

Ryan Knapp, Chair
Judith DeStefano, Vice Chair
Neil Chaudhary
Dan Honan
Mary Ann Jacob
Chris Eide



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TOWN OF NEWTOWN

Minutes of the Legislative Ordinance Committee Meeting

The Ordinance Committee met on Monday June 13th, 2016 in The Council Chambers of the Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Lane, Newtown. Committee Chairman Ryan Knapp called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.

Present: Mr. Chaudhary, Mr. Honan, Ms. Jacob, Mr. Eide and Mr. Knapp. 20 Members of the public
Absent: Ms. DeStefano

The meeting had originally been scheduled for Meeting Room 1, however due to the large number of people, it was moved across the hall with a note left on the door of Meeting Room 1.

MINUTES:

Mr Honan moved to approve the minutes of 2/29/2016, Mr Eide seconded. All in favor, 5-0

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Steve Rosenblatt, 50 Watkins Dr, spoke to giving a credit to the seniors currently outside the existing program. He said he was here to see where the Committee is in their work and is willing to share information on the plan he suggested a few months ago.

Lynn Welsh, Parmalee Hill Rd, asked if there were means of getting notice of meetings out to seniors, perhaps at the Senior Center, given that any are not online. She also suggested daytime meetings as many seniors do not drive after dark.

Claire Theune, 102 Haley Lane, Walnut Tree Village, said she moved here in 2012 and loves Newtown. She is grateful for the tax credit, but still feels the stresses of living on a fixed income with such high taxes. She asked that the committee consider exempting social security and municipal bonds. She also asked that the application period be changed from two years to three years as it is a lot to do if there has not been any change in circumstance.

John Boccuzzi, 57 Queen Street, said during his work for Friends of The Library doing book pick up, he meets many seniors leaving town and they always say "I can't afford to live here." He noted how many volunteers in town are seniors.

Bill Thesus, 103 Curry Tuck Rd, expressed concerns about services. Mr. Knapp informed him about the Roads Committee.

Cathy Mayben, Nunnawauk Rd, is interested in attending more meetings but reiterated awareness concerns. She suggested perhaps the town could put out signs and that way people who may not otherwise be aware may see them.

In recognition of the audience, Mr. Knapp rearranged the agenda to deal with Senior Tax Abatement first. No one objected.

Old Business

Review and recommendation regarding senior tax abatement program.

Mr. Knapp began with a history on the work of the committee to date and the work performed prior to the budget. He explained that the committee documented all suggestions on the record, but due to the election and then being in the midst of a budget cycle without the time to make substantive changes to the ordinance via the charter mandated process, that the committee focused on researching changes it could make by resolution ahead of the March-May 2016 application period and that the committee intended to revisit the suggestions which it is doing now. He then explained the process by which the committee conducts business on an agenda items such as that and that it is only done in public meetings. Ms. Jacob said that the data from the most recent application period will be presented to the LC on the 29th. What happened, who used it etc. She noted we currently allocate over \$1.6M for senior tax relief and that we need to find a balance with the what we ask of other tax payers. She noted Newtown's program is amongst the most generous in the state. On the notion of noticing meetings for awareness, she suggested we send notice of meetings through the Senior Center and contact people at the different senior communities.

Mr. Knapp asked if anyone had suggestions of further questions for the Tax Collector.

Ms. Jacob noted we do not know income data on specific populations.

Mr. Knapp suggested perhaps CCM has that information. Judit had been in contact with them.

Mr. Eide would like to know how many people were ineligible and why?

Mr. Chaudhary asked on the limitations of the statutes and if there is much flexibility. Perhaps there are other statutes to allow us other options.

Ms. Jacob noted Judit DeStefano has been in contact with CCM and made a document. In our January minutes it is attached.

Mr. Eide noted the enabling statutes

Ms. Jacob suggested we ask Bob Tait to our next meeting.

Mr. Eide will look into the limits of the statutory options ahead of our next meeting.

Mr. Knapp will ask Judit to bring the information she got from CCM to our next meeting.

Ms. Jacob suggested perhaps there is a way to get age census data. She noted Social Services did not have the information we had been looking for but the Registrar may have age numbers of registered voters. From a higher level we need to have a budget conversation with the burden of the other tax payers in mind.

Mr. Knapp speculated Registrar data may shed some light on future increases as Baby Boomers continue to age into the program. He will contact. He also suggested the other members review the data from Bob Tait from the February minutes.

Mr. Honan thinks after the questions we asked, this past application period will give us good data.

Ms. Jacob would like to review the impact of the changes and the trends compared to past years.

Mr. Chaudhary wonders if revaluation will impact the average home value test in town.

