

# The Assessment and Taxation Process in Illinois

## Frequently Asked Questions (“FAQs”)

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### What is a tax assessment?

The tax assessment is a value ascribed to a parcel of real property, which is then used to calculate the real estate taxes paid by that property. The Assessor is required by statute to estimate the market value of real property. He then applies an assessment percentage to the market value to arrive at the assessment. In all counties other than Cook, property is assessed at 1/3rd of its market value. In Cook, the assessment percentage depends on the property’s classification. As of January 1, 2009, residential property is assessed at 10% of market value, apartment buildings are assessed at 16% of market value (13% in 2010, and 10% in 2011), industrial property is assessed at 25% of market value, and commercial property is assessed at 25% of market value. There are also a number of incentive classifications available which are intended to encourage new development.

### What is the permanent index number?

A permanent index number (“PIN”) is a number assigned to each parcel of real property in the county. It is intended as a short-hand reference to the underlying legal description of the property. The PIN actually refers to the township, range, block, and parcel as reflected on the county parcel maps.

### How does my tax assessment impact my tax bill?

The assessment directly impacts the size of the tax bill. The larger the assessment, the larger the tax bill.

### Who determines my tax assessment?

The Assessor. In Cook County, there is one Assessor for the entire county. In the collar counties of Chicago, there is an Assessor for each township. Downstate, there is generally one Assessor for the entire county.

### How often is my property re-assessed?

In Cook County, property is assessed triennially, or every third year. Elsewhere in Illinois, property is assessed quadrennially, or every fourth year.

**Can my property be assessed each year?**

Nothing prohibits property from being assessed each year. By statute, the Assessor must at least reassess every four years, but may do so at his or her discretion more often.

**My tax bill is \$0.00. Why is that?**

If the tax bill in question is the first installment bill due in March, then you must either have a new PIN number or the bill for last year was \$0.00. If the tax bill in question is the second installment bill due in the fall, then the tax assessment is \$0.00 (resulting in a tax bill of \$0.00) either because the property is exempt from taxation or was assessed as being of no value.

In Cook County, the first installment tax bill is always 1/2 of the prior year's bill. So, if you have a new PIN number, the bill will always be \$0.00 since the bill for the year before was non-existent and, therefore, presumed to be zero. You may have a new PIN because you live in a new development, which was subdivided to create new lots with new PINs, or there may have been a tax division or consolidation in which your old PIN was eliminated and new PINs created.

If your property is assessed at \$0.00, that is either because you are exempt from taxation, or your property is taxable but the Assessor has determined it has no value. If your property has value and is being assessed at \$0.00, we would encourage you to investigate why so you do not receive a back-tax assessment at some future date.

**Can I contest my tax assessment?**

Yes, due process requires that you have the legal right to contest your assessment before issuance of the tax bill.

**How do I contest my tax assessment?**

In Cook County, the assessment can be initially contested before the Cook County Assessor. The assessment can then be appealed to the Cook County Board of Review. Then, a further appeal can be filed to either the Property Tax Appeal Board or the Circuit Court.

In all other Illinois Counties, the assessment can informally be contested before the local Assessor; however, no county other than Cook has a formal appeal process before the Assessor's Office. The first official opportunity to contest the assessment is before the county Board of Review. Then, an appeal can be filed to either the Property Tax Appeal Board or the Circuit Court of Cook County.

**If my tax assessment is lowered, how will this affect my tax bill?**

If your assessment is lowered, your tax bill will generally be lower than what it otherwise would have been.

**Do I need an attorney to contest my tax assessment?**

Yes and no. An individual may contest his or her assessment on his or her own, without the assistance of an attorney. The Cook County Assessor will allow a non-lawyer to file a tax appeal on behalf of another party. However, only a lawyer may represent another party before the county Board of Review or in Court. Since corporations, partnerships, condominium associations, limited liability companies, etc., are legal entities and not persons, only attorneys may represent them. For example, a shareholder who is not an attorney may not represent the corporation in which he or she owns stock.

**Should condominium unit owners file complaints individually or collectively through the association?**

It is more efficient — and generally more effective - for a condominium association to hire one attorney to file a collective appeal on behalf of all homeowners in the condominium association.

**Is it possible to reduce the assessment of my home?**

Yes. Homeowners or their attorneys often obtain assessment reductions as a result of contesting their assessments.

**What are the chances of success?**

The likelihood of success depends on the evidence. The market value placed on the property by the Assessor should not exceed actual market value. If the actual market value, as indicated by a recent sale price or an appraisal, is less than the assessed market value, the taxpayer should prevail. In addition, assessments should be uniform among comparable properties. So, if the taxpayer can demonstrate that comparable properties are assessed lower, then the taxpayer should prevail. However, a successful outcome may necessitate multiple levels of appeal.

**What are the deadlines for filing a complaint to the Assessor?**

In Cook County, the assessment season generally begins in May and continues through the end of the year. The Assessor allows a thirty-day filing window for each township in which complaints can be filed. These filing windows are spread fairly evenly through the assessment season. The filing deadlines are published on the Cook County Assessor's website in advance. No other Illinois county has a formal filing process at the Assessor's level.

**If a complaint is filed, when can I expect to receive a decision?**

Generally, 30 to 60 days after the complaint is filed.

**How will an assessment reduction affect my tax bill?**

If the assessment is reduced, the tax bill will generally be lower than it would have been.

**If I am dissatisfied with the Assessor's decision, what are my appeal rights?**

You may appeal to the Cook County Board of Review and then to either the Property Tax Appeal Board or to the Circuit Court of Cook County.

**What are the deadlines for filing a complaint to the Board of Review?**

The Board of Review begins its session after Labor Day each year. The Board will establish a 30-day filing deadline for each township soon after the Assessor completes his work for the township. Complaints must be filed prior to the end of the filing deadline.

**How will an assessment reduction affect my tax bill?**

If the assessment is reduced, the tax bill will generally be lower than it would have been.

**If I am dissatisfied with the Board's decision, what are my appeal rights?**

You may appeal to the Property Tax Appeal Board or to the Circuit Court of the county.

**What are the deadlines for filing a complaint to PTAB?**

A complaint must be filed to the Property Tax Appeal Board not later than the 30th day following the date of the decision of the Board of Review.

**If a complaint is filed, when can I expect to receive a decision?**

That depends. If the case is resolved by settlement, this can be accomplished in 3 to 6 months, depending on the backlog of cases. If the case proceeds to trial, you could wait 6 to 12 months for a trial and 3 to 4 four months following the trial for a decision.

**Why would I appeal to PTAB instead of Court?**

The PTAB has a lower stand of proof, more relaxed rules of evidence, and a generally faster docket.

**How will an assessment reduction affect my tax bill?**

If the assessment is reduced by PTAB, you will obtain a tax refund, with interest.

**If I am dissatisfied with the PTAB's decision, what are my appeal rights?**

You may appeal the PTAB decision to the circuit court on administrative review.

**What are the deadlines for filing a complaint to Circuit Court?**

Complaints must be filed within 30 days following the issuance of the PTAB's decision.

**If a complaint is filed, when can I expect to receive a decision?**

Currently, cases are resolved in one to two years.

**Why would I appeal to Court instead of PTAB?**

Taxing districts cannot currently intervene in Court cases. Furthermore, the Court cannot direct that the assessment be increased.

**How will an assessment reduction affect my tax bill?**

If the assessment is reduced by Court, you will obtain a tax refund, with interest.