

Town of Williston  
Board of Civil Authority  
Public Hearing: BCA Appeal of Listers Decision  
July 22, 6pm, via Zoom

2020

Members Present:     Andy Mikell                     Deb Beckett  
                          Terry Macaig                    Ginny Lyons  
                          Jim McCullough               Gordon St. Hilaire  
                          Ben Rose                           Sarah Mason

Others Present: Bill Hinman (Assessor), Harold Cort (Lister)

Appellant: Liam Murphy (MSK Attorneys) Erik Hoekstra, Myles Frenzel (Redstone)

- BCA Chair Andy Mikell opened the meeting at 6:03pm
- Lister and Appellant Oath given to Bill, Harold, Liam, Erik, Myles. /s/
- Harold Cort passes the rights to Bill Hinman to represent the listers testimony.
- Andy Mikell checks for conflict of interest or ex parte communication. None given.

Bill Hinman gives an introduction to the property's assessment. The original assessment was \$9,745,840 and was reduced to \$6,632,150 through the grievance process. A 20% discount was given on the building itself due to the COVID pandemic and how it may be affecting business.

Liam Murphy for the appellant states the appreciation they have of the changes by the listers and assessor, but are still in a pandemic that is having a particularly harsh impact on hospitality properties. He asks what a buyer would pay for this property in a fair market as of April 1<sup>st</sup> and states that the valuation is very difficult.

Erik Hoekstra, Principal, explains a bit about the hotel. It is a Home 2 Suites by Hilton and is an extended stay economy level brand. It is comparable to the Marriot Town Place Suites located just around the corner also in Williston. The audio became very unclear as Mr. Hoekstra talked about the difference in the robust economic times of 2019 versus where things are at now in 2020. \$6.6 million was fair in robust times but we are not there, but are looking for something in the neighborhood of 75% of \$6.6 million. The hospitality industry is running at 25% of what they would be as far as revenue is concerned and no one expects that to bounce back in the near future. It will take years for tourism and travel to recover. There is no revenue history so the hotel is ineligible for any state or federal grants.

Liam Murphy expands on the major shift in travel bookings and the ripple effects throughout the industry. Instead of being able to open on or around April 1, 2020, the hotel did not have its first guest until June, 2020 and continues to see 20-25% occupancy rate. Few bookings seen for the fall season. The fair market value is not where we are at and there is no history to base an appraisal on.

Bill Hinman refers the group to the article by HVS and what the experts expect for hotels in the future. Forecasted worst case scenario is a value decrease of 35%. It could more realistically or

more likely be a -27% value in the market. Listers/Assessors didn't want to reduce too far as we are in unchartered territory.

Ginny Lyons comments that the assessed value is assessed value even in these difficult times. This decision will also have effects on decisions made in the future. We need to sustain our own town services and need to tread lightly on both sides and might need a policy to help us through with other appeals that will come to us in the future.

Bill Hinman states that some changes and guidance need to come from the State level with statutory changes.

Jim McCullough asks if the income approach was used to come to the 20% reduction. Bill explains future forecasting and also a discounted cash flow analysis.

Andy Mikell wants to confirm with Bill that we are not locked into a 3-year period with this assessment if it is reduced. We do not have to wait for another town-wide reappraisal. Bill explains that the BCA decision is one year pending only and can be reviewed by him each year. Either party could revisit this next year.

Chair Andy Mikell explains that normally a three-person inspection team would convene to see the property and asks the appellant if they are willing to forego this particular piece. No objections from Erik Hoekstra.

The appellants leave the meeting and the board moves to deliberate.

Andy Mikell makes the motion to reduce the value by 25% to new appraised value of \$4,975,111 and is seconded by Deb Beckett.

The hearing is closed at 6:45pm.

Next agenda item is to discuss election day duties. Sarah Mason reviews absentee ballot mailing and numbers are record setting highs. Reviewed the election day jobs to be filled. Andy Mikell asks if we can use two tabulators and separate the write-ins as we are sorting. Jim McCullough raises concerns that the presort idea could lead to the ballot opener scanning the ballots more closely than usual. We don't want to leave our procedure open to challenge. Ben Rose states that if we can ensure we can do it with privacy and confidentiality, we could consider it.

Ben Rose makes a motion to adjourn and it seconded by Terry Macaig.

Meeting adjourned at 7pm.

Minutes submitted by:  
Sarah Mason  
Town Clerk