

**TOWN OF NEW LONDON
BUDGET COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 2, 2008**

PRESENT: John Wilson (Chairman), Connie Appel, Doug Baxter, Noel Weinstein, Celeste Cook, Jim Wheeler, Jessie Levine (Town Administrator), Carol Fraley (Finance Officer), Larry Ballin & Mark Kaplan (Selectman)

ABSENT: Barry Wright, Ann Bedard, Bob Meck

ALSO: Chad Denning (Recreation Dept.), Sandra Licks, Liz Meller, Charlene Baxter and Shelby Blunt (Tracy Library), Steve Ensign and Chief Jason Lyon (Fire Dept.), Chuck Curtis, Hoyt Chapin, and Erle Blanchard (COA), and DJ Lavoie

John Wilson called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. and noted the resignation of Brian Prescott from the Board of Selectmen. He said that Brian will be missed. He also thanked Noel for stepping up and arranging the second round of tours. Noel reminded everyone of the Public Works tour on Monday morning.

Minutes of September 15, 2008: Doug Baxter noted typo on page 4 (“nay” should be “any”). Jim Wheeler on page 5, regarding community center, asked that “January” be changed to “November.” Noel referred to the comments regarding the COA letter and asked for time at a future meeting to respond. Minutes approved as amended.

John Wilson said that tonight’s meeting is to better understand the budget, but not to approve anything.

Tracy Library: Library Director Sandra Licks handed out what will be Appendix C, showing the latest spent-to-date. Approximately 73% of funds disbursed and income at 76% to date. They have already cut back on professional travel and dues to cover maintenance expenses. Request for 2009 is \$443,545, down from 2008. Sandra reminded those present that 90% of the budget comes from the town appropriation, so in 2009 the appropriation would be \$399,995, down from \$419,530 in 2008, not including increases in wages & benefits but including the elimination of a staff position when custodian retires on March 31. The Library plans to use the new position of town-wide custodian that is in the Town budget. The Library had to decrease projected income from trust funds as recommended by Pat Sheehan, and will offset the loss of income by raising fines & other revenues.

Sandra referred to page 2 of the handout, which spells out the increases in line items. Noel pointed out that the changes total to about \$31,000 increase, so he asked why there is a decrease in the overall budget. Sandra repeated that the custodian position will go away after March 31 and will not be in next year’s budget (the cost of outside custodial services will also be eliminated).

Doug Baxter asked if people pay for copies at the Library, including color. Sandra said that they do, on the honor system. Connie asked if the lights had been converted to lower energy overhead lights, and Sandra said that they did that two years ago, but the addition of computers and air conditioning have driven up costs (highest energy bill was about \$1,000 per month). John asked if the Library would follow the Town’s wage recommendations for 2009, and Sandra said that they would.

John asked Carol to explain how the Town’s insurance is allocated. Carol will go back and look at that. She said that there is one policy for the entire town but the Library is billed separately for their share. John asked if the Library is content with the number of employees and Sandra said that they are. Jim asked how many gallons of propane were budgeted last year, and Sandra thinks it’s 6,000 gallons of fuel

but a combination of oil and propane. Jim said the new system is supposed to be more efficient and noted they are budgeting for more usage. Sandra agreed that they are, just to be safe.

Doug said that Labsphere had been on an overhead reduction plan lately and mentioned being conscious about turning lights off in hallways and rooms that aren't being used, and said that Labsphere saved \$1750 in one month and \$1500 in the second month for reduced electricity. Sandra said that motion-activated lights would make sense.

Jim asked Jay Lyon for input on the security and fire alarm system. Jay said that it looked like a reasonable price, and consistent with the cost for all of the town buildings. John said that he was concerned during the tour of the air conditioning being on and windows open. Sandra said that the air conditioning only covers certain zones and it is not currently in the CIP to air condition the whole place.

Jim Wheeler and John Wilson commended Sandra on her presentation and noted that she has set a standard for future presenters. Larry Ballin said that the Library benefits from a huge volunteer labor force that should be recognized, and the volume of work done at no cost is tremendous and he thanked the paid staff for encouraging the volunteers to continue (Sandra said that about half of the volunteers were present at the volunteer appreciation party on September 30).

