

**Town of Charleston Board of Civil Authority
Property Tax Appeal Hearing
Tuesday, June 23, 2026 6:30 PM**

MINUTES

Attending: Appellant John Holt of Echo Lake Meadows LLC; BCA Chair Samantha Stevens (Justice of the Peace); Vice Chair Amy Wagner (Justice of the Peace); BCA Members Ben Applegate (Justice of the Peace), Carolyn Hannan (Justice of the Peace), and Teri Gray (Town Clerk & Treasurer); NEMRC Assessor & Lister Jean Wilson; Listers Steve Wilson and Robert Wilson; and Assistant Town Clerk & Treasurer Colleen Kellogg.

Chair Samantha Stevens opened the hearing at 6:32 pm and invited introductions.

She stated that the purpose of the hearing was to hear the property tax appeal from Echo Lake Meadows LLC, represented by owner John Holt (who owns the property with his wife), for the property at 1043 West Echo Lake Road, with a Parcel ID of 0401043.

The Chair administered the Oath to the Appellant and Listers.

The Appellant confirmed that he had received the BCA Rules of Procedure and had no questions.

Board Members confirmed they had no conflicts of interest or ex parte communications to disclose.

Jean Wilson introduced the property. The owner is Echo Lake Meadows LLC. Located on West Echo Lake Rd, it is a lakefront land parcel with 24.7 acres, including 379 feet of frontage on Echo Lake. There is one outbuilding (a shed). The original assessment as of April 1, 2026 was \$419,800. After the grievance, the assessed value was reduced to \$398,400, which is the current value.

Appellant John Holt distributed supporting documents and explained his position. His primary objection is the 0.5 grading of the lake frontage. He noted the town's land schedule does not clearly define grade levels and believes the waterfront should be graded significantly lower (0.1 to 0.25 maximum).

To support this position, Holt presented evidence, entered as Exhibits:

- Map from All Systems Septic Design showing the property, with a close-up of the lake frontage and area closest to the road. Of the 379 feet of shoreline, only ~50 feet are usable; the rest is marsh and wetlands. (Appellant Exhibit 1)
- Wetland Permit from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources: This document (2-page excerpt provided, see Findings 4-5) confirms the All Systems Septic Map—that large portions of the frontage are designated as Class 2 and Class 3 wetlands. (Appellant Exhibit 2)

Holt described the property: a boardwalk leads to the water, after which boots are required due to soft, sinking marsh. Only a small rock outcropping and former driveway area (on Exhibit 1) are non-wetland

He emphasized that the only truly usable portion is also the location of a deeded 50-foot right-of-way owned by Crouse. The town adds \$100,000 to the Crouse property valuation for this same 50-foot right-of-way, suggesting possible double-counting.

He argued that lakefront wetlands should be valued far lower than the standard 1.0. He believes that even 0.5 would suggest some use. On his property, one must go through trees to access the water. It has nice rocks and is a loon nest area.

Holt compared his property to others on Echo Lake via property cost cards (Appellant Exhibits 3-9):

- The Crouse property. Town adds \$100,000 for their 50 ft deeded right-of-way across his property. (Exhibit 3)
- The Tischbein property, which is one of the only lots he could find on the lake that is only land. He finds it to be a nice wooded property, sloping, and with western exposure. That is considered a 1.0. (Exhibit 4)
- The Webb property, graded at 0.95, with nice grassy, easy-to-access frontage, far different from his. (Exhibit 5)
- The Mann property on Spring Meadow Dr, graded at 0.9. (Exhibit 6). He emphasized the contrast between this and marsh/wetlands.
- The Mills property, large frontage graded at 0.8. (Exhibit 7)
- The Thompson property, also noted for context, but assumes the 0.7 grade is explained by the narrowness of the lot. (Exhibit 8)
- The Wilson property, graded at 0.7 with excellent frontage (Exhibit 9). He argued that if the Wilson property is graded at 0.7, it is unreasonable for his largely inaccessible wetland frontage to be graded at 0.5.

Regarding the backland acreage, Holt questioned the 1.25 grade applied to the non-lakefront portion. He acknowledged the nice views but noted that many other Echo Lake properties have good views without grades above 1.0. He appreciates that it is a nice piece of property overall but the valuation does not accurately reflect the severe limitations caused by the wetlands.

In response, Assess/Lister Jean Wilson provided their valuation and supporting evidence. She distributed a 19-page written packet (Listers Exhibit 1) including Basic Property Information, Assessment Data, Sales Comparison, and Attachments, which include property cost cards and the Sales Study for the Reappraisal.

Wilson explained that the property was purchased in 2011 for \$211,000 and is now assessed at \$398,400.

The reappraisal determines fair market value—defined as the price a property would bring in the market when offered for sale and purchased by another, considering all relevant factors including location, potential and prospective use, any functional deficiencies, age and condition. Four

things go into a property's valuation: land, dwelling, outbuildings, and site improvements. Microsoft CAMA valuation software and Marshall & Swift tables are used. New land schedules and lakefront schedules were developed from sales in Charleston from the last three years. This produces new values per square foot and for the different types of buildings, and these are applied to all properties. There are different grading factors that are looked at.

