

TOWN OF NEW LONDON  
CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
APRIL 14, 2007

PRESENT: Larry Ballin (Selectman), Peter Bianchi, Barbara Brown, Sue Clough (Chairman, Board of Selectman), Celeste Cook, David Dunning, Michael Doheny, Ray Ettenborough, Paul Gorman, Peggy Holliday, Mark Kaplan (Selectman), Marilyn Kidder, Steve Landrigan, Bob Lavoie, D.J. Lavoie, Harmon Lewis, Joe McCarthy, Bob MacMichael, Noel Weinstein, Stephanie Wheeler.

Sue Clough opened the meeting at 7:30 a.m., and welcomed newly elected Selectman Larry Ballin. She reminded the Committee that for the past six years, the Board of Selectmen has rotated the position of Chairman, and this year it falls to her to serve in that capacity.

She said the Selectmen would like to open this meeting's agenda to any issues of concern or interest that the CAC wished to bring forward. The ensuing discussions fell into three main areas.

### **1. Board Appointments**

#### The Appointment Process

Sue Clough said the Selectmen made available at Town Meeting the notice regarding the upcoming Board appointment process along with the accompanying "Volunteer Interest Form" as well as publishing it in the *Kearsarge Shopper*, and they are keeping a list of interested residents. Historically, the Board of Selectmen has interviewed both the incumbents who are interested in renewing their appointments as well as potential new Board members. In addition, the Chair of the respective Board will meet with the perspective Board members. She said the Selectmen would like to have the CAC's ideas on the process.

Mark Kaplan went on to say that the key struggle facing the Selectmen is that there are often very good long-term members who wish to continue serving in their positions. On the other hand, the Selectmen are cognizant of a sentiment in Town that there are times when a change is due. They neither wish to hurt anyone's feelings, nor put into place a person on a Board who may not be as prepared to address the issues as someone who has served over the long term. Selectmen recognize the need for some mechanism to use when change is merited.

#### Term Limits

This opened discussion of the question of setting a limitation on the number of terms an individual can serve. Sue Clough explained that a "term" is three years, with the exception of this Committee, for which a "term" is two years. Selectmen pointed out that this Committee differs from Boards as ZBA, Planning and Conservation in that it is advisory, and, as Larry Ballin added later in the meeting, this Committee often serves as a spring board for those interested in serving on any of the other Town Boards.

Stephanie Wheeler asked if the Town gets enough volunteers to set term limits. Sue Clough said they are not limited (in number of interested volunteers). Marilyn Kidder suggested they might get even more volunteers if people knew there were term limits, that is, if they knew they would only be required to serve six years. David Dunning proposed the idea of having term limits, but allowing some exceptions—such as when no one else is available, for example.

Sue Clough agreed with all those opinions, but pointed out that there is something positive about having someone on the Board who has the history of the types problems the Board has faced, and the types solutions it has exercised. By setting a two-term limit, the Board would have a completely new roster every six years. Peggy Holliday agreed that there are some Boards whose material is so complicated that it may be better to have a rotating Chair as opposed to setting strict term limits for all the Board members.

Marilyn Kidder responded to Sue Clough's concern by pointing out that if each term is three years long, and only two members rotate out each year, the Board would not really have an entirely new roster every six years. She said that every organization struggles with this problem, but added that she feels change is beneficial, and often it is the newer people, those less familiar with the Board's history, who ask the best questions. She said she feels that both a term limit and limited chairmanship are good ideas, and added for consideration the suggestion that a member who has served as Chair during his term, could serve an additional third term. Paul Gorman agreed with those concepts.

On the other hand, Steve Landrigan expressed some reservation about setting term limits, if the Selectmen are satisfied with the results of a Board's work. He suggested the idea of having something less formal—a general practice or by-law, not something that must be strictly enforced.

Sue Clough clarified that as far as the Chair position goes, all the Selectmen can do is recommend the concept of rotating Chairs. It would be up to the Board itself to determine whether or not to have a rotating Chair. Mark Kaplan suggested that having a vice-chairman would also work as a rotating chairmanship. Celeste Cook confirmed that the Planning Board does have a vice-chairman.

