



The Charlotte Observer

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Revaluation: What's at stake

County likely to vote for delay Tuesday; analysis finds big disparities in what some neighborhoods could pay.

BY APRIL BETHEA
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If Mecklenburg County's tax books were up to date, a typical Myers Park homeowner might have paid \$2,003 more this year in property taxes.

At the county's northwest edge, meanwhile, homeowners in the Brookmere neighborhood could have saved an average \$383 on an annual bill.

An Observer analysis of how 2008 property taxes could have changed if tax assessments were current shows wide disparities among 16 sample areas. Popular neighborhoods with rapidly increasing home values are, in effect, getting a property tax break, while lagging areas pay too much.

The analysis does not include all of the data and calculations used in a revaluation. But it highlights inequities in a county estimated to have the most outdated property tax values in the Charlotte region.

Mecklenburg County commissioners are expected to vote Tuesday to wait at least one more year for a revaluation, last performed in 2003.

Commissioners said they were not surprised by the Observer's findings and said they had factored the imbal-

ances into their decision to support a delay.

Many said waiting will give the economy and housing markets a chance to stabilize over the next year. Property owners in fast appreciating areas can prepare for a potential tax increase. Homeowners in least popular areas with falling prices could benefit if values drop farther.

"Intellectually, we can say we need to do a revaluation: it's been a long SEE TAXES, 8A

8A | WHERE DO YOU STAND?

- List of area counties and when property tax values were last updated.
- Tax value analysis of 16 Mecklenburg County neighborhoods.

▶ GET THE COMPLETE BREAKDOWN

Interactive map shows 31,000 Mecklenburg County home sales, comparing sale prices with property tax values at charlotteobserver.com/data

THE GIFT OF GIVING STORIES OF HOPE & NEED

Find out how to give, pages 10-12A, and in your regional section today

YOUR CHANCE TO HELP

This holiday season is critical for many charities in the Charlotte region. Most are seeing a vast increase in need, but with a corresponding drop in donations.

The Observer's 23rd annual Giving Guide offers hundreds of ways you can help. Since 1986 it has connected thousands of caring Carolinians with programs and people in need.

Consider Karen Horton, who has been laid off by more relocated, bought-out and shut-down companies than she can count on one hand. But through job training at Goodwill Industries - one of the agencies in this year's Giving Guide - Horton has found renewed confidence in her search for a full-time job. "I know I have a future," says Horton.

Charlotte newcomer Alison Pirola sought help from another Giving Guide agency when she and her husband arrived six months ago. Pirola, who moved from Great Britain, found connections to her new community through International House. Now she's a volunteer at the organization, which advocates for people of diverse national backgrounds and supports those new to Charlotte.

Horton and Pirola are examples of how the Giving Guide works.

People who need help can find it at these agencies. People who want to help can learn how with these listings. This year, it's needed more than ever. — MARK PRICE



PHOTOS BY T. ORTEGA GAINES - ogaines@charlotteobserver.com

GOODWILL INDUSTRIES

Karen Horton (right, photo above), 50, was so impressed with her daughter's experience at Goodwill Industries' banking and customer service class that she also enrolled in the program. Karen's daughter Clantellia Ervin (left), 34, now works at Duke Energy. Goodwill seeks donations for its thrift stores.

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE

Alison Pirola (in photo at left), 30, who moved to the United States six months ago, has found friendship at the International House. The Charlotte organization needs help with technology and maintenance.

▶ CLICK TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN HELP

Have something to donate, but don't know who needs it? Looking for an agency close to you that needs volunteer help? Try our searchable database at charlotteobserver.com/giving

3 WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Editor Rick Thames describes three ways the Observer can help you lend a hand to those in need this season. 2A

Security doubts haunt India

Nation asks: How could just 10 gunmen evade forces while maintaining a bloody, 3-day siege?

BY SOMINI SENGUPTA
AND KEITH BRADSHAW
New York Times

MUMBAI, India — As the reckoning began here, troubling questions arose about whether Indian authorities could have anticipated a three-day standoff with militants that ended amid a fire Saturday at the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower Hotel.

