

A special meeting of the Board of Aldermen was held Tuesday, September 24, 2019, at 6:45 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

President Lori Wilshire presided; City Clerk Susan K. Lovering recorded.

Prayer was offered by City Clerk Susan K. Lovering; Alderman Patricia Klee led in the Pledge to the Flag.

The roll call was taken with 10 members of the Board of Aldermen present; Alderman Laws, Alderwoman Kelly, Alderwoman Melizzi-Golja. Alderman Tencza, and Alderman Clemons were recorded absent.

His Honor, Mayor James W. Donchess, and Corporation Counsel Steven A. Bolton were also in attendance.

President Wilshire

Alderwoman Kelly is not feeling well and won't be joining us this evening and Alderwoman Melizzi-Golja is running a little late but she will be here.

COMMUNICATIONS

From: Lori Wilshire, President, Board of Aldermen

Re: Special Board of Aldermen Meeting

There being no objection, President Wilshire accepted the communication and placed it on file.

DISCUSSION

Assessing Update.

President Wilshire

We are going to invite the Director of Administrative Services, Ms. Kleiner, to join us and give us an Assessing Update. Thank you for being here this evening.

Kim Kleiner, Director of Administrative Services

Good evening and thank you for inviting us to update you on all of the improvements that we have made to the Assessing function. So last we were here, we were here at the end of April and we presented you the improvement plan which we have been working on hard. Before I begin, if you don't mind, I would like to introduce some of the Assessing Staff, who have all joined us here this evening.

President Wilshire

That would be wonderful, thank you.

Ms. Kleiner

So if they'd stand: Louise Brown, the Administrative Supervisor; Greg Turgiss, Commercial Assessor; Amanda Mazerolle, Administrative; Lynn Cameron, Administrative Specialist; Mike Mandle, Residential Assessor, Doug Dame, Commercial Assessor; Gary Turgiss, Residential Assessor. We also have the three members of the Board of Assessors with us, Mr. Paul Bergeron, Mr. Bob Earley and Mr. Dan Hansberry, who is currently serving as Chair.

President Wilshire

Thank you very much, that was nice to meet everyone.

Ms. Kleiner

So without the staff, this would not be possible. So this is their accomplishments and I thank them for putting up with me every day. So this staffing level has remained the same since April, except we have had Karina Ochoa join the Administrative Services Office. She is the Administrative Assistant within my office. She not only provides support to me, but she also provides support to the Department. This summer, we also had a junior from Nashua Senior High School, Alexandra Pickett. She was part of the Mayor's Internship Program and she also assisted the Department. You all know Pam Andruskevich, our GIS Technician, who plays a very important role in the maintaining of property data through Pictometry and GIS Mapping. Pam has joined us here this evening as well.

As you know, a few weeks ago we presented a plan here to PEDC on all the important changes that are happening within GIS. Upon passing of Legislation before you, Assessing will hire a temporary Assessor for 3 to 6 months, part-time, up to \$20,000.00. We hope for your consideration in that Legislation this evening; that is very important to us.

You saw this back in April, this was our Assessing Improvement Mind Map. This laid out for us the areas that we believed we would touch upon within the Improvement Plan. So I wanted to bring that back because you will see a number of these areas discussed as we discuss the progress that has been made so far. So we put the progress into 5 key areas of improvement: Transparency, Customer Service, Efficiency & Data Collection, Procedures & Communication, Property Data Accuracy and Software Program Applications. There is a difference which we will explain later on between Property Data Accuracy and the Data Collection piece.

So Transparency within the Department; in case you haven't noticed, our entire Web Site Page has been re-designed for easier navigation. The popular links button which is a button right at the top in a row of blue buttons provides additional tools and information added. The Residential Assessment Information Guide that was provided by KRT, the Understanding NH Property Taxes, Explanation of Your Tax Bill, Understanding of your Property Card. So we have tried to make information readily available to tax payers to help them understand the process. We have also provided on-line access to your property card.

