


What are TIFs?

- Created by municipality (state statute)
- Boundaries cross political and community boundaries
- Designed to subsidize some business project in “blighted” or under-served area
- Captures “incremental” property taxes ABOVE base when district was created
- Lasts 23 years



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How Much Revenue Have TIFs Collected Since TIFs Introduced Here?

CHICAGO = \$5.5 BILLION
SUBURBS = \$4.2 BILLION

TOTAL COOK COUNTY = \$9.7 BILLION!

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The CivicLab is a place for civic collaboration, education and innovation where we will continue to evolve the Illumination process

“Engage in Dialog of What Should Be” – Illuminating TIFs

By Tom Tresser

The TIF (Tax Increment Financing) Illumination Project is a 100% volunteer driven project that has been investigating and exposing TIF districts across Chicago since February of 2013. We are telling people what TIFs are doing to them at the ward level. We're combining data mining, old school investigatory journalism, graphic design, and community organizing to paint a picture of TIFs that has never been available before. TIFs extract property taxes from all properties within designated TIF districts. In 2012 some 154 TIFs extracted \$457 million from properties in Chicago. An additional 281 TIFs in suburban Cook County sucked up another \$268 million.

We started with an “Illumination” (as our reports are called) of the 27th Ward, where we (The CivicLab) are located. The 27th Ward has 12 TIFs. We created a graphic using the donated services of three coders, one mapmaker, one graphic designer and one lead-investigator-writer. Since then, we've looked at the TIFs for 25 wards, Illuminating 152 TIFs. We've revealed the details of these investigations in TIF Illuminations organized by citizens all over the city. Each meeting is public and is completely run by the neighbors from that ward. For each ward we tell folks:

- How many TIFs are in the ward, names, when formed
- How much property tax did those TIFs extract from the ward in 2012
- How much money was left in the TIF district at the end of 2012 (There was \$1.7 billion total left in TIF accounts on 1/1/13)
- Who got paid and what projects were funded by TIFs in your ward

About 2,000 people have seen these presentations in total. Attendees at these workshops have said:

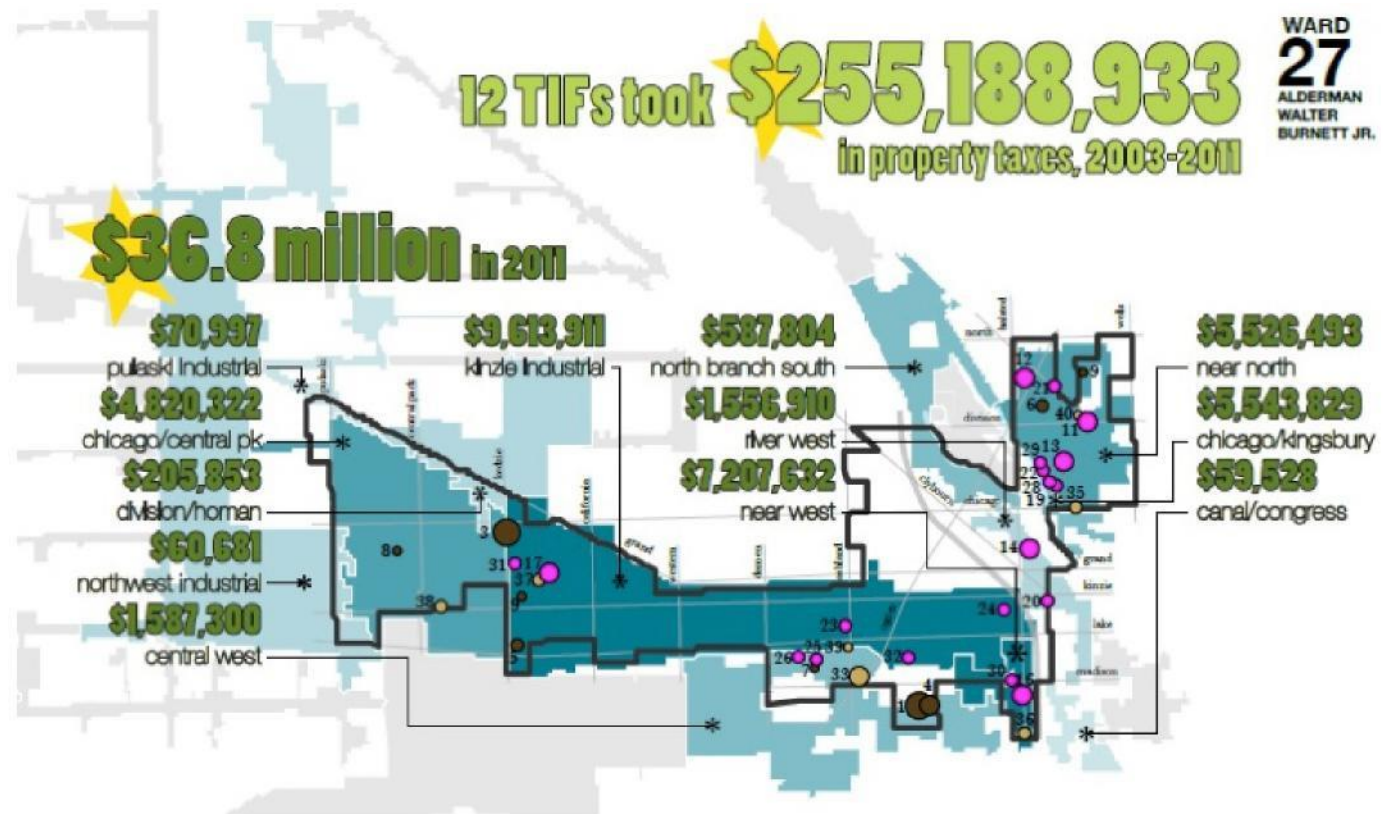
“I just wanted to say thank you for the fantastic class last night. I learned a ton of new and disturbing information. I learned about Civic Lab while taking a class during the Chicago Ideas Week and I am looking forward to more classes! Thanks so much for creating such a wonderful organization and I look forward to seeing you speak at other events.” – John D.