Mr. Knapp realizes we will not meet on this agenda item until after the 29th and will coordinate our next meeting before then so we may announce it at the full LC meeting.

In respect to the audience the committee allowed for a public comment period.

Public Comment:

Steve Rosenblatt, 50 Watkins Dr, said he felt embarrassed he got all these people to come and there had been no progress. He had talked to the First Selectman and the Finance Director about this concept last summer.

Ms. Jacob clarified that the First Selectman and the Finance Director do not have the authority to change Ordinances. That must come through the Legislative Council and the LC was made aware of his request too late in the process to get it done before the March 2016 application start. The suggestion is recorded in the minutes of the January 13th meeting.

Mr. Rosenblatt said his plan would be to give each senior \$1000 in abatement which would cost an additional \$750,000. He requested the Ordinance Committee meet with advocates of senior tax relief.

He noted that some seniors lease cars and did not get tax bills which were used for the awareness campaign. He had concerns that registrar data may not represent home owner data as there maybe renters.

Bernie Cohen, 52 Watkins Dr, asked if the committee can get this done by January and asked if they may tap volunteers from the community to help. He would hate to see this go another year.

Mike Boyle, Watkins Dr, asked that the considerations incorporate seniors leaving town and the costs there in. Also consider them being replaced by families which add a burden to our school system. There is value in retaining seniors.

Joanne Seabald, Whitewood Rd, asked if the information related to seniors could be shared at the library. She suggested an awareness campaign to let seniors know they are cared for. Seniors volunteer a lot. Now in her 70s, she uses local businesses to do a lot of things she can no longer do for herself like basic chores. She suggested a survey to get senior information. She told of how she was unable to keep her family home in another town when she inherited it due to high taxes and a residence requirement. Perhaps Newtown could consider a tax lien program.

New Business

Review and Recommendation regarding Pension Committee ordinance language.

Mr. Knapp began discussion with a review of the charge from the LC.

Ms. Jacob explained this is part of us going through our Code Book and cleaning up as we did with the Medical Self Insurance Ordinance. She suggested we have a meeting with the Pension Committee to get a sense of what they do.

Mr. Knapp said he will coordinate that meeting. In the mean time he asked that other committee members take some time to look over the Pension Committee minutes and familiarize themselves and possibly come up with questions.

Old Business

Review and Recommendation regarding abatement for volunteer fire, ambulance and underwater rescue personnel.

Mr. Eide presented a draft of the Ordinance Language that included changing the misused word "exemption" to "abatement." He also added language similar to that in Senior Tax which allows the LC the flexibility to amend numbers by resolution rather than by changing the full ordinance. The group went line by line through the draft and Mr. Edie updated his working copy.

There were questions about eligibility and how to possibly clarify it. 25 calls seems arbitrary when some departments do many more calls than others. The group spoke to statistics and wondered if that would be better as a percentage.

Mr. Knapp felt that may cause issues as some departments do many calls and moving to a percentage is going to adversely impact someone.

The group wondered what a support member is and would like to understand the bylaws referenced. Speaking to the Board of Fire Commissioners was suggested.

The group also wonders how applicant data is tracked.

Mr. Chaudhary wondered if there was any benefit to clarifying the years of service as consecutive. Others felt it was likely not an issue.

A language change was suggested in 208-23 to strike having the list contain how much of an exemption the member would be eligible for and just have it state years of service as the exemption levels may change.

Mr. Chaudhary wondered if there were call logs and should we require that data be on the record. Mr. Knapp said it should be available as it is used for stipends. It was noted that other communities use a points system.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None.

Mr. Chaudhary motioned to adjourn at 10:25. Mr. Eide Seconded. 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ryan W. Knapp
Ordinance Committee Chairman

DRAFT ORDINANCE 13 JUNE 2016

Motion to recommend to Legislative Council to strike Chapter 208, Article VI from Town Code to be replaced with the following language:

Chapter 208 Article VI. Tax Abatement for Volunteer Fire, Ambulance, and Underwater Rescue Personnel

§ 208-19 Purpose

In recognition of the benefits provided to the Town of Newtown by the dedicated service of the Town's volunteer fire, ambulance and underwater search and rescue personnel, the Newtown Legislative Council hereby establishes a tax abatement program pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 12-81w for volunteer fire, ambulance and underwater search and rescue personnel on the conditions outlined below.

§ 208-20 Eligibility

Members of at least three years' good standing of the Newtown Volunteer Fire Departments, Ambulance Corps and New town Underwater Search and Rescue (NUSAR) who reside in and pay property tax to the Town of Newtown as of October 1 preceding their application shall be eligible for such abatement. A year's service in good standing is achieved when meeting at least one of the following criteria:

A. The member must respond to _____ calls in the calendar year preceding inclusion on any certified list; or

B. The member must hold one of the following positions in the emergency services:

- (1) Administrative/Executive board.
- (2) Commissioner.
- (3) Line officer/operational officer.
- (4) Support member, per company or association bylaws.

