

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF TASK FORCE
Subcommittee: Social and Economic Disparities

Meeting Notes

Wednesday, September 25, 2019

6:30pm

Matteson Area Public Library

801 School Ave,
Matteson, IL 60443

MEETING START

Meeting Scheduled to Start: 6:30pm.

AGENDA

- I. Welcome/Roll Call.** Two members were noted in attendance and thus quorum was not met.

Name	Present
Representative Mary E. Flowers	Yes
Representative LaToya Greenwood	No
Representative La Shawn K. Ford	No
Representative Marcus C. Evans, Jr.	No
Representative Delia C. Ramirez	No

Name	Present
Representative Sam Yingling	No
Representative Lamont J. Robinson, Jr.	No
Representative Thomas Morrison	Yes
Senator Christopher Belt	No
Senator Robert Peters	No

II. Open Discussion

- I. Representative Flowers opened proceedings. She noted the other members of the Economic and Social disparities subcommittee. Flowers thanked Governor Pritzker for signing the Task Force into law. She spoke to the intend of the Task Force, including the goal of coming up with suggestions to achieve short term and long-term property tax relief. She mentioned a few recent articles in Chicago Tribune and ProPublica that noted investigations found lower-value homes were paying for higher value homes creating a regressive system. The study noted that many wealthy areas were already assessed at a lower level, and then appeals were filed lowering the property tax lower. Flowers compared that to people who were unable to appeal their taxes.
- II. Senator Hasting spoke and said all over his district property taxes was the number one issue with his constituents. Hastings said he was not on the subcommittee but was pleased Flowers was leading the subcommittee. Take lot of steps to alleviate problem like education funding and property tax freezes.
- III. Vera Brooks, Representative Debbie Meyers-Martin's Chief of Staff spoke and noted the Representative regretted her absence, but nots she was on the subcommittee for Assessments and Exemptions, chaired by Representative William Davis.

- IV. Revin Fellows of the National Black Agenda Consortium spoke and said they were not just figuring things out, but activists already had a lot of documentation already. He noted a number of urban plans involving Cook County that have come out without the input of the African-American community. Fellows said that segregation has cost the African American community \$4.4 billion dollars. Fellows encouraged people to read the most recent Chicago Tribune which had a long story on the exodus out of Illinois and Chicago.
- V. Anthony Travis gave an overview of recent Cook County Assessors and argued they were systematically mis-valuing certain homes that punished poor and minority homeowners. Travis said the assessment process was shifting the tax burden onto the poor and minority homeowners. He noted a story from last week that the Cook County assessor reduced assessments for one north shore community out of procedure. Travis noted there were 6,000 government entities in Illinois and called for consolidation and singled out the school districts where most of property taxes went. Travis wanted the schools out of the property tax system and called for 102 school districts.
- VI. Clifton Graham thanked Travis and said Illinois has been over taxed. Graham said Representative Flowers wanted to focus a racial and economic lens on the property tax system to create long- and short-term relief. He said Flowers wanted to make sure it happens. Graham moved to Country Club Hills for below market value because it was in foreclosure 20 years ago. He said the value of his home is now worth less than he paid for because higher taxes have lowered his property's value. He said property taxes were rising in his neighborhood while falling in white communities downtown, despite their rising values. Graham said he's seen businesses leave the area, and the only commercial growth has come from Walmarts who are getting property tax breaks. Graham said realtors are misleading buyers on property taxes and has seen some people's taxes have jump three times in one year after moving in. He said if his family takes over my mother's home, the property taxes raise more than ten times than what it is now. Graham said seniors are being devastated. He said he's appealed numerous times but with no relief. He concluded that loopholes have created unfair racial and economic property tax on his community.
- VII. Anton Seals spoke on behalf of Concerned Residents of Matteson. Seals noted Matteson was 82% African-American and 12% white so he was representing all people. He noted issues related to racial divides and unfair property tax levels are well documented, and noted new reports are not needed. Seals called on legislative leaders to fix the Cook County property tax system and end the process of redlining. He read from a recent report that still found it continues in the South Suburbs and elsewhere in Cook County. Seals pointed to documents he handed out to the crowd, including the testimony of Robert Weissbourd who called for more fairness in the property tax assessment process, the TRAEN report said the hardest part of valuation is providing fair assessments in areas with foreclosures, a Chicago Sun-Times article about a special assessment in New Trier, a Chicago Tribune which says there is assessment process that could reduce property taxes but is not implemented, another Chicago Tribune story detailing how the previous assessor's office had multiple errors, a letter from a former

