



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES November 17, 2008

PRESENT:

Mark Kaplan, Chair, Board of Selectman
Larry Ballin, Selectman
Tina Helm, Selectman
Jessie Levine, Town Administrator
Norman Bernaiche, Town Assessor
Kris McAllister, Assistant Assessor
Dave Seastrand, Chief of Police
Peter Stanley, Zoning Administrator
Karen Hoglund, Realtor, New London Agency
Stephanie Wheeler, Realtor, New London Agency
Jim Wheeler, Realtor, New London Agency
Marilyn Kidder, Realtor, Coldwell Banker Milestone
Stefan Timbrell, Realtor, Country Houses
Debbie Cross, Intertown Record

The Selectmen signed the following documents at 7:50 A.M.

Applications for Building Permits:

- K & G Enterprises, 11 Pleasant St. (Map & Lot 084-073-000) installation of 6x8 environment remediation shed – Permit #08-142 – Approved.

Application for Sydney Crook Room:

- New London Garden Club, July 25, 2009 – 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM– Approved.

Application for Whipple Hall:

- Tiger Mountain Shotokan Karate, every Tuesday evening 6:00 – 8:00 PM Approved.

Application for Permanent Sign:

- Bob Andrews Memorial Park, 375 Main St. (Map & Lot 084-090-000) 4x4 post with bracket – Approved.

Intent to Cut Forms:

- Charles Bucklin Family Trust – Morgan Hill Road (Map & Lot 033-027-000) Approved.
- Martha Harris Trust – Little Sunapee Route 114 (Map & Lot 046-002-000) Approved.

Other:

- Disbursement voucher for week of 11-17-08 - Approved.
- GIS Service Maintenance Agreement (2) – Cartographic Associates – 12/22/08-12/21/09 – Approved.

MEETING MINUTES: Chair Kaplan called the meeting to order at 8:00 A.M. The Minutes of November 10, 2008 were approved as presented.

NEW BUSINESS:

Report on Local Government Center Annual Conference: Jessie Levine reported that she attended the Local Government Center's Annual Conference along with Tina Helm, Larry Ballin, Amy Rankins, Carol Fraley and Linda Jackman from the Town of New London. Ms. Levine summarized her attendance at the conference by indicating that the information disseminated was beneficial and will be useful. Ms. Helm attended, at her own expense, sessions on Strategic Leadership, Regional Planning, and Deploying Low Cost Municipal networks. Ms. Helm brought back hand-outs from the sessions which she will give to Jessie Levine.

Ms. Levine stated that she was pleased that the Selectmen were able to attend the conference. This conference has gotten so big, with many programs being offered, that the town really needs many people to attend in order to benefit from all that is offered. Ms. Levine stated that some of the staff from New London was there to attend conference programs on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Ms. Helm concluded that the conference was very well organized and provided a valuable resource for sharing information among the attendees.

Larry Ballin attended the Municipal Advocacy Committee and was put on that Board for a 3-year term. This committee set the legislative policy which sets policies which the staff works under.

CAC: Jessie Levine confirmed with the Selectmen that there will not be a meeting November 22, 2008. The next CAC meeting is on Saturday, December 6, 2008. Tina Helm informed the Selectmen that she will be unable to attend that meeting.

Use of MLS Listings: Chair Kaplan welcomed Norm Bernaiche and Kris McAllister, Town Assessors and Peter Stanley, Zoning Administrator, to the meeting along with small group of realtors to revisit the issue initiated at last month's Citizen's Advisory Committee meeting. Specifically, regarding concerns by the realtors that apparently their advertisements were being used to increase assessed values of homes that were on the market. Ms. Levine indicated that those in attendance were invited to facilitate an understanding of the process of assessment currently being used and to determine whether or not that process should be revised in the future. Ms. Levine indicated that she invited Mr. Stanley to attend since what is done with regard to this topic will affect the zoning as well.

