

Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee Meeting Minutes for August 11, 2015

Location: Conference Room, Sullivan Independence Hall

Present: Tom McCarthy, Chairman; Ruth Smey, Vice Chairman; Carol Way, Secretary
Guests: Donald Ross, Tax Assessor

I. Call to Order:

Tom McCarthy called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. and led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Update and Results to Date

Assessor Don Ross and Chairman McCarthy both had summarizing materials showing the results to date of the most recent year's tax relief program. Both did show that participation rates were the lowest ever over an 11 year history. As we reviewed that history, we saw that FY 2015/16 had 1525 in the credit program, 12 deferrals, and 5 in the freeze category, which gave a total number of participants of 1542.

The contrast was shown in the following table:

	<u>FY14/15</u>		<u>FY 15/16</u>
• New Applications	131	vs.	101
• Excess Income	11	vs.	32
• Excess Assets	0	vs.	4
• Non-CT Residents	3	vs.	6
• Sold, Died, Moved	93	vs.	88
• Failed to Refile	23	vs.	44

Chairman McCarthy commented on the large number that failed to refile – 44 in contrast to 23 the previous year. Once again, we had publicized the deadline dates and had seen many people at the Senior Center and they had publicized the information in the senior newsletters and in posters. Assessor Ross stated that it is difficult to know the exact reasons why individuals do not refile and it would take closer cross-referencing with sales and deaths and interviews to know those details. Terry Giegengack and her volunteers have been a great help.

Carol Way asked about individuals who were considered non-residents. Assessor Ross referred to CT Statute 95.8 sub 3 which requires that the home is occupied by the owner 265 days of the year and that this home is their voting address. Carol Way brought up the residency law used by the IRS (6 months plus 1 day); that would be your primary residence and the state and community where you pay your federal and state taxes. Carol Way brought up the fact that someone could stay with a relative or friend for 5 months in the winter in Florida and be considered a non-resident of Fairfield. "That doesn't make sense. It seems that we should use the IRS rule on primary residence," she stated.

Chairman McCarthy raised the question of the number who qualify because their medical or dental expenses exceed 30% of their income. Don Ross stated this is set through statute 95.8 sub 5. In this conversation, Assessor Ross mentioned that several of the 32 people who did not qualify because of excess income had to take money from savings or a 401K to pay for some emergency such as a new roof, a new car, he has concerns about such situations. Another question that he raised was whether an individual who experiences a negative income figure because of a loss can actually use this to offset his assets.

Assessor Ross will create a spreadsheet that may answer some of these questions more thoroughly. The Assessor then raised a question about policy in the administration of this Senior and Disabled Tax Relief legislation. Currently, Assessor Ross is using a CT Legislation and Policy Manual along with our Town Charter and the legislation passed by the RTM. "We need a good and better definition for determination of assets, and some formal process that states when and if an internal audit is warranted."

III. Public Comment

Palma Senatore of 42 Pilgrim Lane talked about all of the “boomers” who have moved into this senior category, and they don’t want to leave Fairfield. “Can’t we find a way that they pay just an average amount in taxes such as \$2,500, with \$5,000 being the maximum amount,” she asked, “or let seniors stop paying real estate taxes completely or allow them the maximum tax credit relief if they have lived in Fairfield and paid real estate taxes for X number of years. Whenever seniors leave town and sell their homes, families tend to move into them and that costs the town \$16,000 per year per school child in that new family.”

IV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol J. Way, Secretary
Attachments