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KINGSTON, N.Y. – Over 100 people gathered at Congregation Ahavath Israel in Kingston on Sunday evening to observe the annual commemoration service in remembrance of the Holocaust.

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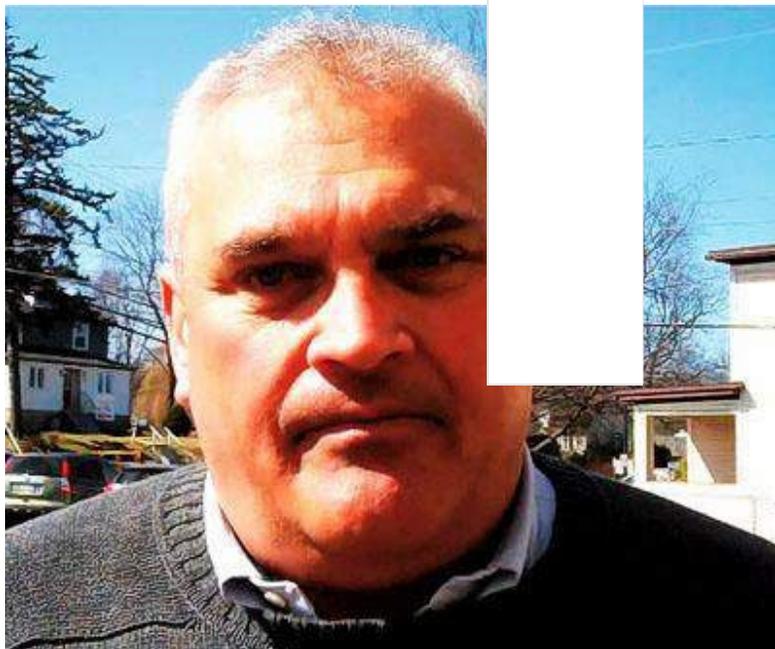
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## **Former Kingston mayor says he suggested new plan to lessen tax gap in 2008**



Former Kingston Mayor James Sottile Freeman Photo

By [Paul Kirby](#), Daily Freeman

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KINGSTON >> Six years ago, Mayor James Sottile embarked on a determined push to radically change the way his municipality taxed residents and businesses.

His effort fell short as others – mainly city lawmakers – came to the conclusion that Sottile wanted to change the city's "base proportion" and shift more of the city's tax burden from commercial property owners to those with homes.

In the end, the Common Council agreed to lessen the gap, but Sottile did not think they went far enough.

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property owners because they take up less of

Additionally, supporters said Sottile’s propos tax-friendly atmosphere where jobs could be

Opponents said homeowners were too overburdened by taxes Sottile was proposing. They also said that busi

Wednesday’s public release of the homestead report for Dutchess County, is set to take place at 6 p.m

Gregg Swanzey, the city’s director of the Office of Economic Development and Strategic Partnership, has said it would outline alternatives to the current homestead

l to level the playing field.”



face once again as officials prepare to announce a new study taxing mechanism on Wednesday.

homestead/homestead formula was unfair to commercial property tax base, but pay more of the actual tax bill.

to make Kingston more attractive to developers seeking a

taxes already and couldn’t afford the type of scenario for profit-making entities while homeowners are not.

homestead report, funded by the Dyson Foundation of Kingston.

omic Development and Strategic Partnership, has said it would outline alternatives to the current homestead taxing system the city uses.

In a press release, Swanzey said the project is an example of what can get done with cooperation.

Mayor Shayne Gallo has said compiling the report was an example of Kingston addressing the taxing structure.

“This study demonstrates Kingston’s willingness to take a leadership role in addressing an issue that many municipalities in the Mid-Hudson Region face,” Gallo said in a press release.

In June, The Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at SUNY New Paltz was hired to conduct the study using \$15,000 grant from the Dyson Foundation.

“The study analyzed the city’s local economy, with particular attention devoted to effects on commercial property values, including a clear and readable overview of the key provisions of the law and a summary of the trends in homestead and non-homestead tax rates over the previous decade,” the press release says.

In the 1980s, state legislation authorized municipalities in New York to tax residential and business property classes at different rates following property revaluation.

The intention was to shift the tax burden from residential property owners to commercial property owners..

Other communities that use the different taxation method include Beacon, Poughkeepsie, Fishkill, Wappingers Falls, Newburgh, Port Jervis, Clarkstown, Haverstraw, West Haverstraw, Sleepy Hollow, Piermont, Stony Point, Kingston, Albany, and Orangetown.

Kingston passed its taxation law in 1988.

Currently, the city taxes business property at approximately 1.8 times the rate it taxes residential property. City business property which comprises 31 percent of the tax base, currently pays 46 percent of the total tax levy.

“Over time, perceived burden on businesses has become a significant issue in many communities, including in Kingston,” a press about the study announcement says. “There is a belief that the higher tax rate discourages commercial development and negatively impacts commercial property value and that the tax is detrimental to

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✕ is also the perception that elimination of the differential tax taxing structure; it only sought to revamp the tax base for homeowners paid.

Sottile's push was an effort to deal with the e

non-homestead/homestead taxing structure in place.

"It is my belief that this action will correct the burden is distributed fairly among the business owners," Sottile wrote in a memorandum at the time.

equities in our property tax burden and assure that the property owners in the city of Kingston," Sottile

Sottile had said that he was seeking the change during his campaign.

to keep a promise he made during the 2007 election

"I made a commitment to this community that during a revaluation, and that is exactly what

to address the homestead vs. non-homestead (tax burden) issue," Sottile said then. "I followed through on my word."

Originally, Sottile had said residential properties on the homestead side of the system, had made up 70 percent of the city's assessed value but bear only 49 percent of the tax burden. Commercial properties, those considered non-homestead, accounted for just 30 percent of the city's assessed value but have been carried 51 percent of the tax burden, the mayor said.

Sottile said then a completed property valuation called for placing 62 percent of the property tax burden on homeowners and 38 percent on businesses.

But the new homestead/non-homestead ratio was not written in stone and required the approval of the Common Council.

Lawmakers balked, choosing less of gap-narrowing measure which still saw businesses paying more than residents.

Gallo last week said it was no wonder that Sottile's push fell short. He said that the change would have caused an explosion in tax bills for residents.

The two men, both Democrats, have been at strong odds.

"He recommended a broad shift ... that could have been devastating to the homestead taxpayer," Gallo said. "The option that Sottile recommended was short-sighted at the time because it would have had such a devastating effect on the homestead-based taxpayers."

Going forward, Gallo said, the city is probably going to have to get state assistance in some way to help create a taxing system fair to both residents and commercial property owners.

Sottile said he showed the will to create a fairer system. The former mayor pointed out that he suggested such a revamped system during the 2007 mayoral campaign and was elected.

"I looked at the bigger picture as to what the future of our community was going to be like, trying to (foster) business growth and not a political future," Sottile said. "You can study, study, study ... but there has to be a will."



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business properties  
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Paul Kirby is a reporter for the Freeman, covering local news since 1996. Reach the author at [pkirby@freeman.com](mailto:pkirby@freeman.com)

on politics. He has been at the Freeman since August 2014. Follow Paul on Twitter: [@PaulatFreeman](https://twitter.com/PaulatFreeman).

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be told, Sottile made this problem worse every

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