

Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
June 11, 2011
7:30am

Meeting Attendees:

Mark Kaplan (Chair, Selectmen), Peter Bianchi (Selectman), Jack Harrod, Terri Bingham, Will Kidder, Bob & DJ Lavoie, Maureen Prohl, Ann Loeffler, Howard Hoke, Donn Klingler, Don Bent, Celeste Cook, Sue Little, Jack Harrod, Andrea Steel, Hugh Chapin, Hardy Hasenfuss, Peter Hoglund, Rob Prohl, Bob MacMichael, Nancy Friese, Bruce Hudson, Renate Kannler

Chair Kaplan called the **MEETING TO ORDER** at 7:30 AM.

Chair Kaplan introduced the new Town Administrator, Kim Hallquist, to those at the meeting. He noted that she has been working at LGC as a staff assistant for legal affairs for towns and municipalities. She has also had experience as an administrative assistant for the town of Carroll, where Breton Woods is located. She will start her new position in New London on June 20th. Mr. Hoke congratulated the Board of Selectmen for sticking to their plan and doing a good job. Ms. Helm thanked the subcommittee of eight members who did a very good job with the selection process. Mr. Bianchi commented that Barry Cox of LGC thought the committee did very well and was impressed with their dedication and thoroughness.

Hardy Hasenfuss welcomed the members of the CAC to the Chapin Senior Center. He reminded them that they met at a similar type of meeting about four years ago and felt it was worthwhile to do again, as there were new members on the CAC. He wished to explain what the Senior Center does.

Mr. Hasenfuss explained that the center serves people 55 years of age and over, and that 50% of New London's population of 4,400 (50%) were in that age bracket. He introduced Hugh Chapin, Erle Blanchard, Andy Steele, and Linda & Paul Reinish. He also introduced Nancy Friese, who has run the center for the past 16 years. Mr. Hasenfuss thanked Ms. Friese for being their leader and for doing such a good job.

Ms. Friese welcomed everyone to the meeting and said that she would be showing a PowerPoint presentation.

The Chapin Senior Center was established in 1992 with a one room office. They have moved three times before purchasing their current location in 2004. The trend seems to be that every 4-5 years they seem to need a larger space.

Ms. Friese explained that the Senior Center does not receive State or Federal funding. The funding, in part, comes from the nine towns it serves. Funding also comes from sponsors, donations, town contributions, grants and book and yard sales. They have a conservative operating budget of \$150,000 per year. Reasons why they are able to adhere to this low budget is because they own the building, they rely heavily on volunteers, (they have only two paid employees), and they are conservative in their spending.

Ms. Friese said that the Center is known for its transportation service, which is comprised of 125 volunteer drivers from nine towns who drive roughly 40,000 miles/year cumulatively. In past years they have driven as many as 55,000 miles in a year when some users of the service needed to be taken to dialysis treatments several times a week at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center. The service is door to door and will get people where they need to go. This includes, but is not limited to, the grocery store, medical appointments, or trips to the vet for their pets. Ms. Friese noted that they are considered to be a model for the State and added that the success of the program is mostly due to the volunteers.

Mr. Sarkisian asked how many volunteers there were. Ms. Friese said that there were about 250. Mr. Sarkisian then asked how participation compared between the towns that use the center. Ms. Friese said that New London makes up half of their activity and membership, while the other eight towns (Sunapee, Andover, Danbury, Springfield, Sutton, Grantham, Wilmot and Newbury) make up the remainder.

Ms. Friese noted some other services that the Center provides:

