

# Incline group withdraws petition for rollback in property tax levels

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The door might be shut for 9,000 Incline Village homeowners to be considered for a rollback in property taxes for the fiscal year starting July 1 because of a dispute about procedures within the Washoe County Board of Equalization.

The Village League to Save Incline Assets voluntarily shut one door when it withdrew its petition Friday for Incline and Crystal Bay residential land values to be rolled back to 2002-03 property tax levels, as they were for 2006-07. While an appeal is pending, the reduction could cost the county \$12 million to \$13 million in tax refunds.

League officials said they wanted to avoid a legal battle with the district attorney's office.

"We would have been in court hearings for eons," said Maryanne Ingemanson, league president.

Ingemanson said she assumed the board would take action to equalize or in this case reduce property values for all 9,000 homeowners, as requested Feb. 12 by former board chairman Steve Sparks.

But no hearing has been scheduled.

On Friday, board member Gary Schmidt asked why the hearing hadn't been set for Wednesday as Sparks requested. Schmidt said Sparks also agreed to Schmidt's request for an agenda item to lower property values for all of Washoe County if Incline values were reduced.

Nancy Parent, deputy county clerk, said she didn't believe Sparks told her to put the issues on the agenda.

New board chairwoman Patricia McAlinden ignored Schmidt's request to set a hearing date for March 5 and said she wanted to review the situation. She asked the clerk to prepare a report by today on what really happened at the Feb. 12 meeting.

John Bartlett, special deputy district attorney for the board, said in an interview it might be too late to schedule the hearings because the board must conclude its business by Wednesday. That is so any appeals can be made to the state Board of Equalization by March 10.

But Suellen Fulstone, league attorney, said the deadline is not set in stone, and the board voted to equalized property values for this year last March.

Les Barta, an Incline league member, said this appears to be another attempt by the county to obstruct justice. But Schmidt said it's simply a clerical mistake.

Sparks resigned Feb. 16 after receiving a critical letter from District Attorney Richard Gammick. Gammick said his office was dropping the board as a client because it refused to follow his lawyers' advice.

County finance director John Sherman also referenced the upcoming board equalization hearing when he spoke to the state equalization board on Feb. 15.

Sparks has said he asked for the equalization hearing after the board voted on Feb. 12 to lower property values for about 30 Incline homeowners.

That is similar to what happened this fiscal year.

Last March's board decision to lower land values for all of Incline Village was held in abeyance until the Nevada Supreme Court ruled on Dec. 28 in a case of 17 Incline Village homeowners. For the 17, the court upheld a Carson City district court decision that tossed out methods used by the assessor in 2003-04 for grading Lake Tahoe views and beaches and rolling back property values to 2002-03 levels. The court said the county made up rules that had not been approved by the state.

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