

Questions and Answers about Tax Bills due August 1, 2014

By Ali ElSaffar, Oak Park Township Assessor

Over the last ten years, the average annual property tax increase in Oak Park has been 4.6%. This year, however, the tax bill for most Oak Park property owners will be about the same as last year's. Most homeowners eligible for homeowner and/or senior citizen exemptions will experience small tax reductions, whereas most businesses will experience tiny tax increases (three one-hundredth of 1%). These results are due to the first decline in the tax levies of local governments in recent memory, coupled with an increase in assessment appeals.

Tax Levies Fall. The total tax levies of local governments serving Oak Park fell by 1.8% this year. The primary reason for this decline relates to Oak Park and River Forest High School's decision to cut its property tax levy by about \$10 million. This decision, made in response to concerns about the large fund balance the school has been carrying, will be felt in both communities the school serves. Oak Park's share of the tax cut will be about \$7.4 million, and River Forest's share will be about \$2.6 million.

Outside of the high school, all other Oak Park taxing districts increased their tax levies this year. But the decline in the high school's levy exceeded the increases from the other local governments, resulting in an overall reduction in property tax levies.

Appeals Offset Levy Declines. Notwithstanding the decline in tax levies, most Oak Park property tax bills were essentially unchanged. This is the result of assessment appeals filed in 2013.

Under our property tax system, whenever one property reduces its taxes through a successful tax appeal, every other property owner has to pay a little more to insure that all the money levied by local governments is collected. This year, the tax increase resulting from appeals nearly equaled the reduction in tax levies. The result is that those who filed successful tax appeals last year will see lower tax bills. But most other taxpayers will see little or no change in their bills.

Can I do anything to reduce my current tax bill? If you are eligible for a homeowner, senior citizen or other exemption but did not receive one, the Township Assessor's office can assist you in obtaining a revised bill for a smaller amount. If you have received all exemptions for which you are eligible, you likely will not be able to do anything about your current bill.

Do the current tax bills reflect the results of the recent reassessment? No. All Oak Park properties received 2014 reassessment notices in April, but the 2014 reassessment will not influence tax bills until the summer of 2015.

Can I do anything to reduce future tax bills? After mailing reassessment notices in April, the Cook County Assessor's office allowed Oak Park residents to contest their new assessments through an appeal process that ended in May. Although the appeal period for the Cook County Assessor is now closed, local residents will have another opportunity to appeal their 2014 assessed values when the Cook County Board of Review begins accepting appeals from Oak Park.

The Board of Review has not yet announced its 2014 appeal dates, but when it does, residents may call Oak Park Township to schedule an appointment for help preparing an appeal. Residents who want to be notified when the Board of Review begins accepting Oak Park appeals can call the Township to have their names put on the Township's notification list.

Oak Park residents can also attend a tax appeal forum sponsored by the Board of Review and co-sponsored by the offices of the Oak Park Township Assessor and State Senator Don Harmon. The forum will take place on July 30, 2014 at 6:30 PM in the auditorium at Percy Julian Middle School, located at 416 S. Ridgeland Avenue.

Why were tax bills mailed out so early this year? Tax bills were mailed on July 1 in order to comply with a state law setting the due date for second installment tax bills on August 1. Although second installment bills used to be mailed well after July, in the last three years county officials have been diligent in making sure that tax bills are mailed on time. For the foreseeable future, second installment tax payments should be mailed on July 1 and due on August 1.

Tax Levies for Government Units Serving River Forest
2003 Taxes Paid in 2004 (Excluding TIFs and Special Service Districts)
Comparison of 2000 and 2003 River Forest Tax Levies

<i>Unit of Government</i>	<i>2000 Total Levy (Paid in 2001)</i>	<i>2003 Total Levy (Paid in 2004)</i>	<i>Annual Levy Growth</i>	<i>% of Total Tax Bill for '03</i>
School District 90	\$9,967,292	\$10,732,071	2.56%	31.57%
High School District 200	\$7,601,783	\$10,912,152	14.52%	32.10%
Village of River Forest	\$3,895,724	\$4,275,123	3.25%	12.58%
Cook County	\$2,102,675	\$2,413,854	4.93%	7.10%
River Forest Library Fund	\$670,973	\$792,966	6.06%	2.33%
Water Reclamation District	\$1,058,993	\$1,383,177	10.20%	4.07%
Triton College District 504	\$847,196	\$1,030,677	7.22%	3.03%
River Forest Township	\$469,529	\$425,298	-3.14%	1.25%
River Forest Park District	\$1,020,716	\$1,632,225	19.97%	4.80%
Miscellaneous Agencies	\$229,661	\$398,477	24.50%	1.17%

Increases in Oak Park's Tax Levies Compared to Inflation since 1999

