

Thursday September 22, 2022 Board of Assessors VIRTUAL Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present: Chairman Jeffrey Quackenbush and member Howard Shpetner. Absent: Susan Reyes. **Also present:** Town Administrator Rebecca Torres, Tax Collector Ellen McKay and Assessors' Clerk Leslie Bracebridge. **Guests:** Leslie Luchonok, Jill Marland, Katherine Powers.

Chairman Jeffrey Quackenbush opened the meeting at 5:36 PM online using ZOOM Meeting ID: 871 5203 8420, Passcode: 90Ma6g, Phone: 1.646.558.8656, Passcode: 418162.

Minutes of the June 30, 2022 meeting were approved as written.

The following Accountant Reports were approved for Assessors' signature stamps:

- **Motor Vehicle Abatements:**

<u>Commit. Year</u>	<u>Report Date</u>	<u>Total Amount Abated</u>
2022	July (2022)	\$982.10
2022	August (2022)	\$360.37

Collector's request for abatements: Collector McKay reported an error in communication between Assessors' Vision property program and Collector's Point billing program caused ½ the amounts of the Septic Loan Program payments, usually included in quarters 3 and 4, to be included in quarters 1 and 2 bills. This could create a hardship on taxpayers, who must budget for these payments. Collector McKay requested Assessors abate the amounts on all 7 properties in the program and proceed as usual with quarters 3 and 4 billing.

Assessors approved 7 septic loan abatements totaling \$4,325.14.

Administrative Updates:

1. Town Administrator Torres reported on the **Administrative Assessor Search and Office operations in the absence of an Administrative Assessor:**
 - a. Initial communications with people who she thought might possibly fill-in for or replace the Administrative Assessor position have all declined.
 - b. She will follow-up on a couple of suggestions for people to fill-in, in the interim including:
 - i. Mayflower Appraisals for "subbing-out" general work.
 - ii. Consultant Roy Bishop, who worked with Assessors in the 2018 Revaluation, has agreed to guide Assessors through the 2023 revaluation with a target completion date of October.
 - iii. Former Shutesbury Administrative Assessor David Burgess will assist with a few immediate requests, including apportionment of taxes for H-43 on Friday, Sept. 30. He will be asked for input on MGL Ch. 59 S 5, Clause 41C1/2 at that time.
 - c. An employment ad will be placed on the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) website, and on the Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers (MAAO) website.
 - d. The state-wide shortage of Administrative Assessors is worse now than it was the last time Shutesbury was searching for an Administrative Assessor.
2. **FY 23 Revaluation and Tax Rate Preparation** progress:
 - a. Chairman Quackenbush will sign the CP1 form in Gateway, as prepared by Town Accountant Weiss, and reviewed against Assessors' records by Assessors' Clerk Bracebridge.
 - b. Assessors' Clerk Bracebridge and Town Administrator Torres are working with Department of Revenue (DOR) Division of Local Services Representative Lauren Aldrich to download and print required revaluation documents including field cards, and the LA3.
 - c. Upon access to passwords to the Administrative Assessor's computer, Roy Bishop will come to the Assessors' office to complete the revaluation and tax-rate setting tasks within the timelines.

Tax-payers Leslie Luchonok and Jill Marland reported delays in getting their questions concerning exemptions approved at the May 2022 Annual Town Meeting answered in previous months. Leslie Luchonok asked, “How did we get to this situation?” They further asked if the Town Administrator could post a public announcement answering his question.

Town Administrator Torres responded that she is not able to go into individual circumstances, that she is working through the personnel situation with legal guidance and actively searching for a replacement Administrative Assessor. Extra hours and consultants are being devoted to the Assessing department, “so that we don’t miss a beat.” “The team is doing everything right.”

Assessor Shpetner reported being “blind-sided” by the situation; that a few months ago, no one was dissatisfied. Shpetner reassured Leslie Luchonok that Assessors have access to detailed information about Assessing and will be able to answer any questions given time to research the questions.

Chairman Quackenbush stated that he has researched the questions that Leslie Luchonok and Jill Marland have put to him concerning MGL Ch. 50 S 5 Clause 41C1/2. What he has read can be interpreted in 2 different ways. He feels that the Assessors need someone knowledgeable with the clause, such as Consultant David Burgess or perhaps Town Counsel, to interpret it.

Jill Marland reported her research indicated that Shutesbury’s previous Administrative Assessor Kevin Rudden accepted a full-time position in Holliston on May 5. Jill wondered how he could do that and do the work of the part time Administrative Assessor in Shutesbury. Town Administrator Torres reiterated that she is not able to comment on personnel questions, that she is receiving legal guidance, and that it is “best to move forward.”

Schedule Next Meeting: The next meeting will be October 13, 2022 at 5:30 PM.

Assessors moved to Adjourn at 6:15 PM: Quackenbush – Aye, Shpetner - Aye.

Respectfully submitted, as approved on October 13, 2022

**Leslie Bracebridge
Assessors’ Clerk**

List of Documents used at the meeting:

1. September 22, 2022 meeting agenda.
2. June 30, 2022 draft meeting minutes.
3. Motor Vehicle abatement summaries to Accountant, as detailed in the minutes.