

TOWN OF NEW LONDON
CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE
DECEMBER 10, 2005

PRESENT: Peter Bianchi, Barbara Brown, Bill Clough, Sue Clough (Selectman), Celeste Cook, Bob Gray, Karen Hoglund, Marilyn Kidder, Steve Landrigan, D. J. Lavoie, Robert Lavoie, Harmon Lewis, Doug Lyon (Selectman), Lois Marshall, Joe McCarthy, Mark Vernon, Noel Weinstein, Stephanie Wheeler.

ALSO: Tom Brennan (Kearsarge Regional School District Superintendent), Mark Vernon (Street Light Study Committee).

Doug Lyon opened the meeting at 7:30 a.m.

The Citizens' Advisory Committee acknowledged the loss this week of two valued Town employees. The Selectmen will discuss with the two families the establishment of college funds for Bob Andrews' children and Ryan Haynes' niece.

At this meeting, the Committee discussed at length the findings of the Street Light Conversion Committee, and briefly, the two-article-compromise reached between the School Board and KARMA.

Street Lights

Mark Vernon distributed information packets which outline the Study Committee's objectives, guidelines, findings and recommendations. The packet includes an exhaustive inventory of the existing street lights in Town, and a remark or recommendation for each. After a year and a half of work, the Committee has developed four conversion cost plans depending on type, number, and type fixture the Town wishes to use.

Currently there are 150 street lights in New London of various types: incandescent, mercury vapor and a few high pressure sodium. Some of the lights date back to the 40's, and locations seem somewhat random. There seem to be places in Town where there are clumps of street lights, and places where there are none. The annual operating cost to the town is \$22,300. In response to question from Bill Clough, Mark Vernon did not have a break down of electricity versus maintenance costs for that figure, but Doug Lyon said that probably most of that operating cost is for the electricity. Several CAC members noted that of the current street lights in Town, several simply do not work. Harmon Lewis asked if PSNH does the maintenance. Mark Vernon said yes. The Town owns the lights, but PSNH is going to charge for disposal, given environmental regulations, particularly for the mercury vapor type.

He went on to say that PSNH offers two plans for conversion to more energy efficient lights: the metal halide bulb which casts a white-light and the high pressure sodium type which casts an orange-ish/yellow light. The first runs about a third higher than the second in both capital and operating costs, but Doug Lyon pointed out that with either type, the Town will see a reduction in operating costs. Both he and Mark Vernon pointed out that once those savings have met the amount of capital outlay for the conversion (the pay back period), the Town will continue to see the annual savings for operation—a savings of more than half of the current operating costs for street lighting.

Study Committee member Stefan Timbrell has taken some photographs which were provided to this meeting. Mark Vernon said that in converting to either metal halide or high pressure sodium, the Town will get the "full-cut fixtures," that is, shades that come lower than the regular commercial variety. Also, the bulbs will have flat lenses. The result will be that the bulb will not extend lower than the shade, and light will be cast downward, along the travel way, rather than out and upwards. One of the Committee's goals is to reduce light pollution, while maintaining or upgrading safety for travelers on the road.

He said that PSNH has placed one of each type, with the full cut fixtures, on Gould Road, and residents will be invited to check those out. He and the Selectmen said they have already begun hearing some comments. One

resident said that the orange color cuts the fog better, and others have indicated that the white is more esthetically pleasing.

Mark Vernon went on to say that the Study Committee considered purchase of more decorative fixtures than those sold by PSNH, but found them to be extremely expensive. Ultimately, they decided to go with the standard fixtures for the bulk of the Town's street lights, but to defer to the newly formed Main Street Committee regarding the type fixtures to use on those 27 street lights. PSNH does require an all or nothing conversion, but is willing to do all but Main Street first, as long as Main Street is done within a year of the others. Doug Lyon clarified that the Town would like to coordinate a number of projects on Main Street, including the State's drainage work, new water mains which are being considered by the Water District, the possibility of burying utilities underground, and now street lights. Noel Weinstein asked if deferring the Main Street light conversion would change the cost parameters. Not if done within a year, and as Doug Lyon pointed out, even if the Town is not able to make that deadline for converting the Main Street lights, the Town will still see substantial savings with the proposed conversion plan.

Mark Vernon said that after several meetings with PSNH and reviewing their findings and recommendations with both the Police Chief and the Road Agent, the Committee developed four financial plans, and is recommending the fourth, or least expensive. Specifically, the Study Committee recommends:

1. removal of 44 of the existing street lights,
2. of the 106 remaining, convert the 79 which are on town streets other than Main Street to high pressure sodium with standard fixtures,
3. within a year, convert the 27 on Main Street, possibly using the more decorative fixtures.

The cost for phase one (steps 1 and 2) will be \$35,114, but the Town will see an annual savings of \$12,747, that is a pay back of the capital cost within 2.8 years.

Harmon Lewis said that the metal halide, or white lights, do throw glare into drivers' eyes. His feeling is that less lighting would be desirable. Beauty is more important than cost, and Main Street is most important of all. He commented on the newer lights behind the college, some of which are better, some of which throw too much light out. Doug Lyon explained that the college is transitioning to lights using the "shoe box" fixtures (the full cut off) from the older, orange "lollipop" style lights. The fixtures on the lights in the rear parking lot near Seamans Road do allow the casting off of more light, but there was a reduction in the total number of lights there. This was per agreement between the college and those neighbors. He went on to point out that the Town's plan is to eliminate about a third of the current street lights in an effort to reduce light pollution, and to utilize the full cut fixtures on the converted lights.

Steve Landrigan asked if there is a preference for metal halide or high pressure sodium in anticipation of disposal or breakage. Mark Vernon said the only issue he is aware of is with disposal of the mercury vapor, but he will look into that.

