

BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON  
Citywide Neighborhood Committee  
Meeting Summary

September 26, 2017  
Conference Room A, City Hall

The meeting was called to order at 7:04

Cliff Lazenby noted that there was an attendance sheet on the table

Cliff entertained a motion to approve the minutes from the March 8, 2017 and July 11, 2017 meetings, Cristy Cardoso made the motion, Marie Kelleher seconded all in favor

Cliff welcomed everyone and talked about past neighborhood forums and noted the upcoming Forum for Ward 5 at the Middle School on October 11.

Cliff entertained a motion to suspend the items on the agenda until our next meeting so we would have more time to talk about the revaluation, Cristy made the motion, Marie seconded, all approved

Cliff introduced and welcomed Nancy Colbert Puff, Acting City Manager and Judy Belanger, Finance Director

Nancy and Judy presented information on the 'Big Picture' of how revaluations work. They explained that the median assessment ratio needs to stay between 90% and 110% and that Portsmouth was at 86.6% in 2016, triggering the need for a revaluation.

They explained the categories: Residential, Commercial and Utilities, and the breakdown of each one, the percentage of residential vs. commercial properties, as well as the percentage of assessed value between residential and commercial properties.

The estimated tax rate will be \$15.36 for the coming year.

Discussion was opened up, questions were asked about the commercial valuation piece, including about Steve Traub's geographical competency, competency to appraise downtown properties, and if he can explain the difference between the sale price and the assessed price for the Hilton Garden Inn. Nancy explained the process and the other values that may have been included in Hilton sale (FF&E, business value, etc.)

Questions were asked about reviewing assessments and Nancy explained the state review process.

Homestead exemptions were explained as well as the deferred tax process available to qualified residents.

Discussion ensued on how more hotels and commercial development downtown has not helped our tax rate.

Discussion on how the appraiser is chosen, as well as why the city has to reassess so often, which is to keep things fair and equitable after a lawsuit brought many years ago by the city of Portsmouth.

There was a question why there was a \$1,000,000 'dummy' valuation on a piece of city owned land on Mechanic Street.

There was a question of why Lonza pays airport district tax while they are in the non airport area of Pease Tradeport.

Question on why there was no impact fees. Nancy answered that there were fees and impact fees.

Question of if the city could just not use this revaluation, and why is already not 100%. Judy explained it is always changing, the goal is always 100%.

Discussion of how a state audit would work.

A question was asked on how many hotel rooms there are, no one could answer.

Discussion that hotel properties are not helping tax burden.

Talk of city buying properties at over appraised value, such as the parking garage site and the teepee man house.

Questions on how apartments are classified, residential or commercial. Judy: a building with 4 or more apartment units is commercial. Condominiums are separate residential units.

Judy explained the time line for setting the tax rate.

Discussion on when people would find out if their assessment was lowered. Nancy or Judy did not know when or how.

Observation by a resident that the revaluation should be abandoned or commercial adjusted out of a sense of fairness.

Talk of gentrification and if the rising tax burden is sustainable.

Questions on specific assessment practices. Judy and Nancy referred residents to talk to the assessor's office.

Discussion continued with similar topics.

Nancy and Judy explained that there would be further discussion with the commercial appraiser, Peter Traub, at the City Council meeting on Monday night, October 9, 2017

Cliff entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9PM, Cristy made the motion, Marie seconded the motion.

Meeting adjourned.