

Town of New London
Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
March 28, 2009

Present: Larry Ballin, Tina Helm, Mark Kaplan, Jessie Levine, Rich Anderson, Stephanie Wheeler, Rip Cross, Michael Doheny, Gary Markoff, Rick Anderson, Jack Harrod, Dave Payne, David Dunning, Peter Messer, Peter Bianchi, Bob MacMichael, Joe McCarthy, Bob Lavoie, D.J. Lavoie, Marilyn Kidder, Ann Loeffler, Hardy Hasenfuss, Liz Stoneman

Larry Ballin called the meeting to order at 7:35 and introduced Rich Anderson and Hardy Hasenfuss, newly joined to the committee. He stated that elected representatives in Concord had been invited to attend the meeting, but had to decline due to other commitments. He then went on to state that the first topic of discussion would be the concept of an economic development commission or committee assigned by the Board of Selectmen. The Board of Selectmen has moved it forward, as well as the Planning Board and Jessie Levine will research the statutory requirements for it. Larry stated that he thought the CAC should help the Selectmen define the charge for them and asked for recommendations.

Michael Doheny suggested that the charge should be to lay out a framework much like the Master Plan, but instead of a plan for development for housing and residential areas and zoning and so forth, it should be a plan for what is important for the Town to have as an economic driver, what the Town needs for an economic driver, how the Town can improve on the economic drivers that it already has, and how the Town can attract businesses with those drivers.

Dave Payne stated that he thought it was important to look at other towns with similar characteristics that have been successful to see how they accomplished their success and what they had done to organize their committee(s) and to not try to invent everything here, that there should be some good models around that the Town could learn from.

Gary Markoff commented that the Town has the basic infrastructure already: an educational system (the College), the Hospital (health care and education), banking & financial services, real estate, recreational activities, so it is a function of growing on top of that (stable) base.

Jessie Levine said that she and Tina Helm had just attended a meeting of the Scenic Byways Program and being part of the program allows the Town to apply for a grant that would benefit the tourist industry. Previous Scenic By-ways grants were used for Newbury's Caboose and a portion of Sunapee's RiverWalk project. She stated that she didn't know if the Town would have any physical project that they would use it for, but they had talked about having Main Street being part of the byway. The presentation perfectly fits with the economic prospects as well. She has talked with Rob Bryant at the Chamber yesterday and he offered to participate in both projects and can tap into a number of existing economic development committees and programs around the State.

David Dunning stated that he thought that there would be opposition because some people would not want this growth to change the character of the Town and that the Town needed to be prepared for that. Michael Doheny responded that they would work within the framework of planning and zoning and that there would be restrictions. He also said that the Main Street project was suggested, that if the Town couldn't wait for the State or PSNH to lower the power lines for the lighting going down Main Street, they would have to do the work themselves, because a key attraction for a town is the Main Street area and the Town green.

Jessie commented that even though there is no statutory framework for the committee itself, there are statutes in New Hampshire that allow the committee to bring certain ideas to Town Meeting so that specific financing can be developed. She also said that the Economic Planning Committee might have a little more success in bringing Kimco to the table (owners of the Shopping Center). Larry Ballin commented that concern has been heightened regarding the increase in rents for a number of units in the shopping center and the operating costs. He stated that Radio Shack is moving out and wasn't sure if they would stay in town because they have another store over in Wendell. He asked if anyone had any contacts with Kimco and Gary Markoff said that he would pursue making contact with them.

Dave Payne stated that he thought the shopping center was such a small project to Kimco that it was almost a non-event to them and Larry Ballin agreed, stating that Hannaford was their largest square foot customer so when Hannaford decided to come into here, Kimco had to buy it. But he stated that because the shopping center is the largest piece of commercial real estate in town, it would be nice to have an understanding with Kimco that they want to benefit the town by being here.

Gary Markoff commented that the securitization market is the bulk of commercial markets and he didn't think Kimco would come in and knock down the shopping center. Larry Ballin responded that while that was possibly true, Kimco has had tenants leave and has not aggressively tried to get new tenants to come in, and empty storefronts would not be beneficial to the town.

