



ASSESSMENT REVIEW - 2009

INFORMATION PACKETS

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2009 General Procedures for the Pre-Assessment Review Meetings with Municipalities

The purpose for establishing these procedures is to provide guidelines for DRA staff in conducting these meetings prior to the actual assessment review process itself. These procedures will also provide municipalities with information about that same process in order to allow municipalities the opportunity to plan for and more efficiently prepare for the pre-assessment review meeting and the assessment review process itself.

I. Responsibilities of the DRA Assessment Representative Prior to the Pre-Assessment Review Meeting

1. Attempt should be made to schedule the pre-assessment review meeting at least 30 days in advance.
2. Inform the municipality of the purpose of the pre-assessment review meeting - to review all of the assessment review requirements, to identify what records will need to be reviewed and how they are filed or maintained, and to discuss the procedures to be followed for those reviews.
3. Insure that key personnel in the municipality are encouraged to attend. This includes a representative of the town such as the selectmen or town manager; the assessor, whether in-house or contracted; and personnel responsible for record maintenance and retrieval. Any other town officials or company employees are also welcome to attend.
4. Inform the municipality of the need to bring their appraisal or assessing manual, and blank property record cards and/or data collection forms for all types of properties for the purpose of determining the data elements to be checked for data accuracy.
5. Request that municipality provide a list of major properties in their jurisdiction, i.e., more than one percent of the tax base or over \$25,000,000.
6. Insure that a letter is sent verifying the date and time of the pre-assessment review meeting, who is to be in attendance, and the items to be provided by the municipality.
7. Verify the appointment approximately 15 days in advance of the meeting.

II. Items to be Covered at the Meeting

1. Provide copies of all pertinent statutes.
2. Provide copies of the ASB Guidelines for all participants.
3. Discussion of what records need to be reviewed. Identify how the records are stored and identified for a random selection process.
4. Discussion of what assistance will be needed from municipality or company personnel versus what can be done independently by the DRA staff person.
5. Discussion to determine what data elements are being collected on the municipality's property record cards, and identification of any items not being picked up as a matter of municipality policy.
6. Discussion about how the field review for data accuracy will be publicized.
7. Discussion of the workspace needed by DRA staff, and where it will be provided.
8. Discussion of the amount of time to be spent in the town hall and in the field.
9. Discussion of which assessment review elements are ready for review by DRA staff, which ones are not, and an approximate time frame when they will be ready.
10. An explanation of ongoing feedback that will be provided by DRA, and the ability and encouragement of municipalities to discuss that feedback and take appropriate, on-going corrective action. Determine who is to be provided the feedback.
11. Explanation of issuance of a preliminary report, the municipality's response, and issuance of a final report.
12. Set an appointment for the initial assessment review visit and the specifics to be reviewed at that time.
13. Encourage municipalities to stay involved in the process and to seek answers to any questions about the process or of the findings in the review. Provide telephone numbers for yourself, your supervisor, and the Director and Assistant Director of Property Appraisal.

III. Specific ASB Guidelines to be Covered

There are six broad guidelines. Guidelines A and E are statistical, and will be calculated in January through March of 2010. Guidelines B, C, and D will be reviewed between April - November 2009. Guideline F (U.S.P.A.P.) will be evaluated upon receipt of the U.S.P.A.P. report from the assessing staff.

A. Level and Uniformity of Assessments

1. Median ratio between 0.90 and 1.10 with a 90% confidence level.
2. COD of 20.0 or less.

B. Assessing Practice

1. Written or verbal policy on availability to the public of assessment records, including specific records identified by the municipality as not subject to RSA 91-A.
2. Review of new subdivisions, plats, surveys, and new construction or demolitions to determine compliance with April 1st assessment date.
3. Written or verbal policy on how assessments are adjusted annually so all assessments remain proportional.
4. Review of current use records and assessment of the Land Use Change Tax.
5. Review of current appraisal service contracts, and the personnel employed under these contracts.

C. Exemptions and Credits

1. Verification of the review of all exemptions and credits.
2. Verification of proper documentation for all religious, educational, and charitable exemptions.

D. Accuracy of Property Record Card Data

1. Check for material errors on property record cards
2. Verification of accuracy of data being collected on property record cards by the municipality. (Advisory only)

E. Proportionality

1. PRD between 0.98 and 1.03 with a 90% confidence level.

2. Median for any of the three described strata with a 90% confidence level be within 5% of the median point estimate for all sales.

F. U.S.P.A.P. Compliant Report

The U.S.P.A.P. Compliant Report submitted to the DRA, by the municipality, will be reviewed based on Standard 6 of the 2005 Edition of U.S.P.A.P. and checked for compliance against the DRA-U.S.P.A.P. Compliant Checklist.

IV. Ratio Study of Property Sales

1. The DRA will use the same sales as in their annual assessment ratio study for equalization.
2. Sales used or submitted can be appealed when adequate documentation is provided by the municipality.
3. A minimum sample size of at least 2% of the total taxable parcels and a minimum of eight (8) sales must exist for the overall median and COD to be calculated, and a minimum of eight (8) sales must exist to calculate a median on a strata.

2009 ASSESSMENT REVIEW GUIDELINES

As recommended by the Assessing Standards Board on January 25, 2008
and passed by HB 1206 (2006 Legislative Session)

A	B	C	D	E	F
Level and Uniformity of Assessments	Assessing Practices	Exemptions and Credits	Data Accuracy	Proportionality	USPAP Compliant Report
<p>. Ratio: 90% - 110% with 90% confidence level - RSA 21-J:11-a,I,(a)</p>	<p>. RSA 91-A access: All records of the municipality's assessor's office should be available to the public pursuant to RSA 91-A</p>	<p>. Periodic review by town at least 95% accuracy. RSA 72:33,VI Elderly Exempt. 72:39-a&b Vet's Credit 72:28 Vet's Total Disable 72:35 Blind 72:37 Disabled 72:37-b Deaf (New) 72:38-b</p>	<p>. 80% of property record cards must be free of material errors RSA 21-J:11-a,I,(d) (See ASB Guidelines for definition of material errors.)</p>	<p>. Verify PRD (Price Related Differential) RSA 21-J:11-a,I,(e) PRD should be between .98 and 1.03 with a 90% confidence level.</p>	<p>. Verify USPAP Compliant Report based on Standard 6 of the 2005 Edition of USPAP be submitted to DRA and checked for compliance against DRA-USPAP Compliant Checklist.</p>
<p>. COD: (Coefficient of Dispersion) of median ratio not greater than 20 (no confidence interval) RSA 21-J:11-a,I,(a)</p>	<p>. 95% of sample: Must reflect April 1 value Must reflect construction done by April 1 and not after. RSA 74:1</p>	<p>. Religious - BTLA A-9 . Educational - BTLA A-9 . Charitable - BTLA A-9 RSA 72:23-c</p>	<p>. Verify accuracy of data elements (report to ASB). RSA 21-J:11-a,I,(d)</p>	<p>. Median ratio, with 90% confidence level all strata within 5% of overall median point estimate - RSA 21-J:11-a,I,(e) . Improved Residential . Improved Non-Residential . Unimproved Property</p>	
	<p>. Have revised inventory program - RSA 75:8</p>	<p>. Charitable - BTLA A-12 RSA 72:23,VI</p>			
	<p>. 85% of Current Use Sample: RSA 79-A:5 Form A-10 timely filed Form CU-12 timely filed Valued per CUB 304 Land Use Change Tax</p>				
	<p>. Appraisal Contracts to DRA RSA 21-J:11 Submitted prior to start Include personnel in contract</p>				

**ASB Guidelines Recommended to DRA as voted on 1/25/08
and passed by HB 1206 (2006 Legislative Session)
(Assessment Review Year 2009)**

- I. The following guidelines are recommended by the Assessing Standards Board (ASB) in accordance with the provisions of RSA 21-J:14-b and RSA 21-J:11-a. These guidelines will be used by the Department of Revenue Administration (DRA) to measure and analyze the political subdivision for reporting to the Municipality and the ASB. These guidelines assist the Commissioner to determine the degree to which assessments of a municipality achieve substantial compliance with applicable statutes and rules.

- II. Pursuant to laws of 2003, Chapter Law 307, section 5, “The general court recognizes all the work in creating a set of proposed standards for the certification of assessments. There is reason for concern, however, that these standards may have an inequitable impact on municipalities within the state due to differences between municipalities in such characteristics as size, parcel count, number of sales, and geographic location. Therefore, the general court finds that in order for the state to continue to implement fair and equitable assessing practices, it is necessary to further analyze the assessing practices of the state’s political subdivisions. This analysis can be accomplished by using the assessing standards board’s recommended standards as guidelines for a measurement tool, rather than as certification requirements, in the first 4 years of the process. The results of measuring these guidelines can then be analyzed for the state’s large and small political subdivision, with a report to be made to the municipalities and through the assessing standards board to the general court.”

- III. These guidelines address the six assessment areas the Commissioner may consider, which are specifically identified in RSA 21-J:11-a, regarding whether the:
 - A. Level of assessments and uniformity of assessments are within acceptable ranges as recommended by the Assessing Standards Board by considering, where appropriate, an assessment-to-sales-ratio study conducted by the department for the municipality.
 1. A median ratio should be between 0.90 and 1.10 with a 90% confidence level in the year of the review.
 2. An overall coefficient of dispersion (COD) for the municipality’s median ratio should not be greater than 20.0 without the use of a confidence interval.

 - B. Assessment practices substantially comply with applicable statutes and rules.
 1. All records of the municipality’s assessor’s office should be available to the public pursuant to RSA 91-A.
 2. Ninety-five percent of the property records in the sample reviewed by the DRA should reflect assessments of properties as of April 1, pursuant to RSA 74:1; and that a municipality should not assess parcels or new construction that did not exist as of April 1 of that tax year.
 3. A municipality should have a revised inventory program in place that addresses

compliance with RSA 75:8, which provides that annually, and in accordance with state assessing guidelines assessors and selectmen shall adjust assessments to reflect changes so that all assessments are reasonably proportional within the municipality.

4. Eighty-five percent of the current use property records in the sample reviewed by the DRA should have:
 - a. A timely filed Form A-10, Application for Current Use Assessment; (RSA 79-A:5 and Cub 302)
 - b. If applicable, a timely filed Form CU-12, Summary of Forest Stewardship Plan for Current Use Assessment; (RSA 79-A:5 and Cub 304.03)
 - c. Current use valuations assessed in accordance with Cub 304; and
 - d. A procedure to determine, prior to July 1 of each year, if previously classified land has undergone a change in use for purposes of assessing the Land Use Change Tax. (RSA 79-A:7)
5. In accordance with RSA 21-J:11, all appraisal service contracts or agreements in effect during the assessment review year for tax assessment purposes should:
 - a. Be submitted to the DRA, prior to work commencing, as notification that appraisal work shall be done in the municipality; and
 - b. Include the names of all personnel to be employed under the contract.
- C. Exemption and credit procedures substantially comply with applicable statutes and rules;
 1. A periodic review should be done, by the municipality, of all exemptions and credits at least once every assessment review cycle with no more than a 5% error rate.
 2. The municipality should have on file a current Form BTLA A-9, List of Real Estate and Personal Property on Which Exemption is Claimed, as described in Tax 401.04(b) for all religious, educational and charitable exemptions.
 3. The municipality should have on file a current form BTLA A-12, Charitable Organization Financial Statement, as described in Tax 401.01(c), for all charitable exemptions.

