

SUPERFUND CLEANUP AREA

Eilers residents drop tax protest

Assessor will track sales to help owners

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The Eilers neighborhood property owners who wanted a cut in property taxes because they now live in a Superfund study area have withdrawn their property tax protest petition from the Pueblo County Assessor's Office.

At least for this year.

Pam Kocman, president of the Eilers Heights Neighborhood Association, said 79 property owners had signed the protest petitions but she withdrew those requests late last Friday rather than submit them.

"Our plan was to make a group protest about our falling property values because of the Superfund listing, but on Friday I learned that by submitting those petitions, every property owner was inviting the county assessor to inspect both their property and their homes — something we hadn't discussed or considered," she said Monday.

Assessor Frank Beltran had indicated he would review every protest application that was properly filled out and give the taxpayer an answer by June 30. When Beltran examined the preliminary list of Eilers-area protests last Thursday, there were 76 signatures. But they had not been delivered to his office yet.

Kocman said Beltran has offered to track the sales of properties in the affected area or nearby neighborhoods, creating a data record that could help the property owners

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"Mr. Beltran indicated he was willing to work with us on this," she said Monday afternoon.

The tax protest was one way the Eilers residents wanted to spotlight a situation where mortgage lenders are apparently unwilling to handle sales or purchases in the area that the Environmental Protection Agency is studying for lead and arsenic contamination.

The study zone is a milewide circle anchored by the Eilers area but it extends west to Cedar Street, south to Baystate Avenue, east to School Street and north to The Grove area across the Arkansas River.

About 1,400 properties are in that area.

The protest focused on the claim that without mortgage lenders, property owners in the affected zone would be reduced to buying or selling property on a cash basis, which they say essentially cuts their property values in half. As a result,

they wanted their property taxes cut in the same way.

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Eilers area property owners on Mesa Avenue are part of the area that may be affected by the Superfund study if they attempt to sell their homes.

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