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Cook County Property Tax Bills to Have TIF Information.

The next set of Cook County property tax bills will show for the first time how much of each bill is going into controversial special taxing districts known as TIFs, county Clerk David Orr announced Thursday.

About 12 percent of county taxpayers own property that is in a tax increment financing district. Those districts are set up by the city and suburbs to divert money to economic development efforts. But critics contend many municipalities, including Chicago, have turned them into slush funds to pay for pet projects.

"The tax bills will be in the mail soon, but for the first time taxpayers will be able to see exactly how much of their money is going into the TIF fund," Orr said, referring to the second installment of property tax bills that will be due Aug. 1, about a month after they are mailed out.

Previous year's bills had a line item for TIF districts, but without the exact amount for each property. Instead, it referred taxpayers to a website that just showed the percentage of the bill that went to TIFs. From now on, the amount and percentage will be broken out on the bill, just as they are with each taxing agency.

In one example released Thursday, a TIF district centered around 43rd Street and South Cottage Grove Avenue will take a \$1,739.42 bite out of one homeowner's property taxes, accounting for 85 percent of the bill. But those percentages can vary dramatically even between neighboring properties, because they depend on the values of those particular parcels at the time the TIF is established.

Orr's office also announced that Chicago homeowners can expect tax bill increases of .5 to 1.5 percent, although those increases could be higher or lower, depending on the individual property's assessed value and any changes in various exemptions afforded to homeowners and seniors.

"That will create individual fluctuations, which is why it's rather difficult to say every taxpayer is going to receive 'X' amount of increase or decrease," said Bill Vaseopoulos, the clerk's director of real estate and tax services. "It's a case-by-case basis."

City bills are rising primarily because of increases enacted by Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, Vaseopoulos said.

In the suburbs, tax increases could be as much as 2 percent, although those increases will vary from suburb to suburb and property owner to property owner, Vaseopoulos said.

"There will be increases, but relatively small," in part because about a third of taxing districts were limited to maximum increases of 1.7 percent, or the rate of inflation, under Illinois tax cap laws, Vaseopoulos said. The overall amount of taxes to be collected by all 1,500 taxing agencies is \$12.1 billion, an increase of about 1 percent.

This year's increases are generally lower than in previous years, Vaseopoulos said.

Orr has long worked to shed light on the amount of money collected by TIF districts. In those districts, any increases in property taxes that result from higher assessed values are paid into a special fund for up to 23 years. Money in those funds is then used to promote economic development, largely by paying for bricks-and-mortar improvements in the area.

The amount of total taxes to be paid by Chicago property owners this year is nearly \$4.3 billion, according to data from Orr's office. The city expects about \$375.9 million to flow into 151 TIF districts, according to the city budget. More than one in five city properties lies within a TIF district.

June 19, 2014|By Hal Dardick | Tribune reporter

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