

State lawmakers are making counties mislead you on property tax notices

Iowa's 99 counties are spending your money to mislead you about property taxes. But don't blame the people at your county courthouse. The Iowa Legislature is forcing them to do it.

Over the past week, Iowans across the state received taxpayer-funded mailings that distorted the reality of property taxes in this state.

Last week, I got my state-mandated property tax notice from the Scott County auditor, and it informed me that if a \$100,000 home went up 10% in assessed value, the taxes imposed by my county for this fall and next spring would rise 12.3%.

But my property value didn't go up 10% last year. It didn't change. I'm sure this is the same for most people. Why? Because 2024 wasn't a reassessment year. These occur in odd-numbered years. The local assessor's offices in this county have said only a small percentage of parcels (about 10-15%) were updated last spring. Many of those that did see changes were due to new construction.

In other words, the 10% scenario described in the mailing isn't based in reality.

Yet, Scott County taxpayers are being forced to spend thousands of dollars to spread this fairy tale.

The county auditor says the mailing cost \$40,474.

Iowa legislators mandated these notices as part of a larger tax bill they approved a couple years ago.

At the time, they said they were trying to increase transparency. And to be fair,



ED TIBBETS
Guest Columnist

there is some useful information in these mailings, such as tax rates and the dates of public hearings.

However, the part purporting to describe individual tax bills for later this year and early next — the part people will be most interested in — is bunk.

The notices say the 10% jump in property value is hypothetical, but according to local governments, this notice will inevitably lead to angry phone calls from people who mistakenly believe they're in for a bigger tax bill.

I should note that this year, 2025, is a new reassessment year for the property taxes to be paid in 2026 and 2027, and it is possible people are now seeing some noticeable increases in their assessed values. I did. I'm told Davenport notices are expected to go out in the next week or so, and that residential assessments are up 8.9% overall. However, like in 2023, the residential rollback the state applies this fall will blunt

most of the impact when it comes to taxable values, which is what are used to calculate the actual taxes we pay.

The rollback, by law, ensures the statewide residential taxable value does not grow by more than 3%.

Yes, I know this can all be pretty confusing, but it might be instructive to know that in 2023, even after the big assessment shock we got that spring, the rollback applied by the state meant about 62% of parcels in Davenport actually experienced a decline in taxable values, and only 12% of parcels saw an increase in taxable value of 10% or more, according to my analysis of city data.

Anyway, back to the misleading notice.

In a presentation a few weeks ago before the Polk County Board of Supervisors, a local budget official explained that rather than the 11.4% increase the mailing misleadingly describes to taxpayers there, the increase in county taxes will be just 1.3% for urban taxpayers who saw no change in their assessed property value. And that increase, they say, is only happening because of a small change in the residential rollback approved last fall by the state that will slightly affect taxable values.

Yet, Polk County officials said the state told them they could not include their own information in these notices to provide taxpayers the correct figures. Instead, county officials are being forced to mail the misleading information. And pay for it, too. With your tax money.

It's much the same story in Scott County. The county has put a statement on its

website pointing out the increase in net taxable value countywide for 2024 was 2.1%. Individuals will see varying results, but the point is this: The vast majority of homeowners did not see a 10% increase in their property values. And they will not see double-digit increases in the taxes they pay this fall and next spring.

That's the reality. But what also is reality is most taxpayers tend not to pay attention to anybody's property values but their own. So, when the state can force local governments to send an official notice to taxpayers suggesting a double-digit tax increase may be in the works, even if it's for somebody else, it is much easier to get Iowans to believe property taxes are out of control.

This, of course, isn't happening in a vacuum.

Members of the state Legislature, mostly those in the Republican majority, and local government officials have been arguing for years about whether the locals are wisely using property tax dollars.

This is a fair argument to have. I think both sides have made some good points. But when lawmakers can use the power of the state to force local governments to mail a deceptive notice to taxpayers that distorts reality, then something has gone very wrong.

