

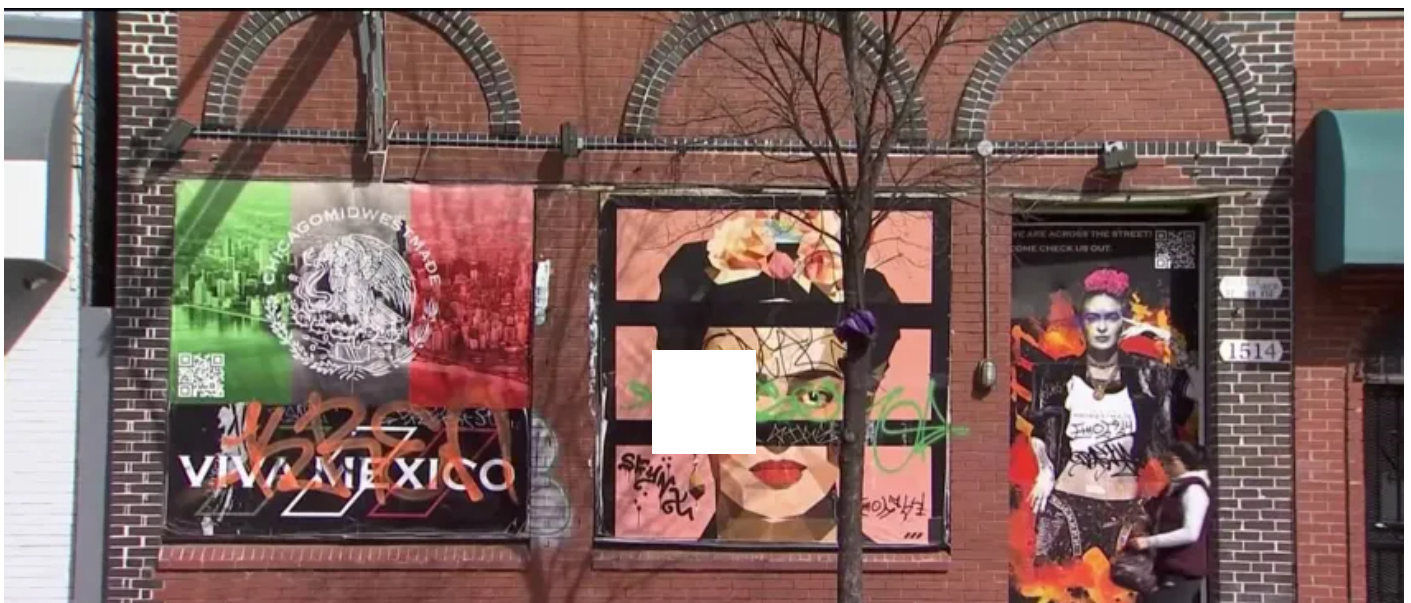


## PILSEN

# Pilsen residents push referendum to offset property tax increases

Several Pilsen homeowners and business owners saw property tax bills triple in recent years

By **Courtney Sisk** • Published March 12, 2024 • Updated on March 12, 2024 at 6:59 pm





Lifelong Pilsen residents are fearful the stark rise in property taxes will push them out of the neighborhoods they grew up in, NBC Chicago's Courtney Sisk reports.

Lifelong Pilsen residents are fearful the stark rise in property taxes will push them out of the neighborhoods they grew up in.

That's why groups such as "El Pueblo Manda" introduced a referendum for the March 19 primary.

The question will ask the 25th Ward's 9th precinct residents to vote "yes" or "no" to a referendum asking "should the government provide assistance if your bill increased by more than 40% to help pay your property tax bill with TIF funds?"

Several homeowners saw increases between 40-60%, while others had their property tax bills triple after the last reassessment.

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According to 25th Ward Ald. Byron Sigcho-Lopez, TIF dollars cannot currently go directly to home or business owners for property taxes. He said this referendum, if passed, would be the first step to making that change.

"This will hopefully help us with a mandate to go to the state to change some of these statutes so perhaps there can be more direct help in specific cases," he told NBC 5.

The increases are hitting lifelong home and business owners the hardest.

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"My grandmother sacrificed to buy this building," said Pat Gonzalez, who owns the home her grandmother bought in 1954. "We want to keep it in our family... Initially my taxes tripled. So, I went from paying \$4,000 in the second half and it went to \$12,000."

She appealed the increase, and was able to lower the tax bill to \$10,000. It still wasn't low enough to provide comfort.

"I'm semi-retired and I have to work more hours," Gonzalez said. "I didn't have a big retirement fund, but I had to dip into that."

She's not alone. Aracely Aguilar has owned a business on West 18th Street for 44 years. In Spanish, she told NBC 5 the increase in property taxes forces her to continue working at 78 years old.

Geoff Smith, Executive Director of the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University, said Pilsen and Little Village have both seen some of the biggest property tax increases out of any neighborhood in the city.

"For a lot of those long-term owners with modest incomes or fixed incomes, their income hasn't increased at the same rate as their property tax bill," he said. "And that puts additional pressure on those homeowners."

Smith said Pilsen in particular has recently become attractive to higher income buyers and developers, which contributes to the rise in property value, and therefore taxes.

"It's important for folks to stay in the community," he said. "But at the same time, we're seeing



challenge.”

Residents feel they're being pushed out by those higher income buyers and developers.

“It’s unjust what they’re trying to do to us, kick us out of our neighborhoods,” one speaker said at a news conference Tuesday.

“Everything we have here we fought for nobody gave it to us,” said Laura Paz, a member of El Pueblo Manda. “So now that it’s this cool, nice community they want to take it away from us. That’s why they put up the taxes, there’s no doubt about it.”

Only 9th precinct 25th Ward voters will be able to vote on the referendum during the March 19 primary.

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