

**TOWN OF NEW LONDON
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
JANUARY 22, 2005**

Present: Cindy Adie, Connie Appel, Peter Bianchi, Barbara Brown, Hugh Chapin, Bill Clough, Sue Clough (Selectman), Celeste Cook, Tracey Godin, Paul Gorman, Peggy Holiday, Mark Kaplan (Selectman), Janet Kidder, Marilyn Kidder, Sue Little, Doug Lyon (Selectman), Bob MacMichael, Lois Marshall, Joe McCarthy, Peter Messer, Debbie Stanley, Noel Weinstein, Barry Wright.

Also: Members of the Community Center Committee: Fred Downey, Ross Stevens, Bob Andrews.

(Please note that Connie Appel was present at the December 11 meeting of the Citizens' Advisory Committee, as well. Her name was inadvertently omitted from those minutes.)

Sue Clough opened this meeting of the Citizens' Advisory Committee at 7:35 a.m.

Two items of discussion were on the table at this meeting.

Community Center

Sue Clough explained that the committee which has been working on plans for the Community Center has approached the Board of Selectmen with a request to incorporate a sliver of town-owned land into the community center plan. The Board of Selectmen wants to act in the best interest of the town, and is seeking input—today from the CAC. They would like to know whether or not people feel this is in the best interest of the Town.

Fred Downey said that after some initial difficulties in locating an acceptable site for this project, it may have appeared that the Committee for the Community Center has been on hold for a year and half. In fact, they continue to feel that the community center is needed, and have been working with the Kidder and Cleveland families regarding locating it on land owned by those families on North Pleasant Street.

At this point in time, they have received approval from the Zoning Board of Adjustment to use this site, noting that in preparation for the zoning and planning board hearings, they have had a traffic engineering study done which showed that the addition of the community center at this site will not further exacerbate the congestion problems that already exist at the intersection of Main and Pleasant. In response to Doug Lyon's question, he said the ZBA approvals are special exceptions to allow a community center on this site which is partly in the commercial zone, and partly in the residential zone, as well as to cross a small amount of wetlands with the driveway and sidewalk, and to create a pond over a portion of wetland.

He said the Town owns a small piece of land adjacent to the Kidder-Cleveland parcel, which was given in the 1940's by Jim Cleveland in an arrangement pursuant to the location of the commercial/residential zoning in that area. Now, the Community Center committee would like to incorporate that sliver into their plans; without it the plan presented at this meeting would not work.

Ross Stevens said that, of the 27-acre Kidder-Cleveland, the Community Center will comprise ten. He noted that of the entire 27-acre parcel, 7 or 8 acres are wetland. The rectangular sliver of Town-owned land that is the subject of this meeting is about one-half acre, and is 82% treed-wetland. In the current community center plan, the pond and a portion of driveway will be on this town owned sliver.

He went on to say that the proposed pond will be centrally located on the ten acres, will extend 250-feet back from Pleasant Street, and will be 100-feet wide. It will serve a number of purposes, primarily recreational—that is for skating, and it may have some walking trails around it. Also, it will be engineered to hold storm-water runoff from hard surface parking areas, the building, and from under the soccer fields, in order to prevent a surge of runoff onto Pleasant Street during storm events. (The site slopes toward Pleasant Street.)

He noted that in this location the wetland is quite isolated; that is, it does not have a lot of flow through it, and the soil in the area is poorly drained. If they cannot use this town-owned sliver, the alternative would be to use a wetland at the back of the site, which does have more of a flow through it, coming from the direction of the college.

He said they have met twice with the Conservation Commission, which commented favorably on this plan. And they have met with the Board of Selectmen specifically regarding the Town owned parcel. He said there are four means by which the community Center could use this sliver:

- o The Town could give it to the Community Center, an option which the Selectmen favor.
- o The Town could sell it to the Community Center.
- o An easement could be put on it.
- o It could be acquired for the community center in a land exchange.

He said there is some merit to the last option, as the site includes at one end a portion of wetland for which the State may require an easement anyway.

Noel Weinstein added that an exchange may be more consistent with the original idea behind Jim Cleveland's gift.

Fred Downey suggested that an exchange may be more complicated. He favors that option least. Gifting, buying, or placing an easement on it would be simpler. They are only talking about half an acre, and of that half-acre town-owned parcel, only 18% is usable, therefore its worth would be only approximately \$3600.

Doug Lyon noted that a condition of the original gift was that this sliver was to remain as open space, and Selectmen feel that this use of it (the Community Center) will not only continue its use as open space but will surround it with more open space. The advantage to the Town is that will be creating an even larger piece of open space, in keeping with the idea of the original gift. He added that any agreement between the Town and Community Center would assure that it is kept as open space in perpetuity—whether or not the community center plan is successful, and even in the future, should the community center no longer be there.

