

**Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**June 27, 2009**  
**7:30 AM**

**Meeting Attendees:**

Larry Ballin (Chair of the Board of Selectmen), Mark Kaplan (Selectman), Tina Helm (Selectman), Jerry Frew (Superintendent of Kearsarge Regional School District), Dan Wolf (Chair of KRSD School Board), Mark Christensen (New London School Board Rep.), Peter Messer, Peter Bianchi, Bob MacMichael, Noel Weinstein, David Harrison, Robert Lavoie, DJ Lavoie, Jack Harrod, Rick Anderson, Gary Lineberry, David Dunning, Hardy Hasenfuss, Rip Cross, Paul Gorman, Bill Clough, Marilyn Kidder, Gary Markoff

Chair Ballin called the **MEETING TO ORDER** at 7:35 AM. He announced that Jerry Frew, Superintendent of Kearsarge Regional School District and Dan Wolf, Chair of Kearsarge Regional School District School Board were in attendance. Chair Ballin announced that the major topic of conversation during the meeting would be regarding the school district and budget.

Chair Ballin asked Mr. Frew and Mr. Wolf if they had any opening remarks to make to the committee. Mr. Wolf began by saying that budgets tend to be the overriding concern these days and they have taken priority over the school district's purpose, which is to educate the children. He believed that the budget is based on needs of the district. The needs versus costs are calculated and then they work from there to figure out the budget. This year, they proposed a 5.93%, which the budget committee cut to 4.8% with little direction on how to make ends meet. He said that they ended up reducing staff by 8.5 positions. He admitted that it did help things that oil prices had decreased, but then the state government hit them with a \$90,000 retirement plan contribution that they were required to pay. So the savings they anticipated from the oil prices wasn't as great as they had once thought. Mr. Wolf shared that as a board, they have to set a target for next year that will be between 2% and 2.5% above the consumer price index. He shared that the discussion on how to make this happen was a very contentious one and they aren't sure how it will all work out. Mr. Wolf went on to say that the teachers' contract will expire in June 2010 and new contracts will need to go out. Para-educators will also be presented with a 3-year contract at that time. He added that within the district, there are about \$40 million in buildings but that they haven't had the ability to put in sufficient money to maintain them correctly. Their goal is to come up with a five year plan for maintenance, and the monies needed for the plan will be factored into the 2.5 %.

On another note, Mr. Wolf wanted to share that this was a successful academic year, which included two valedictorians with perfect 4.0 grades who were going on to Dartmouth College. He said he was also proud of the Adult Diploma Program; of the 19 graduates this year, 9 or 10 were past Kearsarge students. The fee for students within the district is \$35 per credit. Out of district students pay \$135 per credit, plus fees. He shared that people of all ages are using the program and he felt like it was a worthwhile cost to the district.

Mr. Frew spoke to the committee next and started off by saying that he appreciated his first year very much and felt as if he had "come home." Mr. Frew conducted his student teaching in 1975 in the district. He said that the budget and the ice storm were the biggest challenges that the district had to face this past year. He commended the town's team of workers who got them through the storm. He shared that they didn't expect to be the first school in the state to have to close for Swine Flu, but after taking precautions recommended by the state, they were. He mentioned that there were actually three students going to Dartmouth College. Also, students who just graduated were accepted at over 150 colleges and universities throughout the country. He was proud of the fact that the Middle School came off of the "Needs Improvement" list in Math and Literacy in the No Child Left Behind program. He said that they are committed to learning for each child. He shared that they have increased the graduation requirements

for students beginning with the graduating class of 2013. They have instilled a community service program and will require a Senior Project.

Mr. Frew went on to explain a pilot program that was approved through the Department of Education called "Learning Online/Blizzard Bag program." They are interested in the ability for kids to keep learning even though school may be closed for the day. They developed a proposal and submitted it to the commissioner of education. It was approved, and so next year for up to three days, children can learn online or with a "blizzard bag." He said that all of the teachers have laptops and so they can prepare three days of emergency lessons online or in packets (for students who do not have computer access). This way, the students won't need to make up the days in June. Mr. Frew admitted that they would be responsible for gathering a lot of information to see how it all worked and who used it, etc. He shared that high school students and teachers could even conduct book discussions online because all HS teachers have BLOGS. He said that this was the first proposal like this in the state and he thinks it could be ground-breaking to maintain a continuity of education. Kids can still learn, teachers can teach and they won't need to be in school buildings until the end of June. He shared that the concept was well-received by the school board.

