

Skowhegan Board of Assessors
Minutes
Regular Meeting
August 24, 2018

Present: Ronald F. Blaisdell, Chairman
John F. Grohs, Vice Chairman (arrived 4:05 pm)
Bonnie A. Baker

Assessor's Agent: William "Bill" Van Tuinen
Asst. Assessor: Leisa D. Emery-Burns

Others present: Christine Almand, Town Manager
Jeffrey Hewett, S.E.D.C
Bobbi Jo St. Peter, New Communities Inc.

I. Call to order:

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM by Chairman Ronald Blaisdell.

II. Minutes to be approved and signed:

1. July 27, 2018, Regular Meeting:

Bonnie Baker made a motion to approve and sign the minutes, seconded by Ronald Blaisdell. – Vote 2 yes – 0 no

III. Items by the Public: None

IV. Unfinished Business:

1. Robert Reisner, Map 5, Lot 79, abatement request: tabled from a previous meeting
2. Robert Reisner, Map 5, Lot 79-1, abatement request: tabled from a previous meeting

Bill Van Tuinen explained these two abatement requests were on the agenda at the last meeting. Most of the request is based on the noise from the adjacent raceway. At the last meeting Mr. Reisner played a recording of the noise that he hears from his property. One of the abatement requests was confused by the mention of the Farmland application that Mr. Reisner filed with the office and wants taken into consideration when valuing his property. Bill said the Farmland has been calculated for this coming year and it does reduce the value going forward considerably for lot 79. We cannot go retroactive for the farmland. Bill said he would travel to other towns that have a racetrack and try to find sales of neighboring properties to a raceway, but the Town will have to pay for his time and his mileage. Bill said he did not want to encumber the Town with that kind of expense unless he is authorized to do it.

Ronald Blaisdell said the burden of proof is on the taxpayer.

John Grohs said he did go up to the Reisner property this past Sunday and walked up the hill and it was pretty loud. John also rode up to the raceway and there were 200 to 300 vehicles up there. Mr. Reisner said that when it first started it was a very low key racetrack.

Bill Van Tuinen said he went up on a Sunday and it really was not that noisy at all.

John Grohs said Mr. Reisner stated to him that it would affect the sale of his property. John said on the flip side, if someone liked the whole racing thing they would love to have his house.

Bill Van Tuinen and John Grohs both said they have driven up the road before and did not even realize, until Mr. Reisner brought it up, that the racetrack was even there.

Ronald Blaisdell said that we have not had any other abatement requests from anyone else in the area.

John Grohs said it is a real tough call, and he does sympathize with him.

Bill Van Tuinen recommended an abatement of \$15,200 value, which is \$304 in taxes on Map 5, Lot 79 and an abatement of \$17,800 value, which is \$356 in taxes on Map 5, Lot 79-1.

Ronald Blaisdell made a motion to approve the abatements as recommended by Bill, after giving this a lot of thought; seconded by Bonnie Baker. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

3. Jennifer Chandler, Map 30, Lot 110, abatement request: tabled from a previous meeting

Bill Van Tuinen said this is the property next to the car wash on Madison Ave. She complained about the open and overflowing dumpster on the neighbor's property as well as the car wash.

Jennifer Chandler could not be at the meeting today, but she did email Leisa in the office and stated the dumpster has not been too much of an issue since the last meeting and she is willing to accept Bill's recommendation from the last meeting.

Bill Van Tuinen recommends granting the abatement in the amount of \$13,800 value, which is \$276 in tax.

Bonnie Baker made a motion to go with Bill's recommendation, seconded by John Grohs. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

V. New Business:

1. New Communities Inc, Map 29, Lot 231 and 232; exemption application: Bill Van Tuinen explained that New Communities owns two properties on High Street. These properties were owned in the past by Medical Care Development. New Communities works with handicap adults to give them assistance, and help them learn how to be self sufficient. These properties were tax exempt last year and the same mission is being carried out, just by a different organization. New Communities has provided us with all the documentation that we requested.

Bill recommends approval of the exemption on both properties.