Fred Downey pointed out that the ten acres is part commercially zoned, and part residentially zoned. If the community center does not locate there, it is conceivable that in the future, there will be some sort of development in that area.

In response to questions from the Committee, Recreation Director Bob Andrews listed the advantages and disadvantages of the current ice skating pond (on land owned by New London Inn which has given the Town an easement so that the Recreation Department can create and maintain the skating rink there every winter) versus those of the proposed new pond. The proposed skating pond would be six times larger, and easier to maintain as it would not be over grass. He acknowledged that many people have commented on the esthetics of having the skating rink on Main Street, but pointed out that people driving on Pleasant Street as well will be able to view the new skating rink. If the community center's proposal is successful, the Recreation Department would move its skating operation there (no longer maintaining the rink by the Inn).

Mark Kaplan asked about building size and cost.

Fred Downey said the current plan calls for the building to be 20,000 square feet, adding that details have not yet been worked out. When they began this project, the cost estimate for the field and building was 3.2 million dollars. Now, with costs rising, that would probably be closer to 4-million dollars. He said that now that they have the site (approval from the ZBA), they will go back to the community for input. They have discussed the possibility of phasing in the project, perhaps building the playing field, skating rink and parking areas first, then a portion of the building. He noted that in Hanover, a community center was building with a million and a half dollars of private funds, and the Town voting 322 to 7 to make up the balance of a million and a half dollars.

Mark Kaplan confirmed that the intention now is to do it all with private fund raising.

Barbara Brown asked how the recreation department will interface with this.

Bob Andrews said the possibility is that the Recreation Department Director will slide into the building. That does not mean that they will be looking for additional funds, but will mean that the Rec. Department will have access to more facilities. He spoke to a serious problem with lack of gym facilities, and noted that many middle school aged children cannot play basketball a full year. He added that any such interfacing would be closely scrutinized by both the Recreation Commissioners and the Budget Committee.

Peter Bianchi asked about ownership. Will this be on the tax rolls?

Bob Andrews said that they would look to get it off the tax rolls, similar to the Outing Club's situation.

Sue Clough asked if the parking is an acceptable use in the residential zone.

Fred Downey said the ZBA has approved this; the Planning Board must also approve.

Mark Kaplan asked the CAC for some input regarding the idea in general of having a community center, and the location of it on this particular site.

Barry Wright said he feels it is more important to keep the school in Town; the school leaving Town will not be a healthy situation for New London, and he feels there must be some way to work out keeping the school here. He said he would support the idea of a community center if it were in connection to that, noting that trails behind the current middle school may be able to be linked to this property.

Celeste Cook seconded that, and asked if the middle school goes to Sutton, won't the kids be down there? She said she feels the question of the school is a bigger issue.

Tracey Godin asked if people feel that the Community Center would be just for school kids.

Barbara Brown clarified that the intention of the school board is to maintain the New London middle school building for some educational purpose.

Paul Gorman asked about the Community Center acquiring this land, before determining whether or not the community really wants this.

Fred Downey and Bob Andrews said a number of feasibility studies were conducted starting back in 1999, indicating that people feel the lack of playing fields, gym facilities, and other community meeting/activity facilities in Town is a problem. Whether the school is here or in Sutton, there is a need for this to change.

Joe McCarthy coaches basketball for Mt. Royal in Sunapee, and agreed that lack of basketball facilities for kids is a problem.

Peter Bianchi clarified that there is a no-cut policy in basketball at the high school, but he added that he supports the concept of the community center, 100%

Sue Little agreed that there is a need for a community center, both for both adults and kids after school.

Lois Marshall agreed that this would serve kids who may not be interested in sports.

Connie Appel pointed out that if the school moves out of town, it would be even more important to have a community center. The idea of its being no-profit contributes to the sense of community. Regarding the question of the town-owned sliver of land, she supports gifting that to the Community Center.

Cindy Adie agreed that this can only add to the Town, especially if the school leaves. She thanked the community center committee for all its work on this project.

Bob MacMichael also thanked them for their work, and said he, too, supports the concept of the community center.

Hugh Chapin asked if this will be on the warrant.

The question of the town-owned sliver will be.

He asked if the State Wetlands Bureau has approved yet.

Not yet.

Lois Marshall pointed out that generally, the State Wetlands Bureau goes along with recommendations from the Town's Conservation Commission.

Sue Clough reminded the Committee that the nature of this gift would be that the land would revert back to the Town if the Community Center does not go forward.

Marilyn Kidder pointed out that it would be hard to oppose the concept of a community center. She suggested that the Community Center Committee be invited back to future Citizens Advisory Committee meetings as specific details evolve, such as costs, and how it will be run.

