IPTI Xtracts

Property Tax and Assessment News from Around the World

UNITED STATES – September 2022

Contents

U.S. property value to fall 20% in likely recession, Cushman forecasts

Brokerage says mild recession scenario in late 2022 50% likely

Economic uncertainty is the flavor of the day, but Cushman & Wakefield foresees a sour taste for U.S. property values.

The brokerage forecast a 50 percent chance of a mild recession. There was also a decent chance of a soft landing for the economy (30 percent), but only a marginal shot at stagflation or an upside scenario.

Under a mild recession, Cushman projects Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues, oil prices remain elevated and lasting inflation. The recession would remain mild, however, on the back of underlying strength of consumers and businesses.

Overall, property values in the mild recession scenario are estimated to fall 8.2 percent this year and 11.2 percent in 2023. After that, values would slowly start to improve, starting with a 2.6 percent leap in 2024 up to a 4.8 percent gain in 2026.

Cushman's projection calculates net operating income and capitalization rates to determine what property values could look like under each potential scenario.

Naturally, upside growth would be the best case scenario for property values, which are projected to improve 0.2 percent this year under such a scenario. They would drop in 2023, according to the projection, before soaring around 6 percent each of the following three years.

The worst case scenario would be stagflation. Were that to occur, property values could drop each of the next five years, including by 15.8 percent next year alone.

In a mild recession, Cushman projects office property values to drop by 9.6 percent this year and 12.1 percent next year before leveling off. None of the scenarios see office property values gaining before 2024.

Industrial real estate would also see values decline, even under a mild recession. A recession could lead to a 4.7 percent drop in values this year and 14.1 percent fall next year before improving again. With an upside growth scenario, industrial values would increase 3.4 percent this year before dropping in 2023.

Retail appears more immune to the effects of a recession. A mild recession is projected to only lead to a 2.3 percent hit in value this year and 1.8 percent drop next year before the picture begins improving.

The multifamily sector, one of the pandemic's hottest property types, would not be as resilient as the retail sector. A mild recession is predicted to beckon an 11.1 percent decline in values this year and 12.2 percent decline in values next year. No scenario sees multifamily values rising before 2024.

Study Says Rising Seas to Affect $108B in SE Property; Tax Bases will Suffer

Rising seas will engulf millions of homes, business and parcels of land, and will reshape coastlines, property lines and local tax bases around the Southeast in less than 40 years.

And Florida, North Carolina, Louisiana and Texas will see the most impact, according to a new study from Climate Central.

The non-profit research organization, which aims to present the effects of rising seas and other climate changes to news outlets and policy makers, said that as many as 9 million acres in the Southeast will likely be underwater by the year 2100, affecting properties worth a total of more than $108 billion, according to a report by the Washington Post.

“As the sea is rising, tide lines are moving up elevation, upslope and inland,” said Don Bain, a senior adviser at the organization, who led the analysis. “People really haven’t internalized that yet — that ‘Hey, I’m going to have something taken away from me by the sea.’ ”

Louisiana is at the top of the list for states with the most to lose. It will see some 25,000 properties and 2.5 million acres fall below the high-tide line by 2050, the report found. But parts of Florida and other coastal states also will be soaked.

And as once-prime real estate becomes worthless, communities in those states will lose tax revenue – at a time they may need it most to deal with the effects of sea water.

“Diminished property values and a smaller tax base can lead to lower tax revenues and reduced public services — a potential downward spiral of disinvestment and population decline, reduced tax base and public services, and so on,” the analysis found.

Shifting property lines will also lead to legal disputes and political debate. Local governments could be asked to remove or manage submerged structures, roads, sewer systems and septic tanks, the analysis said, the Washington Post reported.

The Climate Central study is similar to others that have predicted dire consequences from climate change in coming decades. A recent report in the New York Times said extreme weather is rapidly becoming the norm.

Where Do People Pay the Most in Property Taxes?

Property taxes are the primary tool for financing local government and generating state-level revenue in some states as well. In fiscal year 2020, property taxes comprised 32.2 percent of total state and local tax collections in the United States, more than any other source of tax revenue. Local governments rely heavily on property taxes to fund schools, roads, police departments, fire and emergency medical services, as well as other services associated with residency or property ownership. Property taxes accounted for 72.2 percent of local tax collections in fiscal year 2020.

Because property taxes are locally levied, providing a useful state-level comparison can be difficult. So, in an effort to present a multifaceted view, today’s blog features two maps focused on the property tax. The first looks at median property tax bills in each county in the United States, and the second compares effective property tax rates across states.

Median property taxes paid vary widely across (and within) the 50 states. The lowest bills in the country are in six counties or county equivalents with median property taxes of less than $200 a year:

- Northwest Arctic Borough and the Kusivlak Census Area (Alaska)*
- Avoyelles, East Carroll, and Madison (Louisiana)
- Choctaw (Alabama)

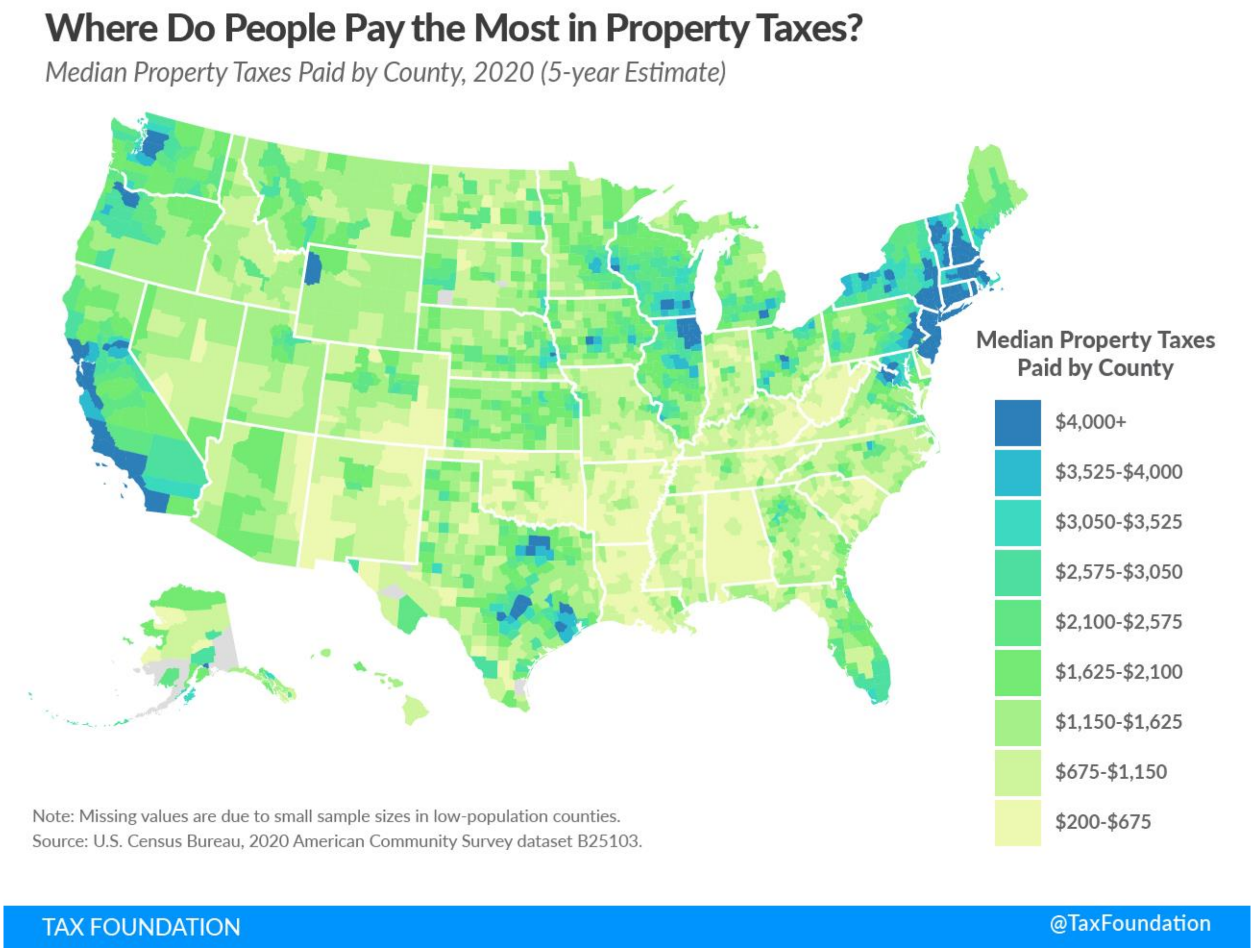
(*Significant parts of Alaska have no property taxes, though most of these areas have such small populations that they are excluded from federal surveys.)

The next-lowest median property tax of $201 is found in Allen Parish, near the middle of Louisiana, followed by $218 in McDowell County, West Virginia, in the southernmost part of the state.

The eight counties with the highest median property tax payments all have bills exceeding $10,000:

- Bergen, Essex, and Union (New Jersey)
- Nassau, New York, Rockland, and Westchester (New York)
- Falls Church (Virginia)

All but Falls Church are near New York City, as is the next highest, Passaic County, New Jersey ($9,999).



Median property taxes by state compare state property tax rankings and property tax bills

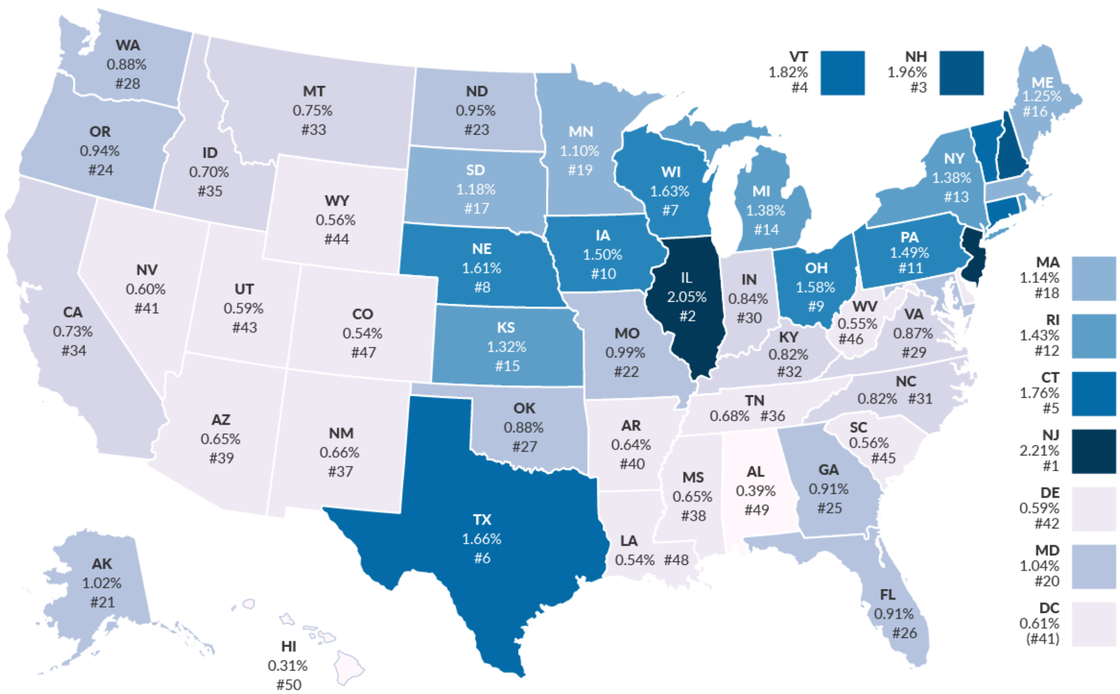
Property tax payments also vary within states. In Georgia, for example, where the median property tax bill is relatively low, median taxes range from $413 in Quitman County (near the Alabama border in the southern part of the state) to $3,185 in Fulton County (a suburb of Atlanta). This is typical among states; higher median payments tend to be concentrated in urban areas. This is partially explained by the prevalence of above-average home prices in urban cities. Because property taxes are assessed as a percentage of home values, it follows that higher property taxes are paid in places with higher housing prices. However, because millages—the amount of tax per thousand dollars of value—can be adjusted to generate the necessary revenue from a given property tax base, the higher payments also reflect an overall higher cost of government—and commensurately higher taxes—in these areas.

While no taxpayers in high-tax jurisdictions will be celebrating their yearly payments, it's worth noting that property taxes are largely rooted in the "benefit principle" of government finance: the people paying the property tax bills are most often the ones benefiting from the services.

Because the dollar value of property tax bills often tracks with housing prices, it can be difficult to use this measure to compare between states. Further complicating matters, rates don't mean the same thing from state to state, or even county to county, because the millage is often imposed only on a percentage of actual property value, as is discussed below. However, one way to compare is to look at effective tax rates on owner-occupied housing—the average amount of residential property taxes actually paid, expressed as a percentage of home value.

How High Are Property Taxes in Your State?

Property Taxes Paid as a Percentage of Owner-Occupied Housing Value, 2020



Property Taxes Paid as a Percentage of Owner-Occupied Housing Value, 2020

Lower — Higher

Note: The figures in this table are mean effective property tax rates on owner-occupied housing (total real taxes paid/total home value). As a result, the data exclude property taxes paid by businesses, renters, and others. D.C.'s rank does not affect states' ranks, but the figure in parentheses indicates where it would rank if included.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 American Community Survey"; Tax Foundation calculations.

