

Letters to the Editor



In the March 9 magazine's cover story, City & State's Jon Lentz reported on the inconsistencies in New York City's property tax system, including the widely varying effective property tax rates from one neighborhood to the next.

City & State highlights a most glaring inequity in New York City's real property tax system. The most glaring issue involves property tax assessments. Something remains really wrong when a system perpetuates inequities such as a co-ops along the perimeter of Central Park paying less—based on effective tax rates—than a typical homeowner. And as City & State highlighted, the inequity extends to certain properties in other neighborhoods, including a home in Park Slope.

For more than three decades I have followed, commented and proposed reforms to New York City's real property tax system. I have been published many times on this topic dating back to law school.

New York City implemented its current system of real property taxation to prevent an unfair increase on middle class, modest- and low-income homeowners threatened by the Hellerstein decision a generation ago. The same formula that protected those folks of more modest means evolved to provide an unintended enormous windfall to the wealthiest, serving up tens of thousands of dollars saved annually for those at the very top.

When I first proposed a classified system in a 1979 article published in Hofstra Law School's *Conscience*, I anticipated exemptions and circuit breakers to keep down taxes for those in modest circumstances. As I wrote then, these "devices would allow the City to increase its tax rate to

better capture value appreciations on owners of high-values residences."

Over the years, I shared solutions to fund the needed tax reforms for homeowners, co-op and condo owners and renters. The STAR program's data supports my calculus. Readers can view many of my reports, statements and op-eds on this topics at StrategicPublicPolicy.com.

My reform proposal identifies where to impose equity based on a property's use and occupancy; it identifies substantial revenue (\$5 billion); and it identifies how to employ this revenue to address inequities. Most agree we need to keep housing affordable in this city. Property tax reform goes a long way to ensuring modest housing that predominates in Classes 1 and 2 remains or returns to affordability. Property tax reform helps give New York City small businesses a break.

—**Corey Bearak**, government and public affairs counselor

While real estate tax reform is an important issue and must be addressed, it is a very complicated matter. What seems fair mathematically may bring about significant hardships for long-term residents, who have declining or fixed incomes but are asset rich based on home values. What seems to be fair can cause great hardship and dislocation. This is a subject that should be approached with great sensitivity and thoughtfulness. The mayor and speaker should be applauded for slowing down the process.

—**Howard Hecht** (via cityandstateny.com)

In a special section on education, City & State's Sarina Trangle reported on the public's lack of access into the meetings of education planning groups called *School Leadership Teams in New York City*.

The city is wrong on at least three levels: School Leadership Teams have more than advisory powers, as re-affirmed by commissioner decisions and state law; they are also public bodies, according to the legal definition of that term, and thus subject to open meetings law; and any meeting in a school must be open to the public, according to state law.

—**Leonic Haimson**, founder and executive director, *Class Size Matters* (via cityandstateny.com)

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