

PUBLIC HEARING of the Town Council held Wednesday, May 25, 2005 at 7:00 P.M. in the Council Chamber, Town Building, Harrisville for and within the Town of Burrillville.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Council President Wallace F. Lees; Councilors Jacqueline Zahn, Councilors Nancy F. Binns, Margaret L. Dudley, Ronald E. Faford and William E. Gonyea.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilor William A. Andrews was excused due to a work commitment.

Relative to a request from Kevin Bliss of Crystal Lake Golf Club to consider granting an exemption or a stabilized amount of taxes, in accordance with Sec. 25-42. Exemption or stabilization on qualifying manufacturing or commercial property, of the ordinances of the Town of Burrillville, 2004 revision.

NOTES:

The above was duly advertised in the Legal Section of the Woonsocket Call on Friday, May 13, 2005.

Councilor Margaret L. Dudley recused from discussion or voting on the request.

1. Comments from Kevin Bliss of Crystal Lake Golf Club

Kevin Bliss of Crystal Lake Golf Club explained the purpose of his request, which was to make his taxes affordable and stabilized for a period of time. Mr. Bliss said his taxes during FY2005 were about \$1,000 each week, with the golf course incomplete. Mr. Bliss discussed his experience in operating a golf course in Massachusetts and the difficulties in operating a new, seasonal business.

Mr. Bliss said that he had worked with the assessor, who had reviewed the appraisal, reviewed the assessed value of the “back land” and lowered the taxes by approximately \$10,000 annually for the 2006 season.

Mr. Bliss said that his request was to establish a tax amount over a period of time so that they could budget appropriately. Specifically, his request was to lock the 2006 tax rate for a four-year period. Mr. Bliss said that, during that period, the golf club would be completed and his residence would be built on the property. Subsequent to the four-year freeze, he requested a gradual, percentage increase for the remainder of the ten years allowed by the ordinance.

Additionally, Mr. Bliss said that he was working with other golf course owners to amend State law to allow for golf courses to be treated as open space, as in other states. This, too, would provide some tax

relief on the land, though not on the buildings.

These measures, he said, would help golf course operators afford to run their businesses.

2. Comments/Input/Recommendation by Administration (Town Solicitor, Town Manager).

Councilor Nancy F. Binns asked how many additional employees the golf course expected to hire after the course was complete. Mr. Bliss said five or six additional employees would be needed when the driving range was complete. He said that currently the course employed about 120 employees, with an annual payroll exceeding \$700,000.

Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, referenced his May 25, 2005 memo which outlined the situation and options that could be considered. Mr. Wood said that the Town ordinance provides for a business owner to petition the Town Council for an exemption or stabilization of taxes, that the administration had been working with Mr. Bliss over a two-year period to develop a proposal for the Town Council to consider, and that the Town Council could take the action it believes appropriate, based on the merits of this situation. Walter J. Kane, Town Solicitor, explained the reasons for and the provisions of the ordinance. Mr. Kane suggested that, after the public hearing, the Town Council should take this under advisement so that the ultimate

decision would be adopted in the form of a resolution.

Councilor Jacqueline Zahn requested that the manager review the various alternatives. Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, said that there were many alternatives and that three examples had been provided for the Council's consideration. The figures in the examples, he said, were not firm numbers but could be affected by changing tax rates and property values.

James R. Drew, Assessor, said that the appraisal for FY 2006 would be a reasonable baseline. The Council, he said, could decide upon a mechanism to provide tax relief, if they determined that would be appropriate. One alternative, he said, would be to freeze the assessed value for a period of time. Mr. Drew said that this was a reasonable request and that, while the appraised value is fair, he recognized that Crystal Lake Golf Club is in a unique situation because his competitors in Massachusetts and Connecticut are taxed differently by the laws of those states.

Councilor Jacqueline Zahn supported the type of business that a golf course brings to the town. She asked Mr. Wood to review the three examples that had been provided. Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, referred to three charts, which are on file with the record of the meeting. He explained the procedure and affect of each:

#1: The assessed value would be frozen and the tax amount would go

up or down, based on the tax rate. After the statistical revaluation, when property values generally rise and the tax rate falls accordingly, this scenario might cause the tax amount to be lower after the revaluation than it would be if the taxes were frozen at current levels.

#2: With the alternative that provides for a freeze of assessed value – normal increase in tax rate, there would be a stipulation that the tax amount could not be lower than the current, first-year amount. In this scenario, after the statistical revaluation the tax rate for the golf course would not go down. That is, the Town Council could freeze the tax rate at whatever amount it determined to be appropriate.

#3: The third alternative would freeze the taxes at the current rate, regardless of the change in value of the property. At the end of the time period set by resolution the tax rate would be adjusted, based on the assessed value and tax rate at that time.

Mr. Wood said that there are other alternatives but that these were three scenarios that the administration considered to be reasonable recommendations. Walter J. Kane, Town Solicitor, said that the Town Council could select the first example but include a provision that, in no event should the tax be less than it was the previous year as a result of a revaluation.

3. Proponents: None

4. Opponents: None

5. Town Council Members Comments/Input: The Town Council had no further comments or input.

6. VOTED to close the public hearing.

Motion by Councilor Jacqueline Zahn. Seconded by Councilor William E. Gonyea. The motion carried, five in favor, one recusal, one excused. Voting in favor of the motion were Council President Wallace F. Lees, Councilors Jacqueline Zahn, Nancy F. Binns, Ronald E. Faford and William E. Gonyea. Councilor Margaret L. Dudley recused. Councilor William A. Andrews was excused.

7. Consider and take action on a request from Kevin Bliss of Crystal Lake Golf Club to consider granting an exemption or a stabilized amount of taxes, in accordance with Sec. 25-42. Exemption or stabilization on qualifying manufacturing or commercial property, of the ordinances of the Town of Burrillville, 2004 revision.

Discussion: Councilor Jacqueline Zahn asked whether one alternative would better serve the Town than the others. Michael C. Wood, Town Manager, said that the difference in the amounts was not significant. Any of the alternatives could be managed administratively. There was a brief review of the scenarios discussed earlier.

Councilor Jacqueline Zahn supported a five-year program, allowing Crystal Lake to petition the Council for an extension at the end of that period.

In summary, the Town Council appeared to favor a proposal that would: freeze the assessed value, subject to the minimum tax being \$32,835, for a five-year period; that while all the land would be included, the proposed residential building would be excluded from the program; that there would be a stipulation that would provide for the taxes to be repaid to the Town if there were a change in the use of the property; and a provision relative to providing employment preference to town residents.

VOTED to direct the administration to prepare a resolution in accordance with the summary and to present the resolution to the Town Council for consideration at a future meeting.

Motion by Councilor Jacqueline Zahn. Seconded by Councilor Ronald E. Faford. The motion was unanimous by the six members present. Voting in favor of the motion were Council President Wallace F. Lees, Councilors Jacqueline Zahn, Nancy F. Binns, Margaret L. Dudley, Ronald E. Faford and William E. Gonyea. Councilor William A. Andrews was excused.

8. VOTED to adjourn at 7:30 P.M.

Motion by Councilor Jacqueline Zahn. Seconded by Councilor William E. Gonyea. The motion was unanimous by the six members present. Voting in favor of the motion were Council President Wallace F. Lees, Councilors Jacqueline Zahn, Nancy F. Binns, Margaret L. Dudley, Ronald E. Faford and William E. Gonyea. Councilor William A. Andrews was excused.

The hearing was taped. The tape is on file with the record of the meeting.

Louise R. Phaneuf

Town Clerk