TAX FOUNDATION @TaxFoundation

In calendar year 2020 (the most recent data available), New Jersey had the highest effective rate on owner-occupied property at 2.21 percent, followed by Illinois (2.05 percent) and New Hampshire (1.96 percent). Hawaii was at the other end of the spectrum with the lowest effective rate of 0.31 percent, followed closely by Alabama (0.39 percent) and Louisiana (0.54 percent).

Governments tax real property in a variety of ways: some impose a millage on the fair market value of the property, while others impose it on a percentage (the assessment ratio) of the market value. While values are often determined by comparable sales, jurisdictions also vary in how they calculate assessed values. While property taxes tend to be imposed at the local level, their basic framework is typically set by state law.

Some states have equalization requirements, ensuring uniformity across the state. Sometimes property tax limitations restrict the degree to which one's property taxes can rise in a given year, and sometimes rate adjustments are mandated after assessments to ensure uniformity or revenue stability. Abatements (i.e., reductions or exemptions) are often available to certain taxpayers, like veterans or senior citizens. And of course, property tax rates are set not only by cities and counties, but also by school boards, fire departments, and utility commissions.

Some states with high property taxes, like New Hampshire and Texas, rely heavily on them in lieu of other major tax categories. This often involves greater devolution of authority to local governments, which are responsible for more government services than they are in states with greater reliance on state-level revenues. Other states, like New Jersey and Illinois, impose high property taxes alongside high rates in the other major tax categories.

$35 Billion Worth of Real Estate Could Be Underwater by 2050

Local governments in coastal states will lose billions of dollars in local tax revenue as rising seas claim developed land

Millions of acres of coastal land will be in flood zones by midcentury, potentially costing communities huge sums in lost property taxes as developed land becomes uninhabitable, an analysis released Thursday shows.

Research nonprofit Climate Central conducted a unique study of sea-level rise, projecting the amount of real estate, buildings and tax revenue that hundreds of coastal counties will lose as tides encroach on developed areas. It found that an estimated 4.3 million acres — an area nearly the size of Connecticut — will be underwater by 2050, including $35 billion worth of real estate.

"Higher flood waters are reaching further inland, flooding properties and buildings that have never flooded before," Climate Central researchers wrote.

Louisiana could be particularly hard hit, according to the report, with 2.4 million acres underwater by 2050. On the Louisiana coast, Terrebonne Parish could see 77 percent of its acreage flood, potentially submerging 5,700 buildings.

Florida, North Carolina and Texas could also face substantial losses. In Dare County on North Carolina's Outer Banks, for example, 27 percent of the acreage will be at risk of flooding by 2050, potentially submerging $875 million worth of real estate and buildings. Monroe County in the Florida Keys could see 19 percent of its acreage flood, representing $700 million in real estate and buildings.

"There are about 30 counties that are going to lose more than 10 percent of their land area by 2050," Climate Central senior adviser Don Bain said.

The losses will magnify by 2100. Climate Central researchers focused on 2050 because global warming patterns are unlikely to change significantly in the next few decades. Such patterns, however, could change by the end of the century, depending on the decrease (or increase) in global emissions.

The analysis, which looked at 328 counties in 25 coastal states including Alaska and Hawaii, aims to alert state and local officials about the threat that climate change poses to tax revenue that pays for public schools, emergency protection and municipal services. It says that smaller tax bases can lead to lower tax revenues, reduced public services, and "a potential downward spiral of disinvestment and population decline."

"If a town has no other income source but property taxes and those property taxes can't be saved, that town is not sustainable," said A.R. Siders, a climate resilience expert at the University of Delaware.

Mark Rupp, adaptation program director at the Georgetown Climate Center, said local property tax bases are "being washed away" by rising tides, which will force local officials to take steps such as relocating residents away from coasts and elevating roadways above flood levels.

The Climate Central report, he said, is "a really fantastic piece of work for governments" trying to plan for climate change and sea-level rise.

The report urges common adaptation strategies, such as steering development away from coastal areas.

"Frankly, we're fiddling around on the margins, but we're not addressing the core of the issue and we're not thinking about it on the scale that it needs to be done," Siders said.

By 2100, nearly 9 million acres — an area nearly the size of New Hampshire — will be underwater, including 3.2 million acres in Louisiana, or about 3 percent of its land area, according to the report. The 9 million acres includes 300,000 buildings and $109 billion worth of real estate. Overall, states in New England and on the Pacific Coast face the least potential land loss.

Climate Central researchers combined the latest sea-level rise models released last year by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change with NOAA data showing coastal tide levels. They combined their analysis with property tax records to determine which parcels face a future flood threat and the value of the threatened real estate.

States With the Highest Property Taxes

In some states, homes are cheap, property tax rates are less than half of 1% and the average property tax payment is just a few hundred bucks per year. In the most expensive states, however, rates soar over 2%, homes are pricey and average annual property tax bills routinely creep above $5,000 and beyond.

Using data from the Tax Foundation, GOBankingRates ranked the states with the highest property taxes in America, including the percentage rate, the average dollar amount paid and the average home value. The results are listed in ascending order from least expensive to most. For context, the national average effective property tax is 0.99%, the U.S. average home value is $337,560 and the average annual property tax bill is $3,357.

10. (tie) Iowa

Average effective property tax: 1.43%

March 2022 average home value: $186,558

Average annual property tax paid: $2,668

Iowa's property taxes are actually low compared to the others on this list, but are still considered high in relation to the rest of the U.S.

10. (tie) Pennsylvania

Average effective property tax: 1.43%

March 2022 average home value: $258,835

Average annual property tax paid: $3,701

Pennsylvania's property taxes are high enough to earn it a place in the top 10, but its residents still pay a relatively low property tax rate. That may be due to it having average home values under $260,000.

9. Ohio

Average effective property tax: 1.52%

March 2022 average home value: $204,237

Average annual property tax paid: $3,104

Ohio has the No. 2 cheapest average home value on the list behind only Iowa. Its property taxes are a bit higher, however, but still nowhere near as pricey as those closer to the top of the list.

8. Wisconsin

Average effective property tax: 1.53%

March 2022 average home value: $257,439

Average annual property tax paid: $3,939

Next on the list is Wisconsin where the average property tax may be less than the ones that follow, but it's still high enough to rank. And with an average home value is among the cheapest on this list, Wisconsin has earned a spot among the five states with average annual property taxes paid of less than $4,000.

7. Nebraska

Average effective property tax: 1.54%

March 2022 average home value: $233,221

Average annual property tax paid: $3,592

Nebraska has the No. 3 cheapest average home value on the list, behind only Ohio and Iowa. And though its property taxes are higher than the rest of the U.S., they're still on the bottom half of this list.

6. Texas

Average effective property tax: 1.60%

March 2022 average home value: $296,622

Average annual property tax paid: $4,746

Prices start to rise all around when we hit Texas. The average home value is climbing toward $300,000, and its property taxes are edging up toward $5,000.

5. Connecticut

Average effective property tax: 1.73%

March 2022 average home value: $369,485

Average annual property tax paid: $6,392

Connecticut and the rest of New England are no stranger to the pricey side of any list having todo with the cost of living in the states. Connecticut marks a significant leap upward in property taxes, closing in on $6,500 per year.

4. Vermont

Average effective property tax: 1.76%

March 2022 average home value: $347,329

Average annual property tax paid: $6,113

Like its neighboring New England states, Vermont is undoubtedly a pricey state to live in. You can expect to spend over $6,000 in property taxes here, but considering that the average home value is almost $350,000, it's no surprise.

3. New Hampshire

Average effective property tax: 1.89%

March 2022 average home value: $434,563

Average annual property tax paid: $8,213

The first state to hit an average effective property tax rate of 1.8%, New Hampshire almost takes the lead with one of the three highest annual average property tax rates on this list.

2. Illinois

Average effective property tax: 1.97%

March 2022 average home value: $258,872

Average annual property tax paid: $5,100

Illinois is an odd little outlier for the No. 2 spot on this list, as its annual average property taxes are lower than others that fall lower on the list, as is its annual home value. However, it's the property tax rate of nearly 2% that earns it this high spot.

1. New Jersey

Average effective property tax: 2.13%

March 2022 average home value: $458,872

Average annual property tax paid: $9,774

New Jersey holds the unenviable distinction of having the highest property taxes in America yet again-it's a title that the Garden State has gotten used to defending. The tax rate there is an astronomical 2.21%, the highest in the country, and its average home value is painfully high as well. The result is America's highest average annual property tax paid-no other state even breaks the $7,000 mark, much less $8,000.

Methodology: GOBankingRates looked at Tax Foundation's "How High Are Property Taxes in Your State?" data to find (1) effective average property tax for each state. Once this was gathered GOBankingRates also found each state's (2) March 2022 average home value from Zillow and (3) average annual property tax paid. Only factor (1) was considered in the final rankings. All data was collected on and up to date as of May 9, 2022.

ALASKA

Tax assessment doxxing weaponized

Borough assessors target Rep. McCabe's home based on 'reporter's complaint'

A complaint filed with the Mat-Su Borough's Assessment Office led to two property assessors showing up at the home of Rep. Kevin McCabe on Friday. They were there to do an inspection and reassessment because someone they would only identify as a "reporter" had made a complaint that McCabe's property wasn't assessed high enough.

None of the properties around that neighborhood have been assessed since 2013, and McCabe said he asked the assessors if they were also doing an assessment on any of the other seven homes in the area between East and West Papoose Lakes. No, they told him, just his property. They weren't going to reassess anyone else's properties.

McCabe says he has 40 acres, a house, and a pole barn, plus a couple of chicken coops. There's nothing special about his place, he said, that would make it stand out for a targeted reassessment.

"I welcomed the borough assessors to come look at my property. I have nothing to hide and they were consumate professionals and very pleasant (and apologetic). When asked, they admitted that they came only to assess my property at the request of some reporter," McCabe said. "It sucks that people can weaponize the bureaucracy to harass a public official whom they disagree with politically. Where does that end? Can anyone ask the borough assessor's office to go out and assess an opponent's property? I don't agree with some of the assembly members position on things, can I ask that they have a special assessment?" McCabe said.

McCabe noted that the lack of property assessments in the area is emblematic of the growth the borough has experienced. "The borough provides no means to self-report ones properties value – and I am not an appraiser anyway," he said.

McCabe was the subject of a lawsuit earlier this year lodged by former newsman Mark Kelsey, who complained that he had been blocked from McCabe's official Facebook page. Kelsey, a Mat-Su borough resident but not a constituent of McCabe's, filed the lawsuit June 1 in Anchorage Superior Court. Kelsey was a publisher of the Mat-Su Valley Frontiersman from 2011-2016, and had been a reporter and managing editor for the paper and other newspapers at various times before that. He also worked for the Department of Commerce for a few years.

Kelsey has, in the past, posted extensive social media comments specifically relating to McCabe's property, including his tax assessment information that is available at the borough, and has called him out as a "tax chiseler."

Kelsey's lawsuit over being blocked on Facebook, and others similarly brought against legislators, have prompted the Legislature to begin to revise the wording on its social media policies. Lawmakers have to walk a fine line — they need to allow people to comment on their official pages, but also need to protect people from being abused, bullied, harassed, and elected officials have to monitor comments for vulgarity and threats.

The Legislature's current social media policy was last updated in 2011 and Alaska has no case law to inform the issue about when a lawmaker can block someone for repeated instances of harassment.

But meanwhile, it appears a resident of the borough — maybe one with strong political and criticisms of Republicans — has elevated the doxxing of a lawmaker to a new level — sic'ing the property assessors on him to increase his tax payments.

CALIFORNIA

San Francisco defends assessment of Ritz-Carlton hotel

The city of San Francisco has denied wrongdoing in an ongoing lawsuit brought by the owner of the Ritz-Carlton San Francisco hotel, which sued in 2020 alleging it was overcharged more than $200,000 in property taxes.

In an Aug. 24 response to the suit, the city asked San Francisco Superior Court to dismiss the allegations and to be reimbursed for legal expenses. A case management conference scheduled for early September week was pushed back to early December.

The lawsuit, filed in in June 2020 from hotel owner CWI 2 San Francisco Hotel LP, said the city improperly pegged the real property value of the hotel at $35.2 million higher than it was worth. CWI purchased the hotel on Dec. 30, 2016, from a Brookfield affiliate.

Although the purchase price was $280 million, the buyer and seller agreed to a market value of $192.6 million for the real property, according to public records of the transfer tax.

But the city said that was not the fair market value of the property and assessed it at $227.8 million.

Before filing the lawsuit, CWI appealed the assessment in 2017, arguing that the city used a flawed methodology that didn't properly deduct intangibles (for instance, value of the Ritz-Carlton brand) from its valuation. The three-person Assessment Appeals Board ruled in favor of the city.

The determination of what's officially "real property" versus "intangibles" can make millions of dollars' worth of tax difference to property owners. Particularly in San Francisco, where the transfer tax on large real property purchases doubled in 2021 from 3% to 6%, accountants have motivation to be as creative as they legally can about the distinction.

Earlier this year, former owner Brookfield — via private funds managed by Brookfield Asset Management — found its way back into possession of the Ritz-Carlton San Francisco. In May it announced a deal in principle to acquire CWI's affiliate, Chicago-based REIT Watermark Lodging Trust for $3.8 billion. Beyond the 336-room Ritz-Carlton, Watermark's 25-hotel portfolio includes the 510-room downtown San Jose Marriott and the 226-room Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa.