This will be updated once a year; the card represents your December Tax Bill. This is the Property Tax Card that we see within the Assessing Office; this is not the Web Prop Data that you used to see prior. If you want a current, live property card, for some reason you think changes have been made from the web site you can e-mail and we will e-mail back a property record card to you with instructions on how to read it.

Starting in August we introduced the new newsletter, the Assessing Monitor; issued monthly it will provide a lot of important dates and deadlines, notices of changes and updates within the Department. We want to make sure that during the Full Measure & List, we can push as much information to our residents as possible. That has been included in the RFP for the Full Measure & List and will be very important. Residents can sign up for this newsletter on the web site and they will receive it by e-mail.

Our Board of Assessor meetings; so now our Board of Assessor meetings are held up in the Auditorium, they are televised on Channel 16, recorded, available on YouTube, minutes are verbatim and available on the web site. We also created an e-mail address for members of the public to contact the Board of Assessors, that e-mail address goes to the entire Board and myself in case there is a staff level inquiry that needs to be investigated for them. Often that address is not for conversation, it is much like the Board of Aldermen e-mail address. But it does get to the Board and they can view the resident's inquiry.

Efficiency & Data Collection: One of the problems that came about was you generally had assessors calling residents and scheduling their own appointments. So as you can imagine in today's busy society, they would call, often get the voicemail and they'd have to leave a message and wait for the resident to call them back. The resident might call them back; they might be in the field. This kind of created a hold up in creating some of those appointments. So right now we have the Administrative Staff, mostly Ms. Cameron, scheduling those appointments. And since she is here in the office, you don't have that telephone tag. And then the assessors can worry about getting out into the field and completing their appointments.

As I mentioned earlier, the hiring of the temporary employee before you tonight; why is this important? It is important because we had an increase in our work load, not really anticipate come this September. So as you may know, we are working with the Legal Department and preparing a response to the BTLA. We are also working with the Legal Department on a number of appeals that have been filed with the BTLA and Superior Court. This takes time, it takes Assessor's time to be in Legal and to walk them through the files and some of the data. This really arose, otherwise we would have brought this to you much earlier, but we are hoping that through the NHAAL List Serve and through contacts that we have with other assessors, that we will be able to fill this position quickly.

We are holding weekly Assessor Meetings; this Monday – yesterday, we had Director Cummings with us from Economic Development. We are trying to increase the communication with other Departments that may have information on development within the City. For instance, Director Cummings would have information on commercial properties and where they may be in their construction process, so to reach out and to make and use the information and the contacts that we have within the City to the best of our knowledge is important. We also discuss properties, consistency of methods, and we have a peer review on different properties and different assessments.

We have re-instituted an updated sales letter, this is a questionnaire that is sent to residents to request and verify the details of their sale. Over the summer, over 1,179 have been mailed and 304 have been returned. Why is this important? Well when we are going through the process of qualifying sales, it is important that we know what information may have been missed on the property card, what information about the sale and the property they can provide to us. So that is important and we hope that residents will take the time to fill out the short survey and return it to us.

We also instituted a letter of assessment change. So when a resident has a change in their assessment over \$20,000.00 due to data corrections, we are sending out a letter to inform them. It has been brought to us that some members of the public would like to see that changed to a percentage, that is something that we are looking at.

But for the time being, we have letters this year that have gone out for the \$20,000.00 and we are going to maintain that for now.

Research of Best Practices and Consulting; so as many of you know, there was \$50,000.00 included in the budget in Assessing for consulting. This was important especially when we eliminated the Chief Assessor job. We are taking use of those funds. We are consulting with David Cornell, who is an Assessing Expert. He has been extremely helpful and very knowledgeable. I have to say that Assessing is a very special field, it is amazing how knowledgeable and how helpful assessors from different communities have been. They have reached out to let us know that they are there if we have any technical questions. They have provided their contact information to us. We have taken use of that a few times. We are also, in the Legislation before you, have the request for some tablets. Why the tablets are important is that this is going to create efficiency within the Department. We will load the new AssessPro5 Software on to the tablets. This will allow assessors to make real-time changes to our system right out in the field. So currently, they have a property card, it is written, they make changes and they write them down, they bring them back and either they enter them into the system or the administrative staff helps and enters them into the system. So the changes that we can just incorporate right there in the field will provide efficiency.

