

**Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee Meeting
Minutes for July 17, 2012**

Present: Sheila Marmion, Tom McCarthy, Eric Newman, Marc Patten, Carolyn Richmond, and Carol Way

Absent: Bill Domeika

Guests: Donald Ross, Tax Assessor

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Tom McCarthy at 7:04 p.m. The evening began with the pledge of allegiance.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the June 19, 2012 meeting were approved with two corrections by a unanimous voice vote.

III. Evening's Business

The first order of business was for the committee to determine the date of the next committee meeting. It was scheduled for August 28, 2012.

Tom McCarthy summarized the meeting that he and Marc Patten had with First Selectman Mike Tetreau and Chief of Staff Bob Mayer. They relayed to those town officials the work of the committee to date and asked for some additional information about how certain changes in the Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Program would impact the Town and its budget. In particular, they questioned raising the income levels for eligibility for the program. There was a caution that this would need to be done with great care because it might possibly cause the program to exceed the designated maximum amount.

The committee then discussed some items where there seemed to be stronger interest and more consensus. The discussion included the following:

1. There should be no distinction between the credit for married people and that for single people.
2. If a resident is eligible for a relief credit, their taxes should stay frozen and not have additional increases. (Increases many times wipe out the amount of the credit)
3. Deferral of taxes may be the wisest choice, but seniors, especially, do not want a lien on their property. In many cases, also, it may take 15 to 20 years before the town recoups the costs from this. Very few currently choose this option.
4. The committee was unified in wanting to increase the income level of eligibility for a tax credit to \$75,000. They wanted to see more concrete figures in this area. How many more would be eligible for a tax credit if the income level were increased to the \$75,000 figure.

Assessor Don Ross stated that he would check on historical data on the tax credit program and amounts that have been given annually. Some committee members asked that we put together some ideas about a percentage of the tax be given as a credit rather than a flat amount. Some people have very high tax bills and a flat credit doesn't do as much for them. There is a need to determine whether the size of the credit has kept pace with the average amount of tax increase each year.

In the discussion of liens and interests with deferrals, Don Ross reminded the committee that 25% of annual taxes must be paid according to State law. Most defer 50%, according to the Assessor. Don Ross also stated that the ordinance with which we are dealing comes up for change/renewal on a biennial basis. This is Public Act 12-197 and Code 95-11; the date for recording changes, revisions, etc. is June 15th.

IV. Public Discussion

Sam Milazzo of 234 Birch Road stated that he was 81 years old and that he had paid taxes to the Town of Fairfield for 43 years. Have we considered making your years in this town tax-free after you have paid in for a certain number of years.

Gail Fennell of 115 Birch Road told committee members that she thought a percentage of taxes given as a credit is fairer than a flat amount. She would like to see that enacted.

Palma Senatore of 42 Pilgrim Lane talked of her taxes increasing 218% over the past 12 years. She also was opposed to the cap of \$500,000 in assets, when reviewing people's eligibility. She also believes it is insulting to call this relief. Seniors merely need to be helped because they deserve a more equal share of the pie. Young families simply have to ask for more money for the school budget and the Town attempts to cater constantly. Seniors should be able to gain some reward for supporting Fairfield for so many years.

Robert Ross of 395 Meadowbrook Road wanted to know why the Town doesn't spend the full amount allocated for this program. Maybe the amount distributed could be based on the number of years a homeowner has paid real estate taxes to the Town, Ross suggested.

Debra Coleman of 26 Cranston Street raised questions about the Town's commitment, or lack thereof, to people with disabilities. First, there is no office or center specifically established to deal with the needs of persons with disabilities. In addition, the reality of a person with disabilities, particularly with disabilities caused by an accident at a younger age, that person has no ability to increase their income over the years, and many times is no longer able to be employed at all. Medical expenses for these individuals are usually amazingly high, and yet they may need to keep a larger amount in assets than the \$500,000 cap, just to be able to continue to live in their homes.

Tom McCarthy stated that the committee will be formulating their final suggestions for the next meeting. Hopefully, we can have things finalized for presentation to the RTM in the fall. The committee will be reviewing again the tax code 95-15.4.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol J. Way
Secretary