Ronald Blaisdell made a motion to go with Bill's recommendation and continue the exemption of these two properties under the new ownership of New Communities Inc, seconded by Bonnie Baker. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

2. Skowhegan Economic Development Corp, Map 26, Lot 140; exemption application:

Bill Van Tuinen gave some background information on how the Board of Assessors decided what and how to exempt SEDC, when he first started working for the Town. Bill said he wasn't sure at that time how they qualified for exempt status. They don't fit the criteria of being a literary and scientific organization, or a benevolent and charitable organization or even technically a Municipality. They do work hand in glove with the Town of Skowhegan, but they do have a separate charter and a board of directors. Many years ago we reviewed the exempt status of many organizations. In review of S.E.D.C's exemption the Board of Assessors at that time decided to exempt any land or vacant buildings that SEDC was trying to lease out to businesses. Any buildings or parts of a building that were leased out would be taxable. Bill explained the property tax exemption application is for the old KVI property across from the Strand Theater and behind the old Aubuchon building next to the municipal parking lot downtown. This property was purchased by SEDC and was recently demolished.

Jeff Hewett said he is basically just trying to follow the same guidelines that have been used in the past. If SEDC isn't bringing in any money from the property, they propose they do not pay taxes on the property. It is not a property they purchased with the intent to make a profit. This was a community project to get rid of an eye sore that was causing problems in the downtown. SEDC stepped up to the plate to take care of the building, they will never recoup the money they have spent to tear the building down.

John Grohs asked what the plans were for the lot.

Jeff Hewett stated they would like to sell it so that a facility could be built there, something that would fit in with the downtown, and something that will be built and will be taxable, not a nonprofit.

Ronald Blaisdell said he wants to know if it does or does not meet the criteria to be exempt.

Bill Van Tuinen said it does not fit literary or scientific and it doesn't meet what most people would consider benevolent and charitable, unless it was considered to be benevolent and charitable as an economic and community development nonprofit organization. Bill explained how SEDC developed the industrial park of North Avenue and got taxable property owners in the park and how they started to develop lots in the Southgate Industrial Park and there are now two taxable businesses there. Bill explained the vacant lots in the Southgate Park that are for sale are exempt at this time. Bill said if we give an exemption on the KVI lot, it would be consistent with what we have done in the past. Bill said it is a gray area and the Board has been square in the gray area for years, and have been trying to administer the exemption in a responsible way consistent with this organization working hand in glove with the Town. In reviewing the amounts to be raised for this year, Bill noticed the Town purchased an easement from SEDC which flies in the face of the working hand in glove.

Jeff Hewett stated that one of the main reasons for SEDC buying the KVI property was to get that easement for the Town. Jeff said back when the Town was doing the parking lot they tried to purchase the easement from the prior owner for a drainage issue, but the owner at the time would not negotiate. Their asking price was so huge it was out of the question. SEDC did acquire the property and the Town did pay them for the easement, because it was a lot less money to the Town and not only did it help with the sewer easement but now the public has access to walk from the parking lot over to the theater. Before getting the easement people were actually crossing on private property.

Bill Van Tuinen asked where the easement was.

Jeff Hewett explained where the easement is located. Jeff said the spirit of the purchase was to work with the Town and to help the Town and the public in the downtown area. Jeff said another point that he wants to make is that SEDC was formed by the Town and the board of directors are appointed by the Selectmen. It is not a standalone organization. Also, the minute that SEDC ceases to exist and is done, all the assets and liabilities reverts back to the Town.

Christine Almand said SEDC is a component on the Towns audit.

Bill Van Tuinen said that when a Town is involved in Economic Development there is a disadvantage to reporting directly to the Selectmen because most everything is public knowledge and the benefit of a separate board is that some things that have to do with economic development have to be kept private and confidential.

Ronald Blaisdell said his only concern is that if we set a precedent and a similar case comes along where an organization doesn't quite meet the guidelines we would have to say yes to them as well.

Bill Van Tuinen said he did not believe that would be the case. This policy has been in effect since about 1990 and no one has tried to cross the line.

Ronald Blaisdell said he for one, does not feel comfortable saying yes now and then tell some other organization no.

