

Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee Meeting & Minutes for April 5, 2014

Present: Tom McCarthy, Ruth Smey, and Carol Way

Guests: Cinda Buchter, Tax Collector; Terry Giegengack, Social Services & Senior Center Director

Attachment: Press Release that had been published in local news media and in the Senior Center newsletter

I. Call to Order:

Tom McCarthy called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. He welcomed the members of the public and thanked them for coming. Tom thanked the Senior Center staff for their help in making the facilities available to us on a Saturday morning and for helping with the set-up for a video presentation that he had prepared. Other committee members, Ruth Smey and Carol Way, and Tax Collector Cinda Buchter were introduced. Tax Assessor Don Ross had sent his regrets with being unable to attend on this particular Saturday, since he has a long-standing teaching commitment on the first Saturday of each month.

II. Presentation and Update

Chairman McCarthy gave a review of the changes that had been instituted with the more two years of work accomplished by the previous tax relief committee. He showed the changes that had been voted in by the RTM, and where we were currently in the process of signing up new people, publicizing new and enhanced programs, and what we were hoping to achieve. It was explained that we were all aware of how difficult it is for many seniors and persons with disabilities to remain in their current homes in our town.

Cinda Buchta filled us in on many of the updates and improvements within the tax collector's office. She explained that all of the problems and confusion in the deferral program had been revised and that all records were filed properly and collections were being tracked appropriately. Inserts in tax bills have given information about senior and disabled programs; however, more and more people are receiving billing and information through online services. Ruth Smey and Carol Way talked about real estate in Fairfield, the results of the last revaluation for certain areas of town, the impact of Super Storm Sandy on seniors who had been long-term residents in the coastal areas, and other policies that are not senior-friendly in many Connecticut communities. It seemed as though this storm was just one more difficulty and increased expense that had caused many seniors to leave Fairfield.

III. Public Comment

Laura Incerto, the owner of an in-home care business for seniors, talked about the difficulty that she has had trying to move her parents to Fairfield. There are very few options for an equal quality of life and home ownership for seniors in our town in contrast to other more affordable Connecticut communities. When we compare this to other states it gets even more complicated. There are many states that give a homestead exemption credit to seniors, veterans, the disabled, etc. There are others that freeze seniors' taxes at a certain level once they have achieved a particular age and have lived in the home for a certain number of years. The tax increases do not have to be paid and they do not take effect until the house changes ownership.

Palma Senatore of Pilgrim Lane mentioned the special difficulties that seniors face if they have had storm damage in flood zone areas – increased insurance costs, need to raise above flood levels, and/or qualifying for tax relief because of income level but assets amount disqualifies them.

A couple of individuals who were new to Fairfield asked about the details of the program. There was a hand-out that had been given to all attendees reminding them about hours of the Tax Assessor's office, when there is assistance at the Senior Center, and a reminder of April 15th as the deadline for applying, unless there is a medical exemption which would extend the deadline to May 15th.

IV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol J. Way, Secretary

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

cjffld@gmail.com

Contact: Carol Way, Secretary

RTM, Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee

E-mail:

Phone: 203-293-3111

Reminder of Tax Relief for Seniors and Disabled Application Deadlines and of Public Meeting Scheduled for Saturday April 5th

Tom McCarthy, Chairman of the RTM Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee, has announced that a public meeting will be held at the Fairfield Senior Center, 100 Mona Terrace, on Saturday, April 5th, at 10:00 a.m. The purpose of the meeting is to hear comments from the public on how the recently revised tax relief program is working and to hear any questions or concerns that the senior and disabled populations may have in connection with this program or other senior and disabled concerns.

A revised tax relief program for qualifying senior and disabled residents of Fairfield was established by the RTM during this past year. As such, applications for the relief program are reviewed by the Tax Assessor and trained staff from the beginning of February through the 15th of May. Senior and disabled residents are able to apply at the Tax Assessor's office on the first floor of the Old Town Hall, 611 Old Post Road, Monday through Friday from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. or at the Senior Center most Mondays and Wednesdays in the mornings starting at 9:15 a.m. Questions may be answered by calling the Senior Center at 203-256-3166 or the Tax Assessor's office at 203-256-3110. Residents should keep in mind that the May 15th deadline is a firm one. At application time, they should submit a copy of their Federal tax return and Social Security Form 1099 for the calendar year preceding their year of application for tax relief if a tax return is filed. If no tax return is filed, proof of income from all sources (including Social Security) will be required.

While it is not necessary that attendees make a reservation for the Saturday, April 5th meeting, it would be appreciated if prospective attendees would call the Senior Center at 203-256-3166.