

S.T.M. – June 26, 2024 – Tax Refunds, Land Transfer & Recycling

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

Town of Bethany

June 26, 2024, at 7:00 P.M.

Brian Eitzer, Chair of the Conservation Commission, presented Bart Piccirillo the Conservationist of the Year award for 2024.

The meeting was called to order at 7:12 p.m. by First Selectwoman Paula Cofrancesco. There were approximately 150 people in attendance. Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Paula Cofrancesco called for nominations from the floor for a moderator. A motion was made by Caroline Leary, seconded by Susan Bradford, to nominate Carol Goldberg. There were no further nominations. Carol Goldberg was elected moderator by a unanimous voice vote.

Steve Thornquist made a motion, seconded by Ruth Beardsley, to dispense reading of the call. There was no discussion. Unanimous approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

The moderator introduced the first resolution on the printed call.

Item (1) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To approve an ordinance regarding tax bills and excess payments less than \$5.00.

A motion was made by Steve Thornquist, seconded by Sally Huyser, to consider the resolution.

Kathryn Sylvester – Went to lunch and was handed her change back. Shouldn't the taxpayer be returned their change?

Paula Cofrancesco, First Selectman – There is a handout to explain how much it costs to do a refund. This has been the past practice of the tax collector, but state statute requires it to be a town ordinance.

Joanne Blanck – Why would they send me a refund check, for my business, for \$3.40? It is inefficient and not cost effective to refund these small amounts.

Steve Thornquist – Is there a way to contact taxpayers to let them know of a refund?

Linda Bates, Tax Collector – Software database does not allow storage of telephone numbers or emails. Also, as a comparison, Prospect waives any delinquents and refunds \$10.00 or less.

Margaret Mattei – There are only 29 refunds in 2 years, offering to come in and call people for free to pick up their refund.

Conor Leary-Watson – Not worth it to spend \$5 to get a \$5 refund. Just waive.

Betsy Thornquist – Agrees. Is it possible to apply the refund to the next tax bill?

Linda Bates, Tax Collector – Would have to mail resident form to request the refund. Then the form would have to be mailed back to us, and then denied. And then we could transfer the amount to an outstanding bill.

Annette Snow – A lot of administrative costs, but can it go into a pay-it-forward fund?

Linda Bates, Tax Collector – That is a Board of Finance Director question. Any excess funds would go into the General Fund.

Jim Foley – Moving to vote on the question.

There was no further discussion. Majority approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

Item (2) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To consider and act on conveying a 0.2-acre portion of 829 Litchfield Turnpike to the owner(s) of 841 Litchfield Turnpike and a 0.7-acre portion of 829 Litchfield Turnpike to the owner(s) of 819 Litchfield Turnpike and to authorize the First Selectwoman to take all action associated and to sign all documents related thereto.

A motion was made by Steve Thornquist, seconded by Ruth Beardsley, to consider the resolution.

S.T.M. – June 26, 2024 – Tax Refunds, Land Transfer & Recycling

Paula Cofrancesco, First Selectman – Owner moved to Arizona and owes back taxes and has no intentions of paying those taxes and gifted the property to the Town. Explains why each address would get those amounts of acreage and how it puts each of those properties into compliance.

James Stirling – Vote against this item because the fiscally responsible thing to do would be to put the gifted piece of property up for auction and be bid on to bring in revenue to support our taxes.

Brendan Rieger – In favor of making conforming lot.

EJ Maher – Not in favor of making conforming lots.

Mary Ann Booss – Have either of the owners on opposite sides been approached to purchase the lot?

Paula Cofrancesco, First Selectman – Trying to be neighborly Bethany and do the right thing and have these owners have their lots become conforming lots. The Town will get tax revenue by distributing the property to the two neighbors.

Linda Bates, Tax Collector – Spoke with the owner of this property, she has been trying to sell it, and neither neighbor wants to buy it. The owner has moved to Arizona, has back taxes, and there are wetlands on the property.

Kristine Sullivan, Chairman of Inland Wetlands Commission – Property is over half wetlands and not buildable or developable.

Brian Eitzer – Do not want to give away something for nothing.

Arnold Novenstein – Are one of the properties the condemnable lot? Offer to sell to neighbor?

Paula Cofrancesco, First Selectman – Yes.

Arnold Novenstein – We should not be giving property to the neighbors that have not taken care of their house and property.

Calen Lang – The neighbors are not interested in buying the lot.

Amy Rushlow – There are wetlands on the property, and would there be a variance needed?

Kristine Sullivan – Wetlands are in the back, unsure if they need a variance.

Kathryn Sylvester – List of Town owned properties and there is a better process for selling Town-owned properties and it should be investigated further for making a process to sell Town-owned properties. Don't give away property for nothing.

Rob White – Can we confirm tonight that these lots are pre-existing nonconforming lots?

Vin Marino, Town Council – Yes, the 3 lots are pre-existing nonconforming lots.

Gary Macnamara – From a Town perspective, it is bad precedence for the town to get involved in one property.

James Van Dyck – Wondering if there is a way to have a parcel appraised to know what a property is valued at before land is added to it and valued at after land is added to it. So, when the property does sell down the road, the owner gets their portion, and the Town can recoup a portion of the sales for the acreage distributed.

Vin Marino, Town Council – That requires an agreement between the town and the property owner. There is no policy in place for anything like that right now. Something that would have to be voted on at a Town Meeting.

Karl Larson – How big is the middle lot?

S.T.M. – June 26, 2024 – Tax Refunds, Land Transfer & Recycling

EJ Maher – Clarify that the properties were formed prior to the zoning regulations, and that they were conforming lots prior to zoning changes.

Steve Thornquist – Does the Town offer this lot for sale or tax auction?

Carol Goldberg – No, the parcel was never put up for sale or tax auction by the town.

Calen Lang – Giving someone land that is not already taking care of their current land. It does not make sense to give someone land in hopes that they will make it nice and sell it.

There was no further discussion. Opposed by a majority of voice vote. **Defeated.**

Item (3) on call – BE IT RESOLVED: To discuss and act on the recommendation from the Board of Finance as amended by the Board of Selectmen: At a cost of \$181,970.00 – Restore full funding to the lines impacted by the original single-stream proposal, with additional funds required to account for increased disposal costs for items brought to the Recycling Center.

Note: This option will be funded from the General Fund and will not have an impact on the FY24-25 taxes. The mill rate has already been set at 28.42.

A motion was made by Steve Thornquist, seconded by Ruth Beardsley, to consider the resolution.

Sharon Huxley, Chairman of Board of Finance - Recycling Center Reboot Handout. Explained at length what the numbers on the handout meant, for full transparency.

Betsy Thornquist – The budget is supposed to have the single stream removed. Does this add money back in for the single stream? The hours at recycling should change because it closes at 3p.m. and people work. The hours of operation are not convenient.

Sharon Huxley, Chairman of Board of Finance – There is nothing added to the budget for single stream. The money in this budget is to add the recycling center back in so that it will operate as it did before.

Patricia Winer – What is the 25% estimate based on?

Sharon Huxley – The assumption is that the recycling center is going to get more recyclables. 25% increase is not a lot at all.

EJ Maher – Was someone losing their job at recycling? Is that why salary is being mentioned on the handout?

There was no further discussion. Majority approval by voice vote. **Passed.**

A motion was made by Sally Huyser, seconded by Amy Rushlow, to adjourn the meeting. The motion was passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Howard,
Assistant Town Clerk