

LUNENBURG BOARD OF ASSESSORS
MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2023
BILOTTA ROOM, LUNENBURG TOWN HALL

Present Members: Vice Chair Sarah Cammer, Chair Brian Laffond, Clerk John Rabbitt, Interim Principal Assessor Rena Swezey.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting opened at 6:41PM.

OPENING COMMENTS

- Board
 - o No board comments.
- Public
 - o No public comment.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Approve Minutes of: October 11, 2023 (Gap), November 6, 2023 (with amendments), November 20, 2023 (if ready)**
 - o The October 11th minutes will be addressed at the next meeting.
 - o There was a motion by John Rabbitt to approve the minutes from November 6th, seconded by Sarah Cammer. All in favor.
 - o The minutes from November 20th were tabled to the next meeting as they were received the same day as the meeting.
 - o John Rabbitt again confirms that the September 27th minutes are still not posted on the website. Brian Laffond will follow up with whoever uploads minutes to the website.
- **Review and Approve Invoices, Expense Vouchers, Payroll, Billing Errors, etc.**
 - o The following invoices and abatements were signed:
 - 2 invoices from CAI technology mapping company
 - 3 copies to sign for Motor vehicle abatements.
 - 5 property tax abatements for exempt properties
 - Sign Proforma Recap – Paper / Gateway (online)
 - After a discussion with Heather Lemieux, it was confirmed there are no paper copies, but it can be signed electronically via Gateway.
 - 61B Acceptance of Affidavit
- **Status Report from Interim Principal Assessor**

Rena Swezey has been working with the tax collector, Marlene, to file the third quarter tax bills. Rena Swezey has also completed the data collection manual. An email containing the manual was sent to the Board and Mike Tarello.

There were 20 homes in the database that were classified as seasonal homes that were subsequently changed to the classification of summer camps.

Brian Laffond, Rena Swezey, and Heather Lemieux met with Tim Fountain from CAI to address the problems with the property cards. During the meeting there was a discussion about software that is included in the contract that was not being utilized. There is an opportunity to update property cards to reflect a change in ownership that can be updated on a monthly or every few weeks basis. Tim Fountain talked about an advanced query program which can set neighborhood layers and site indexes. There is a one-time cost of \$1,800 for this additional program.

Rena Swezey sent lot spits to CAI to digitize and map. Once they are digitized and mapped the Board is given 30 to 45 days to make any adjustments. The town was approved to fix or edit until December 31st. The creation of the maps will include the 2022 changes and January 1st of 2023. Going forward these maps will be updated on a yearly basis. Regarding mapping there were some sketches that weren't brought over or were missing. These can be added to the map at the rate of an additional 20 dollars per sketch.

Sarah Cammer questions if the 400 abatements can be added to property cards to show the abated values. If approved, they will appear on the July 1st cards.

- **Status of Community Outreach**

○ Senior Center

Rena Swezey met with John Rabbitt and provided some additional materials. There was a discussion about a presentation date in early March. This would be ideal as seniors have until April 1st to file abatements and exemptions. To date the board currently hasn't signed all the applications.

John Rabbitt has researched other local towns, specifically Groton. John Rabbitt questions how the town works with affordable housing and if it's similar to Groton. Rena Swezey states it is a separate department that's not part of the Town of Groton.

○ Develop "How to read your Vision card" (for Website, other?)

From research Sarah Cammer has found a template from the Town of Concord that she found informative. Sarah Cammer will use an example template to be added to the website.

- **Status of requests for improved collaboration with Town Manager**

○ Insert for Q3 Property Tax Bills

Prior to the meeting Brian Laffond did speak to Heather Lemieux and provided the latest draft of the insert. Asked if she could include some sort of graphic depiction of the timeline.

- Existing Contracts / Service Agreements / Statements of Work
 - RRC PP Maintenance, Vision CAMA S/W, NearMap Arc/GIS, CAI Tax Map Maintenance, MFS
 - Future RFP Development
- **Discuss response to extensive citizen questions. - i.e. Derner, Lucks, Blatt.**
 Brian Laffond is tabling this discussion to a future meeting, so the board has additional time to review.
- **Finalize / Approve Data Collection Manual (aka Field Inspection Manual)**
 There was a motion by John Rabbitt, seconded by Sarah Cammer to accept the data collection manual that was revised on December 4, 2023. It was agreed that this will be a living document, subject to change. All changes are to be approved by the BOA. All in favor.
- **Potential for ad-hoc citizen committee(s) to aid board members**
 The Board has not had a chance to discuss this so this was tabled to the next meeting.
- **Website improvements**
 John Rabbitt sent his presentation on the day of the meeting and all the board members couldn't review so there was no in-depth conversation.