Another technological advancement within the school system next year is a rapid alert system so that one phone call would broadcast school cancellations, delays or early closings. Also, the district's website capacity has expanded. He shared that a new web page is being worked on, which includes links to all the schools and the towns. Also, the school board approved funding from year-end surplus to install access control into each classroom. The only school that has this already is the middle school. They have been trying to get this accomplished for many years. It is just not safe to let anyone come into the school. Jack Harrod asked what access control meant. Mr. Frew explained that it is a way of controlling who comes in to the building by making everyone have to check in who isn't a faculty or staff member. This would be accomplished by having each visitor activate a buzzer to come into the school. There would also be video surveillance used.

Another exciting piece that Mr. Frew shared was the Kearsarge Learning Campus within something they will call the New London Central School. This would all be taking place within the old Middle School building. They are currently in the early phases and are addressing the sprinkler issues within the school. The Kearsarge Learning Campus will go through many phases over the next few years. They hope to be able to bring the Adult Diploma Program as well as a Professional Development Program to the facility. They are very interested in maintaining the old Middle School as an educational facility and attracting more people to that area, which will also help bring business to New London.

Dave Dunning said that he is glad to hear math is doing well but he wondered how the science program was going and if the teachers were qualified. Mr. Frew said that there was a new science program implemented this year and that the teachers were qualified.

Peter Bianchi said that he had taught in the district for five years, beginning the first year the Kearsarge school was open in New London. He shared that his own kids had gone through the entire district even though they could have gone to Proctor Academy for free. He said that he is a proponent of the school and does not want to sound as if he is pointing fingers rather than he had some concerns. He said that if you look through the history from 2001 to this current year, going by the information the school publishes, the population of students in the district has increased by 34 students (an increase of 1.5%). The operating budget has increased from just under \$19 million to a little over \$35 million, which is an 87% increase. He said that he understands that the Federal Government regulations impose costs on the school district that have to be paid, however, on paper it seems to be a big increase for a small increase in the number of students. He commented that in the same timeframe (2001 to the current year), the SAT scores, when compared with the state and national average had changed. Kearsarge went from above the

state and national average in verbal and math scores in 2001 to below the state and national average in creative writing, math and written scores in 2009. Mr. Bianchi expressed concern that things were moving backwards but wanted to stress that he was not pointing fingers but just had some concern. He added that all of his kids taught or are currently teaching in the school district.

Mr. Wolf said that the budget is always a common criticism of education. He indicated that there were a lot of mandates from the government coming down on the schools that they are responsible for. They feel that if they accept stimulus money, they wonder "what is the hook" for 3-4 years down the road? Mr. Wolf shared that they are very close to a zero drop-out rate in the high school. He said that they are currently in the process of something called a "balanced score card," which includes four pages of academic measurements, with results from last year, this year, and three years ahead. It will include information about SATs, faculty turnover rates, deferred maintenance of the buildings, etc. He stressed that one cannot just look at SAT scores or at the "No Child Left Behind" program. He explained the program as one where the Federal Government set a requirement that each school would have "x" number of students reading at "x" level by 2013. Every two years, the number increases for how many students would have to reach those levels. Next year, the percentage would go up 6% in math and 6% in reading. Mr. Frew felt that more schools will be on the "Needs Improvement" list in the future. The "No Child Left Behind" program is well-intended but presents many challenges to school districts. He said that this was not an excuse, but a reality.

Mr. Wolf said that because of the way the district charter exists, it is important for people to be involved in the budget committee. He said not to just come and vote on it on voting day, but get involved. Everyone's input is welcome. He shared that they have a very dedicated budget committee that meets every other Tuesday to hear all the suggestions.

