

TOWN OF NEW LONDON
CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE
APRIL 29, 2006

PRESENT: Cindy Adie, Peter Bianchi, Barbara Brown, Hugh Chapin, Bill Clough, Sue Clough (Selectman), Celeste Cook, Ray Ettenborough, Paul Gorman, Karen Hoglund, Steve Landrigan, Doug Lyon (Selectman), Marilyn Kidder, Bob Lavoie, D.J. Lavoie, Harmon Lewis, Bob MacMichael, Lois Marshall, Peter Messer, Noel Weinstein, Stephanie Wheeler.

Doug Lyon opened the meeting at 7:30 a.m. This meeting's discussions covered three areas of Town business.

New Recreation Department Director

Chad Denning was introduced to the CAC, and he provided an overview with some detail of projected activities, as well as some ideas for fall and winter. The two beaches will operate this summer much the same as in the past. Nate Heath will again be the Department's waterfront director. The department would like to either acquire two new boats, or refurbish some. They are fortunate in that last year's lifeguards plan to return this summer, and three new persons are currently training for WSI certification. Those three will be providing the swimming lessons this year.

Two big changes are:

- o He will be doing more to tap the energy and resources of the college. This year, he has hired four student interns, and though they will be paid a stipend, using interns will help to keep costs down.
- o Rather than rely on staff and parents to provide transportation in separate vehicles, he has linked up with First Student school bus company. Essentially, he has become an employee of that company, and he as well as one of the student interns will receive (free) training for their CDL (commercial driver's license), and the school buses will be available for the Rec Department to lease for its summer trips. The training is valued at \$850 per person, and the arrangement also has the advantage of allowing all the kids to ride in the same vehicle. (He added that the exchange part comes in when he will be called upon by the company to drive school busses during the school year.)

Two promising proposals are:

- o He has been approached with the idea of having the Nutcracker in New London this winter, as it is no longer performed in Concord, or any of the Upper Valley towns. He has learned that the College's theater is available to the Town free of charge (except for security and ticketing) four times a year any time that the college is not in session. He would like to follow up on the idea of having the Nutcracker in New London for two days during the week of the college's semester break—December 22 through January 22. He asked how CAC members felt about it, and response was favorable. Stephanie Wheeler said she feels it would be very well received. Lois Marshall asked if there would be enough attendance for two days' performance, but the consensus of the CAC was that if it is drawing from the Upper Valley region and from the Concord-Manchester areas, two days would not be too many; they might even want more. Steve Landrigan suggested he solicit help from the Business Association for the marketing and ticketing for this. Chad Denning agreed, and added that that is another way he may use some of the student interns as well.
- o Lastly, he described the "Ski Progressive Dinners" he has organized in Hanover, and suggested a good location for those in New London would be Knights Hill Park, a resource that is probably underutilized in the winter as a rule.

Bill Clough opened some discussion of cross country skiing. Chad Denning said he is enthused about that, and is aware of the situation with Norsk. Marilyn Kidder noted that Pine Hill had a strong membership this year, though everyone agreed that the main problem this year was lack of snow.

Noel Weinstein suggested Chad get with the Sunapee-Ragged-Kearsarge Greenway Coalition about organizing some hikes, and asked if he has had any interaction with the group working on the Community Center. Chad Denning said he has been brought up to speed on the Community Center progress, has gotten the names of all the players, but has not yet had opportunity to meet anyone yet. He knows that the Recreation Department will be involved but he is not yet sure at what level, or to what extent.

Doug Lyon briefly summarized the progress of the Community Center group led by Fred Downey. While that group has been putting together a conceptual plan for a building and a couple of playing fields to be located on Pleasant Street, the Outing Club at the same time has begun discussion of expanding its own playing fields. The Outing Club has floated the idea of using the current middle school site for the Community Center, should the middle school go to Sutton. Recommendations include tearing down the old middle school with the exception of the gym which can be refurbished, and some of the classrooms which can be used for meeting spaces. That site would provide some additional playing fields, and using the gym and classrooms for the community center would allow the Pleasant Street land to be devoted to playing fields and possible a skating rink. There has been some consideration given to having the Town's Recreation Department director serve as the head of the Community Center, but that is still under discussion. Chad Denning agreed, saying that Wednesday's SAU meeting was devoted to discussion about what may happen at the current middle school site. He feels it would be the perfect community campus. Barbara Brown cautioned everyone that this is still very much under discussion. The school buildings belong to the school district, not to the town. Chad Denning agreed, saying that is why he would refer to it as a community campus, rather than a community center. Note made that the Outing Club's mission is broader than New London; it is regional, just as the name of the proposed the Community Center: *Kearsarge/Lake Sunapee Area Community Center* also indicates regionality.

Karen Hoglund returned the discussion back to the Recreation Department by asking if areas of interest other than sports, such as art and music, will be included. Chad Denning agreed that that would be a part of the Recreation Department's activities, noting that the Outing Club hits on all the sports. Doug Lyon reminded everyone that when voters originally approved establishment of a Recreation Department, the idea was that it would not duplicate existing services or facilities, but would fill a coordinating role.