- Information and referral – this includes nursing home information and case management
- Mr. Fix-It program – volunteers go into homes and do small repairs, move furniture, fix light bulbs (no plumbing or electrical)
- Medicare specialist – the person to consult regarding Medicare comes into the building twice/month to answer questions.
- Companions – these are individuals who are paid a stipend and agree to meet on a monthly or yearly guideline to qualify. Once authorized, the center matches these companions with people who need visitors. The companions will go into people's homes and read to them, garden and help with other things around the house.
- Long term care specialist - someone comes in once a month to discuss long term care insurance and planning
- Meals on Wheels - the office for this service is located within the building. About 40 meals are currently being delivered in the area.
- Mobility Equipment Lending Program – There are two rooms filled with things such as walkers, wheel chairs, canes, shower seats, and commodes. These items are free to borrow and have been donated.
- Generator – the center is considered an official warming and cooling center for the area. Ms. Friese said that she is part of the New London Emergency Management Team. The center is not considered a shelter but they will be open during emergency situations so people can come and be warm, cool off, watch movies, play cards or use town water. She said that some people come in regularly just to cool off, as they don't have air conditioning in their homes.
- Bittersweet luncheon – Ms. Friese said that since the Bittersweet residents are quite frail and don't get out of their apartments very often, they bring a monthly program to them at their location. The luncheon includes things such as storytellers, music, etc. and has been well attended.
- Conversations with lunch – this is held once a month to encourage people to come and be social.
- Outdoor Recreation for Seniors (ORFS) – every Tuesday, year round, there is a group of seniors who participate in activities such as hiking, biking, kayaking, skiing, and horseback riding.
- Chair Exercise Program – this program is held twice/week on Mondays and Fridays and is always well attended.
- VNA visits – someone from the VNA comes in three times a month for a blood pressure clinic, twice a month for a foot clinic, and comes for both flu shot and cholesterol clinics.
- Socialization – the Center helps give a sense of community to people. They offer wood carving, bridge, games, trips, parties, movies, volunteering, etc.
- Education, personal development – there is a library that people are encouraged to borrow from, including not only books but DVDs and VHS tapes. They offer genealogy and computer classes. They distribute about 1,800 newsletters each month.

Ms. Friese said that there is no minimum or maximum age to participate in events, and there are no fees involved. She added that there are over 40 programs to choose from. She noted that in 2002 there were 2,000 members. Last year they increased to 2,600 but said they are over that number now. Ms. Friese said that the participation number is duplicated; each person who comes through door is counted. There were 24,000 units of participation in 2010.

Ms. Friese explained that of Merrimac County's total population 13% of it is over 55 years of age. Of New London's population, 50% is over 55 and accounts for 1,100 members out of a total of 2,600.

Ms. Helm said that being a volunteer driver has had a great impact on her life; she loves the people she drives they are so appreciative and she loves to listen to them talk about their lives. Mr. Hasenfuss said that people want to find community where they live, and when you do something for someone else, that creates a sense of community. You give and receive by volunteering.

Mr. Blanchard said that the amount of work that goes through the front and back office is incredible. The volunteer drivers have to have insurance records checked, submit a copy of their driver's license, etc, and said there is an amazing volume of work going through there.

Mr. Bianchi said that from the Town's point of view, every year there is an article at Town Meeting to help support COA and other social service organizations. New London has contributed \$20,000 each year for several years. If the Town of New London had to take over the myriad of programs that Ms. Friese listed, it would take their entire social service budget and it would go sky high. Every now and then they get feedback from people asking why the Town supports places like COA. He opined that for the small amount of funding the taxpayers provide, the benefit is great. Mr. Bianchi felt that one of the best spent dollars to be spent was at the Center and he thought everyone should be thankful for the dedicated people who come together to operate it. Ms. Friese commented that the reason they can run on their budget is because they are good at volunteer management.

Ms. Cook said that COA has asked the Town for the same amount of money for the last four years. She asked if this was the same situation with the other towns. Ms. Friese said that it was. Ms. Cook asked if there was a possibility they would ask to increase it. Ms. Friese said that they may at some point but are sensitive to the economy and the burden on the taxpayers.

Mr. Blanchard said they have put together a CIP for the COA program. He has noted other town areas have had problems when not creating such a program. There are 24 CIP projects to be completed, inside and out and they are almost fully funded as they are due to be completed. They were hoping they won't be asking for money to take care of emergencies as they may arise. Mr. Blanchard added that the total contribution from all the towns was \$38,000 per year. The rest comes from business sponsors, individual donations, the book sale (where they bring in \$12,000 to \$14,000 each year), and their annual yard sale (which earns about \$3,500 per year). He felt the COA was in good shape financially and the planning has been done to make sure they are not going to be asking the towns for more money.