§ 208-21 Tax credit granted

A. For the 2016-2017 fiscal year and subsequent fiscal years (unless changed by the Legislative Council in accordance with this section), the modified income levels for the prior calendar year and the corresponding maximum available tax credits for those levels shall be as follows:

**Years of Service in Good Standing
(preceding date of list certification)**

Maximum Available Tax Abatement

3	\$250
4	\$440
5	\$675
6	\$860
7 or more	\$1,000

B. Abatement amounts for two or more members can be applied to the same property if each member is a co-owner of that property.

C. Tax abatements granted are subject to change upon resolution by the Legislative Council, which may base such changes on recommendations to the Legislative Council from the office of the First Selectman.

§ 208-22 Maximum Tax Abatement Granted

A. In no event may any abatement amount equate to more than the maximum amount of relief permitted under state statute, and if so, the First Selectman may cap the total relief afforded to any individual to the permitted maximum.

B. Members are limited to only one abatement, regardless of the number of volunteer organizations to which they belong.

§ 208-23 Administration of Tax Abatement Program

A. Annually on or before December 5 of each year, the president of each Fire Department shall certify and submit to the Board of Fire Commissioners a list of the members of his/her organizations who are eligible as defined in § 208-20. This list shall contain addresses of such members and the number of years of service in good standing. The Board of Fire Commissioners will review and certify said list, making corrections as necessary, before submitting it to the Office of the First Selectman by December 15 of each year.

B. The Ambulance Association shall review and certify the Ambulance Corps list, and said list shall contain addresses of such members and the number of years of service in good standing and submit it directly to the Office of the First Selectman by December 15 of each year.

C. Annually, on or before December 15 of each year, the President of NUSAR shall certify and submit to the Director of Newtown Emergency Management its own list of members who are eligible as defined in § 208-20. The Director will review and certify said list, making corrections

as necessary, before submitting it directly to the Office of the First Selectman by December 15 of each year.

Ordinance

Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department Tax Abatement Program

1. Statutory Authority

C.G.S. Section 12-81w Municipal option to abate or exempt a portion of property taxes of local firefighters and certain emergency and civil preparedness personnel.

2. Purpose

In recognition of the dedicated service the volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel provide to the town, and to attract and retain said volunteers.

3. Definitions

Active member: A member of the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department who meets criteria set forth in the Department by-laws.

Incentive: Members meeting all requirements shall be eligible to a real estate or motor vehicle property tax abatement not to exceed \$1,000.00.

Program period: The qualifying program shall run from January 1st to December 31st.

Points system: Points will be awarded to members for attending and participating and various department meetings and activities, participation in the Bridgewater County Fair is not in the point system.

Tax Abatement Committee: The Fire Chief, President, and Ambulance Coordinator shall administer the program

4. Incentive Approval

4.1 The Tax Abatement Committee shall certify and submit a list of eligible members to the Bridgewater Board of Selectmen prior to January 31st.

4.2 Members who have meet all requirements to be considered active then need to meet the 60 points required per the point system.

4.3 The tax abatement may be applied to property taxes, motor vehicle taxes, and if the applicant rents property he/she may transfer the abatement to the lessor.

4.4 The Town of Bridgewater shall reward the abatement July 1st based upon the list provided to the town prior to January 31st. The tax abatement will be based upon participation in the previous year.

5. Tax Abatement Program

5.1 Members need to meet requirements set forth in the department by-laws.

5.2 Members must maintain and keep current all certifications.

5.3 Members must provide a department physical and attend department mandatory training.

5.4 Members must acquire 60 points. Points are attained for attending drills and meeting, participating in department committee's, and attending fire or EMS calls.

5.5 The department may change the point values for events to increase participation in areas lacking, 60 points will be the goal for the program. Any changes will be submitted to the Board of Selectmen prior to January 31st to be applied in the upcoming year.

5.6 The Tax Abatement Committee is responsible for maintaining all records and ensuring the accuracy of the reports

5.7 The Tax Abatement Committee shall provide records of eligible members activity upon request.

5.8 The tax abatement may only be applied to Town of Bridgewater taxes.

5.9 Department members who have meet the requirements and then pass away will transfer the tax abatement to their spouse or estate for the current year only.

