Investigation Launched into Cook County’s Assessment Process

By Bob Tivnan, Chicago

A major investigative review will be conducted into the property tax assessment system in Cook County (Chicago), Illinois.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle announced the investigation following charges that homes in low-income communities are regularly being over assessed, while wealthier properties are undervalued.

“Every property tax assessment system ought to be fair and equitable,” Preckwinkle said during an interview. “The assessment process across the country is complicated and nuanced. I’ve had conversations with Assessor Joe Berrios and he and I have agreed to have a third party look at our entire tax system and try to figure out how we can improve it.”

THE TAX DIVIDE

A coalition of community groups and some local politicians are calling for answers to questions about the Cook County assessment process. This comes following a newspaper series published by the Chicago Tribune titled, “The Tax Divide.” The newspaper’s analysis found that problematic assessments in Cook County place a higher financial burden on poorer residents.

The series showed that the assessor did not fully implement a system that was originally touted as an improved model for property tax assessments. Assessor Berrios now claims that the new model was inaccurate. Berrios also added he would never do anything that would cause minorities to be treated unfairly.

The assessment model was created under the direction of Christopher Berry, a University of Chicago public policy professor. “Bringing in a third party to fix the system is a great idea,” Berry said. “But bringing in a third party to study, yet again, whether the system is unfair would be a waste of time.”