

Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee Meeting Minutes for July 13, 2016

Location: Human Resources Conference Room, Fairfield Education Offices, 501 Kings Highway East

Present: Alex Durrell, Hank Ference, Dru Georgiadis, Mark McDermott, Cindy Peckham, Jill Vergara and Carol Way

I. Call to Order:

Hank Ference called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. and led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Election of Officers:

There was a little confusion as we began this process, since originally the RTM leadership had suggested several others to serve as the chair of the committee, and for various personal reasons others had stepped down. The committee thanked Jill for the excellent job that she had done in putting together the “call” for the meeting and in securing the location. The following members were nominated and elected unanimously:

Chairman – Hank Ference

Vice Chair – Jill Vergara

Secretary – Carol Way

III. New Business

There was a brief discussion of the process that had been followed in the past and references made to the five pages of information found in the Town Code Article III: Tax Relief for Elderly and Disabled Homeowners. The mission or the purpose of the Committee was reviewed -- “to find ways to assist the elderly and permanently disabled homeowners with a portion of their costs of property taxation.

The Committee discussed the amount made available in most recent years and the fact that any unused portion reverts to the general or contingency area of the Town budget with no requirement that it be used specifically for seniors. In addition, concerns were raised about numbers of participants going down, and the need to know how many have left Fairfield to move to another state, how many have died, and how many were displaced and may have moved to another CT town because of Storm Sandy.

There was a discussion of the “Homestead Credit” concept used in many other states, and, also, the difficulty encountered when an emergency causes seniors to take money from a retirement fund 401K which increases their income for that year which, in turn, makes them ineligible for the current credits program. The residency rule of 265 days in our current statute was brought up by a Committee member, who contrasted it to the IRS rule (your primary residency is considered to be the place where you spend six months plus one day and where you are eligible to vote. There should be consistency with the federal standard and the local statute

The need to have Don Ross, the Town Assessor, at the meetings was mentioned. He is an excellent resource and his staff members are involved with the information gathering and determining the eligibility of seniors for the program. With that in mind, the Committee set September 13th for their next meeting with Don Ross invited.

IV. Public Comment

Palma Senatore of 42 Pilgrim Lane talked about her involvement with the the seniors of Fairfield. She served on the Top Ten Committee that compared Fairfield Senior Center to several others throughout the state. She suggested that the committee review the report, which can be found on line. In addition, she talked about the percentage of Fairfield’s total tax revenue that is spent on Fairfield families with children in the schools (65%) and the miniscule amount spent on benefits for seniors. The cost to the town, every time a senior leaves, is monumental. Many times their homes are bought by builders who demolish a smaller cape and build one or more larger homes on the lot. We need more accurate statistics about the number of seniors in Fairfield and what the trend has been about their migration to other states. Many committee members suggested that we review the policies of towns similar to Fairfield..

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol J. Way, Secretary

