

Assessors News

Submitted by Rick Williams

FY19 & FY20 Utility and Power Co Valuations Appealed to Appellate Tax Board:

Values increased in **FY19** for Bear Swamp Power Co., Great River Hydro, and New England Power Co. based on appraisals performed in 2018 for the Towns of Rowe, Florida, and Monroe by contracted appraisal consultant, GESansoucy. All three companies appealed their FY19 valuations to the MA Appellate Tax Board (ATB). Attorney David Klebanoff was retained to represent the Towns for these ATB cases. The COVID-19 pandemic caused postponement of all ATB activities earlier this spring which have yet to be rescheduled.

Values for **FY20** remained essentially unchanged and the same companies subsequently also appealed their FY20 valuations to the ATB. The FY19 & FY20 cases for the respective companies will be consolidated when the ATB is reconvened. The following outcomes or some combination thereof are possible for these cases: 1) settlement will be reached between the taxpayer(s) and the Towns prior to ATB hearing(s) taking place, 2) ATB finds in favor of the taxpayer(s), 3) ATB finds in favor of the Towns, or 4) ATB declines the appeal(s) for any number of reasons.

Assessors Overlay/Surplus: The Department of Revenue (DOR) requires that towns set aside sufficient funds in Assessors Overlay for tax abatements. In light of the above ATB appeals which have yet to be resolved, the Assessors have planned for potential abatements. From FY03 thru FY18 the annual amount set aside for Assessors Overlay averaged ~\$30K. For FY19, ~\$100K was set aside with an additional ~\$200K set aside for both FY20 and FY21. Once the ATB appeal cases are resolved and any resulting abatements paid out as applicable, remaining Overlay funds can be declared “surplus” by the Assessors and turned back to the town as a revenue source for that same fiscal year. Any Overlay Surplus balance at year end closes out to the general fund to become part of the subsequent year’s Free Cash.

FY21 Property Values: FY21 is an interim update year (the next total town revaluation will be for FY23). Based on real estate sales analysis, no adjustments were made to the valuations of residential homes, building lots, or excess land. Total town valuation increased by **~0.14%** (from \$515.427 million to **\$516.129 million**).

FY21 Tax Rates/Tax Bills: A Tax Classification Hearing was held with the Selectmen on October 15 where an MRF (Minimum Residential Factor) of **.6429** was selected, representing the tax burden shift from Residential (R) to Commercial-Industrial-Personal (CIP). This established FY21 split tax rates of **R/\$5.33 and CIP/\$8.64** compared to last year’s rates of R/\$5.33 and CIP/\$8.53. The Assessors signed the FY21 real estate and personal property tax warrants on October 20 and the first half tax bills were mailed on October 23. Payments (and any abatement applications) are due within 30 days of tax bill postmark.

Applications for Property Tax Abatement: Applications for abatement for FY21 real estate and personal property taxes must be submitted to the Assessor’s Office by November 1 or 30 days after the 1st half tax bills are mailed, whichever is later. The filing of an Abatement Application does not stay the collection of your taxes. The Assessors have three (3) months from the date an 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 Chap 17D & Chap 41C exemption applications require the *full disclosure of personal financial information* which is kept confidential. Applications for exemption must be submitted to the Assessor's Office by April 1 or three (3) months after the 1st half tax bills are mailed, whichever is later. The filing of an Exemption Application does not stay the collection of your taxes. 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 MGL 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.

Colleen Avallone (Assistant Assessor) has posted office hours on **Monday afternoons from 3:30-5:30pm**. She can be available other times by appointment. Due to continuing COVID-19 restrictions the Town Hall is not open to the public but Colleen can be reached at the Assessor's Office at **413-339-5520 x-15** or assessor@rowe-ma.gov. Contact Colleen with any questions, for further information, or to request Abatement/Exemption Applications. You may also check the following websites for more info and to download applications:

- Department of Revenue (DOR) website
<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/taxpayer-forms-and-guides>

- Town of Rowe website – Board of Assessors (BOA) page
<https://rowe-ma.gov/g/39/Board-of-Assessors>