

Foundations reduce Tolland grand list

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TOLLAND — The town's grand list of taxable property decreased by 0.41 percent, or \$5.2 million, in the last year, with crumbling foundations and a property revaluation accounting for the drop, town officials say.

As a result, town officials are left with three choices as they evaluate the budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1. They can either increase taxes to offset the loss of more than \$189,000 in tax revenue, cut spending, or find other revenue sources, says Lisa Hancock, the town's finance director.

The grand list represents 70 percent of the total value of real estate, motor vehicles, and personal property, or business equipment, in town as of last Oct. 1. It will be used to calculate the tax rate for bills due in July and next January.

The total value of the grand list is \$1.27 billion.

Had it not been for the crumbling foundations, the grand list would have been slightly up because of the increases in personal property and motor vehicle assessments, Town Assessor Jason Lawrence said.

"In Tolland, we are the center of the crumbling foundation crisis," Lawrence said.

Real estate assessments decreased by 0.91 percent or \$10.2 million, to a total of \$1.1 billion.

At the same time, Lawrence said, personal-property assessments increased by 5.9 percent, or \$2.3 million, to \$41.8 million. The reason for most of that increase is that more heavy machinery is in town, working on repairing the crumbling foundations, Lawrence said.

Motor vehicle assessments increased by 2 percent, or \$2.6 million, to \$132 million. The increase was from newer vehicles, Lawrence said.

Town Council Chairwoman Tammy Nuccio said the increases in personal property and motor vehicle assessments have helped to ease the blow the town is facing.

“Without those investments, this revaluation would have hurt a lot more,” she said.

Foundations are deteriorating from the presence of the mineral pyrrhotite in the concrete.

The crumbling foundation problem has affected more than 196 Tolland homeowners since 2016. So far, only 17 homes have been fixed and re-assessed.

If the town’s budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1 is the same as the budget for the current fiscal year, with no increase in authorized spending, there would have to be a tax increase, Nuccio said.

“We’re listening for key priorities that take into consideration the significant losses we’re seeing, and we’re asking them to be cognizant of the position we’re all in,” she said of the town’s departments. “We’re one team. We need one vision. We need to work together to get there.”

Councilman Louis Luba said the reduction in the grand list will affect the budget significantly.

“We need to take a hard look at what the different agencies are requesting,” he said, adding that officials will have to see if it is “something the town can truly afford.”

Councilwoman Brenda Falusi said there will have to be discussions on where the town can find savings.

“Why do we have to have cuts?” she asked. “Cuts don’t always lead to savings.”

While there would be an increase in the mill rate if the budget stays level, Hancock said, that doesn’t necessarily mean everyone’s taxes would increase. A reduced property assessment, combined with an increased tax rate, could work out to a lower tax bill.