

TOWN OF NEW LONDON
JUNE 4, 2005
CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PRESENT: Cindy Adie, Connie Appel, Peter Bianchi, Barbara Brown, Hugh Chapin, Bill Clough, Celeste Cook, Michael Doheny, Raymond Ettenborough, Paul Gorman, Peggy Holliday, Mark Kaplan, Marilyn Kidder, Steve Landrigan, Robert Lavoie, Harmon Lewis, Sue Little, Doug Lyon, Joe McCarthy, Peter Messer, Noel Weinstein, Stephanie Wheeler.

Mark Kaplan opened the meeting at 7:30 a.m. Two items of discussion were on the meeting's agenda.

Skateboard Regulation

Mark Kaplan informed the Committee that, after conferring with a number of Towns on the subject of skateboard use, the New London Selectmen have drafted an ordinance which will prohibit skateboarders from using the streets and roads; that is, they must stay on sidewalks, and stop when they get to the road, and walk across that. There will be a public hearing on the proposed ordinance.

Doug Lyon went on to point out the difference between "short boarders" and "long boarders." The latter are more interested in speed. He said that Bob Andrews is in discussion with several parents and kids in Town regarding the development of a skateboard facility. That would not be relevant to the long boarders however.

Sue Little asked if the long- as well as the short-boarders will be using the sidewalks.

Mark Kaplan and Doug Lyon said the proposed regulation does not differentiate between the two, though they recognize that the long-boarders want places with hills.

Connie Appel expressed concern about sidewalk pedestrians who may not be agile enough to dodge skateboarders, such as users of wheelchairs, and parents with small children. She said that as the Town has increased its sidewalks, more people have been using them. She suggested the possibility that with skateboarders using sidewalks, pedestrians may be afraid to do so. As a merchant on Main Street, she is worried that skateboarders on the sidewalks may create a less friendly environment. She is not sure that either sidewalks or streets are the solution. Perhaps skateboarders (including long boarders) need a separate facility. Pedestrians should be the Town's first concern.

Peter Bianchi asked why.

Connie Appel said because they do not raise the safety questions that skateboarders do.

Doug Lyon said that the proposed regulation will require that skateboarders yield to pedestrians. Note was made, however, that skateboards do not have brakes.

Hugh Chapin asked about enforcement.

The ordinance will stipulate a \$25 fine for violators.

Joe McCarthy pointed out that when a kid jumps off, the board keeps going. Should a board become airborne, it could present a real hazard. Also, he noted that, among other safety issues to be considered, is the fact that skateboarders do not wear helmets or other protective gear.

Question was raised about the Town's liability. With the ordinance, will the Town be condoning something that is unsafe? Mark Kaplan said they will be looking into the liability questions. Harmon Lewis pointed out that that the Town allows motor vehicles on its roads, but is not liable for vehicular accidents.

Suggestion was made that the school grounds could be used after hours, but Cindy Aide pointed out that the school's paved areas have terrible pot-holes. Also, it has been her observation that the skateboarders seek out more challenging locations.

Noel Weinstein suggested that the road from Mt. Sunapee down to 103A might be good, as it is probably not heavily traveled in summer.

Joe McCarthy said that is a State road, and Doug Lyon said that road does see a fair amount of traffic in the summer because of the gondola and other activities at the resort.

Bill Clough asked about all wheeled conveyances in general, such as in-line skates. He suggested developing something similar to what many training facilities have now: asphalt loops which start out from cross country ski trails.

Mark Kaplan and Doug Lyon said they have not had any requests to regulate in-line skates, whereas they have had requests regarding skateboards. The proposed regulation excludes in-line skates. In-line skaters do seem to have more control than skateboarders.

Noel Weinstein asked about painting lines down the sides of the roads.

Mark Kaplan and Doug Lyon said the roads in New London are really too narrow for that, and Paul Gorman has observed that the skateboarders like to weave back and forth across the width of the road.

Some CAC members expressed concern that sidewalks are not the best choice for skateboard use, and that pedestrian safety should take priority. Suggestion was made that the ordinance be reversed; that is, that skateboarders be prohibited from using the sidewalks. Bicyclists use the roadways.

Doug Lyon pointed out that bicycles have brakes; skateboards do not. Also bicyclists are more visible than skateboarders, and do not have the skateboarders' tendency to zoom in and out from between parked vehicles. He acknowledged that limiting the skateboarders to sidewalks is not ideal; rather, it is the lesser of two evils.

On the other side of the coin, some CAC members felt that skateboarders should be as entitled to use sidewalks as anyone else.

Stephanie Wheeler suggested posting certain hours for use of skateboards on the sidewalks.

Marilyn Kidder suggested that might be hard to do. She said she feels that for skateboards, off-sidewalk, would be better than on.

Celeste Cook suggested the possibility of paving the path under the power lines.

Several members agreed that that is a real possibility. The idea of using the trail under the power lines for a bike path had been raised some years ago.

Bob Lavoie said sidewalks would not be enough of challenge for skateboarders, and suggested a survey be done.

Recognizing that the "long-boarders" seek out more challenging places, particularly hills, several members suggested that a specific road or roads in Town, such as Bog Road, Hall Farm Road, or Guild Road, be designated for skate board use, and that those roads either be closed to vehicular traffic during certain hours of the week, or that signs be posted cautioning motorists that those roads are designated for skateboard use.

Committee members agreed that it is important that kids know that the Town is making effort to find a positive resolution. The consensus of this meeting was that a specific place and time should be designated for skateboard use.

