

## **West Greenwich Tax Board of Review**

The West Greenwich Tax Board of Review met on December 12, 2011 in the Town Hall Council Chambers. Chairwoman Elaine Eccleston called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm. Additional members present were John Ruzzo, John Howard and Sandra Bockes. Also present, Tax Assessor Charlene Randall. Chairwoman Eccleston began by introducing herself and the other members of the board and explaining the purpose of the meeting.

### **Castagna, Claudio – 696 Victory Highway – Plat 14 Lot 15-04**

Mr. Castagna and his son, Claudio Castagna Jr., were present and approached the council table. Mr. Castagna explained some issues with his home. He believes his basement stairs are not to code because the treads are not even a foot wide and the stairs are steep. Charlene stated she had spoken with the building official and he told her that although the town was not able to do anything about the stairs, if the owner felt he had a valid complaint against the contractor, he could file a claim with the state contractors' board. Another issue Mr. Castagna has is there is no additional point of egress besides the stairs except for the windows. He was told by the building inspector at the time, Clayton Hopper, that he did not need another point of egress and that he could crawl out the window in an emergency. Charlene explained that she had spoken with the current building official, Dave Tacey, who stated at the time of construction (2003) a second point of egress was not required for an unfinished basement although the code has since been changed in 2005. When the home was built, Mr. Castagna purposely chose the hill to be sure not to have water in his basement and told his contractor he did not want water in the basement. The first rain storm, he got water. He stated he could not use his basement and should not be taxed on it. Chairwoman Eccleston asked if his furnace was in the basement and he stated yes. She asked if he had a sump pump and he stated no. Discussion was had regarding wet basements in general in West Greenwich especially in the last several years because there has been so much rain. Mr. Castagna also stated he never uses his fireplace, although it does work. He asked if traffic conditions were taken into consideration as his house is located on Victory Highway. Charlene explained that yes that is reflected in the lower homesite value. Mr. Castagna asked what does he get for what he pays in taxes. Chairwoman Eccleston explained that the board has no say in how the tax money is spent or what the tax rate is set at. The board was there to make sure the assessment was correct. Chairwoman Eccleston asked if Mr. Castagna had had ample time to discuss the issues he wanted to bring forward to the board. He stated he did. At that time Chairwoman Eccleston closed that portion of the meeting to public comment so the board could discuss this assessment.

Chairwoman Eccleston stated that the owner had not put a sump pump in the basement and that the basement was useable because the furnace was located there. Sandra Bockes noted that a bulkhead could be added if the owner really wanted one. John Ruzzo noted the value had already been reduced during the original appeal from \$340,400 to \$330,600. Charlene further explained about the homesite value and how the grade had been reduced from 1.20 to 1.15 in order to compensate for the construction issues. Chairwoman Eccleston made the motion to deny the appeal based on the following – that the assessor had already taken the construction issues into account when the grade was reduced; and the heavy traffic had already been taken into account in the homesite value; and that the basement was not totally unusable because the furnace was there and it could be used for storage. The motion was seconded by John Howard and all voted in favor. The appeal was denied

### **Gage, Robert – 104 Linden Lane – Plat 23 Lot 98**

Mr. Gage did not attend the hearing. Sandra Bockes pointed out one of the comps (75 Linden) was assessed higher indicating this value may be too low. John Ruzzo pointed out the applicant's opinion of

value on the appeal application is \$310,000. The assessor had reduced the value to \$308,500. He questioned if the applicant was asking for the assessment to be raised? John Howard questioned why the owner requested the hearing. Charlene explained that he was being taxed for a shed that had been removed by the previous owner without a demo permit and so he was required to fill out the appeal form because she wouldn't just remove a building from the tax roll without some sort of paper trail. Also the reval company had been unable to inspect the property so there was a miscellaneous cost included in the assessment that the new owner wanted removed so an appeal application was required. Sandra Bockes pointed out some of the differences between the subject and one of the comps. Chairwoman Eccleston reviewed the information available on this property and made the motion to deny the appeal based on the following - no additional information was brought forward to the board by the owner; and the subject assessment is slightly lower than similar comps; and the assessor did previously reduce the assessment lower than the owner's opinion of value. John Howard seconded the motion and all voted in favor. The appeal was denied.

There being no other hearings to be heard, Chairwoman Eccleston made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:39 pm, seconded by John Howard and all voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Randall