The List
Hotels, Bay Area
Ranked by Number of guest rooms

Rank	Business Name	Number Of Guest Rooms
1	Hilton San Francisco Union Square	1,921
2	San Francisco Marriott Marquis	1,500
3	The Westin St. Francis San Francisco on Union Square	1,195

Kern County assessor: Taxable property values increased $11.7B versus previous year

Kern County Assessor-Recorder Jon Lifquist is pleased to announce the completion of the 2022-23 assessment roll.

The total assessed value of all taxable property in the county, as of Jan. 1, now stands at $115.3 billion, an $11.7 billion increase in locally assessed property over the prior year.

The increase reflects across-the-board growth in real property, business property and oil and gas property values.

Based on percentages, the 41% increase in oil and gas assessments account for the largest year-over-year advancement. With the recent spike in oil prices, oil and gas assessments now exceed pre-pandemic numbers from 2020, though oil and gas assessments are still just half of their 2014 high.

Propelled by soaring real estate prices, real property assessments rose 7.3% to $84.2 billion, though rising interest rates will likely occasion a reversal of this 11-year upward trend in the coming year.

Taxpayers can find individual assessed values for the 2022-23 tax year on the assessor's website.

Lifquist urges property owners to call if they believe the assessed value of their property exceeds market value as of Jan. 1. The assessor and staff are committed to ensuring that property owners pay no more in property taxes than that prescribed by law. Requests for review or appeals of the 2022-23 assessment must be submitted by Nov. 30.

Printed value notices may be obtained by calling the Kern County Assessor's Office at 661-868-3485, or by writing or by visiting in person at 1115 Truxtun Ave., second floor, Bakersfield, CA 93301.

Lifquist would like to extend his grateful thanks to all Assessor’s Office employees for their exceptional effort in the timely completion of the assessment roll in this most challenging year.

CONNECTICUTT

Staggering $14 million owed by top tax scofflaws in Hartford

Hartford’s top 25 real-property tax delinquents and its top 28 personal-property tax scofflaws owe the city a combined total of $14.03 million, according to information obtained by The Courant through a Freedom of Information request.

The top 25 real-property tax delinquents, as of Aug. 26, owed an aggregate of $9.82 million to the city, with Immanuel Church Housing Corp. owing the most: $2.45 million in taxes on 15 Woodland Street, records show. That property is the location of Immanuel House, a nine-story apartment building in the west end that houses low-income tenants 62 and older.

Immanuel and the city are locked in a years-long dispute over whether the affordable housing complex owes any of that money, pursuant to state statute.

Jeanne Murphy, the executive director of Immanuel Church Housing Corp., says her organization has been in discussions with the city, the state and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to resolve the matter, which has been ongoing since 2016.

“Immanuel House is in the midst of an ongoing dispute with the City Tax Assessors Office regarding the standard of the State of CT statute and the proper legal assessment method,” she said in a statement. “Immanuel House is a nonprofit organization offering housing to low-income seniors since 1971. Immanuel House has paid more than $200,000 in taxes every year.”

Top Hartford Tax Scofflaws

This data, provided by city of Hartford Tax Collector Nancy S. Raich, shows the top 25 delinquent tax accounts in the city as of July 28, 2022. One is for real estate and the other is for personal property taxes. In the case of the personal property file, some of the most delinquent taxpayers are no longer being assessed as of the most recent grand list, according to Raich.

Name	Property	Amount
Kessler Construction Inc	244 Prospect Av	$906,386
Ref Us Investments Inc	114 Woodland St	$747,546
The Hartford Club	46 Prospect St	$686,285
Jarosz Welding Co Inc	544 Ledyard St	$426,014
Soapy Suds Laundromat LLC	1200 Park St	$249,515
Shanti Cc Hartford LLC	440 Asylum St	$111,583
The Hub Restaurant Group LLC	201 Ann St	$118,052
Albany Avenue Favorite Chicken LLC	964 Albany Av	$87,693
Mi Rancho LLC	768 Maple Av	$90,172
Dental America LLC	188 Park St	74,142
V S Trattoria LLC	280 Trumbull St	$62,575
Joo Young	294 Farmington Av	$60,116
Genomas Inc	67 Jefferson St	$63,972
Prestige Motor Cars LLC	130 Ledyard St	$57,570
Charter Oak Dental Center LLC	330 Main St	$51
Bay Crane Service Of Connecticut	Various	$43,310
451 Lounge LLC	451 Franklin Av	$47,423
Paradise LLC	381 Franklin Av	$46,529
Hartford Fried LLC	271 Farmington Av	$44,401
First Housing Corp	1132 Albany Av	$43,431
Silon Corporation	306 Farmington Av	$45,948
Launch Trampoline Park Ct LLC	91 Brainard Rd	$44,287
Smc Partners LLC	10 Columbus Blvd	$36,316
Capitol Dental Associates LLC	Financial Plaza	$34,988
Hartford Auto Group Inc	412 New Park Av	$31,634

SOURCE: City of Hartford Tax Collector

Still, John Philip, the head of the Hartford tax assessor department, says the city's interpretation of how the property is assessed is correct and, therefore, the nonprofit owes the full $2.45 million.

John F. Kessler owes the second-most — $1.4 million — for taxes owed on 226 Prospect Avenue, a 4.7-acre parcel also in the west end.

On the personal-property side, Kessler Construction, a company tied to John Kessler, is the top tax delinquent, owing $906,385.62 for items at 244 Prospect Avenue.

Kessler, when reached at the Kessler Construction building on Prospect Street, said he did not have a comment on the matter.

Ref U.S. Investments of Palo Alto, California, owes the second most in personal property — $747,546.15 — for its property at 114 Woodland Street.

Many of those in arrears on both lists are companies or individuals that own apartment buildings (such as Teachers Corner Hartford, which owns Teachers Village at 370 Asylum Street; and Shelbourne Axela LLC, which owns the apartment building at 50 Morgan Street); or industrial buildings (SNE Hartford LLC, which owns 101 Pope Park Highway, and Angelo Palacios, who owns 211 Ledyard Street).

Four companies that appear on the personal-property list — Genomas Inc., Charter Oak Dental Center LLC, Silon Corp. and Launch Trampoline Park CT LLC — are no longer in business or located in Hartford and the assessor is no longer assessing the business on the 2021 grand list. They owe a total of $204,000, which the city faces significant challenges of collecting.

Some of the tax delinquents, including Austin Organs Inc. ($356,925.90 for real estate at 156 Woodland Street) and Polish National Home of Hartford Inc. ($250,328.99 for real estate at 60 Charter Oak Avenue), are Hartford institutions that have fallen on hard times through the years.

Efforts to reach a representative for Austin Organs were unsuccessful. Polish National Home's struggles have been well-documented over the past couple of years.

The owner of 200 Constitution Plaza, 200 CP Holding LLC of Monsey, New York, is third on the list, owing $695,539.96, Philip said.

"For the most part, it's just a couple of years," Tax Collector Nancy Raich said, noting Asylum Hartford, No. 11 on the real-property list at $228,423.69, goes back to the 2020 grand list.

Still, many of those on the top 25 real-estate list haven't made payments dating back to well before the pandemic, Raich and Philip said.

Kessler's real-estate tax issues date back to 2010, Philip said.

Not that everyone is just ignoring their tax bills. Philip noted that Immanuel made a tax payment of over $200,000 in July.

"They're trying, but they have a big [bill to pay]," he said. Or, according to Murphy, Immanuel isn't just trying, but is up to speed on its taxes, depending on how state law is interpreted.

The economic problems that the pandemic has wrought is "absolutely not" the reason for those listed, Philip said.

"Not with this list," he said.

And while the amount of money owed to the city may seem high, Raich said there are no real surprises on either list.

"Although this list looks pretty awful [to the general public], we're not in as bad shape as it looks," she said. "This year we saw a real uptick in tax payments. Our projections look really good for this fiscal year. Residential properties, people are definitely paying their tax bills."

Raich said the city has some tools at its disposal to bring tax scofflaws up to speed.

"Really there's foreclosure and nontraditional foreclosure, which is the tax deed sale that we have once a year," she said. "The city can foreclose if it's blighted property, but if it's just delinquency this office will handle it through … tax deed sales."

Even with the institutions such as Austin Organs, which hasn't made a tax payment since 2016, at some point, the bill has to be paid.

"We're having conversations with Austin Organs right now and they're trying to figure out what they can do because we're at a point where we have to do something," Raich said.

"But with something like Austin Organs we'd like to give them every opportunity [to get up to speed]. That's a historic building. But on this side of things, on the tax collection side, there isn't a whole lot we can do. It's all statutory, which pretty much dictates what we can do."

Donald Klepper-Smith, an economist who chaired the economic team for former Gov. M. Jodi Rell, says a line can be drawn between unpaid taxes and what he says are high tax rates in Connecticut cities.

“State workers on average make 40% more than their counterparts in the private sector,” he said, adding he believed municipal workers earn about 25% more than their private counterparts. “What it says is taxpayers in Hartford and across Connecticut have been abused for a number of years.”

The unpaid taxes in Hartford is a symptom of a larger problem, namely that high taxes stunt job creation, Klepper-Smith said.

“When you think about how high taxes have undermined business growth and job growth, then you start looking at the fact this is one of the reasons the Connecticut economy has effectively moved sideways for the last 10 years,” he said.

Klepper-Smith also acknowledged that Hartford has a significant amount of property — public buildings, hospitals and schools — that isn’t taxable.

But, he said, the larger issue is years of economic policy that have cumulatively had a negative impact on growth.

The pandemic did have an impact as an “exogenous shock,” which saw the state lose more than 300,000 jobs in a short period of time, he said.

Even with regaining those jobs, the state is still about 70,000 short of its peak in 2008, just at the cusp of the Great Recession, he said.

“We have a job recovery rate of about 77%,” he said. “Yes the pandemic has had an impact and has resulted in displacement, the fact of the matter is that when you start talking about Connecticut, it’s never been about maximizing economic growth, it’s about maintaining the status quo. … The tax structure in Connecticut is about maintaining the status quo.”

DELAWARE

Sussex mailing out surveys for commercial properties as part of reassessment

Sussex County’s property reassessment effort is moving to another phase with business properties.

The county this month will issue commercial valuation surveys to nearly 4,500 business properties throughout the county as part of the ongoing reassessment process. The surveys are for commercial property and business owners only, to provide important information about each parcel's activities, which will then be used to help determine a property's overall value.

The surveys will be issued by mail and should be returned to Sussex County by Oct. 31.

Sussex County, along with Delaware's other two counties, is conducting a general reassessment of all properties after agreeing to a 2021 court settlement over outdated property valuations, which are used to calculate annual property tax bills with revenue collected for local government services and public education.

Since last fall, the county's contracted vendor, Tyler Technologies, has been conducting a parcel-by-parcel review, using aerial photos and site visits to evaluate each property and its improvements. Teams continue their work on residential parcels, but are now moving to commercial properties in this next phase of the overall review.

All properties are being evaluated and re-calculated based on current industry-accepted methodologies to produce new assessments that will reflect their true value in money, a requirement under Delaware law. Preliminary assessments are expected later in 2023.

FLORIDA

A way to challenge the property appraiser's assessment of your home's value

U.S. home prices spiked an unprecedented 43 percent during the pandemic, a report found. Higher mortgage rates have started to push that down a bit but a lot of homeowners are still facing higher tax bills because of the spike.

Higher mortgage rates have started to push that down a bit but a lot of homeowners are still facing higher tax bills because of the spike.

Homeowners have the right to appeal their homes assessed value – through the Value Adjustment Board.

For people who live in areas like St. Johns County – which have seen some of the biggest spikes in home prices this could mean significant savings.

It's no secret home values are going up in St. Johns County with no signs of slowing down soon. That's why, when it comes to your home, it's important for you to have a say.

"It's critical in these types of years where property values are going up, St. Johns County Clerk of Court and Comptroller Brandon Patty says. "But it's critical year to year as well."

Patty also says the Value Adjustment Board allows for transparency and diplomacy. Here's how it works.

- The property appraiser's office sends all homeowners a letter outlining their assessed home property value.
- If you disagree with that assessment, you should request an informal meeting with the property appraiser's office
- If there's still a disagreement, you can then file for a hearing with the VAB.

"It's the separation of powers, the checks, and balances, that allows us to be able to just protect the public's trust, Patty says. "In our government. It's one of those where if we didn't have this process, as well as a variety of other processes in place, then taxpayers, property owner residents wouldn't have an opportunity to make sure that their voices heard."

Patty says in 2021, 305 petitions were filed and of those, only 6 went to a hearing.

"This year, we've received close to 60-70 petitions so far, Patty says. "But the window closes next Tuesday. So, that's why it was so important for us to be able to start reiterating and getting the word out."

Most counties have electronic applications – and appeals forms on their websites.

One issue people face – is submitting their applications to the Florida department of revenue by mistake.

These must be returned to the Value Adjustment Board – which is separate.

The deadline is September 13, 2022.

Questions about your assessment or exemptions?

The Citrus County Property Appraiser's main objective is to provide accurate and equitable assessments with unsurpassed customer service. It is my duty and responsibility as your Property Appraiser to determine that your property is appraised correctly and that all exemptions and classifications are properly administered. I do not control property values. They are determined by the rise and fall of the real estate market.

