

**Sterling Board of Assessors
Room 109, Butterick Municipal Building, 1 Park St., Sterling MA 01564**

Minutes of Meeting January 21, 2015

Present: Donlin Murray (Don), Chairman
Robert Cutler (Bob), Vice-Chairman
Michael Rivers (Mike) Clerk
Harald Scheid (Harald), Contract Assessor (RRG/Regional Resource Group)
Debbie Dreyer (Debbie), Assistant to the Assessor

Guest: Charla Kroll, taxpayer

Meeting Opened at 8:07am

Payroll & Payables Signed

Roll Call & Approval of Agenda

Donlin Murray, Robert Cutler, & Michael Rivers present along with Debbie Dreyer & guest Charla Kroll (Harald Scheid will be late). Mike made a motion to accept the agenda, 2nd by Bob, all in favor, aye.

Review and Accept the Previous Meeting's Minutes– Don made a motion to approve the 12/29/14 meeting minutes – Mike asked that a certain phrase be modified. Minutes will be held till Harald arrives for verification of the modified phrase.

Approve 6 Statutory Exemptions (1 new) – Mike made a move to approve the Statutory Exemption list, 2nd by Bob, all in favor, aye

8:12am Harald arrived

Re-visit Minutes – Harald agreed on the wording of the modified phrase. The Chair recognized Mike's motion to approve the amended minutes, 2nd by Bob, Mike abstained since he wasn't present at the last meeting - all in favor, aye.

CONTRACT REGIONAL ASSESSOR (RRG) UPDATE

Update on the Solar Project – At our last meeting the question was raised; on the power generated by Pandolf on their solar array - is that production greater or less than their consumption? Harald called Sean Hamilton who referred Harald to a statement that Joe Curtain had dropped off – the power production numbers for the year are roughly 400kw hours less than their consumption – in 2012 they generated 1.3mega watts and consumed 1.8 - in 2013 they generated 1.3mega watts and consumed 1.7. Last year's numbers aren't in yet – Mike said they're probably always going to use more than they generate. Harald said that there was a question as to whether they were net producers of power. Mike said that the way it was structured - it's like they're two separate entities; they could sell that project to someone else & nothing much would change - they were meant to be arms-length apart.

Mike asked about the Westboro solar project case – what struck him the most is that in order to be exempt, everyone who uses the power must be subject to property tax. In the case of a PPA being sold to a utility you can't make that argument because the Town is not subject to property tax.

Harald sees two different issues – one centering around Pandolf itself & what their motives are for building the site & then as a second matter, the sale of the power in a beneficial way to the light company. The finding doesn't seem to directly address our situation. We still have an opportunity to go into a pilot agreement – Pandolf is still willing.

Mike made a ***motion*** for our Chairman, the interim administrator & Harald negotiate a tentative pilot agreement with Pandolf Perkins, 2nd by Bob, all in favor aye. This also needs to be voted on at Town Meeting – warrant deadline is April. Mike thought we should also have a selectman involved. Harald will talk to Sean Hamilton to see if they're still interested. We'll do an update at each meeting.

Update on Chapter Land review process – Sharon Vincent who was working on the Chapter project has left RRG – Harald now has Sherri, a new person on staff, who's dedicated to working on Chapter – she's made significant progress with her research & crafting new chapter liens. She's about a quarter of the way through the accounts & has quite a number of liens drafted & ready for signing – we'll be reviewing those liens for signatures & letters will be going out to property owners informing them of what we've undertaken & making the request for recording fees.

86 Chace Hill Rd - Harald told Charla Kroll that he did another review of her application & he was in error thinking she was applying as a 61A, but in fact, she's applying as 61B. The Board might have some questions about the recreational aspects of the property. The property is located at 86 Chace Hill Rd with 8.39 acres of which 2 acres would be put aside for the residence – 6.39 acres potentially qualifying for 61B. Hiking's been designated – only to be used by 6 people – not for the public. Charla Kroll says it's a wildlife corridor & doesn't want it disturbed. They've maintained this as an open field for a wildlife refuge. Since retiring they are looking for a break in their taxes - Harald said there is a "quid pro quo" – the rest of the taxpayers will bear your tax burden.

Harald cited that under 61B there are two opportunities for the Board to consider; one is a public recreational use – the other is an open space provision – increasingly boards are requiring a management plan be presented to the BOA – doesn't have to be formal; but something that clearly defines for the Town what it gets to offset the increased tax burden.

Mike says there is a need, in general, for an open space provision but in Sterling there is a lot of protected land particularly with the watershed. It was suggested the Krolls might want to look into a conservation restriction – an option that would drop the assessed rear acre rate from \$6,000/acr to \$1,000/acr (undevelopable land rate).

Larry Davis At our last meeting he submitted an appeal of the denial of his 61A application – the property is a little over 2 acres & he was hoping to maintain his chapter classification based on the premise that he's part of a family operation (Davis Farm Inc) – it would if the ownership was under Davis Farm, but it's under his name only. He had 30 days to appeal the Board's decision – he's asking for an extension since he's been out of town.

Motion : Bob made a motion to grant a 30 day extension on his appeal, 2nd by Mike, all in favor, aye.

NEW BUSINESS

Budget Review – We're on track with the budget – the only increase has been the wages. Harald's RRG contract is coming up for FY16 – we'll need to send out a RFP between now & July 1st. The \$2500 for the liens was reduced. Mike went to the Town Meeting to have our expense budget reduced from \$51,500 to \$55,000. Ed's hours should be increased along with the amount budgeted for his wages since the FY15 building season coming up this spring – it could be busier. The Board will wait to hear from the Finance Committee.

References: FY 16 Assessors' Budget

Next meeting for Feb 18th @7:30am

Mike moved to close the meeting, 2nd Bob Cutler, all in favor, aye.

Meeting Adjourned at 10:03am

Respectfully Submitted
Debbie Dreyer
Assistant to the Assessor