Cook County assessor giving assessment reductions for airline noise. Berrios letter giving tax reductions for airline noise, and a South Suburb retail study that argued redlining process continues.

- VIII. Pastor Martin Stratton is a Pastor, ex-city planner with the city of Chicago, and real estate broker, and was a Flossmoor resident. Stratton said his home was appraised \$1 million and had \$15,000 in property taxes; he could sell for \$400,000 but property taxes were now \$40,000. He talked about a nearby house that assessed at \$800,000 that sold for \$250,000 but has \$28,000 in taxes. He said there's been more foreclosures in Flossmoor and he said he was going to let his house go. Stratton warned the Southlands will start emptying out without action.
- IX. Melody Seaton was from Matteson and a Pastor. She moved to the area in 2006. She said the death of her husband led to a mortgage modification but still cannot afford taxes. She was a Chicago Public Schools principal, but her pension cannot cover her expenses. She said the flight of businesses from the area has made it hard for her to shop for grocers and to run normal errands.
- X. Professor LaShondra Graves was the founder of a 501 c3 rental assistance organization. Although renters do not own property, property taxes still affect them. If property tax bill is \$1,000 a month that means rent is higher than that, making savings of renters harder. She addressed the crowd and told them to not give up. Without ability to save, she warned next generation will not be able to get ahead. She noted there would be five more meetings soon.
- XI. Nate Sutton owns Sutton Ford in Mattson auto mall, has been in the community for 30 years. Sutton said small businesses owners are also getting an unfair share just like everyone else. Sutton said he pays \$35,000 a month and forced him to expand outside the south suburbs and Cook County. Sutton said property taxes drop 40% just a few miles west. He concluded that on behalf of small businesses, it had become cost prohibitive to do business in the south suburbs.
- XII. William Moore was an attorney with a focus in foreclosure defense. When people do modifications its mostly because of taxes. He said that when banks came under scrutiny recently, the property tax issue was not looked at, which makes mortgage modifications regarding taxes hard. He suggested taxes staying foreclosures when one have pending tax appeal was an easy fix. Moore used to work for the Bureau of Planning. He called for a sales tax that returns part of the tax to the community of the buyer. He further noted that a Philadelphia man owns a couple decrepit malls in area and needs to be held accountable. He called for holding vacant owners accountable and create a program to help families that lost their home to foreclosures. Moore said Republican states have much lower property taxes, and claimed politicians were taking community money and giving it to their friends and families.
- XIII. John Petruszak of the South Suburban Housing Center said that his organization was part of a three part lawsuit with Hispanic neighborhoods - Brighton Park and Logan Square, against former Cook County Assessor Joseph Barrios. Petruszak said that now Assessor Kaegi made a number of campaign promises, and the judge might dismiss the lawsuit on the results of the election. Petruszak said he wants to hold Kaegi accountable and was engaging in negotiation.

