

Aging in Place Committee

Approved Minutes October 17,2019

Present: Ellen Ceppetelli, Ron Ceppetelli, Gail Licciardello, Jean Paulantonio, Nedra Sahr, Francis Thomas, Jack Murphy (select board),

Absent: Liz Castillo, Melissa Albert

Guest: Jean Saunders, Fellow, Dana Lee (Eliot Town Manager)

The meeting was called to order at 4:03pm.

Review of Minutes: Nedra moved to approve the minutes as written. Ron Seconded. Ellen, Ron, Gail, Jean, & Nedra voted in favor. None opposed.

Discussion of Tax Relief Models:

Two proposals for tax relief for seniors from Saco were discussed. Jean Saunders presented the two models that Saco is considering. One model was a “work off” plan in which seniors could volunteer time in Saco and received a decrease in property tax. Jean indicated that this was a difficult model to manage. And there are tremendous costs associated with the program. A person was hired to manage the volunteers, then HR had to be involved in the process. She would not recommend that we use this mode.

Saco’s other new model for tax relief for seniors is based on income. It is a flat \$500 tax break. There is no sliding scale. It has specific criteria which includes:

- that you must have applied for the Homestead Tax Credit (which is applied for once, and then the assessed value of your property is lowered, and thus the property tax bill you receive is lower
- the Property Tax Fairness Credit (once completed the state sends a refund check) in order to apply for the Saco Senior Tax Assistance program.

In addition, Jean S. led a discussion on the homestead exemption tax credit and Tax Fairness Credit. Cumberland has a tax reduction program for senior, that is income based. Dana Lee then presented a sample proposed Eliot ordinance, which he adapted from Yarmouth, ME’s program. It is income based with many specific requirements.

Dana indicated that he felt the Select Board would be receptive to the AIP proposing a tax relief program, and that the AIP would define the parameters of the ordinance, i.e. what is the age, income requirements, residency requirements, etc. It was suggested that we need more demographic data. Dana indicated the census and department of labor can give us information about residents of Eliot which would be helpful in developing the specifics of a proposed ordinance for senior property tax relief. He will pull together some of that data for the committee.

It was decided that Ellen would go to the next Select Board meeting. First, she will write a letter indicating that we are working on a reasonable plan to provide some tax relief to seniors. And, that we have looked at 3 options, one is a work off model, one a flat rate model for any senior over a certain age, and then 3rd model which will be income based and will have specific criteria. We are suggesting this third model. And that sometime, after we have done more research, we will present a proposed ordinance to the select board.

Dana indicated we would need to have our proposal for an ordinance done by the beginning of April, so that it can be on the ballot in June. Dana indicated he will get the demographic data on Eliot that is needed for the committee to understand who in Eliot might qualify, what the need is, what the eligibility requirements might need to be. This would be helpful in explaining what the town's residents would need to understand, and then do in order to get property tax relief.

Gail asked if it were possible to freeze taxes when someone reaches a certain age. Dana indicated that unfortunately it is against the state constitution, as the constitution indicates that taxes need to be assessed equally for all property.

Ellen will send letter to Select Board by November 7th requesting support of the policy of tax relief for seniors, but not of any of the specifics of the potential ordinance and how it will be administered. That we looked at 3 models. The first volunteer work off program, had too much administrative cost and time, the second was a flat rate regardless of income. We are recommending a version of a third model which will be based upon specific qualifications, level of need, and income.

It was suggested that we need to put out some workshops (some in the day and some in the evening) about current methods of tax relief, i.e. the Homestead Act, Tax credit for Veterans, for the Blind, and the Property Tax Fairness Credit (which is income based). Both programs are state based. Our future proposed ordinance would be an Eliot bases tax relief program for seniors. Jean S. indicated that as part of our program we can also refer to other programs such as Habitat for Humanity for home repairs, heat subsidies.

In further discussion, Jean S. indicated that the proposed ordinance Dana gave us is very complicated, not easy to understand, not predictable and will be difficult to administer. Most models do not include renters.

Motion: Nedra moved that we put together a memo to the select board regarding the exploration and development of an Eliot Senior Tax Payor Assistance Program. Ron Seconded the motion. Ellen, Ron, Gail Jean, Nedra all voted in favor. None opposed.

Looking at the Action Plan: Ellen asked if we could approve the draft of the action plan. Gail indicated that she had some suggestions to the draft action plan (she provided them to Ellen).

Budget: The budget request is usually done around November 1st. Ellen discussed the budget with Dana. He suggested that we ask for 5-6 thousand dollars, with approximately \$3500 for communication with the residents of the town, and \$2500 for public meetings.

This led to a discussion of possibly having a quarterly newsletter and informational sessions at the library. Also hiring an intern might be helpful in getting things done. Ellen will produce the budget request and forward on to committee members. Jack suggested that we get information about who is new in town. Ellen will work with Melissa to find out how the town office can help in getting information about new residents. Decided that at next meeting we will discuss a communication plan for residents who have volunteered to help or are interested in the work of AIP.

Discussion of next meeting: It was decided that the next meeting will remain on November 21st. (Gail will be out of town, so someone else will have to take minutes)

Fran updated the committee on having students volunteer to help seniors. She has contacted the school department who suggested that we work with the Community Services Department. She will follow up on that.

Motion: Jean moved to adjourn the meeting. Ron seconded it. Ellen, Ron, Gail, Jean and Nedra voted in favor. None opposed

The meeting adjourned at 5:29pm

Respectfully submitted,

Gail Licciardello