Joe McCarthy stated that he has had dealings with Kimco and that they do have a plan. He also said he would touch base with Gary to discuss Kimco and would direct any Kimco representatives to speak with Jessie Levine. Larry Ballin reiterated that the Town would love to have conversations with Kimco because they are such a big economic driver in the area. Jessie stated that the only time the Town has any response from Kimco is if there is a zoning violation, which Peter Stanley conveys to the property manager. Otherwise they do not respond to any communications from the Town; she cited the development of the Master Plan and a request to sit down and have a discussion with them about their plan within context of the Town's Master Plan.

Mark Kaplan commented that if they do have a master plan for themselves on that piece of property, it will affect the Town and that was what the Town is concerned about. Gary Markoff stated that if Kimco was that disinterested in the property, they would sell to someone who was interested. Jessie interjected that if a new owner took over, then the economic committee may be able to take part in finding a new owner.

D.J. Lavoie asked if a committee has been formed and Larry Ballin responded that one has not been formed and they were looking for volunteers as they do for other types of committees. He went on to say that it really is only two weeks since the idea was conceived and hopefully a year from now it would be up and running.

Bob Lavoie asked if the economic development involved some kind of marketing and Larry responded that they have thought about putting a message out in the marketplace about who the Town is, where it is, and why people would want to be here. Jessie interjected that that was why the timing with the Scenic Byways Project grant was beneficial. Rick Anderson commented that in the Master Planning process, in region vs. town, an economic development would have a real regional bent to it.

Gary Markoff commented that every spring the motorcycles come down Route 11 and they were thinking of re-doing the road, and he wondered if there was any way to get a marker for the change at the Four Corners intersection and would that enable the Town to get part of the grant immediately. Jessie responded that part of the design of the road construction was to make that more of a gateway to New London than it is currently. She said that it was part of the construction goal to slow down traffic and

make it prettier as you enter the area and it would be part of the byway with appropriate signs. It was part of what the committee would work out. Larry Ballin interjected that Elkins has the Elkins business loop and it was discussed about whether New London should create the same thing.

Larry went on to the second topic of regionalization, stating that it's an idea that beginning to percolate with the Local Government Center in Concord and one of the things discussed was how to have the towns assist each other with projects and to save money. He stated that New London already has regional projects, one being the assessing program with Newbury and Sunapee, which is working very well. They share employees and the three towns get the benefit of professional assessment without carrying the whole burden of the cost. The other examples are the sewer system with Sunapee, the water district with Springfield, and the school district. The other topic discussed was sharing services that involved major budget line items such as ladder trucks and big pieces of road equipment.

Michael Doheny commented that he thought the Town should own their own ladder truck and other fire equipment, but that something like a road grader could be shared. Bob Lavoie said that he thought regionalization was a great idea and Jack Harrod cited the dispatch system as a good example of regionalization usage.

Jessie Levine said that Dennis Pavlicek, the Newbury Town Administrator, had asked Sunapee, New London, Andover, and Enfield to come over and talk about this subject and that they all agreed in theory that it is a good idea and makes a lot of sense, but the biggest obstacle was that most towns needed the equipment at the same time of the year. She said that this week there was a meeting with New London, Sunapee, Newbury, Springfield, and Sutton to go over the emergency notification system and about getting better pricing from the company they're working with. Larry Ballin commented that it was an issue that was going to be looked at statewide.

Rip Cross suggested that each town could rent a certain piece of equipment for the month that they needed it and not have to own it and that way save on costs. Michael Doheny commented that some towns had done away with their highway departments and had privatized services. Jessie responded that that is what Andover has done, and is also why they only have one piece of equipment. They have a road agent to take care of their highway needs like plowing. Larry Ballin commented that it has the downside of who's going to own all the equipment, but it is an option worth looking into.

Jack Harrod asked if there was an attempt to regionalize all of Merrimack County and Jessie responded that she had not heard any updates about it. The Merrimack County Sheriff's Department and the City of Concord had been discussing it with the towns, but that the towns were concerned about loss of revenues and the emergency response time for their areas.