- D. Assessments are based on reasonably accurate data; and
1. The municipality should have no material errors on at least eighty percent of the property record cards reviewed by the DRA. A material error is defined to be any error or combination of errors that results in a variance greater than 7.5% of the improved assessed value of the property if the errors are attributable to the improvements or if attributable to the land value, a variance greater than 7.5% of the land or if attributable to both improvements and land a variance greater than 5% of the total assessed value; that includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Mathematical miscalculations;
 - b. Inconsistent land values without notation or documentation;
 - c. Inconsistent depreciation without notation or documentation;
 - d. Inconsistent neighborhood adjustments without notation or documentation;
 - e. Market adjustments without notation or documentation;
 - f. Acreage noted that does not match the tax map unless otherwise noted;
 - g. Omission of data such as, but not limited to;
 - i. Addition of improvements;
 - ii. Removal of improvements;
 - iii. Conversion of improvements;
 - h. Erroneous measurements resulting in a square foot variance of 10% or more of the primary improvement(s).
 2. The level of accuracy of the data elements should be determined by the DRA by comparing the information regularly collected by the municipality on a sample of property record cards with the actual property. Prior to commencement of the review process, the DRA should meet with the municipality's assessing officials to obtain an understanding of the municipality's data collection techniques used to determine value and the data elements regularly collected by the municipality that are included on the municipality's property record cards.
- E. Assessments of various types of properties are reasonably proportional to other types of properties within the municipality.
1. The municipality's median ratios with a 90% confidence level for the following 3 strata should be within 5% of the overall median ratio (point estimate):
 - a. Improved residential up to and including 4-family units;

- b. Improved non-residential; and
 - c. Unimproved property.
2. No ratio should be calculated for a particular strata unless a minimum of 8 sales are available in that strata. If no ratio has been calculated, the sales should not be collapsed into another strata.
 3. The DRA should calculate the municipality's price related differential (PRD). The PRD should be between .98 and 1.03 with a 90% confidence level.

New Section F. (Per HB 1206, 2006 Legislative Session)

- F. For all revaluations including full revaluations, partial revaluations, cyclical revaluations and statistical updates conducted on or after the April 1, 2006 assessment year by either an independent contractor or an in-house assessor, A report based on the 2005 edition of the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) Standard 6 shall be produced; and
 1. Copies of this report shall be delivered to the municipality and to the DRA at no additional cost.
 2. The DRA shall review these reports for compliance with USPAP Standard 6 and incorporate its findings in the assessment review process for all reviews conducted on or after April 1, 2006.
 3. In accordance with RSA 21-J:11-a, II, the Department shall report its findings to the Assessing Standards Board and the municipality.

- IV. Property sales utilized in the DRA's annual assessment ratio study conducted for equalization purposes should be used to calculate the median ratios, CODs, and PRDs under guidelines (A) and (E) above. The ratio percentages should be rounded to 3 places. The sample size of the ratio study should contain at least 2% of the total taxable parcels in a municipality; and have a total of at least 8 sales. Alterations to property sales may be based upon documentation submitted by the municipality such as, but not limited to:
 - A. Sales involving an exchange of property for boundary line adjustments; and
 - B. Sales of personal property included in the sale; and
 - C. Sales of properties located in more than one municipality.

- V. In accordance with RSA 21-J:14-b, II, these guidelines will be reviewed and updated annually. Minutes of the ASB along with meeting and forum schedules may be found at the Department of Revenue Administration website.

GLOSSARY

Assessment Review Year - The property tax year set by the department for which a municipality's assessment review shall occur.

Coefficient of Dispersion (COD) - A measure of assessment equity that represents the average absolute deviation of a group of ratios from the median ratio expressed as a percentage of the median.

Confidence Interval - The range established by electronic means within which one can conclude a measure of population lies.

Confidence Level - The required degree of confidence in a statistical test or confidence interval.

Department - The New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration.

Level of Assessment - The overall ratio of appraised values of properties to market value of properties.

Mean Ratio - The result reached after the sum of all ratios is divided by the total number of ratios.

Median Ratio - The middle ratio when a set of all ratios is arranged in order of magnitude.

Point Estimate (of the Median Ratio) - A single number that represents the midpoint, or middle ratio, when the ratios are arrayed in order of magnitude.

Price Related Differential (PRD) - A measure of the differences in the appraisal of low value and high value properties in assessments, as calculated by dividing the mean ratio by the weighted mean ratio.

Ratio Study - The study of the relationship between appraised or assessed property values and the current market value of the properties.

Strata - A division of properties into subsets for analysis.

Uniformity of Assessments - The degree to which assessments bear a consistent relationship to market value.

Weighted Mean Ratio - The result reached when the sum of all appraised values is divided by the sum of all sale prices.

TITLE I
THE STATE AND ITS GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER 21-J

DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

Section 21-J:3

21-J:3 Duties of Commissioner. - XXVI. Review and report each municipality's assessments once within every 5 years pursuant to RSA 21-J:11-a.

Section 21-J:11

21-J:11 Appraisals of Property for Ad Valorem Tax Purposes. –

I. (a) Every person, firm, or corporation intending to engage in the business of making appraisals on behalf of a municipality for tax assessment purposes in this state shall notify the commissioner of that intent in writing. No person, firm, or corporation engaged in the business of making appraisals of taxable property for municipalities and taxing districts shall:

(1) Enter into any contract or agreement with any town, city, or governmental division without first submitting a copy of the contract or agreement to the commissioner along with the names and qualifications of all personnel to be employed under the contract or agreement for review of the proposed contract or agreement and written recommendations of the department to be made to the municipality within 10 working days of receipt by the department;

(2) Begin any appraisal work without first submitting a copy of the executed contract or agreement to the commissioner along with the names and qualifications of all personnel to be employed under the contract or agreement.

(b) Any contract or agreement entered into for a reassessment or new assessment ordered by the board of tax and land appeals, pursuant to RSA 71-B, shall be first submitted to the commissioner for examination and approval.

(c) This paragraph shall not apply to municipal employees.

II. The commissioner, at no expense to the municipality, shall monitor appraisals of property and supervise appraisers as follows:

(a) Assure that appraisals comply with all applicable statutes and rules;

(b) Assure that appraisers are complying with the terms of the appraisal contract or agreement;

(c) Review the accuracy of appraisals by inspection, evaluation, and testing, in whole or in part, of data collected by the appraisers; and

(d) Report to the governing body on the progress and quality of the municipality's appraisal process.

III. The commissioner shall adopt rules under RSA 541-A relative to the:

(a) Contract or agreement provisions for a full revaluation, a cyclical revaluation, a partial revaluation, or a statistical update; and

(b) Methodology for inspection, evaluation, and testing of data for the purpose of appraisal

monitoring.

Source. 1985, 204:1, eff. July 1, 1985. 1999, 17:8, eff. April 29, 1999. 2002, 249:6, eff. May 17, 2002. 2006, 193:4, eff. May 30, 2006. 2007, 182:1, eff. April 1, 2007.

Section 21-J:11-a

21-J:11-a Assessment Report. –

I. The commissioner shall report the degree to which assessments of a municipality achieve substantial compliance with applicable statutes and rules. The commissioner may consider whether:

- (a) Level of assessments and uniformity of assessments are within acceptable ranges as recommended by the assessing standards board by considering, where appropriate, an assessment-to-sales-ratio study conducted by the department for the municipality;
- (b) Assessment practices substantially comply with applicable statutes and rules;
- (c) Exemption and credit procedures substantially comply with applicable statutes and rules;
- (d) Assessments are based on reasonably accurate data; and
- (e) Assessments of various types of properties are reasonably proportional to other types of properties within the municipality.

II. The commissioner shall issue a copy of the report upon its completion to the municipality and to the assessing standards board. The report shall be completed after the completion of the equalization of property valuations conducted pursuant to RSA 21-J:3, XIII. When issued, the report shall be a public document.

III. The assessing standards board shall study and recommend to the legislature whether municipalities should be reimbursed for expenses incurred as a result of changes in assessment practices resulting from legislation enacted in response to the judicial interpretation of part 2, article 6 of the New Hampshire constitution in *Evelyn Sirrell et al. v State of New Hampshire et al.* and, if reimbursement is appropriate, shall recommend a formula for implementation of a reimbursement program.

Source. 2001, 158:56, eff. Sept. 3, 2001. 2003, 307:7, eff. July 1, 2003. 2004, 203:13, eff. June 11, 2004.

Section 21-J:11-b

21-J:11-b Implementation of Assessment Review. –

I. The commissioner of revenue administration shall adopt a schedule so that each city, town, and unincorporated place has its assessments reviewed within 5 years of April 1, 2007, and shall notify each city, town, and unincorporated place, within 60 days of passage of this act, of the property tax year for which their assessment review shall occur.

II. The department shall offer training and technical assistance to municipal officials to assist in complying with the provisions of RSA 75:8, RSA 75:8-a, and RSA 21-J:11-a.

III. The commissioner of revenue administration shall report in its annual report, the number of communities assisted and the types of assistance and training provided pursuant to RSA 21-J:10, RSA 21-J:11, and RSA 21-J:11-b, II.

Source. 2001, 158:56, eff. Sept. 3, 2001. 2003, 307:7, eff. July 1, 2003. 2007, 214:1, eff. Aug. 24, 2007.

TITLE VI

PUBLIC OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES

CHAPTER 91-A

ACCESS TO GOVERNMENTAL RECORDS AND MEETINGS

Section 91-A:4

91-A:4 Minutes and Records Available for Public Inspection. –

I. Every citizen during the regular or business hours of all public bodies or agencies, and on the regular business premises of such public bodies or agencies, has the right to inspect all governmental records in the possession, custody, or control of such public bodies or agencies, including minutes of meetings of the public bodies, and to copy and make memoranda or abstracts of the records or minutes so inspected, except as otherwise prohibited by statute or RSA 91-A:5. In this section, "to copy" means the reproduction of original records by whatever method, including but not limited to photography, photostatic copy, printing, or electronic or tape recording.

I-a. Records of any payment made to an employee of any public body or agency listed in RSA 91-A:1-a, VI(a)-(d), or to the employee's agent or designee, upon the resignation, discharge, or retirement of the employee, paid in addition to regular salary and accrued vacation, sick, or other leave, shall immediately be made available without alteration for public inspection. All records of payments shall be available for public inspection notwithstanding that the matter may have been considered or acted upon in nonpublic session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3.

II. After the completion of a meeting of a public body, every citizen, during the regular or business hours of such public body, and on the regular business premises of such public body, has the right to inspect all notes, materials, tapes, or other sources used for compiling the minutes of such meetings, and to make memoranda or abstracts or to copy such notes, materials, tapes, or sources inspected, except as otherwise prohibited by statute or RSA 91-A:5.