Ed Tibbets, of Davenport, has covered politics, government and trends for more than three decades in the Quad-Cities.

WAPELLO

Continued from page 1

Van Buren and North Second Streets have been selected for the first part of what city officials hope will become a multi-phase improvement project.

Phase I building owners have committed to providing 25 percent of improvement costs, with the city providing another 25 percent and the grant meeting 50 percent of the expense. The façade improvements are expected to restore many of the buildings' historic features, some of which have been covered by previous renovations.

Shafer said work would begin later this year. He did not anticipate street closures, though sidewalks may be affected.

Big logs not allowed

The city will be notifying tree companies that large logs and branches will no longer be allowed in the city's yard waste disposal site in the South End Park, Shafer said.

He indicated the larger debris often smolders after the city conducts a burn at the site, and shifting winds can blow the smoke back into town.

Public hearing news

Prior to its regular meeting, the council held a public hearing on the city's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Proposed Property Tax Levy. There were no public comments during the hearing.

Shafer said the City Regular Tax Rate for FY 26 of just under \$13.31 will be about 38 cents below the current FY 25 rate, which was about 34 cents lower than the FY 24 rate.

"Seventy-two cents in two years is pretty good," he said.

The city council must still hold a public hearing on the proposed FY 26 budget. That hearing is scheduled for April 17.

Fire department busy

Wapello Fire and Rescue Assistant Chief Jarad Kraft reported there had been 41 department calls in March, including 24 medical calls and 17 fire calls.

Kraft reminded the council of the upcoming fish fry on April 5 at the current fire station, starting at 5 p.m.

Bi-weekly updates on the new fire station

construction will be posted on the department's Facebook page, he said. Kraft also reported several firefighters will travel to Breda to take delivery of the new township pumper truck.

In other news

- The council approved a resolution resetting a loan agreement authorization date. The loan is to help cover expenses for the construction of the new fire station.
- The council had originally set April 3 as the authorization date, but city clerk Mike Delzell reported the required paperwork for the authorization had not been completed yet.
- The council approved the hire of Sarah Bockes as the seasonal manager of the city's swimming pool, at a salary not to exceed \$6,000. It also approved the hiring of seasonal lifeguards for the pool. Shafer indicated a few more lifeguards were still being recruited.
- The council agreed to donate \$50 donation to the Wapello Community Club Easter Egg Hunt.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Submit a community activity by calling the Wapello Morning Sun at (319) 523-4631 or by sending an email to lpc@louisacomm.net by Monday at noon.

April 12
Meet your local leaders and organizations in Morning Sun from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, April 12, at the Morning Sun Community Center. Event is organized by the Morning Sun Community Fun and Mellinger Memorial Library.

Prom for Louisa-Muscatine High School will be April 12. The theme is "Once Upon a Time." Grand March is 4:30 p.m., with Dance from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. at Myer's Wedding Barn, Sperry.

Sombrero night fundraiser for Grandview Fire and Rescue will be Saturday, April 12, beginning at 4 p.m. at the fire station, 206 N. Jefferson St., Grandview. Menu includes take-and-bake enchiladas and tacos along with fresh enchiladas and tacos. Pre-order by Monday, March 31. Online forms are available on the Facebook event page.

April 18
Have lunch with box turtles, feel furs and skulls, and enjoy spring with a spring break picnic planned for Friday, April 18, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Virginia Grove park.

May 3
Second annual Made in Morning Sun event will be held 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. May 3 on Division Street in downtown Morning Sun. Check out local vendors, listen to live music, and play some games.

LICENSING

Continued from page 1

In FY 2024 the treasurer's office collected \$38,995 in drivers licensing revenue, but the county's portion was only \$12,523, with the rest going to the state of Iowa. Total revenue collected for vehicle registrations and related work was \$4,285,256, with the county portion \$130,230.

Frank also reported the county collects \$7 per license issued, although that amount could be raised to \$10. She estimated that could increase the county's portion of revenue collected by \$2,000-\$3,000. She hasn't started paperwork to change the collection amount due to uncertainty over the future of the service.