Master Plan

Mark Kaplan said that updating the Town's Master Plan is the responsibility of the Planning Board, and to that end, Planning Board Chair Karen Ebel will be organizing committees. He urged everyone to give some thought to what they would like to see changed in Town, and what they feel should be maintained. Anyone interested in working on one of the Master Plan committees should call the office.

Doug Lyon said the Master Plan work will include improvements to Main Street. A Main Street Committee has been formed, and a letter is soon to go out to that group. Within the next few years, the State is going to be tearing up the road to improve drainage there, and that will be the time for the Town to proceed with such changes as burying cables, improving parking, creating more sidewalks, improving the water system.

Mark Kaplan agreed that that would be the time for the Town to implement its desired changes, as the State, in tearing up the road for its work, will be bearing a great portion of that expense.

Harmon Lewis said there is a federal grant program for urban beautification, which may cover some expenses as burying utilities.

Mark Kaplan agreed, but said first they need input from the Town.

Bob Lavoie asked if the State is going to change the drainage.

Doug Lyon said no, it is replacing the current system which is old and small.

Paul Gorman said the Master Plan work should address the intersection at Main and Pleasant Streets. He reminded the Committee that in the past a roundabout has been discussed.

Marilyn Kidder suggested that four-way stops placed at that intersection and the intersection with County Road would be a low cost solution to provide the needed breaks in traffic. She pointed out that these are used in many major cities with success.

Noel Weinstein said the one recently placed at Stoney Brook Road and 103A has worked very well.

The consensus of this meeting was that four-way stops would be a low cost solution to the intersection dilemma, and is at least worth a try. It is understood that as Main Street (like 103A) is a State road, the Town will have to obtain the State's permission for four-way stops there.

Peter Bianchi asked if the State controls all signage on Main Street, as for example, the duplication of "No Parking ..." signs in front of the library. He said he would be opposed to adding more signage.

Also, he opened some discussion of the No Overnight Parking on Main Street rule, and said that many do not realize that is the rule, and he would favor doing away with it.

Mark Kaplan said the No Overnight Parking on Main Street rule was put into place in 1999 in response to Main Street merchants' objections to the number of college students leaving their cars on Main Street for extended periods of time. It is the rule all the way down Main Street, and does not separate sections of the street.

Several members noted that although it has been the rule since 1999, there are no signs informing people of that. Mark Kaplan said the signs are on order.

Peter Bianchi said he does not have a problem with the rationale for the rule, but it seems that the college could work with the Town on the parking issue.

Mark Kaplan and Doug Lyon said that the college has provided adequate off-street parking, but students, faculty and staff are inclined to park in the closest and most convenient spots. If overnight parking is permitted on Main Street, it cannot exclude students.

Barbara Brown opened some discussion of allowing parking on Main Street with a permit.

And Michael Doheny suggested limiting parking on Main Street to two hours between certain times, for example, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. That would prevent cars from being left there for days, but would allow overnight parking.

Paul Gorman supported that idea, but Doug Lyon said that would still leave the problem of overnight parking.

He went on to add that the only complaint the Town has received regarding that rule (before this morning) has been from New London Inn. The Town has suggested the Inn have a sign inside its lobby informing guests of the rule.

Joe McCarthy said overnight parking becomes a real problem for police and road crews during the winter. If they are able to locate the owner of a parked car, that owner will be called—sometimes in the middle of the night. However, if they cannot locate the owner, the car must be towed.

Harmon Lewis said he feels the No Overnight Parking is a sound rule, and ought to be extended to include all the streets in Town.

Bill Clough said both the skateboarding issue discussed earlier and this one point to the fact that there is a growing kid population in Town, as well as a growing retiree population. He said issues are going to arise from the contrasting needs of those two populations. He asked what the college's long-range plans are for growth.

Doug Lyon said the Trustees have authorized the college to grow to 1000, but that number remains to be defined. Right now the college has 850 on campus students, and 100 day students. That second number has remained steady for about fifteen years. The first number has grown since the college provided some on-campus apartment-style residences. He added also, that, though there are some natural limitations to growth at the college, i.e. space and cost, that number, 1000, could change in the future.

Sue Little said the school is the biggest issue that has to be solved.

Barbara Brown said the school board has reopened discussion of renovating and adding on to the current middle school.

Noel Weinstein said he thought the decision to move the middle school to the site in Sutton was a “done deal.”

Barbara Brown and Doug Lyon explained that that decision was based on figures of four to five years ago. There is now some evidence that the school population may not be as large as those statistics anticipated.

Celeste Cook asked if that is even in consideration of the anticipated increase in growth in Sutton.

Barbara Brown said yes, the school board is taking that into consideration.

Doug Lyon said there remains discussion between the two groups: those who favor combining middle schools at the site in Sutton, and those who wish to keep the schools in Town. Barbara Brown pointed out that, as it is, only 10% of the student population walks to school now.

She also said that the current site has only 26 acres for both the elementary and middle school, and traffic and parking issues would also have to be addressed.

The school board will not put both options on the warrant, as one must receive at least 60% of the vote. She added however, that it is quite possible that citizens may put a petition article on the warrant.

Stephanie Wheeler asked if a second story could be added to the Sutton elementary school.

There may be a requirement that elementary level classes be kept on one floor.

Michael Doheny asked why Sutton doesn't look at the New London model, combining middle and elementary school. They have the site to do that.

Mark Kaplan said it has been shown that K through 8 is a better model.

Barbara Brown said the curriculum needs are different. Both she and Steve Landrigan agreed that it would be difficult for two small middle schools to meet the costs of providing necessary curriculum such as Shop and science labs.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S.A. Denz
Recording Secretary