Attachment #1
 Point System of the BVFD
 (to be resubmitted yearly for informational purposes)

Activity	Points
Training	
HazMat awareness / refresher (required)	1
Bloodborne pathogens (required)	1
Airborne pathogens (required)	1
Required EMT-B refresher (25 hour class)	20
Approved Courses < 8 hours	4
Approved Courses 8-10 hours	5
Approved Courses 10 to 20 hours	10
Approved Courses 20 to 40 hours	20
Approved Courses 40 + hours	30
Drills	
Attend/participate (includes ambulance meeting/drills)	3
Organize / lead drill	5
EMT case review	2
Attend / participate in "truck night"	3
Meeting	
Monthly department meetings	3
EMS Monthly department meetings	2
Emergency Response	
Fire or Ambulance call	5
Non-Emergency Participation	
Chair of a committee or organizing an event	2
Participate in committee / event per meeting *	1
Elected Offices	
Line or Administrative officers	40
Engineers, Chaplin, Parliamentarian, fire police Coordinator, etc..	20
Discretionary	
At the discretion of the personnel committee	up to 20

Total points need annually to qualify for Reward Program

60

***Note: Only "duty crew" hours will be counted for Fair coverage.**

From: Mary Ann Jacob <mjacob4404@charter.net>
Subject: Re: No meeting
Date: April 18, 2016 at 7:58:57 PM EDT
To: Stephen Rosenblatt <stevedot213@gmail.com>

Hi Steve,

Thank for following up with me. Please let anyone who may have questions in the future know I am available.

First, let me respond to your concerns regarding the tax abatement plan. The committee took your recommendations very seriously and as a result has asked the council for more time to consider, and possibly act on both of the options put forth. It's a complex issue with very serious financial implications for all taxpayers and deserves the time and research to fully vet the subject fairly before making a recommendation back to the council. The time from when we received the information at the committee level and the beginning of the tax abatement season this year did not give us the appropriate amount of time. I did discuss the option with you of possibly forming a separate ad hoc committee to research and present options to the Ordinance Committee for consideration. The work that you did with Bob Taite seemed to replace the need for that part of the process. The actual consideration of changes to the ordinance itself by our charter lies solely with the Legislative Council and by extension the Ordinance Committee. I expect we will be taking that part of our charge up, as I mentioned in my last note, as soon as the budget work has been completed.

As for the budget itself, I was grateful for your speaking up and I know, if you followed the 12 hours or so of discussion that followed your comments that the majority of the members heard your concerns quite clearly. When we received the budget the proposed tax increase was 2.34%. At this time, after reductions to the request and the use of a bond premium to reduce coattail requests, the voters will be asked to approve a proposal that has a 1.62% increase. This follows two years of either a reduction, or zero percent increase in the operating budget. Unfortunately, we are faced with the loss of significant revenue from grants that covered security and mental health services in our schools that we are forced to add to our own operating costs.

I don't believe that it is our job to "let the voters decide" without first having heard and deliberated on the budget presented. This year, as in many other years, those deliberations have resulted in a lower tax increase than originally requested. The charter has given the council the authority to set the tax rate and that is a responsibility I take very seriously as a taxpayer myself. I think we both know that the way opponents of the budget often let themselves be heard is at the voting booth. This year, I hope they see the work we have done and support this modest increase. It's time now for the Board of Education to seriously review the need for seven schools and that impact on the taxpayer.

I hope that answers your questions, let me know what else I can do to help support your community. I'll make sure you are alerted when the deliberations begin again on the tax relief ordinance.

Mary Ann

On Apr 18, 2016, at 11:18 AM, Stephen Rosenblatt <stevedot213@gmail.com> wrote:

I sent invitations to a dozen people who in the past attended meetings with yourself and other public officials.

Apparently no one has questions about the upcoming budget referendums, so there is no need meet.

Thank you for your invitation.

I do have a question though. When I attended the first Ordinance meeting on the proposed tax abatement plan, I read an opening statement but thereafter neither Bernie Cohen nor I could speak at the meeting. Roberts' Rules rule. Previously you spoke to me about having seniors sit with the committee and hear our concerns, particularly since two or three members of the committee were recent appointments. I have heard nothing further about this.

And I was particularly disappointed that the tax abatement plan which was put together with Bob Tait's tireless assistance last summer and given to the First Selectman in September, had no chance of being considered by the Legislature (if it was to be considered) for another year.

I attended and spoke to the Legislature during the public session of the school budget review and wondered if anything I said was being heard by our elected officials around the table.

The legislature, yet again, approved the school budget without an apparent thought given to the desires of a good portion of the voting public.

Is there no one who will speak on behalf of the opponents of the school budget? The PTA moms who speak at these meetings always end with "let the voters decide", knowing full well that their votes will outnumber those in opposition.

But not forever.

Mary Ann, I am gratified by your efforts to keep a respectful and open discussion going with the senior population in town.

Steve