

Real Property Tax Administration Committee

Minutes: October 19, 2016

Location: The Hotel at Vernon Downs (Oneida County)

In Attendance

Assessors

- Dennis Ketcham
- Todd Wiley
- Rochelle Harris
- Teri Ross
- Warren Wheeler
- Curt Schoeberl
- David Briggs

County Directors

- James Kirsch
- Daniel Martonis
- Suzette Booy
- Jay Franklin
- Steve Harris
- Eric Axelsen
- Tom Jackson

ORPTS

- Teresa Frank
- Joe Gerberg
- Tim Maher
- Susan Savage
- Geoff Gloak

Additional persons present

- Hannelore Smith

Facilitator: Alan Kresge

Recorder: Jim McGovern

Get Organized

Previous minutes approved

Action Items

- Commissioner Boone sent a response letter to the concerns raised in the letter sent to him. Not all received it so the letter will be distributed to the group members (**Action Item #1**)
- STAR recoupment letter will be distributed through email blast
- Received 5217 concerns have been forwarded to Kim Manley
- Update on Newsclips. These will be updated by noon everyday (**Action Item #2**)
- Laura Fallon received many suggestions and ideas regarding the website
- Update on building shell class codes (**Action Item #3**)
- Why is there a difference between the State website and FindLaw regarding Ag and Mkt sec. 305? (**Action Item #4**)
- There was a suggestion that legal presentations (such as at conferences) be tailored toward attendees needs with expanded explanations of new legislation. Joe agreed that this can be done.

Welcome

Susan welcomed the group and thanked the county directors for arranging the meeting.

It was announced that Geoff Gloak has returned to ORPTS to head up communications.

Restructuring of Intergovernmental Teams

Geoff discussed the restructuring of intergovernmental teams

- A subgroup held three conference calls regarding the review of all teams- RPS Governance, RPTAC, Training, Equalization Project, Valuation, Property Class Codes, Public Education and Sales Processing. There would be one charter for RPTAC vs. individual team charters.
- It was recommended that all teams except for RPS Governance become sub-teams of RPTAC. Each group will provide minutes and reports for RPTAC meetings. There was discussion on that RPTAC needs to provide team oversight.
- It was recommended to have the Equalization Issues and Sales Processing committees meet as needed.

Restructuring of Intergovernmental Teams (continued)

It was brought up that some areas of the State have no input into market trending. Tim asked for specifics because that is not how the process is supposed to operate. Assessors will provide the names of munis left out of market trending input (**Action Item #5**).

There was also discussion on the need for putting minutes behind the Assessment Community. Many report account issues with passwords. ORPTS will check with IT on password expiration requirements. (**Action Item #7**)

Communication

Changes have been made to STAR Credit registration per suggestions made regarding the STAR Code and Prior Owner Name fields

There was discussion on whether palm cards are still necessary in light of the FAQ sheet being available.

County Directors suggested that updates to the Legislative Status page be announced as they are for the Legal Cases page

Warren brought up that some fill in forms lack enough space in the fields. He will email Geoff a list.

It was suggested that the email blasts be formatted for printing and also that the formatting of the website for mobile be updated.

There was a suggestion that announcements from ORPTS be on department letterhead to make them look official.

ORPTS announced that instructions for the late ESTAR hardship application process are on the STAR Local Officials page and that the STAR recoupment letter has been shared.

Warren stated that people are pleased with the direction of the new communication efforts.

STAR Credit

Tim Maher presented on the STAR Credit.

STAR Credit (continued)

It was announced that 45,000 checks have been sent out. Some ESTAR recipients received checks for Basic STAR amounts. Those persons have been contacted, will be sent letters, and will receive a second check for the difference. There was discussion on the topic. 1502 people were affected and there was no geographic cluster of affected taxpayers. The problem has been identified and will not reoccur next year. The Assessors stated that they should have been sent lists of their affected tax payers.

It was asked if people who used the new hardship extension were checked for income eligibility. The answer is yes.