III. Each public body or agency shall keep and maintain all governmental records in its custody at its regular office or place of business in an accessible place and, if there is no such office or place of business, the governmental records pertaining to such public body or agency shall be kept in an office of the political subdivision in which such public body or agency is located or, in the case of a state agency, in an office designated by the secretary of state.

III-a. Governmental records created or maintained in electronic form shall remain accessible for the same retention or archival periods as their paper counterparts. Methods that may be used to accomplish this requirement include, but are not limited to, copying to microfilm or paper or to durable electronic media using standard or common file formats.

III-b. A governmental record in electronic form shall no longer be subject to disclosure pursuant to this section after it has been initially and legally deleted. For purposes of this paragraph, a record in electronic form shall be considered to have been deleted only if it is no longer readily accessible to the public body or agency itself. The mere transfer of an electronic record to a readily accessible "deleted items" folder or similar location on a computer shall not constitute deletion of the record.

IV. Each public body or agency shall, upon request for any governmental record reasonably described, make available for inspection and copying any such governmental record within its files

when such records are immediately available for such release. If a public body or agency is unable to make a governmental record available for immediate inspection and copying, it shall, within 5 business days of request, make such record available, deny the request in writing with reasons, or furnish written acknowledgment of the receipt of the request and a statement of the time reasonably necessary to determine whether the request shall be granted or denied. If a computer, photocopying machine, or other device maintained for use by a public body or agency is used by the public body or agency to copy the governmental record requested, the person requesting the copy may be charged the actual cost of providing the copy, which cost may be collected by the public body or agency. Nothing in this section shall exempt any person from paying fees otherwise established by law for obtaining copies of governmental records or documents, but if such fee is established for the copy, no additional costs or fees shall be charged.

V. In the same manner as set forth in RSA 91-A:4, IV, any public body or agency which maintains governmental records in electronic format may, in lieu of providing original records, copy governmental records requested to electronic media using standard or common file formats in a manner that does not reveal information which is confidential under this chapter or any other law. If copying to electronic media is not reasonably practicable, or if the person or entity requesting access requests a different method, the public body or agency may provide a printout of governmental records requested, or may use any other means reasonably calculated to comply with the request in light of the purpose of this chapter as expressed in RSA 91-A:1. Access to work papers, personnel data, and other confidential information under RSA 91-A:5, IV shall not be provided.

VI. Every agreement to settle a lawsuit against a governmental unit, threatened lawsuit, or other claim, entered into by any political subdivision or its insurer, shall be kept on file at the municipal clerk's office and made available for public inspection for a period of no less than 10 years from the date of settlement.

VII. Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to require a public body or agency to compile, cross-reference, or assemble information into a form in which it is not already kept or reported by that body or agency.

Source. 1967, 251:1. 1983, 279:2. 1986, 83:5. 1997, 90:2, eff. Aug. 2, 1997. 2001, 223:2, eff. Jan. 1, 2002. 2004, 246:2, eff. Aug. 14, 2004. 2008, 303:4, eff. July 1, 2008.

TITLE V

TAXATION

CHAPTER 74

ANNUAL INVENTORY OF POLLS AND TAXABLE PROPERTY

Section 74:1

74:1 Annual List. – The selectmen of each town shall annually make a list of all the polls and shall take an inventory of all the estate liable to be taxed in such town as of April 1.

Source. RS 41:1. CS 43:1. GS 51:1. GL 55:1. PS 57:1. PL 62:1. RL 75:1. RSA 74:1. 1969, 23:1, eff. April 22, 1969. 2003, 307:3, eff. July 1, 2003.

CHAPTER 75

APPRAISAL OF TAXABLE PROPERTY

Section 75:8

75:8 Revised Inventory. –

I. Annually, and in accordance with state assessing guidelines, the assessors and selectmen shall adjust assessments to reflect changes so that all assessments are reasonably proportional within that municipality. All adjusted assessments shall be included in the inventory of that municipality and shall be sworn to in accordance with RSA 75:7.

II. Assessors and selectmen shall consider adjusting assessments for any properties that:

- (a) They know or believe have had a material physical change;
- (b) Changed in ownership;
- (c) Have undergone zoning changes;
- (d) Have undergone changes to exemptions, credits or abatements;
- (e) Have undergone subdivision, boundary line adjustments, or mergers; or
- (f) Have undergone other changes affecting value.

Source. 1876, 27:1. GL 56:11. PS 58:7. PL 63:7. RL 76:8. RSA 75:8. 1969, 23:7. 2001, 158:53. 2003, 307:13, eff. July 1, 2003.

75:8-a Five-Year Valuation. – The assessors and/or selectmen shall reappraise all real estate within the municipality so that the assessments are at full and true value at least as often as every fifth year, beginning with the later of either of the following:

I. The first year a municipality's assessments were reviewed by the commissioner of the department of revenue administration pursuant to RSA 21-J:3, XXVI and the municipality's assessments were determined to be in accordance with RSA 75:1; or

II. The municipality conducted a full revaluation monitored by the department of revenue

administration pursuant to RSA 21-J:11, II, provided that the full revaluation was effective on or after April 1, 1999.

Source. 2001, 158:54, eff. Sept. 3, 2001. 2003, 307:11, eff. July 1, 2003. 2005, 119:1, eff. June 15, 2005.

75:8-b Annual Appraisal; Municipalities Over 10,000. – Except when assessing real estate under RSA 75:8-a, any municipality with a population over 10,000 as determined pursuant to RSA 78-A:25 intending to appraise real estate annually at market value, as defined in RSA 75:1, shall authorize such annual appraisal by a majority vote of the governing body. The governing body shall hold 2 public hearings regarding the annual appraisal process at least 15 days, but not more than 60 days, prior to the governing body's authorization vote. Any municipality with a population over 10,000 as determined pursuant to RSA 78-A:25 annually appraising real estate at market value shall provide notification of changes to the assessed valuation prior to the issuance of the final tax bill, either by individual notice to the property owner, by public notice in a newspaper of general circulation, or by any other means deemed appropriate by the governing body.

Source. 2004, 203:15, eff. June 11, 2004.

CHAPTER 79-A

CURRENT USE TAXATION

Section 79-A:5

79-A:5 Assessment of Open Space Land. –

I. The selectmen or assessing officials shall appraise open space land, as classified under the provisions of this chapter, excluding any building, appurtenance or other improvement on the land, at valuations based upon the current use values established by the board. The valuations shall be equalized for the purpose of assessing taxes. The selectmen or assessing officials shall use the soil potential index when available, to determine the value of farm land within the ranges established by the board. It shall be the duty of the owner to provide the soil potential index to the selectmen or assessing officials.

II. No owner of land shall be entitled to have a particular parcel of his land classified for any tax year under the provisions of this chapter unless he shall have applied to the assessing officials on or before April 15 of said year, on a form approved by the board and provided by the commissioner, to have his parcel of land so classified. If any owner shall satisfy the assessing officials that he was prevented by accident, mistake or misfortune from filing said application on or before April 15, said officials may receive said application at a later date and classify the parcel of land hereunder; but no such application shall be received after the local tax rate has been approved by the commissioner for that year.

III. The assessing officials shall notify the applicant on a form provided by the commissioner no later than July 1, or within 15 days if the application is filed after July 1, of their decision to classify or refusal to classify his parcel of land by delivery of such notification to him in person or by mailing such notification to his last and usual place of abode.

IV. Prior to July 1 each year, the assessing officials shall determine if previously classified lands have been reapplied or have undergone a change in use so that the land use change tax may be levied against lands changed in use, according to RSA 79-A:7. A list of all classified lands and their owners in each town or city shall be filed by the respective assessing officials each year. Such list shall be part of the invoice and subject to inspection as provided in RSA 76:7.

V. [Repealed.]

V-a. The commissioner shall include on the inventory blank, required under RSA 74:4, a question concerning whether any changes have been made in the use of land classified as open space. The question shall be written to enable the assessing officials to locate parcels which may require a change in assessment and to fit the context of the blank.

VI. The assessing officials shall file with the register of deeds in the appropriate county, on or before August 1 in each year, a notice of contingent liens describing all parcels of land classified under the provisions of this chapter. If a parcel of land is classified as open space land after such date, the assessing officials shall file notice of contingent lien with the register of deeds in the appropriate county within 14 days of said classification. The notice filed pursuant to this paragraph shall be on a form approved by the board and provided by the commissioner, shall contain the name of each owner, the date of classification and a short description of each parcel of real estate together with such other information as the board may prescribe; provided, however, the assessing officials shall not file each year parcels of land classified under this chapter which have been previously filed, unless there has been some change in the acreage involved.

VII. A fee, in accordance with RSA 478:17-g, I, shall be paid by the owner for each parcel which is classified as open space land to the local assessing officials, to be paid over to the register of deeds for recording the notice of contingent lien. The notice of contingent lien shall constitute notice to all interested parties that a lien on the parcel shall be created if and when the land is subsequently disqualified from current use assessment, as provided in RSA 79-A:7, II(e) and RSA 80:85.

Source. 1973, 372:1. 1974, 7:5-8. 1975, 197:2. 1977, 326:4. 1979, 183:1. 1981, 561:2. 1988, 5:2, 4. 1989, 50:6. 1991, 281:8-10, 26, I, eff. Aug. 17, 1991.

CHAPTER 72

PERSONS AND PROPERTY LIABLE TO TAXATION

Section 72:27-a

72:27-a Procedure for Adoption, Modification, or Rescission. –

I. Any town or city may adopt the provisions of RSA 72:28, RSA 72:29-a, RSA 72:35, RSA 72:37, RSA 72:37-b, RSA 72:38-b, RSA 72:39-a, RSA 72:62, RSA 72:66, RSA 72:70, or RSA 72:76 in the following manner:

(a) In a town, other than a town that has adopted a charter pursuant to RSA 49-D, the question shall be placed on the warrant of a special or annual town meeting, by the governing body or by petition pursuant to RSA 39:3.

(b) In a city or town that has adopted a charter pursuant to RSA 49-C or RSA 49-D, the legislative body may consider and act upon the question in accordance with its normal procedures for passage of resolutions, ordinances, and other legislation. In the alternative, the legislative body of such municipality may vote to place the question on the official ballot for any regular municipal election.

II. The vote shall specify the provisions of the property tax exemption or credit, the amount of such exemption or credit, and the manner of its determination, as listed in paragraph I. If a majority of those voting on the question vote "yes," the exemption or credit shall take effect within the town or city, on the date set by the governing body, or in the tax year beginning April 1 following its adoption, whichever shall occur first.

III. A municipality may modify, if applicable, or rescind the exemption or credits provided in paragraph I in the manner described in this section.

IV. An amendment to a statutory provision listed in paragraph I related to an exemption or credit amount or to the eligibility or application of an exemption or credit, shall apply in a municipality which previously adopted the provision only after the municipality complies with the procedure in this section, unless otherwise expressly required by law.

Source. 2003, 299:1, eff. April 1, 2003; 299:23, eff. April 1, 2003 at 12:01 a.m. 2004, 170:3, eff. July 23, 2004. 2008, 224:3, eff. July 1, 2008.

