

Lakeview Township tax assessment event draws SRO crowd, second chance planned for Sept. 13

BY PATRICK BUTLER

When Michael Cabonargi tells you he's from the government and that he's here to help you, he means it.

He's one of three Cook County Board of Review [BOR] commissioners who act as a kind of appeals court on real estate taxes.

The Board of Review is a "quasi-judicial" panel that acts as a "check and balance" on the Assessor's Office, Cabonargi told a capacity crowd of at least 100 in the community meeting room at the 19th District police station, 850 W. Addison.



"We want to make sure you pay what you should and not a penny more," Cook County Board of Review Comr. Michael Carbonargi tells a standing-room only audience at a recent property tax workshop at the Town Hall police station.

Photo by Patrick Butler

And he wants to hear from you if you have the slightest suspicion you might be paying more taxes than you should.

"Probably the biggest mistake people make is not taking advantage of this," said Cabonargi, who came to the meeting with several staffers to help homeowners get the process rolling.

Taxpayers have until Sept. 18 to request an appearance before the BOR, he said, inviting residents to fill out their paperwork to start the process.

Unfortunately, he cautioned, once a hearing date is set, it can't be rescheduled.

Analysts from Commissioner Cabonargi's office were on hand to take questions and assist attendees in filing their appeals. Those who brought their relevant property information were able to fill out their appeal forms and file them with the Board of Review the same night.

Joining him was State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (12th) who wasn't surprised by the turnout in a community of once stratospheric property values and real estate taxes.

Since the Recession, the biggest investment in most people's lives has been losing money, but property tax levels have often remained the same or gone up because the assessment is set by the assessor but taxes are actually based on the money government taxing bodies spend, not on the value of any particular property. The tax rate [what you'll pay] is set by the County Treasurer after consultation with local taxing bodies like the public schools, libraries, water district and city agencies like the police and fire departments.

Property tax assessment appeal seminars for Rogers Park homeowners

Residents of Roger Park Township will have a similar chance to take their property tax appeals before the Board of Review on Tuesday, Sept. 11, 6 p.m., when Cabonargi, along with Cook County Comr. Larry Suffredin, aldermen Joe Moore [49th] and Debra Silverstein [50th], host a property tax assessment appeal seminars for township residents at the Loyola Park Field House, 1230 Greenleaf.

The seminar will inform homeowners on how to determine whether they were over assessed, where to gather evidence for an appeal with the Board of Review and how to fill out and file the assessment complaint form for the 2012 assessment year. This assessment will be for taxes to be paid in Fall 2013. Rogers Park Township homeowners have until Sept. 18, to submit their complaint forms to the Board of Review.

Taxpayers are encouraged to bring their Tax Bill, Assessment Notice or Property Identification Number to the

"There's no downside to this. It's always in your best interest to at least check. If your assessment is in line with your neighbors, we'll keep it there. If we do anything, it will be to bring it (your assessment) down, not up," Cabonargi said.

According to BOR figures, 75% of the appeals to the panel led to reductions in 2009, while 68% got reductions in 2010.

The average tax saving in 2005 – the last year for which any figures were available – was \$395, the BOR's website noted.

There's no fee to appeal, and even if homeowners got a reduction by the assessor's office, they can still appeal to the BOR, Cabonargi said, adding that further appeals can also be made in court or before the Property Tax Appeal Board.

While an individual homeowner can represent himself, businesses must be represented by an attorney, according to the BOR.

Cabonargi said the Board of Review is located at 116 N. Clark and can be reached at (312) 603-5560. Appeals to the BOR can be filed online at www.cookcountyboardof-review.com, he added.

seminar in order to complete and submit complaint forms at the seminar. For more information call (847) 864-1209 or (312) 603-5542.

"It's great to know that while times are still tough financially, there is a plethora of resources for people to use. Some people in my district are paying more in property taxes than they did for the property itself," said Rep. Feigenholtz, who had talked earlier with a couple from around Sheffield and Cornelia who said their first tax bill was \$455 about 40 years ago.

People today, Rep. Fagenholtz said, are not only looking for every possible exemption, but accessibility. "It's really about being able to talk to a human being and find the appropriate answers at the end of the phone," she said.

Residents who were unable to attend this workshop have another opportunity to receive guidance in their appeals process at a second Property Tax Appeal Seminar that will be held on Thursday, Sept. 13 at the Uptown Library, 929 W Buena Ave.