

Board of Selectmen Sets Agenda Items for Special Town Meeting, Rescinds Resolution on Racism



The Board of Selectmen approved five items to be included on the agenda for the upcoming special Town Meeting. The meeting will be held in person on Tuesday, March 23 at 7 p.m. in the Samuel Staples Elementary School cafetorium.

Attendance will be limited based on restrictions set by the state in accordance with COVID-19 safety protocols. Town residents will also be able to watch the meeting live on Government Channel 79 and streaming online. First Selectman David Bindelglass asks members of the community who do not wish to speak at the meeting to please watch from home in order to allow all those who want to speak a chance to attend in person.

The board had considered holding the meeting virtually or a hybrid format. Based on experiences of other communities with similar virtual meetings and the increase in state gathering limits, the selectmen decided the best option is to hold the meeting in person. All items on the agenda will be adjourned to machine vote to be held on Tuesday, March 30. Items to be included on the special Town Meeting agenda are:

- Shall the Town of Easton approve the Tax Relief for the Elderly Ordinance as recommended by the 2021 Tax Relief for the Elderly Committee?
- Shall the Town of Easton appropriate the sum of \$49,770 to purchase body and dash cameras for the Easton Police Department as mandated by state law?

- Shall the Town of Easton approve an ordinance revision increasing the stipend for our volunteer fire fighters and EMS workers?
- Shall the Town of Easton join the Westport Weston Health District? ([Information and related videos](#))
- As an advisory question, shall the Town of Easton recommend that the town allocate \$249,400 to fund part of a multiuse walkway along Sport Hill Road, in addition to federal funding, as was vetted extensively at a design charrette in November 2019?

More information on these issues will be presented in the coming weeks, prior to the special Town Meeting.

Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis in Easton

The Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to rescind its resolution declaring racism a public health crisis in Easton, and will now allow voters to decide if the resolution is desired by the community.

The board initially approved the resolution at its meeting on August 20, 2020. You can [read the resolution online in the minutes](#) from that meeting.

Selectman Kristi Sogofsky moved to add the resolution to the agenda for the annual Town Meeting at the end of April. It will not be considered at the upcoming special Town Meeting in March because it does not have a budgetary impact.

Recording of Public Comment

The selectmen discussed how public comment is recorded in meeting minutes and in articles for the Courier written by Selectman Bob Lessler and Selectman Kristi Sogofsky. In terms of official meeting minutes, the board decided that a person's name and the

specific topic they addressed will be the only information listed. Those interested in reviewing the full comments can watch videos of the meeting posted online. For meeting recaps provided to the Courier, public comment will either be left out or follow the standard set for meeting minutes.

Other Actions

Other actions taken at the Board of Selectmen meeting on March 4 include:

- The board discussed beginning to reopen meetings to the public, possibly holding them in the Easton Library community room to allow for proper social distancing.
- The board accepted the resignation of Lise Fleurette from the Easton Diversity and Inclusion Task Force.
- The board appointed Logan Shedd to serve on the Pension and Employee Benefits Commission with a term ending January 2, 2022.

Tax Relief for the Elderly Committee to Review Existing Ordinance



A Tax Relief for the Elderly Committee has recently been formed by the Board of Selectmen to review the ordinance that governs the town's program for property tax

relief for Easton residents who are 65 years old or older and meet other eligibility requirements.

The committee is tasked with studying and investigating the Town's property tax relief program for seniors and reporting its findings to the Board of Finance. The committee will report on the fiscal effect the program has had on property tax revenues and will make any recommendations for any changes the committee feels need to be made to the ordinance.

The Town of Easton provides tax relief for qualifying seniors in two programs, the Tax Abatement program and the optional Tax Deferral program. The following is a summary of these two programs and their requirements as defined under the current ordinance. Some of these may change as a result of the ordinance review in progress.

Qualification Requirements:

- The applicant must be 65 as of Dec 31, 2020 (or a surviving spouse 60 or older).
- The property must be the applicant's principal residence.
- The applicant must have lived in the residence for at least five years.
- The combined income of all adults living in the residence must be less than \$85,000.
- Income is calculated using the Qualifying Household Income Worksheet.
- The combined assets of all adults living in the residence must be less than \$750,000.

Tax Abatement Program:

This program provides a credit against the applicant's real-estate property taxes. The credit is a percentage of last year's tax bill before any tax relief.

- The abatement percentage is calculated on a sliding scale based on income.

- The maximum abatement percentage is 46%

Tax Deferral Program (optional):

- This program allows the applicant to defer up to 75% of their remaining tax after all other tax relief benefits have been taken.
- The deferral continues until the house is sold, transferred or vacated or the taxpayer dies.
- Deferred taxes may be repaid without penalty.
- The deferral draws interest at the town's borrowing rate (typically less than 3%).
- The deferral is secured by a lien on the property.

Application Process:

- If you live in Easton and are 65 or over you should get a letter in March that contains a tax relief application form and information on how to apply. If you do not receive this letter by the end of March, call the Assessor's Office at 203-268-6291.
- You must schedule an appointment and apply in person at the Town Hall.
- If you are unable to appear at Town Hall in person due to physical limitations, an exception to this requirement can be made.
- You must bring all income documentation listed on the application's check-off list.
- Application must be made by May 15.

Note: Due to pandemic safety measures at Town Hall in person applications may not be possible. Other procedures for applying will be put in place.

A complete description of the program is contained in the *2018 Tax Relief for the Elderly Ordinance* which can be found on the committee's web page at:

<https://www.eastonct.gov/tax-relief-for-the-elderly-committee>.

The committee has no set schedule for meetings, but the agenda of each meeting is

announced in advance on the above link. Currently all our meetings are being held over the Zoom app. A link to the app is in each agenda. Questions or comments by the public at these zoom meetings are encouraged.

If you have any questions about the Senior Tax Relief program you can contact me by phone at 203-500-0635 or e-mail via a link on the committee's web page.