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Fulton County Tax Assessments Skyrocket

By Paul Miller, Atlanta

Preliminary figures from the Fulton County Board of Assessors show the median county-wide increase in property values in 2018 is 28 percent. In the City of Atlanta, the median increase is 33 percent.

The known increase is for residential properties. There is no across-the-board change for commercial properties. Non-residential assessments are escalating at various rates.

NUMBERS MAY CHANGE

The numbers released are preliminary values and could be altered before assessment notices are mailed out on May 22. The board will review and approve the assessments before then.

“We’re painting with, not a scalpel, but a broad brush,” said the county’s chief appraiser Dwight Robinson. “I’m 100 percent sure that on some of these parcels there are errors.”

ASSESSMENT FREEZE NO LONGER APPLIES

This year's reported assessment increases are based on 2016 home values. In 2017, residential values were frozen by former Fulton County Chairman John Eaves.

The assessment freeze was the county’s way of dealing with homeowners’ complaints about drastic assessment increases. The county board decided to keep property assessments the same as the prior year.

Fulton officials can’t freeze property values again this year because the law dictates tax assessments must reflect current market value.

WAS THE FREEZE LEGAL?

Fulton County will not immediately go to court to defend the decision to freeze 2017 property values. The county attorney withdrew the request in Fulton County Superior Court to compel the state Department of Revenue to approve the tax digest it rejected last year. The county intends to file the request again, but needs more time to provide

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documentation for the case. Because the case was dismissed, there is currently no date for the county's court arguments and no timeline for when the 2017 tax digest may be approved.

The case is related to the authority of the Board of Commissioners, and whether they had the ability to freeze residential values. Commissioners did so, citing a law from the 1880s that allowed officials the ability to modify the tax digest.

The dismissal of the case practically guarantees that the county will have to ask for a temporary collection order from the courts for the second year in a row to get permission to collect property taxes.

Last year, the need for the last-minute collection order sent local governments' budgets into disarray. This year, a Fulton spokesperson said the request would be made much earlier.