The issue of the fairness of who gets the credit when there is a sale of the property was raised. It was responded that the law states that the taxpayer receives the credit. Attorneys will have to take this into consideration during the closing process.

It was suggested that the STAR team should meet in person vs. conference call

It was asked if mobile home/co-op checks had been sent out yet. They have not, but expect to go out soon. There is no specific target date. It was brought up that some mobile home park owners are billing residents for taxes.

Property Tax Freeze/Relief

Tim Maher presented.

The Freeze program is in its third year and represents all taxes in this check except for school. The school tax portion of the program is complete.

The Relief program is in its first year and includes only school taxes. It is a fixed amount this year: \$185 for upstate and \$130 for the downstate MTA district. Next year the amount is based upon income eligibility.

RPS V4/V5

Tim Maher presented.

There was a June meeting of RPS Governance. The group charter has expired but the group believes it should continue. A new charter has been drafted and tweaked to include V5. The number of ORPTS members has been increased to 6 and the IT members reduced to 2. It has been signed by County Directors and Assessors and is waiting for the signature of IT Directors.

RPS V4/V5 (continued)

V5 bids are being reviewed. Vendor should be selected by November 3 with a date of Feb. 1, 2017 for contracts to be signed. The goal is to have a product by Fall of 2018. It was asked if a change to pricing is foreseen. It was responded that this has not been discussed.

Testing continues on Windows 10. An update on testing will be reported (**Action Item #7**)

Suggestions were discussed. Issues can be sent directly to Mike Griffen.

- When updating owner addresses, it no longer asks to update all owners with the same address
- Would like a new build. Currently on Build 2013 and there are just too many patches.

RFI Appraisal Assistance FVM

Tim Maher presented.

A request for information for appraisal work was issued. Four responses were received. They included information but were unclear on pricing. A discussion followed and it was asked if the RFI was for specific valuations. The response was that it was for all types of appraisal.

Valuation Assistance-Solar/Broadband

Todd Wiley and Jay Franklin presented.

There was a discussion on the fact that solar farms are becoming a widespread issue. It was suggested that perhaps the State could provide valuation assistance like for public utilities.

There was also discussion on steel poles being erected in the public right of way by a company for wireless signal transmission. The issue is of taxability and if it is special franchise. ORPTS asked that it be included in the special franchise report and it will be looked at to make a determination. Teri Ross asked to have that decision announced once it's made

The Valuation Team will look at valuation guidelines for solar farms at its next meeting on November 16.

Succession Planning For Assessors

Todd Wiley presented.

Succession Planning For Assessors (continued)

It was discussed that it is time to start planning for a new crop of Assessors to replace the wave of retirements that is on the horizon and to assure local governments that there will be adequate replacements available. Assessors asked if ORPTS would consider sending communications to local governments reminding them of the importance of funding assessor offices properly and that they should promote and groom people for the position.

There was also discussion on suggestion on how to get people into the profession. Ideas such as internships, more training, utilizing candidates for Assessor, and community college programs were discussed. There was also discussion on having Training Governance examine qualifications to determine if they are too strict. Additionally, there was discussion on more incentives for coordinated assessment programs.

Title 6 Accommodation

Jay Franklin presented.

There was discussion over the responsibilities of local Assessors in providing forms and materials in different languages to be in compliance with LEP (Limited English Proficiency) plan requirements under the Civil Rights Act. It was asked if locals had authority to translate state forms on their own. Joe responded that the technical answer is that the prescribed forms are supposed to be used. There was further discussion on the use of translation services to meet the requirements.

Additional Items

Suzette raised the issue that it has been heard that there will be changes coming soon regarding the methods of contacting ORPTS personnel. It was responded that the call center is now being utilized for the public, but assessors and county directors continue to have the ability to contact staff directly.

A letter from Roger Tibbetts was read. The letter contained an offer regarding having the IAO provide assistance with basic assessor training at a cost. This would help with a perceived problem with training availability. Susan responded that the offer would be taken back to ORPTS and given consideration.

Wrap Up

Next meeting is February 1 at The Indigo Hotel in Colonie.