

**Senior and Disabled Tax Relief Committee Meeting
Minutes for August 28, 2012**

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

Guests: Donald Ross, Tax Assessor

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Tom McCarthy at 7:10 p.m. The evening began with the pledge of allegiance.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the July 17, 2012 meeting were approved by a unanimous voice vote.

III. Evening's Business

The committee discussed how the evening's business should be conducted. It was determined that there seemed to be consensus on a number of points that had been under discussion over the past several months. The committee decided to deal with those items where there seemed to be the greatest agreement for change and what that change should be. With that in mind, these were the motions and votes that were made:

1. Motion: That there should be a single tier, no distinction between single or married people, in terms of eligibility levels and amount of credit that can be received.

Motion made by Carol Way, seconded by Bill Domeika

Vote was unanimous in favor.

2. Motion: To change the amount of credit that can be given so that it is based on a percentage of the tax bill rather than a flat amount.

Motion made by Carolyn Richmond, seconded by Sheila Marmion.

Vote was unanimous in favor.

There was discussion about raising the maximum qualifying amount for tax relief from \$60,900 to a higher figure. Carolyn Richmond asked the committee to consider \$75,000. Don Ross, Assessor, stated that the State Legislature will mandate COLA changes to the Town of Fairfield, also. After a good deal of discussion a motion was made:

3. Motion: To increase the qualifying income level for Fairfield taxpayers from \$60,900 to \$70,000.

Motion made by Sheila Marion and seconded by Marc Patten.

Vote was unanimous in favor.

4. Motion: To raise the level of the Asset Cap from the current \$500,000 to \$650,000.

Motion made by Marc Patten, and seconded by Eric Newman.

Vote was unanimous in favor.

5. Motion: To change the wording in Public Act 12-197, Code 95-11 from "tax assessed" to "tax levied".

Motion made by Carolyn Richmond and seconded by Sheila Marmion.

Vote was unanimous in favor.

6. Motion: To change the current tax deferral program in the following ways – the qualifying age will be 75 reached by December 31st preceding the application date. Those deferring may have up to \$80,000 in income. The deferral may be unlimited in time-frame, with the repayment to take place at the time of the sale of the property or at the death of the owner/owners. Interest would be due at that time, also.

Motion made by Marc Patten and seconded by Sheila Marmion.

Vote was six in favor (Domeika, Marmion, McCarthy, Patten, Richmond, Way) and one against (Newman).

Motion: To lower the eligibility for tax relief because of medical expenses from the current 40% of taxable income to 30% of taxable income.

Motion made by Eric Newman and seconded by Carolyn Richmond.

Vote was six in favor (Domeika Marmion, Newman, Patten, Richmond, and Way) and one opposed (McCarthy).

Two areas that were discussed but not voted on were:

1. Review of a tax freeze. There was a need to look more closely at this and to lock in the level of taxes at the previous year's amount, rather than allowing the freeze to be at an increased amount.
2. To use the discretion given by the State of Connecticut for those filing tax returns later than the April deadline because of medical reasons. The Tax Assessor should consider making this change in our local deadline, also.

With any legal wording that we have questions about, Chairman Tom McCarthy has been instructed to seek the proper verbage from our Town Attorney.

IV. Public Discussion

Kim Fawcett, State Representative 133th District and resident at 234 Collingwood Avenue, spoke of the hardship of her constituents in meeting their tax bills. This is especially true of the elderly who have contacted her. In many cases they can no longer afford to pay the cost of their medicines, food and utility bills. She spoke of an 81 year old woman who burst into tears when Kim was visiting with voters in the neighborhood. She had just received her new tax bill with a major increase and she was already on the maximum amount that she could receive through the relief program. Don Ross verified that there seemed to be little more that could be done to help this specific individual. It is a critical time for many seniors in Fairfield. We cannot sustain increases every single year of 4% or more.

Joan Fortuna of 38 Pine Creek Avenue complained of the major increase in her taxes, which are now set at \$30,000 a year. If you are a single person paying that amount, you know that you are actually paying for two children in our school system. The cost per child is \$15,000 a year for their education. She has no children in the schools. This is a major issue.

Palma Senatore of 42 Pilgrim Lane talked of how much seniors have contributed and continue to contribute to the well-being of the town of Fairfield. While they are 28% of our population, there is no way that they receive anywhere near that percentage of benefits. There needs to be a fairer and more equitable distribution of benefits to this group that has been passed over in our town.

Bruce Graham of 26 Cranston Street asked the committee to "be vigorous in using the criteria that you have been reviewing to create a fairer system."

The committee determined that there was a need for an additional meeting before taking our report to various committees and the RTM for review. September 18th at 7:00 p.m. was chosen for the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol J. Way, Secretary