We also have a number of different areas where we are looking at efficiency now. We are looking at the property cards as we move to AP5 and we are trying to figure out what information needs to be added to the card, what information needs to maybe be removed from the card because it is not useful to the tax payers but it still needs to be seen by the assessors. So we are making those types of changes. We also have a property card revision notification, so we include the property card in the mailing to residents when an abatement is either approved or denied by the Board of Assessors. This allows them to look at the property card and see if any data corrections have been made during that process or to question maybe why the denial or the approval has been made. That was not done prior; prior they just received a letter.

Procedures and Communication; so in addition to the weekly assessor meetings, we also have a weekly meeting with all staff members. We review data, we review work load, we review procedures, changes in policies or directives, just general information that all of the staff needs to know. These are important and these weren't being done and this was an issue that we brought up during the Management Audit. You need to have widespread communication within any function. They have been very useful. There have been times, I will admit, especially during the abatement process in July, that the abatements took first slot and we actually had to postpone some of our weekly staff meetings because the assessors had appointments and needed to be out in the field. So during July, we did a lot of catch up and passing information from word of mouth but those abatements had to be done and that was our priority.

I am also providing departmental updates to the Board of Assessors at each meeting. These are generally in writing. I think I may have shared a couple of them with the Board of Aldermen especially when it was talking about the number of abatements and things that we were having. But of course you can find them in the review of minutes from the Board of Assessor's meeting. The Board of Assessors are currently undergoing a review of their By-Laws. So as you know, we had the appointment by Mayor Donchess of Mr. Bergeron this summer and after he joined the Board, they began reviewing their bylaws and they are currently in that process.

It has been asked how there is any control of assessment changes within the Department; what type of review and audit is being undertaken? So there is a report, it's called Assessment Audit Report and both Louise Brown and I have access to that and we run that periodically. I am informed of assessment changes over \$20,000.00 as I said, we have these weekly assessor meetings, we discuss large cases. But I also run these audit logs and I review those and what do they tell me? They tell me the change that's been made to any building, the change that's been made to any land, and the change in total. So if I have questions, if any of those look like I need to inquire on further information I do and the Assessors walk me through those changes.

You may have heard of a procedure manual that was just introduced to the Board of Assessors in September. It was reviewed by David Cornell, our Assessing Expert. I stated during the meeting at the Board of Assessors that this was a live document and it will be amended. So with the new AssessPro5 Software, there will be a number of changes required and one of the changes that was specified in the Management Audit Report was the moving away from the EYB or Effective Year Built for depreciation. We brought that up, it was a recommendation in the Management Audit Report, it is a discussion that we are currently having with Patriot Properties and it is included in the RFP for the Full Measure & List.

I did not want to undertake changes to a procedure manual when I know that this is going to be addressed in the Full Measure & List. The current policy is as is, we did not revise the policy for the EYB or for the Grade & Conditions to the bathrooms and the kitchens; that will be all handled then. We also continue to consult with David Cornell on best practices and changes will be made to the manual as we find best practices not only suggested by he but other communities that we are talking with.

We are undergoing rotating attendance at the NH AAO meetings by Assessors. This provides them continuous education. There is an education portion of those meetings. This part month, Mr. Turgiss and I attended and the education session was on utility valuation and that was given by Scott Bartlett. So as they hold their meetings each month, we will rotate the assessors so that all the assessors have a chance to get this information, bring it back to our weekly assessors meetings and discuss it and share it with all.

