

Study sheds light on property tax inequity in Ulster County

By **ARIEL ZANGLA**
Freeman staff

NEW PALTZ — A new study is raising awareness about inequity in the tax burden shared by Ulster County property owners.

The study, "Equity and the Property Tax Burden for Citizens in Ulster County," released by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach based at SUNY New Paltz, looks into why people with properties of similar values in Ulster County pay widely different levels of taxes.

For example, property taxpayers in the village of Ellenville and the Ellenville school district pay almost three times as much in taxes as their counterparts in the town of Marbletown and the Onteora school district, the study found.

"This and similar inequities outlined in the report are as much a problem as the property tax level and the rate of tax increase," Gerald Benjamin, the director of the Center for

Research, Regional Education and Outreach and associate vice president for regional engagement at SUNY New Paltz, said in a press release.

Benjamin, a former Ulster County Legislature chairman who co-authored the study with Rachel John, said it attempts to start a discussion about the fairness of the tax burden and to help inform policy making. He said the study does not make specific recommendations to address the issue, but does offer topics for discussion.

The study says some states have found ways to divide the property tax burden among local jurisdictions and that some lawmakers are discussing a "circuit breaker" measure to link homeowners' tax bills with their ability to pay. Other topics include how the state Office of Real Property Services is seeking to assure that all properties in a

county are assessed on the same basis and how that would affect the county.

"We're talking about equity," Benjamin said. "What's fair."

According to the study, there are 55 different tax burdens in the county. Inequities can arise when one taxing jurisdiction has too many tax-exempt properties, or when those with concentrated populations and those that are rural and geographically large require a bigger tax burden than average. Jurisdictions with the highest concentration of poor people require a higher property tax efforts, which contributes to inequities, the study said.

The study is the first of a planned series of discussion briefs on regional issues being prepared by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach. The study can be found online at www.newpaltz.edu/crreo/discussion-brief1.pdf.