

**Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee Meeting  
Minutes for June 19, 2012**

Present: Bill Domeika, Tom McCarthy, Eric Newman, Marc Patten, Carolyn Richmond, and Carol Way

Absent: Sheila Marmion

Guests: Donald Ross, Tax Assessor

**I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Tom McCarthy at 7:06 p.m. The evening began with the pledge of allegiance.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the May 19, 2012 meeting were approved 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 July 17, 2012.

Committee Members reviewed demographic information provided by Mark Barnhart sourced from American Community Survey which indicated that on the basis of qualifying income level as many as 1000 more Fairfield Seniors might have been able to have applied for relief than actually did in 2012. Reasons for the difference between number who applied and those within eligible income level were subject to speculation. According to Chapter 95-11 of Town Code the amount designated for tax relief cannot exceed 4% of total real property assessed in Fairfield during the previous tax year.

Don Ross then shared the document dated June 25, 2012 which was his final report to the RTM for the Tax Relief Program for FY 2012-2013. The committee noted that the recipients did not require the full 4% figure. There was some discussion of better ways to communicate the availability of the funds. In addition, there were some questions. Marc Patton asked about extensions for people who did not make the February 15<sup>th</sup> deadline. Only medical reasons would qualify and the State actually determines that exception. The Office of Policy and Management also determines that income from all sources must be included in the total calculations for eligibility for relief. Documents that allowed comparison of numbers choosing which relief programs were made available for the past five years. It was quite clear that the figures were basically flat, and some years they actually were significantly smaller than others.

Tom McCarthy then posed this question to the Committee, "How do we want approach this situation in order to have a report with recommendations?" Marc Patten had a list of facts and ideas that he raised with the Committee. He listed at least 12 items that we could actually propose changes to in the ordinance, and he also had several suggestions about media outreach. The Committee also reviewed income figures from Fact Finders, and suggested that it appeared that an additional 450 households with some 65 or over would possible be eligible if we raised the qualifying income levels. We need to see projections in order to know what such action might produce.

**IV. Public Discussion**

**Palma Senatore of 42 Pilgrim Lane** talked of inequities with what the seniors get in the Town of Fairfield. The Board of Education merely has to ask, she commented, and whatever they wish is given to them. Nobody seems to care about the quality of facilities that we have for seniors and the fairness (or unfairness) of the system. There is no relief if you have over \$500,000 in assets other than your home. She felt this is unfair. That may be what the individual has to live on for many retirement years. Why not have a decreasing scale for your taxes depending on how long you have lived in the community.

**Helen Bedcoe of 211 Judd Street** wanted to know what happened to the great comments that were made in the meeting of May 19<sup>th</sup>. Tom McCarthy reassured her that all comments are being considered as we construct our recommendations for presentation to the RTM and other Town officials.

**Helen D’Avanzo of 1446 Jennings Road** stated again that we should consider a more robust deferral plan similar to that of Darien. This could be phased in, but to be eligible you must pay at least 25% of annual taxes – that is State statute.

**Richard Ross of 395 Meadowbrook Road** stated that tax relief is just the “right thing to do”. He also questioned the \$500,000 cap.

Committee member Carolyn Richmond stated that if people qualify for tax relief there should not be any increase that is calculated on their taxes, otherwise it isn’t relief.

The committee discussed the way taxes were calculated this last time around. Different locations in town were really hit hard, and others actually saw their taxes decrease. The average assessment in Fairfield is \$294,000, for an average real estate tax of \$6,884.50. The interest on a deferral of taxes is simple interest at 1.8% based on a 10 year Treasury bill. There was discussion of extending the freeze option, possible raising the qualifying income levels, get rid of the differentiation between married and single, and possibly raise the asset cap.

Better methods of communication were suggested – Fair TV, a senior/disabled column, better newspaper, radio coverage. The question was raised as to whether Don Ross could use some volunteers for the work of his office. He commented that he would have to look into the legal aspects of such a move.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol J. Way  
Secretary