We have binders that we have created for the Board of Assessor meetings. Assessing is an interesting function because it is very paper dependent. There is a large amount of paper that is processed through the Assessing Department. So you can imagine when you have 40 abatements going to the Board of Assessors for consideration and it is a bunch of loose papers or papers that are just paper-clipped. They are trying to get through this big packet and they are trying to have residents join them. We felt that there just needed to be some organization provided for them to assist them. And also I will admit it assists me in following the meeting and now we are doing one for the legal representative that is at that meeting as well and one for staff to share. It does, it has helped very much with the flow and the organization of the meeting. They take relatively little time to produce. These are also done and used for actually where I got the idea was the Board of Public Works binders. I think that organization and having a good flow of the meeting is important, especially when it is televised and we want to make sure that things aren't omitted or missed. In July when we had all the abatements was probably when it took the most time to prepare these binders. Normally, half an hour tops to create these binders for a normal meeting. But they are extremely helpful.

During the Management Audit we discussed the lack of mileage reporting and we had stated back then that this had already been looked at and had been addressed. This continues, the assessors fill out a mileage report, they attach their field log, it is required by all assessors; it is reviewed and approved by myself. I also receive all of the schedules that are created by the Administrative Staff and I can always compare against those schedules as well.

Property Data Accuracy: By far this is one of the most important things that I could discuss tonight with you. We have a request for proposals currently out there. That request was posted on August 29th. On September 5th, we hold a pre-proposal meeting, this was non-mandatory. We had two firms attend; Vision Government Solutions and Tyler Technologies. On September 9th was the deadline for any questions to be submitted to the City and on September 11th we posted any answers to those questions. This Thursday responses are due to the City by 3:00 P.M. I can tell you to date, as of this morning, none had been received so we are hoping that everyone is waiting until the last moment. We have put together a team to review the proposals that are submitted, we are including Purchasing, members of Assessing, CFO Griffin, Director Cummings, Celia Leonard, to review this proposals.

Then we will choose a couple that we will invite in to speak with us and to rate. Ultimately we hope to have a decision made as quickly as possible so that we can bring the contract forward to both Finance and to the Board of Aldermen, considering that is a multi-year endeavor.

I note here again because this is very critical, the EYB, the Effective Year Built. We know there has been a lot of discussion on this. When CFO Griffin and I conducted the Management Audit, we held meetings with different assessing experts and we discussed this with the President of Patriot Properties. We let you know at that time that although the EYB method was used, now back when we installed this software back in the '90's, it was a commonly used approach. That is not the case now, it is not best practice and we hope that through the RFP process with the firms getting into as many homes as possible, we will be able to move away from that Effective Year Built. So it is critical that we get into as many homes as we possibly can. We are going to provide the public with as much information and make them feel as comfortable as possible. We will also have members of staff that can answer any questions and we will be using the newsletter to push information on where they may be concentrating and when so that residents have a heads-up on the areas of the City that the firm may be in. It has been a long time since the City undergone a Full Measure & List and a revaluation and we really need to make the best and make sure that this is important data collected for the City.

In April when I came to you I did not recommend an upgrade from AssessPro Classic to AssessPro5 this summer. I had actually pushed it out and said that we hoped to do it in 2020; well things change every day in assessing and what we have found was in order for us to move the exemptions and credits from the ADMIN System which is the old system which we told we would do this summer. That was not going to be possible with our current version of AssessPro. That together with the very different information and the highlights and the benefits that the AssessPro5 version offers, we met with Patriot and they agreed that they could do it. So with the help of Information Technology, we decided that we would undergo it.

So far, it has been going well. We have completed general training, we are moving on now to more specific user one-on-one training; so administrative staff needs to know different information than our assessors need to know. So that would be user specific training. We believe that the benefits of AssessPro5 are going to provide us with a lot of increased efficiency within the Department. So not only will it provide an abundance of screens for us to put important data that have been limited in the past, but the AssessPro5 provides for a role based security which is not current in the AssessPro Classic. So it is important that when you have any system that your security within the system is really limited to the role that individual plays. So that has been an issue that AssessPro Classic didn't address as well as AssessPro5.

You can see there, there's a number of other benefits; there is the ability for multi-year architecture, meaning currently we cannot go in and create or enter changes that are for the following tax year. We have to wait until the present tax year has been rolled and the file has been captured. That may be a series of week that we are not entering data. This system provides for multi-year where you can actually go in and update a prior year or a future year depending on what is needed. So that is another important function.