Our office recently mailed out more than 154,000 TRIM (truth in mileage) Notices to Citrus County property owners. Florida law requires the Property Appraiser to assess every parcel of real and tangible personal property in Citrus County as of Jan. 1, 2022. The 2022 just values are based on the 2021 market data. As I wrote about last month, the TRIM notice you received shows your 2022 just value, exemptions you are receiving, and the proposed tax amounts as set by the various taxing authorities listed on the notice.

It is important to remember the Property Appraiser's Office does not set or collect taxes. If you feel your taxes or tax rates are too high, the Value Adjustment Board (VAB) cannot help you. You need to attend the annual public budget meetings of those Taxing Authorities that set the tax rates. You can find a schedule (time, date, and place) of all the annual budget public hearings for each governmental entity listed on the back of your TRIM Notice that you received in the mail or located online.

Hopefully, you all have reviewed those notices for accuracy. If you feel that your market value is not where you think it should be, or you are missing a tax savings exemption, please contact our office before the end of business day on Sept. 13, 2022. Anything after that day will require a petition to be filed with the Citrus County Clerk of Courts office and the VAB.

Once a petition is filed by a property owner, our office can't make any changes to the current tax roll, unless granted by the VAB. Florida law sets the deadlines for filing a petition. These deadlines do not change. The VAB may charge up to $15 for filing a petition. We encourage all property owners to have an informal conference with our office prior to filing a petition with the VAB. Although, the deadline date will not change even if you have a discussion with our office.

The VAB is an independent quasi-judicial review board. The VAB has five members, two from the county's board of commissioners, one from the county's school board, and two citizens. Pursuant to Florida Law, counties with populations of 75,000 or larger must hire Special Magistrates to conduct hearings and make recommendations to the VAB's on each petition. Special Magistrates are appointed by the VAB based on their qualifications as real estate appraisers, personal property appraisers, or attorneys. Both the VAB and the Special Magistrates are independent of the Property Appraiser's Office; in fact, the Property Appraiser is merely another party before the Special Magistrate, as is the petitioner. The duty of the Special Magistrate is to review property valuations, denials of exemptions, classifications, deferrals, and change of ownership or control determinations.

After a hearing has taken place, the Special Magistrate will provide a written recommendation to the Clerk of Circuit Court. The Clerk will send copies of the recommendation to the petitioner along with our office. The Clerk will notify the petitioner of the VAB's final decision. Included in that decision the Clerk will explain if the VAB has made any changes.

Remember, the absolute deadline to file an application for any 2022 exemption or appeal your property's just value is Sept. 13, 2022. If my office can ever be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us 352-341-6600 or stop by and meet with a member of our staff at one of our two convenient locations in Inverness or Crystal River. You can also chat with one of our customer service representatives during normal business hours on our Live Chat feature on our website at citruspa.org. I hope you have a wonderful day and hope to hear from you soon.

Cregg Dalton is the Citrus County Property Appraiser.

IOWA

Property taxes

I just finished going through "tax shock" after viewing my latest property tax bill. My $700 year-over-year increase on top of 9 percent inflation at the check-out line impacts daily life. Many of you share my pain.

John Hendrickson, policy director for ITR Foundation, and Rusty Cannon, president of the Utah Taxpayers Association, describe something I believe we need to explore in the Iowa Legislature.

The Tax Foundation's 2022 State Business Tax Climate Index ranks Utah with the seventh lowest property tax burden in the nation, while Iowa is ranked 39th in the nation. Utah's ranking has improved, while Iowa's has fallen. High property taxes are not just harmful to individuals and families, but they also discourage economic growth. This is especially true for small businesses and burdensome property taxes can serve as a deterrent to entrepreneurs who wish to start a business.

Property tax reform is difficult in Iowa because it is exclusively a local issue. Utah's Truth-in-Taxation law is considered one of the most taxpayer-friendly property tax laws in the nation. The Truth-in-Taxation law is a revenue-based limitation, which means as valuations increase, property tax rates decrease.

Utah's Truth-in-Taxation law guarantees that each taxing entity receives the same property tax revenues as the previous year including new growth. This prevents local governments from getting a windfall because valuations have increased. Truth-in-Taxation works to prevent local governments from benefitting from increased assessments. If assessments increase by 10 percent, it does not mean that local government budgets should increase by 10 percent.

If a local government wants to exceed the certified tax rate, it then requires a Truth-in-Taxation hearing that is accompanied by an extensive direct notification and public hearing process. Truth-in-Taxation also forces local government officials to take recorded votes to approve an increase in tax collections.

Through the Truth-in-Taxation process, local governments must justify why they want to increase taxes for additional spending, forcing them to be more transparent as to why they need additional tax revenue. A crucial aspect of Utah's law is a direct notification requirement, where notices are sent to taxpayers, providing information on the proposed tax increase and how much their tax bill will increase. It also includes the date, time, and location of the Truth-in-Taxation budget hearing. This extensive public notification and hearing process has been successful, and taxpayers in Utah actively participate in Truth-in-Taxation hearings.

Certainly an idea that could eliminate that yearly "tax shock." Let me know what you think.

KENTUCKY

Kenton County Fiscal Court reduces property taxes to lowest level since 2009

Kenton County's Judge/Executive Kris Knochelmann, Commissioner Dr. Jon Draud, Commissioner Beth Sewell, and Commissioner Joe Nienaber voted unanimously to reduce the 2022 real property tax rate by 6.5%.

This is the second consecutive year that the Fiscal Court reduced the rate, and takes Kenton County's real property tax rate down to the lowest level since 2009.

The real property tax rate was reduced from 15.4 cents per $100 of valuation to 14.4 cents.

"The hard work of Kenton County employees, who deliver essential services in a very cost-effective way, allow us to reduce tax rates," stated Judge/Executive Kris Knochelmann.

"This property tax rate is the lowest since 2009. Improvements in our operations are generating greater efficiencies and performance quality."

Commissioner Dr. Jon Draud added, "the positive momentum from improvements to County operations is real, and I think we're going to see further cost-savings in the years to come. Kenton County's team of employees is top-notch, and the citizens of the County should feel very good about the future of their government services."

"I am pleased to support another property tax reduction this year. While the County portion of residents' overall tax bill is already very small, it's still important to reduce it even further when circumstances allow, especially as citizens face increases at the grocery and gas pump.

It is appropriate for us to not add to their burden and provide relief wherever possible," said Commissioner Beth Sewell.

"I am very excited that the efforts of both the Fiscal Court and staff of Kenton County have resulted in the ability to once again lower property taxes. The energy, creativity, and passion of those who are responsible for delivery of services in Kenton County is second to none and continues to provide positive results for the citizens of Kenton County," said Commissioner Joe Nienaber.

Kenton County property taxes are the main funding component of the County's General Fund and fund general government, protection to persons and property, roads, and capital projects.

MASSACHUSETTS

TAX LIEN CASE AGAINST CITY DISMISSED BY COURT

Plaintiff Settles Separately with Private Defendant

Tax lien-related litigation in which the City was a co-defendant has been settled and the case against the city was dismissed this month in U.S. District Court.

The court made its Aug. 12 dismissal "with prejudice," meaning the ruling is final and the plaintiff cannot re-file the case against the city in the future.

The plaintiff, New Bedford resident Deborah Foss represented by the Pacific Legal Foundation of Sacramento and Greenberg Traurig of Boston, reached a settlement with private defendant Tallage Davis, LLC.

The City of New Bedford is not responsible for any payment to the plaintiff.

The litigation stemmed from tax lien sales, in which a city sells the right to collect tax liens to a third party. Under Massachusetts law, many cities use tax lien sales as an alternate means to collect delinquent taxes and steward public funds without having to employ internal legal staff devoted to pursuing tax liens in Land Court.

In 2015, delinquent property taxes owed to the City totaled more than $22.6 million, an amount equal to nearly 6 percent of the City's budget. To help alleviate that burden, the City, in accordance with MGL chapter 60, section 52, initiated a bulk tax lien sale. The winning bidder was Tallage, LLC, now known as Tallage Davis.

The City's delinquent tax burden had been cut in half, to $11.3 million, following the last tax lien sale, in May 2019.

Over the past decade, the City has taken significant additional steps to address delinquent taxes, including amending its tax repayment ordinance in 2012. The amended ordinance has enabled delinquent taxpayers to enter into repayment agreements of up to five years and receive 50-percent interest forgiveness, after paying 25 percent of the outstanding balance as an initial deposit and while continuing to make current-year payments.

The City's Office of the Treasurer-Collector continues to make the collection of delinquent taxes a priority and encourages taxpayers to enter repayment agreements. As always, the city's preference is to service delinquent taxpayers by offering repayment agreements and managing delinquencies in-house.

MICHIGAN

Property tax coalition, Detroit officials spar over city assessments

A coalition of Detroit homeowners and advocates insists that the city continues to systematically over-assess and over-tax some homes—a claim Mayor Mike Duggan's administration vigorously denies.

Members of the Coalition for Property Tax Justice and Duggan administration officials, including Detroit's chief assessor, discussed the issue at a sometimes-contentious Detroit City Council committee meeting on Thursday.

Both sides agree on two basic points. One is that during and in the aftermath of the Great Recession, Detroit did systematically over-assess the majority of its residential properties—from 55% to 85% of all homes from 2009-2015, according to one study. That was in violation of Michigan's state constitution, which caps assessments at 50% of a home's market value. It also led to inflated property taxes that sparked a wave of tax foreclosures from which the city has not yet recovered.

The second point is that since Duggan took over as mayor and overhauled the city assessor's office, the problem has decreased dramatically. But where the two sides disagree is whether the city continues to over-assess some properties, particularly the lowest-value ones, leading to a disproportionate property tax burden on the poorest homeowners.

Data scientist Eric Langowski analyzed recent city assessment and property sales data on behalf of the coalition. He found that while assessments in violation of the state constitution have dropped dramatically—from 53% in 2016 to 12% in 2021—"the ones that are remaining to be over assessed are the lowest-valued homes."

"The findings are that the lowest valued homes are still being assessed in violation of the Michigan State Constitution," added Professor Bernadette Atuahene, a coalition leader and professor of law at the University of Wisconsin who has extensively studied Detroit's assessment practices and resulting housing inequities.

But city assessor Alvin Horhn pushed back on the coalition's assertions, calling its data analysis flawed.

"I reject the notion that we're overvaluing low-value properties, and that we're undervaluing high-value properties," Horhn said.

Horhn acknowledged that with over 400,000 properties on Detroit's tax rolls, it's "statistically impossible" that all of them are assessed correctly. "But that's why we have an appeals period" where homeowners can challenge their assessments and tax bills, Horhn added.

If the coalition believes that Detroit continues to illegally assess properties, "Then take it to the people who can make this office comply with the state law," Horhn said. "That hasn't happened yet. And I think that's telling."

Horhn's comment drew a sharp rebuke from Atuahene, who accused the city of refusing to do an assessment ratio study to confirm what outside researchers have found. "We have about four different [studies] done by four different entities. We have even had those studies peer reviewed," Atuahene said.

"There are still illegal assessments happening in Detroit. We have to suture the wound. We have to stop these over-assessments in Detroit so we can move on to conversations about compensation [for past over-taxation]. We cannot suture the wound if the administration is denying in the face of all of this data that a problem even exists."

The two sides were able to agree on possible changes to the assessment process to make it more user-friendly, such as improving the city's annual assessment notice and sending assessment data out earlier. Such changes would need to be approved by the City Council. The Council is also exploring possible avenues for compensating Detroiters who lost their homes to tax foreclosure due to over-assessment.

MONTANA

Land value tax pitched as one idea to increase housing development in Montana

Members of the Governor's Housing Task Force met Wednesday by video to discuss barriers to housing development and possible solutions. Task force members Mark Egge, Secretary of the Montana Board of Housing Adam Hertz, Rep. Danny Tenenbaum, D-Missoula and DEQ Director Chris Dorrington as well as other members discussed what solutions appeared most viable.

In a Wednesday subgroup meeting of the Governor's Housing Task Force, members discussed the feasibility and merit of ideas such as allowing cities to swap to a land value tax and pushing for more multifamily housing allowances in cities.

In July, Gov. Greg Gianforte created the task force and asked it to recommend ways to make "housing more affordable and attainable for Montanans." The task force's about 30 members broke into four smaller subgroups to tackle specific topics, such as local issues, construction, economics and regulatory and permitting. The regulatory and permitting subgroup held its third meeting by video conference to discuss some of the solutions the group came up with to eliminate barriers to housing development.

Regulatory and permitting subgroup co lead, Mark Egge, is a Bozeman-based affordable housing advocate and former member of the Bozeman Planning Board. Egge asked the group to vote on whether a solution was realistic and how significant the change would be if implemented. In the vote, members deemed removing bans on multifamily housing and streamlining developer applications as the easiest and quickest legislative solutions, while members felt allowing cities to swap to a land value tax would require significant effort.

The task force's first report to the governor is due Oct. 15. The initial report is meant to focus on possible legislative solutions.

The entire task force is scheduled to meet in person and by video conference on Thursday, Sept. 8. Department of Environmental Quality Director Chris Dorrington is the presiding officer for the task force and DEQ set up a public comment form on its website. Public comments are publicized through an interactive map, which also shows where the person submitting the comment lives and their housing status. As of Wednesday evening, the map displayed 38 public comments.

