

**Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee Meeting
Minutes for April 12, 2012**

Present: Bill Domeika, Sheila Marmion, Tom McCarthy, Marc Patten, Carolyn Richmond, and Carol Way
Guest: Donald Ross, Tax Assessor Absent: Eric Newman

I. Call to Order:

Tom McCarthy called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The committee began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Approval of Minutes

The Secretary was asked to read the minutes of the March 5th meeting. The committee approved the minutes of the March 5th meeting as written and presented.

III. Presentation by Tax Assessor

Our new Tax Assessor, Donald Ross, began his presentation with a handout which detailed the current tax relief program for seniors and disabled citizens of Fairfield. The committee members began to review the document and asked Assessor Ross for more detailed explanations of what they were reviewing. There were several items that were detailed and reviewed:

- Enabling legislation from the State of Connecticut makes the period of February 1st through May 15th as the time frame when seniors and disabled may apply for the benefits of the program
- There are several options –
 1. A freeze on the taxes at the current level (requires no payback and no lien)
 2. A deferral of all taxes (which requires a payback and a lien on the property)
 3. A reduction/credit to the current taxes for people in a designated AGI level on federal taxes

The question was raised about any relief for renters, and Assessor Ross stated that there are State of Connecticut renters' rebates.

Assessor Ross stated that this program had begun in 2002, and that this program must be renewed every five years which means that the program was renewed in 2007 and is due for renewal in 2012. The most popular item chosen has been the reduction/credit. Most citizens do not want a lien on their property; they don't choose that option.

Carolyn Richmond stated that the choices are a little difficult to explain and compare. There seems to be a need for specific examples or graphics. 'How do we explain these options,' she asked. Assessor Ross stated that they do put out. He said that they have press releases, brown bag lunches, information meetings at the senior center, churches, library – various public places. The committee members felt that we need to be certain that our residents do know that this exists. Marc Patten mentioned that almost all of the funding that has been allocated for this is currently being expended; however, Assessor Ross stated that the Town is obligated to fund legitimate requests no matter what the allocation may be. Tom McCarthy mentioned that the per capita income in Fairfield is \$50,000. Some questioned this statistic as being low, but correct or not, all committee members felt that there are "many Fairfield's"; we have more diversity and range than many similar towns in Fairfield County. Carol mentioned that the demographics for Fairfield show a more aging population than most people realize.

Committee members told Assessor Ross of the designated dates for future meetings of this committee. Those dates are: Thursday, May 3rd at 7:00 p.m., May 19th at the Senior Center at 9:30 a.m., and June 19th at 7:00p.m.

There was discussion of contacting the top three towns that are similar to Fairfield to see about similarities and differences in these communities. Assessor Ross will be in touch with West Hartford.

III. Opportunity for Public Input

The following gives a summary of the comments from the public:

Palma Senatore of 42 Pilgrim Lane commented that no matter how generous this tax relief may seem, it really isn't helping and it probably won't really help to curtail the senior exodus. Seniors are leaving. They get only about 20% maximum of the taxes collected in terms of any direct benefits. There needs to be a survey that is done among seniors in the town and there needs to be much greater interest shown toward the Senior Center.

Nancy Legare of Mosswood Condominiums, 245 Unquowa Road stated that seniors are intimidated about coming into Town Hall. They need educating about all of the opportunities, programs, etc. from which they may benefit. Perhaps if there were designated times (one or two days a month) at the Senior Center for Town staff to meet with seniors this might be quite helpful. Don Ross stated that the “Renters’ Program” will be presented at the Senior Center. He will look into other informational programs being there, also. Nancy also questioned why there is a difference between the amount of “married” credit and “single” credit. Most often, the need is greater for “single” people, yet their tax credit is less.

Debra Coleman of 26 Cranston Street stated that she is not 65, but she is legally disabled. “Why,” she said, “have we not given the full title of this program in our materials and in any publicity that we use so that the disabled will become more aware of benefits that are available to them?” According to Ms. Coleman, there are only 189 disabled people receiving these tax credits. In addition, she commented, the materials are very hard to access.

Marion Queripel of 114 Oyster Road asked a common question. “Why did my taxes go up, when some of my friends in other locations had no increase at all?” Once again, our Tax Assessor, Don Ross, stated that we are many different Fairfields and location does make a difference. Carolyn Richmond asked about the possibility of making changes to taxes being tied to a 70% assessment value. Don Ross told us that the 70% assessment is a State-mandated program. It is very difficult to change. You can phase in some changes, but it is very complicated.

Dave Farrington of 641 Penfield Road Mr. Farrington stated that he has been a resident of Fairfield for 55 years. He lives in a raised ranch, but he is taxed so much more because of all the McMansions around him. He had a request – consider freezing taxes in this relief program for longer than five years.

IV. New Business

It was agreed that Marc Patten would produce the press releases in connection with our future meetings and in connection with the deadline date of May 15th. It was advised that this should be done just as soon as possible.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol J. Way, Secretary