

Town of Brunswick, Maine

**Finance Committee Meeting / Property Tax Public Forum
Thursday August 31, 2023 at 6:30 PM
85 Union Street – Council Chambers
and by electronic devices**

Meeting Minutes (Approved)

Committee Members: Councilor Sande Updegraph
 Councilor Nathaniel Shed
 Councilor Dan Ankeleles

Town Councilors: Abby King
 Jennifer Hicks
 Kathy Wilson
 Steven Walker

Staff: Finance Director Julia Henze
 Town Manager John Eldridge
 Assessor Taylor Burns

1. Acknowledgement that meeting was properly noticed
2. Adjustments to agenda
None
3. Plan for public outreach and communication around property revaluation

Councilor Updegraph introduced the Finance Committee and other Councilors attending, reviewed the purpose and goals of the meeting, and invited the public to speak.

The following speakers offered suggestions:

Andy Roberts, 7 Peary Drive
Jay Nieto, 11 Barrows Street
Jane Millet, 47 Willow Grove Road
Millie Stewart, 281 Old Bath Road
Dan Harris, 1 Mountain Ash Avenue
Mark Rosenthal, 280 Durham Road
Anne Wescott Dodd, 39 Windemere Road
Jean Powers, 40 Redwood Lane
Chris Healey, 21 Shobe Avenue
Chris Teal, 656 Gurnet Road
Jeanne Johnson, 532 Harpswell Road
Debbie Bridges, 64 Wildwood Drive
Joe Ciarrocca, 532 Harpswell Road
Kathy Bridge, Brunswick

Camden Rice, 126 Pegasus Street
Carol O'Donnell, 305 Maine Street
Nathan McDonald, Everett Street
Patty Dunning, Brunswick

During the discussion, Town Councilors Ankeles, Walker, Shed and Wilson all provided input. The notes from the meeting are attached to these minutes.

4. Review of meeting minutes from 7/20/23
Councilor Shed moved to approve, Councilor Updegraph seconded. Unanimously approved.

5. Adjourn
Councilor Updegraph adjourned meeting.

Town of Brunswick, Maine
Finance Committee Meeting
Thursday, August 31, 2023
Assessing Revaluation Notes from Public Comment

Agenda Item 3: Plan for public outreach and communication around property revaluation.

- **How to structure public forums**
 1. Round table discussion formats.
 2. Focused meetings around specific topic points.

- **When and where to hold them**
 1. Micro informational sessions held at various public locations in town.

- **What specific topics will be discussed**
 1. Understanding the methods of assessment that are available and what methods of assessment are used by Brunswick to establish values.

 2. Process for crosschecking assessment valuations.
 - a. Outside firm review.
 - b. Verification that outliers are not influencing data.
 - c. Size of market sale dataset.
 - d. Review of property cards for potential errors.

 3. Discussions around relationship between market values and assessed values.
 - a. What if the market “bubble” pops and market values decrease?
 - b. Can multi-year sales data samples be used?
 - c. Commercial vs residential development trends (historic).
 - d. New construction assessed values vs existing structure assessed values.

 4. Regularity of changes in assessed values going forward.
 - a. Timing and communication between changes in tax bills due to:
 - i. Changes in assessed value.
 - ii. Budgetary changes.
 - iii. Budget review & landscape for FY25 budget.

 5. Is a phased-in approach to the change in tax possible?

 6. Vacancy and/or short term-rentals.
 - a. Can the town apply different fees to these types of properties?
 - b. What are the assessed classifications of short-term rentals?

Town of Brunswick, Maine
Finance Committee Meeting
Thursday, August 31, 2023
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- What specific topics will be discussed (cont'd)
 7. Tax relief options available to taxpayers
 - a. All taxpayers
 - i. Homestead exemption
 - ii. Veteran exemption
 - iii. Paraplegic veteran exemption
 - iv. Blind exemption
 - v. Renewable energy investment exemption
 - b. Retired and/or individuals on fixed incomes.
 - i. Property Tax Fairness Credit on State of Maine Income tax return
 - ii. Senior tax assistance program
 - iii. Tax deferral program
 - c. Communication around any upcoming state legislation and its impact on local communities.
 - i. Working waterfronts.
 - ii. State law re: assessment
- What other ideas are there around improved communication from the Town to the citizens and in reverse?
 1. Passive communication:
 - a. Utilization of quasi-municipal organizations for outreach (library, People Plus, etc).
 - b. Bulletin boards around town.
 - c. Offer to subscribe to town communications when visiting town offices.
 2. Active communication:
 - a. Public relations position?
 - b. Roaming forums.
 - c. Town Hall open door policy to the public.
 - d. Interactive discussion board on the town website.

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QUESTIONS FROM CITIZENS

Market value and assessed value

- What if the market “bubble” pops and market values decrease?
- Can multi-year sales data samples be used?
- How are commercial and residential values determined?

Phasing-in and different formulas

- Is a phased-in approach to valuation possible?
- Can different formulas be used to assess different types of property?
- What are the assessed classifications of short-term rentals?

Relief options

- What are available and how can information be found?

Process

- What went wrong with the recent revaluation?
- What are we going to do to validate the next revaluation?
- Is there a rush to do this?
- What are the different approaches to revaluation?
- Can we/should we do this every 5 years?

Budget

- When will we talk about next year’s budget?
- Can we have a more in-depth discussion on the Fund Balance?
- How is the budget developed and adopted?

Other

- Can a list of town-owned properties and tax exempt properties be made available to the public?
- What is happening in Augusta around this issue?
- Can tax payers get credit for living in their houses for long periods?
- What is the historic economic development pattern?
- What is the plan for the homeless?