

October 14, 2015
Sussex County Board of Taxation
Regular Meeting
Minutes

Open Public Meetings Act Statement

The Regular Meeting of the Sussex County Board of Taxation was opened by President John Fierro; with a reading of the Open Public Meetings Act, at 9:38 AM.

Followed by: **Salute to the Flag**

Roll Call: Mr. George Conway, Present; Mr. Rich Ecke, Present; Mr. John Fierro, Present.

Approval of Minutes - September 16, 2015 – Regular Meeting

President John Fierro introduced the Minutes from the September 16, 2015 - Regular Meeting of the Tax Board, and asked if the commissioners had had an opportunity to review them; both commissioners Ecke and Conway answered "yes." President Fierro asked if there were any comments or questions; Commissioners Ecke and Conway answered "no." President Fierro asked for a Motion to approve the Minutes. Mr. Conway made a Motion to approve, Mr. Ecke Seconded the Motion; all in favor.

NEW BUSINESS –

Director's Table

President John Fierro asked the Board if they'd had an opportunity to review the Directors Table; to which County Tax Board Melissa Rockwell answered "no" (the Board of Taxation Commissioners are looking at an updated Tax Rates and Ratio's sheet prepared by office personnel which includes the new Director's Ratios). Ms. Rockwell explained to the Board that the "Director's Table" comes out once a year - October 1st, and it gives a statistical listing of all the non-usable and usable sales and the ratios, and the Director's Ratio.

Andover Borough's ratio is not listed on the sheet; the reason for that is, last year, Andover Borough's ratio was 65.32% and then with the "Page 8" (Formula for determining the new average ratio of revalued or reassessed districts), it was 99.65%. Andover Borough had absolutely no usable sales whatsoever. There were five (5) sales, but they happened in 2014 so they were an automatic n/u (non-usable), because those sales were based on the (2014) assessment, and did not reflect the "new (2015 revaluation) assessment." Going into a "revaluation," any sales from the first 6 months of the sampling period (July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015), are automatically considered non-usable according to the State.

To further clarify, Ms. Rockwell explained (using Sparta Township as an example) that if you have a revaluation going on the books for 2016, the normal sampling period starts July 1, 2015 and runs to June 30, 2016, so all of the sales that occur between July 1st and December 31st are made non-usable, because those ratios are based on the previous year's assessments, and does not fully reflect the new updated assessments.

Ms. Rockwell elaborated; because the Director's Table formula; the State uses to come up with the new ratio is averaged, they don't look at the "page 8" ratio, because the "page 8" ratio is only used for equalization purposes. So, because the ratio was so low in 2015 and there were no sales, the ratio dropped from 99% to 78%. Ms. Rockwell said she called the State and asked them to look at it. Melissa Gorman, Property Administration, said they were looking into it, however Ms. Rockwell hasn't heard back from them. The State may have to change the way they do their formula, especially in a downward market; you really don't get a true ratio reading until the 3rd year (because the 1st year out of the reval is the "page 8" formula, and the next year you're still averaging your previous year's ratio, so then the following year is when you get a true depiction of the town). Ms. Rockwell said she could do another "page 8" formula, but is unsure whether or not she will have to do all the towns; if she does it for one, does she have to do it for all? That was her question to the State.

The real bottom line problem with this is their State Aide formula; one of the major reasons for the reval in Andover Borough, was because they were getting killed with the Regional School Tax. President Fierro asked Ms. Rockwell to keep the Board informed, and he thanked her for the detailed explanation.

The Board continued to discuss several of the towns in detail (usable vs. non-usable sales, coefficients, etc.) as it relates to the Director's Table.

OTHER BUSINESS –

Correspondence – Letter of Resignation

Ms. Rockwell introduced and read letters' of resignation (letters to the County Tax Board, and to the Township of Sandyston). Effective December 31, 2015, Bob Pastor, Tax Assessor, will be retiring after over 43 years working in Sandyston Township. President Fierro said on behalf of the Board, that he wishes Mr. Pastor the best of luck in his future endeavors; he will be sorely missed - he was not only a tremendous assessor; but also a "valued" opinion, not only with this Board, but with everybody else. Mr. Fierro also wished the town the best of luck with their search to fill the position.