"Mesa Building" in Elkins

Doug Lyon said this building has recently come on the market, and the Selectmen, in looking down the road twenty years or so – and particularly at current congestion in the Elkins beach, boat launch and post office area, and are seeking input from this Committee regarding the possibility of the Town's purchasing it. It would require a vote at Town Meeting.

He said that Mesa has indicated an interested in continuing its lease of the building, which would give the Town a 10% return annually. Also, the post office has indicated a willingness to participate in cost of constructing a new post office on this site, and subsequently entering a twenty-year lease. (Now, they have a five-year lease on the current post office building at Elkins.)

Other options which have been floated include making the site into a park, or using the space for parking.

Celeste Cook asked to confirm that the little building next to this one is not included.

Doug Lyon confirmed that. Currently that is also leased by Mesa, but owned by someone else. There is a problem with the septic system in that little building. In contrast, the larger building that is now for sale has a new septic system with five-bedroom capacity.

Celeste Cook asked if the Town owned that, would the Town be responsible for its maintenance?

Selectmen agreed that it is probably a "tear-down" building, and there may be some question about paying \$295,000 (the current asking price) for it. They added, however, that the post office would assist with cost of a new construction there, and then would be willing to sign a 20-year lease. They noted strong opinion among residents for keeping a post office in Elkins.

Peg Holliday suggested this may be an opportunity that should not be missed.

Bob MacMichael said that the Ladies' Aid owns the park. He said that at one time, the post office was in that building and Pressey's print shop was there, too. He pointed out that the Mill Pond is the responsibility of whoever owns that building, and fixing the dam would be a problem.

Sue Little said that the New London post office is not very attractive, and she would hate to see a similar building in Elkins. She asked if the Town would engineer a new post office, esthetically.

Sue Clough agreed, the concept would have to be in keeping with Elkins.

Marilyn Kidder pointed out that this site is 3/10ths of an acre, and asked if, considering setback requirements, would there be enough room for a post office and parking.

Doug Lyon said the Town does try to abide by its own regulations, but it does not have to. He suggested that other groups as the Conservation Commission may have input, and it will be a good idea to see what everyone can agree on, which would improve the current situation. Even turning the site into a park might be better than then having the building falling down there.

Peter Bianchi asked if the Town must abide by the State's wetland requirements.

Doug Lyon said he is not sure about that.

Noel Weinstein asked about Mesa's lease.

It is a year-to-year lease.

He questioned buying a building, to destroy it.

Marilyn Kidder pointed out that in two years, \$295,000 for this may look good.

Peter Bianchi said he would not be in favor of the Town getting into the real estate business. He would have no problem buying it for use as a park.

Lois Marshall pointed out that the Town already is in the real estate business, in that it leases the building currently used as the Elkins post office.

Peter Bianchi said he is not in favor of that either.

Doug Lyon said several people have indicated that they like the idea of a park there.

Bob MacMichael noted that the back of this building hangs over the brook. He asked if the Town could improve the building as long as it conforms to the existing footprint.

Doug Lyon said that normally, if an owner alters a non-conforming building, the altered building would have to be brought into compliance with current regulations. The Town however, has more leeway.

Sue Cough pointed to a parallel at Sunapee Harbor, along the Sugar River. She added that people do need to think about our waterways as the Town continues to grow.

Celeste Cook said the post office is a necessary part of that community. She asked if there is any other place it could go.

Sue Clough pointed out that the town line is very near that location. There have in the past been some brief discussions with Wilmot about a joint post office.

Bill Clough said he feels that Elkins is endangered, and asked if the Master Plan addresses the issues of parking and pressure at the beach there. He said there needs to be some bigger thinking.

Doug Lyon said the Master Plan is being updated now. He agreed that there needs to be greater thinking with respect to Elkins. That is why the Selectmen asked the Recreation Department to look at some conceptual ideas for improving the beach there.

Janet Kidder asked if the post office is sure it wishes to stay there.

Mark Kaplan said right now they have signed a five year lease for the current post office building at Elkins, and have said they will go out as far as twenty years for a lease on a new building, if that building is jointly planned.

Sue Clough said this would have to go to Town Meeting with this. If the Town does not act now, it would not be able to do so again for another year.

Celeste Cook asked if the owner has to have accepted the Town's offer, before this can be put on the warrant.

Lois Marshall said a figure must be put in the warrant article.

(So the purchase figure would have to be agreed on.)

Hugh Chapin said he objects to the Town getting into the real estate business. He said he feels that purchasing this would set precedent for the future when other properties as deserving come onto the market. He said he might favor the Town's purchasing this, if it were incorporated into a park.

Sue Clough said the Selectmen are considering this, specifically for its unique siting. They would take such opportunities (for other properties as deserving) on a one by one basis.

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The meeting adjourned at 9 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S.A. Denz
Recording Secretary