Questions arose as to whether the government could have had better security in place, especially after a 2007 report to Parliament that the country's shores were inadequately protected from infiltration by sea - the way the attackers snuck into Mumbai.

All the while, tensions swelled with Pakistan, where officials promised that they would act swiftly if any connection to Pakistani-based militants were found, but also warned that troops could be moved to the border quickly if relations with India worsened.

The official death toll stood at 172 on Saturday night; the Associated Press estimated that as many as 195 were killed and 295 wounded. Among the dead were 18 foreigners, including six Americans.

It was still unclear Saturday whether the attackers had collaborators already in the city, or whether others in their group had escaped. And perhaps the most troubling question to emerge for the Indian authorities was how, if official estimates are accurate, just SEE INDIA, 16A

HOW MUCH DID CEOs EARN?

The Carolinas 50, the Observer's annual look at executive pay, shows last year was quite lucrative for some. But will paydays start to plunge? **MONEYWISE**



Analysis: Crisis creates parallel presidencies



Just weeks after his election, President-elect Obama is making public pronouncements on the economy - an unusual tactic for a president who has not yet taken office. What's behind his high-profile moves? **6A**

12 illuminating escapes

Great holiday-light displays within driving distance of Charlotte. **TRAVEL**

Uptown cinema's grand re-entrance

EpiCentre Theaters, an alternative to the many suburban multiplexes, aims to boost center city as a hot spot.

BY SARAH AARTHUN
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In the past 30 years, uptown Charlotte has transformed from a city with bankers' hours into a thriving hub with a bustling night life.

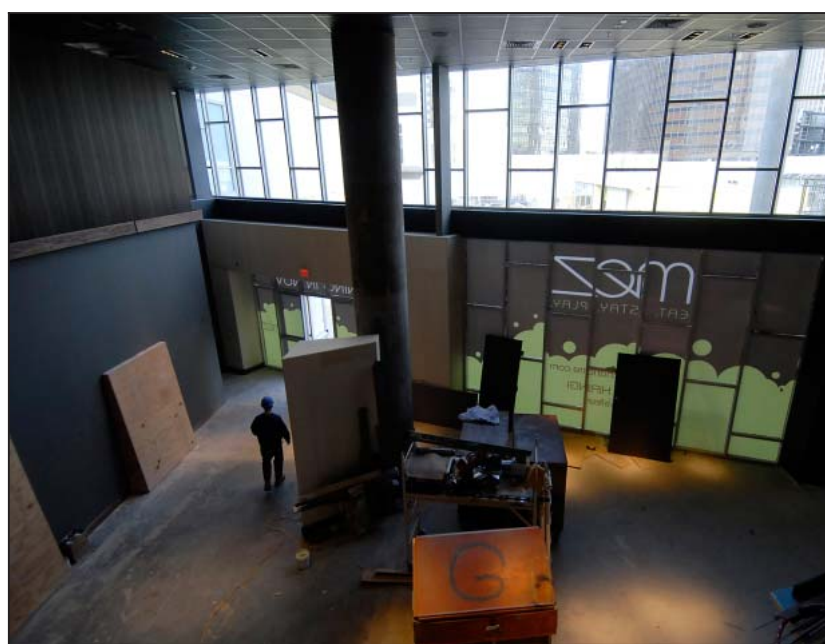
But since the latest surge of uptown growth started, its residents have clamored for a big-city staple - a movie theater.

Next month, they're getting their wish. The EpiCentre Theaters are set to open Dec. 12.

The theater's opening is the latest sign of uptown's growth. Twenty years ago, uptown had fewer than 3,000 residents and only 10 restaurants. And nightlife? There was none. By 1998, only five bars were ahead of the entertainment boom that started in the early 2000s.

More than 11,000 people live uptown now. Entertainment is abundant, with busy clubs and more than 50 places to eat or drink.

The theater's arrival comes at a moment when Charlotte's uptown residential market has cooled a bit. SEE EPICENTRE, 9A



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The cinemas at the EpiCentre mark the first theaters uptown since 1978. The five-screen theater, paired with a restaurant, opens Dec. 12.

46° **38°**
Wet and cold: Cloudy with areas of rain. Clearing on Monday. **8B**

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