Mr. Hasenfuss said that they are probably wondering why Center isn't better known. He said that it was because they are not big advertisers and don't have a big advertising budget. Also, he thought there was a stigma attached to getting old and that others are afraid to associate with older people. There are many people in their 50's and 60's who don't want to come because they are not "old enough" yet. There is a reason to get to know and interact with the next generations. He hoped the people at the meeting would spread the word about what they are doing at COA.

Ms. Helm asked Ms. Friese about intergenerational programs at the schools, for example, a grandparent program. She has had experience with parents who wanted to get such a program going. Ms. Friese said they have tried it several times but haven't had much luck getting the seniors to participate. The feedback she received was that they want to do their own thing and not be involved in intergenerational activities. She opined that this train of thought may have changed since their last efforts. Ms. Helm said she would

like to explore the idea with her and that when she goes to volunteer at the schools, she sees many who are older who are also there because they like to be around the younger generation.

Mr. Chapin said that some of their programs are currently under consideration by the House of Representatives and the Budget Committees. He has heard that the Community Action Program (Meals on Wheels and other similar programs) and Service Link (visitation by Medicare personnel) will be left alone. However, if either of those programs are cut back or done away with, it would be a serious blow to seniors. They'd have to figure out how to make ends meet.

Mr. MacMichael said that he has been in New London almost 86 years. He came to the meeting because of his love for the town. Over the years he has seen much growth, and wonderful people who have come and gone in the town. He has felt there New London has always been a town that had their hand out for you. People are always there to help you. Mr. MacMichael said that he was so proud to live in a town that is so caring. He was so thankful to be there and be part of the meeting where people give up their time to make the town a better place to live in.

Ms. Prohl said that about five years ago she was looking for someone to come into her in-laws home in Massachusetts and she came to COA to get advice. They sent her to a COA in her in-laws town which enabled them to get someone all set up to meet their needs. They were given a lot of information that was invaluable. She wondered if they still offered the same type of service for people who are the children of seniors. Ms. Friese said that they did but it was not publicized; they can only handle so many of these requests, but they do assist in such matters.

Ms. Cook asked if newspapers write articles about the activities within the Center. Ms. Friese said that it seems newspapers seem very reluctant to publish any of their news. Mr. Sarkisian suggested one/some of the volunteers to give a call to the newspaper instead of her. His thought that they may be more receptive to a volunteer rather than a paid employee.

Ms. Loeffler asked if they had a link on the Town's website. Ms. Friese said that they were linked to the Town's site, but that it was not direct; you have to hunt to find it.

Chair Kaplan said that at one of their Board of Selectmen meetings they had a discussion on the Elkins project. They have a grant and program to fix up the Elkins area. They have reestablished an Elkins subcommittee which will have their first meeting on June 20th to give them the charge to go ahead and get a concept of what they can and will do with the renovations. He wanted everyone to be aware of this.

Mr. Hoke opined that there were strict rules governing the acceptance of the grant money. Once construction is done and things are/are not done, he wondered what the penalty was if the Town doesn't follow the rules. Mr. Bianchi said that Nate Miller, engineer, warned them if they deviate too far from the plan and go ahead with engineering studies that are not approved, the money spent on that engineering would need to be repaid.

Chair Kaplan said that he would be glad to find out what the penalties are for not sticking to the specifications exactly. In terms of maintenance thereafter (such as plowing the sidewalks), he wasn't sure of the penalties. Mr. Bianchi thought there would be some ramifications but wasn't sure what they were. There was some concern that there were strings attached to any grant money. Ms. Helm felt it was an important question. Richard Lee (Public Works Director) said that once the sidewalks are improved, plowing is included in what has to be done going forward. There was no discussion of ramifications if they did not follow through. Ms. Helm said they have been advised that they have to stay on top of the details and decisions that are made to make sure they go along with the specifications.

Nate Miller has volunteered his time to work with the Elkins subcommittee, which will meet as public meetings which will be noticed.

Ms. Helm thanked COA for the work they do and though the information session was extremely helpful.