John Grohs asked what happens to the funds if the property is sold.

Jeff said the land is for sale and if it sells the money goes back in to the SEDC funds to help recoup the cost of the purchase and demolition which is way over \$100,000.

John Grohs asked if the Town was involved in the purchase.

Jeff Hewett stated they were not involved except for the purchase of the easement. Jeff said SEDC did apply through the Town to get the abatement permit to get rid of the asbestos materials.

John Grohs said on one hand he agrees with Ron about another organization coming to us down the road after precedent has been set, but also SEDC is connected with the Town.

Bill Van Tuinen said there is no question that they are non profit and there is no question they are very closely affiliated with the Town.

Bonnie Baker made a motion to grant the exemption and follow the procedures set up many years ago. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Ronald Blaisdell made a motion to deny the exemption for the simple reason if another organization was to come along in a similar situation Ron would not be able to set on this Board and say no, seconded by John Grohs. – Vote 2 yes – 1 no (Bonnie Baker)

3. Families Matter Inc, Map 5, Lot 100; exemption application:

Bill Van Tuinen stated this is the property that many years ago was Tilton's Log Cabin Restaurant on the Canaan Road. Bill said he reviewed their application for exemption and everything appears to be in order and they are a benevolent and charitable organization.

Bill recommends granting the exemption.

Ronald Blaisdell made a motion to approve the exemption, seconded by Bonnie Baker. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

4. Plum Creek Maine Timberland – Weyerhaeuser Co, Map 14 Lot 42,
supplemental tree growth penalty:

Leisa Emery-Burns stated that part of this parcel has been sold. It was 20 acres, all of which was in the tree growth tax law program. Twelve acres have been sold; therefore the remaining 8 acres must be removed from tree growth because you must have 10 acres to remain in tree growth. The closing is next week and the check will be brought in by the real estate agent after the closing to pay the supplemental penalty bill of \$680.

Bonnie Baker made a motion to approve the supplemental tree growth penalty bill, seconded by Ronald Blaisdell. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

Leisa Emery-Burns stated she has one personal property abatement that needs to be approved for Rejuvenate Salon that was located on Madison Avenue and closed before April 1, 2017. This abatement would be in the amount of \$3,100 value, which is \$62 in taxes.

Ronald Blaisdell made a motion to approve the abatement of \$62, seconded by Bonnie Baker. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

5. Review amounts to be raised by taxation:

Bill Van Tuinen reviewed the amounts to be raised by taxation with the Board and Christine Almand.

John Grohs asked when Bill thought we would be ready to set the mill rate.

Bill said that Gail Pelotte will be on vacation on September 13th and 14th and Leisa Emery-Burns will be going on vacation September 14th and returning to work on September 24th.

Bill said he has made a lot of progress on things to get done, but he isn't sure if he can get the rest done before those vacations. Bill said he would suggest that the meeting schedule be kept flexible so when we are ready, we can have a meeting and set the mill rate.

VI. Chairman's Items: None

VII. Member's Items:

Bonnie Baker had no items.

John Grohs asked if Skowhegan had a noise ordinance. The Board and Christine Almand discussed this issue. There is not a noise ordinance.

VIII. Assessor's Agents Items:

Bill Van Tuinen said there are a couple of appeals to the Board of Assessment Review that will be held on September 11th.

Bill said that when we had the abatement from Mr. Kinney on his property on the Dudley Corner Road, we were not aware that the Get Er Done Raceway was on that same parcel of land. We did grant an abatement for the over valuation of some mobile homes, etc. on that parcel. Bill said he would assume there is money being made from the raceway and perhaps Bill should add some value to the land for having a raceway on that property. Bill said he did not want to add value without discussing this with the Board.

The Board of Assessors are all in agreement that value should be added for the raceway.

IX. Asst. Assessor's Items: None

X. Adjournment:

Ronald Blaisdell made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Bonnie Baker. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 PM

The Skowhegan Board of Assessors

Ronald F. Blaisdell, Chairman

John F. Grohs, Vice Chairman

Bonnie A. Baker

BOA:lde-b