David Harrison asked if Mr. Frew or Mr. Wolf could address how they would describe a successful end project for a child in the district who was not planning to go on to college. Mark Christensen, School Board Rep, said that a student graduating who was not going off to college would hopefully be a whole, well-rounded individual with strong academic background, engaged in the community with a strong work ethic. Mr. Wolf added that the student should think and act in a manner that produces a productive individual in today's society. He indicated that there are many students who don't want to be in school and don't want to learn. Mr. Christensen believed that it was important to make education relevant to the students. Regardless of the path of the student, for them to become engaged and interested, they need to make it relevant. Tina Helm, Selectmen member, asked if parents subscribe to his theory as well. Mr. Christensen answered in the affirmative and added that since becoming a school board member, one thing he has seen is that everyone is getting to realize that relevance is key.

Mr. Frew referenced the beliefs of an educator, Lionel Tracy, who came up with the idea to "follow every child." Mr. Frew said that it is important to track the children throughout their school careers so that they are prepared for their obligations after school and to help them develop as people. He noted that 70% of the kids at the high school are involved in co-curricular activities and they are successful in these activities ranging from choir, foreign language poetry competitions, etc...these activities help build character, develop a sense of community and a sense of caring for others. He said that the kids are products of our schools.

Peter Messer asked if the night school program was successful. Mr. Frew said that he has only seen it for one year and hasn't been able to study it fairly, but that those who graduate are motivated to do more with their lives and it is hard to tell what would or wouldn't happen if they didn't participate in the program. Mr. Messer thought that having the program allows lazy or uninterested kids to go to school at night and that perhaps it was an easier road for them.

Mr. Wolf interjected and said that the night school program was his favorite program. He said that the kids are not lazy and that they are committed because they have to work all day and then go to school, paying out of their own pocket, until 9:30pm. He shared that Colby Sawyer gave a scholarship to one young mother this year who had completed the night school program. Another student was accepted to the University of Hawaii. Mr. Wolf said that he didn't see it as an easy way out, but rather a harder way out. Mr. Messer said he knew only of one individual case where the night program didn't work and that was what he was basing his remarks on. Mr. Wolf answered that there would always be successes and failures in any program. Mr. Frew added that work ethic, being on time, etc., are the types of things that the kids should leave the night school or regular school program knowing.

Gary Lineberry asked Mr. Frew or Mr. Wolf to expand on plans for old Middle School. Mr. Wolf said that the first phase of the project would involve the installation of sprinklers from everything after the library and toward the new gym, and would also include the lobby and corridor that led down to the pit (but not including the pit). They are not planning to invest any money into the pit. Mr. Frew added that down the road, a wood-chip boiler could be implemented in this location. In this newly sprinkled space, they hope to house the SAU office, and eight functional classrooms. The second phase of the project will involve going into the 1941 building to sprinkle.

Hardy Hasenfuss asked if they had ever attempted to quantify the difference between what costs are mandated by the government and those that are not mandated to get some idea of what the true costs for education were. Then they can see how much of the 6% increase next year would be mandated money vs. other money. Then if the numbers look like they make sense it may help the population to understand the budget better. Mr. Frew said that Mr. Hasenfuss raised a great question because there is a new state retirement plan that is mandated and would impact the taxpayer rate. It might help people to understand that these rates are not fully imposed by the school, but also by the Federal Government. Mr. Wolf said that it would be a great exercise to show why the budget has grown 87%.

Mr. Hasenfuss asked what happened in terms of the effects of the staff cuts. Mr. Frew said that they had an audit done, which indicated that they could do with two less Special Education positions. They also had to restructure the language program to eliminate one position. The Family/consumer sciences program was also restructured. The main effect of the staff cuts is that there would be more students in classes. English and Math classes will now have 22 – 23 students. The Kindergarten program eliminated two sections (one in Springfield and one in New London). Mr. Frew explained that even though class size would increase, it was still below School Board standards.

Howard Hoke shared that when he was on the budget committee, he was interested in changes in funding (fed/state mandated), and people always look at the bottom line. He said that they need to divert their attention to where it belongs. He indicated that if people are unhappy with the burdens of mandated fees, they should write the state or federal representatives. He suggested that as they go forward they should explain to the people the mandated programs and their effect on the budget. This gives an opportunity to divert attention to another direction, and not solely on the cost.