NEWJERSEY

Atlantic City Casino Property Tax Bill That Saved Resorts Millions Overturned by State Judge

An Atlantic City casino property tax adjustment that would have saved nine gaming resorts some $55 million this year alone has been overturned by a state judge.

Last year, New Jersey lawmakers and Governor Phil Murphy (D) amended the casinos' payment-in-lieu-of-tax (PILOT) structure to remove iGaming and online sports betting revenue from the calculation used to determine the resorts' annual property tax load.

Formed in response to the 2008 Great Recession and the closure of five casinos from 2014 through 2016, PILOT assesses a collective property tax responsibility for the casinos based on their annual gross gaming revenue.

The gaming industry convinced the state that several casinos would be at risk of closing without PILOT reductions. They argued that since iGaming and online sportsbook revenue is shared –third-party operators like DraftKings and FanDuel have little physical presence in the city — that revenue shouldn't be included in their annual property tax bill.

This week, New Jersey Superior Court Judge Michael Blee said the PILOT change was carried out in violation of the state Constitution.

Preferential Tax Treatment Prohibited

Blee reviewed the PILOT amendment after a New Jersey-based nonprofit conservative political group, Liberty and Prosperity 1776, filed suit against the state. They claimed that the state Constitution prohibits preferential tax treatment.

Blee previously ruled in Atlantic County's favor in its legal plea that the 2021 PILOT change violated a consent order reached with the state. That order guaranteed the county approximately 13.5% of the annual casino property tax.

Blee said at the time that the state could reduce the casino property tax by stripping iGaming and internet sportsbook revenue. But he also ruled it must continue to pay Atlantic County the full amount it would have received before the calculation adjustment.

Now, Blee is throwing out the entire PILOT change.

There is no evidence to suggest that casinos could not meet their PILOT obligations under the Original Act," Blee wrote in his order issued on Monday.

Instead, the judge concluded that the PILOT change was simply "to aid what was actually a resurging industry." Outgoing New Jersey Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D), who a political newcomer defeated during the 2021 election, spurred the PILOT change. Sweeney was a longtime advocate of the Atlantic City gaming industry.

No Public Purpose

The New Jersey Constitution allows special tax treatment in the rare case such a policy serves a "public purpose." Blee found that the 2021 PILOT adjustment failed to reach that classification.

This Court finds that the Amendment was enacted to aid the casino industry and not for a public purpose," Blee summarized.

The Casino Association of New Jersey didn't respond to a request for comment. The lobbying group cited its policy of not commenting on pending litigation. However, Seth Grossman of Liberty and Prosperity 1776 did comment.

"The bottom line is when you have tough economic times, every business is affected. So, to say you're going to give one industry a break by making everybody else pay more, that's not helping the economy. It's just helping one 'ailing' industry," Grossman opined.

NEW YORK

Tax breaks for solar farm? Brunswick says 'no'

Town Supervisor Phil Herrington is fighting the Rensselaer County Industrial Development Agency's first-time ever consideration of tax break awards to a solar farm -- in a town where there are a number of solar proposals pending.

Under state law to promote solar energy, Brunswick has provided a payment in lieu of taxes approval for the project on 25 acres of farmland at 7 Belair Lane off North Lake Avenue proposed by CVE (Changing Visions of Energy) US E17 Belair LLC. The company never indicated it would seek tax relief from the county IDA, Herrington said.

"The bottom line is they're getting a PILOT on the land. They don't need additional tax breaks from the county," Herrington said.

Herrington wrote the IDA that waiving mortgage and sales tax payments would hurt the town and county. Rensselaer County shares the tax income with its municipalities.

"The Town of Brunswick is already impacted by real property tax restrictions under New York State Law on commercial solar energy facilities, and further tax abatements in the form of reduced sales tax revenue appears unwarranted. The additional loss of sales tax revenue that would otherwise be generated by this project will negatively impact both Rensselaer County and the Town of Brunswick," Herrington wrote.

Brunswick has three large-scale commercial solar facilities in the town, two additional facilities approved but not yet built, and it has received three applications for solar facilities pending before the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals.

The company only wants the mortgage and sales tax relief from the county IDA, said Craig Weinand, senior project developer for CVE NA, who appeared before town review boards for the project.

Herrington said if the IDA granted the requested approvals it would set a precedent that would impact every solar project countywide. The companies could, he said, rush to the IDA for any of the tax breaks it offers.

The town is pushing its position due to a public hearing on the tax breaks scheduled to be heard at 10 a.m. Tuesday at Town Hall. 336 Town Office Road. The county IDA meets Thursday at its downtown Troy offices to consider the tax relief.

IDA Executive Director Robert Pasinella said the IDA has avoided becoming involved in solar facilities projects in the past. This is in part due to the facilities not creating the jobs that the IDA would prefer to see at projects it has supported, such as Regeneron Pharmaceuticals in East Greenbush and the Amazon warehouse in Schodack, Pasinella said.

The CVE proposal in Brunswick is the first one the IDA board will consider.

"We're always deferential to the town. We collaborate with the town of Brunswick," Pasinella said.

The IDA has not received any other applications for tax breaks for other solar projects, Pasinella said.

A large-scale solar facility has been proposed by ELP Greenbush Solar LLC that will be situated in the town of North Greenbush but will require at access road and nine utility poles in East Greenbush. The East Greenbush Town Board has set a public hearing for 6 p.m. Sept. 14 at Town Hall, 225 Columbia Turnpike, for public comment on the site plan for the 13 Morner Road project. The town said it considers this a major site plan application.

Corning to start new citywide property revaluation. What it means for assessments

Work will soon begin on a full revaluation of properties in the City of Corning for the first time since 2014..

City Manager Mark Ryckman said the city recently hired GAR Associates for $150,000 to complete the citywide reassessment.

What happens in a citywide revaluation?

The first step in the process is to send a letter and property inventory to each owner in the city. People should expect to receive them sometime soon after Aug. 9.

"We ask that owners review their property inventory to ensure the data we have on file is up to date," Ryckman said.

Throughout the project, property owners may see the Assessor's Office or GAR Associates taking pictures in front of their homes to update the city's records, Ryckman said.

GAR Associates will look at many issues during the revaluation process including the year the property was built, improvements made, square footage, style and location.

GAR Associates will assign values to more than 4,000 properties from October through mid-January, Ryckman said. A preliminary assessment will be issued in February 2023.

The official date to file grievances (complaints about the new assessments) will be May 2, 2023, and the final rolls will be filed June 1, 2023.

Will your tax bill go up after the revaluation?

City Manager Mark Ryckman explains the property revaluation process Tuesday night at a meeting of the City Council.
Ryckman said the city's equalization rate for 2022 is expected to be about 86 percent. In other words, the current values assigned to properties are estimated to be only 86 percent of their actual market value.

That means the new assessments are likely to go up significantly, in line with a boom in the real estate market over the last couple of years.

But that doesn't mean tax bills will necessarily rise.

Corning Assessor Barbara L. Roberts stressed that a citywide reassessment does not generate additional tax revenue for city government.

"Basically, the reassessment is to establish uniform fair and equitable assessments on all property," Ryckman added. "So, people are paying their fair share in taxes, which are levied by the City Council, the Corning-Painted Post School Board and the Steuben County Legislature."

NYC's gauging of commercial property values leads to inequities

Revenue from commercial buildings make up nearly 40 percent of the city's property tax base.

Commercial properties are a critical part of New York City's property tax base. Revenue from these buildings make up nearly 40 percent of property tax revenue.

A new fiscal brief from the city's Independent Budget Office (IBO) indicates that the city's method for gauging commercial property values leads to inequitable assessments and potentially lower tax revenues.

To calculate a commercial property's value for tax purposes, the city uses what is known as a "capitalized income approach." Released on August 30, the IBO brief examines this assessment method, focusing on a key part of the calculation — capitalization rates used by the city's Department of Finance — and investigates how the overestimation of these rates leads to inequitable property assessments.

Among the IBO's findings:

- Capitalization rates used by the Department of Finance are, on average, higher than the capitalization rates IBO estimated based on market sales. Adopting artificially high capitalization rates can lead to the underassessment of property values, compared with those that would have been generated based on market information.
- New York State requires the city to value properties in Tax Class 4 according to their current use, rather than their highest and best use. This can lead to lower-assessed values than what the market implies.
- Using established metrics, IBO found evidence of both "horizontal" and "vertical" inequity of assessments under the current system. This means that properties of similar market sale prices have different assessed values and higher-value properties are underassessed – and therefore undertaxed – relative to their lower-value counterparts.

As New York City's property tax structure is bound by state law, almost any changes require state intervention and the city's options to remedy these equity issues are limited, the IBO brief pointed out.

However, there may be some adjustments the city could make to its guideline capitalization rates to help narrow the gap between the values it assesses and the market sales values, the brief said.

"Reforming the assessment regime towards equity can lead to raising more revenue from higher-value properties, and at the same time alleviating the burden for lower-value properties to incentivize business activity in the city. These reforms are all the more important in the current times," the IBO wrote.

"Aside from the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic, which left many commercial properties with no income for an extended period of time, the need for commercial space is going through seemingly permanent changes: new technologies have enabled workers in several industries to work from remote locations, not necessarily from a specific physical spot, and consumers to do their shopping without need to visit physical stores," the brief said. "These changes highlight the importance of assessment equity as a tool to create a more level playing field, rather than an additional obstacle, for business activities."

OREGONA

As Amazon expands in eastern Oregon, regional carbon emissions soar

The electrical utility serving Morrow County once had some of the cleanest power in the state.

Drawing mostly on nearby hydroelectric projects on the Columbia River, power sold by the Umatilla Electric Cooperative emitted just 3% as much carbon as the statewide average.

Then Amazon came to town.

The company built a succession of large data centers in Morrow and Umatilla counties, financed partly by local tax breaks, and industrial power use in the region quadrupled. While Amazon isn't solely responsible for the increase, the additional power use matches the annual household power consumption of 200,000 homes.

Even as carbon emissions have soared along with power use, Amazon has accumulated tax breaks worth more than $160 million for its data centers in eastern Oregon. That's created a disconnect between state policies designed to encourage clean energy and tax breaks that set no such requirements for major energy consumers.

"There's really no room for a tech giant to be contradicting that and holding up that goal," said Joshua Basonfin of Climate Solutions Oregon, which helped lead the campaign for landmark climate legislation Oregon lawmakers passed last year.

What's happened to Umatilla Electric's carbon profile is striking.

Carbon emissions per megawatt hour are up 543% since 2010, according to state data, shortly before Amazon's arrival. So not only is power consumption way up – each megawatt of electricity has a far greater climate impact than before Amazon arrived.

The reason the power mix is so much dirtier, the utility says, is because electricity demand is now much higher than Umatilla Electric's federal allocation of clean hydropower.

The Bonneville Power Administration allocates energy generated by Columbia River dams to utilities throughout the region based on historical demand and other factors. Umatilla Electric, a tiny cooperative, receives approximately 1.6% of that output.

Beyond that, Umatilla Electric must buy whatever is available on the open market to meet the data centers' growing power demand. That market power has a carbon profile that resembles natural gas, a major contributor to climate change.

The inherent tension between the local tax breaks and wider climate goals have largely escaped notice. But environmental advocates say they may seek legislation that would require tech companies to power large server farms with clean power.

POLICIES AT ODDS

Oregon lawmakers set ambitious climate goals last year with landmark legislation that sought to shift the state's utilities to clean energy by 2040.

The legislation is among the nation's most aggressive, banning new fossil fuel power plants and requiring existing generators to begin cleaning up their electricity almost immediately.

As Oregon moves forward on the climate mandates, though, some of the state's biggest tax breaks are eroding its progress.

Data centers run by many of the nation's largest technology companies – among them Amazon, Apple, Google and Facebook – receive property tax breaks collectively worth several hundred million dollars.

The incentives come from two state programs that exempt them from the property taxes other businesses pay – the enterprise zone and strategic investment programs.

Local authorities, typically city and county governments, negotiate the deals in exchange for jobs, capital investment and offsetting payments. The state sets few boundaries on the deals, autonomy the local governments generally welcome.

As a result, Oregon has long had some of the nation's biggest tax breaks for data centers. And that's a big part of the reason why many of the world's largest tech companies have server farms in far-flung corners of the state.

But the state can't use the enormous tax breaks to encourage big energy hogs to use cleaner power because the incentive programs – which date to the Reagan administration – set no environmental targets whatsoever.

Some companies, notably Apple and Facebook, have voluntarily financed solar or wind projects in Oregon to compensate for the energy their data centers use.

Amazon's energy use in eastern Oregon is a very different story.

Umatilla Electric says its industrial power sales have grown from 1.1 billion kilowatt hours in 2016 to 4.1 billion last year, a period of rapid growth in Amazon's local footprint. Residential and agricultural power consumption increased little during that time among Umatilla's customers.

Amazon has built large clean energy projects in Canada and the Southeast U.S. but not in Oregon, Washington or Idaho. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality estimates Umatilla Electric's total emissions have increased from 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide in 2010 to 685,000 in 2020.

Seattle-based Amazon declined to discuss its Oregon energy consumption, but said it has set ambitious clean energy goals worldwide.

"Amazon is the world's largest corporate purchaser of renewable energy, and we are on a path to procure 100% renewable energy to power our operations by 2025," the company said in a written statement.