Michael Doheny said he would be opposed to term limits, and opened some discussion of the possibility of the Town going from appointed Boards to elected ones. In a sense then, the voters would set the term limits. That raised some concern about the potential for a Board to consist of specific special interests in Town. Both Steve Landrigan and Noel Weinstein seconded Michael Doheny's opposition to term limits, the latter adding that he would support the idea of rotating chairmanship, whether it be for an appointed Board or an elected one. He said the point is, why make a change just for change's sake?

Larry Ballin said term limits would avoid complacency on the part of sitting members, and assure new energy always coming in to the Board. If an incoming member knows his or her term is limited, he will understand he has only a certain time to accomplish objectives, and is more likely to get right to work. He added that a member who has rotated out at the end of his or her term limit, can stay off the Board for a year, then apply for re-appointment to that Board.

Celeste Cook said she is not crazy about the idea of term limits, pointing out that the Planning Board's procedures take a long time to learn. She does not see a lot of people standing in line to give all the time and energy that process requires. She noted the increasing complexity and length of time of Planning Board cases, and asked what if the Board is right in the middle of a project when a member's term expires. Larry Ballin said those members rotating out would leave a body of knowledge with the Board. The staff and the new Chairman would both already be involved in that project.

Peter Bianchi agreed that this is a difficulty that Selectmen have always faced. He said he would favor a limitation on the number of terms an individual serves. He said there is the perception in Town that without limiting the number of terms individuals serve, a Board gets ensconced in a direction that may or may not be representative of the entire Town. He said he does not feel continuity is an issue, as there would only be two members rotating out each year. He suggested the general policy be such that there is some rejuvenation of the boards, and a continual flow of new ideas, but with some flexibility built in. For example, the Selectmen could reserve the option of filling an open seat for one year with a previous member.

#### Alternate Members to Boards

Sue Clough said that State law allows Planning Boards, Zoning Boards and Conservation Commissions to have alternate members. She suggested that that may be a way to have new volunteers coming in, and beginning by working on subcommittee issues. Ray Ettenborough asked, would alternates have a vote on the issues, would they be subject to term limits? Sue Clough said alternates would be subject to term limits. Larry Ballin explained that on the Zoning Board, alternates are called to fill in when needed to make a quorum, and in those instances, they are filling the seat of a regular member, and they do vote on the case before the Board that night. It was pointed out that the Zoning Board differs from Planning in that it opens and closes most of its cases in one evening. Larry Ballin said

not always, but when a case must be continued, they try to have the same composition of Board members follow it through.

He asked if alternates were appointed to the Planning Board, would they be used to fill the seats of those members who are rotating out. Sue Clough said the details of how the alternates would serve would have to be worked out. Ray Ettenborough cautioned against allowing the Boards to be put into a position where alternates control the committees. Barbara Brown pointed to the very differing nature of all the Boards.

Michael Doheny asked to clarify that alternates would only have a voice if they are substituting for a regular member in order to make a forum, that is, only when they are serving in active duty. Sue Clough confirmed that, adding that her idea is that alternates would also work on the subcommittees. Harmon Lewis asked if then, the alternates would only come to the meetings when called. Sue Clough suggested that for the Planning Board, alternates be required to come to most of the meetings. Marilyn Kidder pointed out that it would be difficult to ask for a commitment from people, if they are not going to have a vote. She agreed that the details of having alternates need a lot of noodling. She asked Celeste if she felt that having alternates on subcommittees would be helpful to the Planning Board. Celeste Cook said it would, and it would also bring another body of knowledge to the subcommittee. Marilyn Kidder agreed that having alternates serve there would be another way to get them interested in the Board itself.

Peter Bianchi asked if any RSAs pertain to alternates. No, just those mentioned above that allow Boards to have them.

Larry Ballin suggested using retired members (those who have rotated out of their term limits) serve as alternates.