- XIV. Seals noted that too many people were not voting in elections. He further noted he invited Cook County Assessor Kaegi to visit the community but had yet to be unable to do so. Seals said there were billions of dollars flowing through the neighborhood, but there was nothing stopping in the area.
- XV. Diane Lewis Sharpe just moved out to Country Club Hills. She said that taxes have been going up every year and despite that, her child's local school was due to close. She said she moved out to the area because she thought her children would have access to good schools.
- XVI. Patrick Peterson lived over in Trinity Creek. Peterson said his community was very nice but lacked businesses. He compared Matteson, a mature community with money in the community, to New Lenox which is pretty new and seemed to have expanding businesses. Peterson complained residents have to go to other communities to patronize businesses, but noted the businesses are not far away so they were still taking their money. Peterson expressed confusion about a local TIF district since the community had the money to support businesses and accused businesses of just waiting to utilize TIF districts. He suggested using TIF funding to help support loans for people who want to buy vacant houses.
- XVII. John Curran spoke next and identified himself as the Mayor's husband. He said he paid \$14,000 in taxes without children in school system. Curran pointed to levies as the problem, instead of assessments. In Matteson there are four high schools that only have 800 students each. Curran said property values reflected the schools. He said he was home association president and he made sure laws were being followed.
- XVIII. Layton W. was from Flossmoor. Layton said this country depends too much on property taxes and had one of the lowest levels of income taxes despite being wealthy. Layton said that wealthy people can just move to avoid property taxes, but they could not escape a progressive income tax. Layton conclude by saying he read the richest 80,000 people had 51% of the wealth.
- XIX. Kevin Sampson bought a house in the area three months ago. Said he heard problems identified, but said solutions were not talked about. He asked what he should do as he did not want to be speaking in four years about how high his taxes were.
- XX. Brian McGraw of Concerned Neighbors of Matteson said the crowd had heard powerful testimony and now needed action. McGraw called on people to ask politicians when they want to raise property taxes. He noted levies went down because we're focused on it. He said no one knows what goes on in Matteson unless people speak out, so people needed to be involved in the process the whole time. Urban League did a study on the wealth gap in 1963, and it was the same as it is today. McGraw said egregious that people are paying so much in property taxes without being part of the process. One of the wealthiest black communities in the nation, so there's no reason why our neighborhood looks that way.
- XXI. LaKia Colquitt said she grew up in the neighborhood and it was beautiful. She then moved to Lockport where she faced racism in white neighborhoods so she came back. She called on the community to stop going to other neighborhoods and giving them their money.

XXII. Seals said there was 3/4ths of a billion of median income in the community. He further said \$1.3 billion was spent between a couple local neighborhoods. Seals called on Senator Hasting to work harder on solving the property tax problem, and invited him to come back to report on progress. Hastings said he had been living in the area his whole life and was extremely proud of his record. Hasting said he's taken a number of actions that preemptively helped keep property taxes lower, like allowing voters to consolidate their local governments, putting half a billion dollars into the school systems. Hasting said he did not understand why there were things like mosquito abatement taxing districts. Hasting the state did not show up on property tax bills but noted elementary schools and high schools have been raising taxes. Hastings encouraged residents to bring the issue up with school districts and local trustees and mayors who had more control over local property taxes.

XXIII. Flowers said the event was to help educate the public on taxes, assessments, and racial inequalities in the system. Flowers said she grew up in Englewood, which used to be a great business district with great schools. Flowers said the community engagement was because people understood they had been robbed of their wealth. Flowers said it will take two hundred years to build up wealth after hundreds of years of slavery. Flowers called on the community to act. Flowers said some changes are going to take time and some changes are going to take a constitution change. Flowers said the wealthiest had to pay their fair share. When legislation will be introduced in Springfield, Flowers called on the community to rally behind their efforts.

XXIV. The floor was opened for more questions.

- i. Shirley Johnson of Olympia Fields called for a 10% property tax across the board. Travis said in California they do it at 2% and there's an uproar over the disparities but said that could be fixed. Travis pointed to the Fair Tax, which would be on the ballot, and would shift the burden off property taxes. Johnson said seniors should not have to pay for taxes
- ii. One person in the crowd asked when this will all happen. Flowers said the Task Force was due to issue a report at the end of October and the process would start then.
- iii. Mrs. Sampson (the wife of an earlier speaker) asked what she needs to do. Graham said she needed to appeal her property taxes. Flowers said that it was a process.

III. The meeting was adjourned around 8:40.