Chair Kaplan asked Mr. Bernaiche to review the process he currently uses to make assessments. Mr. Bernaiche indicated that they have several methods by which they gain information. These include: building permits; driving by the property under review, looking for any institutional change; utilizing a regular re-inspection program; sending letters requesting inspections to those home owners who are not home during a neighborhood re-inspection; sending letters out at the time of every home sale to verify the data; and utilizing the MLS listings and comparing these to current property assessment cards. Mr. Bernaiche further indicated that any home owner who has a change in assessed value gets written notification informing them of the reason for the change and a copy of the new tax card. The home owner is then asked to review this information and look for any discrepancies, inviting the owner to call the assessor with any issues they may have. The goal of this program is accuracy of assessments. During this process, assessments have both been increased as well as decreased.

Ms. Hogle asked Mr. Bernaiche if he becomes aware of a change, does he go ahead and make the change to the assessment card first and then notify the home owner. Mr. Bernaiche indicated that he makes the change on the card first. He believes this is the most efficient way to proceed due to the

resources currently available to him. If the home owner believes this change to be inaccurate, then they will let him know.

Ms. Levine asked what was the most common change to a home that the assessors have found through the MLS information. Ms. McAllister said that it was probably finished basements, since homeowners frequently do not share this information with the assessor. She further stated that New London goes one step further than many communities in that they notify the home owner of any changes to their assessment. Many communities do not do this.

Ms. Hoglund stated that she had two clients who were directly affected by this process. One was an elderly man who brought her his new card and notice. She said that the notice itself did not have detailed information, just indicating what the old value was and what the new value is and stating that the reason for the change could be related to one or more reasons stated at the top of the notice. Unless the home owner had a copy of the old card, they would not be able to compare that to the new one to determine the exact changes.

Ms. Levine reviewed the process where a current home owner is informed of a difference in assessment: when a difference in the home is picked-up between the home and its assessed value, a letter is sent to the home owner indicating the change, and perhaps the home owner will call the assessor and ask them to come see the home. If the property is sold then a letter goes out to the owner requesting an opportunity to go out to review the home at the time of sale to make sure that the data reflects the sale price. If there are any discrepancies, then the data would be adjusted. However, the value would not be adjusted simply based on the sale price. That data goes into the whole year of data for the town which is then analyzed. This is done once a year. Ms. Levine reminded the meeting that they are required by NH law to have accurate data.

Larry Ballin brought the discussion to a close by suggesting that the following steps should be followed in this process: include the old and new tax assessment card, highlighting the changes, along with the letter of notification inviting and encouraging the property owner to call with any questions or concerns. He further stipulated that the MLS listing should be used by the assessors in gathering information rather than the advertised property listing. Ms. Levine stated that the property owner has the opportunity to talk to the assessor at any time during the year, and changes can be made. The property owner can also apply for an abatement before March 1, which would be retroactive for the entire year. Peter Stanley, Zoning Administrator, stated that he and the assessors work closely together to keep each other apprised of changes to properties that they may become aware of which may affect assessing as well as zoning statutes. When changes occur is important from a zoning perspective due to changes in the zoning regulations.

Jim Wheeler asked where the assessor draws the line with regard to renovation when making a change in assessment. Mr. Bernaiche responded by saying that this whole process is subjective. He observes a property relative to its age, design appeal, quality of renovations, and overall condition. He said that the assessors are more than willing to come out and review the property. He also said that when a realtor lists a property, if they want the assessor to come and look at it before it is listed, they would be more than willing to do that.

Ms. Levine suggested that when the realtor is speaking with a client about any changes in the property that are to be included in the listing that they ask the home owner if they got a building permit for the changes, since this is now required by the zoning ordinance as of December 2007. Most changes that are cosmetic in addition to structural now need to be approved. Mr. Bernaiche and Mr. Stanley also mentioned that they frequently get intended home purchasers and banks coming to review the assessment and zoning records of a town to make sure there are no issues with the property prior to closing.

Ms. Levine stated that Mr. Bernaiche has prepared an informational memo concerning the sales climate nationwide and locally and wondered how this should be released. It was suggested that rather than mailing this memo out it be placed on the web site. The gist of the memo is that we are faring better locally due to our unique market, and that a downward adjustment of assessments is probably unlikely. Mr. Bernaiche said that last year the median was higher than the weighted mean ratio, and both are well under a 100 % assessment-to-sales ratio. When a realtor calls for this information with regard to New London, they should be given both the weighted mean and the ratio data. Ms Hoglund said that this process has been very satisfactory. The fact that a topic can come up at a Citizens Advisory Committee and then is brought before the selectmen for discussion and resolution is very gratifying.

