Official Minutes of the Public Hearing of December5, 2022 for the purpose of receiving comments on the proposed 2023 budget for the City of Poughkeepsie

THE CITY OF POUGHKEEPSIE
NEW YORK

PUBLIC HEARING

Monday, January 30, 2023 6:00 pm **Common Council Chambers**

Welcome to the scheduled meeting of the Public Hearing in the City of Poughkeepsie. The date is January 30, 2023 and the time is 6:00 pm.

THIS HEARING IS FOR THE PURPOSE OF RECEIVING COMMENTS ON THE proposed Local Law Amending Section 14.35 of The Administrative Code of The City of Poughkeepsie Entitled "Taxes – Partial Exemption Granted; Conditions"

Councilwoman-At-Large Brown called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

I. WELCOME

II. ROLL CALL: 7 present, 2 absent (Absent: Councilmembers Flowers & Johnson)

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: Five (5) minutes per person public comment.

1. Peter Van Aken – reading comments on behalf of Naomi Brooks*
2. Laurie Sandow – S. Grand Ave. – submitted written comments*
3. Nick Kalogris – 14 Maryland Ave.

* WRITTEN COMMENTS INSERTED BELOW:

Public Hearing Senior Tax Exemption January 23, 2023

Naomi Brooks
S. Grand Avenue

I keep track of my spending on a monthly basis. Here are the categories with regularly occurring bills.

A little less than 20% of my budget is for food, household supplies, and transportation expenses.

Another 20% is for health insurance and deductibles, co-pays, etc.

Another 20% is for utility bills – gas and electric, phone, and Internet.

Another 20% is for property tax, home insurance, sanitation, sewer and water bills.

The remaining 20% is for everything else. Everything. Income tax. Unexpected expenses like replacing everything in the refrigerator after a power outage, or roof repair, or dental work that isn't in my insurance plan, or travel to be with an ill loved one. There is rarely money for a night out, or for presents for family and friends, or for donations, or for savings.

I do everything I can to lower my costs. I am a sale shopper, a coupon clipper. I research the least expensive options for my needs - on everything from insurance to toaster ovens. There's still never enough money.

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How much does a typical senior receive in social security? As of October 2022, the average payment is $1550 a month, or $18,600 a year. Without a pension or substantial investment income, a senior who has finished their working years is already unable to cover the most basic living expenses. $1550 a month does not cover the items in my budget. Not by a huge margin. It is a grim reality.

How can we help close that budget gap and retain our seniors, some of whom have lived here, worked here, contributed to our community for decades? What can we offer so they are not priced out of our city, so they can afford to maintain their health and to maintain their homes? A senior tax exemption based on income limits is one way, and top thresholds for exemptions were set at $29,000 in 2009. That has not kept up with the true cost of living, and NYS has recently raised their income guidelines for exemptions to $50,000. Many municipalities have taken the opportunity to raise ***their*** guidelines as well.

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What would it mean for Poughkeepsie? We know from our city's 2022 S495 Exemption Impact budget report that under current guidelines, 111 seniors qualified for exemptions worth about .31 – that is, 1/3 of 1% - of our property tax revenue. I think that giving over 100 senior households some tax relief to help them afford to live here is very much worth the small amount of our tax revenue we give up with these exemptions. Even if these same 111 seniors would get **additional** tax relief with new guidelines, and even if **more** senior households would be eligible, the small percentage of revenue loss to the city is worth the value of supporting our senior population.

Forcing seniors to decide between paying taxes or repairing their homes, between paying taxes or buying food and medicine? That is not the way I want to think of our community, which has benefitted from the contributions this segment of our population has provided over the years.

Please support this amendment to raise the income thresholds for senior tax exemption.

There are two public hearings scheduled tonight—the first being Redistricting, and this second one being the Senior Property Tax Exemption. Each, in their own way, is an election year stunt. But calling them a stunt would be the least of it—each, in their own way is an act of self-dealing by Common Council members.

As has become the norm with the Council's abuse of both the consent agenda and last minute agenda additions, the councilmembers themselves have said little to nothing on the record prior to tonight's public hearing, nor made resource and reference materials available to the public for knowledgeable commentary.

The current resolution made an appearance as a last-minute addition and "First Read" on the Common Council agenda of December 5, 2022. Then, it made another appearance on the Council's December 19 consent agenda.

You know, surprise!, the Council's consent agenda where no written policy controls its content. The Common Council's consent agenda which is used by colluding and conspiring members to advance resolutions and items without transparency, and without ever themselves speaking on the record, and without ever revealing and stating for the record the extent to which they, themselves, have read and understand the items to which they're consenting

At the December 5 First Read of the Senior Exemption resolution, Evan Menist made a claim that he'd discussed this with the City of Poughkeepsie's Assessor. I would like Menist to not only re-assert that on the record, but provide a table of how this proposed resolution will affect taxes for each income category he seeks to benefit. Prediction One: He didn't have the discussion and can't produce such a table. Prediction Two: we'll {air-quotes) "learn" more in an online article that will day or so after tonight's public hearings and Common Council meeting, when Councilmembers either leak or use an online source to disclose information about issues that they, themselves, won't commit to speaking into the permanent webcast record.

"House rich, cash poor" is a term used when a homeowner has equity built up in their home but is burdened by expenses that might exceed their budget. Though this certainly applies to many seniors, it does not **EXCLUSIVELY** apply to seniors. Yet the resolution being proposed is a blanket program seeking to provide benefit to only one class of property owners, regardless of financial hardship—a benefit that is neither being provided to other property owners nor made available to renters, who might be equally or even more burdened, and who often pay more in monthly rent than a property owner pays for their mortgage.

Are current councilmembers even familiar with the Council's and the City's recent history of senior exemptions? That a revision to the senior exemption was instituted less than two years ago? That the 2021 revision increased the exemption limit from $27,000 to $29,000? The current resolution, on first inspection, appears to revise the upper limit to $50,000, an increase of $21,000 that would be close to, but not quite double, the previous limit.

But read the proposed resolution even further and one finds computations for incomes, after deductions, of up to $58,400—far exceeding this City's median income. Do our councilmembers even read or understand their own election year stunts and propaganda?

Persons in poverty have been reported as 18.8% of the city's population. What, specifically are the population numbers and incomes for seniors in the City? How many seniors would this proposal apply to? What will be the net effect of this proposal on the City's revenue and expenses?

Furthermore, Menist's proposal, in a City that refuses to undertake property registration, provides way too much fuzziness regarding property ownership, use and residence. There are examples galore, even among certain councilmembers and Dutchess legislators who claim one address as their legal residence, even when it might not be the their primary residence, and when their primary residence might not be in the City of Poughkeepsie at all.

I speak tonight as a senior who lives on a fixed income and who owns their own home. I am unalterably opposed to this Resolution as written.

IV. ADJOURNMENT:

The Public Hearing ended at 6:30pm.

Dated: February 3, 2023

I hereby certify that this true and correct copy of the Minutes of the Common Council Public Hearing held on January 30, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

Jasmin Nicole Davis
City Chamberlain