Bob Lavoie suggested a combined solution: (a) setting the term limits at two, (b) having the new people come in to serve on the subcommittees, and (c) using retirees as alternates to be called upon when needed for a quorum.

Paul Gorman said he feels there really needs to be term limits in order to address the perception that the Boards are composed of entrenched interests. He agreed that the policy would have to be clearly articulated, and the details worked out in order to both solve that perception problem, and maintain continuity at the same time. He added that he feels more people might be willing to serve if they know there is a limit to the length of time they will be required to. David Dunning agreed that there is that perception problem, but said that the truth is, there are not that many people lined up to serve on the Boards.

Peter Bianchi, having served as Selectman in the past, agreed that one of the most difficult things Selectmen have to do is to say no thank you to a volunteer, but he pointed out that if everyone knows up front that there are term limits, that would be less of a problem.

Celeste Cook asked if many people are filling out the forms. Also, she noted that the Master Plan subcommittee work will be getting underway. Selectmen confirmed that they have received completed Volunteer Interest Forms from several residents including a number who wish to be active in the Master Plan process. Michael Doheny asked if he has filled out a form in the past, need he do so again. Selectmen confirmed that anyone who has filled out a Volunteer Interest Form in the past will still be on the list, but it would be a good idea to fill one out again.

In conclusion, Ray Ettenborough pointed out that it is not clear from all of the above, whether people are in favor of term limits or not. Selectmen asked for vote by hand, and that indicated that a majority of Citizen Advisory Committee members (14 to 3) do favor some arrangement for term limits.

Selectmen added that the Board appointment process will again be the subject of discussion at 6 p.m. at Monday's Selectmen's meeting. Bob Lavoie asked if the plan is to discuss and decide on a policy at that meeting, then decide on the appointments. Yes.

## **2. Master Planning**

Noel Weinstein said he has heard comments to the effect that the Town is seeing an excessive number of sales of businesses and residences now. He asked if everything is normal or abnormal. Marilyn Kidder said there are more now than this time last year, but the numbers have not reached the levels they once were. Stephanie Wheeler said she feels that the volume of sales is not significantly higher right now; there have been some price adjustments over the last year, but things seem to have stabilized. Sue Clough added that Peter Stanley's records reflect that the number of new house building permits was down last year, but the number of permits for additions and renovations was up. She said that New London's real estate firms provide the Town with some annual statistics regarding growth in Town, and it looks as though there is a pretty stable base. Larry Ballin said he noted that in 2005 there was a great deal of turn over in ownership of businesses but that leveled off in 2006. He noted that the Town is not losing the businesses but just seeing turn over in owners, and that is considered healthy.

Celeste Cook opened some discussion on the lack of affordable housing in New London. Harmon Lewis said that is not the case around New London, in surrounding communities. Marilyn Kidder disagreed, saying it is harder and harder to find affordable housing in surrounding communities as well as right in New London. Steve Landrigan said a median price under \$200,000 is almost unheard of now.

Harmon Lewis asked (if affordable housing were worked into the Master Plan), would it be taxpayer supported or privately sponsored. Sue Clough said one possibility is doing some rezoning. Marilyn Kidder agreed. She said the Town has something of a catch-22 now, in that it has created a situation in which everything is so valuable; having affordable housing will require a lot of help from planning and zoning. Stephanie Wheeler said that one idea would be to relax the zoning restrictions on accessory dwelling units.

Sue Clough added that there has been a lot of talk about keeping the village core, a core. Steve Landrigan suggested the possibility of a land donor. Perhaps someone considering putting his or her land into conservation would donate land for this purpose instead, perhaps even allocating the front of a parcel for a conservation easement, and the rest for housing.

Bob MacMichaels reminded everyone how difficult it was to bring Bittersweet into Town, and members observed that that is federally subsidized. Bob MacMichaels asked about the status of the Hayward building and Mesa building.