Reschedule November 24 Selectmen's meeting:

This meeting was canceled due to a conflict in Ms. Levine's meeting schedule.

OLD BUSINESS:

Installation of Gate at Pleasant Lake Dam: Ms. Kidder asked for an update on the Pleasant Lake Dam. Ms. Levine reported that the gate was being installed today. She said that the town was not paying the original company the full cost and has hired Paul Manson to complete the job and that they were crediting some of his cost against some of what they still owe the company in Maine. She said that they may still come after the town for this money, but they will deal with that if it occurs.

COMMITTEE MEETING & REPORTS:

CIP Subcommittee (November 11): Ms. Levine distributed a spread sheet which she does annually to set dispatch fees for New London customers. In this context she and Dave Seastrand have a meeting on Wednesday with representatives from Merrimack County and the towns in Merrimack County that dispatch like we do. Apparently there is discussion about whether there should be county wide dispatching and we certainly have that interest due to the \$130,000 annually in revenue that comes to New London.

Returning to the spreadsheet, Ms. Levine said that every year the Police Department gives Ms. Levine the number of calls for service for the previous year and the number of calls to date. We bill the customer towns on a three year average based on calls and a base user fee that every town pays of \$3000. The remainder of their fee is based on a three year average of their call volume. To start with, New London pays 62% of the dispatch budget; we bill out the 38%. The budget includes what we know right now that is in the budget plus a 5% adjustment to all of the salary categories. Ms. Levine said that usually at this time of year she sends notice to the participating town of a "worse case" scenario that your fee will be no higher than, and will follow-up once the budget is final. Comparing the 2008 and 2009 fees, most noticeable is the Grantham Fast Squad; their call volume went up tremendously so they have a 17% adjustment on a fairly small bill. The volume also went up in Sunapee by 14%. She informed that town manager last week that that was probably going to be reflected in the fees. The volume for the town of Wilmot went down, so their fee will also probably go down.

Larry Ballin asked whether or not the additional staff help was included in this budget. Ms. Levine said that it was included, plus 5% has been added to the full time wages, part-time wages and overtime.

Chief Seastrand reported that Sullivan County has talked about regionalizing and that this topic has been going back and forth dealing with the same issues that Merrimack County has dealt with, i.e. how is it going to run, where is it going to be situated. Chief Seastrand said that what we are trying to do right now is just stay ahead.

Chair Kaplan asked what the impact of this regionalization change would have on the New London Dispatch. Mr. Seastrand said that this new service would not have the familiarity with our local area. In

a survey done several years ago, the responders clearly said they wanted a dispatch service located locally which was familiar with what was going on in our community. With a more regionalized dispatch service a great deal of personal service would be eliminated. This would also affect the fire departments causing their budgets to double or possibly triple.

Ms. Levine said that one of the reasons that New London pays 62% is that we have the advantage of 24x7 coverage and walk-in service at the Police Department. She thought that even with a county wide dispatch system she didn't think New London would want to lose that 24x7 coverage. We would, therefore, lose the revenue but still have the cost. Chief Seastrand pointed out that the 24-hour dispatch also allows the cells to be used locally. If we did not have overnight staff, we would have to transport prisoners to the county jail, which means the night officer could be out-of-town for at least an hour at a time.

Ms. Levine said that we are billing a community for a dispatch fee if a New London ambulance is dispatched to that community. Communities that are not dispatch clients are not dispatched for ambulance, which is a hole in the process. She asked if this Proposed Dispatch Fee report was acceptable to the Selectmen and they agreed that it was.

Whipple Basement Project: A required walk-through occurred with contractors on Tuesday morning November 11 at 9:00 A.M. Although there were 6-8 contractors at the walkthrough, ultimately we only sold 3 sets of bid documents. Bids are due on December 3 so they will be known for the Budget Committee meeting on December 4. The removal of 4 additional columns was added to the bid package as an alternate. The fire chief asked that the bid include a sprinkler system since one is being included downstairs along with lighted EXIT signs. Ms. Levine did include this in the project, on the platform that we should follow the code that we are insisting businesses follow. The Selectmen agreed with this decision.