Section 72:33

72:33 Application for Exemption or Tax Credit. –

VI. The assessing officials may require applicants for any exemption or tax credit to file the information listed in RSA 72:34, or the statement required by RSA 72:33, V **periodically but no more frequently than annually**. Failure to file such periodic statements may, at the discretion of the assessing officials, result in a loss of the exemption or tax credit for that year.

Source. 1947, 240:1, par. 29-d. RSA 72:33. 1969, 55:1. 1973, 544:8. 1977, 502:1. 1983, 155:8; 385:1. 1987, 325:1. 1991, 70:14. 1994, 102:2; 390:3, 8. 1995, 265:3, 20. 1996, 140:7. 1997, 281:1, eff. Jan. 1, 1998, at 12:01 a.m. 2003, 131:1, eff. April 1, 2003; 299:25, eff. April 1, 2003 at 12:01 a.m.; 299:6, eff. April 1, 2005; 299:26, eff. April 1, 2005 at 12:01 a.m. 2007, 182:3, eff. April 1, 2007.

Section 72:39-a

72:39-a Conditions for Elderly Exemption. –

I. No exemption shall be allowed under RSA 72:39-b unless the person applying therefor:

(a) Has resided in this state for at least 3 consecutive years preceding April 1 in the year in which the exemption is claimed.

(b) Had in the calendar year preceding said April 1 a net income from all sources, or if married, a combined net income from all sources, of not more than the respective amount applicable to each age group as determined by the city or town for purposes of RSA 72:39-b. Under no circumstances shall the amount determined by the city or town be less than \$13,400 for a single person or \$20,400 for married persons. The net income shall be determined by deducting from all moneys received, from any source including social security or pension payments, the amount of any of the following or the sum thereof:

- (1) Life insurance paid on the death of an insured;
- (2) Expenses and costs incurred in the course of conducting a business enterprise;
- (3) Proceeds from the sale of assets.

(c) Owns net assets not in excess of the amount determined by the city or town for purposes of RSA 72:39-b, excluding the value of the person's actual residence and the land upon which it is located up to the greater of 2 acres or the minimum single family residential lot size specified in the local zoning ordinance. The amount determined by the city or town shall not be less than \$35,000. A city or town may set a combined net assets amount for married persons in such greater amount as the legislative body of the city or town may determine. "Net assets" means the value of all assets, tangible and intangible, minus the value of any good faith encumbrances. "Residence" means the housing unit, and related structures such as an unattached garage or woodshed, which is the person's principal home, and which the person in good faith regards as home to the exclusion of any other places where the person may temporarily live. "Residence" shall exclude attached dwelling units and unattached structures used or intended for commercial or other nonresidential purposes.

II. Additional requirements for an exemption under RSA 72:39-b shall be that the property is:

- (a) Owned by the resident; or
- (b) Owned by a resident jointly or in common with the resident's spouse, either of whom meets the age requirement for the exemption claimed; or
- (c) Owned by a resident jointly or in common with a person not the resident's spouse, if the resident meets the applicable age requirement for the exemption claimed; or
- (d) Owned by a resident, or the resident's spouse, either of whom meets the age requirement for the exemption claimed, and when they have been married to each other for at least 5 consecutive years.

III. Upon the death of an owner residing with a spouse pursuant to subparagraph II(b) or II(d), the combined net asset amount for married persons determined by the city or town shall continue to apply to the surviving spouse for the purpose of the exemption granted under RSA 72:39-b until the sale or transfer of the property by the surviving spouse or until the remarriage of the surviving spouse.

Source. 1996, 140:1, eff. July 23, 1996. 2003, 299:14, 15, eff. April 1, 2003. 2004, 238:3, eff. June 15, 2004. 2006, 212:1, eff. June 1, 2006.

Section 72:39-b

72:39-b Procedure for Adoption and Modification of Elderly Exemption. –

I. A town or city may adopt or modify elderly exemptions by the procedure in RSA 72:27-a.

II. An elderly exemption, based on assessed value for qualified taxpayers, may be granted for a different dollar amount determined by the town or city, to a person 65 years of age up to 75 years, to a person 75 years of age up to 80 years, and to a person 80 years of age or older. To qualify, the person must have been a New Hampshire resident for at least 3 consecutive years, own the real estate individually or jointly, or if the real estate is owned by such person's spouse, they must have been married to each other for at least 5 consecutive years. In addition, the taxpayer must have a net income in each applicable age group of not more than a dollar amount determined by the town or city of not less than \$13,400 or, if married, a combined net income of not more than a dollar amount determined by the town or city of not less than \$20,400; and own net assets not in excess of a dollar amount determined by the town or city of not less than \$35,000 excluding the value of the person's residence or, if married, combined net assets not in excess of a dollar amount determined by the town or city of not less than \$35,000 excluding the value of the residence. Under no circumstances shall the amounts of the exemption for any age category be less than \$5,000. The combined net asset amount for married persons shall apply to a surviving spouse until the sale or transfer of the property by the surviving spouse or until the remarriage of the surviving spouse.

Source. 1996, 140:1. 1997, 241:2, eff. Aug. 18, 1997. 2003, 299:16, eff. April 1, 2003. 2004, 238:4, eff. June 15, 2004. 2006, 212:2, eff. June 1, 2006.

CHAPTER 72

PERSONS AND PROPERTY LIABLE TO TAXATION

Section 72:28

72:28 Standard and Optional Veterans' Tax Credit. –

I. The standard veterans' tax credit shall be \$50.

II. The optional veterans' tax credit, upon adoption by a city or town pursuant to RSA 72:27-a, shall be an amount from \$51 up to \$500. The optional veterans' tax credit shall replace the standard veterans' tax credit in its entirety and shall not be in addition thereto.

III. Either the standard veterans' tax credit or the optional veterans' tax credit shall be subtracted each year from the property tax on the veteran's residential property. However, the surviving spouse of a resident who suffered a service-connected death may have the amount subtracted from the property tax on any real property in the same municipality where the surviving spouse is a resident.

IV. The following persons shall qualify for the standard veterans' tax credit or the optional veterans' tax credit:

(a) Every resident of this state who served not less than 90 days in the armed forces of the United States in any qualifying war or armed conflict listed in this section and was honorably discharged or an officer honorably separated from service; or the spouse or surviving spouse of such resident;

(b) Every resident of this state who was terminated from the armed forces because of service-connected disability; or the surviving spouse of such resident; and

(c) The surviving spouse of any resident who suffered a service-connected death.

V. Service in a qualifying war or armed conflict shall be as follows:

(a) "World War I" between April 6, 1917 and November 11, 1918, extended to April 1, 1920 for service in Russia; provided that military or naval service on or after November 12, 1918 and before July 2, 1921, where there was prior service between April 6, 1917 and November 11, 1918 shall be considered as World War I service;

(b) "World War II" between December 7, 1941 and December 31, 1946;

(c) "Korean Conflict" between June 25, 1950 and January 31, 1955;

(d) "Vietnam Conflict" between December 22, 1961 and May 7, 1975;

(e) "Vietnam Conflict" between July 1, 1958 and December 22, 1961, if the resident earned the Vietnam service medal or the armed forces expeditionary medal;

(f) "Persian Gulf War" between August 2, 1990 and the date thereafter prescribed by Presidential proclamation or by law; and

(g) Any other war or armed conflict that has occurred since May 8, 1975, and in which the resident earned an armed forces expeditionary medal or theater of operations service medal.

Source. 1871, 13:1. GL 54:2. PS 56:4. 1907, 95:1. 1919, 54:1. 1921, 12:3; 103:1. 1923, 68:2. PL 60:26. 1941, 157:1. RL 73:29. 1943, 174:1. 1944, 4:1. 1947, 240:1, par. 29. 1949, 167:1. 1951, 132:1. RSA 72:28. 1955, 289:1. 1963, 49:1; 118:1; 324:1. 1967, 35:1, 2; 219:1, 2. 1971, 303:1. 1975, 282:1. 1976, 42:1, 2. 1977, 61:1. 1979, 288:2. 1981, 215:1. 1989, 64:1; 270:1. 1991, 70:3-6. 1992, 70:3. 1993, 73:3, 10; 262:1, eff. April 1, 1993. 2003, 299:2, eff. April 1, 2003. 2005, 126:1, eff. April 1, 2006.

Section 72:35

72:35 Tax Credit for Service-Connected Total Disability. –

I. Any person who has been honorably discharged or an officer honorably separated from the military service of the United States and who has total and permanent service-connected disability, or who is a double amputee or paraplegic because of service-connected injury, or the surviving spouse of such a person, shall receive a standard yearly tax credit in the amount of \$700 of property taxes on the person's residential property.

I-a. The optional tax credit for service-connected total disability, upon adoption by a city or town pursuant to RSA 72:27-a, shall be an amount from \$701 up to \$2,000. The optional tax credit for service-connected total disability shall replace the standard tax credit in its entirety and shall not be in addition thereto.

I-b. Either the standard tax credit for service-connected total disability or the optional tax credit for service-connected total disability shall be subtracted each year from the property tax on the person's residential property.

II. The standard or optional tax credit under this section may be applied only to property which is occupied as the principal place of abode by the disabled person or the surviving spouse. The tax credit may be applied to any land or buildings appurtenant to the residence or to manufactured housing if that is the principal place of abode.

III. (a) Any person applying for the standard or optional tax credit under this section shall furnish to the assessors or selectmen certification from the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs that the applicant is rated totally and permanently disabled from service connection. The assessors or selectmen shall accept such certification as conclusive on the question of disability unless they have specific contrary evidence and the applicant, or the applicant's representative, has had a reasonable opportunity to review and rebut that evidence. The applicant shall also be afforded a reasonable opportunity to submit additional evidence on the question of disability.

(b) Any decision to deny an application shall identify the evidence upon which the decision relied and shall be made within the time period provided by law.

(c) Any tax credit shall be divided evenly among the number of tax payments required annually by the town or city so that a portion of the tax credit shall apply to each tax payment to be made.

IV. [Deleted.]

Source. 1947, 240:1, par. 29-f. RSA 72:35. 1955, 283:1. 1963, 174:1. 1967, 219:6. 1969, 54:1. 1973, 553:1. 1975, 277:2. 1983, 95:1. 1989, 64:3. 1991, 70:17. 1993, 73:6, 7. 2000, 54:1, eff. June 16, 2000. 2003, 299:8, eff. April 1, 2003.

Section 72:37

72:37 Exemption for the Blind. – Every inhabitant who is legally blind as determined by the blind services program, bureau of vocational rehabilitation, department of education shall be exempt each year on the assessed value, for property tax purposes, of his or her residential real estate to the value of \$15,000, and a city or town may exempt any amount it may determine is appropriate to address significant increases in property values in accordance with the procedures in RSA 72:27-a. The term "residential real estate" as used in this section shall mean the same as defined in RSA 72:29. All applications made under this section shall be subject to the provisions of RSA 72:33 and RSA 72:34.

Source. 1935, 71:1. RL 73:30. RSA 72:37. 1957, 299:1. 1967, 419:1. 1973, 285:1; 538:1. 1975, 198:1. 1979, 100:1. 1985, 329:1. 1991, 70:21. 1992, 215:1. 1994, 379:2, eff. June 9, 1994. 2003, 299:10, eff. April 1, 2003.

Section 72:37-b

72:37-b Exemption for the Disabled. –

I. Upon its adoption by a city or town as provided in RSA 72:27-a, any person who is eligible under Title II or Title XVI of the federal Social Security Act for benefits to the disabled shall receive a yearly exemption in an amount to be chosen by the town or city.

I-a. Upon the adoption of this paragraph by a city or town as provided in RSA 72:27-a, a person who is eligible under Title II or Title XVI of the federal Social Security Act on his or her sixty-fifth birthday shall remain eligible for a yearly exemption either in the amount of the exemption applicable under paragraph I or the amount of the elderly exemption granted to the person under RSA 72:39-b, whichever is greater.

I-b. Upon the adoption of this paragraph by a city or town as provided in RSA 72:27-a, any person who at any time previously was eligible under Title II or Title XVI of the federal Social Security Act for benefits to the disabled, but who is no longer eligible for such federal benefits due to reasons other than the status of that person's disability, shall be eligible for the exemption under paragraph I or I-a, or both as may be applicable, provided that the person submits an affidavit from a physician licensed in New Hampshire that attests to the fact that the person continues to meet the criteria for disability that are used under Title II or Title XVI of the federal Social Security Act.

II. The exemptions in paragraph I and I-a may be applied only to property which is occupied as the principal place of abode by the disabled person. The exemption may be applied to any land or buildings appurtenant to the residence or to manufactured housing if that is the principal place of abode. Nothing in this section shall preclude a qualified applicant from earning an income.

III. No exemption shall be allowed under paragraph I or I-a unless the person applying for an exemption:

(a) Had, in the calendar year preceding said April 1, a net income from all sources, or if married, a combined net income from all sources, of not more than the respective amount determined by the city or town for purposes of paragraph I or I-a. Under no circumstances shall the amount determined by the city or town be less than \$13,400 for a single person or \$20,400 for married persons. The net income shall be determined by deducting from all moneys received, from any source including social security or pension payments, the amount of any of the following or the sum thereof:

- (1) Life insurance paid on the death of an insured.
- (2) Expenses and costs incurred in the course of conducting a business enterprise.
- (3) Proceeds from the sale of assets.

(b) Owns net assets not in excess of the amount determined by the city or town for purposes of paragraph I, excluding the value of the person's actual residence and the land upon which it is located

up to the greater of 2 acres or the minimum single family residential lot size specified in the local zoning ordinance. The amount determined by the city or town shall not be less than \$35,000 or, if married, combined net assets in such greater amount as may be determined by the town or city. "Net assets" means the value of all assets, tangible and intangible, minus the value of any good faith encumbrances. "Residence" means the housing unit, and related structures such as an unattached garage or woodshed, which is the person's principal home, and which the person in good faith regards as home to the exclusion of any other places where the person may temporarily live. "Residence" shall exclude attached dwelling units and unattached structures used or intended for commercial or other nonresidential purposes.

(c) Has been a New Hampshire resident for at least 5 years.

IV. Additional requirements for an exemption under paragraph I or I-a shall be that the property is:

(a) Owned by the resident;

(b) Owned by a resident jointly or in common with the resident's spouse, either of whom meets the requirements for the exemption claimed;

(c) Owned by a resident jointly or in common with a person not the resident's spouse, if the resident meets the applicable requirements for the exemption claimed; or

(d) Owned by a resident, or the resident's spouse, either of whom meets the requirements for the exemption claimed, and when they have been married to each other for at least 5 consecutive years.

Source. 1993, 212:1, eff. April 1, 1993. 1997, 87:1, eff. Aug. 2, 1997. 2003, 299:11, eff. April 1, 2003. 2004, 238:2, eff. June 15, 2004. 2008, 307:1, eff. Apr. 1, 2008.

Section 72:38-b

72:38-b Exemption for Deaf or Severely Hearing Impaired Persons; Procedure for Adoption. –

I. Any deaf person or person with severe hearing impairment shall be exempt each year on the assessed value, for property tax purposes, of his or her residential real estate to the value of \$15,000, and a city or town may exempt any amount it may determine is appropriate to address significant increases in property values in accordance with the procedures in this section. For residential real estate owned by the spouse of an eligible person, the exemption shall be allowed if they have been married for at least 5 years. The term "residential real estate" as used in this section shall mean the same as defined in RSA 72:29. All applications made under this section shall be subject to the provisions of RSA 72:33 and RSA 72:34.

II. The exemption in paragraph I applies only to property which is occupied as the principal place of abode by the eligible deaf person or person with severe hearing impairment. For purposes of this section, "deaf person or person with severe hearing impairment" means a person who has a 71 Db hearing average hearing loss or greater in the better ear as determined by a licensed audiologist or qualified otolaryngologist, who may rely on a visual means of communication, such as American Sign Language or speech recognition, and whose hearing is so impaired as to substantially limit the person from processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, so as to require the use of an interpreter or auxiliary aid. The exemption may be applied to any land or buildings appurtenant to the residence or to manufactured housing if that is the principal place of abode.

III. No exemption shall be allowed under paragraph I unless the person applying therefor:

(a) Has resided in this state for at least 5 consecutive years preceding April 1 in the year in which the exemption is claimed.

(b) Had in the calendar year preceding said April 1 a net income from all sources, or if married, a combined net income from all sources, of not more than the respective amount determined by the city or town for purposes of paragraph I. Under no circumstances shall the amount determined by the city or town be less than \$13,400 for a single person or \$20,400 for married persons. The net income shall

be determined by deducting from all moneys received, from any source including social security or pension payments, the amount of any of the following or the sum thereof:

- (1) Life insurance paid on the death of an insured.
- (2) Expenses and costs incurred in the course of conducting a business enterprise.
- (3) Proceeds from the sale of assets.

(c) Owns net assets not in excess of the amount determined by the city or town for purposes of paragraph I, excluding the value of the person's actual residence and the land upon which it is located up to the greater of 2 acres or the minimum single family residential lot size specified in the local zoning ordinance. The amount determined by the city or town shall not be less than \$35,000 or, if married, combined net assets in such greater amount as may be determined by the town or city. "Net assets" means the value of all assets, tangible and intangible, minus the value of any good faith encumbrances. "Residence" means the housing unit, and related structures such as an unattached garage or woodshed, which is the person's principal home, and which the person in good faith regards as home to the exclusion of any other places where the person may temporarily live. "Residence" shall exclude attached dwelling units and unattached structures used or intended for commercial or other nonresidential purposes.

IV. Additional requirements for an exemption under paragraph I shall be that the property is:

- (a) Owned by the resident;
- (b) Owned by a resident jointly or in common with the resident's spouse, either of whom meets the requirements for the exemption claimed;
- (c) Owned by a resident jointly or in common with a person not the resident's spouse, if the resident meets the applicable requirements for the exemption claimed;
- (d) Owned by a resident, or the resident's spouse, either of whom meets the requirements for the exemption claimed, and when they have been married to each other for at least 5 consecutive years.

V. In addition to the exemption provided in this section, a person may claim an exemption for improvements to assist persons who are deaf or severely hearing impaired as follows:

(a) Every owner of residential real estate upon which he or she resides, and to which he or she has made improvements for the purpose of assisting a person who is deaf or severely hearing impaired who also resides on such real estate, is each year entitled to an exemption from the assessed value, for property tax purposes, upon such residential real estate determined by deducting the value of such improvements from the assessed value of the residential real estate before determining the taxes upon such real estate.

(b) The exemption under this paragraph shall apply only in taxable years during which the person who is deaf or severely hearing impaired resided on the residential real estate for which the exemption is claimed on April 1 in any given year.

VI. Any town or city may adopt, modify, or rescind the provisions of this section in the manner provided in RSA 72:27-a.

VII. The vote shall specify the provisions of the exemptions provided in RSA 72:38-b. The exemption shall take effect in the tax year beginning April 1 following its adoption.

VIII. A municipality may rescind the exemptions provided by this section in the manner described in paragraph VI.

Source. 2003, 131:3, eff. April 1, 2003; 299:24, eff. April 1, 2003 at 12:01 a.m.

Section 72:23-c (BTLA Form A-9)

72:23-c Annual List. –

I. Every religious, educational and charitable organization, Grange, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, the American National Red Cross and any other national veterans association shall annually, on or before April 15, file a list of all real estate and personal property owned by them on which exemption from taxation is claimed, upon a form prescribed and provided by the board of tax and land appeals, with the selectmen or assessors of the place where such real estate and personal property are taxable. If any such organization or corporation shall willfully neglect or refuse to file such list upon request therefor, the selectmen may deny the exemption. If any organization, otherwise qualified to receive an exemption, shall satisfy the selectmen or assessors that they were prevented by accident, mistake or misfortune from filing an application on or before April 15, the officials may receive the application at a later date and grant an exemption thereunder for that year; but no such application shall be received or exemption granted after the local tax rate has been approved for that year.

II. City assessors, boards of selectmen, and other officials having power to act under the provisions of this chapter to grant or deny tax exemptions to religious, educational, and charitable organizations shall have the authority to request such materials concerning the organization seeking exemption including its organizational documents, nature of membership, functions, property and the nature of that property, and such other information as shall be reasonably required to make determinations of exemption of property under this chapter. Such information shall be provided within 30 days of a written request. Failure to provide information requested under this section shall result in a denial of exemption unless it is found that such requests were unreasonable.

Source. 1957, 202:4. 1961, 233:2. 1973, 544:8. 1983, 8:2. 1988, 1:3. 1991, 306:4. 1994, 378:2, eff. April 1, 1994.

Section 72:23 (BTLA Form A-12)

72:23 Real Estate and Personal Property Tax Exemption. –

VI. Every charitable organization or society, except those religious and educational organizations and societies whose real estate is exempt under the provisions of paragraphs III and IV, shall annually before June 1 file with the municipality in which the property is located upon a form prescribed and provided by the board of tax and land appeals a statement of its financial condition for the preceding fiscal year and such other information as may be necessary to establish its status and eligibility for tax exemption.

PART Cub 304 ASSESSMENT OF OPEN SPACE LAND

Cub 304.01 Acreage Requirement.

(a) "Value-added agricultural products" means, for the purposes of this section, products or materials grown on farm land, and processed beyond their natural state as harvested, for market or sale.

(b) Open space land shall consist of:

- (1) A tract of farm land, forest land or unproductive land totaling 10 or more acres;
- (2) A tract of any combination of farm land, forest land or unproductive land, which totals 10 or more acres;
- (3) A tract of undeveloped land of any size, actively devoted to the growing of agricultural or horticultural crops with an annual gross income from the sale of crops normally produced thereon totaling at least \$2,500, in accordance with Cub 304.16 and Cub 304.17, below;
- (4) A certified tree farm of any size; or
- (5) A tract of unimproved wetland of any size.

(c) All land qualifying for current use assessment under Cub 304.01(b)(3), above, shall, be required to show \$2,500 of annual gross income from the sale of crops normally produced thereon.