Frank said that six members of her staff had quit over the past five years and the stress of driver licensing services, including going out alone with strangers for driving

tests, contributed to turnover.

Losing a position in the office also contributed to high stress levels, as remaining employees took on the duties of the eliminated position, she said.

Hardin indicated that terminating driver licensing would help county finances and staff stress. He said that, regardless of the future of driver licensing services in Louisa County, the eliminated position in the treasurer's office would not be restored.

Maine said that cutting the driver's licensing services could be a double-edge sword from a financial viewpoint. He said the county would definitely lose the revenue the service generated, but the expenses were hypothetical, apparently due to the four-member staffing level.

Hunt said he could see both sides of the issue and asked if the county could reduce

the hours services were offered. Frank said that doing so would not resolve safety concerns over solo staff conducting driver tests.

Reducing hours could be a viable option if the 28E agreement permitted it, Frank continued. She said, as the office holder, it would be her responsibility and not the supervisors' to establish the schedule.

In other action

The supervisors:

- Tabled final approval of the county's five-year secondary roads plan, after county engineer Adam Shutt said the DOT had some questions over the plan's budget;
- Approved liquor licenses for Conesville Event Grounds, LLC; and Evergreen Entities, LLC (Ship's Place);
- Received an update on the secondary roads department from Shutt.

Mutual Telephone Fiber to the Home IS NOW COMPLETE!

Look at these new packages!!

DOWNLOAD SPEEDS	UPLOAD SPEEDS	
50 mbps	50 mbps	\$49.95
100 mbps	100 mbps	\$59.95
200 mbps	200 mbps	\$69.95
400 mbps	200 mbps	\$79.95
Up to 1 GB	200 mbps	\$99.95
w/free router		

No Data Caps or Modem Rental Here!

Mutual Telephone Co.

of Morning Sun 319-868-7636

We offer free basic computer service. Ask Us!

TOLL FREE 24-7 INTERNET TECH SUPPORT 1-866-811-8769

Published by Sycamore Media Corp.

Wapello Morning Sun

P.O. BOX 286, WAPELLO, IOWA
Phone: 319-523-4631 | FAX 319-523-8167

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

In Louisa County: \$55.00
Elsewhere in Iowa: \$65.00 · Out of State \$75.00

The first insertion of your advertisement is proof of publication. In case of error, notify us at once. Adjustments will be made on the basis of the first appearance only. No cancellations or copy change made after insertion.

The advertiser and/or advertising agency shall pay for the attorney fees and for any judgments against the publisher that are caused by the publication of any advertisements submitted by or published at the direction of the advertiser and/or advertising agency.

If publisher shall fail to publish public notice or advertising as required by an order, in whole or in part, or shall make errors in such notice, publisher liability therefore shall in no event exceed the amount of the charges allowed by law for the publication of the notice which was not published in accordance with an order.

E-MAIL: lpc@louisacomm.net
Office hours: 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday;
9:00 a.m. - Noon Wednesday and Friday

Trevi Mayfield, President tmayfield@sycamoremedia.net
Donna McGowan, Circulation
Jenna Murray, Receptionist/Composition lpc@louisacomm.net
Wendy McCart, Advertising wmccart@sycamoremedia.net
Jim Rudisill, Reporter

THE PUBLISHER RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REFUSE ADVERTISING

OFFICIAL LEGAL NEWSPAPER FOR THE FOLLOWING:

Louisa County and City of Wapello, City of Oakville, City of Grandview, City of Letts, Wapello Board of Education and Morning Sun School Board and City Council

The Wapello Morning Sun (USPS #665-880) is published weekly (every Thursday) by Sycamore Media Corp. 301 James L. Hodges Ave So., PO Box 286, Wapello, IA 52653

POSTMASTER Send address changes to The Wapello Morning Sun, PO Box 286, Wapello IA 52653

WAPELLO MORNING SUN IS A MEMBER OF

IOWA NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION