

ASSESSORS NEWS

New Online Tax Map System

The Assessors have implemented a new state-of-the-art AxisGIS online tax map system. The user friendly system can be accessed by the general public via the Town Tax Map link on the Assessor's Page of the newly revised Town website (rowe-ma.gov) or may be accessed directly at axisgis.com/rowema.

Assessors Pursue New Initiatives Regarding Utility Valuations

As part of the *Mass Modernization Law* changes enacted in Nov 2016, the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) changed from a triennial (every three years) revaluation cycle to a quintennial (every five years) cycle. The Assessors of Rowe, Monroe and Florida—who jointly contract for the valuations of our hydro facilities—felt that five years was too long to go between formal appraisals due to the volatile nature of the electricity market. Following consultation with the DOR, all three towns' Boards of Assessors requested funds for annual valuations of these facilities and jointly signed a 5-year contract with GE Sansoucy PE of Lancaster, NH for interim year updates based on electricity market changes—and any facility changes—for the first four years (FY19-FY22), followed by a formal revaluation in the fifth year (FY23).

Another initiative underway in western MA involves the appraisal of electric utility transmission and distribution (T&D) personal property assets using a methodology similar to that used by the DOR for valuing telephone and telegraph assets. These personal property assets have heretofore not been fully valued. A revised valuation of easements under transmission lines was also adopted. For the easements, the utility will be assessed for 70% of the land value while the landowners will have their land value assessment reduced to 30%. Although the DOR is not formally involved in this initiative, they have been supportive of the process. Numerous towns in Berkshire, Hampden and Hampshire counties are considering implementation of such T&D appraisals in their communities. The Rowe Assessors decided to pursue this for FY19 and requested funds and signed a contract with GE Sansoucy PE for this work.

FY19 Property Values and Tax Rates

FY19 was an interim update year. The DOR approved the FY19 property values on December 5. Based on the real estate sales analysis, there were no valuation adjustments made for residential homes, building lots, or excess land. The updated appraisals of the hydroelectric facilities however resulted in significant increases in value. Brookfield's Bear Swamp and Fife Brook facilities increased by ~111% and Great River Hydro's Deerfield No. 5 and Sherman facilities increased by ~92%. Appraisals of the T&D assets also resulted in significant increases in value (~138%), mainly due to major upgrades to the New England Power Company's Bear Swamp Upper Switchyard. The resulting total town valuation for FY19 increased by approximately 81% to **\$513,673,154** which reflects ~\$39.8 million in New Growth.

A Tax Classification Hearing with the Board of Selectmen to select the Minimum Residential Factor (MRF) was held on December 5. The MRF determines the amount the tax burden will be shifted from Residential (R) to Commercial-Industrial-Personal (CIP) and establishes the split tax rates (R/CIP). An MRF of .6501 was selected for FY19.

The **FY19 tax rates** are as follows: (note these tax rates ended up much lower than what had been projected in May due to the large increase in total town valuation)

Residential (R): **\$5.01** (FY18 tax rate: \$6.86)

Commercial-Industrial-Personal (CIP): **\$8.02** (FY 18 tax rate: \$14.73)

The Assessors subsequently signed the warrants for the FY19 real estate and personal property taxes on December 12 and the 1st half tax bills were mailed out the same day. 1st half tax payments are due **January 14**.

Applications for Property Tax Abatement

Applications for abatement for FY19 real estate and personal property taxes must be submitted to the Assessor's Office no later than **January 14** (one month after the 1st half tax bills are mailed). Note that the filing of an Abatement Application does not stay the collection of your taxes. The Assessors have three (3) months from the date an abatement application is filed to act on it.

Applications for Property Tax Exemptions

The following Mass General Laws (MGL) Chapter 59, Section 5 property tax exemptions are currently available to Rowe taxpayers who satisfy eligibility requirements:

- **Clause 17D** – Surviving Spouse, Minor Child, Seniors (Exemption amount: \$175)
- **Clause 22, 22A-E, Paraplegic** – Qualifying Veterans (Exemption amount: varies)
- **Clause 37A** – Blind Persons (Exemption amount: \$500)
- **Clause 41A** – Seniors Property Tax Deferral (**this is not an exemption**)
- **Clause 41C** – Seniors (Exemption amount: up to \$1000)

Note that some exemption applications require the disclosure of personal financial information which is kept confidential. Applications for exemption must be submitted to the Assessors Office no later than **March 14** (three months after the 1st half tax bills are mailed). Note that the filing of an Exemption Application does not stay the collection of your taxes. Following submittal, the Assessors have three (3) months from the date an exemption application is filed in which to act on it.

Personal Property Exemption

The Town previously adopted provisions of Mass General Laws Chapter 59, Section 5, Clause 54 to establish an exemption from taxation on personal property valued less than or equal to \$10,000. This automatic exemption is only applicable to residents, businesses, or second home owners whose personal property is valued at less than or equal to \$10,000. Those taxpayers with personal property assessed at greater than \$10,000 will receive a personal property tax bill, based on the full assessed value of their personal property (i.e., there is no exemption for the first \$10,000 in value.)

Tax Breaks for Active Military Personnel

Certain tax breaks are also available for Rowe taxpayers who are active military personnel per the referenced MGLs, as described below:

- **MGL Chapter 59, Section 5L** provides a **deferral of property taxes** due by a member of the Massachusetts National Guard or reservist, or a dependent of a member of the Massachusetts National Guard or reservist, on active service outside the Commonwealth and for the next 180 days after that service.
- **MGL Chapter 60A, Section 1** provides an **exemption from motor vehicle excise** for Massachusetts residents who are on active military duty outside the country for at least 45 days of the excise calendar year, or if wounded or killed in an armed conflict, the exemption applies regardless of the number of days deployed.
- **MGL Chapter 60A, Section 9** provides a **deferral of motor vehicle excise** due by a member of the Massachusetts National Guard or reservist, or a dependent of a member of the Massachusetts National Guard or reservist, on active service outside the Commonwealth and for a period of up to 180 days after completion of that service.

Contact the Assessors' Office at 339-5520 x-19 or send an email to assessor@rowe-ma.gov with any questions, for further information on any of the above, or to request Abatement/Exemption Application forms.