Bill Clough asked if the Town has any plan for connecting trails as a means of getting around on pedalled vehicles. Sue Clough said that should be part of the Master Plan process. Right now, they are exploring the concept of a trail that would start at the school, run behind the Spring Ledge area and hit Newport Road by the hospital land. Marilyn Kidder also pointed out that Knights Hill and the Outing Club land are adjacent and could offer connecting trails, and Doug Lyon said there is also discussion of a trail under the power line.

Karen Hoglund asked if the Recreation Department serves all ages. Chad Denning said yes, he feels that recreation has no boundaries. Right now he is working with both the COA and the elementary school on the upcoming walkathon.

Roundabout

Doug Lyon reported that at recent Selectmen's meetings at which the round-about proposed for the County/Newport Roads intersection was discussed, responses were quite favorable. Selectmen have decided to proceed. They have signed a contract for a design that will be done over the next year. Prior to the 2007 Town Meeting, that design will be made available to the public, and at the Town Meeting voters will be asked to approve construction. He reminded everyone that the Town has received a federal grant for this, so 80% of its cost will be covered.

He added that they asked the designers to take a look at the Jiffy Mart intersection, and have learned that a smaller round-about will work there. Eventually, the Town will apply for grant money to address that intersection as well. In addition, Selectmen have spoken with the local NH DOT representative regarding the dangerous intersection of Main Street (114) and Route 11, suggesting the State give some consideration to a round-about there as well. Both those are State roads, however, so the Town can only suggest.

Peter Messer advised Selectmen that many in Town still do not understand the round-about, and he urged them to provide more education. Sue Clough said they have had four public meetings on it. D.J. Lavoie suggested they put something on Channel 10, and Celeste Cook suggested a summer meeting as well. Bill Clough asked if there is any money for the education. Yes, some. He proposed a FREE dinner at the fire station (for purposes of getting out more information about the round about).

Public Works Department

Doug Lyon said that the Selectmen have had a study done on the concept of combining the sewer and highway departments in Town, and the results of that study suggest that it would be advantageous financially, as well as in terms of efficiency and improved productivity. He reminded everyone that the Sewer Department is facing some large costs. In addition to the on going upgrading at the Georges Mills pump station, the New London pump station is aging and will soon require upgrading as well. Also, New London will be asked to bear a portion of the cost of renovations to the sewage treatment plant in Sunapee. As the workings of both sewer and highway departments become increasingly complicated, it makes sense to have both under a central control. The Sewer Commissioners have agreed, and at the next Town meeting, voters will be asked to approve dissolution of the Sewer Commission (not the Sewer Department). The operations of the Sewer Department will be transferred to Richard Lee and the Highway Department, and between then and now, cross-training of staff will take place. The Town will have access to professional outside assistance should that be required during the transition and training phases. A big step right now is delineating all the daily operations within the Sewer Department, and newly elected Sewer Commissioner Bob Lavoie has agreed to put all that in written format.

Peter Bianchi asked if, after the transfer of operations, sewer costs will still be borne by the sewer users. Doug Lyon said yes, that could only be changed by vote at Town meeting. He noted, however, that the entire town does benefit in having a sewer system. Its commercial businesses are on the sewer system, and there are environmental benefits. He said he sees expansion of the sewer system in the future, just as with the water system.

Peter Messer asked if the savings referred to (by combining the two departments) will be in salaries. Selectmen confirmed that, and Sue Clough added that there will be savings in machinery as well, as Richard Lee has all the necessary equipment already. The study pointed out a variety of things that can be coordinated between the Sewer and Highway Departments.

CAC members understand that one of the currently full time sewer department employees will be leaving next week, but it is not clear yet if the other full time employee will be staying on. Question was raised about whether that sewer department employee will be taking over some Highway Department duties once Sewer is put under the Highway Department umbrella. Selectmen indicated that that has not been worked out. They reminded everyone that Richard Lee will be getting a part time secretary to relieve him of much of the paper work responsibilities.

Peter Bianchi expressed concern that the Sewer Department will require personnel who are familiar with the pumping capacity, and workings of the pump station. He asked if the Town can put someone on board with that level of expertise. He said he does not feel the town of New London should be responsible for that. Selectmen pointed out that they will not be losing all of the sewer department personnel. Rather the study simply suggested that it may not be necessary to have two full time employees in supervisory positions within the Sewer Department. Doug Lyon observed that the State does not require certification of employees operating the collection and pumping station, suggesting that it might not be that difficult to learn its operations. Also, the Town will be able to access additional help if needed through contractual organizations. The purpose of the cross-training is to provide the town with staffing who can work in both departments, and to provide back up. The Sewer Department must have someone on call 24/7. Training costs will be covered by the Sewer Department, and even after the integration of the two departments, billing and labor costs will be kept separate. Peter Bianchi pointed out that the Town pays Richard Lee. Sue Clough said he will keep separate track of the time and labor he puts into the Sewer Department.

Bob MacMichael expressed concern about placing this additional load on Richard Lee. He asked what brought this all about.

Peter Bianchi asked if the Highway Department would be left undermanned while employees are being trained in sewer department operations, or will the Town would have to add personnel to keep up with road work during that time. Selectmen assured everyone that the Highway Department will not be understaffed. As far as costs go, the study indicated that, considering all factors, combining the two departments would result in a savings of up to \$80,000 in the first year. Bob Lavoie disagreed, saying that the cost savings have yet to be determined. He suggested that during the transition phase, there might not be much savings.

Peter Bianchi asked if combining the two departments will increase liability to the town. Selectmen said that the agreement with the sewer department contains a long liability clause. Bob Lavoie agreed that the issue of liability is incorporated into the written agreement. However, he said that his understanding is that the entity which would be liable for any problem would be that whose employee caused the problem.

Several CAC members expressed concern about the idea of the Town taking over the Sewer Department, pointing out that if the problems there are personnel issues, the Sewer Department should have solved that years ago. Selectmen agreed, but added that staffing is only part of the reason the study recommends combining. There is more to be gained by combining the two departments.

Bob Lavoie said the competency of staffing is key, and he felt that was not addressed in the study. Doug Lyon said he felt the study does address that issue, and he added that the Town has lined up outside firms to handle issues that may arise during training and the transition.

Marilyn Kidder asked to clarify who will see the savings—the Town or the Sewer Department. The Sewer Department will see the savings. She asked how the Sewer commission will be dissolved. By voters at Town Meeting. She asked for clarification of who sees the savings, and who holds the liability once the Sewer Department comes under administration of the Selectmen.

Harmon Lewis pointed out that right now the Sewer Department is a separate legal entity. It is a Sewer Department with a Sewer Commission. When problems arise with the sewer, the Town is not obliged to respond. He expressed concern that combining the Sewer Department with the Town's Highway Department will risk that separation of liability.

Doug Lyon said the current system is anachronistic. Most towns are establishing Public Works Departments. It makes more sense to put this under one structure. Sue Clough reminded everyone that the Sewer Commissioners are volunteers, and the job imposes a great deal of pressure, and demands for time.

Peter Bianchi asked what will happen if voters do not approve dissolution of the Sewer Commission. Doug Lyon clarified that the voters will be asked to create a Department of Public Works, which will be administered by the Selectmen. If the Sewer commission isn't dissolved, the Selectmen and Commissioners will work hand in hand.

Marilyn Kidder asked if more highway staff will have to be hired. Selectmen said the hope is not. The study indicates that having two full time people at the Sewer Department was not necessary; cutting back to one there will result in significant savings. Marilyn Kidder asked why not just make personnel changes then. Doug Lyon said they will need the cross-training to provide back up. Sue Clough reminded everyone that someone must be on call 24/7 for the sewer. Doug Lyon clarified that the cross training will provide the Town with people who can work in either department, but, again, the billing for each department will be kept separate.

Paul Gorman asked to clarify that though the Sewer Commission may be dissolved, the Sewer Department made up of the people who use the sewer system will remain intact. Selectmen confirmed that, and said that according to the lawyers, the Sewer Department will carry the liability. The Sewer Department will continue as a legal entity.

Celeste Cook asked to clarify that the projected savings will go back to the sewer users then. Sue Clough said this

year those will probably be absorbed by the legal issues and added that there will also be costs for upgrading the plant. Also, there is the potential for a fine to be imposed by DES relative to last year's spill at Georges Mills.

D.J. Lavoie asked why the Sewer Department isn't using town trucks to begin with. Sue Clough said most of the work is for pump maintenance and electrical systems, for which they have equipment contracts. Stephanie Wheeler asked if the Sewer Department leases that. Yes, and that will continue with separate billing. Doug Lyon added that other than that, Doug Gay has been using much of his own equipment; now Richard Lee will use his.

D.J. Lavoie said that if the Town administers this, the Town should have some of the financial responsibility. Doug Lyon said that according to the attorneys, they can keep liability separate. Stephanie Wheeler asked if someone were suing over a sewer problem, couldn't he or she name the Town in the suit. Doug Lyon said they would have to demonstrate negligence on the part of a Town employee who is working on the sewer. Yes, there is that potential, but it can be obviated by having on hand multiple cross-trained, back up employees.

Ray Ettenborough said he feels this does not make sense. It would make more sense to make the Sewer Department more efficient. Bob Lavoie agreed that this is applying an organizational solution to a staffing problem. Several CAC members asked why said problems were not resolved earlier. Doug Lyon said the existing structure has been unable to solve the problems. Selectmen confirmed that the Sewer Commission has the authority to hire and fire, but they added that the existing problems at the Sewer Department predate the incumbent Board of Sewer Commissioners.

Noel Weinstein suggested a diagram be made to demonstrate how the combination of the departments will work.

Karen Hoglund asked if the Water Department will be brought into the Public Works Department. Selectmen said the Water Department which actually is a precinct or separate village, involves multiple towns, and is much more complex legally.

Hugh Chapin asked about the study itself. Selectmen assured everyone that the Study is available to the public. Doug Lyon said he will check to see if an electronic version is available.

Meeting adjourned at 9 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S.A Denz
Recording Secretary