

LOPATCONG TWP.

Twp. council hires special tax assessor

By Sarah Peters

The Express-Times

Lopatcong Township Council decided Wednesday night to hire a special tax assessor amid a resident's complaints improvements to a councilwoman's home were overlooked, and non-veterans were getting deductions.

Resident Kathy Devos at a March 18 council meeting alleged people who are neither veterans nor seniors are receiving tax deductions to which they're not entitled. She estimated the township is allowing about \$25,000 of deductions that it shouldn't.

Devos is also the chairwoman of the rent-leveling board.

She also claims the addition of a pool, pool house and two-story addition to Councilwoman Donna Schneider's home in 2011 and 2012 were not properly accounted for in the assessed value.

Council voted 4-0 Wednesday night, with Schneider abstaining, to hire a special tax assessor to review the complaints. Schneider, who recused

SEE **TAX**, PAGE A2



Tax

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

herself from a closed session discussion about the matter, said her property was reassessed last year, and she's tired of the personal attacks.

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm here. Enough is enough," she said. "I'm not deceiving anyone on my taxes, and I'd appreciate it if you'd just knock it off."

Schneider said Thursday she filed for all her proper permits and did what she was supposed to do as a resident of the township. Questions should be directed to the township or assessor, Schneider said.

Assessor Kathy Degan on Thursday referred comment to her attorney, Leonard Artigliere. He said any investigation will establish that the allegations are "malicious, defamatory and, quite frankly, ridiculous." Artigliere said they would not interfere with council's investigation.

"Moreover, Ms. Devos' persistent efforts to defame, harass and intimidate one of the finest human beings that I know, not to mention a trained, experienced and respected professional, will be addressed at the appropriate time in the appropriate forum," Artigliere said in a statement.

At the March meeting, Degan said the township gets audited by the state every few

years.

She also said she and the tax collector look at the new deeds and adjust the deductions accordingly. Veterans and their surviving spouses after their deaths are entitled to tax deductions.

The township did not identify the special assessor officials planned to hire by name.

However, township Attorney Katrina Campbell told Degan they'll use the same expert they did when she had a conflict with the Sycamore Landing development. That was Paramus, Bergen County, Assessor James Anzevino, according to Oct. 1, 2014, meeting minutes.

Regarding Schneider's property, building permits issued for the pool, pool house and fence totaled \$31,220, according to Devos. The assessed value of the Schneiders' property increased by \$22,800, she said.

Devos also claims Degan did not account for the \$26,000 two-story addition to their home.

During public comment, resident Peter Olschewski said hiring the outside assessor is a "slap in the face" to Degan. He told Schneider he would have understood many times if she had resigned from her council seat.

"I assume that's what people wanted. Don't let them get to you," he said.