but someone else's assessment is too low, then you will have to make up the difference by paying more than your fair share. Please contact Scott Smith, our Chief Communications Officer, about any follow-up questions you have. He can be reached at ssmith@cookcountyassessor.com.

Regards,

Fritz Kaegi

Cook County Assessor