(d) Land qualified under this section in tax years prior to 1993 may stay in current use even though the annual gross value of \$2,500 came from the sale of value-added agricultural products marketed from the land, provided that such land owners continue to produce such products that qualified the land for current use assessment.

Cub 304.02 Farm Land.

(a) Farm land shall be a tract or tracts of undeveloped land, devoted to, or capable of, the production of agricultural or horticultural crops including the following:

- (1) Forage;
- (2) Grains;
- (3) Fruit;
- (4) Vegetables;
- (5) Herbs;
- (6) Plantation christmas trees;
- (7) Nursery stock;
- (8) Sod;
- (9) Floral products;
- (10) Pasturage;
- (11) Fiber;
- (12) Oilseeds; or

(13) Short rotation tree fiber farming.

(b) Land containing roads constructed in support of agricultural or horticultural activities, as defined in RSA 21:34-a, shall remain in current use.

(c) Land containing roads to provide access to non-agricultural or non-horticultural structures or residences shall not remain in current use.

Cub 304.03 Assessment Ranges for Farm Land. The assessment ranges for farm land shall be \$25 to \$425 per acre.

Cub 304.04 Use of the Soil Potential Index (SPI).

(a) A landowner may require the local assessing officials to use the most recent SPI in determining the assessed value of a tract of land by providing:

- (1) A single SPI for the entire tract of contiguous parcels of farm land; or
- (2) A separate SPI for each separate parcel of farmland.

(b) When a landowner provides the SPI, the local assessing officials shall use the SPI to determine the assessed value of that tract of land as follows:

- (1) The low end shall be subtracted from the high end of the assessment range from Cub 304.03 above;
- (2) The difference derived from (1) above shall be multiplied by the SPI provided by the land owner;
- (3) The dollar amount of the low end of the range from Cub 304.03, above, shall be added to the product derived from (2) above;

(c) The assessed value of farm land shall be equalized by multiplying the assessment by the municipality's most recent department of revenue administration median equalization ratio in accordance with RSA 79-A:5, I.

Cub 304.05 Forest Land.

(a) For purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

- (1) "Class" as referenced in RSA 79-A:2, V, means land enrolled in current use as forest land;
- (2) "Grade" as referenced in RSA 79-A:2, V, means land having a physical geography affecting timber harvesting costs by the presence or absence of the following:
 - a. Steep slopes;
 - b. The presence of boulders and rock outcrops;
 - c. Ravines;
 - d. Wetland or bodies of water; or
 - e. Any other physical qualifications;
- (3) "Location" as referenced in RSA 79-A:2, V, means characteristics affecting accessibility to the land, by the presence or absence of the following:
 - a. Legal restrictions to access;

- b. Abutting a maintained public highway; or
- c. Any other characteristics affecting accessibility;

(4) "Site quality" means the capacity of a parcel of land to produce wood, including factors that affect management, as follows:

- a. The quality of the soil;
- b. The climate and elevation;
- c. Physical geography; or
- d. Any other factors that would affect the management of the land; and

(5) "Type", as referenced in RSA 79-A:2, V, means the mix of tree species, as listed in Cub 304.03(e).

(b) Forest land shall be one of the following:

(1) A tract of undeveloped land actively devoted to, or capable of, growing trees of any age including the production or enhancement of one the following:

- a. Forest products;
- b. Maple sap;
- c. Naturally seeded christmas trees; or
- d. Wildlife or wildlife habitat; or

(2) A certified tree farm.

(c) Land containing roads constructed in support of forest purposes or forest protection shall remain in current use.

(d) Forest land that has been subjected to clear cutting shall still qualify as forest land.

(e) Forest land shall be classified to a minimum of 10 acres in accordance with the majority of the type of trees growing on the land.

(f) Once the dominant forest type has been determined in (e) above, forest types of less than 10 acres shall be classified with the dominant forest type.

Cub 304.06 Forest Land Classifications.

(a) Forest land classifications shall be as follows:

(1) White pine forest stands in which white pine trees make up the majority of the stocking;

(2) Hardwood forest stands in which any combination of hardwood trees, as listed below, along with other less common hardwood species make up the majority of the stocking:

- a. Red oak;
- b. Sugar maple;
- c. Yellow birch; and
- d. White birch; or

(3) All other forest stands in which tree species not included in (1) and (2) above, make up the majority of the stocking.

(b) The assessed value of forest land shall be equalized by multiplying the assessment by the municipality's most recent department of revenue administration median equalization ratio in accordance with RSA 79-A:5, I.

Cub 304.07 Assessment Ranges for Forest Land Categories. The assessment ranges for forest land categories without documented stewardship shall be as follows:

- (a) The category of white pine shall be \$128 to \$192 per acre;
- (b) The category of hardwood shall be \$57 to \$86 per acre; and
- (c) The category of all other shall be \$86 to \$129 per acre.

Cub 304.08 Assessment Ranges for Forest Land Categories with Documented Stewardship. The assessment ranges for forest land categories with documented stewardship shall be as follows:

- (a) The category of white pine shall be \$86 to \$130 per acre;
- (b) The category of hardwood shall be \$20 to \$34 per acre; and
- (c) The category of all other shall be \$49 to \$74 per acre.

Cub 304.09 Documented Stewardship.

(a) Landowners applying for documented stewardship shall submit Form A-10 accompanied by the following documentation at the time of application for open space assessment, and periodically thereafter at intervals of 5 or more years:

- (1) A statement of past forestry accomplishments, including an explanation of deviations from the objectives of past plans submitted under this section;
- (2) An updated map as required under Cub 309.01(c)(1); and
- (3) One of the following:
 - a. A letter from the New Hampshire Tree Farm Committee confirming certified tree farm status;
 - b. A forest stewardship plan that includes:
 - 1. A statement of forest stewardship objectives;
 - 2. Current forest stand descriptions;
 - 3. Current management prescriptions that address the following:
 - (i) Timber;
 - (ii) Fish and wildlife habitat;
 - (iii) Soil;
 - (iv) Water quality;
 - (v) Recreational resources;

- (vi) Aesthetic values;
 - (vii) Cultural features;
 - (viii) Forest protection;
 - (ix) Wetlands; and
 - (x) Threatened and endangered species and unique natural communities;
4. A boundary maintenance schedule;
 5. An access development and road maintenance plan, if applicable; and
 6. The signature of:
 - (i) A New Hampshire licensed forester; or
 - (ii) A person exempted from licensure under RSA 310-A:98, II, if the person meets the qualifications for licensure in RSA 310-A:104; or
- c. A completed Form CU-12, "Summary of Forest Stewardship Plan for Current Use Assessment" as described in Cub 309.03, in lieu of Cub 304.09 (b) above.

Cub 304.10 Assessing Factors for Local Assessors for Forest Land and Forest Land with Documented Stewardship.

(a) The local assessors shall consider the class, type, grade, site quality and location, in accordance with the following factors when determining where within the forest land range of assessments a particular parcel of land is placed pursuant to RSA 79-A:2, V:

- (1) The land shall meet the definition of "class" of forest land in Cub 304.05 (a) (1);
- (2) The type of forest land shall be determined pursuant to Cub 304.05 (a) (5) and (e);
- (3) The assessed value shall increase as the grade has an effect to decrease the costs of timber harvesting, and the assessed value shall decrease as the grade has an effect to increase costs; and
- (4) The assessed value shall increase as the location has an effect to increase accessibility, and the assessed value shall decrease as the location has an effect to decrease accessibility;
- (5) The assessed value shall increase as site quality has an effect to increase the ability to produce wood; and
- (6) The assessed value shall decrease as site quality has an effect to decrease the ability to produce wood.

(b) The local assessors shall request an updated map as described in Cub 309.01(b)(1) periodically at intervals of 5 or more years.

Cub 304.11 Challenges to Forest Land Assessments.

(a) If a land owner challenges where, within the forest land assessment ranges, a parcel of forest land has been placed, either of the 2 following methods shall be used:

- (1) The land owner shall provide site quality, location and grade information to the local assessors to support an appeal of the assessment, indicating that:
 - a. The grade, as defined in Cub 304.05(a), (2), of the land has either a positive or negative

effect upon the costs of timber harvesting;

b. The effect upon the accessibility of the land due to location, as defined in Cub 304.05(a),(3), of the land has either a positive or negative effect upon the accessibility of the land; and

c. Site quality, as defined in Cub 304.05(a)(4), if the land has a positive or negative effect upon the capacity of the land to produce wood; or

(2) In lieu of (1), above, the land owner shall engage a forester to determine the site quality, location and grade of the land.

(b) When a land owner provides the information listed in Cub 304.11(a), above for a parcel of forest land, the local assessing officials shall consider that information in accordance with the following factors to determine the placement of that land within the forest land assessment ranges:

(1) The assessed value shall increase as site quality has an increased capacity to produce wood, and the assessed value shall decrease as site quality has a decreased capacity;

(2) The assessed value shall increase as the grade has an effect to decrease the costs of timber harvesting, and the assessed value shall decrease as the grade has an effect to increase costs; and

(3) The assessed value shall increase as the location has an effect to increase accessibility, and the assessed value shall decrease as the location has an effect to decrease accessibility.

Cub 304.12 Unproductive Land.

(a) Unproductive land, as defined in RSA 79-A:2, XIII, shall be one of the following:

(1) A tract of unimproved land that:

a. Has no structures;

b. By its nature is incapable of producing agricultural or forest crops, and

c. Is being left in its natural state without interference with the natural ecological process; or

(2) A tract of unimproved wetland, as defined in RSA 79-A:2, XIV, that:

a. By its nature is incapable of producing agricultural or forest crops; and

b. By reason of wetness is being left in its natural state.

(b) For wetland, assessing officials shall allow a buffer of up to 100 feet in depth provided that the land within the buffer is:

(1) Unimproved; and

(2) Is being left in its natural state without interference with the natural ecological processes.

Cub 304.13 Assessment Range for Unproductive Land. The assessment for unproductive land shall be \$20 per acre.

Cub 304.14 Assessment Range for Wetland. The assessment for wetland shall be \$20 per acre.

Cub 304.15 Unproductive Land. In accordance with RSA 79-A:5, I, the assessed value of unproductive land shall be equalized by multiplying the assessment by the municipality's most recent department of revenue administration median equalization ratio.

Cub 304.16 Land Having a Gross Income of \$2,500. To qualify under Cub 304.01(b)(3), the land owner shall demonstrate to the local assessing officials that during the previous year, at least \$2,500 gross income was earned from the sale of agricultural or horticultural crops grown on the land.

Cub 304.17 Open Space Assessment Classification. Land qualified for open space assessment under Cub 304.01(b)(3) shall be classified as follows:

(a) The acreage on which the income producing crop is actually grown shall be classified as farm land, pursuant to Cub 304; and

(b) Contiguous land not involved in the income producing activity shall be classified as farm land, forest land, or unproductive land, pursuant to Cub 304, regardless of acreage.

