

Tax Bills Bring Modest Increases to most Oak Park Homeowners

By Ali ElSaffar, Oak Park Township Assessor

The recently mailed second installment property tax bills reflect modest annual changes compared to last year's bills, with businesses and most residential properties experiencing increases of 2.6% or less. Many senior citizens receiving the Senior Freeze exemption, however, saw their bills increase by 5.4%.

The driving force behind the tax increases this year is the tax levy increases of local governments serving Oak Park, which combined for an overall increase of 3.2%. This increase is below the limitations imposed on most local governments under the Illinois Tax Cap Law.

The Tax Cap Law allows for levy increases based on the rate of inflation, but only up to 5%. Since the applicable inflation rate for the current tax bills was 7%—above the maximum—Oak Park's elementary school district, library, park district and township were all limited to levy increases of about 5%.

Oak Park's village government, however, decided not to increase its levy at all this year. And the high school increased its levy by 4% even though it could have received a 5% increase. The decisions by the village and high school boards, coupled with the cyclical shifting of Oak Park's share of county government taxes (Oak Park's share went down this year), combined to keep Oak Park's overall levy increase at 3.2%.

Do the tax bills reflect the reassessment of my property value that took place earlier this year?

No. Illinois property taxes are paid in arrears, which means that the 2023 reassessment of Oak Park properties will appear on second installment tax bills in calendar year 2024. The bills that were recently mailed are the second installment of 2022 taxes, which are paid this year, in calendar year 2023.

Why were second installment tax bills issued so late this year? Cook County's second installment tax bills are supposed to be due on August 1 each year. But last year, second installment tax bills were due on December 30 and this year the due date is December 1. The reason for these delays relates to the county tax appeal system.

Second installment property tax bills cannot be issued until all tax appeals are decided, first by the Cook County Assessor's office, and then by the Cook County Board of Review. In 2021, a computer modernization project created compatibility problems between these agencies that led to months-long delays in getting correct data from one agency to the other.

Once the system falls as far behind as it did in 2021, it takes time to catch up. But the catch-up is happening. This year, second installment tax bills are due about a month earlier than last year, and the next second installment tax bills may be due at some time in September of 2024.

Why did senior citizens receiving the Senior Freeze have higher increases than other property owners?

The Senior Freeze exemption provides tax savings for homeowners age 65 or older whose household income is \$65,000 per year or less. The exemption works by freezing a property's assessed value, but it does not freeze the tax bill or the tax rate. Tax rates can fluctuate for many reasons, leading to above-average tax increases for Freeze recipients in some years, and tax reductions in other years. This year featured above-average increases, but most seniors receiving the Freeze will likely see tax reductions next year.

What if I didn't receive the Senior Freeze or another tax exemption on my tax bill? This year, many eligible seniors did not receive the Freeze on their bills because special rules related to the

Covid-19 pandemic came to an end. Before the pandemic, seniors had to renew the Freeze annually by verifying that their household income was below the program’s \$65,000 maximum. The annual renewal requirement was temporarily waived during the pandemic, but this year seniors again have to apply for the Freeze.

If you are eligible for but did not receive the Senior Freeze exemption or other exemptions such as a homeowner or a disability exemption, the Township Assessor’s office can assist you in obtaining a revised bill for a smaller amount.

Can I do anything to reduce future tax bills? The next appeal period is expected to take place when the Cook County Assessor’s office opens for appeals at some time in the spring of 2024. Taxpayers who need help filing appeals or want to be notified of the opening of the appeal period should feel free to call Oak Park Township at (708) 383-8005.

**Tax Levies for Government Units Serving Oak Park
2022 Taxes Paid in 2023 (excluding Special Service Areas)**

<i>Unit of Government</i>	<i>Tax Levies Paid in 2022</i>	<i>Tax Levies Paid in 2023</i>	<i>Levy Growth</i>	<i>% of Tax Bill in '23</i>
<u><i>Oak Park Districts</i></u>				
School District 97	\$89,337,053	\$94,003,675	5.2%	39.1%
High School District 200	\$56,796,448	\$59,129,868	4.1%	24.6%
Village of Oak Park	\$37,197,278	\$37,198,728	0.0%	15.5%
Oak Park Library Fund	\$10,042,704	\$10,544,521	5.0%	4.4%
Oak Park Park District	\$11,033,883	\$11,642,909	5.5%	4.8%
Oak Park Township	\$5,573,046	\$5,876,374	5.4%	2.4%
<u><i>Oak Park's Share of Regional Districts</i></u>				
Cook County	\$8,340,868	\$7,890,084	-5.4%	3.3%
Water Reclamation District	\$7,143,972	\$6,846,616	-4.2%	2.8%
Triton College District 504	\$5,890,972	\$5,546,858	-5.8%	2.3%
Miscellaneous Agencies	\$1,701,836	\$1,757,420	3.3%	0.7%
Overall Total Levies	\$233,058,061	\$240,437,053	3.2%	100.0%

Notes:

1. The levies for Oak Park River Forest High School reflect Oak Park's portion of the school's total levy.
2. The levies listed for regional governments reflect Oak Park's share of the levies of these governments. Oak Park's share of regional levies typically rises in Oak Park's reassessment years, and falls in non-reassessment years. Since tax year 2022 (taxes paid in calendar year 2023) was a non-reassessment year, Oak Park's share of regional levies fell.