Recreation Department: John recognized Recreation Director Chad Denning, who passed out a supplemental packet of information following an e-mail from John asking for more information. Chad said that last year, his budget increased 4.7% and the only increases were his salary and benefits. This year, there are a few proposed changes, with the biggest being waterfront staff wages (his returning lifeguards should receive a bump as they get older and gain experience). That line item reflects about a 3% increase to \$40,000. We employ 15-17 lifeguards every summer. The biggest hit in the Recreation budget is the request for \$4,680 for another staff member for the May, June & July, when the phone continuously rings, registration is high, and there are a lot of sign-ups, and there is also demand for him to be out of his office to make sure programs are running, so there is no one in the office to register people. He proposes \$13 per hour at 30 hours per week, and they would also do strategic programming.

He noted the other employee benefits that increase every year. In the computer support budget, the current budget reflects the RecTrak fees. That should come back down in 2009.

Chad referred to the Bucklin Beach budget – he has left the budget at \$3000 because although he will not be buying boats this year, does need a motor for the rescue boat at Bucklin. The Elkins budget reflects the addition of boats. Chad noted that the travel budget has increased due to having to take his mileage out of the budget rather than the revolving fund, and he uses his personal vehicle for all travel. The remaining portions of the budget are the same or increased slightly.

Chad said this year's budget will come in below budget at the end of the year. Chad referred to his supplemental handout and noted that the costs for programs comes from the revolving account. He said that in 2007, the NLOC had \$10,800 go through our department, and in 2008, there is no OC pass through. Not including the OC, we had about \$40,000 in programming revenue last year and \$56,000 this year. The Summer Day Camp was "busting at the seams" this summer – it was very popular and people thought it was money well spent.

Chad referred to the list of special activities that are not accounted for in RecTrak and cannot be reflected in numbers of monetary value. Chad then referred to the demographic report for the department, which shows the ages of participants and where people are from (sorted by zip code). He said that 56% of constituents are from New London, and including Wilmot it's 67%. Chad also noted that a lot of the out-of-town zip codes are grandchildren or children related to members of the community.

Chad then referred to a list of programs from the Recreation Department for the last few years. Some of the programs are a little old (2006-2007) – this page shows the number of participants in the programs.

The Unique Enrollment Report is to date, with 610 unique participants – showing again that 59% of registrants this year are residents. The last pages are the breakdown of the Recreation Revolving Fund spreadsheet by program. He started this year with \$29,000 and there are currently about \$37,000, because about what goes out comes in.

Celeste asked if lifeguards were paid for the days it rains. Chad replied that lifeguards are paid for the days they are logged; if they are there and it rains, they get a minimum of two hours. If they do not come in at all, then they do not get paid for that day. They do not get paid extra for swimming lessons, but they may make more if they have different levels of certification. Chad said that we had 100% return rate for our lifeguards this year, which is outstanding, but many are off to college next year.

Noel asked if it would make sense to staff the summer position with another part-timer or overtime, and Jessie said that it would be cheaper to pay \$13 per hour than pay our existing staff overtime.

Jim Wheeler asked about tennis and adventure camp. Chad said that tennis was an OC program, and said that he has changed the adventure camp to summer adventures trips, which are more popular for middle school age children.

Noel asked about the new fence at Bucklin Beach and the Ropes Course and Skateboard Park. He said that he has asked for a \$20,000 out of the capital reserve fund to replace the fence at Bucklin with a removable fence so that it is not damaged by snow plows. It will cost more in the front but will be able to maintain for longer.

Master Plan projects include a High Ropes Course, which he is doing in conjunction with Colby-Sawyer College and Kearsarge School District, with expenses split three ways. The planning is going forward on this and also potentially a skateboard park on the sewer property (seeking federal funds for sewer overflow). Mark asked for more information about a High Ropes Course, and Chad said that it is a bunch of telephone poles or trees with cables and ropes to enable team building exercises. The School District has appropriated \$15,000 to use Dartmouth's course, and Colby-Sawyer has funded for outside courses as well. Chad said there is no reason not to have one here to benefit the community and bring in revenue. Mark asked what age group this covers. Chad said that it is usually middle school and up. John asked what personnel requirements are needed. Chad said that highly-certified people are required (one person for every 8 participants). He would like to have volunteers trained to do this and does not anticipate adding staff without having revenue to cover it.

Connie Appel asked about abutters on Frothingham Road and Jessie said that this is in the planning process at this point and there has not been public discussion. Connie said that there are neighbors who are enjoying the use of the public property and she hopes that others will support it as well. Chad said that skateboarding, for example, provides a great opportunity for youth-at-risk, and can be monitored. He also said that he would like to get the neighbors involved and engage them to have pride and interest in the park. She said that she thinks the people on that property should be included. Chad said that he would also like to use the cut through from South Pleasant to the sewer department and would like that to be part of the plan.

