

TOWN OF NEW LONDON
CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE
APRIL 1, 2006

PRESENT: Cindy Adie, Peter Bianchi, Bill Clough, Sue Clough (Selectman), Michael Doheny, Mark Kaplan (Selectman), Karen Hogle, Doug Lyon (Selectman), Peggy Holliday, Marilyn Kidder, Jessie Levine (Town Administrator), Harmon Lewis, Bob MacMichael, Lois Marshall, Peter Messer, Noel Weinstein, Stephanie Wheeler.

Doug Lyon opened the meeting at 7:30 a.m., with the following announcements:

- o The petition warrant article proposing an increase in the veterans' credit from \$200 to \$500 was passed by voters at Town Meeting.
- o Voters also approved the allocation of \$38,000 for the mosquito control program, including both the larviciding, and the trapping and testing of some adult mosquito populations in town. (The \$4800 previously approved for mosquito control will be applied to that.)
- o The Town has a new Recreation Director—Chad Deming, and he will meet with the CAC in May.
- o New London Health Officer Dr. Don Bent has received the Roger Fossum Award for Lifetime Achievement in Public Health.
- o The demolition of the Whipple Town Hall basement has been completed, except for removal of the asbestos; that must be done by a separate contractor. With that, they have been able to eliminate wiring issues and three of the ceilings, and determined the amount of room available there. The next step is to come up with a design plan. Mark Kaplan added that the Selectmen would like to hear from anyone with suggestions on that.

During the meeting, CAC members discussed at length the proposed improvements to the County/Newport Roads intersection, and more briefly other intersections in Town, Police Department and Transfer Station.

County Road/Newport Road Intersection

Doug Lyon reminded members that the Town has received a grant which will cover 80% of the cost of these improvements, and at Town Meeting, voters appropriated the funds to come up with a design for the intersection. For a number of reasons the Board of Selectmen is leaning toward a "roundabout" for that intersection, and a public meeting has been scheduled for April 17, to go over the pros and cons of both the roundabouts and the signal intersections. They would like to go to next year's town meeting with a definite plan.

Using slides, he showed the differences between a "roundabout" and a regular "traffic circle." The former forces vehicles to make a right turn upon entering, and to slow down. The latter does not result in vehicles that are entering to slow down. He said that a traffic light would force traffic to stop altogether.

They have obtained data as well as photographs of a number of roundabouts in use at intersections throughout the country, and he referred everyone to the Town's web site which offers some video of vehicles moving through the roundabouts. He noted that the one in Montpelier, Vermont which is adjacent to the school, has received particularly high marks in that statistics show that prior to the roundabout being constructed, that intersection saw an average of five accidents per year; since the roundabout, they have had four accidents in ten years.

He referred to a slide of the roundabout being proposed for the County and Newport Roads intersection (design in early stages), noting the landscaped center and the truck lane or "apron." The proposed roundabout will be 110 feet in diameter with the landscaped center being about 40-feet in diameter.

Mark Kaplan pointed out that this proposal calls for "islands" for the pedestrian cross walks in the entering and existing traffic lanes which will reduce pedestrian exposure to traffic to four seconds. At a typical signal

intersection, pedestrians are exposed to traffic for ten seconds. Statistics show that there are an average of 1000 deaths of pedestrians crossing at signal intersections each year.

Marilyn Kidder asked if the roundabout at that intersection would create gaps in the traffic further down Main Street. Jessie Levine said data indicates that the roundabout will have that impact on traffic only about 500 to 800 feet away. Further away than that, people entering Main Street from the side streets will fill in the gaps. Sue Clough added that the same numbers apply to signal intersections—that is, they provide gaps in traffic for only a distance of 500 to 800 feet away from the intersection.

Noel Weinstein said that the current data shows that that intersection sees 1200 to 1300 vehicles per hour during peak times; that's three per second, and speed limit on that stretch of road is now 30 mph. Will traffic slowing down for the roundabout create a problem during those peak hours? Doug Lyon said in peak hours, traffic may back up, but less so with a roundabout than with a signal. He added that their understanding is that the roundabout can easily handle as many as 2500 vehicles per hour, and, in looking at this, Selectmen are trying to plan for twenty years down the road.

Noel Weinstein asked if the center and the islands will be elevated. Jessie Levine said yes, though they have not determined by how much.