The town's overall reappraisal shows strong accuracy. The Common Level of Appraisal (CLA)—a ratio of listed value over sale price—is approximately 101%, so listed values came in at around 100% of what they sold for. The Coefficient of Dispersion—deviation of individual properties from the average—is within 6%.

For this 24.7-acre parcel, the break down is: Overall land value \$391,600; Shed \$1,800; Site improvement (septic) \$5,000. (see Page 3)

The property is difficult to "comp" due to the difficulty in finding sales of this acreage on a lake, so it is analyzed in components. In Vermont, a two-acre house site is valued first, either where the house is located or the most potential building site. If the most potential building site on a lake parcel is across the road from the lake, the property was assigned a two-acre lot across the road and received a standard 0.7 grade on the frontage. The site itself received a 2.0 grade which is 200% of a typical site value. Because the property is in the Echo Lake neighborhood, the site receives a 2.0 grade, but lake frontage doesn't add as much value because one has to cross the road and walk down to access the lake. Houses located on the lake side of the road typically received a site grade of 1.0, and some were graded up or down from that depending on the topography.

Because the frontage of the subject property cannot be built on, the two-acre site grade is 2.0. The 21 backland acres are nice rolling land in the lake neighborhood, which contributes to a higher grade. The assessment reflects that the contributory value of the 22.4 acres would be roughly \$146,000 (see house site and backland on page 3). If you put this land somewhere else in the town of Charleston, the site value wouldn't be as high as \$80,000.

The 1.2-acre lake frontage is graded at 0.5 (one of the lowest grades on land; appraisal values do not go down to 0.1) because it is largely wetlands. The frontage still provides exclusive lake access and privacy, which adds substantial contributory value. Buyers will pay a premium for any lake access, even if the shoreline itself is not developable.

Wilson presented the following comparable sales, which helped develop the schedules, to support the valuation:

- Rokuski property (see Attachment 5 and page 3 table), probably the closest comparison having frontage: Sold in April 2026 for \$646,000 after the reappraisal. It has 699 feet of frontage and a house. The road runs right along the frontage; access to the lake requires walking across the road to a dock. 2.0 grade on the building lot; frontage graded at 0.25; backland (steep and rocky) is typical, graded at 1.0, and has contributory value of \$19,400. Contributory land value approximately \$261,800. Demonstrates that exclusive lake access adds significant value even with limited usable land.

- Zuaro property (838 West Echo Lake Rd; see Attachment 5, page 7): Sold in 2024 for \$750,000. House right on Echo Lake with 200 feet of frontage. Contributory land value \$401,000.
- Mackey property (formerly Vinton; see Attachment 5, page 5): Contributory land value \$400,000.
- Raphael property (see Attachment 5 page 4): Sold for \$500,000. Very dated camp with 100 feet of frontage on 0.38 acres. Contributory land value \$300,000.

Since there were no vacant land sales on Echo Lake, the Listers also included two recent sales on Lake Seymour to demonstrate that lake properties command strong market value due to access and privacy, even with development limitations (See Attachment 6, pages 1-2):

- Daniels property (Camp Winape Rd): One acre with 125 feet of frontage, purchased for \$320,000. Very wooded; cannot build in the first 100 feet of frontage and view may be limited. Paid a premium for lake access.
- Morrison-Smith property (Trillium Forest off Morgan-Charleston Road): 4 acres with 107 feet of frontage, purchased for \$334,000 in 2023. Access is challenging via right-of-way.

The Listers reviewed the percent change in assessed value for abutting and nearby properties (see page 4). The town-wide average increase was approximately 90%. Echo Lake Meadows received one of the lowest percentage increases, giving assessors confidence that they were being equitable and not over-assessing the property.

Wilson closed by saying that properties have doubled in value since the parcel was purchase in for \$211,000 in 2011. She noted that Mr. Holt has never mentioned to Listers what he believes that market value would be.

The Chair invited questions from BCA members.

Board Member Ben Applegate asked for clarification on the grading factor applied to the land. He noted that the main argument appeared to center on the “factor” value of the land. He referenced the Rokuski parcel, which has the road running essentially along the lake and was graded at 0.25 on the frontage, and asked how that compared to Mr. Holt’s lake frontage.

Jean Wilson replied that the Holt property has depth to it.

Mr. Applegate followed up, acknowledging that even though it is a wetland with no buildable use — which would be the appellant’s counter-argument — he asked how that limitation is taken into account, or whether it is taken into account.

Ms. Wilson responded that it is taken into account because the frontage is graded at 0.5. She explained that 0.5 is typically the factor used for swampy land.

Mr. Applegate then inquired about the overall range of the factor. He asked for an idea of how high it goes. If there is beautiful, buildable lakefront, does the factor go up to 2 or 3?

Wilson explained that the factor goes up to 2.0, which would double the value of the base land. She emphasized that it is a multiplier. Typically, they start with a 1.0 for average typical land, which applies to most properties on the lake. Sales have shown that buyers primarily want to be on the lake, regardless of water depth or gradual access.