Mr. Hoke also wanted to mention something about the Blizzard Bags and the idea of learning at home. He said that hopefully they will know how many students don't have computers. He indicated that he serves on many service organizations and felt that there could be a way to get loaned or otherwise provided computers in the homes of these students. He gave an example of how this could work by using something that the Lyons Club does within the school. The Club gets references from the school nurses in terms of need for students that range from eye glasses, eye care, hearing aids, etc... and then the Lyons Club helps the students meet these needs. The same could be done with computers, perhaps.

Paul Gorman asked if computer literacy was measured upon graduation. Mr. Frew answered in the affirmative and said that there are information/technology standards that have to be met from even the lower grades. He said that 8<sup>th</sup> graders have a digital portfolio and by the time they are in High School, they are competent in computer literacy.

Bill Clough said that he thought the "No Child Left Behind" program was attempting to change the way education dollars were invested. He said that the program is being fought now in Washington and thinks that the school board should let the people in the town know where to put the right pressure on the right representatives. He said that legislation is saying good-bye to "No Child Left Behind" and is moving towards a program that is less test-oriented, and involves more civic engagement. The supporters of the new program are the top people in education at this time, and felt that it would all be changing very soon. Mr. Frew said that with this new program, there would be new expectations of delivery, which is hard to do with shrinking resources. He believed that they were all good ideas but that they all take money.

Bob Lavoie asked what incentives are available, if any, to reward teacher performance. Mr. Frew indicated that while there was no financial incentive, they take strides to be personal in recognition of good work. Performance-based pay had been discussed in the past, but it is not a reality. Mr. Wolf added that all incentive money had been eliminated from the budget. Senior and secretarial staff who provide exemplary service and may have received incentive money in the past are not able to do so this year. Mr. Wolf said that \$25,000 was included in last year's budget for this reason but that it was unavailable this year. David Harrison suggested it be possible to provide recognition through the help of local businesses. Perhaps they could donate gift certificates or discounts to the teachers. Mr. Frew mentioned the Teacher Appreciation Week and gifts they received from the Parent-Teacher Organization. He also indicated that teachers are recognized for years of service in 5, 10, 15, 20+ year increments.

Tina Helm gave an example of how a teacher could be rewarded without financial incentive. She said that she volunteers in a first grade classroom and believed that the teacher was great. With the help of the principal, the teacher was nominated for Teacher of The Year. While she was not chosen as the winner, being nominated did a lot to make her see that her teaching was good and it helped to motivate her to keep doing a good job.

Noel Weinstein asked if there was sufficient infrastructure in place to provide the learning at home program. He also wanted to know if it would be cost effective, such that it would really reduce the number of days in June to actually see a trade-off. He asked if the learning at home program could be used for non-emergency situations, and for kids out sick from school. Mr. Frew answered in the affirmative on all accounts. Students at home sick could get on the website and pull of their homework assignments. The infrastructure was in place to handle the need, and he believed it to be cost-effective, even if only the savings of bussing is considered for a few days.

Gary Markoff thought the idea of deploying technology in the school/teacher/student/parent side ties everything together. He was excited about the idea. He believed that if the assignments were sent to the parents of the students, then they could become more involved in what their children were learning and could help their children be better educated while at home. He felt that the use of technology to bring the students and parents and teachers together was ideal.

Mr. Markoff said that he would be interested in knowing who the teachers are and thinks the best teachers should be recognized. He would also like to see a list showing all of the colleges being attended or a description of the plans of students who had graduated.

Mr. Wolf said that he thought it would be a good idea to send home a syllabus showing what the children would be doing during the semester, but maybe not every lesson. He believed that if the parents knew what is being expected, they could be better involved.

Mr. Christensen said that technology would become the best practice of the teacher. He said that a discussion needs to happen with the teachers, the building administrators, etc., as we embrace technology more. Soon, the use of such technology will become the expectation of the teachers.