Town of Marlow

Docket No.: 18478-01RA

ORDER

The board held a hearing on June 7, 2001, pursuant to a show cause order, in order to receive evidence from the “Town” regarding its assessment practices pertaining to current use (“CU”) in the forest land classification. Attending and testifying at the hearing were the Town selectmen, Joseph N. Feuer, John A. Russell and Charles B. Strickland, and the Town counsel, Genienne A. Hockensmith, Esq. Also in attendance, as observers, were Robert Camp and Joanne Tramontozzi from the department of revenue administration (“DRA”).

The Town’s representatives characterized its CU assessment practices as a “good faith” effort to comply with relevant statutes and regulations using a “fair and objective” method. The Town also described these practices in some detail. The Town reviews each new CU application. If the taxpayer’s property has enough qualifying acres, the Town determines the “class” of CU land (farmland, forest land or unproductive) for the property. If forest land, then the “type” (white pine, hardwood and all other) is determined based upon the information submitted by the taxpayer.

The Town indicated it uniformly utilizes the upper limit of the assessment ranges for

each of the forest land categories. In other words, the Town assigns the highest value in each range, without considering site quality, location or grade characteristics that may distinguish each property in CU. The Town defended this process of uniformly assigning the highest values to each CU property in the forest land category because the Town believes to do otherwise would involve too much 'subjectivity' and excessive 'time and expense' on the part of the selectmen/assessors.

The Town's representatives indicated only two individuals have ever challenged this practice of assigning the highest value to each CU property. The Town argued that approximately 70% of the land area in the Town is in CU and the forest land is generally of high quality and is fairly homogeneous. The Town also stated its belief, which it apparently confirmed with DRA representatives, that 'many' towns follow a similar process in using the highest value in the range, rather than attempting to apply the entire range of values to the CU assessment process.

The Town requested that, if its approach is found to be invalid, the board provide some guidance regarding a practical way of administering the CU statutes and rules relative to forest land. The board's ruling and reasoning, as well as suggestions for the Town, are presented below.

Board's Rulings

The board rules the Town's uniform practice of using the high end value of the CU forest land assessment ranges, without making any distinctions or adjustments for the physical characteristics of the land, is not in accordance with applicable law and must be corrected. The

board orders the Town, beginning with tax year 2002, to reassess all CU forest land to comply with the applicable statute and the rules adopted by the Current Use Board (“CUB”). The Town shall notify the board in writing every six months, commencing September 1, 2001, as to the progress it has made in carrying out this ordered reassessment of CU forest land.

In the remainder of this Order, the board will review the constitutional, statutory and regulatory provisions that should guide the Town. Then, because requested to do so by the Town, the board will provide some practical suggestions for achieving the required outcome in a reasonable amount of ‘time and expense,’ while at the same time furthering the Town’s stated goals of objectivity and fairness.

Constitutional and Statutory Requirements

The Constitution and several tax statutes embody two distinct bases for assessing property taxes in New Hampshire: assessments proportional to market value; and assessments proportional to CU value. The first basis is governed by Pt. 2, Art. 5 of the Constitution (permitting general court to “impose and levy proportional and reasonable assessments, rates, and taxes, upon all the inhabitants of, and the residents within, said state; and upon all estates”) and the second basis by a more specific provision added in 1968, Pt. 2, Art. 5-B (permitting general court to “provide for the assessment of any class of real estate at valuations based upon the current use thereof”).

The first basis is reflected by statutes contained in RSA Chapter 75. Specifically, RSA 75:1 requires assessments on real estate to be proportional to market value (“full and true value in money as they would appraise the same in payment of a just debt”). Under this ad valorem

requirement, proportionality is a product of the market value of taxable real estate,” and the municipality’s level of assessment, and the cases have so held. In addition, “our constitution mandates that all taxpayers in a town be assessed at the same proportion of [market value].”

Public Service Co. of New Hampshire v. Town of Seabrook, 133 N.H. 365, 377 (1998); Appeal of City of Nashua, 138 N.H. 261, 265 (1994); Appeal of Andrews, 136 N.H. 61, 64 (1992); Amoskeag Manufacturing Co. v. Manchester, 70 N.H. 200, 204 (1899).

In contrast to this ad valorem approach, Pt. 2, Art. 5-B of the New Hampshire Constitution authorizes a second basis for property taxation based upon “current use” rather than market value. This provision enabled the general court to enact RSA Chapter 79-A in 1973 to provide for the assessment “of open space land based upon the income-producing capability of the land in its current use, and not its real estate market value.” See RSA 79-A:2, V. One clearly-stated purpose for this form of taxation is to help maintain and preserve “open space . . . the land, water, forest, agricultural and wildlife resources” of the state and to protect them from excessive development pressures due to higher tax assessments. See RSA 79-A:1.

For property qualifying for “current use” taxation, proportionality is achieved, not by market value determinations, but by adhering to the statute and CUB regulations, which prescribe both a range of values and the criteria which must be used to assign values for specific property within each range. RSA 79-A:3 and 79-A:4 create the CUB and authorize it to establish CU values and criteria on an annual basis. RSA 79-A:5, I, requires the selectmen to appraise open space land “at valuations based upon the current use values established by the [current use] board.” RSA 79-A:2, V, requires that “[t]his valuation shall be determined by the

assessor in accordance with the range of current use values established by the board in and accordance with the class, type, grade and location of land.”

CUB Requirements

With this constitutional and statutory background, the specific regulations governing CU assessments in the forest land category can be examined in more detail. Regulations promulgated by an administrative agency, such as the CUB, have the force of law and are “binding on the town” unless and until challenged by any town subject to those regulations. Blue Mountain Forest Assn. v. Town of Croydon, 119 N.H. 202, 204-05 (1979). As a result, the board will quote the relevant CUB regulations pertaining to “forest land” at some length:

Cub 304.03 FOREST LAND.

(a) For purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) “Class”, as referenced in RSA 79-A:2, V, means land enrolled in current use as forest land;

(2) “Grade”, as referenced in RSA 79-A:2, V, means land having a physical geography affecting timber harvesting costs by the presence or absence of the following:

- a. Steep slopes;
- b. The presence of boulders and rock outcrops;
- c. Ravines;
- d. Wetland or bodies of water; and
- e. Any other physical qualifications;

(3) “Location”, as referenced in RSA 79-A:2, V, means characteristics affecting accessibility to the land, by the presence or absence of the following:

- a. Legal restrictions to access;
- b. Abutting a maintained public highway; or
- c. Any other characteristics affecting accessibility;

(4) “Site quality”, means the capacity of a parcel of land to produce wood, including factors that affect management, as follows:

- a. The quality of the soil;
- b. The climate and elevation;
- c. Physical geography; and
- d. Any other factors that would affect the management of the land;

(5) “Type”, as referenced in RSA 79-A:2, V, means the mix of tree species, as listed in Cub 304.03(e).

Cub 304.03 (k) further provides: “the local assessors shall consider the class, type, grade and location when determining where within the forest land range of assessments a particular parcel of land is placed.” In other words, the regulations place the responsibility for considering these criteria squarely on the local assessors.¹

¹ Section 304.04(l) and (m) then provide:

“(l) If a land owners wishes to challenge where, within the forest land assessment ranges, a parcel of forest land has been placed, either of the 2 following methods shall be used:

(1) The land owner shall provide site quality, location and grade information to the local assessors to support an appeal of the assessment, indicating that:

a. The grade, as defined in Cub 304.03 (a), (2), of the land has a positive or negative effect upon the accessibility of the land; or

b. The location, as defined in Cub 304.03 (a), (3), of the land has a positive or negative effect upon the accessibility of the land; or

(2) In lieu of (1), above, the land owner shall engage a forester to determine the site quality, location and grade of the land.

(m) When a land owner provides the information listed in (1), above, for a parcel of forest land, the local assessing officials shall consider that information to determine the placement of that land within the forest land assessment ranges.”

It is eminently clear from the detail contained within the statutes and rules that for the constitutional requirement of proportionality to be met in the assessment of CU forest land, the selectmen must, as part of their assessing responsibilities, consider any affect of “type” (tree species), “grade” (physical geography), “location” (accessibility) and “site quality” (soil, climate, etc.) in determining the proper assessment. Cub 304.03 (l) clearly places this responsibility initially with the assessors to determine, as best they can, how each qualifying piece of land should be assessed within the CU assessment ranges.

To do otherwise, as the Town acknowledges it has done with respect to all forest land with its uniform ‘highest value’ policy, is a violation of the above statutes and CUB rules. The rules, of course, were promulgated to carry out the intent of the statute and are not extraneous to proper assessment practice at the town level. See Blue Mountain, supra, 119 N.H. at 204-05; accord, Foster v. Henniker, 132 N.H. 75, 82 (1989) (CUB “regulatory criteria did not modify the statute, but served to effectuate its purpose.”)

Insofar as CU forest land is concerned, the Town’s present uniform practice of imposing the highest assessment on each property, even if arguably easier to administer, may result, to the extent it disregards key forest land characteristics specified in the regulations, in a “systemic pattern of disproportionate taxation.” Cf. Sirrell v. State of New Hampshire, No. 2001-003 (May 3, 2001), __N.H.__, <http://www.state.nh.us/courts/supreme/opinions /0105/sirre087.htm>.

Notwithstanding these considerations, the board is also cognizant that the valuation differences between the low and high end of the forest land ranges are small relative to the overall magnitude of assessments the selectmen are required to undertake. Nonetheless,

approval of the Town's current practice would require the board to ignore the explicit requirements of the CUB regulations and the other authorities cited above. Consequently, the Town is ordered to change its assessment practices with respect to forest land in CU to consider and apply the criteria set forth above.

Suggestions for CU Forest Land Assessments

During the hearing, the Town requested that if the board were to require the Town to reassess its CU properties, some guidance be provided as to a practical, cost efficient way to do so. While the board is reluctant to mandate one specific approach over all others, because the Town can and should have discretion in how it complies with the law, the board is willing to propose what may be a useful approach for the Town's consideration. This approach attempts to satisfy the need to obtain factual information from taxpayers as to each CU property's grade, location and site quality in a manner that it is not overly burdensome to either the taxpayers or the Town selectmen/assessors.

When CUB 304.03 (a), (k) and (l) are considered together, it is clear CU assessments for forest land should reflect three key characteristics (grade, location and site quality) affecting the economic productivity of forest land, as well as its "type" and whether there is evidence of "documented stewardship." For example, to the extent slopes or ravines, accessibility to a public highway and soil quality, climate and elevation affect the ability to manage forest land for productive uses, these factors should be considered in determining where within the value range the selectmen should place the forest land in CU assessment.

