



Randolph Town Council

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: Monday, November 14, 2022 at 6:00 p.m., Remote Meeting via Zoom

Call to Order: Council President W. Alexopoulos called the meeting to order.

Roll Call – Council Members Present: Christos Alexopoulos, William Alexopoulos, Richard Brewer, Natacha Clerger, Ryan Egan, Jesse Gordon, Katrina Huff-Larmond, Kevin O’Connell (Councillor Burgess Absent)

Pledge of Allegiance: Pledge of Allegiance led by Councillor Christos Alexopoulos.

Moment of Silent Prayer: Moment of Silent Prayer held.

Announcements from the President:

New Business:

1. FY2023 Tax Classification Presentation

Principal Assessor Janet Teal and Assessing Consultant Nate Cramer were in attendance to give a presentation on the FY2023 Tax Classification.

The purpose of the presentation is for the Town Council to decide on the following:

1. Select a single or split tax rate,
2. Whether to adopt an open space discount,
3. Whether to adopt a residential exemption, and
4. Whether to adopt a small commercial exemption.

The Presentation covered prior year tax rates, prior year shifts in the residential factor, and the projected average increases in tax bills depending on which shift is adopted by the Council this year.

Council President Alexopoulos welcomed questions or comments from the Town Councillors.

Councillor Gordon asked if we had a higher commercial base then could we be more flexible in a residential tax rate since the current tax base is at 11% for commercial and 89% for residential, and secondly, what can we do to get the commercial base up? Assessing Consultant Nate Cramer stated the town is on its way to increasing the commercial tax base. Additionally, the residential class is always the prominent revenue source in most towns.

Councillor Gordon asked for a ballpark of how we compare to other towns on the CIP (commercial, industrial and personal property taxes), for example, is it true Milton is lower or Braintree is higher? Assessing Consultant Nate Cramer stated he could gather that information and forward it along.

Councillor Huff-Larmond asked if we should be looking in the direction of increasing commercial? Also, what does it mean by “we’re almost there” when it comes to increasing our commercial property? I also want to keep in mind all of our residents in residential and commercial areas. Assessing Consultant Nate Cramer stated that by “almost there” he meant that there are projects in the pipeline that are going to be coming, but he is not trying to suggest that the Town has any goal of a certain percentage of commercial revenue.

Councillor O’Connell asked about the Lombardo’s location and if we know what’s going there? Council President Alexopoulos stated we don’t have any information yet but we know that something is coming in that location within the next year.

Councillor Gordon asked if it's true that businesses base their prospective location on a town’s tax rate? Principal Assessor Janet Teal stated that commercial rates may play a factor in where a business decides to locate itself. Town Manager Howard further explained that reports from various businesses have stated that working with the planning department has been great. There are many factors that play a role in a business determining where it should locate.

Councillor Huff-Larmond asked about how successful the resiliency fund has been in helping residents as it relates to their mortgage and taxes. Town Manager Howard stated that he will have to check with Liz LaRosee about the specifics. The funds can be used to pay late mortgage payments if you’re behind, but you have to meet certain standards and essentially have to prove the need. It’s also been used for utility bills. The Town will continue to assist residents where we can through that program.

Councillor O’Connell asked approximately how many open commercial spaces are available right now. Town Manager Howard stated the industrial parks are maxed out, and the businesses there currently are potentially looking to increase their square footage.

Councillor C. Alexopoulos: In the industrial parks we are maxed out, we might see a few retail locations that may be open, but aside from one building, we’re busting at the seams. Looking at it from a business point of view, if we have a better tax rate versus communities, then they’re able to save that money whether it's reinvesting it in their community or for their employees then that’s something we should consider as well. It’s something they can use to better their surroundings.

Councillor Gordon wanted to address what might be some myths regarding there being no commercial property available but what’s incumbent on us is that we make more commercially zoned property. As Assessing Consultant Nate Cramer stated, we should have an economic development officer to let us know how we can expand these zones. Councillor Gordon also asked how often the Town is assessed. Councillor Gordon also wanted to address a potential myth that if home values go up then taxes go up and that’s not necessarily true because if the home value goes up it’s only relative amounts. In other words, what matters is how much your home value has gone up relative to other homes in Randolph. Is that right, or a misunderstanding?

Assessing Consultant Nate Cramer stated every single property is reassessed every year as of January 1, 2022. Every fifth year, the Town is audited by the Department of Revenue. As far as home values going up then taxes going up- you’re right it’s not necessarily true. It’s based on the needs of the town and the budget that they adopt more than anything.

Council President Alexopoulos stated that every year our taxes go up by 2 ½%. The comment is always made that if you want your taxes to go down, then don’t spend as much but then where do you want to make the cuts?

Councillor Gordon addressed an additional way to make your taxes go down which is through residential growth. In the context of the Highland Avenue construction, which a lot of people expressed that they didn't like because of the size of the building, the counter point is that that's the way to reduce the tax rate for everyone else. Nate Cramer stated a large project like that will definitely have an impact on the tax rate.

Council President stated there is an increase in the amount of taxes the town is able to collect. Unfortunately, it puts more of a burden on the residential rate payer than the commercial rate payer because the commercial percentage will decrease. So, it's good that you're able to bring in more tax revenue but the offset is less because you can't push it off to the commercial. There are pros and cons. The more residential units we put into town, the less of an ability we have to push that to commercial.

Council President Alexopoulos stated we have a week to review this and we'll vote on it during the next meeting on November 28, 2022.

Town Manager Howard stated that if anyone has any questions for Principal Assessor Janet Teal and Assessing Consultant Nate Cramer, please submit them sooner rather than later so they have enough time to gather the information and provide it before the next meeting.

1. Council Order 2022-053: FY2023 Reserve Fund

Council President Alexopoulos read Council Order 2022-053 into the record.

Town Manager Howard introduced Council Order 2022-053 to the Town Council. Town Manager Howard explained that over the last number of years there has been a levy that is left which is put into a Reserve Account to be used for unforeseen expenditures in most cases. One of the main concerns we have this year is the school building project will be going out to bid shortly. If we see a 30% increase as we've seen in other projects, we're going to want to be prepared. We've already done value engineering to shave costs off of the project, however if we reduce any more costs then we won't have a building we can be proud of.

Council President Alexopoulos further stated that we'll know more in January when the project goes out to bid but we're going to need as much help as we can get to try to offset some of the price increases. We also know that there are various schools with the same issues we're running into and there have been discussions at the state level to give the communities additional funds.

Councillor Huff-Larmond asked about whether there is any infrastructure money that we can use.

Town Manager Howard stated that the infrastructure money would not be able to be used for the schools based on various conversations he's had. There have been many communities that received funds from the state to build schools and the amount that was asked for versus what is actually needed since the pandemic is very different. There have been discussions at the legislative level to assist and it may come down to them to open up the books.

Councillor Huff-Larmond requested a list of the towns in a similar situation. Town Manager Howard stated he would get the list and provide it to her.

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn was made by Council Vice President Clerger, seconded by Councillor Gordon.

Roll Call Vote: 8-0-0 (Burgess absent)

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 PM.