

Mayor keeps pushing for property reval

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. said he favors conducting a new property revaluation in order to bring Orange's property assessments into line with the current real estate market.

Hawkins, who said last week he wants a property revaluation, was upset because the council did not approve his request for a property reassessment. He said the council's action was unfair and it needs to approve a revaluation project.

Hawkins said he has put together a list of reasons for a property revaluation. The reasons included how the state-mandated property revaluation that occurred five years ago, when home property values were high during the peak in the housing bubble, was handled. Hawkins claimed that after the revaluation, tax bills of many homeowners increased from 40 percent to as much as 100 percent.

"In one year, property taxes on homes rose by from \$500 to \$6,000," Hawkins said. "The revaluation shifted more of the cost of government from commercial property owners to homeowners. For example, the White Castle on Central Avenue had their taxes reduced \$30,000 by revaluation at the same time that residential taxes shot up."

Hawkins said he believed that adjustment especially hurt homeowners on fixed incomes. Their



The White Castle restaurant on Central Avenue had its tax bill reduced as a result of the state-mandated property revaluation five years ago, said Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr., who is in favor of a new property revaluation.

pain, however, was spread equally across the city, said Hawkins.

"All homeowners were put in jeopardy of losing their homes, their retirement savings, and their financial security," Hawkins said. "If we conduct a revaluation now that residential values are much lower, we can begin to repair the imbalance between residential and commercial property values and achieve fairness for all taxpayers."

"If the City Council approves the revaluation process, taxes will be based on today's lower market values, not the unfair assessments

of the past revaluation," Hawkins added.

Another reason the revaluation is needed, Hawkins said, is because it could slow the drain on Orange's revenue caused by a large number of tax appeals during each of the years since the revaluation.

"Because of tax appeals, the city lost about \$400,000 in revenues last year," Hawkins said. "That same loss continues every year, but it grows enormously as each year passes with more and more people appealing their assessments."

the benefits. The \$400,000 cost represents approximately \$65 for the average homeowner. If it were spread over five years, that would be about \$15 per year."

In exchange for a relatively few dollars, Hawkins said that many city taxpayers will see their taxes reduced by hundreds or thousands of dollars compared to what they would pay without revaluation.

"Without revaluation, the tax base will continue to go down as smart taxpayers appeal their valuations," Hawkins said. "The taxpayers who can't pay the high cost of challenging their assessments will get hit with tax increases to make up for the lost revenues from those who appealed their assessments."

Councilman Elroy Corbitt said that even though he opposed Hawkins' reassessment request, he was not opposed to a property revaluation.

"A revaluation is more fair than a reassessment. It's also more effective because they have to go inside all of the properties to look around, see if there have been in additions, improvements or upgrades that would have affected the value of home of the property instead of just riding by and doing a reassessment based on surrounding properties," said Corbitt. "In a reassessment, if a property had been sold in a particular area, they use that selling price to calculate the values of the other properties in that area, but that's not fair because every home is different."

"All of that lost revenue has to be made up by the other taxpayers who did not appeal their assessments," Hawkins continued. "Without revaluation, as each year passes, the property-tax burden in Orange will become more and more unfair."

Hawkins said the last revaluation hurt property owners in every ward, but a new revaluation, likewise, would benefit owners throughout the city.

"This is not just a South Ward issue," Hawkins said. "The cost of revaluation is small compared to