Properties on the opposite side of the road, where owners must walk down to the lake, generally start with a 0.7 grade on the frontage. Wilson noted that 0.5 is used on a couple of other properties abutting Mr. Holt's that also didn't have much usable frontage. However, they have to look at the value of the whole piece of land. The listers are saying the whole piece of land is worth approximately \$400,000, and they know that if he broke off that piece, he would not get \$250,000 for it; it is just a contributory factor of the entire piece of land.

The Chair asked about the interaction between the 2.0 grade for the house site and the 0.5 grade for the lake frontage.

In response, Jean Wilson, using her own house as an example, explained that the state requires assessors to assign a value to the first two acres as the house site for purposes of income sensitivity. None of the lakefront land itself is included in that two-acre house site. Therefore, they must separately value the house and the two acres around it. Because the property is on the lake, it receives a higher site value (typically 2.0) than a similar site located elsewhere in town. This is why most lakefront properties receive the 2.0 site grade for the house site. Properties located directly on the lake side of the road generally receive a 1.0 grade on their lake frontage, as the lake access value is already incorporated into the site value.

Board Member Ben Applegate asked for clarification on the grading: "So pretty much any house around the lake would have an automatic 2.0?"

Jean Wilson responded: Houses located on the lake side of the road generally receive a 1.0 grade on their lakefront because the lake access value is already intrinsic to the site. There really aren't many houses on the opposite side of the road that receive the 2.0 site grade. It is basically the strip on West Echo Lake Road. Almost all properties on East Echo Lake Road are on the lake side and receive the 1.0 grade on their lakefront. Some properties receive higher grades depending on setting and extensive landscaping. For example, the Fernandez property has extensive landscaping. The Jamie Barron property, which sold for \$1.5 million, had extensive landscaping and therefore received a higher lake value, as opposed to the Mills property that just has woods and a trail down to the lake.

The Clerk asked the Chair to invite questions of the Appellant. The Chair had a question: Do you have a number that you think the property should be valued at?

Mr. Holt responded: At most 269,000. That would be based on a 0.25 on the frontage. We bought it for \$211,000 and spent way over what we should have. We thought we would be able to build on the frontage but were informed otherwise by the septic design company. I didn't look at property and would not have paid \$211,000 if I had known. No other questions.

The Chair appointed Ben Applegate, Carolyn Hannan, and Amy Wagner to the Inspection Committee. The inspection was scheduled for Monday, June 29th at 5:00 pm, with agreement from committee members present.

At 7:21 pm, the Chair recessed the hearing until Monday July 13, 2026 at 5:00pm, at which time the BCA will hear the report of the inspection committee and take in any final evidence before concluding the hearing and beginning deliberation.

[Recess]

The Chair reopened the hearing at 5:00 pm on Monday, July 13, 2026, restated the hearing purpose including appellants' names, property location and parcel ID. All participants of the initial hearing were present except Jean Wilson, Robert Wilson, and Steve Wilson.

The Chair invited the inspection committee to present their report. Ben Applegate distributed written copies and summarized the report. He, Carolyn, and Amy visited 1043 West Echo Lake Rd on June 29th at 5:00 pm and walked up into the meadow and down onto the 1+ acres between the road and the lake. Committee members concurred with lister findings and found the 0.5 grade on the lake frontage in keeping with other parcels assessed around the lake. While there were wetlands and wet soils, there are places where there is lake access. The frontage is not entirely dry, and they believe the 0.5 grade reflects this.

There were no final questions from BCA members.

In his final comments, Mr. Holt thanked the board for their time and service. He disagreed with the 0.5 valuation of his property.

He noted that Mrs. Wilson had stated that properties divided by the road start at a 0.7 grade, including her own property and the Thompson property. Both are well-maintained grass lawns extending to the lake with easy access—far easier than on the Holt property. He questioned how a 0.5 valuation could be reasonably comparable to 0.7.

Mr. Holt also disagreed with the lister assertion that 0.5 designates wetlands, stating that insufficient basis had been provided. He believes swampland should be valued below 0.5. While they have a boardwalk, it does not reach the lake. The area beyond it was relatively dry during the committee's recent visit, but there is a large pond near the current loon location, making lake access difficult.

Additionally, he pointed out an inaccuracy in the listers' report to the board (page 3), which stated the Holt property has 'exclusive' access along the full 379 feet of frontage. In reality, the most accessible 50 feet is the right-of-way (ROW) belonging to the Crouse property. The town already assigns an additional \$100,000 valuation to the Crouse property for that access, meaning the Holt property has exclusive access along only the remaining 329 feet. This suggests no more than about 30 feet of usable non-wetlands lake access, consistent with the state wetlands map. Mr. Holt is unsure how the town differentiates valuation between exclusive and shared access. He asked the board to ensure its decision is based on accurate information.

There were no final Lister questions since they were not in attendance.

The Chair adjourned the hearing at 5:07 pm, stating that the BCA would deliberate in closed session and issue their written decision within 15 days.

Submitted,

Samantha Stevens, BCA Chair

Attest: _____ Date: _____
Teri Gray, Town Clerk