We have, right now, IT is working on a number of projects and they are all inter-related. So not only do we have the upgrade from AssessPro Classic; we also have within the Building Department and others, a permitting change from City View to CivicGov. So if you may have noticed up in the auditorium there are computers set up and staff from the Building Department has been up there training on CivicGov this week. We hear mid-October they should be up and running completely. That makes changes in the way that the Building Department communicates with the Assessing Department. So now what IT refers to as a bridge needs to be written between the AssessPro5 and the new CivicGov and that needs to be tested and evaluated.

We also have the changes within GIS, so GIS has transferred over to new servers and we have the creation of the GIS Steering Committee, an adaption of the Strategic Plan that was recommended in the report presented to you by CDM Smith. So Building, GIS, Assessing, it is a large number of changes occurring, we are very thankful the IT Department and their support. But there is a lot of testing and a lot of training that is required by a number of different departments.

On top of all the changes, on top of all the training, what are we currently working on? So this is a list provided for you of what our administrative staff is currently working on. We are preparing for the MS1 and many of you may have heard from Finance and Budget meetings that we filed for an extension of the MS1 and our new deadline is October 11th. Of course the AP5 Training & Testing they are continuing an audit of our veteran's credits. They are updating AssessPro with BTLA in Superior Court abatement appeals and responding to BTLA check lists that are required for those appeals. They are processing property transfers and name changes and filing, everything that is normal within the administrative staff function continues. It has not slowed down; they provide excellent customer service and I can tell you that I've had a number of residents come to me and I am very, very proud of the customer service that the administrative staff provides. Some of you may have heard that as well. I was at the DRA in a training last week and I heard it up there from members of the DRA on some of our staff members and they are really looked at as some of the experts in their field. Quite often they are called from other communities for questions and answers to things. They also print and process all the monthly building reports and of course schedule the assessors and complete the data entry when they return. They QC all of the information that is entered by our assessors.

What are the assessors working on right now? Well you've all heard pick up of building permits for file capture prior to October 11th. That's the number one function right now. They also have a sales qualification that's mandatory for the DRA Ratio Study. They provide responses to petitions of the appeals at the Hillsborough Superior Court and the BTLA. They work very closely with Legal on all of those cases. They answer tax payer's requests for inspections and inquires and work on the on-going litigation that I mentioned. They review the exemptions and the credit applications and sign off on those. They have their own review of the MS1 that is required and they have their own training for AP5.

So while all of this was happening, we processed in 2019 for 2018 406 abatements. I'm sure as the Board of Assessor can attest, this kept us quite busy. They had all these appear before them; approved was 171 and denied was 213, 22 PSNH remain with Legal. They also had a total of 959 exemptions to process. So these are applications that require a great deal of examination of documents and to make that they have completed all the information and that they can give a recommendation to the Board of Assessors. We have so far received to the BTLA 6 residential taxpayer's appeals and 52 commercial. I think that speaks somewhat to the success of the revaluation, when you only have 6 appeals to the BTLA. But that is my own opinion. To Superior Court, we have 28 commercial currently and that number includes PSNH.

This is a project that we brought to you in April, we talked about how the Assessing Office really needed to undergo a redesign. This plan was created, it was reviewed by City Buildings and the Risk Department. We will work towards cost estimates but it was require an RFP. The main purpose is really the Customer Service that the office provides. So currently the office is not handicapped accessible and neither is there a lot of information for assisting tax payers at the counter. Some of the information that we discuss during an exemption or an appeal or a credit is information on income. These residents may not feel comfortable discussing this out in a general customer service area. So the plan does include creating a couple of cubicles within the conference room in assessing so that these discussions could be held more privately. Currently they are taking these residents out into the hallway if they need to sit and review and we would recommend that is probably not best practice. This will have more information to come but as City Buildings looks at the plan and does some more measurements and an RFP is put together, we will bring that back.

