

# Push for city revaluation is set to begin

By Chris Sykes  
Staff Writer

Two weeks ago the City Council was asked to vote on a resolution to allow Orange to conduct a property revaluation. One member, however, said the problem was there was no legislation on which to vote.

Councilman Elroy Corbitt said he believed Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. was behind a citizens' revaluation request at the council's Nov. 1 meeting.

"The mayor had about three or four citizens come forward at the last meeting to address the council and encourage us to vote for the revaluation," Corbitt said. "There was no resolution before us for us to even consider. The concern of myself and other members was why they were encouraging us to vote for a resolution that wasn't before us."

Corbitt said he believed it was an unnecessary and ill-timed exercise in trying to sway or affect public policy.

The reason for that, said Corbitt, is that any plans for a revaluation will cost taxpayers money.

"I feel the mayor was behind this because he has done things like that in the past," Corbitt said. "He has made robo-calls, where he reached out to numerous citizens to come out and urge the council to vote for things that he considered to be important to Orange."

"It could be good because you get to hear the views of your constituents," Corbitt continued, "but it could also be bad because you're only hearing from a select group of people who are not necessarily a fair representation of the entire city."

Hawkins said the council's recent refusal to approve a property reassessment his administration wanted is an unfair thing that has happened in the city. He said he has conducted a series of small gatherings in residents' homes to listen to their concerns. One of the issues that Hawkins said is discussed

frequently is the council's failure to approve a property reassessment during the summer.

Since that is the case, Hawkins said, he wants to return the issue of property-value fairness to the council.

"Today, reassessment is no longer possible by law because reassessments must be conducted within a limited period of time after the last revaluation," Hawkins said. "That time window has closed. However, a full revaluation would accomplish the same goals as a reassessment."

Hawkins said a property revaluation is similar to reassessment but is more time-consuming and costs more. Under a revaluation, every property must be visited and evaluated but a reassessment can be conducted without a careful inspection of each property.

"To pass a revaluation, the city would adopt an ordinance, issue notes for a period of five years, and raise one-fifth of the total project cost in each succeeding budget year,"

Hawkins said. The city had sought bids during the late summer but not awarded a contract. Hawkins said the cost would be about \$400,000, with repayment of about \$13 per year for an average assessed property.

Corbitt said it was the first time he has heard any cost figures from Hawkins. He said he wants to check into the mayor's figures. Corbitt noted that even if a revaluation were conducted, it likely would result in a short-term benefit.

"Even if we decide to vote to do this and lower the property taxes on homeowners and others this year, that doesn't mean that it will last. The taxes could go up again next year," said Corbitt. "Why do a revaluation that will reduce taxes when we're just going to have to turn around and raise them again next year? In the words of Mike Tyson: 'That's ludicrous.' If we're going to do it, then let's come up with a plan to maintain low taxes for years to come."