

TOWN OF NEW LONDON
CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MAY 19, 2007

PRESENT: Larry Ballin (Selectman), Peter Bianchi, Barbara Brown, Hugh Chapin, Bill Clough, Sue Clough (Selectman), Sue Little, Celeste Cook, Michael Doheny, Paul Gorman, Bob Gray, Jack Harrod, Karen Hoglund, Howard Hoke, Mark Kaplan (Selectman), Marilyn Kidder, Ann Loeffler, Bob MacMichael, Peter Messer, Fred Peterson, Noel Weinstein, Stephanie Wheeler.

Sue Clough opened the meeting at 7:30 a.m. During this meeting, CAC members met with Representative Randy Foose on the topic of school funding, and discussed six other areas of other town business.

Randy Foose said that a joint Senate-House Committee charged with defining "adequacy" in education has agreed on these criteria:

- o In defining adequacy, that word will pertain just to the instructional programs, not to the peripheral programs such as busing, etc.
- o An adequate education will include one-half day of kindergarten—though he acknowledged there is some concern in requiring this of towns that do not have some means of funding it.

He said that it costs \$2.2 billion to deliver education in the state. Of that, the portion considered critical to "adequate" education costs \$1.2 billion, and if the State provides \$800 million, that will leave the Towns to fund the balance.

He went on to say that Governor Lynch is firmly committed to opposing a sales or income tax. That would seem to throw the burden back onto property taxes. The Governor's solution is to pass a constitutional amendment that would give the citizens of New Hampshire the ability to remove the requirement that the State fully fund an adequate education.

He reported that 15 Democratic Senators and Republican Senator Bob Odell said yes to the constitutional amendment. However, afterwards, two of the Democrats made public comment to the effect that they could not support the amendment as written, but that they are confident that the House will amend it. Subsequently, Terry Novelli assigned it to the House Finance Committee for study.

He reported that that constitutional amendment as written received opposition from both sides of the aisle. But they see that the Governor now enjoys 80% popularity rating, so they feel the people must support this to some extent. Their work included consideration of eight different proposed amendments, consideration for throwing out the whole section dealing with the State, and consideration of the notion of an income tax. At this point, the House Finance Committee has crafted their version of an amendment and sent it back to the Senate. There were three hearings on that last week, and will be two next week. They plan to have it on the floor of the house the first week of June.

The constitutional amendment as proposed will:

- (a) Target certain communities rather than have aid be locked into a formula that sends money to communities whether it is needed or not.
- (b) Recognize that State and local communities will share responsibility for funding education. He added that a cautionary note there is that the more funding for education that the State provides, the more control over local education the State will have.

Noel Weinstein asked if the definition takes into consideration future needs. Randy Foose said the amendment will provide for review on a regular basis.

Noel Weinstein asked why kindergarten is not just folded into adequate education with the other grades. Randy Foose said historically, people in the State have not wanted mandatory kindergarten.

Marilyn Kidder expressed concern about the sharing of the funding between State and communities, and the possibility that if the State is only required to put up a certain percentage, that leaves the property tax payers with having to fund the balance of “adequate education.” Randy Foose agreed there is the potential for that to be problematic for the towns.

Barbara Brown pointed out that when Kearsarge School district decided to add kindergarten, the State provided 55% of the cost. She asked if the State will do that for other towns. Randy Foose said the State will have the responsibility to fund the construction needed for mandatory kindergarten. Larry Ballin asked if that is not contrary to the definition of adequacy that excludes programs other than purely instructional. Randy Foose said that would be considered part of the program, rather than a capital cost.

He conceded that this is going to be messy.

Jack Harrod said that local control of schools has always been the principle here. He expressed concern about the threat of the State taking over control of the local schools if it is sharing the cost. Randy Foose said they recognize that people do not want that to happen. The Supreme Court said that the State must conform to the constitution. We do have the right to change the constitution.

Sue Little asked why kindergarten is not part of the definition of adequacy. Randy Foose said that in New Hampshire, people have never said it should be required. Now, however, the House of Representatives has said it should be, and its definition includes that. It is not clear whether or not the Senate will include it in the definition.

