

Will my rising property assessment mean my taxes will go up? What to know

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Property values across Ohio have soared, based on the letters homeowners received earlier this year from their local auditors.

The question on the minds of voters this November as they decide on levies: Will their taxes also soar?

It depends on where you live. And some counties do a better job than others of answering that.

The Enquirer posed that question to Hamilton County Auditor Brigid Kelly, who responded that the impact on each individual's property taxes is unknowable until December when the state will issue final home values.

"People can best determine their new tax bills when they get their final values in December when we know the disposition of levies, and after the state has determined effective rates," Kelly, a Democrat elected last year, wrote in an email to The Enquirer.

Other county auditors have attempted to answer that question even though there are still many factors yet to be determined. (More on those factors later.)

The upshot: A big increase in property value doesn't often mean a big increase in property taxes.

Why has this year caused particular concern?

The booming housing market sparked a historic rise in property values across Ohio. That led to sticker shock among homeowners in Hamilton, Butler and Clermont counties when they received their new tentative assessments from the county auditors this summer.

Those are the three counties in Greater Cincinnati up for reappraisal this year. Each saw property values rise countywide between 23% to 38%.

What is a reappraisal?

County auditors conduct a full reappraisal of properties every six years for tax purposes and update each appraisal every three years based on market data. The 2023 appraisal in Hamilton County is the full reappraisal, which includes the auditor's staff viewing the outside of properties as well as using market data. Butler and Clermont counties had the three-year update.

Counties have to use guidance provided by Ohio's Tax Commissioner. The commissioner issues recommended property valuation increases for counties using the last year of its home sale data.

Auditors try to quell fears

Kelly and others have tried to quell fears people have about how much their taxes will go up. They've repeated the mantra that a 10% increase in property values doesn't mean a 10% increase in taxes. People, however, are left to speculate on what it'll mean for their individual taxes.

"The bad news is, we can't give them a simple formula," Kelly said at a recent meeting of the Hamilton County commissioners. "And we can't give them any kind of estimate until we know the final values of the effective rates and disposition in December."

Some auditors around the state, however, have tried to answer that question.

How did Franklin and Clermont counties answer residents' questions?

At least two Ohio counties allow property owners to estimate what their new tax bill will cost based on the latest appraisals, Franklin County in the Columbus area and Clermont County in the suburbs east of Cincinnati.

Residents in those counties can type in their addresses on a county-run website to get an estimate of how much their new tax bill will cost. Both calculators have a litany of caveats the calculator can't take into account, such as whether property tax levies will get passed in November, the final assessments from the state in December and other factors.

A message to the office of Clermont County auditor Linda Fraley, a Republican, wasn't returned. In Franklin County, auditor staff took a year to create the database after the previous reappraisal in 2020, Franklin County Auditor Michael Stinziano told The Enquirer. It's called "Know Your Home Value."

Three years ago, the two most frequent questions he received were: "How much would my property value increase?" and "How would that affect my taxes?"

"It's been a helpful tool to show people, instead of me just explaining to people, your value can go up and your taxes could go down, your value could go down and your taxes could go up," said Stinziano, a Democrat. "That's why we created it."

The Franklin County calculator also allows people to put in a specific tax levy.

Clermont County has put a similar tool on the auditor's website under the ["2023 Triennial Update"](#) link. It takes you to a map where property owners can look up their property.

What do Hamilton County and other counties have?

Hamilton County and Butler County auditors have a field on their webpage that can calculate the taxes based on the previous valuation. It doesn't try to predict how the new valuations will impact taxes. Hamilton County doesn't provide that.

For Hamilton County, the calculator is not easy to find. It's an empty field on each property report under the tax distribution tab.

Kelly, in an email to The Enquirer, said they will consider developing an estimator similar to Franklin County's.

"We do not have an estimator planned for this cycle, but are considering it for the future," Kelly wrote.

Butler County's auditor has put a link to its tax calculator on its home page, but, like Hamilton County, it doesn't take into account the raised property values throughout the community.

What do the estimates show?

By typing in some sample properties in Franklin and Clermont counties, it showed a large jump in property value resulted in a much smaller increase in taxes – or even resulted in a decrease.

For instance, a house valued at \$405,600 in the Northmoor neighborhood of Columbus went up in value 32%, but the taxes on the property could end up going up 1% or down 9%, according to the estimator.

In Clermont County, a home in Union Township at \$321,000 went up in value 20%, but the taxes are projected to go up 7%, according to the calculator.

A wide disparity between the increase in property values and the increase in taxes is not unusual.

During the last reappraisal in 2020, residential property values in Hamilton County went up 14% while the average property tax bill went up 6%, according to the Hamilton County auditor and treasurer.

In 2020 in Franklin County, property values increased 20% while the average tax bill increased 7%, according to the Franklin County auditor.

Why do other people's rising values help keep taxes low?

When other people's property value rises, that helps keep your individual taxes low. State law limits most property taxes to bring in a set amount.

For instance, in Hamilton County, the levy that pays for the Cincinnati Zoo brings in \$7 million annually. That means no matter how much more property is worth, the levy will still just bring in \$7 million.

So the more valuable Hamilton County property becomes, the lower the zoo tax rate for the individual.

What part of the bill actually goes up?

Since the law limits most property taxes to a fixed sum, an increased home value impacts a small portion of one's tax bill, about 1%, according to officials.

This is the first 10-mills of a property tax bill. Mills are the measurement by which Ohio governments calculate levies. They're one-thousandth of a dollar or \$1 for every \$1,000 of assessed value. A home is taxed on 35% of the appraised value.

Based on Ohio law, the first 10 mills of a property tax bill can't be voted on or taken away, so they go up and down with property values. It accounts for a small portion of the property tax bill. So the increases usually are minimal.

In some areas, certain school districts have a 20-mill floor that goes up and down with taxes. In those areas, property valuations can have a bigger impact.

What does that mean in terms of taxes?

If your property rises in proportion to the surrounding jurisdiction, your taxes will likely remain the same or could even go down. If your property increases much higher than other properties in the jurisdiction, say 30% compared to 10% countywide, then your taxes will go up.

Why is it so difficult to answer?

Because each property is in many different property tax jurisdictions with different rates and millage. There are 117 different taxing districts in Hamilton County, 65 in Butler County and 140 in Franklin County.

So each property is different. And while some properties could see a few percentage point increase or decrease, others, such as those in Middletown in Butler County, could see much higher tax bills. Property values in this working-class town shot up 40% and, because of the specific types of taxes in place, could have tax bills go up 20%.

"So even for some neighbors, it's different, one side of the street to the other, the impact of a value increase to their taxes," Stinziano said. "That's why people voting is so important."