The company said its data centers are 88% more efficient than those companies use to store their own data, and it says it recycles 96% of the water it uses to cool its data centers. Amazon didn't say, though, how it will obtain the renewable energy for its operations in eastern Oregon. And in 2014, as it began its rapid expansion in Morrow County, the company successfully lobbied Oregon lawmakers to ease clean air standards.

CALLS FOR CLEAN POWER

Bob Jenks is executive director of the Citizens Utility Board, which monitors state energy policy on behalf of residential power users. He said the rising carbon emissions at Umatilla Electric reflect the Western electrical grid's reliance on natural gas, a carbon-intensive form of electricity.

Since Oregon tax breaks play a big role in attracting Amazon to the region, and since the state is aggressively pursuing cleaner energy, Jenks said it stands to reason that policymakers should be pushing for data centers to use cleaner power.

"People ought to be pressuring Amazon," Jenks said. "Amazon ought to have an interest in having those plants, those server farms served by renewable energy."

While Oregon's tax breaks have attracted some major energy consumers, they have also helped finance major clean energy projects – including massive wind farms and solar projects in Morrow County.

So it’s not the tax breaks themselves that are generating carbon emissions – it’s the absence of any guidelines to ensure the incentives’ recipients are complying with Oregon’s broader climate goals. To Basonfin, that’s an obvious failing in state policy.

“If a tech company with all of its resources is still having really high levels of emissions, then we shouldn’t be rewarding that with tax breaks,” he said.

Given the huge amount of energy that data centers use, and the resources available to big companies like Amazon, Basonfin said Oregon should make sure tax break recipients aren’t working against the state’s climate goals.

“A trillion-dollar company would have the wherewithal to do that if they were serious about it,” he said.

PENNSYLVANIA

Philly Today: Can We Talk About These Ridiculous Property Assessments for a Moment?

If you own a home in Philadelphia, you probably just received a piece of mail from the City of Philadelphia Office of Property Assessment. I suggest you open it.

Inside is the city’s notice of valuation for 2023. In other words, the city is telling you how much it says your house is worth, and they base your upcoming taxes on this value.

In my case, the value of my rowhome in West Philly, that I haven’t done a thing to improvement-wise since I moved in 16 years ago, somehow jumped by close to 70 percent in just a year. That’s nothing. I’ve heard stories from some homeowners who claim that the city’s valuation increased by more than 200 percent.

Okay, so maybe the city just doesn’t know how to do math. Or maybe they’re being greedy. Either option is perfectly believable.

The real problem here is that the city was way late sending out these notices. Supposedly an envelope shortage was a factor in this. And yet, the city somehow managed to send me a bill for the fee the city makes me pay to have an alarm system in my house. I think I got three pieces of mail from the Water Department in the course of three weeks. (No, I’m not overdue.) But they couldn’t find envelopes for the property assessments. OK then.

What you really need to know is that there are two looming deadlines here. One is a sort a casual “first level review” that you can request. The deadline for this is September 30th. I reached out to the mayor’s office and suggested they move this deadline. A spokesperson said they are considering it and hope to have more information soon.

But then comes October 3rd. That's the deadline for the more-complicated formal appeal with the Board of Revision of Taxes. As the spokesperson explained, that deadline is set by the state and the city can't do anything about it. A rep from Governor Tom Wolf's office confirmed this. Unfortunately, she said that moving the deadline would require a change to state law. Good luck getting that to happen.

The good news here is that if the city sides with you on the first level review, you're all set and won't have to file a formal appeal with the BRT, the deadline for which you'll probably miss anyway. Good luck!

Here's how Philly's property tax system compares with other cities

Public opinion of Philadelphia's property tax remains low, with residents scoring it as one of the most unfair levies in a poll conducted by Pew Charitable Trusts.

Philadelphia's latest property reassessment represents "a key moment" for Philadelphia, according to a new report from Pew Charitable Trusts, with the city's total combined property value rising to $204 billion, up from $168 billion just three years ago.

The report comes amid controversy over the first citywide reassessment in three years — and property owners' frustration over resulting tax hikes. Public opinion of the city's property tax remains low, with residents scoring it in a Pew poll as one of the most unfair levies. Among large cities in the country, Philadelphia has one of the highest home-ownership rates — both generally and among low-income homeowners in particular.

Pew Charitable Trusts, a nonprofit and nonpartisan policy think tank that conducts research on issues in Philadelphia, released the report Thursday. Here are six key takeaways:

Philly's property tax revenue grew 60% in the last decade

Despite ongoing problems with the city's property tax system, revenue is booming.

Annual revenues collected from property taxes have skyrocketed from just over $1 billion in 2010 to more than $1.6 billion in 2021, a period in which the city implemented four rate increases and multiple reassessments that led to higher tax bills for many property owners.

Philly's budget isn't particularly reliant on property tax compared with peer cities

Property tax revenue is almost equally split between the city and the School District of Philadelphia. But overall, Philadelphia is much less reliant on property taxes to fund its operations than Boston, New York, Washington, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Columbus, Baltimore, Atlanta, or Pittsburgh.

For the last decade, property taxes have steadily contributed about 15% of Philadelphia's general fund, which finances most government functions. By contrast, in 2020, seven other cities were more reliant than Philadelphia on real estate taxes to fund similar services, including Pittsburgh at 27.1%.

Instead, Philadelphia looks to its wage tax to fund city government. Taxes on wages, earnings, and net profits made up 43% of the general fund in 2021.

Cities tend to lean heavily on property tax because it is a more reliable source of income, particularly during the pandemic, when wage taxes were more unpredictable, the Pew report said. Cities that derive more revenue from property taxes can therefore be more economically resilient.

But homeowners' overall tax burden is among the highest across the country.

Despite paying relatively low real-estate taxes, Philadelphians shoulder a relatively high household tax burden when compared with peer cities, researchers found. That's because Philadelphia levies taxes that other jurisdictions don't use or establish at much lower rates — such as the oft-criticized wage tax.

Citing research by a Washington analyst, the report states that for a family earning about $50,000 in 2019, only three peer cities — Baltimore, Chicago, and Detroit — would tax a higher share of their income than Philadelphia would. (Pittsburgh was excluded from that analysis because it studied only the largest cities in each state.)

The vast majority of Philadelphia's property tax revenue comes from residential properties

More than two-thirds of Philadelphia's land parcels are residential properties, similar to Chicago and to Columbus, Ohio.

And more than two-thirds of Philadelphia's property taxes come from residential properties. In Chicago and Columbus, residential properties constitute 51% and 61% of overall property revenue, respectively.

Why the difference? Philadelphia is bound by the Pennsylvania Constitution's uniformity clause, which mandates that all properties — residential or commercial — be taxed at the same rate. In Philadelphia's case, that number is 1.3998%.

By contrast, Chicago, Boston, and Washington set a lower tax rate for residential properties than all other types of properties. That's also true for "single-family homes and small apartments" in Columbus and New York.

Besides Philadelphia and Columbus, only Atlanta and Baltimore see residential properties generate more than half of the city's property tax revenue.

Meanwhile, about a third of all properties are tax exempt

Rather than changing the tax rate depending on the type of property, the city runs a number of exemption programs to reduce some property owners' tax burdens.

As of the last fiscal year, 32% of properties in Philadelphia were exempt from taxation. Most of the untaxed parcels are government buildings, churches, public spaces, nonprofit hospitals, and other nonprofit civic institutions.

But tax relief programs — like the popular homestead exemption and the controversial 10-year tax abatement — also contribute to the $54.5 billion value of untaxed property, Pew said.

More than 260,000 properties are enrolled in tax relief programs citywide. Of those, the abatement accounted for nearly half of the exemptions, while residential relief programs like the homestead exemption or the senior tax freeze accounted for the other half.

Philadelphia's homestead exemption is 'comparatively generous'

All Philadelphia homeowners can receive the homestead exemption for their primary residence, making it the most popular of the city's tax relief options. This reduces the taxable portion of owner-occupied properties by a fixed amount — which has grown from $30,000 in 2014 to $80,000 for tax year 2023.

Pew found that the newly raised homestead exemption most benefited people living in low-value homes, in some cases reducing their tax rate by 75% or more.

Philadelphia's average property tax bills were the second lowest among peer cities surveyed by Pew — and that owes partly to the city's "comparatively generous" homestead exemption, which amounted to $45,000 at the time of the study.

Philadelphia property taxes under the microscope

Philadelphia's property tax system is at a "key moment" following the release of the first citywide reassessments in years.

That's according to a new report from Pew Charitable Trusts that analyzed our tax system and compared it to 10 peer cities, including New York City, Chicago and Baltimore.

Why it matters: Philly has a history of irregular, inconsistent and seemingly unfair assessments.

A scathing audit in 2020 found significant inaccuracies, leading to a series of reforms and the ousting of the city's chief assessment officer.

Catch up quick: The city skipped reassessments for tax years 2021 and 2022 due to those concerns about accuracy as well as pandemic-related issues.

New 2023 citywide assessments were released this past May, and systemic inaccuracies appear to persist, with the tax burden distributed unequally, according to the Inquirer.

Zoom in: The property tax bill for a "typical owner-occupied home" in the city was $1,131 in 2021, according to Pew — less than any comparable city besides Detroit.

Residential property values increased 31% on average citywide this year since the last assessment in tax year 2020.

The city has made adjustments to the property tax system over the years to help ensure better accuracy and fairness, such as accounting for a property's characteristics.

Plus: Officials boosted the homestead exemption to $80,000 this year, which Pew said was generous compared to other cities.

What they're saying: "How well those adjustments are received, along with the new assessments, will go a long way toward determining whether Philadelphians become more accepting of the property tax," the Pew report says.

By the numbers: Pew found that residential properties account for 71% of Philly's property tax revenue in 2021 — the highest share among comparable cities.

Yes, but: Property taxes only accounted for roughly 15% of the city's budget in fiscal year 2021 — far less than the median for the other peer cities (31.5%).

Time to Act If You Want to Challenge Philly's New Property Values

If you own property in Philadelphia, you should have received a notice from the Office of Property Assessment (OPA) by now informing you of the new assessed value for your property. If you have not received the notice yet, you can find the new assessed value for your property online at property.phila.gov. Be prepared to be shocked. The property value of your property likely increased by a significant amount. This increase will directly translate into a much larger property tax bill in March and all future tax years. According to the OPA, the aggregate value of all properties in Philadelphia rose by approximately 21% since 2020. This dramatic rise is attributable to the City's strong real estate market.

The OPA increased the assessed property values by looking at certain factors. For residential properties, the OPA specifically reviewed the size and age of the property, the property's location and condition, and recent sales of comparable properties in the area. For commercial and large multi-family properties the OPA used slightly different factors such as the recent sales of comparable properties, cost of operating the property, income generated by the property, and cost of construction. The OPA obtained this information through field inspections, aerial photography, data from other City departments such as permits and deeds, and commercial sources such as property listings and sales data.

To help mitigate the impact of the property tax increase, certain tax relief programs were expanded. For example, the residential property tax exemption under the Homestead Exemption was increased from $45,000 up to $80,000. This increased exemption is effective for 2023 and thereafter. As a result, $80,000 of your property's assessed value will be exempt from property tax. It is estimated that this exemption increase will save most homeowners about $1,119 in property tax annually. The Senior Citizen Real Estate Tax Freeze Program was also expanded to allow senior citizens who missed enrollment to currently enroll in the program and freeze their property value at the amount it would have been when they first qualified for the program. However, these tax relief programs will not help commercial property owners.

If you believe the reassessed value of your property is incorrect, you can challenge the reassessed value by filing an appeal with the Board of Revision of Taxes (Board). The deadline for filing this appeal is October 3, 2022. Keep in mind, this is a firm deadline. No appeals will be accepted by the Board after this date. If you are interested in challenging the reassessed value of your property, you should consult your tax attorney or legal advisor immediately to assess your case. The deadline is right around the corner.

Some Allegheny County property owners could see massive decrease in taxes after assessment ruling

Homeowners facing possible tax hikes this year because of property assessment appeals brought by school districts and municipalities won a big victory Thursday — one that could have major repercussions for many others in Allegheny County as well.

Common Pleas Judge Alan Hertzberg ordered a huge reduction — from 81.1% to 63.53% — in the number to be used in 2022 appeal hearings to determine the value at which a property will be taxed.

The drop in the common level ratio could provide some relief for thousands of property owners who have been hit with assessment appeals filed by school districts and municipalities after buying homes in Allegheny County. The appeals, which seek to raise the assessment closer to the new sales price, are often derided as a newcomers' tax.

Before the change, a home valued at $100,000 in an appeal would be taxed at $81,100 using the 81.1% common level ratio.

Using the 63.53% ordered by the judge Thursday, the property would be taxed at $63,530.

That would mean a substantially lower tax bill for the property owner.

The ruling also could result in tax breaks for other homeowners and commercial property owners in the county, particularly if Judge Hertzberg or the county allows another round of appeals to be filed this year. The original appeals deadline was March 31.

If that happens, a homeowner or building owner would only have to show that his or her property changed in value, however slightly, to qualify for the new ratio — and potentially a lower tax bill.

John Silvestri, the attorney for nine property owners who filed the lawsuit that led to Thursday's reduction, was elated with the judge's decision.

"The ruling is excellent for property owners because they can no longer be cheated into paying too high taxes," he said.

Mike Suley, a former assessment board member and director who served as a consultant to the plaintiffs, called the ruling a "game changer."