The Selectmen and Administrator went on to discuss statistics indicating that, though roundabouts may be more expensive to construct, there are substantial improvements in safety, as well as cost benefits over time. For example, a roundabout will reduce the potential points of conflict between two vehicles from 24 to 8 and the potential points of conflict between vehicles and pedestrians from 32 to 8. Those numbers are the same whether you are changing from a traffic light to a roundabout or from a stop sign to a roundabout. Statistics also indicate that roundabouts reduce minor accidents at the intersection by 39%, accidents with damage to vehicles by 76%, and accidents resulting in fatalities or incapacitating injuries by 89%. Vermont has done a cost benefit analysis for its roundabouts, and determined the savings in property damage, insurance premiums, etc. Surveys indicate that people favoring roundabouts jumped from 31% before construction to 63% after construction of the roundabout, and the numbers opposed decreased from 41% before construction of the roundabout to 15% after construction of the roundabout.

Harmon Lewis pointed out that with a traffic light, the Town can regulate it according to the time of day and season. Also, he asked about a walk light similar to those used in Hanover. Doug Lyon said changing the timing of the light with the time of day or with the season, may cause more problems particularly during times of higher traffic volume.

Noel Weinstein expressed concern that over time, the roundabout would require more maintenance, including landscaping. There will be some kind of Town commitment to this. Jessie Levine reiterated the savings in things like property damage. Vehicles entering will have to slow down to 18 mph, and there will be signage warning them of the roundabout ahead. Doug Lyon added that there would be annual maintenance costs with a light as well.

Karen Hogle said the constant flow of traffic on Main Street is dangerous. She suggested a delayed green at the County/Newport Road intersection, plus the pedestrian lights suggested by Harmon Lewis. Sue Clough said this intersection is so far away from Main Street, the gaps in traffic created by the delayed green would be filled in by people entering from side streets.

Peggy Holliday reported that her observation while in Australia was that roundabouts are very effective.

Bill Clough asked if that intersection is built out now. How about in 20 years? Jessie Levine said it is built out, with the exception of the frontage owned by the hospital that includes the power line. The State has approved an entrance there, and the hospital may utilize that for such in the future.

Bill Clough asked if the roundabout would be bicycle friendly. Doug Lyon said yes, some of the tapes show that bicycles enter the roundabout and go through it just like a car. The cars cannot pass the bikes in the roundabouts, as they do on regular traffic ways. He noted that in video of the Montpelier roundabout in action, some of the school

children are going through it on bikes. Ms. Clough said the speed in the intersection was 18-20 MPH, which should be appropriate for bicyclists as well. Ms. Levine said the engineer's advice was to "claim the lane."

Peter Bianchi asked if there is a fender bender in the roundabout, won't that completely stop everyone. He said that with a light, traffic could just go left to get around the accident. He asked if any studies have been done relating to roundabouts causing bottle necks in such instances. Doug Lyon said that in an emergency, emergency vehicles can go over the truck apron. Peter Bianchi confirmed that there would be some sort of protocol for that. He noted that the roundabout would not eliminate those kinds of incidents, but reduce them. He asked if it would require additional lighting. No.

Peter Messer said that now that he has more information about the roundabout, he would be in favor of it for that intersection. He asked about the best way to get this information out to the public. Doug Lyon said there will be information on the link, and the public meeting on the 17th. Also, they intend to discuss it with the various service organizations in Town. They have a year to inform people about roundabouts. Sue Clough added that the Master Plan will include some discussion of this in its multiple public sessions.

Marilyn Kidder expressed concern about yet more new signs. Jessie Levine said her office receives complaints to the contrary, but she assured everyone that signage will be part of the review and design process. Marilyn Kidder urged them to accomplish what they must with as little additional signage as possible.

Harmon Lewis asked if the traffic will still be required to yield to pedestrians. Yes.

Bob MacMichael said he is in favor of this, but cautioned that a great deal of grading will be required in its construction, particularly on the hospital side of County Road. Selectmen agreed, but pointed out that issues such as the difficulty entering and exiting Jake's and Ledyard, for example, already exist.

Peggy Holliday asked if the plan includes extending the sidewalk up toward Hilltop. Sue Clough said yes, actually the entire intersection project is driven by the sidewalk extensions, and the State's requirements for addressing the intersection before it would allow a sidewalk in that area, though she added that everyone—the hospital, merchants, safety departments—agrees that the intersection should not stay the way it is right now. Jessie Levine went on to elaborate on the proposed sidewalk work which will be included in this project.

Peggy Holliday asked about the stretch of County Road from the intersection to Lakeside Road, which is particularly dangerous for pedestrians. Jessie Levine agreed, and said the Town is looking at that. That stretch is complicated by the steep bank on one side, as well as the fact that the water main is located under that side of the road.