Added/Omitted Books

The Added/Omitted Books were printed, with the exception of Hopatcong, Andover Borough, Sandyston, and Wantage Township; they're getting new pages. MicroSystem's has lost one of their major employees, George Lockwood, who left at the end of August. Rollback figures were accidentally omitted, due to Mr. Lockwood's absence, therefore, new pages will be printed and should be delivered here today.

Ms. Rockwell brought up the issue of having no contract with MicroSystems, just an oral agreement. She feels it would be in the best interest of the county, to consider entering into a contract, and going to Bid for a MODIV Vendor. Basically there are three available MODIV Vendors in the State of New Jersey: Microsystems, Vital, and Property Pilot. Ms. Rockwell would like to invite them to give a demonstration on the assessor's package, appeal package, and to see what they have for the administrators for equalization and tax rates. Ms. Rockwell said she would like the Commissioners to be present as well.

Seasonal Employee

Every year we hire "seasonal" employee, Judy Ross. However, the issue that we tend to have, is that "seasonal" status is considered a six month (and six months only) period of time. Every year, we try to extend and

figure out when exactly Judy's going to start; when we're really going to need her, and how long it's going to last. We always need her for a few meetings here and there, coming the latter half of the year. The last email Ms. Rockwell received from Personnel, said it was time to terminate Judy as far as her seasonal status was concerned, or she would have to start paying union dues; Judy is capped at \$15,000.00 per year. We've tried to call her position "Temporary" or "As Needed/not to extend \$15,000.00" but that doesn't seem to help. In the Employee Handbook, the other status we could possibly hire Judy at, would be an "unclassified" position, and Ms. Rockwell asked the Board if she could prepare a Resolution with a request to bring back Judy, for an Unclassified Position, at the \$15,000.00 cap, so there's no budgetary change; just a change in title/status.

President Fierro asked Ms. Rockwell why the six month window that we have Judy, does not suffice for our needs? Ms. Rockwell told the Board, we brought Judy in, in April, and we had to terminate her in September. We would like to have the ability bring her back for certain meetings, Added/Omitted Hearings, and also, on the occasion that two people are out of the office, leaving only one person alone. We'd like to have Judy "on-call" or, Mr. Conway interjected, "per-diem."

Ms. Rockwell said there are provisions in the statute, under the Board of Taxation Trust Account; that would allow Judy to be paid out of the Trust Account. Mr. Fierro said he was worried about using the Trust Account, because of a potential decrease in hearings based on municipalities being correct now, and the market is hopefully stabilized now. Ms. Rockwell reminded Mr. Fierro that there were more appeals filed this year, than last year. President Fierro said he had no problem with the request; we need to have coverage, and we need her here during our busy times.

Office Reconstruction –

Commissioner George Conway asked about the meeting room (reconstruction). Ms. Rockwell told the Board she'd heard nothing, and that she would send a letter to Joe Biusso and Mr. Gruchacz. Mr. Fierro asked who our liaison was; Ms. Rockwell answered "Mr. Graham." Ms. Rockwell said she thought the project was put on the "back-burner" because of another project in the administration building. Commissioner Conway said the winter months would be a good time to get it done, during our slow period; before appeal season begins.

Vernon Township –

Mr. Fierro asked if Ms. Rockwell followed up with Vernon; she told him that she would be inviting them to the December meeting and that she would have statistics on the 2nd half of the year. A brief discussion ensued regarding foreclosures, sales, and certain trends.

There being no further business to come before the Board, Commissioner George Conway made a Motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:22AM, Commissioner Rich Ecke seconded the motion; all in favor.

Respectfully submitted by,

Marylou Hennighan
County of Sussex Board of Taxation