Mr. Bianchi said that now that they have the Town Administrator position filled, their next step is to replace Carol Fraley (Financial Officer) who is retiring in the fall. There are other ongoing projects for the rest of the year. There was a Single Stream recycling presentation at the last Board of Selectmen meeting, there is a resolution needed for the Elkins Dam, for which the Town has received another letter of deficiency for, and they basically have to get back to "business as usual." Input from everyone is what they depend on.

Chair Kaplan noted that they have not signed any agreement yet for Single Stream recycling. He said that today, every homeowner segregates and separates their recyclables and disposes of these things in the proper barrels. Single Stream would make it so all recyclables go into one bag and trash would go into another. The Town would take all the recyclables and send them to the cooperative in Boscawen. They would segregate it there. Chair Kaplan said what they save is the time that every individual has to spend separating. Mr. Lee is in favor of the concept and feels the population has grown to the point that he is now crowded and things are getting transferred back and forth several times. Has reached the point where he is at full extension.

Mr. Sarkisian asked if they would have fewer employees at the transfer station if Single Stream recycling was used. Ms. Helm said that would be a strong possibility. Mr. Harrod said he didn't see the advantages of Single Stream recycling until he learned that they would be able to recycle more things, such as all plastics numbered 1-7. Currently, they are limited to recycling only bottles that are plastic #1 and #2.

Chair Kaplan explained that recycling more things causes fewer materials to be put into the waste stream. Transporting and tipping fees would be less for the trash. It was asked if moving to Single Stream recycling would change the income to the Town. Mr. Bianchi said that it would. He noted that the previous year the Town received \$61,000 by selling recyclables. Using Single Stream recycling they'd ship the recyclables to the plant, and then they would be paid a percentage of what the plant sells it for. In the past 5 years they've never lost money recycling. Trash to the land fill has gone down over the last few years as well. This would be a 15 year commitment and in his opinion, once they go to Single Stream, if the recycling profits are negative, the Town has to pay the facility.

Ms. Helm said there is one dimension that hasn't been discussed. With the plastics the way they are recycling now, they have to get a certain maximum amount before it can be taken to the vendor. In some cases, it can take up to a year to get the minimum load. During that time, they house the materials until they get enough. In any event, the Town would need to build something new to house these materials. If they take the next step to use "Pay as you Throw" they would have to be environmentally conscious and be responsible about what they are doing with their waste. People would be really thinking about what they are tossing.

Mr. Hoke said he has intentionally talked to people who don't recycle. The Single Stream option is something that would encourage them to recycle. He's talked to 10 people, but all of them do not recycle and said they would in a Single Stream environment. Mr. Hoke felt that they would save money by reducing the amount of things being sent into the landfill. He thought the town would be better off financially with Single Stream than without it.

Mr. Blanchard commented that the transfer station employees are unbelievably helpful. They help the elderly and everyone with unloading and distributing recyclables, etc. Ms. Cook wondered if fewer employees would be needed with Single Stream, or it would cause someone to lose their job. Ms. Helm said that they value their employees and would most likely move them somewhere else if they weren't needed at the transfer station. Mr. Bianchi noted that it was a safety issue to have fewer than two people working at the transfer station due to the use of the compactor. They wouldn't be able to have fewer than two at once.

Mr. Sarkisian voiced a concern: In the last couple of weeks there have been signs on the hydrants saying that they will be flushed. He felt the sewer and water departments should be informed that they should have a hose connected to the hydrant to take the water away from the road into the woods. He has seen many washouts on the sides of the roads of 1' – 1.5' feet, which is dangerous. The Town will now have to get someone to fill the trench that has been made, and will have to be tamped as the side of the road will break down if this is not done. He thought it would cost roughly \$700-\$800 to repair each of these trenches.

Mr. Bianchi said that the Board of Selectmen had nothing to do with the water department. The concerns are valid but that is something has to be taken up with the New London-Springfield Water Department. Mr. Sarkisian said that the hydrants and roads are in the town and they are being damaged. He felt the Board of Selectmen should speak with the water department about this.

The meeting adjourned at 8:37am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London