Public Discussion Outline: Senior & Disabled Tax Exemptions

Following our recent public discussion, this outline summarizes the data presented regarding potential updates to the Low-Income Senior and Low-Income Disabled Property Tax Exemptions.

The Core Objective: Balanced Relief

The town is evaluating how to best support our most vulnerable neighbors on fixed incomes while keeping property taxes stable and predictable for working families and non-exempt homeowners.

Key Framework Under Consideration

1. Maintaining the $34,000 Income Limit Baseline

- **Why it matters:** The town is inclined to keep the current maximum income baseline at $34,000 rather than adopting the county's NEW higher $45,000 limit.
- **The Impact:** Keeping the threshold steady prevents middle-income brackets from entering the program all at once, which would instantly push local exempt property values up and shift a heavy tax burden onto everyone else.
- **Systemic Blind Spots:** Real-world case files show state income formulas allow some households with $60,000+ in actual cash flow to qualify for exemptions, while seniors living solely on the lowest incomes and cash flow get the exact same benefit. Keeping the baseline steady controls these distortions.

2. Adopting the New State-Authorized 65% Exemption

- **Deep Relief:** The state now allows municipalities to increase the maximum property tax exemption from 50% up to 65% for residents at the absolute lowest income tiers.
- **Targeted Support:** This option ensures that seniors living on under the $34,000 a year receive a higher level of relief than those with much larger financial cash flows.
- **Local Impact:** Roughly 80% of our currently enrolled low-income seniors would qualify for this enhanced relief tier.
- **Administrative Commitment:** While the state database cannot process exemption rates above 50%, the Assessor's office is prepared to manually calculate these savings so software limitations do not stand in the way of senior relief.

Next Steps

This targeted strategy allows the town to deliver deeper assistance to those who need it most without expanding the program's overall tax footprint. The Board will use this framework to guide an upcoming **public hearing and adopting a local law that updates the current law**.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: Why isn't the town matching the county's new $45,000 income limit?

A: Raising the income limit to $45,000 would expand eligibility into middle-income ranges and instantly push local exempt property values higher. Because any exempted tax balance must be shared across all other local taxpayers, this shift would create a heavy tax burden for working families and non-exempt owners. Keeping the baseline at $34,000 keeps local taxes balanced.

Q: If the income limit stays the same, how are we helping seniors?

A: Instead of expanding the program to more people, the town intends to provide deeper relief to those who need it most. By adopting the state's new option, the maximum tax exemption for the lowest-income tiers will jump from 50% up to 65%.

Q: Who actually qualifies for the new 65% exemption?

A: This is designed specifically for neighbors living on the lowest fixed incomes (such as under $34,000 a year). Data shows that 80% of our currently enrolled low-income seniors will qualify for a higher exemption under this new tier.

Q: I heard some people with high cash flow get exemptions while low-income seniors miss out. Why?

A: The town must follow strict State mandates to calculate income eligibility. Unfortunately, these state rules include blind spots—like ignoring second incomes from unmarried household, not considering the number of household members. Keeping the baseline at $34,000 while maximizing the exemption percentage to 65% is the best local tool we have to correct these distortions and target truly low-income residents.

Q: I heard the States computer software can't calculate a 65% exemption. Will this stop the program?

A: No. While it is true the state's assessment database cannot calculate percentages above 50%, the town refuses to let administrative inconvenience get in the way of senior relief. Your Assessor's office will manually calculate these savings to ensure eligible seniors receive their full benefits.

Q: Has this been officially voted on yet?

A: No. This is a proposal following our recent public discussion. The Town Board will use this framework and community feedback to guide an upcoming **public hearing and adopting a local law that updates the current law**.