

Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
May 14, 2011
7:30am

Meeting Attendees:

Mark Kaplan (Chair, Selectmen), Peter Bianchi (Selectman), Jack Harrod, Terri Bingham, Will Kidder, Phyllis Piotrow, Vahan Sarkisian, Rip Cross, Howard Hoke, Beth Swanson, Joe Cardillo, Bud Dick, Don Klingler, Sue Little, Rob Prohl, Jack Harrod, Peter Hoglund, Maureen Prohl, Bruce Hudson, Renate Kannler, Celeste Cook, Bob MacMichael, Gary Markoff, Rich Anderson

Chair Kaplan called the **MEETING TO ORDER** at 7:30 AM.

The Town Administrator Search Committee will begin interviewing nine candidates beginning the week of May 23rd. The top three will then be interviewed by the Board of Selectmen. They hoped to have someone in the position by the end of June. Mr. Cardillo asked for information about the selection committee. Mr. Bianchi said there were eight people on the committee. Chair Kaplan noted the importance of confidentiality in this process. Mr. Sarkisian wanted to know who was on the committee. Ms. Helm explained that the Board of Selectmen decided that each of them would come in with two names which would not be challenged by the others on the board. Then they agreed on two names, together. The members who were chosen are: Erle Blanchard, Dan Snyder, Doug Lyon, Karen Ebel, Dave Cook, Stefan Timbrel, Lisa Carlin, and Cicely Markoff. Chair Kaplan noted that seven of the members were present at the first meeting, which was held the previous day. The facilitator, Barry Cox, is a representative from LGC, and will be present at each interview. Mr. Bianchi explained that the Board of Selectmen would not be present during the interviews at this level. Mr. Cox will be sure that the interviews are conducted in a legal manner, keeping certain questions omitted from discussion. Chair Kaplan noted that background checks would be done. Mr. Cross asked about drug testing. Chair Kaplan said he didn't know of any testing that was required. Ms. Helm wondered if town employees were required to be fingerprinted and was curious to find out.

Ms. Helm spoke for herself when she indicated that if she doesn't feel comfortable with the final candidates, they would go back to the drawing board and begin the search anew.

Chair Kaplan noted that they have invited the people of Elkins to the Board of Selectmen's meeting on May 23rd to talk about the possible work to be done in Elkins. There seemed to be a bit of controversy at Town Meeting regarding the project. The Board of Selectmen wanted to make sure there was a time for questions to be asked and answered. The meeting would begin at 6pm and would be the first agenda item at the Board of Selectmen's meeting. Chair Kaplan said that this meeting would be advertised in the Kearsarge Shopper.

Mr. Bianchi said that the money has been appropriated for the engineering portion of the project, but no money can be used for actual construction until they have another Town Meeting and decide that the majority of the Town is on board. Chair Kaplan said that the Town pays 20% (\$160,000) of the bill, and the rest is federally funded at 80% (\$800,000).

Mr. Markoff asked if the email list serve that Ms. Levine used to announce meetings and other town information was still being used and by whom. He said he wasn't receiving notices like he had been when Ms. Levine was there. Chair Kaplan indicated that Ms. Hardy, Interim Town Administrator, was handling this and they would check with her about it.

Mr. Cardillo wondered if the funding for the Elkins project was State or Federal and if it would still be available if they waited beyond September. Chair Kaplan said that it is Federal money but comes through

the State. He said if the people of Elkins don't want the work done, the Board of Selectmen won't go through with it. The vote (taken via voice) at Town Meeting was overwhelmingly for the project. A few people were against it. Ms. Prohl said that historically there have been two well-attended meetings regarding this project. The Town applied for and won this grant. Both she and her husband Rob Prohl helped put the application together, which sold the project. She felt it was great to revisit it, but felt as though it had been revisited enough and they should move on with the project.

Mr. Bianchi said the original application and scope of work had changed, for instance, the MESA building is now gone. He wondered if details that were evident on an artist's charrette were the things the people of Elkins wanted. Ms. Prohl said those details are what they will hash out once it has been decided to move forward. She opined that the people of Elkins may think this work will make their town "fancy-fied" and that they don't want this; they like it the way it is.

Mr. Bianchi said it seems as though all the grants they get seem to come from different places, including FEMA, State of New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, etc. Each grant has different requirements and specifications. Chair Kaplan said they will need \$5.2 million dollars for the sewer project. They have been approved on a 25% grant, which is contingent on the Federal and State budgets. If they don't receive the grant, they will need to borrow this money. He thought the rate of the balance they would be responsible for was at 2.8% or 2.9%. They will know by July 1st if the grant will be funded. If un-funded, the Town will go to private funding sources to borrow the money and begin the project, as the project needs to be done. With the grant, the balance needs to be paid off in 20 years. A private loan will be paid back over 30 years.