The board suggests one practical method is to utilize a matrix to gather information from taxpayers with CU forest land. The board is aware of at least one other municipality that employs a matrix approach to obtain information for CU assessments. Appendix A is an example of how a matrix could be used by the Town to obtain better information about the forest land it is obligated to assess within the value ranges, using the criteria specified in the CUB regulations. The Town may also consider requesting from each taxpayer with land in CU further information in the form of a county soil map and/or topographical map depicting the property. Scaling the land characteristics (good, average and poor) as 2, 1 and 0, with respect to each criterion, provides a relatively simple arithmetic basis for determining assessments within the CUB ranges, instead of always using the highest value.²

This approach solicits voluntary information initially from taxpayers. If the selectmen receive inadequate or faulty responses, or if the taxpayer fails to respond in a timely fashion, then the selectmen can take whatever additional steps may be necessary to obtain adequate

² For example, if the forest land type is “white pine” without “documented stewardship” (CUB range: \$112 to \$170 per acre in 2001) and the grade, location and site quality indications are average, poor and good, respectively, the calculated scale would be 1 for grade, 0 for location, and 2 for site quality, for a total of 3 out of a maximum possible of 6, or 50%. 50% of the difference (\$58) between \$112 and \$170 is \$29 which, when added to the base of \$112, arrives at an assessment of \$141 per acre [$.50 \times (170-112) + 112 = 141$] for forest land with these

information or, on their own, determine or adjust where within the assessment range to place the forest land using other acceptable methods and information sources. Lack of response from a taxpayer does not relieve the selectmen of their initial obligation to assess the property as best

they can based on available public information. See Appeal of Gillin, 132 N.H. 311 (1989) (lack of cooperation on the part of a taxpayer should not be seen as a basis for punitive assessment).

specific attributes.

Finally, the board has noted the testimony of the selectmen and representatives of the DRA which asserts the Town's CU assessing practices are similar to practices in certain other municipalities. If so, the board suggests the DRA, under the general supervisory authority contained in RSA 21-J:3, V,³ ensure proper compliance with this aspect of CU assessment throughout the state. Further, the CUB may wish to consider whether more detailed rules might be appropriate to regulate these aspects of the assessment process.

SO ORDERED.

BOARD OF TAX AND LAND APPEALS

Paul B. Franklin, Chairman

Michele E. LeBrun, Member

Douglas S. Ricard, Member

³ This statute provides: “[T]he commissioner of the department of revenue administration, . . . shall . . . V. [e]xercise general supervision over the administration of the assessment and taxation laws of the state and over all assessing officers in the performance of their duties, except the board of tax and land appeals, to the end that all assessments of property be made in compliance with the laws of the state.”

Albert F. Shamash, Esq., Member

Certification

I hereby certify that copies of the within Order have this date been mailed, postage prepaid, to: David and Linda Kinson, Taxpayers; Genienne A. Hockensmith, Esq., counsel for the Town; Chairman, Selectmen of Marlow; and Guy Petell, Director, Property Appraisal Division, Department of Revenue Administration.

Date: July 30, 2001

Lisa M. Moquin, Clerk

APPENDIX A

Property Owner _____

Address _____

Town records indicate you have the following parcels that are partially or fully assessed in FOREST LAND current use category. To assist the selectmen in determining where in the current use forest land assessment range each particular parcel should be assessed, please circle your best estimate of the “grade”, “location”, and “site quality” for each parcel in the grid below. Also, please attach a photocopy of a topographical map and/or soils map with the outline of your parcel(s) indicated on the maps.

Factors affecting “grade”, “location”, and “site quality” are specified in current use rule CUB 304.03 as follows:

Grade: (a) Steep slopes; (b) The presence of boulders and rock outcrops; (c) Ravines; (d) Wetland or bodies of water; and (e) Any other physical qualifications	Location: (a) Legal restrictions to access; (b) Abutting a maintained public highway, or (c) Any other factor affecting accessibility	Site Quality: (a) The quality of the soil; (b) The climate and elevation; (c) Physical geography; and (d) Any other factors that would affect the management of the land
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Parcel Location & Number of Acres	Characteristics of Land			
	Grade Location Site Quality	Good Good Good	Average Average Average	Poor Poor Poor
	Grade Location Site Quality	Good Good Good	Average Average Average	Poor Poor Poor
	Grade Location Site Quality	Good Good Good	Average Average Average	Poor Poor Poor
	Grade Location Site Quality	Good Good Good	Average Average Average	Poor Poor Poor
	Grade Location Site Quality	Good Good Good	Average Average Average	Poor Poor Poor

Property Owner’s Signature _____

Date _____

Town of Stoddard

Docket No.: 18362-00RA

ORDER FOR REASSESSMENT

On September 7, 2000, a petition was filed with the board by the department of revenue administration (ADRA@), pursuant to RSA 21-J:3, XXV, requesting the board order a reassessment in the Town of Stoddard (ATown@). On July 23, 2001, a public hearing was held, pursuant to the board's June 22, 2001 order, to receive testimony and evidence to determine if the board should order a reassessment pursuant to its authority in RSA 71-B:16, III.

The DRA argued all the criteria set forth in RSA 71-B:16-a warrant ordering a reassessment for 2003. The Town has not had a complete reassessment since 1990; the coefficients of dispersion in the last three years exceed 20%; and the Town has no immediate plans for a reassessment, according to the DRA.

The Town, however, stated it recognized the need for a reassessment and had taken some preliminary steps to accomplish that task. At the March 2000 town meeting, \$20,000 was set aside for a town-wide revaluation. However, the Town did not raise any money in 2001 pending the outcome of this appeal so it might know the required timelines for completion of the revaluation. The Town has investigated the cost of doing both an update and a manual-card reassessment, but has not proceeded due to the filing of the DRA's September 7, 2000 petition.

The Town also testified it was in the process of updating its tax maps and these maps will be available prior to the completion of the town-wide revaluation.

Right to Equitable Assessment

The right to equitable assessment and taxation is guaranteed not only by statute (see RSA ch. 75) but, even more importantly, by the New Hampshire Constitution. N.H. CONST. Pt. 1, Art. 12th and Pt. 2, Art. 5th and 6th. "In this State probably no constitutional principle is better understood than that the taxation of property requires a proportional valuation and a uniform rate." Opinion of the Justices, 81 N.H. 552, 558 (1923). Note is made of the following pertinent decisions of the supreme court, among others: Sirrell v. State of New Hampshire, No. 2001-003, __N.H.__, <http://www.state.nh.us/courts/supreme/opinions/0105/sirre087.htm> (May 3, 2001); Opinion of the Justices, (Reformed Public School Financing), No. 00-179, __N.H.__, <http://www.state.nh.us/courts/supreme/opinions/00012/ojschool.htm> (December 7, 2000); Claremont School District v. Governor, 142 N.H. 462, 471 (1997); Opinion of the Justices, 106 N.H. 202 (1965); Opinion of the Justices, 101 N.H. 549 (1958); Rollins v. City of Dover, 93 N.H. 448 (1945); Trustees of Phillips Exeter Academy v. Exeter, 92 N.H. 473 (1943); Town of Bow v. Farrand, 77 N.H. 451 (1915); Amoskeag Mfg. Co. v. Manchester, 70 N.H. 336 (1900); Winnepiseogee Lake Cotton & Woolen Mfg. Co. v. Town of Gilford, 67 N.H. 517 (1896); State v. United States & Canada Express Company, 60 N.H. 219 (1880); Edes v. Boardman, 58 N.H. 580 (1879); Morrison v. City of Manchester, 58 N.H. 538 (1879); and Opinion of the Justices, 4 N.H. 565 (1829).

Board's Findings and Rulings

The board orders a complete reassessment to be effective for tax year 2003. The Town should consider obtaining a computer-assisted mass appraisal (ACAMA@) system instead of a manual card system, which will assist the Town in maintaining assessment equity after the revaluation is complete. Any future updates or revaluations should be easier and less expensive if an appropriate computerized system is employed.

RSA 71-B:16-a sets forth the criteria for the board to consider in determining the need for a reassessment. Without reiterating these criteria the board finds the following facts support an order for reassessment.

The last and only complete reassessment was conducted in 1990. The Town has not updated its tax maps recently but has plans to do so prior to the town-wide reassessment. The DRA reported the coefficients of dispersion in the Town for the past three years were 27.80 in 1998, 27.13 in 1999 and 21.39 in 2000. These indicate there is significant inequity within the tax base and a need for the Town to initiate a complete reassessment of all taxable property. The Town has stated that subsequent to the last reassessment, the only changes made to any assessments were as a result of building permits issued to perform exterior work only. No building permits are required for interior renovations and, thus, a taxpayer could, ostensibly, completely renovate the interior of the dwelling with the Town unaware of the changes and the assessment would remain the same.

The selectmen are to be commended for recognizing the need for reassessment and having initiated some plans to raise the funds to perform one in the future. The financial commitment made to update the Town tax maps, as well as raising some of the funds necessary

to perform the revaluation, are steps in the right direction. However, the Town will now need to appropriate the balance of the funds to carry out the reassessment for 2003.

Further, the board is directing Mr. Stephan Hamilton, its tax review appraiser, to review, on an ongoing basis, the procedures and analysis that will be employed during the 2003 reassessment. The involvement of the board's review appraiser is not intended to watchdog the actions of the Town or to supplant the selectmen's assessing responsibilities. Rather, based on its experience with other ordered reassessments, the board believes that a more active participation by its review appraiser during the reassessment process will be beneficial to the Town, instead of waiting until the reassessment process is complete. In short, the board wants to ensure, as much as possible, that the Town receives the highest quality reassessment for the funds expended.

The Town shall, starting November 1, 2001, and every three months thereafter, notify the board in writing as to its progress in carrying out this reassessment order. The Town shall submit a copy to the board of an executed reassessment contract approved by the DRA as part of its notification of carrying out this ordered reassessment. Further, this reassessment must comply with applicable statutes and regulations, including Part 600 of the DRA's rules on reassessment.

Upon receipt of this order, the Town shall post a copy of this order in two public places in the Town.

Findings of Fact and Rulings of Law

The board responds to the DRA=s requests as follows.

In these responses, Aneither granted nor denied@ generally means one of the following:

- a. The request contained multiple requests for which a consistent response could not be given;
- b. The request contained words, especially adjectives or adverbs, that made the request so broad or specific that the request could not be granted or denied;
- c. The request contained matters not in evidence or not sufficiently supported to grant or deny;
- d. The request was irrelevant; or
- e. The request is specifically addressed in the decision.

Findings of Fact

1. Granted, with a change to the verbiage amending Astudy of the assessment equity@ to an equalization study.
2. Granted.
3. Granted.
4. Granted.
5. Granted, with AOfficials@ corrected to Officers.
6. Neither granted nor denied.
7. Granted.
8. Granted.
9. Granted.
10. Granted.

11. Granted.

12. Granted.

13. Granted.

14. Denied.

15. Denied.

16. Denied.

Rulings of Law

1. Neither granted nor denied.

2. Neither granted nor denied.

3. Denied.

4. Granted.

5. Granted.

6. Granted.

7. Neither granted nor denied.

8. Denied.

9. Granted.

10. Granted.

11. Granted.

12. Neither granted nor denied.

SO ORDERED.

BOARD OF TAX AND LAND APPEALS

Paul B. Franklin, Chairman

Douglas S. Ricard, Member

Albert F. Shamash, Esq., Member

Certification

I hereby certify that a copy of the foregoing order has been mailed this date, postage prepaid, to: Chairman, Board of Selectmen, Town of Stoddard; Mark Bennett, Esq., counsel for the DRA; and Guy Petell, Director of Property Appraisal, DRA.

Date: September 4, 2001

Lisa M. Moquin, Clerk