

BOARD OF FINANCE SENIOR & DISABLED TAX RELIEF COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
November 18, 2019

A Meeting of the Board of Finance Senior & Disabled Tax Relief Committee was held in the First Floor Conference Room of Independence Hall, 725 Old Post Road, on Monday, November 18, 2019, at 7:30 pm.

MEMBERS PRESENT Christopher DeWitt-Chairman, Sheila Marmion-Vice Chairman, James F. Walsh-Secretary

ALSO PRESENT Debra Coleman, Fairfield Senior Advocates Rep. Urb Leimkuhler, Bud Morton, Rep. Jill Vergara

Call to Order - Chairman DeWitt called the meeting to order at 7:41 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance – Ms. Marmion led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Review and demonstration of the “S&DTR computation tool” (in Excel using a projector for the room).

The Committee reviewed the information in the packet, referred to charts and discussed on how best to achieve the highest number of participants getting maximum benefits. Maxing out in the percentage, caps, cliffs and smoothing were examined.

Mr. DeWitt referred to a spreadsheet that displayed several levels broken down and the Town’s costs and tax burden. He reviewed each line going from no credits to the most credits. It revealed the current system is indeed helping and benefits even today are making a difference. Mr. Ross supplied the average income for the Committee to assess.

Mr. Walsh requested to review the math in each box in the chart. Mr. DeWitt explained his calculations and formulas. He said we are not currently getting state benefits but can input into the spreadsheet when that changes. Assumptions, variables, income levels and home assessments were analyzed. Goals to increase benefits to the most needy, current state, and conclusions were then addressed.

The Committee reviewed recommended language changes in the ordinance in Section 95-7 through 95.15.4, tax freezes and qualifying income...

The Committee reviewed and discussed Westport’s hardship language, ranges, caps and comparisons to our chart ranges. Ms. Vergara noted Westport doesn’t have QTAV and are doing both programs. Mr. Murray is not in favor of. Mr. Walsh read Westport’s Hardship definition and exception and wondered what their impact was. It states it must be approved unanimously by the BOS.

There are eight people with a deferral and abatement. Mr. DeWitt suggested speaking with Mr. Murray to determine potential impact and cost. Ms. Marmion said the Committee should make suggestions to be considered for the next two years after our presentation. Language for trust, abatement and hardship was further discussed.

Mr. Walsh wanted to strengthen the language for the penalty of perjury and audit a certain number of applicants but has not heard back from Mr. Lesser. He said Westport's language includes the documentation necessary for an applicant to supply and wants to include all trusts. The new Town Attorney will work with Mr. Murray.

Mr. Walsh will draft language into an affidavit for trusts, abatement, mirror hardship exceptions, unanimous approval by BOS, pretense of perjury statement and subject to internal audit warning. This language will be in the affidavit not the ordinance and should be listed as a required document. Mr. Walsh will review the total income language and make a recommendation.

Mr. Walsh motioned the freeze be removed. Ms. Marmion seconded the motion which carried unanimously, 3-0.

Mr. Walsh commented that a 10% increase sounds like a lot of money and questioned where would we take it from, education? He said the BOE is already looking at a salary increase and that a 10% increase for any other department would be high with what's going on in town. He suggested we invite the new First Selectwoman to the next meeting.

Mr. DeWitt said if we agree with the numbers it needs to be reviewed by the CFO and Tax Assessor.

2. Presentation from the Committee Chairman on recommendations from the "S&DTR computation tool" and data supplied by the Town Tax Assessor.
3. Review of the most current S&DTR document with RTM and the BOF S&DTR recommendations included.
4. Vote on final recommendations to be briefed by the Committee Chairman to the BOF at the December 3, 2019 BOF meeting.
5. To Hear, Consider and Approve Minutes of: October 22, 2019.

Ms. Marmion motioned to approve the minutes of October 22, 2019. Mr. DeWitt seconded the motion which carried unanimously, 3-0.

6. Public comment – Mr. Morton suggesting alerting the BOF in the presentation that there are number of issues the committee has not had time to address such as the ability to participate in more than one program, what the program is supposed to accomplish, how to measure, how much we should spend and are there better ways to achieve. He asked if there is additional information that the Committee would like to have to gathered for the benefit of future sub-committees. He

believed the strategic plan has to be part of it and needs to be integrated to help guide the next version, when time permits.

Ms. Marmion agreed there are definite ideas to consider for future committees and we must procedurally work together. She is in favor of getting the medical, trust and annuities language cleaned up.

Ms. Coleman mentioned the cost of living income levels and asked if there is any consideration of increasing the QTAV since it hasn't increased since 2012. She reminded them to please remember to include disabled in categories. She asked what the maximum home assessment is and Mr. DeWitt explained how he determines averages for the max.

7. To Hear, Consider and Act Upon Any Communications.

Adjourn – There being no further business to come before the Committee, Ms. Marmion motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:51 p.m. Mr. DeWitt seconded the motion which carried unanimously, 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Sheila Tesei