Mr. Wolf addressed Mr. Markoff's ideas about getting the parents more involved with their children by sending them the homework assignments directly. He commended Mr. Markoff for his insight and his obvious positive involvement with his own children, but shared that unfortunately, there are many uninvolved parents in the district. Simply sending homework assignments to the parents instead of the kids would probably not cause them to become more engaged in their child's education. Mr. Wolf indicated that some students in district are given lessons on how to eat at and set tables because they don't sit down with parents to eat. He said that there is a huge spectrum of involvement of parents with their children in the district.

Stephanie Wheeler said that she is an engaged parent of a middle-school student. She said that she uses the school's web site for assignments and to see what the children are doing. Other parents do not embrace it as well, but the school should take a stand to embrace the use of the web.

Mr. Ballin asked if there were any other topics of discussion that should be addressed.

Mr. Bianchi shared that the 1941 part of the old middle school building should be preserved. He felt that it is a very important center-piece of the town of New London. He indicated that he had heard a rumor that it was going to be demolished.

Mr. Ballin asked Mr. Frew or Mr. Wolf to clear the rumor, as he had also heard the same. Mr. Wolf indicated that there were no plans to bulldoze the building at present time. Mr. Frew said they would like to proceed with re-populating the building and saw it as a source of community pride. Mr. Lineberry suggested putting something in the paper to let people know what the plans were for the building so that the rumors would stop.

Mr. Wolf shared that there were some plans for the old Middle School that did not come to fruition and that now they were trying to find a way to keep the building populated and bring the facility back to being an educational building. Currently, the district is bussing students to Newport and Claremont each day for vocational classes and it is their hope to keep the kids closer and utilize the old Middle School building. Mr. Frew said that what is stopping them from making this all happen now is a need to sprinkle to building, which was \$67,000 and an additional \$30,000 needed for wiring. They will need almost \$200,000 to get the building ready to renovate into an educational facility.

Bob MacMichael said he took his hat off to Dan Wolf and admired him for the time he puts in. He said that in 1940, he was 16 years old and worked on the foundation of the 1941 School, pouring the concrete. He said he would also like to see it saved. He also wanted to share that there so many people who were very educated in the meeting. He claimed to be just the opposite. After WWII, he attended the Plymouth Teacher's College and got his high school diploma in 3 months. Looking back, he said he believes he had ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and had a very hard time staying on task and was always told to "pay attention." He understands that there are many children who need extra help and said he would pay whatever his tax bill came to, to help all the children to get an education.

Mr. Ballin asked if there were any other issues in town that should be discussed today.

Marilyn Kidder said she had heard rumors of "big box" stores coming to town and of Hannaford expanding, and creating a strip mall. Mr. Ballin said that he hadn't heard anything. He indicated that Tom Cottrill, Chair of the Planning Board, had reached out to Kimco, owners of the Hannaford plaza, to find out what they were planning for the future. He was aware that some rents had been increased and then decreased in other places. It is obvious that the company is not very transparent but that there is no legal way to get them to tell us their plans. He heard that most of leases were up in 2012 but that they have no info.

David Dunning, committee member said that he believed Mr. Markoff had been looking into the matter. Mr. Markoff said that he believed something was in play as Kimco was being very quiet and are not offering any information. Dan Wolf said he has had communication with Kimco. He agreed that there were lots of rumors and is not a fact that all the leases expire in 2012; some go to 2025. He noted that Kimco is a private enterprise doing their own thing and that the town should not try to legislate commercial real estate.

Mr. Hasenfuss asked about the repaving of Tracy Road. He said that it has little traffic and was paved 7 or 8 years ago. It seemed to him that the timing of this project given the present economy wasn't ideal. Mr. Ballin said that the road was on the maintenance schedule for town roads but that they would look into it.

Rip Cross asked about paving Route 114. Mr. Ballin suggested calling the State Highway Department. The Selectmen have tried to get them to pave 114, but to no avail.

Paul Gorman asked about status of the Four Corners paving project. Mr. Cross said that it has started but unfortunately, they are not paving in the direction that needs it most.

**Meeting was adjourned at 9:00 AM.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary  
New London Planning Board