Marilyn Kidder asked about the frequency of ambulances coming out at that intersection. Jessie Levine referred to data indicating how easily emergency vehicles can get through the roundabouts. Sue Clough added that the State prefers the roundabout to a signal light. Doug Lyon added that some states—New York, Maryland, Kansas and Alaska, require roundabouts for any intersection improvement, except where one would not fit.

Michael Doheny said his observation of the roundabout in Duxbury, MA, which must accommodate traffic exiting and interstate the nearby interstate, is that it is very effective.

Marilyn Kidder asked what is under the road there. Jessie Levine said there are some utilities and water mains there. They are not going to do anything about the PSNH lines at the Ledyard corner, due to cost; however, the project will offer the water precinct opportunity to upgrade its main under the road.

Stephanie Wheeler asked how long the construction would last. Jessie Levine said for a light it would be about a month, for the roundabout 2 or 3 months. She added that they must spend the grand funds by October 2007, so the plan is to take the design to Town meeting in March 2007, and, hopefully, begin work on it as soon as possible that spring.

Noel Weinstein asked how artistic the Town can get with the landscaped center. Could it have a fountain? Jessie Levine said she would like that, but there are already drainage issues in that area.

Harmon Lewis asked if the pedestrian cross walk in front of the Gallery and the one from Hilltop's back entrance will remain in place. Jessie Levine said yes, and added that there is some consideration for extending the pedestrian safety islands up Newport Road some distance, though she does not think that will be done as far as the crosswalk in front of the Gallery.

Karen Hoglund asked about putting a light at the crosswalk. Doug Lyon said that as soon as you stop all traffic, you defeat the purpose of the roundabout. He added that people ignore those lights a great deal of the time.

Marilyn Kidder asked if emergency vehicles would just go with the flow of traffic while in the roundabout, or would there be a way for them to get around it. Doug Lyon said that they could use the truck apron, and Jessie Levine said that the Fire Department has set up cones in the dimensions of the proposed roundabout, and found that they were able to navigate through those with their vehicles. The roundabout should accommodate vehicles as large as a 53-foot tractor trailer. It will not be designed for the extra-wide, or double tractor trailers, but those are not supposed to be on that road anyway.

Bob MacMichael said that ambulances coming from this end of town would have to go all the way around the roundabout to get to the hospital. Doug Lyon agreed, but there won't be the back up there would be with a signal intersection.

Marilyn Kidder asked about the space that would be taken from the corners for the roundabouts. Doug Lyon said they would not take much more than some slivers for the sidewalks. The travel portion of the roundabout will work in the existing space of the intersection. Jessie Levine elaborated by pointing out some possibilities for the Jakes corner, and the possibility of including a retaining wall for the slope on the corner across from that (by Huberts).

Peter Messer asked if this work will go out to bid. Jessie Levine said yes, that is a requirement—both for the design, and for the construction, as this is a federal grant.

Doug Lyon said they have asked the consultants to take a look at the Jiffy Mart intersection as well, and found that it would take a roundabout if the landscaped center were eliminated. In other words, the truck apron would be the center. Jessie Levine said they have applied for a grant to improve that intersection, but she is less optimistic about getting it. Noel Weinstein said the main problem with that intersection is that cars traveling south have reduced vision as they come up that (Pleasant Street) hill, and approach the intersection. He added that the close proximity of the gas tanks to the road complicates things there.

Doug Lyon said that the intersection which sees the most accidents is the Four Corners. Both roads there are state roads, so it is not clear what the Town can do about it.

Other Items

Bill Clough asked about reactions to the reduction in speed limit to 30 mph on Newport Road going out of town. Jessie Levine said responses from Great Pines and South Cove residents have been positive.

Noel Weinstein asked if the policing of the transfer station is working. Selectmen and Jessie Levine said it seems to be. More people are coming in to get stickers, and the transfer station attendants are able to do their own work.

Peter Bianchi suggested increasing police presence on some of the private roads such as in Seasons and Slope and Shore. Harmon Lewis asked who owns those roads. Would the police need permission to go in there? Doug Lyon said they are private roads, but public ways, and the police would not need permission.

Karen Hoglund suggested, and several CAC members concurred, that people in Town feel out of touch with the Police Department these days. Some CAC members said they do not even know who is working in that Department now. Karen Hoglund suggested a cracker barrel meeting, or some other interaction with the Police Department.

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Marilyn Kidder reiterated a comment she made at an earlier meeting regarding the absence of the police logs. Although they would not want to raise people's fears unnecessarily, it would be a good idea for people to have an idea of what is going on in Town.

The meeting adjourned at 9 a.m. Next meeting of the CAC will be April 29 at 7:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S.A. Denz
Recording Secretary