

OPEN SESSION

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2020 MAY 13 AM 11:48

The Board of Assessors met on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, at approximately 6:12 PM. Present were Chairman Steve McCarthy, Member Paula Bunker, Principal Assessor John Donahue and Principal Secretary Daniela Nilsson. The Chairman announced that Clerk Cheryl Smith was participating remotely via telephone. Due to the coronavirus pandemic the town hall was closed to the public. However, the public was allowed to listen to the meeting via teleconference and to watch a live broadcast of the meeting via community access television.

The Chairman announced that the meeting was being recorded by community access television. The Principal Assessor read aloud the Board of Assessors' State of Emergency Public Access Notice from the publicly posted Agenda stating that, due to the increasing concerns surrounding the coronavirus pandemic, the meeting would be open to the public through remote participation only and stated the telephone number and access code needed to join the live teleconference. The State of Emergency Public Access Notice also stated that the meeting was being broadcast live via Facebook.

The Principal Assessor reported:

- The Board of Selectmen were meeting tonight at 7:00 PM to discuss, among other things, whether or not the March 30<sup>th</sup> Special Town Meeting and/or the April Town Elections should be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic;
- The RMV ATLAS Training Workshop scheduled for Friday, March 20, 2020, has been cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic; and,
- Building Permit field inspections are currently on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic. A formal policy is expected to be issued by the Board of Selectmen after its meeting tonight.

Due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency declared by Governor Baker, the Principal Assessor asked to discuss Work From Home (WFH) options with the Board. He stated this is a fluid situation and a stay-at-home order could be issued any day now. Other towns have made changes to their office procedures, such as closing buildings and offices for deep cleaning, staff reductions, and rotation of office staff members. The Principal Assessor stated that he thinks most of the office functions could be performed remotely from home just as effectively as they would be as if performed in the Assessor's Office. He stated he has employed remote access capability to the office computer server for several years now and that the town's remote access applications have been updated and improved over the past two years. The Information Technology (IT) Director was in the office on Monday to install necessary remote access applications onto the clerical staff's laptops computers, operating on the assumption that the Town and the Board of Assessors wished to move in that direction. One staff member had an issue uploading the remote access application onto her computer, so the Principal Assessor purchased a laptop as an alternative, if needed; but it is still in the box and may be returned if the Board chose not to use it. Member Bunker stated she did not want to do anything without consulting the Town Administrator and getting his approval because what one department does will affect other departments since they are all union positions. Member Bunker was also

concerned about putting personal information at risk and spreading viruses by using personal laptop computers for work. The Principal Assessor stated the town hall computer servers are secure and he has worked closely with the IT Director who has assured him that working from home by the staff members is safe for remote computer access purposes. Member Bunker believes putting this software on personal computers is a risk to the town. The Principal Assessor stated that he is concerned about taking decisive action because this may be the last Board meeting for a while, due to the uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic, and he was seeking guidance on which direction to go - in coordination with the IT department, the Town Administrator, and Board of Selectmen - if changes need to be made sooner rather than later. Member Bunker supports whatever the Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen decide. Chairman McCarthy stated that even if this may be the last physical meeting held, if need be, teleconference meetings can still be conducted. He also feels it is too soon to make a decision on bringing work home or making other plans, unless the Town Administrator says otherwise. He hopes someone can be in the office to answer calls and assist the public. The Principal Assessor stated that he intends to continue to provide service to the public and therefore was trying to plan for the best way to do so in an emergent situation. The Chairman stated that if a serious situation, like a shelter in place order occurs, he believes some work could be placed on hold and the Assessors Office would just do the best job they can do under the circumstances. Clerk Smith agrees that we should wait for the Town Administrator's guidance.

The Level Two Grievance listed on the meeting agenda will be rescheduled as an Executive Session item. The Principal Assessor suggested that a meeting could take place either next Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup>, or at the regularly scheduled meeting on April 1, 2020. The Chairman stated that he preferred to stay with the regular schedule and meet on April 1st. The Principal Assessor noted that he had already submitted a request for an extension of time to respond to the Clerical Secretary's Union regarding the Board's decision, which Union representatives have indicated would probably be acceptable, under the circumstances.

A **motion** was made by Chairman McCarthy to enter into Executive Session to discuss Applications for Abatement/Exemption, relative to Purpose 7 of the Open Meeting Law (OML), in compliance with MGL CH 59, section 60, and also to review and discuss pending Appellate Tax Board litigation, relative to Purposes 3 and 7 of the OML, because to do so in open session could have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Board of Assessors, and not to reconvene in open session at the conclusion of the Executive Session. A **roll call vote** was taken as follows: Chairman McCarthy = affirmative, Clerk Smith = affirmative, Member Bunker = affirmative. The Board adjourned Open Session and entered Executive Session at approximately 6:30 P.M.

Next Meeting: April 1, 2020

I certify that the minutes of this meeting are true and accurate to the best of my recollection.

Respectfully submitted,



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Cheryl Smith, Clerk

Prepared by Principal Secretary, Daniela Nilsson

*Documents referenced during the meeting:*

*Bills payable, Motor Vehicle Excise, Statutory Exemptions, Exemption Certificates, and other administrative documents referenced during the meeting*