

**Trout Lake Community Council
Draft Minutes
July 2nd, 2008**

Members present

*hard to tell, the room was packed full.

Ken Belieu opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Ken introduced Van Vandenburg, and dismissed normal Community Council business.

Ken V. introduced his role as Assessor of Klickitat County (herein after referred to as KC). KC has been divided into 4 relevant sections; Ranges 10-11, 12-13, 14-15, and 16 to county line. These sections are on 4 year cycles for reassessments. Washington State's counties range from 1 to 4 year cycles. It is the intention of the KC to get on an annual cycle for reassessment.

Van interprets State Law and WACs, property taxes. He explained that what Trout Lake saw is a reassessment from Jan 1, 2004 on Jan 1, 2008. He uses sales data to determine values for properties. For the past 4 years, there have been over 1000 houses sold in the west end of KC. In 2004, the market was escalating, and Trout Lake was the leader in the county. Van described that the assessments from 2004 were bad, and did not represent the true market value.

The meeting was moved to the Gymnasium where there was more room for the audience, and resumed at 7:20 pm.

Van started his position in 2000, and has brought the assessment system up to speed from past and poor assessments. He explained they are using advanced computer programs to assess values.

His job is to assess properties at 100% of the market value, or the highest value. Recently, sales have been high. Records of sales are a commonly used tool to assess property values. Van then described the difference between Advolaram Appraisers (counties) vs Free Appraisers (private). He understood that our shock value was high, but the new property values found on the West end of KC are best and fair estimated values.

His task is to assess property values from the last 4 years, and he explained that this is what his data represents. He added that land values increase more so than house values, and they can estimate appreciation with computer programs.

Van then described his handouts (**copy is attached**). These are also available on the KC website.

Ken asked Van to explain upcoming property taxes.

Van explained that what TL property owners received is a property value, not a tax bill. Washington State operates on a rate based system, where there is X% per dollar. He further explained that KC is based on a budget system, and that estimating what property taxes will be is not available at this time. Later in the year, October for example, budgets are submitted to the county, and property values and budgets for the different programs of the county are put together, and property taxes are estimated at that time. Van explained that he only has portions of available data, and property taxes can't be estimated at this time. He stated that it is possible, from his experience that some property taxes will go down.

Ken asked to describe the appeal process.

Van explained that anyone can appeal. The process for appealing is to call his office, and his representatives will talk through the appeal. They will run through different models of assessments, and may come out with a different estimate than a homeowner previously received. A homeowner can go **to the Board**, and they will decide on your case. If a further appeal is needed, it goes to the Superior Court – and the judge's decision is final.

There are certain exemptions for senior citizens and disabled homeowners. Criteria include:

- 61 or older
- must reside in residence
- not own multiple properties
- must meet certain income requirements – scales of income vary

There is also an exemption for veterans with 100% disability

At this point in the meeting, the room was opened for questions.

Q1: Will windmills in the county lower property taxes?

A1: Yes, they have gone down in the past & they will continue to go down. Van then gave some examples.

Q2: In the overall picture of evaluating property taxes, what does this mean for the community? What happens if you can't sell your property?

A1: That is in the future, not now.

Q3: Community issues include societal/economic factors at state, including a community lawsuit.

A3: No answer

Q4: Is the county responsive to requests for an appeal, is there a timeframe issue?

A4: The backlog of phone calls is huge, and there is an extended 30 day period of time.

Van mentioned that all sales for the county are available on KC Assessors website.

Q5: Since the decline in the market from Labor Day until now, how did the county take that into consideration?

A5: Ken noticed no decline in the Trout Lake market. He followed by explaining trend market estimates.

Q6: Assessments in the area have doubled. How does it compare to White Salmon and Bingen?

A6: They are similar.

Q7: By 2010, are annual assessments a good way to go, are they applicable?

A7: Yes, absolutely. If market downturns, he will lower the value.

Van explained that the county has excellent computer systems for assessments.

Q8: Has the entire county been assessed?

A8: No, only the west end. Van explained the 4 sections of the county and how their assessments are completed in 4 year cycles.

Q9: I missed this one from Jackie Taylor – sorry (Carter)

A9: The appraisal is an opinion of value in a certain moment of time.

Q10: Look at land use in White Salmon vs Trout Lake. Does this play into assessments?

A10: No, he only looked at Trout Lake sales for assessing Trout Lake.

Q11: Do they consider zoning with land use values?

A11: No, this is only a planning department issue, but they do group together.

Q12: What about group appeals? The community has been struck with unrealistic assessments.

A12: You are on your own. Van asked if the community could effect how Assessors assess? – Maybe...

Q13: Can we reassess outside of the 4 year cycle?

A13: No, if you are on a cyclical cycle like KC, you cannot change. You would have to go to the State to change this.

Q14: Do you have to make an appointment?

A14: No, it is on a first come, first serve basis. You can however download the appeal form from the website and email it to the county.

Q15: On the senior citizen exemptions, is it based only on income and not land?

A15: Yes, exactly. If you qualify, your value is frozen. In a declining market, Ken wasn't sure about having values frozen. He would have to further investigate this.

Q16: Markets have gone up and down. Have there been assessments for a declining market?

A16: No, given his experience. Maybe in the future.

Q17: Does the county collect on percentage/ratio study?

A17: No. Van explained ratios. There are random appraisals which give a ratio of how far over or under an assessment is. Trout Lake was 60% or so low.

Q18: How are sale prices compared to the assessed value? How much is the total increase in value in the west end?

A18: About \$500 million with about 4700 property owners.

Q19: Are other land developments other than windmills included with tax assessments?

A19: Yes. There was a gas plant about four years ago.

Q20: Are areas clumped together for future assessments (White Salmon and Trout Lake)?

A20: No, Trout Lake is assessed on a neighborhood level.

Q21: Can property taxes raise 15 or more percent from last year?

A21: No, because of initiative 747, raises in property taxes are limited to 1% increase per year.

Q22: What about businesses/commercial industry in county?

A22: Cap rate was discussed.

Q23: Are mortgages deductible?

A23: No.

Q24: The annual assessment cycle is definitely coming?

A24: Yes. Van has to apply to the state. He believes by the year 2010 it will become implemented. He further explained initiative 747.

Q25: Are physical assessments on file?

A25: Yes, with documentation. He invited folks to come see for themselves.

Q26: Does the extra money go into the general fund?

A26: Yes and no – it goes into different accounts of KC. Nothing comes out of retirement accounts.

Q27: For individual property assessments – is anybody higher checking these?

A27: No, you can.

Q28: What about physical attachments to houses?

A28: Physical improvement exemption applications should be filled out prior to building. You can get an exemption for up to 3 consecutive years.

There were no further questions.

Copies of the handouts will be available at Bret's (Little Mt. Hardware) and on the KC website.

Ken made a call for donations to the council for covering paperwork and copies of the handouts.

Ken Belieu adjourned the meeting at 8:34

Carter Davis
Secretary