Larry Ballin introduced the next topic which was the wastewater treatment grant and stated that New London was in the top ten and Jessie clarified that it was for \$125,000 to replace the High Pine pump station, which doesn't meet current standards. For the larger project, Jessie said that the Sunapee project is on the list and it is done by scoring. She said she thinks the project is # 65 on the list. She said that the biggest goose egg on the scoring was that the project was not shovel ready. The town would be in the next round of shovel ready, but they hoped the design would be ready in time for the next stimulus money distribution. She said the question still remains if it will be a loan or a grant. The money for High Pine is some level of grant which will be principal forgiveness if the town were to borrow, but they are not intending to borrow for that project because they have collected that money already. She stated that most of the message has been that it will be low interest loans, but that New London qualifies for a 30% grant if grants are allowed.

Bob MacMichael asked for an update on Route 114 and Main Street. Larry Ballin responded that the State is planning on spending \$4.7 million on Interstate 89 and Route 11 and 12A and doing \$2.5 million between Exit 11 and Andover. He said that a letter was being sent to the State suggesting that instead of putting all this money into roads that are in pretty good shape, would the State please look at the roads that are driven on every day to work and consider doing something to them instead.

Jessie Levine said that Main Street had been in the State's ten year plan in the '90s, but when the State realized that the ten-year plan was drastically under-funded, they threw out the Main Street project, among others. New London had been putting \$10,000 a year into a capital reserve fund so that when the State came through on the roadway, the Town could do sidewalk projects and associated projects that weren't covered by the State money. At the Byways meeting that she and Tina went to on Wednesday night, she asked about the terrible roads and what the State would be doing to fix them especially since they are trying to increase tourism and visitors will be driving over these terrible roads, but she didn't get a very hopeful response. Mark Kaplan commented that from the State's point of view, it is a south-north route along 89. Gary Markoff asked if the money from the ticketing goes to repairs and Mark Kaplan responded that it goes to the State and that most of the road repair funds come from the gas tax.

Peter Messer asked if the Town anticipated cutting the budget next year and suggested that the third shift of police be eliminated, saving quite a bit of money for New London, especially since the state police were on call 24 hours. Joe McCarthy responded that there are only two state troopers on call during the third shift for Merrimack County and Jessie interjected that although it seems obvious that staff elimination saves money, the level of activity is no lower at night in New London and reducing police coverage becomes a hardship for the community because there are fewer resources to respond. She did a cursory review and found that it didn't make sense for the Town.

Peter Messer suggested a salary freeze and Jessie said that they were prepared for that possibility next year and the message at the meeting that the Selectmen will have on Wednesday with the employees will be that next year could be different. She also said that they will be looking at a lot of different options for the budget, i.e. unpaid furloughs, reducing paid work weeks, so there are all kinds of solutions to consider. Peter Messer suggested that in order to keep morale up, let employees keep their benefits, but cut back on pay. Larry Ballin interjected that the revenue stream from the State is unclear and it may be more clear in August that they need to do something to cut back.

Jessie Levine said that the Town had reduced the benefit package to employees last year and saved the Town about \$50,000 on the prescription plan. Michael Doheny agreed that cutting pay would cut morale and that it was a global issue. By keeping pay the same, tweaking benefits slightly, and letting people keep their jobs the message is positive and morale stays high.

Ann Loeffler asked if the Town had any foreclosures yet and Jessie responded that there had been a couple, but not any significant delayed tax payments. She reported that the State is trying to get a bill passed in the Senate that would reduce interest on unpaid property taxes and that hurts both the Town and the taxpayer in the long run. She said that this would reduce the Town's revenue from property tax interest by 25%.

Jessie stated that the raises this year were budgeted at 2.5% for full time employees and that the Budget Committee strongly recommended to the Selectmen to not give that raise across the board. The Selectmen ultimately decided to give a 1.2% COLA to all employees, with additional raises targeted to those employees whose salaries were not in line with the comparison for their position. Two employee positions did have upward grade adjustments and a few employees had minor tweaks, but about 2/3 of the employees received only the 1.2% COLA. Jessie Levine stated that the State was talking about changes to the retirement system and this would put more of the retirement costs back on the Town as well. The final

piece of the raise money is reserved because it's possible that the Town's cost for retirement will go up on July 1st and that was not part of the budget that was approved at Town Meeting.