 Recommendations to improve website include adding: a vision statement, mission statement, ethics statement, past tax assessment investigations, news section just for the assessor's department, picture of members, agenda center, link to YouTube meetings. All these ideas will be run by Heather Lemieux for further discussion and recommendations.
 - Melrose vs Lunenburg review
 - Add Data Collection Manual
 - Add link to YouTube of Meetings
 - Create and Add "How to read my Vision Card"
 - Other (Board vs. Department?)

NEW BUSINESS

- **CAI – Currently we “freeze” Property Record Card as of January 1 each year**
 - Discuss updating more frequently
 The board approved that changes can be added to living documents when necessary.
- **Guidelines for Public Comment**

Brian Laffond states that some comments from the Board and the public can be lengthy and off topic. There was a discussion about setting a time limit for all comments. If there is a lengthy discussion it should be added to the agenda.

- **Review Property Cards for recent abatement requests / Investigate differences**
 - o Assessment Reconciliation – Sample Findings
This discussion is tabled to the next meeting.
 - o Most “Neighborhood” designations are currently not populated (or nil)
The town doesn’t have many neighborhoods and Rena Swezey states that the DOR prefers a lesser number of neighborhoods. This will be reflected on the new maps from CAI.
- **Corrective Action Request proposal (includes Tracking / Closure)**
 - o John Rabbitt suggests that a methodology be put in place to assure that the processes put in place stay reliable. If a mistake is made to identify the problem and try to remedy it. An investigation into the root cause to decrease repeats.
 - o Rena Swezey states that property record cards have an audit trail to reflect changes. The only changes that are reflected are new construction, exemptions, and abatements.
 - o Brian Laffond confirms that a root cause of issues needs to be found versus a specific change. People who are qualified to do the work will have the data collection manual.

FUTURE AGENDA TOPICS

- **Review and Approve Senior / Veterans Exemptions**

This will be discussed after the first of the year and will be brought to the town meeting in May.

 - o Discuss implications for FY2024
- **Review and Approve Chapter Land Exemptions**

The board confirms that this will be a long process and include a lot of signatures from the Board.
- **Software – Xembly discussion**

This was added as a future agenda topic for upcoming meeting.
- **Policy Establishment / Review-**

The board feels that this has been addressed and can be removed from any future agendas as this is being implemented.

 - o Land Value Policies / Propose Criteria
 - o Building Value Policies / Propose Criteria: New Categories

- Data Storage. (i.e. Reason for previous approval of abatement)
- Document Control
- **Schedule Future Zoom Session for Public Q&A with Nate Cramer**
Nate Cramer has responded to the questions previously provided.

CLOSING COMMENTS

- Public

Dave MacDonald - 155 Island Road- thanks the Board for their work. Brian Laffond expresses that their goal is to re-create trust within the town.

Carl Luck - 50 Sunset Lane - shares his ongoing concern regarding abatement values and vision cards. Carl Luck looked at over 100 properties that were listed as good and noted that every good property from the 2024 vision card was inflated by 8%. Carl Luck wants to know where the calculations are to support the percent increase. There is still a request to see the numbers from qualified sales numbers, ASR, to draft report recommendation and final recommendations. Rena Swezey confirms there will be a total field review completed for 2024. Additionally, a whole new land schedule will take place and a drive by on every street. The Board will confirm but believes that Mike Tarello will be starting all over with a clean slate. Regarding ad hoc Carl Luck believes that there are tasks that residents can help with. One suggestion is to create a timeline of the process. Carl Luck also shares that these subcommittees should be formal. Brian Laffond agrees and confirms that any meetings will be held in the public eye. Brian Laffond confirms that the suggestion of the subcommittee name of ad hoc was specifically regarding the fact that these residents would not have voting rights.

- Board

- Sarah Cammer suggests creating a One drive for the assessor's board to assure that documents are being archived electronically.
- There was a motion by Sarah Cammer, seconded by John Rabbitt to accept the minutes compiled by Rena Swezey from the executive session on October 11th and November 6th. All in favor. These minutes can be added to the file but not publicly posted until Abatement/ ATB resolution.
- John Rabbitt posed a question in regard to the Tanner Cole Property (61B). Rena Swezey states there is no word yet and the selectman has 120 days to act.

ADJOURN

Motion to adjourn by John Rabbitt, seconded by Sarah Cammer.

The meeting closed at 8:50 PM.