CIP Subcommittee (November 11): Ms. Levine said that for this Budget Committee meeting she has revised Table 20 and some of the attached sheets as well. The biggest changes were to the Gravel Road Plan and would like the Selectmen's input on how they would like to proceed with the gravel road schedule. The initial decision was to only make a deposit in 2009 which would be \$50,000 which would not leave enough money in the fund to pave Rowell Hill Road and Ridge Road but there would be enough money to pave Quail Run. This would push the program back a year. Would the Board like to proceed by notifying the affected residence by sending out a letter? Larry Ballin suggested sending out a letter saying the Board is still committed to the project, but due to financial uncertainties we are in all probability moving forward at a slower pace than we had previously anticipated. Ms. Helm suggested that if there is a ground swell of comments from those receiving the letter, then a meeting would be in order.

Ms. Levine said that the other big decision was to stick with the purchasing of two pieces of heavy highway equipment in 2009 because it does save at least \$25,000 over two years. The Board also considered whether or not to proceed with the idea of the purchase of a new ladder truck in 2012 instead of 2017. The goal is to save money over the long run, saving about \$500,000 over the course of the CIP. Ms. Levine stated that these will be discussed more at the Budget Committee meeting tonight. Ms. Helm will represent the Board at the meeting and will be prepared to give a 5-10 minute update on the Board of Selectmen's meeting.

Ms. Helm said she will not be here for the Budget meeting on December 4. Larry Ballin will attend that meeting and represent the Board. She will also be unavailable for the meeting on December 6. Mr. Kaplan and Mr. Ballin will be at that meeting. Mr. Ballin and Mr. Kaplan will attend the November 20th meeting in Sunapee with the Sunapee Sewer Commission. Ms. Helm will be unable to attend that meeting.

Planning Board November 11:

Mr. Ballin reported that this Board met for a Master Plan Workshop concerning historic resources. This plan is still being re-worked. Ms. Levine asked if the subject of subcommittees was discussed. Mr. Ballin said that the Board's current thinking is that there has been adequate notice to all parties who previously attended workshop sessions and that if people wanted to be there they have come. Ms. Helm offered to assist Karen Ebel by making pointed phone calls in order to get more people involved.

Energy Committee (November 10):

Ms Levine reported that the small planting initiative which was in front of the Transfer Station was discussed. This was an example of what an un-mowed lawn would look like. This was maintained by Mark Vernon, Joan Cobb, and other members of the energy committee. There was agreement that the town should keep going with examples of un-mowed gardens as a way to reduce cost. The Energy Committee was complimentary of Richard Lee's efforts to reduce the cost of mowing the town's public places to one time per week rather than 2, and reducing the road side mowing to twice a summer. This will result in lower fuel and labor costs. The Energy Committee has decided not to pay for an intern in 2009 but rather attempt to work with the College and recruit a student volunteer. They would like to include money in their budget for 2009 to do an energy audit of another town building.

Public Hearing on Comcast Negotiations Wednesday, November 19:

Ms. Levine reported that some town residents are displeased with the service and that she expected those residents to attend this meeting.

Crockett's Corner/Route 11: Thursday, November 20:

Ms. Levine reported that this meeting will primarily focus on turning lanes from Crockett's Corner to Seamans Road. Ms. Helm will be there to represent the Board.

Roundabout Opening/Dedication: Saturday November 22.

Mr. Kaplan will make some appropriate remarks thanking the public and the abutters for their patience during this construction process as well as recognizing the vendors who participated in the project. This dedication, taking about 10-15 minutes, will be held in the Ledyard Bank parking lot, with parking available in the Gallery lot. It was encouraged that those who have "I survived the NL Roundabout" t-shirts should wear them.

Non-Public:

The Board of Selectmen entered into non-public session at 9:43 A.M. to discuss salaries pursuant to RSA 91:A-3 II (a).

Upon returning to public session, the meeting adjourned at 10:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen K. Colby, Recording Secretary