

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUiqbO4RkoE>

Members of the Public: Due to COVID-19 & pursuant to Executive Orders 7B & 9H, the Town is holding this meeting via Webex & taking live public comment via Webex during the meeting.

- ✓ Back-up documents relating to the agenda items can be found at [www.fairfieldct.org/bof](http://www.fairfieldct.org/bof).

**Board of Finance Special Meeting Final Minutes**  
**Wednesday, March 10, 2021**  
**7:00 pm**

A Special Meeting of Finance Meeting was held virtually on Wednesday, March 10, 2021 at 7:00 pm in Fairfield, Connecticut.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Edward Bateson, Jim Brown-Chair, Lori Charlton, Christopher DeWitt-Vice Chair, Mary LeClerc-Secretary, Sheila Marmion, John Mitola, Jack Testani, James Walsh  
ALSO PRESENT: CFO Jared Schmitt, Tax Assessor Ross Murray, Municipal Valuation Services Mike Fazio, Municipal Valuation Services Chris Kerin, FairTV

1) Call to Order

Mr. Brown called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

2) Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Brown led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3) To hear an update on the Revaluation 2020 and Grand List

Mr. Brown said that the BOF will be starting the budget meetings tomorrow night and decisions made are reliant upon the Grand List. He introduced Tax Assessor Ross Murray who had prepared a presentation that was sent to all the board members regarding the October 1, 2020 revaluation. He said the presentation is in the backup documents. Mr. Murray said the revaluation is required every five years by State Statute. He said every ten years there is a full reval where the company visits homes. He said it is required every five years to equalize the change in values. After the presentation, Mr. Fazio and Mr. Kerin of Municipal Valuation Services, LLC went through some examples of how their company did the revaluation. Mr. Fazio said they broke some neighborhoods up because they were too large and land values were different in certain areas. He said the Fairfield Beach area was broken into several neighborhoods depending on closeness to the beach. He said he did a statistical revaluation where values were combined by land/building. Once he felt they were statistically correct, Mr. Fazio said the company applied that formula to the Town. Mr. Kerin talked about commercial properties and said the methodology was similar, but he went further back and also outside the Town. He said he divided commercial properties into three categories: Apartments, Industrial/Retail, Office/Mixed use. He said he also used income/expense statements of commercial property owners. He said nursing homes and hotels were on a separate analysis. He said he looked at regional sales or statewide sales. He said COVID changed property dynamics. Mr. Brown then turned it over to the BOF for questions.

Mr. DeWitt said he wanted to know why nursing homes had declined. Mr. Kerin said that nursing homes were hit hard by COVID with deaths and the beds were not filled because people were not putting their parents into nursing homes.

Mr. DeWitt said there were many nursing homes in Town and Mr. Kerin said the information was based on value and not quantity. He said assisted living facilities are different than nursing homes.

Mr. Walsh asked if he used the sales or income/expense for commercial properties. Mr. Kerin said they used both and an analysis of the market. He said they build the model and look at rents based on the value of each property and income. Mr. Walsh commented that the pandemic changed some incomes and that will not reflect until they file taxes this year. He said the reval done in October was based on income from a year ago and it would not be reflecting the impact of the pandemic on last year's income. Mr. Kerin said Mr. Murray sent out supplemental I & E questionnaires to commercial property owners. He said they also spoke with many investors and if anything had changed, it was taken into consideration.

Mr. DeWitt asked about the added docks and billboards and if they had been taxed in prior years. Mr. Murray said if residents had docks, it was not added to the field card, but they are now. He said billboards were added as a fixture before, but they looked at the revenue generated from the billboards when determining the value.

Mr. DeWitt also asked about some parcels being in incorrect neighborhoods and having to change that. Mr. Murray said they went through the neighborhoods that were miscoded and changed them. He said they were just data entry errors. He said using GIS, he was able to correct them and make them consistent. Mr. DeWitt also asked why neighborhoods were added. Mr. Fazio said, for example, North Stratfield is different from Stratfield because there was a slight difference in land values. Mr. DeWitt asked if the new map would be the standard going forward. Mr. Murray said it could be, but if there are changes to be made, they will do it again.

Ms. Charlton asked about the appeals filed and if they would change the final result of the revaluation. She also asked how changes were made. Mr. Murray said people were given informal hearings by the Municipal Valuations Services, LLC. Mr. Fazio said some changes were made by people bringing in pictures. He said he also went to some houses to see grade or if the card was inaccurate to see if it needed to be adjusted. He said if a change was made he added a note so everyone would be able to see if they were looking up the property. He said the model is not 100% perfect on all individual properties. Ms. Charlton also asked if someone missed an appeal period, would that person be able to go back the next year and have it looked at retroactively. Mr. Murray said it would not be retroactive, but they could appeal the upcoming tax year as long as their taxes had not already been lowered previously. He said if it was a clerical error, they can go back three years.

Ms. Marmion asked about the appeals and legal fees for the current process. Mr. Schmitt said there has not been a lot spent on appeals and court cases or settlements, but the Town put more in next year's budget and are on track with the budgeted amount this year. Mr. Murray said the legal fees will be seen when cases are filed in Superior Court.

Mr. Mitola asked if there was something found that had been adjusted incorrectly and then changed, would the reval company look at the other houses in the neighborhood and see if they needed to be changed too. Mr. Fazio said yes and has done so with some condos.

Mr. Testani wanted to know how much it had cost the Town in the past for appeals being heard at Superior Court. Mr. Schmitt said the last reval that was closest in volume was in 2010.