Noel Weinstein referred to some recent studies indicating that some street lights can alter photosynthesis of surrounding plants and trees. Harmon Lewis asked if there were evidence of that. Sue Clough said not in New London, but studies have been done that indicate that possibility. She said that Lake Sunapee Protective Association may have some information regarding that. The Committee noted that PSNH does offer timers that turn street lights off during certain hours, and Sue Clough suggested the possibility that those could be installed retroactively. Mark Vernon will follow up with both LSPA and PSNH on this issue.

Marilyn Kidder expressed concern that removal of that many street lights seems contrary to the public's interest in increasing safety. She suggested that they consider relocating some of those instead of removing them. Stephanie Wheeler said that there are places in Town now where there are no street lights, but she noted that the Study Committee makes no recommendation to add any. Mark Vernon conceded that the Study Committee's bias was toward elimination of lights, but he noted that with either the metal halide or the high pressure sodium, illumination or a greater number of lumens will be cast than with the current lights. The current incandescent and mercury vapor

lights are very inefficient. Sue Clough pointed out that the Street Lighting Study Committee did follow criteria in their recommendations. Most of those recommended for removal are on straight stretches of road that see relatively little traffic. D.J. Lavoie asked where the guidelines came from. Mark Vernon said they are an amalgamation of those used by other Towns. He reiterated that the removal of the 44 street lights was reviewed with the Police and Highway Departments, but the Committee did not specifically solicit suggestions from those departments regarding adding lights or relocating old ones to new spots (nor did either the Police or Highway Department volunteer recommendations for new or relocated streetlights). He added that there is a mechanism for adding street lights. Residents may request or recommend an addition of a street light in a certain spot by applying to the Selectmen.

Steve Landrigan suggested that the safety departments look especially at high traffic areas when considering the possibility of adding some street lights. Lois Marshall said street lights should be considered for those areas where the Town is constructing sidewalks. Along those lines and in response to Bob Lavoie's question regarding the possibility of some grant funding for this conversion cost, Sue Clough said she will speak to Jessie Levine about incorporating lighting into sidewalk project for the area near the Cricenti's intersection. Doug Lyon said otherwise, there is only PSNH's financing plan, adding that PSNH is motivated to assist conversion by the public's demand that it (PSNH) reduce the amount of energy used. Steve Landrigan added that for private individuals, there is some tax incentive in converting to the more energy efficient lights.

Sue Clough asked Tom Brennan if the School district has a policy about locating its bus stops under lights. Tom Brannan said right now the School Board is reviewing its bus routes. They would prefer the stops to be in well lit locations.

Bob Lavoie suggested that adding street lights could be part of the second round of the conversion process; that is that could be done when the Main Street lights are converted. There was some question about whether PSNH would object to adding lights as part of the conversion process (if they are added within a year), or would that require a different vehicle altogether.

CAC members recommended that the possibility of adding or relocating street lights be investigated, and Karen Hoglund also suggested that before removing certain street lights altogether, PSNH could be asked to simply turn those off, and see how people feel about not having lights in those locations. Mark Vernon indicated that he and the Committee will follow up on both those suggestions. Doug Lyon added that even if residents decide to retain all 150 of the current street lights, conversion to the more energy efficient types would have a six year pay back period, but would still result in a savings to the Town.

Peter Bianchi asked if converting all the Town's street lights on the public ways will make a significant difference in the amount of light pollution over New London. Mark Vernon emphasized that this Street Light Study Committee's work was not in preparation for presenting a town-wide outdoor lighting code, i.e., a regulation for all, including private outdoor lighting. The conversion of the Town's own street lights (*only* the Town's street lights) will not necessarily eliminate the night time glow in the sky. Doug Lyon agreed, but added that conversion of the Town's own street lights will at least reduce the glare in driver's eyes referred to by Harmon Lewis, and again, the Town will see significant savings after the conversion.

Harmon Lewis recommended that the Town do look into developing an outdoor lighting ordinance that would require even privately owned outdoor lights be limited to a specific number of lumens. He said some of the lights on the exteriors of buildings now, cast bright light all the way to the streets. Sue Clough said the Planning Board does consider lighting in applications that come before it. Conversion of the Town owned street lights will set some standard for that Board. Also, lighting will be addressed in the Master Plan. She is not sure if an ordinance could be applied retroactively. Harmon Lewis said he felt it could, if a conversion period, for example of five years, is allowed to the private owner for changing to the new type lights.

Bill Clough cited his experience with a similar project. He said he found that passions run high in regards to lighting, and he recommended review of the plan and the figures by an independent consultant. Lois Marshall asked if it were his experience that the independent consultant's figures differed from the Committee's. Bill Clough said

they were marginally different. Mark Vernon agreed that the cost estimates provided by PSNH are “rough,” but he said he feels confident that they are in the right ball park. PSNH will not provide final figures until the Town commits the funding. Noel Weinstein and several other CAC members agreed that there would be a value (in public relations) in getting an outside evaluation.

Mark Vernon invited further comments. His email address is mtvernon@tds.net.

The New School

Doug Lyon reported that the School Board which supports the location of the new central school in Sutton, and KARMA, the group which recommends renovation and expansion of the current middle school in New London, have reached an agreement which will result in two articles being on the warrant in March.

- o The first article will ask voters to approve the bond for a new central school. This bond article will require 60% of the vote in order to pass.
- o The second article will ask voters to determine the location—Sutton or New London. This article will require a simple majority vote.

The Selectmen are pleased with the compromise, as there has been some concern that if two separate articles—each concerning both bonding and location, were on the warrant, neither would receive the required 60% vote. The result of that would further delay the construction—with construction costs increasing each year, and continue to have students working in the substandard building.

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The meeting adjourned at 8:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S.A. Denz
Recording Secretary