

Town of Brunswick, Maine

**Finance Committee Meeting / Property Tax Public Forum
Thursday October 19, 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 Ankeles
Town Councilors:	Councilor Abby King Councilor Kathy Wilson Councilor Steve Walker (remote)
Staff and others	Finance Director Julia Henze Town Manager John Eldridge Assessor Taylor Burns Deputy Finance Director Branden Perreault Auditor Tim Gill (remote)

1. Acknowledgement that meeting was properly noticed

Ms. Henze confirmed. Councilor Updegraph introduced the Finance Committee members, Councilors and staff attending. Reminded participants to sign in and include email addresses to receive the notes after the meeting.

2. Adjustments to agenda

Councilor Updegraph added two items:

1. Presentation by Branden Perreault on the Senior Property Tax Assistance Program
2. Update on proposed sale of Town property on Water Street

3. Presentation by Auditor Tim Gill, CPA from Runyon Kersteen Ouellette joined remotely and offered a presentation on the audit process, describing the auditors' responsibilities and management's responsibilities. Mr. Gill reviewed the purpose of the audit, the procedures used by the auditors to assess risk, with details on the specific items and internal controls that are reviewed. Reported that the only recommendation this year is related to the timing of cash deposits of student activity funds. Committee discussed the follow-up on management comments.

Mr. Gill reviewed the single audit requirement for federal grants, and which programs were reviewed. Described the audit reports which will be submitted to the Town and relevant agencies at the conclusion of the audit. Asked the Council for any comments, concerns, questions, and made his contact information available. Councilor Shed pointed out that the

Finance Committee takes a close look at the audit reports when they are issued, and the Town Council also receives a report on the results.

4. Presentation by Deputy Finance Director Branden Perreault on the Senior Property Tax Assistance Program. Mr. Perreault reported that to date this year there are 43 new applicants to the program – a 55% increase in number of applications completed. Estimates this to be just over \$100,000, a 74% increase in the amount of rebates from last year. This is not just due to the new applicants, but also because of the changes in the State PTFC program. Councilors King asked about the participation percentage. Mr. Perreault explained that he can get the total number of credits with a Brunswick address from the State, but this does not indicate that all would be eligible for the Town's program. Followed up with the data from the State, and that handout is posted online and is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Perreault stated that by ordinance, the checks must be issued by the end of December, but described the process of verifying the applications with the State, and said that the hope is to get the checks out by early December. Reviewed the status of the fund, and reported that with carryforward from the prior year there is approximately \$118,000 available for this year's program.

Committee discussed the ordinance that established program, the eligibility requirements, and the annual review process. Mr. Perreault described the outreach efforts to get the word out about the program. Councilor Ankeles reviewed the history of the program, and also suggested providing info at the Senior Expo for next year. Other suggestions included posting notices in public places, and senior centers, etc.

5. Finance Director Julia Henze gave a presentation on how the budget is established, how the budget determines the amount to be raised from taxes, and how that is divided over assess property value to determine the tax rate. Also presented slides to illustrate how the equalization redistributes the tax revenue, and how the tax rate decreases when the assessed valuation increases. Town Manager Eldridge provided clarification. Questions from the public and discussions are outlined in the attached notes from Councilor Updegraph.

6. Assessor Taylor Burns demonstrated how to find property data on the Town's website, as well as the Cumberland County Registry of Deeds and the Maine Revenue Services Real Estate Transfer Tax database.

<https://me-brunswick.civicplus.com/149/Assessing>

<https://me-brunswick.civicplus.com/151/Real-Estate>

<https://me-brunswick.civicplus.com/152/Tax-Maps>

<https://gis.vgsi.com/brunswickme/Default.aspx>

https://www1.maine.gov/cgi-bin/online/mrs/rettd/public_lookup/index.pl

<https://www.brunswickme.org/167/Property-Taxes>

Questions from the public are outlined in the attached notes from Councilor Updegraph.

7. Consideration of electronic information kiosks. Councilor Shed proposed installing multiple information kiosks around town as a means to communicate with citizens.

Councilor Shed moved to request that Town staff investigate options, prices and locations. Councilor Ankeles seconded. Unanimously approved.

8. Added item – update on the possible sale of a portion of 63 Water St. Ms. Henze reported that the issue was forwarded to the Rivers and Coastal Waters Committee. The RCWC issued a memo stating “the commission doesn’t support the all-out sale of the property as proposed by the landowner...” Other considerations could be “swapping a smaller portion of road frontage at 63 Water St with a portion of the river frontage at 65 Water St”. Ms Henze noted that the other option suggested was a swap with the Pinnette Park, but based on the deed this would not be possible.

Councilor Ankeles and Councilor Wilson expressed interest in the swap option, but not support for an outright sale. The FC discussed the next steps. The Rec Commission tabled this item at their last meeting, but will take it up at their next meeting.

9. Review of meeting minutes from 9/21/23
Councilor Ankeles moved to approve, Councilor Shed seconded. Unanimously approved.

10. Adjourn
Councilor Updegraph adjourned meeting.

Comparison of tax returns filed with Maine Revenue Services containing the Property Tax Fairness Credit to the total number of Brunswick Tax Assistance Rebates approved for the same income tax period.

