

Skowhegan Board of Assessors  
Minutes  
Regular Meeting  
August 25, 2022

Present: John F. Grohs, Chairman  
Bonnie A. Baker, Vice Chairman  
Harvey Austin, Jr.

Assessor's Agent: William "Bill" Van Tuinen  
Asst. Assessor: Leisa D. Emery-Burns

**I. Call to order:**

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM, by Chairman John Grohs.

**II. Minutes to be approved and signed:**

1. April 21, 2022, Regular Meeting:

Bonnie Baker made a motion to approve and sign the minutes as written, seconded by Harvey Austin. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

**III. Items by the Public:** None.

**IV. Unfinished Business:** None.

**V. New Business:**

1. Robert Owen III & Marcia Ann Kessack, Map 11, Lot 2, Tree Growth  
Penalty Supplemental Tax in the amount of \$40.20:

Bonnie Baker made a motion to approve the supplemental in the amount of \$40.20, seconded by Harvey Austin. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

2. Review amounts to be raised:

Bill Van Tuinen reviewed the County, School and Town warrants with the Board of Assessors. Bill went over the State Municipal Revenue Sharing and other revenue.

3. Discuss update of values:

Bill Van Tuinen explained that real estate sales have continued to rise over the past couple of years. We did make adjustments to the real estate values last year, but our sales ratio has declined.

We ran an analysis of sales for the period 7/1/2020 to 6/30/2021 on improved properties and it indicated an average sales ratio of 84%. We chose this period of time for two reasons. One, it corresponds to the period the state will study when it develops the sales ratio of the town for the 2023 state valuation. That study will be the basis for our next ratio declaration to be filed with the state. Two, the

inflation of real estate values has been very substantial. With the rise in interest rates, many think it cannot continue or will reverse. The idea of using sales that are a year behind the current date is to be conservative. If the values begin to drop, perhaps we will not have updated values to a level that is too high in the future.

With the changes to the appraisal base rates that we made, it increases the sales ratio from 84% to 92%. That 92% ratio, if it is confirmed by the state's own ratio study, will allow the town to declare a ratio of 100% next year, for the purpose of homestead and veteran's exemptions.

There was a discussion on the changes in the base rates.

Bonnie Baker made a motion to approve the base rate changes as recommended, seconded by Harvey Austin. – Vote 3 yes – 0 no

**VI. Chairman's Items:**

John Grohs said that he had asked Leisa Emery-Burns about the Property Tax Stabilization for senior citizens.

Harvey Austin stated that he feels it is a good program, in that it will hopefully help some senior citizens stay in their homes.

Bill said that he wanted the Board to know that at times, helping the senior citizens fill out these forms can be very time consuming. There are a lot of these applications coming in at this time.

The software has not been updated for this program to be implemented. It is a work in progress, but we are taking applications until December 1, 2022 and the taxes will be stabilized when the bill goes out in 2023. There is no downside to this program for the applicants.

**VII. Member's Items:** None.

**VIII. Assessor's Agents Items:**

Bill Van Tuinen stated that he wanted to discuss the Brookfield Hydro Weston Plant with the Board. Bill wants the Board to be aware that Brookfield Power has been very aggressive in asking for abatements the past two years. This year Bill has worked in several of these Towns on the Hydro electric appeals. Whole sale prices of electricity had gone way down in 2020 and in 2021 they rebounded a little bit. In 2022 they have gone up even more. A problem on this hydro is there has been a real focus on upstream and downstream fish passage. Brookfield and prior owners have not done much to deal with helping out with the fish passage.

Bill discussed this in detail. The cost of a fish passage here was about \$11 million dollars for just the south dam. Bill said he needs to take this into consideration

for this year's valuation. Bill discussed the best way to take this into consideration. We reduced the value some last year, but we really should reduce it more this year. The company has delayed putting money aside in a reserve fund for this fish passage. They and the prior owners have known about this since 1998.

Bill said he would recommend a value of \$28 million for this year.

Harvey Austin asked what the value was this past year.

Bill said the value in 2021 was \$31 million.

There was a brief discussion.

John Grohs asked if Brookfield Power gives Bill their financial information.

Bill stated they give him all of the information that he asks for every year.

Harvey made a motion to set the value at \$28 million, seconded by Bonnie Baker.

There was another brief discussion.

John Grohs said he has a problem with that much of a reduction in value, because they need to put in a fishway they should have been dealing with a while ago.

Bill stated he wants to be able to say that we at least did address the fact that a fishway is an expense that needs to be addressed.

John Grohs made an amendment to the previous motion to reduce the value by \$2 million instead of \$3 million. The motion to amend failed for lack of a second.

After a lengthy discussion, the Board voted 3 yes – 0 no to set the value of the Hydro at \$28 million. John Grohs voted yes with reservation.

Bill Van Tuinen said he had one more item to bring up.

Bill said he and Leisa will not be working here forever. He stated that he will work here as long as Leisa is his right arm. Bill said that he and Leisa have a great working relationship and that Leisa does a lot of work. Bill explained that next year will be Leisa's last commitment because she is retiring in the Spring of 2024. Bill said he will be giving up some of his assignments even before that. He stated that he is doing his last commitment in one town this year. Bill said the Town needs to start planning. This is the type of work that you can't just step in off the street and do.

Harvey Austin stated that Leisa is a pleasure to work with and is very knowledgeable. They should have someone available to gather up as much of that knowledge as possible.

Bill said that he and Leisa have worked hard and are proud of the job that they have done. Things are never perfect but the Town doesn't want to stumble and fall when this happens.

Harvey said that Bill and Leisa have been a great team.

Bill explained that he just wanted the Board of Assessors to be aware, because it would be a big mistake if the Town waits until both he and Leisa have retired before this is addressed. Bill said that he just wanted the Board to know this is on his mind and he doesn't want to leave the Board in a chaotic state, but the Town needs to think about it.

John Grohs asked if this information had been shared with the Town Manager.

Leisa Emery-Burns stated that she and Bill have already had that discussion with the Town Manager.

Bill said there should be some overlap, because they should not wait until Leisa retires.

Bill said we have a lot of work to implement the changes that have been discussed and approved at today's meeting, but he is really busy and would like the Board to schedule a meeting to set the mill rate.

After a brief discussion the Board set a meeting for September 8, 2022 at 4 PM to set the mill rate.

**IX. Asst. Assessor's Items:** None.

**X. Adjournment:**

Bonnie Baker made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Harvey Austin. – Vote 3  
yes – 0 no

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 PM

The Skowhegan Board of Assessors

---

John F. Grohs, Chairman

---

Bonnie A. Baker, Vice Chairman

---

Harvey Austin, Jr.

Boa/leb