All this work is not a result of just the Assessing Department although they have worked extremely hard. We have to thank the Mayor for his support; the Board of Assessors; of course all of you. The IT Department has been instrumental, the Legal Department of course, the Tax Department, CFO Griffin and his Department, Risk & City Buildings, Mr. Budreau and his staff in HR, Purchasing and Director Cummings in Economic Development. As I mentioned earlier, David Cornell has provided a wealth of information. I know it has been stated probably many times before you that I am not an assessor, that is true. But I am fortunate to have good people around me that have reached out and are providing help to us including David Corner, Patriot Properties, KRT, Mr. Gagne from Manchester, Mr. Reese from Portsmouth and other assessors. So I have to thank them for all of their support and I know that our assessors also help them. This is how the assessing function has really worked for a number of years; it is a very close knit group throughout the State. They often rely on each other when they have questions and I would remain that is always best practice.

We have a ways to go, we have continued improvements and efficiency that is going to take place. We want this to be sustainable change. We know that as new management practices will need to be reinforced and nurtured. We also know that as we discussed with you back in April, we promised to have the discussion on whether the Chief Assessor role is one that needs to be explored again. So as we look to the future, there's going to be a lot of continued discussion and we hope to bring a lot more back to you and update you. But there are a number of items that we are still evaluating and we hope that you will bear with us. This is a process. That's all Madam.

President Wilshire

Thank you Director Kleiner, we appreciate your thoroughness and your presentation and bringing your staff in. I want to thank them for being here as well. Thank you.

Alderman Klee

Thank you very much. I want to make a statement and then I have one real quick question for you. Today I was up at the State House, part of my Committee; I'm on a sub-committee to review Veteran's Tax Credits & Exemptions. In doing so I spoke with people from the DRA and from the NH Municipal Association and that's why I knew you had taken the training with others. But the one thing I want to give a shout out to and that is to Louise Brown. I was told that the boots on the ground and the expert to give me the information I need resides right here in Nashua in our own Assessing Department. While she did not know who the counterpart was in Manchester, Louise was the go-to person that she recommends to everybody. So I'd like to thank Louise for her work and everything that she does.

The question that I have is when you did that little Assessing 101, one of the things that kind of came out was our property size went down a little tiny bit. And that was because I think Mr. Turgiss has explained to us that the State came in and kind of re-did the boundary lines slightly. When you talk about the \$20,000.00 of course it was so tiny it wouldn't have hit \$20,000.00 but is that beyond someone going into assessing, could something like that happen if we got a correction from the State or anything else or that?

Mr. Kleiner

So currently the letters are being issues if your total assessment has changed more than \$20,000.00. It has been brought up at a Board of Assessor meeting by a resident, could it be a percentage of assessment. That is a pretty good idea because ideally you could have lower assessed properties with families that a change in their tax situation may actually affect more. We are going to look at that. What I don't want to do, is we are moving to the AssessPro5 and I want to figure out how we can automate these processes.

So that's a process that's easily automated within AssessPro5 and that has percentages. So it's not that we're not taking resident's idea; we are but we are in that crucial time where we are moving from one software to another. We could look to see if there is the ability to automate a letter on a change; I would assume it was a change to your Deed?

Alderman Klee

Yeah I think that's the way it came in. I wrote it down, I think it was, no I guess I didn't write it down. Something like the HS something. It was the HCRD or something like that that changed and actually brought the property line down a little bit. Madam President may I just ask, OK, the other question I have which is my biggest concern of everything you did. What happens if Thursday comes and we don't get any? Do we throw it out again?

Ms. Kleiner

Yes, yes we do. I would hope that maybe some of the firms that attended the pre-bid meeting might be willing to give us some reasons why? Was there something in the RFP specifically? I think that the RFP, it is very thorough so we are asking for a lot of communication and we are expecting them to make continuous entries to get into the homes. So I am really thinking that is not going to happen. Purchasing has assured me this morning when they told me that, that it is common for RFP's to come in that afternoon, all at once, so I'm going with that.

Alderman Klee

Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN O'BRIEN TO ADJOURN
MOTION CARRIED**

The meeting was declared adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

Attest: Susan K. Lovering, City Clerk