

How Nassau Assessment Plan Could Affect You

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Nassau County Executive Laura Curran

NASSAU REASSESSMENT

Who will be affected?

Grievors will pay more, but others still carry burden

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Under an executive order from Nassau County Executive Laura Curran, residents who have grieved their taxes extensively will see increases stemming from a planned reassessment to be phased in gradually.

But that also means homeowners who have never or rarely grieved may reach full market value in a shorter period of time and so will continue to shoulder an unfair burden of the county's taxes, critics of the plan say.

Curran signed the order last Monday to limit assessment increases caused by reassessment to 6 percent a year or 20 percent over five years for residential properties, in alignment with state law. She signed it after the county legislature approved her request to borrow \$2.2 million to pay two firms to reassess all county properties.

A Newsday investigation last year found that the county's assessment system shifted \$1.7 billion in taxes over a seven-year period from the 61 percent of residents who successfully appealed their assessments to the 39 percent that hadn't. By reassessing, the county is looking to arrive at correct figures and eliminate disparities.

The effects of the new assessment program will be felt differently across the county, as the rate of grieving within communities varies widely.

In 23 school districts, more than three-quarters of the residential and commercial properties were grieved in the last eight years, according to county data through tax year 2018-19.

In the Jericho and Syosset districts, 87 percent of properties were grieved, followed by



HOWARD SCHNAPP

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— Nassau County Executive Laura Curran

Hewlett-Woodmere and Plainview-Old Bethpage districts, with 86 percent, and Merrick and Rockville Centre, with 85 percent.

Roosevelt, where 45 percent of the properties were grieved, had the smallest percentage. It was followed by Glen Cove with 51 percent, Uniondale with 52 percent, Elmont with 56 percent and Valley Stream 30 at 58 percent.

“We just wanted to make sure that while we built fair-

ness into the system, at the same time, we weren't giving people who didn't have the ability to pay a massive increase in their assessments, which correlates to a large increase in their taxes,” said Presiding Officer Rich Nicoletto (R-New Hyde Park) of the county legislature.

When someone's taxes go down because of a grievance, someone else's has to increase to maintain the same tax levy. So while the phase-in will limit tax increases for those

who grieved, it also will mean those who didn't will have to wait longer before they no longer are subsidizing the group that did.

Legis. Siela Bynoe (D-Westbury) explained, for example, that an assessment increase of “6 percent on someone who is currently at 41 percent of market value . . . is low when you have someone else sitting at 85 percent, and they're going to get phased-in at 6 percent as well.”

The executive order “perpetuates a system where they [those who grieved less] are still shouldering the large majority of the tax burden,” she said.

Chief Deputy County Executive Helena Williams acknowledged the idea that the order “gives the majority of taxpayers protections that their property taxes won't go up with any surprising, huge jumps. The downside,” she said, “is that the people who are closer to fair market value will be getting to fair market value faster than other properties.”

“One of the difficulties of state law is that it doesn't anticipate property values going up greater than 6 percent or 20 percent in five years,” Williams said. “The difficult issue is there is a need to catch up so that people are taxed more closely to their property value, but we don't have a crystal ball. We don't know what will happen to property values.”

Shirley Lassic, 53, a Hempstead resident in Bynoe's district, said she has never grieved her taxes and is beginning to ask questions about the process. “I think everybody should be brought up to the level of taxes they're supposed to be paying together, not some people at this point, not everybody at a different level,” Lassic said.

Asked about the delay in eliminating the inequities for the non-grieving group, Curran pointed to the fact that her predecessor, Edward Mangano, froze the tax rolls.

Curran, in a statement, said, “Those taxpayers who have not grieved in general will reach equalized market value sooner than those who have grieved for the past eight years. Grievors have the protection and certainty afforded by state law. The disparity between grievors and non grievors is a result of the frozen tax roll, which was the tax policy of the prior administration. It is time to end that policy.”

Ahead of the Curran administration's re-evaluation, resi-



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wrong, and something I would fight with tenacity.”

Legis. Arnold Drucker (D-Plainview) said that his residents “didn’t grieve their taxes because they thought they were getting a gift. They grieved their taxes because they were being taxed unfairly. So, yes, I’m concerned that people who grieved their taxes, as well as people who never grieved their taxes, are going to perhaps face an increase, and that’s unfortunate.”

Administration officials said tentative rolls will go out in January 2019, and residents will have until the end of March to file grievances. Tax bills for schools will arrive in November 2020, followed by the county bills three months later.

Preliminary notices will be mailed to residents in October 2018, noting the “true market value” of the home, officials said. The Curran administration is planning a “customer-friendly” approach that will involve justifying the new numbers to residents and answering their questions.

“We’re always worried about property taxes,” Williams said. “But we always want to have a fair and equitable property tax system.”

Hempstead Receiver of Taxes Donald Clavin, a Republican, said uncertainty is high in the dozens of property tax workshops he’s held in recent months. Clavin said many residents and observers are taking a “wait-and-see” approach to see if what Curran is “going to do is going to be successful or not.”

Pat Nicolosi, 61, an Elmont resident and member of Residents for Efficient Special Districts, said he has grieved his taxes for years and worries about a potential 6 percent assessment increase. He said his “income is not keeping up pace with the cost of living and school taxes.”

He also said he has paid a substantial fee to a law firm to appeal his taxes over the years. “I paid out half of my reduction to a law firm, so to take it away from me is like a double punch,” Nicolosi said.

“It’s yet to be seen how it will play out,” said Legis. Howard Kopel (R-Lawrence). “It’s going to hurt some people, and help a lot of people.” *With Matt Clark*



ALL-ISLAND AERIAL / KEVIN P. COUGHLIN

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— Shirley Lassic, a Hempstead resident

Houses along Fortune Lane in Jericho, where the rate of grievances was relatively high.

dents and lawmakers are awaiting the new numbers with bated breath. Many are unclear how a review of the county’s assessment system may affect their own finances or correct years of inequity.

In the communities with a high percentage of grievances, lawmakers expressed concern

about the potential for sharp assessment increases. Adding to the fears of sticker shock is the elimination of state and local tax deductions passed in December as part of sweeping changes to the federal tax code.

“With the loss of SALT deductions, my constituents are already shouldering a bigger

tax burden for years to come, and that is why it’s important for the six percent cap that the County Executive has imposed for her order is both implemented, and upheld,” said Legis. Joshua Lafazan of Woodbury, who caucuses with the Democrats but has no party affiliation.

“The majority of residents have grieved their taxes with regularity,” Lafazan said. “However, my constituents were simply playing by the absurd rules ushered in by [former County Executive Edward] Mangano. Penalizing them with a jump larger than the six percent figure is both