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As North Shore assessments skyrocket, recent sales tell a different story

By [Dennis Rodkin](#)



Credit: VHT Studios

Justin Ishbia paid \$16 million in 2022 for this 10,000-square-foot house on 1.06 acres next to the others he owns on Sheridan Road in Winnetka.

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Drive or bike six miles of Sheridan Road between Wilmette and Glencoe on a nice day this spring and you'll see a string of substantial mansions along the lakefront: half-timbered Tudors, Italianate designs with clay tile roofs, baronial limestone manors and more.

On the same stretch of road, Cook County Assessor Fritz Kaegi sees 15 properties valued at \$16 million or more. That's 13 more than the assessor saw in 2022, the last time New Trier Township was reassessed in the triennial cycle that covers all of Cook County every three years.

In the intervening years, just one property in that swath of upper-end homes has sold for \$16 million or more. That was the mansion billionaire Justin Ishbia [bought in 2022](#) to add to the two he already owned next door in order to create a 3.7-acre estate where he's now building an even bigger mansion.

"I know nobody has the violin out for the owners of these expensive homes," said Andrea Raila, senior tax analyst at her eponymous River North property tax law firm, Raila & Associates. "But I think the assessor is grasping here, putting out speculative values that have not been proven by the market."

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Raila, a former employee of the Cook County Board of Review, the office that evaluates property owners' appeals of their assessments, ran for Cook County assessor in 2018, the year Kaegi won the job.

For 2025, assessments went up an average of 42% in the lakefront district the assessor calls Neighborhood 171, to an average of almost \$10.1 million, Kaegi's office told Crain's.

The 15 highest-value lakefront mansions in the New Trier Township reassessments, published by the Cook County assessor April 25, run from \$16 million to \$34.8 million. Three years ago, their assessed market value ran from about \$7.4 million to \$22.2 million.

Some of the steepest increases are the result of new construction. The owners of six-tenths of an acre on Michigan Avenue in Wilmette saw their 2025 assessment go up 1,160%, to nearly \$16.3 million. In 2022, when the land was vacant, the assessment was \$1.32 million.

The property, now an 11,000-square-foot home, pictured below, is nearly complete. Crain's couldn't determine the cost of construction or the names of the property owners who in 2020 [bought the site for \\$8 million](#), using a land trust that conceals their names. If the land alone cost \$8 million, this might well be a \$16 million property when complete.



Credit: Dennis Rodkin

This home under construction on Michigan Avenue in Wilmette is one of 15 lakefront homes in New Trier Township assessed at \$16 million or more.

"Because almost every single home is custom-built, each property is unique and was individually reviewed," the county assessor said in a statement to Crain's. "These reviews were very granular. For example, the level of access to the lake and the type of materials that make up the lakefront (sandy beach vs. rocks), were both factors the (Cook County Assessor's Office) considered."

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In Cook County, it's tradition to be startled by the high valuations that come out from the assessor, whose job is to determine a taxable market value for each property that will hold true through the next three years as prices escalate — if they do.

In New Trier Township, the median 2025 assessment of single-family homes was a little less than \$1.19 million, an increase of 28% from 2022, [the county assessor reported April 25](#).

"It is important to understand that assessments in Cook County reflect market value over the last three years," Kaegi said in the announcement, where he noted that property owners have until June 5 to submit appeals.

With that deadline in mind, "we've been inundated with questions about appeals, because most people see these (assessed) values as unattainable," said Dan Pikarski, a partner at Loop real estate law firm Gordon & Pikarski.

Lakefront land on the North Shore is a textbook example of a limited commodity whose buyers pay a premium to get their piece. To wit: Two Winnetka properties that went for over \$12 million in recent years — one [at \\$12.75 million](#) in 2022 and the other [at \\$12.25 million](#) in 2023 — were purchased as teardowns, with the new owners planning megamillion-dollar new homes on the sites.

Even so, "a lot of people sitting in these lakefront houses were shocked when they opened their assessment letter," said Jena Radnay, an @properties Christie's International Real Estate agent who has represented several of the top-priced homes in New Trier and is a resident there.

Can Radnay envision 15 lakefront homes selling for \$16 million or more in the next three years?

"Probably not," she said. "The market has been very, very good for these homes, but it's not that high. We're not Bel Air." In that tony Los Angeles neighborhood, the median price of homes sold in the past year is over \$5.1 million, according to Redfin, compared with \$1.2 million in Winnetka.

But owners' investments in existing homes can certainly top \$16 million, Radnay said. The Wilmette property mentioned above is a prime example.

Some additional points to consider in the New Trier assessments:

The Ishbia effect

His \$16 million purchase, more than a year after he spent a combined \$23.9 million on three other mansions — one of them separated from the others by a public park — "shouldn't even be considered in market data," Radnay said, "because it clearly wasn't an arm's-length transaction."

The purchase occurred only after a legal morass undercut a proposed land swap with the park district, where he would get some of the park land beside the first two properties and the park district would get the third house he bought. Buying that fourth one was, he told Crain's at the time, the viable way to get a contiguous piece of land to build on.

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In the triennial assessment, the three contiguous parcels where Ishbia's mansion is under construction are assessed as empty land with a market value of \$11.8 million. The 2028 triennial should show a far higher value, after completion of the house, which construction permits say will cost \$44 million to build.

Chasing sale prices?

In the new assessments, the highest estimate of market value, a little over \$34.86 million, is a 2.3-acre estate in Winnetka that went up for sale in August at \$35 million and [went under contract to a buyer in February](#).

The sale has not closed yet, so it's not known what the final sale price will be.

Both Raila and Pikarski wondered what evidence other than the asking price Kaegi's team had for valuing the property at so close to what the sellers were asking. "There's nothing in the market telling us it's a \$34 million house other than the seller's listing," Raila said.

Pikarski added that "the assessor can't be chasing sales" to estimate future market value.

The statement from Kaegi's office said "the model does not consider the possible future value of property when setting residential assessments."

Winnetka's steep slope ordinance

Concerns over the reduction of the bluffs on Ishbia's property and others spurred Winnetka officials to develop an ordinance that reduces what homeowners can build on lakefront sites.

The intent of the ordinance, passed in February 2024, was to keep natural bluffs stable and prevent erosion or undercutting that could lead to bluff collapse. The effect, [according to lakefront property owners who sued the village](#), was to cut the value of their land by reducing its buildable space.

When the new assessments for New Trier Township arrived last month, Radnay said, "they conflict with the ordinance, because they don't consider that the property can't be used the way these owners thought it could, and it's going to sell for less." She forecasts lakefront teardowns losing some value as a result of the ordinance.

In response, Kaegi's office told Crain's that "when land has a steep grade and we are made aware of it, we measure and divide the land into buildable and unbuildable land. Unbuildable land is valued at 50 cents per square foot. As a rule, steep-slope ordinances do not automatically lower land values."



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