

Grand Island revaluation debated

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Housing revaluations haven't been done on Grand Island since 1986. Many town residents made it clear Monday night that they wouldn't mind going another 25 years without them.

More than 50 Grand Island residents gathered at Memorial Library on Monday to hear Town Assessor Judy M. Tafelski explain details behind the town's plan to change the property equalization rate from 46.5 percent of a home's value to 100 percent.

"If it's at 100 percent, every-one's paying their fair share. I need to go on record saying I believe in it. It needs to be done," she said. "We have a lot of properties that are out of whack."

Several residents said the changes would be burdensome in the current economy. They expressed fear that a 100 percent revaluation would scare away potential property buyers and lower real property values.

"I just don't think it's the time. We're in the midst of a recession. It's not right to be raising taxes," said resident Sherry McDonald, a real estate agent.

But Tafelski said raising the valuation is not the same as raising taxes. She denied that revaluation was an effort to extract more money from taxpayers, since rates are determined by a municipality's tax levy.

"The tax levy will stay the same. Each person's piece of what they owe will change," Tafelski said. "Some taxes are going to go up, some are going to go down, and some are going to remain the same."

Critics also were concerned that longtime residents would be hit with a major increase in taxable value, perhaps forcing them out of their homes.

“The biggest hit will be on the waterfront. People won’t be able to live there. They’ll put their houses up for sale for what the assessor says it’s worth, and we won’t be able to sell it for that,” a resident said.

Others railed against not just revaluation, but the concept of paying property taxes as a percentage of a home’s value.

“If I make improvements to my home [to make it more energy-efficient] and it increases the value of my house, I’m being penalized,” a resident said. “That’s the opposite of how it should work.”

Tafelski maintained that many nearby municipalities have gone to a 100 percent