Bob MacMichael asked about the impact of the state lottery. Are most of those revenues going just to overhead of the lottery? Randy Foose said the Finance Committee has looked at that, and found that the overhead for New Hampshire’s lottery is less than in other states. He went on to point out that in New Hampshire, we depend on so many different sources of revenue, and it is difficult to track a single source to a single purpose. Because there is no broad based tax, we have constructed this complicated web of revenue sources. He added that in recent polls, 45% to 50% of residents feel that the State now needs to look at an income tax, or possibly a sales tax. Others are more cautious. He said it is clearly premature to think that this Governor would support a broad based tax.

Peter Messer asked how many people at this meeting went to kindergarten. The majority raised hands. Mark Kaplan pointed out that in some towns, kindergarten is a private, for-profit enterprise, and making public kindergarten mandatory will put those people out of business. Other CAC members disagreed with that, saying that some parents will still prefer to send their children to the private kindergartens, for a variety of reasons including that it is often sequential with the children’s nursery school, and also the private kindergartens offer full days for those two-working-parent households.

Several CAC members expressed some consternation about the reluctance to go to an income or sales tax, though Fred Peterson said that it has been found that a sales tax is the most regressive form of tax, as it affects people in low income groups the hardest.

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1. Roundabout—Selectmen reported that after a delay on the State’s end of things, the roundabout has gone out to bid, and they hope to award the contract on June 4. Due to the delay, the work will be occurring during the summer months. Selectmen considered and determined that it would not be practical to put it off until fall.

Jack Harrod asked how traffic will be routed. Mark Kaplan said they will be working on one-half at a time, so there will always be one lane open, and there will always be a police presence, and flaggers. Still Selectmen conceded that there will be additional traffic on some side streets, and the Town will do its best to address any problems.

Question was raised about the entrances and egresses to businesses in the area. Mark Kaplan said that the Sugar River Savings Bank does not want a common exit with Jakes, so those driveways will remain as they are now. There will be two entrances to Jakes, and one exit from Sugar River bank.

Bob Gray asked if special provision will be made for ambulance service during the construction. The Selectmen said that Jessie Levine has spoken to the hospital, and they have said this will not be a problem for them.

Peter Bianchi asked if it looks as though they will be able to stay within the projected costs. Selectmen said staying within the budget is part of the contract, and given the situation in construction these days, they are hoping for the possibility that it may even come in under budget. They hope to receive at least three bids, and will be required to go with the lowest bid—as long as that bidder is approved by the engineer.

Noel Weinstein asked if PSNH is “wired into this.” Yes. Also, the water precinct will be doing some upgrading of its main in that area at the same time. Though they had not planned to do that for a few years, it will be much less expensive and more efficient for them to go ahead with that now while the road is dug up.

Marilyn Kidder asked about a sidewalk to Hilltop. Yes, there will be one, on the west side of County Road. There is the additional proposal to extend the sidewalk on the other side of Newport Road past Huberts down to the Hospital.

Jack Harrod asked if this work will have any effect on the schedule for replacing street lights on Main Street. Selectmen said no, there is no connection, but they are going to do that replacement this year also, as agreed upon with PSNH.

Bob MacMichael expressed concern that this upheaval is going to require that everyone keep cool heads. He anticipates some turmoil. Selectmen again expressed disappointment that they have to go ahead with this during summer months, but the State held up the contract for weeks. Noel Weinstein asked about doing it in phases. Selectmen agreed that the basic intersection will be done first. The supplemental things like sidewalks could be done later.

2. Hazardous Materials Collection Day—Noel Weinstein opened this discussion, and questions were raised about things containing PCPs, about the new energy efficient light bulbs (anything that contains mercury is considered hazardous waste), and the fluorescent bulbs that several members have observed on the shelf above the cardboard compactor at the recycling center.

Selectmen explained that this year—probably in July—there will be a one-day collection, and it will be just for New London. They hope to do this annually so people will not have such a large accumulation to dispose of, thereby eliminating the long lines they have experienced in past years. (That is also the reason they have decided to do it alone this year, rather than in conjunction with other towns.) Mark Kaplan added that if they find they still have an extraordinarily long line, perhaps the Town will have one every six months or every three months. Karen Hoglund seconded that idea, pointing out that often, in their need to dispose of things in a timely manner, people will just shove things like paint cans into a bag.

In response to question from the Committee, Selectmen explained that the collection of hazardous waste will actually be done by an outside company with whom the Town will contract. The Town itself does not have the ability to collect and store hazardous waste. The Town will, however, start collecting electronics at the Highway Department site, and there will be a fee for people to drop those items off. Peter Bianchi suggested having a user fee for the hazardous waste collection, too, particularly if the Town has those days more often.

