

Real Property Tax Committee Minutes
August 10, 2020 – 2:30 p.m.

Present: Chairwoman Sandra Winney; Committee Members Eric Connolly, Tara Gaston, John Lant, Tom Wood, Benny Zlotnick; Supervisor Phil Barrett, Chairman of the Board Preston Allen; Chad Cooke, Matt Rose, County Administrator; Steve Dorsey, County Attorney; Chris Schall, Auditor; Anna Stanko, Real Property Tax; Andrew Jarosh, Terri Wrisley, Treasurer.

Chairwoman Winney called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

On a motion made by Mr. Lant, seconded by Mr. Zlotnick, the minutes of the June 8, 2020 meeting were approved unanimously.

A motion was made by Mr. Lant, seconded by Mr. Connolly, approving the 2020 First and Second Quarter Reports by the County Auditor. Unanimous.

Mr. Schall distributed copies of the reports. For the first quarter there were 12 corrections totaling \$4,880.54 and 13 refunds totaling \$6,528.34. For the second quarter there was 1 refund for \$566.66.

A motion was made by Mr. Zlotnick, seconded by Mr. Wood, to authorize setting the Fall Real Property Auction Date. Unanimous.

Ms. Stanko said that the date is November 17th. The March auction was cancelled due to COVID as was the September auction. Ms. Stanko said that they have the solar building reserved for that evening and there are different options for the actual auction.

A motion was made by Mr. Lant, seconded by Mr. Connolly, to authorize a temporary amendment to Resolution 166 of 1996 Establishing Auction and Conveyance Policies for County Lands. The motion passed. Supervisor Gaston was opposed.

Mr. Dorsey said that there has not been an auction since March 2019. Anyone that was scheduled for auction in March would have received an additional 8 month delay since there will not be an auction until November. The question being posed to the committee, is if anyone comes in to request a first pull, how should those pulls be treated. They have already had the benefit of an 8 month extension. Should the pull be treated as a second pull and require the payment of 2020 taxes, or a second option is to treat it as a first pull but require them to pay the 2020 taxes. If a second pull is requested next year, then require them to pay the 2021 taxes at that point. The concern is that there will be complaints for those people who did exercise a first pull before the auction was cancelled in March, that others are getting an additional 8 month extension on top of a free first pull. Handouts with two options were distributed and offered to the committee. The idea of requiring them to pay for 2020 taxes is to prevent them from getting too far behind, they were already 3 years behind. Mr. Dorsey said that by next year they could potentially be 5 years behind. Mr. Connolly said that he would be in favor of option A which states “All pull requests received for any of the parcels scheduled for auction on November 17, 2020 that were previously

scheduled for auction on either September 15, 2019 or March 19, 2020 shall be treated as a request for a second pull, except for those parcels for which a second pull had previously been authorized by the Real Property Tax Committee.” Mr. Zlotnick asked if any people had paid their taxes between when the auction was supposed to be. Ms. Stanko said there were 4. Mr. Dorsey said that there were approximately a dozen first pulls before the auction was postponed in March. Ms. Gaston said that currently a significant proportion of the County is in an economic crisis and she believes that changing the policies to make it more difficult is not ideal for her. If people still need to catch up eventually, her preference would be to do that. Mr. Zlotnick asked to review option B which states “All former owners making a first pull request through their Town Supervisor for one or more of their former parcels scheduled for auction on November 17, 2020 shall be required to pay the current taxes in full by no later than November 16, 2020.” Mr. Dorsey said that in option B the first pull would require the payment of 2020 taxes and an extension would be given until Spring of 2021, at which point if a second pull is requested, the 2021 taxes will need to be paid. Mr. Dorsey said that the intent in both options is to keep people from getting further behind, with a better chance of recovering and redeeming the property. Mr. Dorsey said that option B could potentially give the person until Fall of 2021 until the property goes up for auction. Under option A, the properties would go to auction in Spring of 2021. Ms. Stanko said that she would like to clarify that these delinquent parcels have nothing to do with COVID. These are old taxes from 2017 onwards. Mr. Jarosh said that these parcels were set to go to auction in March and the auction was cancelled two days prior to the auction date. Mr. Jarosh said that these people were already prepared that the properties were going up for auction in March. Mr. Wood said that he was leaning toward option B, he said that we want to work with the residents of the County and the goal is not to take their property, their goal is to work with them. He understands the concept of not letting them get too far behind in taxes but he can also appreciate that some people may have lost their jobs and not have the resources to step up to the plate before now. Mr. Wood said that he can go with either option. Mr. Connolly clarified that the parcels up for auction did not have any pulls requested prior to the March auction being cancelled, and some properties already had their first pull therefore his position is option A. There is no need to give people extra opportunities to pay because they were not pulling the property in the first place. Mr. Dorsey said that this amendment to the policy would be a onetime revision for this auction only.