“Illuminating and impressive presentation on TIFs in Chicago/Cook County last night. I thought I was up to speed, but proceeded to have my mind further blown on the lack of transparency and accountability. Highly recommend checking out The CivicLab Chicago. Thanks to Tom and the team there!” – Cory Jaffe

“The TIF 101 Class was AWESOME!!!! It is information that everyone should know. I hope that you will consider publishing that booklet that you presented. It would sell like wild fire!” -Dr. Carmen L. C. Palmer, Founding President, Educational Village Keepers

This is a case of civic data making a big splash. We originally were advocating that TIF information be placed on the property tax bill because it is not currently shown. Cook County Clerk David Orr recently announced that this would start with the July 2014 property tax bills. This is a real revolution in civic transparency. Our work has fueled all manner of civic activism and has made major headlines. Some 24 articles have been written. The Nation profiled our work in its July 22 cover story, “Chicago Rising!” When we revealed that Chicago’s 154 TIFs had a balance of \$1.7 billion as of January 1, 2013, the Chicago Sun-Times on August 2 agreed with our position that these funds should be given to the units of government that should have received that money in the first place.





WHERE HAS THE MONEY GONE? 2003-2011

- under \$1million
- \$1million-\$4.9million
- \$5million-9.9million
- \$10million and over

42% public

46% private

12% non-profit

The TIF Illumination Project is an example of citizen-powered journalism made necessary because of these factors:

- Local papers are in and out of bankruptcy and have no staff or interest for this subject
- Four organizations covering city data with a grassroots perspective have closed in the last ten years
- The current City Council votes with the Mayor an unprecedented 94% of the time, making them the biggest rubber stamp council in over 70 years (and therefore completely unwilling to interrogate this program that strip mines almost one billion dollars in property taxes every two years)
- Major civic organizations that receive millions of dollars in grants and donations have been co-opted by Big Capital and City Hall and can no longer be relied on to protect the public interest.

The CivicLab is a place for civic collaboration, education and innovation where we will continue to evolve the Illumination process. The Lab is completely volunteer-based and we seek collaborators, instructors, coders, and designers to join us. Our operations pose significant monthly expenses and we welcome investors and invite individuals to co-work in our space or to take a class from us.

For more information about the CivicLab, please visit us at civiclab.us. For more information about our Illumination Project, please visit tifreports.com. You may also contact Tom Tresser at 312-804-3230 or at tom@civiclab.us.



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Tom is an educator, organizer, creativity champion, public defender and fighter of privatization. He teaches a number of classes on policy, creativity and civic engagement for Loyola University, the Illinois Institute of Technology, and The University of Illinois Chicago. Tom is extremely proud to announce the launch of a new civic project, The CivicLab, a storefront space where activists, educators, coders and designers meet to collaborate, teach, and build tools for civic engagement.