Noel asked if Chad has been included in the Community Center process, and he said that there has been discussion about him being included, but it's hard to plan with a question as to whether it will go forward. He hopes it does. John thanked Chad for his presentation.

CIP: John noted that the draft of the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) was due to the third week of August, and because of some changes and request by the CIP on how things are going to be expensed, it got stalled. The final version was supposed to come out September 30 so that the plan could be integrated with the regular operating budget. Jessie said that there is still time to include the plan in the budget process.

Fire Department: Fire Chief Jay Lyon said that he also received an e-mail from John requesting an overview of activities from the last year. One question in the past had been how many calls were handled by the on-call officer as opposed to a general call. The Fire Department is doing well with 45 firefighters and has responded to 492 calls to date, out of which 108 were general alarms (meaning that the entire department was toned). For the other calls, either Jay, Karl Bjorklund, or the on-call firefighters responded to the rest. At the tours, Ann Bedard had asked the cost difference between on-call response and general alarms, and Jay said that it's about \$500 per hour for a general alarm, so 108 calls at \$250 per hour = \$27,000 (which is about what the payroll shows), and the 384 calls at \$15 per hour = \$5,760. So the estimated savings is about \$77,000 by using the on-call system. That said, the on-call system was not established to be a money saver but to reduce the number of calls to which the Fire Department responded. In the late 1990s, the Fire Department had more and more calls with fewer firefighters responding, so now when they are toned they know they're being called for a reason.

The Firefighters' Association has been busy. Open House during Hospital Days (estimated 500-750 people per year in the past; this year about 600 people). The Association also sent out a donation request to retrofit the current tanker with a 500 GPM pump, and the donations have been generous in difficult economic times. The tanker pump installation is scheduled for the end of this month or first week of November. October is Fire Prevention month, so he's gearing up to having all of the kids come through the station over the next two-three weeks. Jessie suggested that Jay e-mail the schedule of fire prevention classes so the Budget Committee can drop in to watch.

Jay said that the Fire Department waits until late in the year to spend money in case there are emergencies. One of the larger expenditures this year was the radiator on the ladder truck, and the discovery that the frame rails supporting the chassis had been cut to put in the original radiator from the manufacturer, which compromises the structural integrity of the vehicle. Also a brake drum blew apart, which was about \$1900. The Fire Department's budget is zero-based. Every year he documents what he's looking to purchase, which is attached at Appendix A.

Jay said that going forward, he needs to go through the department to evaluate long-term needs and better anticipate budget expenditures. He referred to the air bags (reinforced bags that raise up vehicles that have rolled over), which will cost \$3700 to replace. They are older than 20 years, which is the life expectancy. Jessie pointed out that at that level, that is not something that typically would be part of the capital program. Jay referred to the \$1500 request for a rescue tripod (for anything below grade). Jay proposes to replace fire hose – one section of 100 feet is \$600 – and he is asking for four lengths this year and will replace it over time. Jay received a federal grant of \$30,000 for replacement of protective clothing. Jay referred to the \$1500 simulated extinguisher for fire extinguisher training classes, which are done for places of business in New London (as well as the Town of Sutton).

Noel asked about Jay's prediction for this winter given the oil and gas cost increases. Noel asked if there is anything the Town could or should do to educate people given that reality. Jay said that he has talked to Debbie Cross, who will do a story for the Intertown on Fire Prevention Week. This year, the Fire Department has responded to 492 calls to date. He expects an increase in calls to chimney fires and other fires due to the use of alternative heat, such as wood, space heaters, etc. Even if New London is not

directly affected, there may still be an increase in mutual aid calls to other towns. The NFPA is targeting education towards the reduction of house fires and testing detectors, etc.

Referring to the CIP, Jay referred to the fund to replace the self-contained breathing apparatus. The air packs were from 1988 and no longer meet NFPA compliance. He applied for a \$124,000 grant from the Department of Homeland Security (has not heard back and remains hopeful). That grant would save the Town \$100,000.

Referring to the handout regarding the number of calls, there has been a decrease of late. Down in structure fires, which is great, but up in some categories. Jay said that Jim Wheeler asked on the tour how it is determined if on-call or general alarm goes out. He showed the Alarm Response category, which out of 28 responses, 4 were general alarm (smoke in the building) and the rest were tripped by something else. Under False Alarm, there were 3 that were more than one officer responding, and the rest were on-call officer. He said there were 13 rollovers this year out of 101 motor vehicle crashes responded to so far, and 37 of the motor vehicle accidents were toned for general alarm. Jessie pointed out that the Fire Department as a department (general alarm) responds to more motor vehicle accidents than any other emergency.