Selectmen agreed to devote a Link to this subject, and to ask people for feedback. Howard Hoke asked if the Town receives a report from the hazardous waste company on what it collects. Yes. In that case, he suggested the link include information on some alternatives people can use.

Bob MacMichael commended the employees who are working at the transfer station and recycling center now.

Sue Clough concluded by saying that now that the Town is changing the place to which it will send solid waste, it may seem like the right time to push for more recycling effort. The more recycling people can do, the less solid waste the Town will have to pay to dispose of. Jack Harrod suggested that the sign at the recycling center detailing how much the Town has saved by recycling each year, be reactivated.

3. Sewer Commission—Paul Gorman asked how the relationship between the Sewer Commission and the Town has worked out. Sue Clough said the Sewer Commission was dissolved at Town Meeting. The Board of Selectmen has

resumed responsibility and authority over New London's sewer department, and they have been attending joint meetings with the Sunapee sewer commission. She said they see the beginnings of a good working relationship, and the two superintendents work very well together. She said that questions remain around issues of billing, function and age of the system. It is Sunapee's purview to order what they see fit for the plant, and then they bill New London 60% of that cost.

Mark Kaplan said that since the reorganization in New London, the Town is seeing a great savings in personnel costs. However, they are also discovering a number of serious problems with the system itself, things that have been neglected, and will now have to be addressed. Those costs will be borne by the users. The Sewer Department has not had a CIP in the past. This year, they, they have started one with \$96,000.

Noel Weinstein asked if there is a line in the budget for potential lawsuits. Selectmen said no, but they do have insurance. They went on to discuss the agreement that has been worked out with the Attorney General regarding the fine relevant to the 2004 spill. Originally, that fine was going to be over \$100,000. The AG has agreed to reduce that to about \$20,000 and in addition, New London will conduct an inflow study, and do repairs that that study finds necessary. Cost of that will be \$50,000.

Paul Gorman asked if sewer work can be fit in with the intersection work at all. Larry Ballin said it will give the Town a chance to look at the system from Hilltop to the hospital. Sue Clough said they do have an indication that the greatest amount of storm-water infiltration is in that area.

4. **Planning**—Marilyn Kidder asked when the Master Plan work will begin. She suggested that by working on regulations each year without updating the Master Plan, the Planning Board is putting the cart before the horse. Larry Ballin agreed that the Planning Board is doing a lot of catch up. Right now, they are working on updating the Site Plan Review regulations. Celeste Cook added that this year, they were hampered by some unanticipated budget shortfalls. Ken McWilliams has recommended that they go ahead and finish work on the Site Plan Review regulations before going on to work on the Master Plan.

Bill Clough said it seems inevitable that the Planning Board is going to continue to be inundated with applications, and he suggested that they look at the idea of establishing an additional, *real* Planning Board. He said that strategic planning is something that must be done constantly. Selectmen said they thought that a great idea, and they asked him to come to a Selectmen's meeting and make a formal proposal of it. Sue Clough just asked to clarify though, that the planning process has not really been 100% put on the shelf, though she agreed that planning needs to be current and on-going.

Peter Bianchi said that every year, the Town votes in ordinances that seem to be knee-jerk reactions to problems that don't really exist on a Town-wide basis. He suggested that a lot of the Planning Board's work on applications has been brought on by their own ordinances, and that streamlining those ordinances would free up some Planning Board time.

5. Bob MacMichael asked if there is any Town involvement with the Mesa building. Stephanie Wheeler said there is nothing solid. She said it is her sense that some direction from people on how they would like the property to be used, and how it might benefit the Town, might breathe new life into that idea. Larry Ballin said that Jessie Levine has discussed the possibility of a charette in Elkins, and the round-about engineer has indicated that he would be willing to conduct that. He said there are water issues in that area, and also there is some discussion about the possibility of running the sewer line down that way.

Celeste Cook said the Town should still give consideration to purchasing the point there, adjacent to the Elkins beach. The price has come down.

6. Barbara Brown asked about the Pleasant and Main Street intersection and the Citgo sign. Jack Harrod said Mesa would like to use the post of that, and Mark Kaplan confirmed that Mesa has applied for a sign permit. Selectmen said the jersey barriers will be removed eventually, and there will be green space there—probably to be maintained by the town.

The meeting adjourned at 9 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah A. Denz
Recording Secretary