A motion was made by Ms. Gaston, seconded by Mr. Connolly, to approving Auctions International as the auctioneer for the Fall 2020 property auction. Unanimous.

Mr. Dorsey said that he received two proposals for the selection of an auctioneer for the Fall auction. One from Auctions International and one from Collar City Auctions. Mr. Dorsey handed out some samples of the brochures they produce for their auctions. Mr. Dorsey said that with an online auctioneer, they will have a much more extensive marketing campaign for the properties. Previously advertisements were placed in newspapers and notices in Town Halls and various county offices. With this, brochures will be created and a social media campaign. Mr. Dorsey said that the proposal from Collar City is a little confusing. Both options have a 6% buyers premium, which means the winning bidder will pay an additional 6% on top of their winning bid, these funds go straight to the auctioneer and there is no fee to the County. Auctions International state that they will charge a 4% convenience fee for the use of a credit card. Collar City is a little confusing as it states 9.5% credit or debit card and it is unsure if the intent is 3.5% on top of the 6% buyers premium or a separate 9.5% on top of the 6%. If the committee is inclined to go with

Collar City, Mr. Dorsey said that he can clarify this prior to going to a contract. Mr. Dorsey said that in the brochures that are produced, Auctions International dedicate one page per property with aerial views of parcels for land locked parcels. For land locked parcels, Collar City enters no photo available. Collar City also have multiple properties on each page. In Mr. Dorsey's opinion the Auctions International catalog is a little more user friendly. Mr. Dorsey said that there will be limited amount of in person bidders permitted. Maximum of 28 people will be admitted which will include auctioneer staff and county personnel. Additionally, everyone will need to pre-register online or at the Treasurer's office. All of this depends on the Governor's social distancing restrictions at that time. Mr. Dorsey said that the County already has a track record with Auctions International as they sold the former County Homestead property in Providence last year. Ms. Gaston asked if either of the firms have experience with both in person and online participation at the same auction. Mr. Dorsey said that none of the firms expressed concern over this. Mr. Jarosh said that he has already reached out to IT for the necessary hook ups and equipment needed. Mr. Jarosh said that in his experience with other County Treasurers the concept of doing a hybrid online and in person auction has been done. Ms. Gaston said that it seems that it's a lower cost for the buyer with Auctions because they can choose to pay by any method and then it's only 6%, if they choose to pay by credit card it then brings it up to 10%. Collar City seems to be either 9.5% or 15.5%. Ms. Gaston said that the County already has a track record with Auctions International. Mr. Connolly agreed and said that he prefers the layout and look of Auctions International's product. Supervisors Zlotnick and Wood agreed.

Mr. Dorsey said that he was recently contacted by Mr. Gary Bowich who has served as environmental counsel for the County on a couple of properties in the past. Mr. Bowich was very instrumental in getting the EPA and DEC involved in the sale of the County Infirmity in Providence. Mr. Bowich said that the Oil Spill fund had contacted him about a property in the Town of Ballston, the old Magnum gas station on Route 50 and Lakeville Road. This property has been abandoned for many years and Mr. Bowich was able to obtain records from DEC which show that the property had an extensive clean up in 2016 paid for by the owner. It is believed there is still contamination around the building, the gas station itself is falling apart and eventually will need to be taken down. The Town has expressed an interest in purchasing the parcel and either using it to expand turn lanes, or a town park, or both. Mr. Dorsey said that he contacted Supervisor Connolly and he is very interested in working with the OIL spill fund. Mr. Dorsey said that he would like to retain Mr. Bowich's services for this parcel. Mr. Dorsey said that he would also like to get Mr. Bowich involved in the Patenaud parcel in Stillwater and another garage that has previously been discussed. Mr. Dorsey said that he would be hired under a minor contract. The rate has increased from \$190 to \$210 which is still a very reasonable price for expert attorneys. Mr. Dorsey said that Mr. Connolly and Mr. Kinowski are in full support of moving in this direction. The intent is to come up with some solutions to move these properties forward. Ms. Gaston thanked Mr. Dorsey and supports hiring someone to advise the county regarding these properties.

Mr. Dorsey said that recently the County Historian was contacted by the Travel Channel. They wanted to shoot a TV show called "Destination Fear" at the old County Homestead. The episode was shot around a month ago. The episode should be available on the Travel Channel at some point in the future.

On a motion made by Mr. Zlotnick, seconded by Mr. Lant, the meeting was adjourned unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Therese Connolly
Deputy Clerk of the Board