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**SPECIAL MEETING  
NOVEMBER 17, 2008**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on Monday, November 17, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Silas Deane Middle School.

Present: Councilors Cascio, Console, Forrest, Hemmann, Kotkin, Roberts, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Montinieri, and Chairperson Adil.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, Chandler Rose, Town Assessor, Dave Arnold and Monique Theroux both from Vision Appraisal and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Chairperson Adil began the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Special Presentation from Vision Appraisal, the Revaluation Company**

Chandler Rose, Assessor, Dave Arnold of Vision Appraisal and Monique Theroux of Vision Appraisal introduced themselves.

Chandler Rose, Assessor, said that Mr. Arnold would provide an update of where the Town is in the process including data on what has been seen so far with the Revaluation Project.

Dave Arnold, Vision Appraisal, said that he would like to discuss where Vision Appraisal is now, what is going to happen in the next few weeks, and how it got here. In the next two to three weeks, notices of assessment will be sent out to 10,000 property owners in Town. The notices will show the difference between the assessment in 2003 and the assessment in 2008, a five year period of time. About a year ago, data collectors started out in Wethersfield canvassing the neighborhoods. Out of the 10,000 properties in Town, Vision Appraisal inspected about 6,500 of them and inspected the exterior of many others. About 1,500 refused both inspections. About 2,000 residents responded to letters requesting inspection of their property. Another 2,000 did not respond. While the data collection was conducted over the last year, the appraisers were looking at the sales that were taking place over the previous year and looking at what the Market was doing. The Assessors are now going out and inspecting properties that sold within the last year in Town. Those properties will reflect an October 1<sup>st</sup> value. When the notices are sent out, the Town Council members will receive telephone calls. He said that he wants to educate the Town Council on what took place and how Vision Appraisal got to this point so that the Town Councilors have some answers to the residents' questions. The current assessment ratio that the State requires for October 1<sup>st</sup> is 70 percent. The prior ratio that the Town has now is 55 percent. So the Town has to go from 55 percent to 70 percent. There is going to be an increase in values that represents the change from 2003 to 2008. People are reading in the newspaper that the market is falling and the values are dropping. It may be true but the revaluation is taking the values from 2003 and not 2007.

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The other question that will be asked is what to do when the notices are received. Vision Appraisal will be holding hearings next month at the Community Center. There is a toll free number on the notice. Residents can call the number and set up an appointment to speak to someone at Vision Appraisal to discuss their assessment. There will be a second round of appeals, the Board of Assessment Appeals in February. The Board of Assessment Appeals applications can be picked up in the Assessor's Office and are available at the town's website. Both the Assessor's Office and Vision Appraisal have been working together. Chandler Rose has been working with an appraiser in the field almost daily. He is familiar with the process. The Vision Appraisal website has a lot of information on the appraisal process.

Councilor Roberts asked if the letters going out to residents had Vision Appraisal's website listed and for more information on the current assessment sales ratio.

Mr. Arnold said that the e-mail information will be on the letters going out to residents. He said that currently, if he took the old assessment and divided it by the sales price today it would be 55% based on the 2003 fair market value. In 2003, the assessment was 70 percent, too but the values have increased since 2003 but the assessments have stayed the same.

Councilor Kotkin stated the assessment was 70% in 2003 and currently it is 55%. Sale prices stayed the same so this is the inflationary value from 2003 and today, 2008. He wanted to know how people would find out this information and asked for a brief explanation as to the steps involved.

Mr. Arnold said residents will receive a legal notice with the old assessment and the new 2008 assessment. There will be a brief explanation of the assessment process and an 800 number to call. If they go to an informal meeting and still do not agree with the appraisal, they have the option of arranging an appointment with the Board of Assessment Appeals.

Councilor Kotkin asked if it includes why there would be a change in the assessment like an addition to the property.

Mr. Arnold said that it is not specific to the property. If an addition was made on the property, the adjustment would already be shown on the assessment. The explanation on the letter says that this is a requirement by State Statue, the fair market value as of 2008 and prior values represent the fair market value from October 1, 2003. All of the hearings that will be done by Vision Appraisal will be informal. Residents can look at the website and see the appraisals of their neighbors.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that in the 2003 revaluation there was a data base on-line that showed appraised values. He said that he remembers some inconsistencies with appraisals of similar houses on the same street with the same square footage. Will that even out now that actual walkthroughs have been done?

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Mr. Arnold said that he would hope that any incorrect data in 2003 would be fixed and that there would be consistencies.

Councilor Forrest said that it is important to explain to the public that when someone reads the evaluations of homes, the reevaluation is to make the tax system equitable for the amount of wealth that any taxpayer or homeowner may have. Just because the revaluation goes up by anywhere between 20 and 25 percent, it doesn't mean the taxes will go up that much. The mill rate will actually go down when assessments go up.

Mr. Arnold said that revaluations are not meant to raise or lower taxes. Over the years, properties get out of equity with some properties increasing faster than others. The State said that a revaluation needs to be done every five years. The purpose is to have all properties assessed at 70 percent.

Councilor Forrest said that certain properties change at different rates. He asked if he had a feel for the amount of change for the commercial/industrial sector versus the residential sector.

Mr. Arnold said that what he has seen preliminarily is that the sectors are changing at about the same rate, about 25 to 27 percent.

Councilor Forrest said that it appears the tax burden is the same then.

Mr. Arnold said yes.

Chairperson Adil asked what happens when a property owner doesn't let an appraiser in and therefore a proper evaluation can't be done. How is the assessment of that home made?

Mr. Arnold said that the appraiser has the historic information on the home. There are two types of refusal, one type when the person tells the appraiser to get off the property and the old measurements and interior information are used to go by with an estimate based on the other homes in the neighborhood. The other refusal is when someone doesn't let an appraiser into the house but allows them to measure the exterior of the property. Again, the stored information is used along with the best estimation given the other homes on the streets. If homeowners are unhappy with their assessment and go to a hearing, the property will be inspected then.

Chairperson Adil asked if the Board of Assessment Appeals was meeting in February or March.

Chandler Rose said that taxpayers have until February 20<sup>th</sup> to file an appeal and the meetings take place in March.

Chairperson Adil asked him to go through the appeals process one last time.

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Chandler Rose said that applications will be available in the Assessor's office and on-line at the town's website. The application needs to be filled out and dropped off prior to February 20, 2009. The meetings will take place in March. The person making the appeal will attend the session and will present the appeal. The Board then makes a decision.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager said that she wants to reiterate to the public that while the National housing market may be going down, the market in Connecticut and especially the Hartford area has been steady with sales. Pricing is not going down in the Hartford area and the State as a whole. Lastly, residents will take their letters and automatically multiply the assessment by the mill rate and goes through the roof. The mill rate will change. It will go down in a revaluation year. The appraisal is the fair market value of the property. Vision Appraisal's website can be accessed through the Town website. Residents can look at their own assessment as well as their neighbors.

Chairperson Adil thanked Vision Appraisal and the Assessor for presenting the information. He said that he would like to look for other ways to communicate this information to the public. He suggested an article in Wethersfield Life.

At 7:23 p.m., Chairperson Adil adjourned the meeting.

Dolores Sassano  
Town Clerk