

NEWS RELEASE

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Minnesota Taxpayers Association Releases Updated Educational Guide on Property Taxes

St. Paul, MN—The Minnesota Taxpayers Association today released an updated version of its award-winning booklet called Understanding Your Property Taxes, 2005 Edition, which is designed to help taxpayers get involved in their local government budgeting process, just in time for this year's Truth-in-Taxation hearings. The booklet is written to address the property taxes that will be paid in 2006. It won the 1993 *Most Effective Citizen Education Award* of the Governmental Research Association shortly after it was first printed.

The 44-page booklet, a publication of the Minnesota Center for Public Finance Research, the 501(c)(3) educational and research arm of the Association, will help taxpayers understand how their property taxes are determined and help them ask important questions at local budget hearings, required to take place between November 28 and December 21, according to Minnesota law.

According to Lynn Reed, Executive Director of the non-profit, non-partisan Taxpayers Association, "this year's report is being released right at the beginning of local governments' budget hearings, hopefully to catch the attention of taxpayers and motivate them to study the process and learn how they can get involved in the hearings." Parcel specific notices of proposed property tax increases were mailed by counties to taxpayers from November 11 through 24, with hearings to be held no sooner than Tuesday November 29.

"It is always important for citizens to attend local budget meetings," said Reed, "but because of cuts in aid to cities and counties in the last couple of years, and the use of more property taxes for additional school funding as part of the settlement of the lengthy special session this past summer, it is especially important this year. Local governments are under a lot of pressure to raise property taxes, and recent notices of proposed increases reflect that pressure. However, local governments should not *automatically* replace those dollars with property taxes. With citizen involvement, local governments can be encouraged to make sure they are spending as efficiently as possible before raising property taxes to cover lost aid amounts. Many increases may prove to be essential, but without taxpayer involvement there will be less certainty about their necessity."

The booklet contains comparative spending data for cities and counties for 2003, the latest year available, and helpful "How-to's" such as how to be effective in monitoring hearings, how to appeal property assessments, and how to read the November "truth-in-taxation" notice. It follows an easy question-and-answer format, and contains suggested questions on what to ask your local officials to maximize your effectiveness at a budget hearing and to help make sure you understand the budgeting process.

The Taxpayers Association is making the publication available to the public for free on their web site, at www.mntax.org/cpfr/uypt.php. Permission is given to print as many copies as needed. "Our goal with this booklet is to improve public policy by combining the good judgment of Minnesotans with a better understanding of how their taxes are determined," Reed said. "We want as many copies circulating as possible."