

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Norwich Board of Listers  
26 February 2015, Tracy Hall**

Present: Liz Blum (Chair), Ernie Ciccotelli, Cheryl Lindberg (Listers); Bill Krajeski (Assessor); Jonathan Bynum (Clerk & Scribe)

Members of the Public Present: Scott Genzer, Joanne McCormick

Blum called the meeting to order at 5:28 pm.

**1. Review and Approval of Agenda**

Ciccotelli **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Blum) to approve the agenda as distributed. Motion **passed 2-0**.

**2. Public Comments**

None at this point.

Lindberg arrived at 5:30 pm. She correctly pointed out that the clock in the Lister/Assessor's Office is fast.

**3. Approval of minutes of Lister meeting of 15 December 2014**

Ciccotelli **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Blum) to approve the minutes. Lindberg had a number of changes, which she listed. The Listers voted **3-0** to approve the minutes as amended.

**4. Update on effect of new legislation (32 VSA §3481 (1)(c)) on assessment of homes in Starlake Village (housing subsidy covenant)**

Krajeski explained that there is new legislation affecting the assessment of owner-occupied properties with housing subsidy covenants. While currently the 14 Starlake properties are assessed according to a formula developed by the Twin Pines management group, the new legislation requires that the fair market values of such properties be reduced by somewhere between a high of 40% and a low of 30%. It is up to the Listers to determine what adjustment is appropriate, and the State provides very little guidance about how the decision is to be made.

Krajeski produced a handout showing charts of the current assessments and of a number of possible adjustments that could be given under the new legislation. He said that there was no requirement to give everyone the same adjustment.

Lindberg pointed out that sellers of Starlake properties were allowed to benefit from improvements they had made to the property, and that, once an individual had bought a property in Starlake Village, they could remain indefinitely even if they no longer met the income requirements.

Lindberg continued that she wished to be fair to all Starlake owners, while at the same time minimizing the loss to the 2015 Grand List.

There followed discussion of the relative merits of the various options presented by Krajeski with respect to which was most equitable, which had the smallest range from highest to lowest assessment, and which resulted in the smallest loss to the Grand List.

Blum invited public comment, and Scott Genzer suggested that all Starlake adjustments be changed to 68.6%, which was the largest preexisting adjustment. As a result, no one's assessment would rise as a result of this legislative change, and the loss to the 2015 Grand List would be minimized.

Krajeski produced a new chart, reflecting Genzer's suggestion. After discussion, Lindberg **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Ciccotelli) to adjust the fair market values of Starlake Village properties according to this chart. Krajeski pointed out that the assessing software would round all values to the nearest \$100. **Motion passed, 3-0.**

#### **5. Discussion of 2012 Reorganization of Listers'/Assessor's Office:**

**(a) Who supervises NEMC, and in what respects, the Listers or the Town Manager?**

**(b) Should the Listers have their own desks, computers, and access to and training in the assessing software?**

**(c) Should the Listers draft their own budget?**

There was an examination of the contract for assessing services between the Town and NEMC dated 21 March 2014. Ciccotelli objected to the contract because it cuts the Listers out of project management and does not allow for Krajeski to train the Listers. Ciccotelli continued that NEMC was originally hired to assist the Listers, but now has taken over all assessing functions, and that he would like the Listers to manage the contract for the Town rather than the Town Manager. He expressed concern that NEMC is not beholden to the taxpayers.

Lindberg said that the cost of the Listers'/Assessor's office has not gone down under the reorganization. She continued that the Listers' role would continue to be effaced without effort on their part, and that the Listers were as far apart from the information going into the Grand List as could be. She is uncomfortable being asked to sign a document that she does not play a role in creating.

Lindberg continued that she was concerned about the appearance of the Town Manager being responsible for supervising the Assessor, while not being permitted to set values himself. She asked why there is a job description for the Assessor, when he is a contract employee?

Ciccotelli said that Bill Tobin, Norwich's District Advisor from the Department of Taxes, had told him that Norwich's structuring of the Listers'/Assessor's Office is "odd." Ciccotelli feels that having elected assessing officials accountable to the taxpayers is desirable and "in character for Vermont."

Blum argued that the arrangement prior to the reorganization was not economical and spawned much litigation and mistrust of the Office. The 2011 Committee to Review Real Property Assessment Functions, which recommended reorganizing the Office, came about partly as a result of the settlement of the Bragg Hill lawsuit. Many of the Committee's recommendations were adopted by the Selectboard (and by the Town through adopting a restructured budget), but the recommendations did not include the Town Manger overseeing the Assessor.

Ciccotelli said that money needs to be provided for Lister training, and the lack of a desk and a computer makes the problem worse. Lindberg said that Ciccotelli could come into the Office any day, and that the Lister stipend of \$1500 is an indication that they should do more than sign the Grand List and hear grievances.

Ciccotelli said that as his term was up in a few days and he was not running for reelection, his points were moot, but that as a citizen he resented the fact that "we don't have Listers any more."

Ciccotelli and Lindberg agreed that more contact with Bill Tobin would be a good idea.

Lindberg said she had not been consulted over a recent staffing change to the Office, whereas the contract says that such changes are to be approved by the Town Manager, "in consultation with the Board of Listers."

She concluded by saying that she was sorry that Ciccotelli was leaving office, as he makes some good points.

Blum invited public comment, and Joanne McCormick stated that she very much regretted the reorganization of the office. She felt that the detachment of the Listers from the informal grievance process reflected how much the Town has changed, in a way that she feels is not positive. She misses the closeness of the Listers to the people, and wants them back with more involvement.

There were no motions as a result of the discussion of item 5.

## **6. Progress report on 2015 Grand List and 2016 Reappraisal**

Krajeski presented a summary of the number of cyclic reinspection letters sent and properties reviewed to date. The cyclic reinspection process is on schedule, as is the 2016 Reappraisal. Krajeski suggested that future consideration be given to extending the length of the three-year reinspection cycle beyond 2016.

2015 inspection letters for permits or other changes are likely to be sent around the end of March.

Chair Blum left the meeting.

Lindberg and Ciccotelli continued the meeting.

## **7. Discussion of neighborhood designations**

Lindberg asked about the mapping software and whether there could be a map presented to the Listers that shows where the Assessor has chosen to break from one neighborhood to a different one throughout the Town. Krajeski stated that the software had just been received and loaded onto the computers but no work had been done with it yet. Before the next grandlist is to be lodged, Lindberg wants to see the Town neighborhoods on a map. Krajeski agreed to provide this and make it available at a future meeting.

## **8. Update on progress of mapping**

Mapping is still not getting done with up-to-date information. The production of maps of the Town are done from the Planning Office and they don't reflect current information. This matter needs to get resolved.

## **9. Discussion of education tax reform**

This item was postponed until the next meeting.

Next meeting is for reorganization after Town Meeting and to discuss filling the open Lister position. Policies for the office need to be drafted in several areas. Collaboration of the Listers and Assessor needs improving. Inviting the District Advisor to a meeting on a quarterly basis was agreed upon. No date was set for the next meeting, but Blum and Lindberg will check their schedules for a date.

At 7:10 pm the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Liz Blum, Chair  
Norwich Board of Listers