



Board of Selectmen

Ware Town Hall, Meeting Room, 126 Main Street

Regular Meeting Minutes – Tuesday, November 23, 2021, at 7:00 p.m.

Instructions for call in option: at or before 7:00 p.m., call the phone number below and when prompted enter the Meeting ID number. The platform is Zoom Meetings.

Join online: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7846041861> (the online option will require a download).

Meeting ID: 784 604 1861

Passcode: 01082

Phone: 929-205-6099

Present: Selectman Thomas H. Barnes, Selectman Nancy J. Talbot, Chairman Keith J. Kruckas, Vice-Chairman John J. Morrin, Town Manager Stuart B. Beckley, Executive Assistant Christopher J. Nolan

Absent: Selectman Caitlin M. McCarthy

Present via Zoom: Theodore Balicki of the Board of Assessors, Regional Assessor Harald Scheid of Regional Resource Group, Deanna Lavigne of the Assessors Department

Meeting Opened by Chairman Kruckas at 7:00 PM.

Opening Remarks, Announcements, and Agenda review by Chair - none

Consent Agenda

- Approval of October 5, 2021, and October 19, 2021, Meeting Minutes
- Approval of One-Day Liquor License, Workshop 13, December 5, 2021, from 3-5 PM

Selectman Talbot made the motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

- Selectman Talbot re-introduced the 2020 Re-Precincting Plan for the Town of Ware, initially approved at the October 5, 2021 Board meeting.
- The plan maintains and approves the three-precinct boundary description provided by the Town Clerk's Office.

Selectman Talbot made the motion to approve the 2020 Re-Precincting Plan for the Town with the required signatures from the Board. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

- Selectman Talbot revealed that the plan would be sent to the state before formal approval.
- Chairman Kruckas wished all in attendance a Happy Thanksgiving, and encouraged all to participate in Shop Small weekend.
- Selectman Barnes expressed his appreciation for the Town's beautiful Christmas Tree in Veterans Park.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin announced the creation of two new small parking lots on Bank Street.
- Chairman Kruckas urged residents to be careful navigating the new traffic signals Downtown.

- Selectman Barnes asked about the status of large tractor-trailers on West Street at the light intersecting Main Street, and whether they are required to keep the white boxed-in area clear.
- Selectman Talbot responded that all vehicles, including large trucks, must keep the indicated area in front of the Town Hall parking lot clear when stopped at the red light.

Scheduled Appearances


- **7:05 PM- Tax Classification Public Hearing with Assessors**
 - Mr. Beckley introduced Mr. Theodore Balicki, from the Board of Assessors, and Mr. Harald Scheid, a contractor currently working with the Assessor's Office.
 - Mr. Scheid noted that a great deal of preparation had taken place leading up to this hearing, which will concern whether the Town maintains its single tax-rate, or chooses to adopt a split rate that would allow commercial properties to be taxed higher than residential.
- Mr. Scheid explained that tax classification is a year-long process consisting of abatements, info gathering, use of an assessment system, and valuations. The Assessors' Office Sends all submittals to the state Department of Revenue for approval.
- Mr. Scheid gave a brief introduction to some of the complex terminology and figures used in assessing.
 - Ware has the ability to raise \$16,700,000 in tax revenue, and this year it received \$16,458,000.
 - Roughly 85% of all the Town's taxable properties are in the residential class.
 - It would take a 6.5% increase in the commercial tax rate to equal the revenue made from a 1% increase in the residential tax rate.
 - The Town saw a slight reduction from the previous year due to a number of factors.
 - Price appreciation
 - Increased number of valuations
 - The value is reflective not of the current market period, but rather of the Calendar Year 2020
 - Valuations are expected to rise 15-20% in the next year to account for the currently hot real estate market.
 - If the Town decided to adopt a split tax rate, it would take a sizable commercial tax hike to balance out the revenue needed for a modest residential tax cut.
 - Small increases in residential and commercial values have contributed to modest tax increases.
 - Mr. Scheid recommended that the Board make the motion to maintain the Town's single tax rate.
- Mr. Balicki described how cities with a high volume of commercial real estate can benefit from a split model, but small, predominantly residential towns like Ware are served best by the single rate.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin asked whether resident income affects the valuation of two and three-family homes, or if it merely affects the values.
 - Mr. Scheid answered that apartment complexes rely more on reading incomes than other multi-family residential properties.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin asked for a measurement of how many of the Town's 3-family homes are owner-occupied.

- Mr. Scheid responded that the answer could be found in a previous survey that had been conducted.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin asked if he could see the results of said survey.
 - Mr. Scheid commented on the difficulty of obtaining this data when annual questionnaires often only see a 20-30% return.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin argued that the Board should receive data to back up the assertions of Mr. Scheid, expressing the belief that valuations seem very low compared to the amounts that residents are charged in rent.
- Mr. Beckley offered to provide this data by combining the Assessors' information with the Town's Street List.
- Mr. Scheid asserted that assessments rely more on data from actual sales than they do on income measurements.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin argued that 3-family homes functionally act as apartments.
- Mr. Scheid explained that conventionally, 2-3 family homes are treated as their own unique category, whereas homes for 4 or more families are classified as apartment complexes.
- Selectman Barnes cited the work of Ms. Deanna Lavigne in the Assessors' Office, who created a spreadsheet that calculated value per square foot.
 - The spreadsheet finds that the Town can be roughly divided into 3 sections based on this data.
- Selectman Barnes described that he closely follows Ware properties for sale on the real estate website Zillow.
 - As of that day, there were 60 properties for sale in the Town.
 - One that caught his attention was a 3-family home in the Town's 'S&B Zone,' on the market for \$500,000, and with a lower tax rate than what Chairman Kruckas pays on his property.
 - Selectman Barnes argued that Ware is a high-tax Town, and questioned why there is so much inequity in valuations between its different sections.
 - Selectman Barnes also expressed that the community struggles with many absent property owners who neglect their land and tenants, especially when crises such as building fires arise. He expressed displeasure with neglectful landlords buying up properties which they seek to profit from without properly maintaining.
- Mr. Scheid explained that when appraisers examine the data, they attempt to reconcile market determinations with actual sale prices of properties.
- Mr. Scheid also discussed how the Assessors could potentially examine distinguishing owner-occupied vs. non-owner-occupied homes when dealing with known problematic properties.
 - However, he also asserted that the Assessors must demonstrate that they are using equal formulas across the different types of properties.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin made the argument that he feels multi-family homes in the Town appear to not be taxed enough in comparison to single-family homes.
- Selectman Barnes asked Mr. Beckley if more data could be investigated on this matter.
- Mr. Beckley answered that yes, the data he was looking for would be fairly simple to compile.

- Mr. Scheid expressed the wish to push the Board forward with the question of setting the tax rate. He also argued that the Town would be well-served by pushing more toward hiring a full-time Principal Assessor, as this position has been vacant for several months.

Selectman Talbot made the motion to vote in accordance with MGL, Chapter 40, Section 56 as amended, the percentage of local tax levied which will be borne by each class of real and personal property, relative to setting the FY2022 tax rates, and set the residential factor at 1.0, with a corresponding CIP shift of 1.0, pending approval of the Town's annual Tax Recap by the Mass Department of Revenue. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

Adjournment

Attest: 
Christopher J. Nolan
Executive Assistant to Town Manager