

August 3, 2010

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SATELLITE COORDINATES:

Date: 8/3/10

Time: 1:30 PM (CT) – 1:45 PM (CT)

Satellite: AMC 15KU

Transponder: 01

Slot: A-9

Downlink Frequency: 11706.5

Downlink Polarization: V

Bandwidth: 9 MHz

Symbol Rate: 3.978729

FEC: 3 / 4

Data Rate: 5.5

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Leader Cross introduces Property Owners' Bill of Rights that aims to end potential "Pay to Play" in Cook Co. Assessor's Office and Board of Review

(Chicago) Illinois House Minority Leader Tom Cross introduced a Property Owners' Bill of Rights today that aims to put tighter restrictions on political contributions and provide more transparency in an often complex process at the Cook County Assessor's Office and the Cook County Board of Review.

"Illinois House Republicans have been working tirelessly to bring reforms to state government and we believe that similar reforms are needed in the Cook County Assessor's office and the Cook County Board of Review to help curb potential conflicts of interest," said Cross. "As a rule these days, Illinois residents don't believe that politicians are always acting in their best interest. We need to put rules in place to create an environment where the public can again trust elected officials who hold these positions of great authority and influence."

The Cook County Property Owners' Bill of Rights includes six major reforms that would put rules in place to eliminate conflicts of interest and provide more transparency to property owners when appealing their property tax bills in Cook County.

House Bill 6888 would prohibit campaign contributions to the Cook County Assessor and the commissioners of the Cook County Board of Review from any property owner, or any lawyer or law firm that represents property owners, who has a property assessment appeal pending before the Assessor or the Board of Review. The ban on contributions will also apply to political candidates for these positions and to the campaign committees of these officeholders and candidates. It will apply to all property assessment appeals during an assessment year.

House Bill 6889 would prohibit the Cook County Assessor and members of the Cook County Board of Review from being registered lobbyists.

Another bill that the House Republicans will file, will require that the Cook County Assessor and Cook County Board of Review maintain a public log of “ex parte” communications, which is something that many other boards and commissions are already required to do.

The transparency of the appeals process to the public could be greatly enhanced by requiring the posting of additional information on the websites of the Cook County Board of Review and the Assessor’s office.

House Bill 6890 would require public disclosure of each assessment appeal recommendation by Commissioner, Assessor, or staff member within 48 hours of filing on the Board’s or Assessor’s website.

House Bill 6891 would mandate that the Board’s website includes an option to search property assessment appeals by law firm.

“Only a few law firms handle a significant majority of all commercial and industrial property appeals in Cook County, this option to search appeals by law firm would allow scrutiny by the public and add transparency to the process,” State Representative Jim Durkin (R-Western Springs).

House Bill 6892 would require that the Board’s and Assessor’s websites include a series of general statistics on their actions. Each website should cover the actions of the past three assessment years for each township, including the most recent triennial assessment by the Assessor. When the update covers a triennial reassessment of a township, the website update should be posted no more than 60 days after completion of the reassessment. The general statistics required will include, but are not limited to:

- Number of appeals filed at the Board or the Assessor’s Office;
- Number of total appeals (by complaint number) that received an assessment reduction;
- Number of individual, pro-se property owners who filed an appeal;
- Percentage of individual, pro-se property owners (by complaint number) who received an assessment reduction;
- Average property tax savings for individual, pro-se property owners (by complaint number) who were successful in their assessment appeal;
- List of attorneys or individuals representing a property owner, number of appeals (by complaint number) filed by each, and percentage of their appeal cases (by complaint number) that received an assessment reduction; and

- List of law firms representing a property owner, number of appeals (by complaint number) filed by each firm and percentage of their appeal cases (by complaint number) that received an assessment reduction.

“We believe that prompt and full public disclosure of the Board or Assessor’s Office statistics will allow a public review of how these offices operate and make their assessment appeal decisions,” concluded Cross. “It will also permit the public to monitor the role of attorneys and their respective law firms, along with other individuals who represent property owners for a profit, on the assessment appeal process in Cook County.”