Pittsburgh school district appeal may delay assessment deal — and possible tax breaks for Allegheny County homeowners
"There are winners and losers. The losers are the people who send out the tax bills, and that includes the county," he said. "And the winners are the taxpayers, the people who own properties."

A budget buster?

No doubt the ruling could have huge consequences for the county, school districts, and municipalities that were counting on the revenue from property assessment appeals to help balance their budgets this year.

With the stroke of the judge's pen, much of that revenue could evaporate, barring an appeal of Thursday's decision to a higher court, which seems likely given the stakes involved.

During a court hearing Thursday, Megan M. Turnbull, an attorney for the Pittsburgh School District, said the change in the common level ratio could have "massive repercussions" for taxing bodies that have already set their budgets for the year.

"There's not a whole lot of time left to do some course correction in any municipal budget or any school district budget should they need to do so," she said.

Ms. Turnbull added there's a need to craft a "fair and equitable" solution "that doesn't leave every taxing body in the red at the end of the year for reasons that were completely beyond our control."

Beyond the cases currently pending, she noted the ruling has the potential to trigger a whole new wave of property owner-led appeals. She said that if owners of large multi-million dollar properties appeal to get the lower ratio, they could "drive very big results very quickly."

Ms. Turnbull urged Judge Hertzberg to allow the district to withdraw some of the appeals pending before the county property assessment board rather than spending the money to pursue them, given that the return won't be as great as it would have been with the higher ratio.

Prime for appeals

The Pittsburgh School District has already appealed one of Judge Hertzberg's ancillary rulings involving the assessment case. Asked if the district planned to appeal Thursday's order, Ms. Turnbull said she would have to look at it.

Shelley Rohrer, an attorney for the county, wouldn't say in court whether the county intended to appeal the judge's decision.

"We're reviewing the order and will act accordingly," county spokeswoman Amie Downs said afterwards.

Edward Hirshberg, an attorney who specializes in property assessment matters, said government agencies have "pretty strong rights" to appeal the type of preliminary injunction order Judge Hertzberg issued Thursday and "immediately stay its impact."

Some experts have predicted that a ruling resulting in a lower common level ratio could result in across-the-board tax increases by school districts or municipalities as they look to make up lost revenue.

Still to be determined is if Judge Hertzberg will allow the district and other taxing bodies to withdraw their appeals and whether he will permit another round of appeals by property owners this year.

Ms. Rohrer said that county council may have to be the one to decide whether to allow more property assessment appeals.

However, David Montgomery, attorney for the assessment board, said he believes the judge can also order it.

The assessment board has not been issuing decisions on appeals this year pending a decision by Judge Hertzberg on what common level ratio to use.

Although that has now been decided, Mr. Montgomery said the board will wait until the judge determines whether to allow taxing bodies to withdraw appeals before rendering any decisions.

He also believes property owners should have another chance to appeal.

“Both parties have been proceeding under a number that turned out to be substantially wrong for this year. If one side can withdraw, the other side should be able to participate under the new data,” he said.

Mr. Silvestri argued that taxing bodies should only be able to withdraw appeals if the property owner involved consents to the move. Like Mr. Montgomery, he believes the judge should reopen the appeals window this year.

“There were property owners who were overtaxed in prior years that need their taxes reduced now, not later,” he said.

‘Zero sympathy’

Mr. Silvestri had little sympathy for school districts and municipalities that may lose revenue as a result of the ruling. He said they can adjust their budgets next year to account for any shortfalls.

“The school districts have zero sympathy for having used the higher [ratio] last year that overtaxed property owners. I have not heard either the county say I’m sorry, and I have not heard the school district say the property owners are as important to us as our budget,” he said.

The new 63.53% common level ratio was calculated by Mr. Silvestri and his team based on sales data that had been submitted by the county.

While Judge Hertzberg issued a preliminary injunction setting the ratio at 63.53, he also ordered the county to submit its data to the state tax equalization board, or STEB, to calculate the ratio.

He did so apparently because the county had argued that the board is the only one that can calculate the ratio under the law.

Of course, if the state board comes up with a much different ratio, it could throw a monkey wrench into the entire process, which has dragged on since April when the judge ordered the county to re-examine the way it coded 2020 property sales data used to determine the ratio.

Mr. Silvestri isn't worried about that happening. Asked if he anticipated any difference between the 63.53% and the ratio to be calculated by the state tax equalization board, he replied, "None."

The common level ratio is used in appeal hearings to account for widening disparities between assessed values and current sales prices since the last countywide reassessment took place a decade ago.

TEXAS

The truth in taxation

Local government and schools are finalizing their financial plans for the upcoming fiscal year.

It's no easy task, and we're glad we're not in their shoes.

But well before the agendas and public hearings are set, there's so much more that's already been done and calculated.

As citizens ourselves, we've not been immune to the same rising appraisal notices as you. But while appraised values do help determine property taxes, an increase doesn't necessarily equal a larger tax bill.

Property tax collections have risen more than 20% since 2017, according to data from the Texas comptroller's office. Texans paid an estimated $73.2 billion in property taxes in 2021, which went to school districts, cities, counties and other taxing entities that then use the revenue to fund everything from public schools and police departments to road maintenance.

So why are property taxes in Texas so high?

Texas' local governments rely heavily on property taxes to pay the salaries of police officers and firefighters and for government services like roads, libraries, parks and public schools. Coupled with the fact that Texas has no state income tax, Texans' property tax bills are among the highest in the nation. Not having a state income tax may seem like a bonus at first glance, but it's a major source of funding for other states.

Homeowners pay a higher proportion of their home value toward property taxes than most homeowners in other parts of the nation, according to the Tax Foundation. Texas depends more on property taxes than almost any other state to pay for government services — edged out only by New Hampshire, Alaska and New Jersey.

Public schools also depend greatly on property taxes for funding, using revenue to cover as much of their base budgets as possible. The state does contribute the rest, but as local property values have grown, the state's share decreases.

In any given year, revenue from property taxes makes up more than half of the state's pot of funds to pay for public schools, the rest of which comes from state and federal sources. Of the $69.3 billion that went to public education in fiscal year 2020, property taxes kicked in $38.4 billion while the state provided $23.3 billion. The rest came from federal funds, according to the Texas Tribune.

As a result, school property taxes make up the bulk of a typical homeowner's tax bill. More than half of all property tax revenue in the state comes from school property taxes, according to data from the Texas Comptroller's office.

State lawmakers three years ago passed two bills to help schools. House Bill 3 included $11.6 billion in school finance, including $5.1 billion to lower school district taxes, and $6.5 billion in new school spending and caps on districts' tax rates. Another bill from the Senate required taxing entities to get voter approval before raising property tax revenue by 3.5 percent or more from the previous year.

According to a study by the Texas Taxpayers and Research Association, taxpayers would have shelled out $6 billion more in property taxes than they did in 2021 if not for the two bills — the result of falling tax rates. But while school tax rates have dropped 13 percent since 2019, taxable values rose by 23 percent, according to the study.

Residents in May were granted some relief, after voters overwhelmingly approved two state constitutional amendments — one to set a cap for those 65 and older, or disabled, on their school property taxes, and the other increased the residence homestead exemption in public school taxes from $25,000 to $40,000.

Reality is, our local elected officials are damned if they do, damned if they don't. If they raise the tax rate to fund projects or programs, people gripe. If they lower it and have to cut these same programs or projects, people gripe.

We understand times are tight, particularly for those who are on a fixed income.

It appears our counties and cities are doing their absolute best to manage growth while keeping their areas in the lower zones.

Could they do better? Always. But it's not all on their shoulders.

While we can't control the number of people moving here, we can look to our state leaders, who recently have made some pretty big promises about property taxes.

Gov. Abbott has deemed property tax reduction a top priority when lawmakers reconvene next year.

Others are looking at $3 billion in federal stimulus dollars, and a $12 billion surplus in state revenue, to set aside for tax relief. But it's not a sure thing, as there's question to whether the $3 billion could be used, as its source — the American Rescue Plan Act — prohibits the use of stimulus funds for tax cuts.

At a yearly salary of $153,000, Abbott may not have to worry about his own finances. But he needs to make sure we don't either.

'Owners are freaking out': Austin rental home owners worry about big tax increases

Mike Nassour said he was stunned this year when he found out the assessed value for a rental home he owns outside Leander. He said it increased more than 57% this year, from $267,366 to $422,075. Even with taxing entities such as Williamson County and the Leander school district lowering their property tax rates, Nassour will still have to pay at least $2,000 more in taxes.

That's because rental owners do not receive homestead exemptions on those properties. They also don't qualify for a 10% cap on the increase in their assessed value that owners with homestead exemptions receive.

With home appraisals up and none of the protections that homestead owners receive, many rental property owners see little choice but to raise rent on their tenants or consider getting out of the business.

The median market value of homes in the Central Texas area, including Williamson, Travis, Hays and Bastrop counties, jumped more than 40% this year, officials have said.

"The high demand on all property types with a low supply of units available caused sales prices to increase during 2021, which caused an increase of appraised values on all property types," said Alvin Lankford, the chief appraiser for the Williamson Central Appraisal District.

Mike Nassour owns a rental property in the Block house neighborhood in Leander and has seen his taxes rise in 2022 by one third of what they used to be.

He said the median market value of a home in Williamson County increased 45.7% this year.

Kris Latham, a property manager, said the appraisal market values for many of the rental homes she manages in Williamson County increased more than $100,000.

"The owners are telling me their taxes are doubling," she said. "I just had a couple of owners that had to increase the rent by $400 and the owners still can't cover their mortgage. A lot of owners want to sell. It's not convenient to be an investor in the market in the Austin area."

Latham works for Banks Earl Realty, which manages more than 70 rental homes in Williamson, Hays and Travis counties. She said thata year or two ago the average rent for a single-family home in Williamson County was $1,600 "but now it's crept up to $2,400" because of the increased appraisals.

Charles Heimsath, president of Capitol Market Research, an Austin-based real estate consulting firm, said he wasn't surprised to hear that property values had gone up dramatically in Williamson County. "Increasing demand drives up prices," he said.

People are continuing to come to the county because of its job growth, Heimsath said. For example, Samsung is building a $17 billion chip factory in Taylor that is estimated to provide about 1,800 jobs. CelLink, a technology company that makes circuits used in electric vehicles and other high-tech sectors, is building a $130 million manufacturing facility in Georgetown that could provide 2,000 jobs.

Heimsath said he thinks property appraisals in the Austin area, including in Williamson County, will continue to rise but "at a slower rate."

Rental home owners in Travis County are also facing problems with big jumps in appraisal values, said Emily Blair, the vice president of the Austin Apartment Association.

"I spoke with a rental housing provider who has a few single-family homes in the Pflugerville area, and he had to raise his rent hundreds of dollars just to break even with the increase in property taxes," she said. "With no homestead exemptions, property taxes are one of the biggest impacts on rent."

Jeanette Shelby, who owns a property management company, said she manages rental single-family homes and duplexes in Bastrop and Williamson counties.

"All my owners are freaking out about what their taxes might be just because appraisals went up," Shelby said.

She said she's had so many requests from owners to protest their appraisals that she had to send an email out to tell clients she couldn't help them reduce their values. Several owners have decided to sell, she said.

Many of her property owners are from other states, she said, including California.

"They buy out here because the property prices are lower than in California," she said. "But they don’t check to see we have some of the highest property taxes in the nation."

Texas ranks between sixth and 13th for the highest property taxes in the nation. depending on which methodology is used, according to the Tax Foundation on State Tax Policy in 2021.

Shelby said she's also seen tenants in properties she manages move out because their rent went up $400 to $500. Most people looking for a single-family home under $1,000 can't find anything, she said. Shelby said she recently rented a home for $850, but it was a 300-square-foot tiny home with one room and a bathroom.

Nassour said he has thought about selling his house but has decided not to do it.

"The price went up so much that what would happen is I would have to pay a huge amount of capital gains taxes," he said. Currently he is renting the three-bedroom, two-bath home to a single mother with two children. "I have one of the best tenants in the known universe," he said.

He is still waiting to calculate what his taxes might be from other taxing entities, including the Block House Municipal Utility District, which will not adopt a tax rate until Wednesday.

Nassour said he has already figured he will have to raise the rent 20%.

"That's the most I've ever had to raise rent on a tenant," he said, "and I've been a landlord since 1980."

Independent audit of appraisal district just makes sense to ease taxpayers' concerns

Did your property assessment go up earlier this year? If you answered yes, as many in Victoria County surely can, you probably would like to know with certainty the change is correct. Even if your assessment didn't rise, you'd most likely want to know proper assessments based on the latest methods and technology are being used to determine your tax bill.

If for no other reason, that's why the Victoria County Central Appraisal District ought to hire an outside firm to conduct an audit of its practices.

The district's leadership discussed an audit in July and approached county commissioners last month about supporting such an audit from the International Association of Assessing Officers, an independent nonprofit. The district came under fire from vocal property owners who complained their tax assessments were shooting up at exponential rates.

Commissioners decided in a split vote they weren't going to help fund the audit and would leave the appraisal district to its own means.

The district most definitely should hire the IAAO to audit its practices and results to give taxpayers and voters peace of mind.

But this week, the appraisal district sent out a cryptic statement that the agency will instead rely on audits conducted by the Texas comptroller's office every two years.

