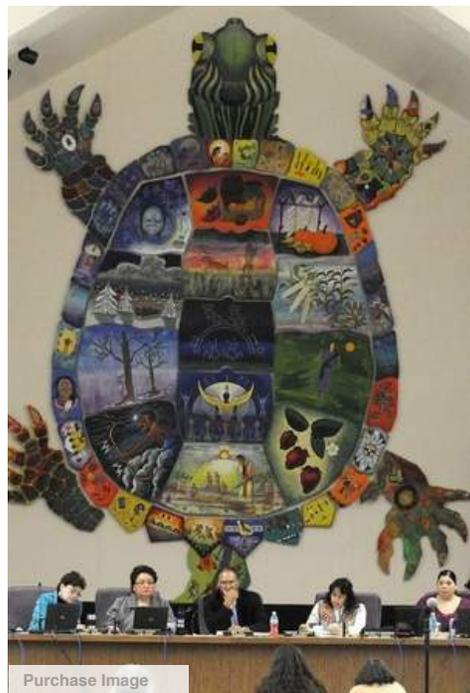


Oneida tribe says it overpaid property taxes by \$1 million

Aug. 31, 2013 | Comments

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Oneida tribal administrators, seen in this photo from inside the tribe's administrative building, detected a problem after reorganizing the tribe's housing authority. / File/Press-Gazette Media

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The Oneida Tribe of Indians is seeking tax breaks on dozens of Brown County properties, saying it overpaid by more than \$1 million over several years.

The tax bills came at the same time the tribe's housing authority was giving the city of Green Bay payments in lieu of taxes — totaling another \$400,000 over the past 20 years — on many of the same properties.

The overlooked double payments went undetected until a reorganization involving the housing authority exposed the glitch on properties used to house tribal members.

The tribe is not pursuing any refund, but it has asked the city and county to agree that all 90-odd properties will be classified as tax-exempt from now on.

No decisions have been made on how to proceed, and Green Bay leaders have discussed the situation behind closed doors, saying that it could end up being fought out in the courts.

"It's still something that's being evaluated," said Carolyn Maricque, the county's finance director.

If the properties are taken off the tax rolls as the tribe is asking, that could force tax collectors to dig deeper into other taxpayers' pockets to make up the lost revenue, currently estimated at \$173,000 a year.

"Other people's taxes will go up," said Alan Wagner, chief financial officer for the Green Bay School District.

The situation came to light in January when Oneida Tribal Chairman Ed Delgado wrote the city and county that tribal

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officials “recently discovered” they have been paying taxes on properties as well as the payment in lieu of taxes. Scattered throughout the area, the residential properties are used to provide housing to low-income tribal families.

The oversight was uncovered while the tribe’s housing authority was being changed from an outside agency to an internal department within the tribal administration.

In his letter, Delgado concluded that the tribe “does not intend to pay” taxes on those properties effective immediately.

Oneida officials declined to comment, but they issued a prepared statement that they are willing to continue the payments in lieu of taxes to Green Bay. Nonprofit groups and others exempt from property taxes often make such payments in recognition of the fact that they receive basic municipal services.

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