Chair Kaplan said the water treatment plant is slated to be completed in 2013. They are discussing the possible addition of UV filtration which is a \$50,000 add-on to the project. Mr. Bianchi noted that Sunapee has applied for an RDA grant for their portion of the project. Every step within the project requires different procedures and timelines for the project because two towns are getting their funds from two different grants.

Ms. Bingham asked if the project contemplated adding more users. Chair Kaplan said it did not; it was contemplated with existing usage. He indicated that the plant is still under-used at just 60% utilization. Ms. Helm said there were no plans for expansion as it wasn't necessary at this time. Chair Kaplan said the only area they have contemplated expanding was the homes around Perkins Pond. Mr. Bianchi said that New London owns 65% of the 600,000,000 gallons/day capacity. If Sunapee reaches capacity on their end, they wouldn't be able to expand any further unless New London sold back some of their capacity to them. He was against doing this. Chair Kaplan said that New London has saved a considerable amount of money due to the Department of Public Works making upgrades and repairs to leaky manholes which were pumping excess water to the sewer.

Mr. Markoff asked how many bids would be forthcoming and what was the minimum they were aiming for regarding the contract? How is the construction going to follow the engineering? Chair Kaplan said engineering was to be done by Wright-Pierce, who will be sending out the RFPs. They have done a number of these projects throughout New Hampshire including one in Keene. They know the best people to hire for the work. Mr. Bianchi thought there was a minimum of three bids, and if using Federal or State money, they have to pick the lowest bid. Every engineering company can find out about this project and if they wanted it bad enough, could come in, lower the numbers, and get the job. Mr. Cross noted that the company would need to get a sizable bond before doing the work, so they would need to be of substantial size to even bid on the project.

Mr. Markoff asked about the retirement community that had been contemplated by the hospital and if this was accounted for in the study. Chair Kaplan said that it wasn't part of the study, but they have taken the possibility into consideration. It wouldn't raise their usage of the plant by 50% so were not alarmed. Mr. Markoff wondered if expansion should be contemplated, as projects such as the retirement community and increases at the college could create further need. Chair Kaplan didn't believe this expansion would happen at both the hospital and the college. They would actually have to double in size. Ms. Helm said she wasn't sure they should speak for the hospital with regards to the retirement community being put on hold. Mr. Harrod said he had received a letter indicating that this was the case.

Ms. Helm said she was impressed with New London's collaboration with Sunapee on this project. She added that they had established a subcommittee to study the plans given to them by Wright Pierce. Richard Lee and Ed Rushbrook (their hired consulting engineer) represent New London on this subcommittee.

Mr. Bianchi said it seems the population in New London is level, given the latest census. He thought that if they are not increasing the population, or possibly decreasing, they should consider this fact in any long-range plans they are working on.

Chair Kaplan asked if anyone had any questions on any subject.

Mr. Sarkisian said that a number of people have approached him about the additional charge on their Comcast bills that is going to the Town. Chair Kaplan said that at the annual renewal with Comcast, it was indicated that the town is entitled to raise its franchise fees as high as 5%. Until this current year, it was 3%. The Board of Selectmen increased it by .5%, making it 3.5%. The money goes into the general fund. Mr. Bianchi said it adds up to about \$60,000/year. Mr. Sarkisian wondered if they could use this money for bringing Wi-Fi and other technological gains into the town. Mr. Bianchi said that could be done, but there would need to be a push for it. He noted that the town used to have its own channel, but there is no current interest to do this. Chair Kaplan didn't believe that \$60,000 would be enough to pay for the expense of a public station. Ms. Helm said that someone contacted her and the percentage on their bill was 3.85%. She suggested having them talk to Comcast about it, as it should not be that high. Mr. Bianchi noted that this was for television only; not internet. The franchise fee was at 3% for 8-10 years.

Ms. Prohl asked if there was any station that could be hired to broadcast locally. Mr. Markoff suggested they could broadcast things like Town Meeting over the internet so families who couldn't leave their children, or who were remote, could dial in. They could rent that broadcast for one day. This is something that is happening now and is an available service.