The audit is somewhat comprehensive, giving mostly positive grades to the Central Appraisal District. But it lacks depth and specificity that an IAAO report would contain. Whereas the comptroller's audit provides results in a "pass/fail" format that gobbles up all of 12 pages, including the cover, the IAAO audit of a Kansas county, for instance, is written in narratives that go into great detail over 112 pages, including the cover.

Basically, the old adage holds true: You get what you pay for.

Earlier this year, some 43,000 Victoria County residents were notified by the district their property values had gone up by at least $1,000 since the previous appraisal. Some had gone up quite substantially. This angered property owners, who held town hall meetings with elected officials to vent and explain why sky-high appraisals are inappropriate. Some claimed their assessments had increased by 50%.

While it's notable these property owners were angered at this sticker shock, the truth is tax assessments in Texas cannot keep up with real estate values. Rather, the taxable value used in determining property taxes can only go up 10% a year. So taxable values will take a while to catch up to steep assessed values.

Still, taxpayers — and we — wonder if these assessments are accurate.

Of the four mandatory requirements of the comptroller's audit, the Victoria district got a "fail" in one of them. As any parent of a student in school knows, that's a 75% grade. Would you be happy with "C" on the report card? Further, regarding appraisal district activities, three of four categories were rated as "meets all." One, the district's governance, was rated "meets." "Meets all" is a score of 100, while "meets" ranges from 90 to 99.

The district actually scored a 94 in governance, which certainly is not a failing grade, scoring a "no" in the question of whether the board of directors posted a notice of a public hearing for its 2019-2020 reappraisal plan by a 2018 deadline or for its 2021-2022 reappraisal plan by its deadline in September 2020, both as required by the state's tax code.

Perhaps this failing has led to some distrust.

We're attaching the state's audit and the audit by the IAAO of Sedgwick County, Kansas, to this editorial so our readers can see what they could get with a full and complete audit.

In any event, a thorough, independent review of the Victoria County Central Appraisal District is in order. If for no other reason than to allay valid and legitimate concerns raised by taxpayers. We urge the district to follow through and hire the independent IAAO to audit its work. Victoria County taxpayers deserve no less.

UTAH

At a glance: property taxes in Utah

How is the value of property assessed for tax purposes in your state? Which types of property are subject to tax?

The Utah Constitution provides that all tangible property in the state is subject to an ad valorem property tax based upon the property's fair market value. UCA § 59-2-201 prescribes those properties that are subject to property tax assessment by the Tax Commission (often referred to as centrally assessed or state-assessed property). All other property is subject to assessment by the assessor of each of Utah's 29 counties (often referred to as locally assessed property). The Tax Commission certifies the values of the properties within its assessment jurisdiction to the counties in which those properties are located, and the county governments add the value of such properties to the value of the other property on their respective tax rolls and impose a tax rate on all property located in the county. Although the Utah Constitution only allows for the assessment and taxation of tangible property, there is perpetual litigation before the Tax Commission concerning whether and which intangible attributes of tangible property may be subjected to assessment and taxation under the "unitary" method of assessment. This issue is not usually present with locally assessed property because county assessors generally do not use the "unitary" method of assessment.

What is the state property tax rate?

There is no state property tax rate, however, Utah requires counties to impose a property tax imposition to fund K-12 public education. The rate of such imposition changes from year to year.

What is the range of local property tax rates levied in your state?

Local property tax rates are imposed by Utah's 29 counties on behalf of the various taxing jurisdictions within each respective county, including municipalities and school districts. The total tax rate imposed by any particular county varies from year to year, however, counties and their various subdivisions cannot impose a tax rate higher than a rate that will generate the same amount of revenue generated in the prior year, with an adjustment allowed for actual new growth, and certain other adjustments, without notifying the citizens of the taxing jurisdiction proposing to impose a higher tax rate and holding a public hearing to explain why additional revenue is required. This procedure is called "truth in taxation," and has been successful since its enactment in the mid-1980s in keeping Utah property tax rates stable. In 2021, local certified property tax rates ranged from 0.005171 in a tax area in Rich County to 0.025654 in a tax area in Utah County.

What exemptions and deductions are available?

Property tax exemptions and deductions are those authorized by the Utah Constitution. Legislative attempts to provide for property tax exemptions by statute have, generally, been rejected by Utah courts as being unconstitutional. Constitutional property tax exemptions include:

- property owned by the state;
- property owned by a public library;
- property owned by a school district;
- property owned by a political subdivision of the state, located in the political subdivision;
- property owned by a non-profit entity used exclusively for religious, charitable or educational purposes;
- places of burial not held or used for private or corporate benefit;
- farm equipment and farm machinery, as defined by statute;
- water rights, reservoirs, pumping plants, ditches, canals, pipes, flumes, power plants, and transmission lines owned and used to irrigate land, under certain circumstances;
- tangible personal property constituting inventory, under certain circumstances;

- tangible personal property held for sale or processing and shipped to a final destination outside the state within 12 months;
- property used to generate and deliver electrical power for pumping water to irrigate lands in the state;
- up to 45 per cent of the fair market value of residential property, as defined by statute;
- household furnishings, furniture, and equipment used exclusively by the owner of that property in maintaining the owner's home;
- tangible personal property that, if subject to property tax, would generate an inconsequential amount of revenue;
- certain exemptions for those who have served in the military and their families, as determined by statute; and
- remission or abatement of the taxes of the poor.

What filing requirements and procedures apply?

Taxpayers whose property is subject to assessment by the Utah State Tax Commission are required to file annual returns or statements – generally, in March – with the Tax Commission containing sufficient information and data to allow Tax Commission assessors in the Commission's Property Tax Division to issue an annual assessment on or before May 1. Taxpayers and counties in which the properties are located are generally entitled to challenge the annual assessment issued by the Tax Commission. Counties also issue assessments – generally, in July and August – for all real property not subject to assessment by the Tax Commission. Locally assessed personal property taxpayers self-report on an annual basis. Locally assessed taxpayers are generally required to appeal a county assessment by mid-September. Taxes are due on or before November 30. Taxpayers have the right to challenge county assessments before the County Board of Equalization of the county in which the property is located. Decisions of a County Board of Equalization may be appealed to the Utah State Tax Commission by the taxpayer or by the county assessor.

How is the transfer of real estate taxed in your state (including tax base, rates, exemptions, and filing formalities)?

Utah does not impose a real estate transfer tax.

WISCONSIN

Green Bay homeowners shocked by new tax assessments

City leaders say a lot's changed since the last assessments in 2004 but it doesn't necessarily mean paying higher taxes.

Some Green Bay property owners may be shocked and frustrated after receiving their assessments in the mail over the weekend.

It comes at a time with high inflation and high natural gas prices.

Green Bay Alder Jesse Brunette of district 12 says he's gone door-to-door meeting with constituents after several commented on a Facebook post where he criticized the new values.

"I think the unfortunate part of where the process is now, is that we're reassessing people at a very high inflationary period, and also at a time where a lot of people feel that their properties are not worth with the city says their property are being assessed at," Brunette said.

According to the city assessor's office, the assessments are supposed to be within 10 percent, plus or minus, of a property's market value.

Officials say it's the first assessment done by the city since 2004.

"We all know that the value of homes, from what we've seen going on in sales over the last 2 or 3 years, has gone through the roof," Alderman Bill Galvin said. "And the state requires that you have proper assessments done on a regular basis -- and unfortunately, the city hasn't done it since 2004."

According to the assessor's office, just because the property value went up doesn't mean you'll pay higher taxes. The reassessments were done to produce a more accurate and equitable value than was previously in place -- and they also said they had to remain in compliance with state law.

Galvin said, "When I came home, my wife had opened the assessment and she was very concerned. All I'm asking is, people, take a deep breath. Read through the information."

Yet that isn't stopping people from calling their local city council members and expressing their concerns about the jump in their property values.

For alder Brunette, who also serves as city council president, he says he will seek to reduce the tax rate this fall as much as possible.

"We can't go to people and expect them to pay a high tax rate when their assessments increase by this amount," Brunette said.

Property owners have a right to challenge the assessed value. First, you need to set up a meeting with a city appraiser. If you still disagree after that meeting, you can appear before the Board of Review.

‘It’s something we owe.’ Madison church pays ‘voluntary tax’ to Indigenous nations

The $4,000 payment is part of an effort by St. Dunstan’s Episcopal Church to acknowledge its debt to Ho-Chunk who once lived there.

The history of Indigenous peoples in Wisconsin is deep and abundant, yet it’s a history that has long been glossed over without proper attention or, in many cases, unacknowledged completely.

St. Dunstan’s Episcopal Church on Madison’s west side is pushing against that narrative of erasure through a voluntary land tax that goes beyond simply acknowledging that the land under the church once belonged to the Ho-Chunk Nation — whose members were forced from the land.

“We started researching to understand how the land that the church stands on came to be the church’s land,” said the Rev. Miranda Hassett, rector of St. Dunstan’s. “We felt like that needed to be accompanied by some restorative actions. Taking some actions to kind of make amends, and move toward restoring wholeness and being better allies, even in small ways.”

She added, “We’re pretty close to a historic Ho-Chunk village, in a part of the southwestern corner of Lake Mendota. That was part of the territory that was ceded in the 1832 Treaty that dislocated and removed the Ho-Chunk, so our initial thought was to make a gift to the Ho-Chunk tribe.”

Hassett contacted the Rev. Kerri Parker, executive director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC). St. Dunstan’s is a member of the WCC, and Hassett thought the effort could benefit from collaboration. As an organization with 75 years of history that connects 21 different Christian traditions across the state, the WCC is no stranger to facilitating solutions to modern social issues.

“We find that we can do a lot of things more effectively together than we could do alone,” Parker said. “Our core values … that animate our work are courage, justice and holy imagination.”

Beyond working with social issues such as COVID safety, racial justice and refugee aid, the WCC is also committed to acknowledgement, restorative justice and current issues facing Indigenous communities.

"We have taken the time to start building relationships with leaders and educators," Parker said. "You can say you want to give money, but you're not really doing the work unless you have that meaning level between people … It's about understanding why this money is changing hands, and how it all came to be."

Parker connected Hassett to Bill Quackenbush, the Ho-Chunk's tribal historic preservation officer. On Quackenbush's advice, the church decided to pay the voluntary tax to the Wisconsin Inter-Tribal Repatriation Committee.

"That seemed like the appropriate entity," Hassett said. "I think Bill was thinking, if this church does it, maybe other entities will follow suit. Rather than parse it out tribe by tribe and try to figure out exactly whose territory everybody's sitting on, it makes sense for this organization that represents all the Wisconsin tribes to have that role here."

Hassett said the church's $4,000 payment is a first for the repatriation committee. Parker hopes it won't be the last.

"I think about this event, this moment of possibility, as an example of instigating holy imagination in people," she said. "Look at this thing that this church did. I wonder what we could do?"

'We all have a creator'

Hassett presented the check to Quackenbush at the repatriation committee's Aug. 16 meeting at the Radisson Hotel on the Oneida Reservation. The committee includes historic preservation officers from tribes in Wisconsin whose work includes repatriation of artifacts to Indigenous nations from individuals and state museums and preserving historic sites, such as effigy mounds.

"We all have a creator," Quackenbush said. "All of this (land acknowledgements and donations) is symbolic of a healing process, but also a step forward. … The tribes can't do it alone. We need state agencies and other organizations."

The check was presented in a purple envelope, which Parker said is the color of repentance.

"We acknowledge that our ability to worship on Ho-Chunk land came at a great cost to those people," Hassett said at the meeting.

Much discussion at the meeting revolved around the Doctrine of Discovery, which was Catholic doctrine that essentially permitted Christian European nations to subjugate and spread forced Christianity on Indigenous peoples in the Americas and Africa.

"The Doctrine has become the foundation of people's understanding relative to North America and its original inhabitants," she said. "The settlers had a sense of understanding that their mission was for God and king. That understanding has become part of our psyche. It's ingrained in our laws and was part of the idea of Manifest Destiny. It's not just history, but still happening today."

'This is something we owe'

Hassett said the payment is not charity — it's part of the church's budget of expenses related to owning the property.

"We have money we give away to organizations that are doing good in the community," she said. "This is different from that. This isn't from our charity, or generosity. This is something we owe. That was important to me."

The voluntary land tax is just one piece of what Hassett sees as a multitude of ways in which work can be done to help mend a history that has seen Indigenous people subjugated and erased from social recognition.

"We want to be allies in the sense that, we're going to observe Treaty Day in some way, we're going to try to mark Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Day, and when there's an issue to protest or a legislative issue that's important to the tribes, we're going to pay attention, show up for that, and lend our voices."

Teach The Truth Wisconsin is part of the Wisconsin Council of Churches' effort to educate about U.S. history that includes how structural issues such racism, sexism and marginalization of Indigenous peoples have shaped the country and the effect they still have on society today.

"We're encouraging people to make videos, have community events, or anything that helps people understand how vital it is that we tell these stories and rehearse these histories," said Parker of the WCC. "In a time when there are movements that say, 'That's hurtful, or that makes people feel bad,' it's really important that we understand the truth and the difficult histories that are part of our legacy here in the United States."

Hassett noted that St. Dunstan's stands near an effigy mound, a reminder of the Ho-Chunk who once lived there — and their resilience.

"They were removed, but they kept coming back to their ancestral homelands to care for their ancestors' graves and engage in the historical ecological practices of their people," Hassett said. "Eventually, they were able to buy land and really reestablish a stake in Wisconsin, which is amazing."