

MINUTES BOARD OF ABATEMENT

Tuesday, May 27, 2025, 7:00 pm
Brandon Town Hall
1 Conant Square, Brandon, VT

Present: Vice Chair Wendy Rowe Feldman, Brian Coolidge, Bud Coolidge, Cecil Reniche-Smith, Jeff Haylon, Doug Bailey, Todd Nielsen, John Peterson, Laura Peterson and Clerk Susan Gage

Taxpayers present: Chelsea Cioffredi and David Fifield

Wendy Rowe Feldman opened the meeting at 7 pm and the hearings began.

I) Take action on the following abatement requests:

SEWER ABATEMENT

7:00 pm Hearing – Roger Thompson, 453 Forest Dale Rd, Brandon, VT; Requesting abatement of Sewer under *24 V.S.A. § 1535(a)(10) sewer, water, utility, or service charges caused by circumstances that were difficult to foresee or outside of the person's control.*

Wendy Rowe Feldman ensured that no members of the board present had any conflicts of interest or ex parte communications. Board members questioned the fact that the taxpayer was not present. Susan Gage stated that their presence is not required for the hearing. Roger Thompson owes \$2,264.98 in utilities, and he was being brought to tax sale for a balance of \$1,741.24. These are base fees because no one's living there, so there's no usage. The board discussed why he hasn't disconnected from sewer and water, which he certainly could, to give up his capacity and avoid charges.

The board discussed tabling the discussion until Mr. Thompson could participate in the hearing but decided to phone him from the meeting to ask whether he had attempted to get the sewer capacity turned off, and if not why. The board also wondered if he had requested that the water be turned off at the property. Susan Gage left a message from Mr. Thompson and a callback number. The board closed the hearing but indicated that they would take additional testimony should Mr. Thompson return the phone call.

The hearing was closed at 7:13 pm.

TAX AND SEWER ABATEMENT

7:15 pm Hearing – Renee Barnes and Chelsea Cioffredi, 88 Pine Tree Dr, Brandon, VT; Requesting abatement of Taxes under *24 V.S.A. § 1535(a)(3) Taxes or charges of persons who are unable to pay their taxes, charges, interest, and/or collection fees.*

Wendy Rowe Feldman ensured there were no conflicts of interest or ex parte communications and gave the oath to Chelsea Cioffredi who resides in the mobile home under discussion. Ms. Cioffredi explained that she is a single mom and has had trouble keeping up with bills. She lost her job for a year and a half after COVID and is still catching up. She has caught up on utilities and rent in the last few months. Ms. Cioffredi also provided copies of recent payments to be entered into evidence, showing that she is getting caught up.

Ms. Cioffredi is not able to claim a homestead or file for a rebate because she doesn't own the mobile home. Ms. Cioffredi explained that her mother, Renee Barnes, purchased the trailer for her. Ms. Cioffredi has a bill of sale from her mother but has never been able to transfer it because she hasn't been able to pay the taxes off fully. Ms.

Cioffredi is requesting abatement due to financial hardship, and requests abatement, waiver of fees and penalties, or any assistance to help her catch up.

The hearing was closed on 7:29 pm

7:30 pm Hearing – David Fifield, 935 Union St, Brandon, VT; *24 V.S.A. § 1535(a)(3) Taxes or charges of persons who are unable to pay their taxes, charges, interest, and/or collection fees.*

Wendy Rowe Feldman opened the hearing at 7:30, assured that there were no conflicts of interest or exparte communications and swore in the taxpayer David Fifield. Mr. Fifield also furnished copies of his handwritten letter that he has since typed up. Mr. Fifield detailed in his letter to the board a series of health issues that kept him out of work for several years. He is better now and is hoping that he can get caught up with his taxes and utilities. It was noted that he did not file a homestead election nor a rebate for all the years he is in arrears. Mr. Fifield stated that we was not aware of that until recently.

Susan Gage stated that he is currently paying about 18% interest on his outstanding balance and would probably be better off borrowing the money to pay off the town. He acknowledged that he has equity in his home, but his income is still spotty. The board asked Mr. Fifield if he was able to stay on top of his expenses now that he is feeling well again. Mr. Fifield indicated that he believes he can find some work this summer. Up until his numerous illnesses, Mr. Fifield stayed on top of his municipal expenses.

Mr. Fifield currently owes \$34,440.56 in taxes and utilities. Mr. Fifield indicated that he has set up a payment plan with Jackie Savelle to remove his property from tax sale. Mr. Fifield is requesting abatement of principal, interest and penalties to help lower the levy on his home.

The hearing closed at 7:45 pm.

II) Adjournment

Following the public hearings, the board went into deliberative session to discuss the information and testimony received. The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm. The Board of Abatement is still in deliberative session until the decision is finalized. Clerk Gage will write up decisions and email to everyone for approval.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Gage, Clerk

Wendy Rowe Feldman, Vice Chair