Peter Bianchi stated that the school budget was a large portion of budget expenses and that he thought that some projects were bloated and could be cut back, citing the slow rate of growth for high school attendees. Jessie responded that New London has the greatest number of students and the highest property values in the district. Peter pointed out that the ratio at Sutton grammar school is 27 employees for 86 students, admitting that not all the employees are teaching, some are custodial and administrative staff, but reiterating that there may be some hidden areas that could be looked at for cut backs.

Gary Markoff asked that some hard demographics be added to the economic committee agenda that would help the Town to see exactly where the bulges and gaps are and determine whether or not to build out to 900 and if the Town doesn't have to build more infrastructure to attract more people, then the obvious thing would be to attract more young families.

Jessie Levine stated that the new school district superintendent and administration are very concerned about the quality of the district and are working hard to turn it around. Joe McCarthy stated that 15 families are sending their children to Bishop Brady next year. Stephanie Wheeler stated that it is imperative to attract young families to the area and stated that the perception in the market so far is okay, but there are still some questions out there, people are doing their homework and comparing one district to another. Dave Payne commented that people come here because there are nearby choices. Peter Bianchi commented that the teachers, school board, superintendent, should be accountable for the product that they are putting out because U.S. children have to compete in a global community now. Jessie stated that the administration and school board representative could be invited to participate in the conversation with the CAC. Rich Anderson interjected that he serves on the budget committee for the school district for New London.

Bob Lavoie asked for an update on the status of the old middle school. Larry Ballin responded that the Kearsarge Community Center project has been tabled due to the town's decision to not pursue the bond for it and the withdrawal of donations that were originally promised during the fundraising efforts. It's now back in the school district's court to come up with a plan to find a use for the building. He stated that he was meeting with the school board chairperson and that would be one of the agenda items for discussion.

D.J. Lavoie asked if the building could be converted to senior housing and Larry responded that he thinks the cost to renovate would be prohibitive. Peter Bianchi asked if any thought had been given by the school board to give the building to the Town, as he didn't want to see the building razed. Jessie responded that one of the concerns was that it would take a district vote to sell the building to New London for a dollar and there was some feeling around the district that the district voters paid for the building all these years so New London shouldn't be the recipient at the end of it. Mark Kaplan commented that New London gave the building to the district and there was no reason not to give it back to New London. Peter Bianchi stated that at one time it was the New London Central School with grades 1-12. Larry Ballin commented that there was a lot of sentiment to protect the school building, but that there was not any money to maintain it. Dave Payne asked if there was an asbestos problem in the building and Larry said there probably was. Dave also asked if it could be used for administrative offices and Jessie responded that the Town voted to authorize the sale of the SAU building. She repeated that she would invite Jerry Frew and Dan Wolf to meet with the CAC to address their school-related questions.

Ann Loeffler asked if the Community Center would come back and Larry Ballin responded that the Community Center had hired an Executive Director and until the monies are realized and a revenue

stream can be established, it was not realistic to try to use the building. Operating costs would be around \$1,000 per day and with the economy the way that it is, contributors were not forthcoming.

Bob Lavoie asked if the court closing was final and Jessie responded that it was likely.

Larry Ballin said that the Lake Sunapee Rowing Club's proposal to use Bucklin Beach had been discussed at a public hearing and the subject would be continued to the Selectmen's April 15 meeting. Mark Kaplan commented that the group would be using the area from 5:30 AM and would be gone by 8:45 AM. so he didn't see any problem with parking, etc. He thinks it is the type of activity that New London should be known for and should encourage.

Jessie stated that one of the concerns was that it would encourage partying on the dock areas and that would have to be controlled. Larry interjected that there would be another meeting where it was hoped that the lakefront owners would be present. He took a quick hand vote to see how many CAC members supported the Rowing Club's request and support among the CAC was unanimous.

Bob MacMichael asked if the supper for the Town Meeting could be reinstated and Jessie responded that there were plans for next year already in the making.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Camille Holmes