

GTA homeowners face a hit

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Last Updated: 30th September 2008, 3:04am

Homeowners in the GTA are about to get kicked in the assessment.

The Municipal Property Assessment Corp. is in the process of mailing out 4.7 million notices across Ontario that show an average increase in home values of 20%.

Assessments to York Region homeowners are in the mail with the rest of the GTA's notices expected through the middle of next month and into November.

Toronto Councillor Michael Walker warned some homeowners in the city are about to get "whacked."

Levying property taxes on market value assessments alone is "unjust," argued Walker. "I think the average increase in Toronto may only be 20% but there will be a lot above that," he said, noting those above the average almost always end up paying higher taxes. "We could have cases where people are going to have to pay another \$1,500 (in property taxes)."

'SILLINESS'

Outside the GTA -- where property owners are already getting the bad news -- there is concern. "This is getting to the point of silliness," said Ernie Grozier, an 84-year-old Second World War vet.

Grozier, who lives with his wife on a fixed income in a house they own near Markdale in the Municipality of Grey Highlands, said he has been told to expect a 20% assessment hike that will be phased in over four years.

In the last few years, Grozier said his 1,450 square-foot home on the Beaver Valley Ski Club has been dwarfed by some larger monster homes that would sell for around \$750,000 -- and that has been driving the property assessment increases.

The final tax bill won't be known until individual municipalities apply their tax rates on top of the assessments, but Grozier is fearful of an increase on his fixed income.

He estimated his pension income has only about half the buying power it did when he retired 20 years ago.

Walker said he thinks market value assessments should only account for a part of the tax bill, the rest determined by the size of a building or home and the size of the lot.

Market value assessment alone, he said, "creates an inherent instability and uncertainty on the part of hundreds of thousands of citizens. At some point, most particularly for fixed income earners, people are economically evicted through tax reassessment."

"There's a sucker out there and its called a taxpayer, and they've got to punish politicians who provide less service, who don't have focus, and who are raising taxes ... That applies to MPPs, and it applies to city councillors and mayors," Walker said.

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