Chair Kaplan explained, as most were aware, they have changed their fiscal year. The next Town Elections will be the second Tuesday of May, 2012. The Board of Selectmen are trying to determine which day Town Meeting would be held; the voting has to be on that Tuesday, but the actual meeting could be held another day. Mr. Prohl said that the school district has to issue contracts by April 15th, by law. Mr. Harrod said that the school budgets are usually "A" or "B" (Municipal Budget Committee (MBC)/School Board (SB)) and are usually similar. Mr. Markoff agreed that this could be a stumbling block, as they won't know definitively, what the budget is. This year, the difference in the MBC and the SB was \$300,000+.

Mr. Bianchi said that they will open the Town Meeting when the elections open, for the purpose of voting. It would be announced that Town Meeting would be reopened at a later date. Mr. Harrod said he believed some other towns had a problem with Saturdays in May. Ms. Helm asked people to consider a Friday night meeting, as the usual Wednesday night meeting could be ill-attended due to it being a school

night. Mr. Markoff thought if the May meeting created a dislocation with teacher contract tendering, they should change the Town Meeting back to March.

Mr. Hoke said they could open the meeting on Tuesday in March, and then recess until May. Ms. Helm didn't believe they had that flexibility.

Mr. Cross wondered how the tax collection went. Chair Kaplan said it went very well. Mr. Bianchi said that Ms. Hardy indicated usually they have \$500,000 in the bank after Town Meeting. This year, they had over \$3,000,000.

Ms. Piotrow asked if New London had any interest in the Northern Pass issue. She said the experience Hilltop has had with PSNH repairing and putting underground pipes in has been poor. The lesson they learned from this experience was that what PSNH promises is not always what is delivered. Chair Kaplan said there was no interest in the issue.

Mr. Dick said in spite of what they hear on talk radio and Fox News, what it boils down to is that there are 11 appropriations bills and all the government comes down to those bills. He spent two years as a lobbyist for the hospitality industry and found that if you find the right person you can get your project funded. He advised that the money appropriated won't be lost; once it is appropriated, it stays that way.

Mr. Sarkisian said he wanted the group to think about installing a small roundabout near the library. He has done some measuring and thinks a smaller roundabout than was in the center of town, would fit without taking any land away. He drives through one small roundabout in Concord and found it works nicely. Ms. Little said she recalled that this area was measured for a roundabout when they measured for the one that was created. Chair Kaplan recalled the same, except he indicated that Mr. Sarkisian was referring to an even smaller roundabout.

Mr. Sarkisian also asked if it was necessary to keep the library lights on all night. He has driven by as late as 10pm and has found all the lights on. Mr. Bianchi said they had the same problem in the town office because the cleaning people were afraid of not having the lights on. They have a new cleaning service now and so far it has not been a problem.

Mr. Markoff said that Ms. Levine had been becoming very adept at generating relationships in Concord. Having those relationships were valuable, as they enabled the Town to know what was coming, and relationships may predict an outcome. The candidate they choose should have the skills or willingness to execute on that front as well as local and the town. He remarked that what is happening at the State level is important to what is happening to them as a Town. Mr. Markoff also wondered if the Town Administrator would have a one-year contract. Mr. Bianchi said that Ms. Levine's contract had a 60-day notice, which she carried out.

Mr. Cardillo had to leave, but thought for next meeting he'd like to hear feedback on what is happening with the school lease situation with the former middle school. He was also interested in hearing about the skateboard park progression, and the community center proposition. Mr. Markoff said that the school board agreed to give the town the land for the skateboard park, but it has not progressed. The School Board has negotiated with some people pushing for a community center and they are at the beginning of the process. Mr. Bianchi said a contract was to be signed by the group interested in getting a Community Center created, the following Monday. Ms. Helm said that this would be funded by private money and no town money was involved.

Mr. Dick said there had been a thought to move the culinary arts program to the former middle school. The students are now are traveling to Concord. To cut down on bussing, he wondered if there had been any thought to moving the program back to New London. Mr. Markoff could not speak to that factually. He said that there had been a lot of ideas but no move has been made. He recommended coming to the next School Board meeting which would be held the coming Thursday at 6:30pm to ask questions and discuss the topic further. He invited anyone in the room to show up at the meeting and get involved. Mr. Bianchi said one of the tenants of the contract to be signed planned to have the kitchen and cafeteria designated for school use. He felt the tenants of the building would be in favor of the school district and school programs.

Ms. Helm asked who was on the committee. Mr. Markoff said that Fred Downey represented the Community Center, and Dan Wolf was the School Board representative.

Mr. Bianchi said the library project has started, and they've done some work on the beach situation. He offered to stay after the meeting to discuss, should anyone be interested.

Ms. Helm said the next meeting would be held at COA on June 11th at 7:30am.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London