

**CHARLEMONT BOARD OF ASSESSORS
DECEMBER 11, 2023 MEETING MINUTES
CHARLEMONT ASSESSOR'S OFFICE**

Members Present/ Participating:

Jacqueline Cashin, Karen Rau

Members Absent:

Anthony Ostroski, Chair

Call to Order

Cashin called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

#1: Board Discussion

Tax classification options and discussion. The Board reviewed the tax rate worksheets and Hayden showed the tax rate split options and effects of levying below the limit, to the limit or using some excess levy capacity. She noted that the current tax rate, if they levied below the limit was up .07 from last year's rate, using \$100,000 of excess capacity resulted in a rate of 0.65 higher than last year and using all \$454,212 in excess levy capacity (levying to the limit) increased the tax rate by \$2.70 over last year. After review, the Board felt it best to levy below the limit to keep the tax rate as low as possible, especially with the continuing inflation and high interest rates. Cashin commented that she maintains her conviction that the mechanisms used for using excess levy distorts the cost of government, by requiring the Town to increase their estimated receipts, which in turn provides inaccurate information for estimating receipts in future years. On a motion by Cashin and seconded by Rau, it was unanimously voted to levy below the limit. It was then discussed that Charlemont still does not have enough commercial tax base to substantiate a split tax rate. Several commercial businesses have either closed their doors or reduced their hours, as keeping a business going in Charlemont is difficult enough, but especially in a struggling economy. Additionally, the tax rate benefit to the residential class is minimal in proportion to the resulting rate hike for the commercial, industrial & personal class. Therefore, on a motion by Cashin and seconded by Rau, it was unanimously voted to recommend a single tax rate for all property classes.

#2: 6:15 Appointment with Select Board; Tax Classification Hearing

At 6:15 P.M., the Assessors adjourned their meeting and went to join the Select Board for the Tax Classification Hearing. The Select Board opened the hearing at 6:21 p.m. Hayden handed out the worksheets and gave an overview of the tax rate options and explained the effects on the tax rate for each of the classes, as stated above. The Assessors conveyed their position of not being in favor of adding to the tax burden in a continuing difficult economy and recommended a single tax rate and levying below the limit, noting that this option leaves \$454,212.08 in excess levy capacity. Select Board Chair Val Reid asked about the residential and small business exemptions, which the Assessors had looked into but explained the residential exemption seemed complicated to implement, that with residential versus mailing address and rentals, it's not always clear whether the owner actually resides on the property or not and the exemption only benefits those whose values fall under the break-even point; properties over that point will see an increase whether town residents or not. Mixed use and multi-residence properties could also throw in another level of complication for determining whether a parcel would qualify or not. Similarly, the small business exemption isn't beneficial and the list the Assessors receive has issues with accuracy, despite many attempts to correct it. Therefore, it was felt that neither exemption was of enough advantage for Charlemont in relation to the amount of time/work they would take to implement. After further discussion on the tax rate, the Select Board unanimously voted to accept the Assessor's recommendation of a single tax rate and levying below their limit. The tax classification hearing was closed at 6:50 P.M.

Reconvene in Assessors Regular Meeting

At 6:56 P.M., the Board reconvened in their office to complete their business.

#3: Approval of Minutes

The Board reviewed the minutes from their 11/6/2023 & 11/27/2023 meeting. After a few grammatical amendments to both sets of minutes, on a motion by Cashin and seconded by Rau, the minutes were unanimously approved, as amended.

#4: Board Action/Signatures

The Board reviewed/signed the following (Cashin motioned, Rau seconded):

1. Franklin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority PILOT assessment
2. Invoice from Catalis Tax & CAMA for ongoing cyclical work. Cashin signed the invoice.

#5: Board Discussion

With the slight increase in property values this year, Town Administrator Sarah had suggested the Assessor's office may want to come up with an article for the public in anticipation of any questions that may be raised. Hayden presented the Board with a draft which gave an overview of how values and taxes are arrived at. Since the information didn't come directly from the DLS site, Rau just wanted to make sure the information was correct. Hayden assured her all information and procedures were as governed by the General Laws.

With the tax classification hearing completed, Hayden reminded the Board that they need to sign the LA-5 Options and the Tax Rate Recap forms on Gateway. Rau and Town Clerk Thorne Palmer logged on and signed off on the LA-5, and Palmer provided Hayden with the Clerk's certification of vote on the tax rate to upload to Gateway.

Adjournment

At 7:34 p.m. on a motion by Cashin and seconded by Rau, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn their meeting. The next meeting will be Monday, January 8, 2024.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carlene Hayden,
Assessor's Clerk

Documents Viewed in Meeting of 12/11/2023*

1. Agenda for meeting of 12/11/2023
2. Fiscal Year 2024 Tax Classification Options worksheets:
 - a. Option 1; Levying below the limit
 - b. Option 2; Levying to the limit
 - c. Option 3; Using \$100,000 of excess levy capacity
3. Minutes from meetings of 11/6/2023 & 11/27/2023
4. Franklin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority PILOT assessment, 12/11/2023
5. Invoice from Catalis Tax & CAMA for ongoing cyclical work, 11/30/2023
6. How Property Values and Taxes are Determined article, 12/11/2023
7. Fiscal Year 2024 Online LA-5 form on DLS Gateway tax rate module.

***Documents are stored in their respective files in the Assessor's office.**