

H. Courant editorial: Hartford's request to delay revaluation another year should be allowed. Some small businesses were revalued at 3 times the 1999 assessment – a tax increase of 50% in one year. A delay would also give the city another year to attempt to change the state law. (Perez proposal was a cap of 4% of person's income for property taxes for 1,2 and 3 family owner-occupied homes.

Small Businesses At Risk

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State lawmakers should allow Hartford to delay revaluation for a year, as requested by the city council and Mayor Eddie A. Perez.

A delay would allow the city to square matters with a group of small-business owners who claim city hall assessed their property values too high - in some cases triple what they were in 1999 when the last revaluation was carried out.

The new assessments, issued in late November, translate into tax increases of more than 50 percent for 583 commercial property owners out of some 1,500 - virtually all of them small businesses.

True, the business owners should have started seeking relief long before the final two weeks of the legislative session. Moreover, only 119 of those businesses have appealed their assessments to date - 39 of which had their values reduced.

But the city, which asserts that it conducted a proper, state-certified assessment process, also wants the delay to argue once again for overhauling its tax system in a way that it believes would be more equitable.

Last year, Mr. Perez proposed a system whereby property taxes would be tied to a homeowner's income. Owner-occupants who live in one-, two- and three-family homes would pay no more than 4 percent of their income in property taxes.

Absentee landlords with rental property would pay much more. The plan also eliminated the 15 percent tax surcharge on businesses.

State lawmakers, instead, allowed the city to phase in revaluation on residential properties over five years, while phasing out half of the surcharge. These moves left small businesses that are now complaining exposed to steeper taxes.

It would be shame if those merchants, some of whom have long histories in Hartford, picked up stakes and fled to the suburbs.

One year should be enough time to create tax alternatives that won't burden small businesses unfairly.