

BOARD OF SELECTMEN / SEWEER COMMISSIONERS MEETING

Wednesday December 14, 2022 – 6:00 PM – Hybrid

PRESENT: Roger Manzolini, Chair; Neal Pilson, Selectman; Alan Hanson, Selectmen; Danielle Fillio, Town Administrator; Jodi Hollinsworth, Applicant for Treasurer/Tax Collector; Harold Scheid, Town Assessor; Bob Gniadek, Chair, Finance Cte.; Angela Garrity, Town Clerk/Accountant

Roger called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Tax Classification Hearing: Harold Scheid, Tax Assessor, approached the Board to provide the purpose of a Tax Classification Hearing, which is to determine whether the Town will adopt a single tax rate or a split rate, which would put an extra financial burden on commercial properties in order to provide relief to the lower-income residents.

The current anticipated tax levy is \$5,948,806.00 plus a recently discovered addition of \$14,000.00. The anticipated single tax rate would be \$10.56, down from \$12.74 last year. Ninety-four percent of the properties in Richmond are residential. It would take an increase of 23% in commercial taxes to equal a 1% drop in residential taxes. The members of the Board indicated that they favor a single tax rate.

Bob Gniadek asked for a copy of the document provided to the Board from Harold. He also asked about the excess taxes levy capacity, which is \$278,000.00 which might change. Roger pointed out that the average assessed tax on homes in Richmond in 2021 was \$488,200.00 and in 2022 it rose to \$551,700.00. Bob asked Harold whether the changes in assessed values were applied evenly. He was advised that there are several considerations that go into that assessment. Roger noted that previously under-assessed houses have undergone significant increases in taxes over the last three years because of the requirement by the State to bring all assessments up to at least 90% of retail value. Roger said that the Board of Assessors has recommended that the Board adopt a single-tax rate.

Neal moved that the Richmond Board of Selectmen vote in accordance with M.G.L., Ch. 40, Sec. 56, as amended, the percentage of local tax levy which will be borne by each class of real and personal property, relative to setting the Fiscal Year 2023 tax rate 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 Massachusetts Department of Revenue. He was seconded by Roger and the motion carried by unanimous vote.

Bob G. reminded the Board that at last year's Tax Classification Hearing he had requested that the Assessors create an analysis of the impact on the residents of Richmond of a Residential Tax Exemption. The Board had directed the Assessors to create such a study and Bob expressed his disappointment that it had not been done. He still felt that it is important for the Board to know

what the impact on residents would be and he would appreciate having that analysis for the new budget period in late January, early February.

Roger asked Harold how big a job that analysis would be. Harold replied that it would be a large undertaking, but not onerous and that he would arrange for that to happen. There was a discussion of exactly what is involved in a split tax system and Neal pointed out that the decision in this case is within the authority of the Board of Selectmen. Roger added it is also within the authority of the Board to seek input from the townspeople.

Appointment of New Treasurer / Collector: Roger provided the background to why Jodi was at the meeting today: The previous Treasurer/Collector resigned his position. The opening was advertised, several applications were received, some interviews were done and the consensus of everyone involved was that Jodi Hollingsworth was the obvious best choice for the job.

Jodi introduced herself and provided some background which included sixteen years of experience as a Treasurer/Collector in two local towns. She enjoys the work and after a short hiatus is now enthusiastically looking forward to taking on this position.

Members of the Board and Bob G. remarked on their enthusiastic support for Jodi to take on this role both for her expertise and her extremely pleasant and engaging personality.

Roger moved to appoint Jodi Hollingsworth to the position of Richmond Treasurer/Tax Collector at an annual salary of \$65,000.00. Neal seconded the motion, which was adopted by unanimous consent.

Approval of the Minutes of the November 30, 2022 Meeting: Neal moved to approve the minutes as read. He was seconded by Al and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

Discussion of Upcoming Budget Season: Danielle reported that she had met with the Finance Committee and discussed with them starting the budget season earlier this year than usual. That would allow her to meet the deadlines for the printing of the Annual Report and preparations for the Annual Town Meeting. She will start next week sending out the information to Department Heads so that budget meetings can start on February 1st. The proposed schedule of meetings is: February 1st, 8th and 22nd. March 8th and 22nd and March 1st will be held open in case it is needed.

Bob G. noted that the school is never ready with their budget on time. He asked Danielle to impress upon them the need to get it done earlier. Danielle will try.

TOWN CENTER DISCUSSION:

Invoice for approval: Danielle presented the Board with a bill for \$389,068.51 for approval. Roger moved to approve the bill. Neal seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Status of Building: Roger noted that the building is 1/3 of the way completed, the Town is 1/3 of the way through the money and there are no issues or concerns with the schedule or the materials or the construction. Roger also reported that the Department of Transportation had taken down that big old tree on the building site, which did not seem to him to be in bad condition.

Public Comment: None

Town Administrator Updates: Danielle reported that the Christmas Tree was delivered today and that lights would be put on it very soon. She advised the Board that Town Hall will have to open late on Thursday as the Electric Company needs to shut down all power to the building for about an hour or so. Town Hall will open at 9:30 AM.

There was a very bad smell noticed in the downstairs offices. The sewer people were called in and they checked the system, which turned out not to be the cause. They believe the smell was coming from water in the foundation which was causing mold and mildew to grow. Danielle sent the staff home as people were beginning to feel ill from the smell. She attempted a temporary cure by pouring lemon bleach into wherever there was access to the foundation, which did help a little but eventually the smell returned just as strongly. The Fire Chief, Steve Traver, the Highway Superintendent, Peter Beckwith, and the Sewer Maintenance person, Tom Grizey, will meet at the Town Hall on Thursday to see how strongly the smell registers on detectors.

In case of a major snowstorm on Friday, Angela will work from home.

Selectmen's Matters: Roger told about a situation on Monday where there had been a three-car pileup a quarter mile up the road on Lenox Road from the Pond. EMT's had difficulty reaching the accident site in which some residents were injured. A discussion of the dangers of winter driving and ways to avoid similar situations in the future included the suggestion that residents on that road be asked to advise Town Hall of sudden changes in the road condition, especially during snowstorms.

The new owners of a house on the Northwest corner of Dublin Rd. and Rte. 41, have planted trees in front of their fence along the road. The line of sight to their left for drivers traveling south on Dublin as they approach the intersection will soon be impaired as the trees grow taller and larger. In the recent past there have been several accidents at the Dublin/Rte. 41 intersection, two of them fatal, and the State has made a strong effort to improve the lines of sight for all drivers at that intersection. Danielle reported that the new owners were contacted immediately and asked to move those trees, but they refused to do so. The only course of action left is for the Town to contact the State and request that they move to take a larger right-of-way on State Road, putting the trees on State property and allowing for their removal.

Sewer Matters: None

There being no further business before the Board, Roger moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:10 PM. The motion was seconded by Neal and adopted by unanimous consent.

Signed:

Roger Manzolini, Chair