Jay noted the increase in medical assists, most of which are covered by Karl Bjorklund, the other full-time firefighter, who is also an EMT. The staggered shifts between Jay and Karl allow more coverage during the day for inspections, etc., but also allows the on-call officer to sign on later in the day because coverage goes until 7:00 PM. Medical assists are handled by Karl. Jim asked who is doing the requesting, and Jay replied that it is New London Ambulance or Dispatch if the ambulance is out of town (such as serving in another town). Jim noted the large increase and asked if prior to Karl's hiring, did people not get a response when needed? Jay said that New London does not have a FAST squad like other towns. We want the ambulance to do well; we want them around, because without the Hospital's ambulance, the Town would have to look at taking that expense on. Jay cited a few examples of medical assist: bicycle crash, dislocated hip, etc. He does not think that there is anything wrong with Karl responding, but it is a category that has increased. Jessie said this does not take the place of an ambulance coming eventually, but is a more immediate response when the ambulance cannot be there.

Jay said that a benefit of this renovated facility is that there are firefighters here hanging out, so there are more people available to respond to emergencies if the on-call officer is busy.

Discussion regarding ambulance coverage, the number of ambulances, staffing, etc. Jay said that if New London Ambulance is on a call in one of the other seven towns, then New London has to wait for a backup ambulance from Bradford or Andover (volunteer departments) or Newport. Larry Ballin said that the issue isn't the number of ambulances, it's the staffing. John said it would be helpful to have the Hospital make a presentation at a future meeting. Jessie spoke of the meeting that she and Jay Lyon had with Kent Wheeler regarding ambulance service. The first thing all three agreed on was that we did not have hard data about the number of calls that went to a second call. The second ambulance pays for itself, as it is used for medical transfers. The first ambulance is used for emergencies in the 7 towns, which includes emergency transfers. If the first ambulance is on another call or not staffed, then there is an ambulance shortage. John reiterated asking the Hospital to make a presentation at a future Budget Committee meeting.

John Wilson said that without salaries and benefits, the Fire Department is showing a 5% increase. Jay said that Ann Bedard recommended sending a survey out after responding to a call for feedback from the homeowner. Jay said that any call we go on could be evaluated for better performance. He said the community is extremely supportive and he would not want the survey to look like an "attaboy." In the end, those present agreed that a survey did not make sense.

Selectmen's Update: John asked the Selectmen for an update, including whom will be appointed to join the Budget Committee. Mark said that will be between he and Larry and it has not been discussed yet. John pointed out that the Selectmen only receive one vote on the Budget Committee. Mark reported that he and Larry have met once to discuss suggested replacements, but the process may take some time.

The roundabout should be complete in about two weeks, so the Edmunds crew will be gone, and the only thing left will be the landscaping (Jessie said that Sue Clough strongly recommended waiting until the spring).

Larry Ballin reported on the Community Center. The Board met this morning and is still in the quiet fundraising phase. Even with tough economic times and a lot of concern regarding fundraising, the group is meeting success and is optimistic. The group looks forward to presenting to the Budget Committee in November. We have started discussions with the School Board as to a moveable date for the lease due to the difficulties fundraising. We came away optimistic from the meeting today. Jessie said that Linda Ewing has joined the board and Marc Violette has re-joined. The committees are becoming active and things are moving. With respect to the November meeting, John said that he would like to hear the whole package, including finances and programs, etc. Larry agreed that should be fine, and he will ask Bill Dowd to make the program presentation. Noel asked for the information ahead of time. John asked for a copy of the economic impact study, and Jessie said it will be public as soon as it is received by the Town.

Next Meeting: John said the next meeting is on October 20 and the Budget Committee will meet with Police and Public Works (including Transfer Station and Sewer). John asked if another group should be added (Hospital, Energy, Conservation, Health?). Doug Baxter recommended that the Energy Committee be invited that night. To that end, Doug Baxter read that the Selectmen asked that the Energy Committee assist residents in energy-saving ideas. He asked for clarification about the Selectmen's expectations.

Connie asked why Peter Messer's application for a windmill was turned down. Larry said that the zoning ordinance did not address wind turbines, and that Peter Messer later thanked the Selectmen for turning down the permit because he would have made a mistake had he gone forward with that plan.

John Wilson asked for the General Government presentation to be done on November 17, if there is time following the Community Center presentation. John asked everyone to peruse what was discussed tonight so that questions can be raised at a later date.

Motion made, seconded and unanimously approved to adjourn at 8:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessie W. Levine
Town Administrator