

## Relief for Joburg rates objectors

Relief is in store for 40 000 residents who believe their properties were overvalued by the City of Joburg in its new general valuation roll released last month.

The city has announced that property owners who lodged objections will be allowed to continue paying the existing rates they are currently paying, and not the inflated rates, as from July 1.

However, this is on condition that they continue to pay their rates as normal and, should their objections not be successful, they will have to make backdated payments from July 1, with interest.

The average increase was about 18.5% in values, but some ratepayers faced increases of up to 5 000%.

The objection period closed on April 6. But some 8 000 properties, which were "grossly" overvalued, came under review before objections closed.

A Kew property owner whose valuation jumped from R2.4 million to R11.4m, which meant his rates bill went from R3 850 to R22 000 a month, said Kew business property owners were relieved.

"Luckily, following the outcry, the city revalued our property to R3.2m, so we will be paying about R5 000 a month, as opposed to R3 850, which is still quite high given the state of neglect in Kew," he said.

A Bellevue property owner, Ann Kirchner, said she has two buildings in the area and was going to be forced to abandon them as she faces increases in rates of up to R60 000 a month, excluding water and electricity.

"I can't pass the increases on to the tenants. The only option now is to give up the buildings and have them taken over by hijackers.

"Both buildings are looked after and are in good condition," she said.

The city also announced that the rates rebate would increase for the first R350 000 value of the property, as opposed to R200 000 previously.

The pensioner rebate has been raised from R2m to R2.5m.

The revised rates have been welcomed by many residents who faced bankruptcy after the announcement of the new valuations.

Mayor Herman Mashaba said the city would assist residents by ensuring that those who have objected to their property valuations will be allowed to continue paying what they have been paying so far, until the objection process has been finalised.

"We will ensure that no credit-management processes are initiated against objectors on condition that they continue to pay the previous amounts to the city, along with their invoiced service charges.

"Their invoices will still reflect the rates charged on the new valuation, because the law prescribes this."

Mashaba said the 40 000 objections - or 4.4% of the 890 000 revalued properties - was lower than the 89 000 objections lodged with regard to the 2013 valuations roll.

Accounts with outstanding objection decisions would be flagged to prevent debt-collection action, until such time as the objection had been resolved.

"The flag on the account is with respect to the disputed rates account. But the affected account holders will be expected to continue to pay for all other services.

"Once the objection process is finalised, the objecting property owners will be required to make payments, with interest, backdated to July 1, 2018 for the valuation arising from the objection outcome," he added.

All property owners who have objected to the new valuations will be notified accordingly, the mayor pointed out.

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