

The Township Assessor might more accurately be called an appraiser. The Assessor does not levy a tax, but rather places a value on (assesses) all property for tax purposes, appraising it at its fair market value.

The County Clerk compiles a list of all lands and lots to be assessed, including those which are taxable, or which have become taxable for the first time. These lists are conveyed to the Township Assessors through the office of the Supervisor of Assessments.

The Assessor must then determine the market value of all taxable property, and assess that property at one-third of its market value. Township assessors use the same principles, techniques and methodologies as those employed by fee appraisers with only slight variations to accommodate the uniformity criteria of the statutes. The ultimate purpose of the assessed value is to proportion the tax burden, as established by the taxing bodies, over all property in a fair and equitable manner based on the value of the real estate.

Under Illinois law, several programs designed to provide property tax relief are available to homeowners. We have prepared this guide to familiarize you with these programs, and to answer the most frequently asked questions. We also have provided definitions of terms which are frequently used in discussing property taxes.

The staff in the Township Assessor's Office will be happy to provide additional information, and we encourage you to contact us if you have questions about these programs.

The Illinois Homestead Exemption Program

What is the Illinois Homestead Exemption Program, and who qualifies?

Through a variety of exemptions, this program lowers the equalized value of your property to which the tax rate is applied to determine your tax burden. As explained below, qualifications and application procedures vary for each exemption. *In all case, however, you must live at the property to qualify for any of these exemptions.* Additional information is available at www.co.lake.il.us/assessor/taxrelief.asp.

General Homestead Exemption

This exemption lowers the equalized assessed value of your property by **\$6,000**. To receive this exemption, you must:

- Have lived on the property on or before January 1 of the tax year; otherwise the value may be prorated for the portion of the year that it was owner occupied
- Have the exemption initiated by the Township Assessor's Office.

Homestead Improvement Exemption

This exemption defers for four years any increase in the assessment of your property due to an addition or other improvement to your home for which the township assessor would add value.

- A maximum of **\$25,000** of equalized assessed value may be deferred under this program.
- The Township Assessor's Office initiates this exemption.

Senior Homestead Exemption

This exemption lowers the equalized assessed value of your property by **\$4,000**, and may be claimed in addition to the Homestead Limited Exemption. To receive this exemption, you must:

- Have lived on the property which is your principal residence on or before January 1 of the tax year: otherwise the value may be prorated for the portion of the year that it was owner occupied by a senior citizen.
- Have reached age 65 during the tax year.
- Apply for the exemption at the Township Assessor's Office. You will need to bring a copy of the deed to the property and proof of age with you when you apply. If the property is held in trust, you will also need a copy of the trust agreement indicating the beneficiary.

Senior Citizens Assessment Freeze Homestead Exemption

This exemption freezes the assessment on your property, but does not freeze the tax rate. This exemption may be claimed in addition to those described above. You need to understand that the actual taxes which you pay may continue to increase based upon the amounts levied by the taxing bodies where you reside (school, park, village or city, township, etc.).

The filing deadline for this exemption is in July of each tax year. Forms will be mailed to all individuals who have a senior homestead exemption in mid-May. To receive this exemption, you must:

- Have fulfilled a property residency requirement as explained on the application form.
- Be age 65 or older.
- Have a maximum household income of **\$55,000**. This household income includes that of all persons using the property as their principal dwelling place on January 1 of the tax year.
- Please note that this exemption must be renewed annually. The Chief County Assessment Office mails applications to all taxpayers receiving the Senior Homestead Exemption.
- First-time applicants can obtain forms from the Chief County Assessment Office or your local Township Assessors.

Senior Citizens Real Estate Tax Deferral Program

What is the Senior Citizens Tax Deferral Program and who qualifies?

This program is designed to allow senior citizens to defer payment of part or all of the property taxes on their homes. This program functions as a loan, with an annual interest rate of 6 percent. Each January, the Chief County Assessment Office mails an informational postcard to all taxpayers receiving a senior homestead exemption informing them of the program and its deadlines.

To qualify for this deferral, you must:

- Own the property, which must be used exclusively as a residence. Please note that joint ownership under this program is limited to you and your spouse.
- Have lived on this or another qualifying property for at least three years, except for periods in which you may have resided temporarily in a nursing or sheltered-care home.
- Be age 65 or older by June 1 of the tax year.
- Have a maximum household income of **\$50,000**.
- Owe no delinquent taxes on the property
- Note: The filing deadline for the program is March 1 of the tax year.

How much may be deferred?

Eligible residents may defer part or all of their property taxes for each year in which they qualify. The maximum which may be deferred (including interest and fees) is 80 percent of the taxpayer's equity in the property.

When must deferred taxes be paid?

Property taxes which are deferred under this program become due when the residence is sold or upon the death of the taxpayer. The deferral may be continued by a surviving spouse who is at least age 55 within six months of the taxpayer's death.

How does one apply for this tax deferral program?

Application for the Senior Citizens Real Estate Tax Deferral Program must be made each year. The applications include:

- A request for information about the taxpayer, his or her income and the property for which the deferral is being sought.
- A request that any joint owners must agree to the deferral.
- Presentation of evidence of adequate insurance on the property.
- Completion of an agreement which sets out the conditions of the tax deferral, including the maximum amount which can be deferred, the interest rate to be charged, and arrangements for repaying the "loan".

Senior Citizens Circuit Breaker Grants

What is a Senior Citizens Circuit Breaker Grant and who qualifies?

This is a State of Illinois program providing low-income senior citizens with yearly grants. The amount of the grant is determined by a formula which takes into account your property taxes and/or rental payments, and your total household income. To qualify for a "circuit breaker" grant, you must:

- Be age 65 or older before January 1 of the tax year. If you reach age 65 during the tax year, you may be eligible for a partial grant covering the months in which you qualify.
- Live in Illinois at the time you file for the grant.
- Have a maximum household income of **\$24,808** for a one-person household or **\$32,016** for a two-person household.
- Obtain an application from the Illinois Dept. of Revenue, and complete and file it on or before Dec. 31 of the tax year.

Mail the completed forms to:

Circuit Breaker

Illinois Dept. of Revenue