Noel Weinstein asked if serving on the Master Plan committees will involve a lot of nuts and bolts. Won't it require a great deal of technical knowledge? Sue Clough said not really, the Master Plan is a vision for the Town. It is what the zoning regulations are based on. She added that the Planning Board plans to get those subcommittee meetings started this spring. The idea is to have the update complete by the current plan's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Marilyn Kidder asked about the Main Street committee, noting that its work would involve more than Main Street beautification. Sue Clough agreed, but said that the State keeps pushing back the date they will begin their work on 114, and the Town would like to do its part at the same time that is done.

In response to question about the round-about, she said the main work of that project will begin in September. (Bids go out this month.) They may be able to get some of the small parts done—sidewalks, for example, before the summer traffic. The objective is to not have the work going on during the height of summer season.

### **3. Selectmen's Update**

- o Sue Clough said she will be the New London Selectmen's representative to the Sunapee Sewer Commission meetings, and that Commission plans to follow through on the infiltration study, and to continue to do upgrades. She noted particularly that New London's Sewer Commissioners should be thanked for the tremendous amount of work and time they put into this Department, and for putting a lot of things in order thus enabling the Selectmen to go forward.

- o Larry Ballin opened some discussion on the petition to be heard at Monday night's Selectmen's meeting regarding a change in the water precinct boundaries. Sue Clough clarified that people who live within the water precinct pay a base fee and those who are actually connected to the system also pay user fees according to the water meters on their homes. Asked about the reasons people signed the petition to change the boundaries, she said there are varying reasons, but most are similar to those who live in a subdivision for which the subdivision owner originally had the option of connecting to the water system, but did not, and those residents now find it would be prohibitively expensive and difficult to do so.

Marilyn Kidder said there are a number of people who own parcels of land without residences on them. The water line passes right in front of those parcels, but there is no connection. Mark Kaplan agreed that if a boundary change is made, those people would take notice and want some similar arrangement for themselves.

Michael Doheny said his feeling is that if residents aren't being served by the water system, they should not be in the precinct, paying the base fee. He does not think it is fair to have to pay that if they are not going to be connected. He said he is talking about people whose houses are hundreds of yards away from the water pipe, and would not be easily connected to it. Steve Landrigan said he feels that as long as the Selectmen feel it is in the public's best interest to keep the boundaries as they are (and until that is no longer the case), they should not be changed. Sue Clough said one proposal is that if it seems unlikely that a house will ever be connected to the water line, perhaps there could be a reduction in that base pay.

D.J. Lavoie asked about the process here. Sue Clough said both Towns' (Springfield and New London) Boards of Selectmen must recommend the boundary change before it goes to the water precinct for final decision. (She noted that the Water Precinct Board has already said it does not think a boundary change is a good idea.) In response to further question from D.J. Lavoie, Selectmen clarified that it is the Water Precinct Board (consisting of elected representatives) that will actually vote, but any member of the public can speak at the public hearing.

- o Bob Lavoie asked about the progress of the Salary Review Subcommittee of the Budget Committee. Larry Ballin said that subcommittee has met with the representative from Local Government Center who did the salary study for the Town, and the subcommittee is now in the process of digesting all that information. Sue Clough reminded everyone that Town Meeting agreed to pay employees the 3% COLA retroactively to January, and the 3% merit increase pending evaluations.

Bob Lavoie said the question is how will this issue be handled in the future, noting that a number of the Town's employees are above median salary levels now. Larry Ballin agreed that the Town has been on an increasing matrix for a long time. The discussion is one of lateral scale over horizontal scale. He noted that the subcommittee is also discussing benefits. Those are costly, and they are looking at all options such as HSAs.

Sue Clough said she would be cautious about tearing apart the study that has been done. She feels it is important to encourage people who are working and living in New London now to stay here. Steve Landrigan opined that it is not necessarily a bad thing to have a number of employees above the median range in salary. He added also, that cost of living here is above median, too.

Bob Lavoie asked to confirm that any policy that comes out of the subcommittee's work will be immediately transparent to residents. Yes.

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The meeting adjourned at 8:50 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah A. Denz  
Recording Secretary