

Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee Meeting Minutes
February 12, 2018
Location: Lower Level Conference Room, Sullivan Independence Hall

Present: Michael Herley, Mark McDermott, Cindy Perham, Peter Tallman, and Jill Vergara.

I. Call to Order:

J. Vergara called the meeting to order at 7:45 p.m. and took roll call.

II. Election of Officers

M. Herley nominated Jill Vergara for Chair of the Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee. C. Perham seconded the nomination. Jill Vergara was unanimously elected.

C. Perham nominated Mark McDermott for the role of Vice Chair. J. Vergara seconded the nomination. M. Herley requested a bi-partisan structure to the committee's leadership. M. McDermott, C. Perham, P. Tallman, and J. Vergara were in favor. M. Herley was against. Mark McDermott was elected.

J. Vergara nominated Cindy Perham for the role of Secretary. M. McDermott seconded the nomination. Cindy Perham was unanimously elected.

III. New Business

A Selection of Recurring monthly meeting dates

Discussion ensued regarding having the meetings in Sullivan Independence Hall, and alternating with 530 pm and 730 pm meetings. We are looking into the first Tuesday of the month as our recurring meeting.

B. Discussion of Objectives and Timeline for Review

The committee opened up with a discussion about the shortcomings in the existing ordinance. The committee stressed its interest in making small administrative changes to the ordinance so that Tax Assessor Ross Murray will be better able to enforce the ordinance. We did all agree that with our Assessor present, we can run these items by him in the next committee meeting. We also discussed the process to get these and other changes through L & A so that we can affect changes this year. The committee understands this will require outreach to make seniors aware of the changes for this application season (FY 18-19)

J. Vergara also suggested we look at the Ridgefield and Redding programs. We need to look into a combination of needs based and credit system. J. Vergara reiterated that we need to help our seniors and residents right now, and we will contemplate, analyze, and craft an incentive program that will be used in the February 1 – May 15, 2019 Relief program. M Herley and M. McDermott strongly support raising income levels for program eligibility now.

In the past L & A wanted more economic data as to how many more people the changes would open it up to. M. Herley stressed that the job of the L & A Committee is to do a "form" review of the ordinance and that it was the role of the full RTM to debate any revisions to the ordinance.

C. Discuss Community Outreach and possible dates for public forum at Senior Center

Once the changes are made, we will reach out to do a public forum at the Senior Center on a Saturday to get a good number of residents there to make sure all changes are clearly communicated. We will have a forum this spring and in the fall.

IV. Public Comment

John Wynne of 144 Harbor Road and Urb Leimkuhler of 83 Spruce Street, Southport had comments regarding possible supplemental awards to fully utilize the 2.5% of the Grand List that is set aside for Senior and Disabled Tax Relief. Discussion included questions about what the software at the Tax Assessors office is capable of and a good education to all beneficiaries of the individual brackets of those who qualify.

J. Wynne feels that a refund should be given to Seniors to send a message that Seniors matter. He said there is an emotional component that can be enhanced with even a small refund. J. Wynne also discussed the fears some seniors have regarding town spending, and that they don't use as many services as others do. U. Leimkuhler discussed the survey that his group (Fairfield Senior Advocates) is trying to administer to as many seniors as possible in all areas of the town.

V. Adjournment

Motion made by C.Perham to adjourn meeting. M. McDermott seconded. Unanimously passed. The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Perham, Secretary