Data provided by Maine Revenue Services w/ Brunswick Addresses

TAX_YEAR	Age Range	# of Returns	\$ value of Prop Tax Fair Credit	Brunswick Tax Assistance Program # of Rebates Issued	BTAP % of potential applications
2018	<65	446	\$ 218,522		
2018	65-67	44	22,770		
2018	68-70	48	21,297		
<u>2018</u>	<u>>70</u>	<u>185</u>	<u>99,130</u>	47	25%
	total	723	\$ 361,719		

*Brunswick's program limited to **70** or older for this income tax year.

TAX_YEAR	Age Range	# of Returns	\$ value of Prop Tax Fair Credit	Brunswick Tax Assistance Program # of Rebates Issued	BTAP % of potential applications
2019	<65	453	\$ 221,206		
2019	65-67	41	22,717		
2019	68-70	35	18,002		
<u>2019</u>	<u>>70</u>	<u>179</u>	<u>101,854</u>	48	27%
	total	708	\$ 363,779		

*Brunswick's program limited to **70** or older for this income tax year.

TAX_YEAR	Age Range	# of Returns	\$ value of Prop Tax Fair Credit	Brunswick Tax Assistance Program # of Rebates Issued	BTAP % of potential applications
2020	<65	600	\$ 281,148		
2020	65-67	60	35,583		
2020	68-70	54	31,374		
<u>2020</u>	<u>>70</u>	<u>301</u>	<u>179,989</u>	56	19%
	total	1015	\$ 528,094		

*Brunswick's program limited to **70** or older for this income tax year.

Did not receive data for tax year 2021 from State of Maine

TAX_YEAR	Age Range	# of Returns	\$ value of Prop Tax Fair Credit	Brunswick Tax Assistance Program # of Rebates Issued	BTAP % of potential applications
2022	<65	877	\$ 523,382		
2022	65-67	104	70,198		
2022	68-70	101	74,233	Estimate as of 10-20-23	
<u>2022</u>	<u>>70</u>	<u>474</u>	<u>308,458</u>	122	21%
	total	1556	\$ 976,271		

*Brunswick's program limited to **68** or older for this income tax year.

Important considerations:

1. State data changes constantly as new tax returns are filed and previously filed returns are audited or adjusted.
2. State data is pulled from tax returns filed with a Brunswick mailing address appearing on them.
3. Brunswick's program currently requires 10 continuous years of maintaining a homestead in Brunswick and the State lists returns with a Brunswick address regardless of term of homestead.

Town of Brunswick
Finance Committee Meeting
October 19, 2023
Assessing/Re-valuation/Property TAX Notes

Tim Gill, Principal, Runyon Kersteen Ouelette, CPAs, reviewed the auditor's role, timeline, and process.

Julia Henze, Finance Director, presented details of the budget process.

Taylor Burns, Town Assessor, demonstrated use of the assessing data base.

Branden Perreault, Deputy Finance Director, reviewed Senior Tax Rebate Program.

All documents can be found at:

https://www.brunswickme.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_10192023-3034?html=true

Questions/Answers:

- What can be done to improve and speed up handling of small transactions within the School Department? It is up to the School Dept to manage and speed up these transactions but the Town is ultimately responsible and the Finance Dept will see that it is handled.
- When will the audit be completed? Hopefully, by the end of November.
- Are the audit findings made public? Yes.
- Are any recommended changes made public? Yes, in a management letter which is on line. When corrections are made they are not included in the management letter for the following year. The FC also reviews the audit as does the full Council. We regularly have a very clean audit and high bond rating.
- What percentage of those eligible have applied for the Senior Tax Rebate Program? It's difficult to get exact numbers but there has been a 74% increase in applications since last year.
- Can we decrease the qualifying age from 68 years to 65 years and, if so, can we increase the amount appropriated in the budget? Yes and Yes. The FC will bring to the TC for action.
- Why don't citizens vote on the whole town budget. The Town Charter adopted in 1969 vests that responsibility in the elected Councilors.
- What is the amount of total taxes to be raised? That is determined by the budget. We only raise the amount required by the budget.
- Can we compare the residential and commercial markets? Only in a broad sense. There are a lot of variables in the commercial market especially.
- Can the Town set a maximum increase for the School Dept? Council Leadership has already begun meeting with the School Board to discuss budget matters.
- Does the amount of taxes we each pay depend on the budget? Yes
- Should we discuss tax exempt entities? Yes, at a future FC meeting.
- Are local option taxes possible? Not unless state law changes.

- How can you compare property valuations? By viewing individual property cards, by street name. There are other ways as well. Please contact the Assessor's office.

Additional links:

Julia's presentation on budget and tax rate

<https://www.brunswickme.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/1589?fileID=28378>

Branden's presentation on Brunswick's Property Tax Assistance Program - State Data

<https://www.brunswickme.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/1591?fileID=28388>

<p>If you would like to receive Jean Powers' newsletter, <i>Voice of the Brunswick Taxpayer</i>, please send your email to japowers@comcast.net</p>