He said there was approximately \$88 million in assessed value that was changed on the Grand List. He said there was about \$9.7 million in court settlements that affected the next fiscal year.

Mr. Brown asked if there were generally less appeals with a full reval. Mr. Fazio said if there is a changing market, there will be more appeals. He said in 2015, the real estate market was not changing much and there were less appeals.

Ms. Charlton wondered if the amount of appeals is a reflection of the revaluation as a whole. Mr. Murray said he did not think that would determine the quality of the reval and that this was the second lowest of the past years.

Mr. Walsh asked about the pricing model and if it is done street by street. Mr. Fazio said they look at various characteristics of the property and went through the many different types of property and buildings, land value and many other things to determine value. Mr. Walsh asked if the model for determining the value could become public. Mr. Fazio said it would be available if someone asked to see it. Mr. Murray said there is a revaluation manual that will be turned over to the Town and made public. He said they need the information from the BAA to complete the manual. Mr. Walsh suggested that prior to the RFP going out for the revaluation next time, the BOF should be involved in the process. Town Attorney Jim Baldwin said it is within the purview of the BOF, but at this stage in the appeals process it is not the model being appealed, but the propriety of the valuation. Mr. Walsh said he wants to follow the Charter and be involved and aware of the next revaluation. Mr. Brown and the rest of the BOF agreed.

Mr. Brown asked if anyone had additional questions, but there were none. He thanked Mr. Murray, Mr. Fazio and Mr. Kerin for answering their questions.

Public Comment submitted via email:

**From:** Alyssa Israel  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 10, 2021 12:01 PM  
**To:** Carpenter, Jennifer <JCarpenter@fairfieldct.org>  
**Cc:** BOF <BOF@fairfieldct.org>  
**Subject:** Testimony to the Board of Finance

Dear Board of Finance,

I am writing for several reasons and my main points are bulleted below:

- I would like to applaud the First Selectwoman for requesting the addition of a grant writer position.
  - In 2003, I was hired by the Town of Trumbull to answer the question, “Should Trumbull hire a grant writer?” The short answer to that question was a resounding YES! I interviewed full-time grant writers with the Towns of Ansonia, Shelton and the City of Bridgeport. I determined that there are many benefits to hiring a full-time grant writer. Full time grant writers have the time to research funding opportunities and establish relationships with federal, state and private funders. In addition to

writing grants, the grant writer can also assist the town with data collection, program/project evaluation, and report writing.

- I recommend that the grant writer also have extensive experience in process, impact and outcome evaluation. This important expertise can be used to not only evaluate certain programs and projects, but also to evaluate the quality of work by consultants to the Town such as SLR Consulting and Municipal Valuation Services.
- This is a segue into my second major reason for writing. After conducting extensive research for our property tax appeal, my husband and I noticed significant problems with the revaluation by Municipal Valuation Services (MVS), including a “blanket reduction” of homes in the beach area following the informal appeals. Of the 16 comparable homes we tracked, 5 (31%) were grossly UNDER-appraised by an average of \$339,960 per home. These 5 already grossly UNDER-appraised homes then received an additional reduction when MVS made the “blanket reductions” in the beach area.
  - I was told by a professional who works as a consultant to the City of Danbury, that 650 BAA appeals is enormous! He told me that Danbury receives at most, only about 80 appeals even during an evaluation year. Clearly MVS has done a terrible job.
- I fear that many homeowners will be overtaxed, even more will be UNDER-taxed...and ultimately the Town will suffer an overall loss in property tax revenues.
- A professional grant writer with process, impact and outcome evaluation expertise (needed for grant writing) could also investigate and report on the performance of consultants like MVS.

Sincerely yours,

Alyssa Israel  
679 Rowland Road  
Fairfield, CT 06824

**From:** Alyssa Israel  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 10, 2021 10:37 PM  
**To:** BOF <BOF@fairfieldct.org>  
**Cc:** Carpenter, Jennifer <JCarpenter@fairfieldct.org>  
**Subject:** Additional testimony following your 3/10/2021 meeting

Dear Board of Finance,

I submitted testimony earlier today. I just now listened to the entire meeting and was deeply disappointed.

I don't understand why the Board of Finance cannot question the accuracy of this revaluation. It is obvious from the high number of appeals in Fairfield compared to Westport that something is SERIOUSLY wrong with this revaluation.

I challenge the Board of Finance to look at the field cards for 298, 377 and 431 Rowland Road and compare their recent sales data to MVS' appraisals. You will see that that these homes were grossly UNDER-appraised by \$300,000 to \$500,000+.

What's worse is that I told the Tax Assessor about these grossly UNDER-appraised properties on January 8th. Below is my email exchange with the Tax Assessor to prove this. And guess what? The Tax Assessor and MVS allowed these already grossly UNDER-appraised properties to be further reduced by an additional \$24,100 to \$34,800 as part of the "blanket reduction" in the beach area that I told you about in my previous email.

Sales data should drive a revaluation, not some artificial assumptions devised by MVS and kept secret. It is disturbing that taxpayers are not allowed to see these assumptions. We demand transparency! It is our right to understand why some homes were grossly OVER-appraised, while other homes 1,000 feet away were grossly UNDER-appraised by as much as \$500K compared to sales data.

There is no doubt that MVS did a terrible job on this revaluation. Ultimately, the Town will suffer from lawsuits and unrealized revenues from UNDER-appraisals.

I challenge the Board of Finance to prove me wrong on any of my statements.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Israel  
679 Rowland Road  
Fairfield, CT 06824

4) Adjourn

Mr. DeWitt made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:16 pm. Mr. Bateson seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Pru O'Brien  
Recording Secretary