



TOWN OF
NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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DRAFT
Budget Committee Meeting
Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2014

BUDGET COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: John Wilson, Ben Cushing, Doug Homan, Joe Cardillo, Pat Blanchard, Bill Green, Rob Prohl, Phyllis Piotrow, Larry Dufault, Janet Kidder (Board of Selectmen's Representative)

STAFF PRESENT: Kim Hallquist, Town Administrator and Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer

OTHERS PRESENT:

Sean Carroll, *The Intertown Record*

Ed Andersen, Acting Police Chief

Donna Larrow, Police Department Administrative Assistant

Steve Ensign, Board of Firewards

Jason Lyon, Fire Chief

Bruce Hudson & Renate Kannler, New London Residents

Don Griffin, New London Hospital

Jim Wheeler, New London Resident

Jack Sheehan, New London Resident

Bob Brown, Chair of the Conservation Commission

Hardy Hasenfuss, New London Resident

Nancy Friese, COA

Peter Bianchi, Selectman

Jennifer Tockman, Chamber of Commerce Director

Chair Wilson called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Review of Minutes

IT WAS MOVED (Joe Cardillo) AND SECONDED (Ben Cushing) to approve the minutes of January 22, 2013, as amended. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

Selectmen's Report

Selectman Kidder said the Buildings Committee has continued to assess the Town buildings. The bandstand roof is almost complete and the next building they will focus on is Whipple Hall. Their focus is on the HVAC systems, specifically at this time. Structural and drainage issues have also been brought to light. The Selectmen have approved the spending of \$2,800 to have an engineer go through the building to assess the HVAC needs of the building and make recommendations.

Selectman Kidder also indicated that background checks are being conducted for the individual they have chosen as Police Chief and once those checks are completed, an announcement will be made indicating their choice. This was projected to take a couple of weeks.

Selectman Kidder concluded that the lease for the 1941 Building was still in the process of being negotiated, and currently the Selectmen and Department Heads are hard at work on the FY 2015 budget.

Mr. Homan thought the lease would be ready to review for the meeting that evening. Selectman Kidder said Dan Wolf had been away which interfered with the lease negotiations. Ms. Hallquist concurred that there was no lease or document for the Budget Committee to review that night. Mr. Homan said it was an essential document to have in order to make an informed decision. He felt it was a critical component of their deliberations and wondered if there was a timeline when they could expect to have the lease. Selectman Kidder informed the Committee that no date has been set for the completion of the lease.

Non-Profit Budget Review

Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC)

Chair Wilson noted that there was an increase of \$100. Ms. Hallquist said the Planning Board relies on the UVLSRPC for training and to get advice on subdivisions and other matters. There are two members of the community that represent the Town (Bob Crane and Nancy Rollins) and New London has been a member of the commission for decades. Mr. Green asked what the commission helped the Town with over the last year. Ms. Hallquist said they are helping with the internet speed issue throughout New Hampshire, as well as the transportation plan. In the past the Planning Board has used the UVLSRPC for assistance in preparing the Capital Improvements Program and it is expected that the Planning Board will utilize their services for some training this year. Their membership dues cover the use of their expertise. They also helped with the Master Plan last year.

Mr. Cardillo said he read through the written request and wondered how many towns were involved in the commission. Mr. Ensign said every town in the State is part of a regional planning commission. Mr. Cardillo felt it was a stable request. Mr. Homan wondered how many of these services offered by the UVLSRPC were redundant. They already have a full-time planner. Ms. Hallquist said the UVLSRPC is a regional resource and doesn't just focus on the Town, as their own Town Planner does. They have a team of professional planners they can use for training and other services. Ms. Piotrow said it would be nice to know what the UVLSRPC did for New London this past year. Ms. Hallquist said she could get that information for the Budget Committee. She would try to have it by the February 19th meeting.

Lake Associations

Chair Wilson said they stayed pretty much the same. He said that it is no longer only weeds that the lake hosts have to watch for, but also things like mussels.

Council on Aging

Chair Wilson said they are requesting the same amount as last year, which was \$35,000. There were no questions or remarks from the Budget Committee.

Community Action Program (CAP)

Ms. Hallquist said this program administers the fuel assistance program and Meals on Wheels. They are a big resource for the Town and Celeste Cook, Welfare Officer, when someone needs this kind of help.

Chamber of Commerce

Chair Wilson noted that this request was the same as it was last year. Jen Tockman, Executive Director, confirmed that they are not part of the National Chamber of Commerce. She noted that the funding they are requesting goes towards the operation of the Information Booth. Part goes towards her salary and towards their part-time help in the summer. They sponsored the midway at Hospital Days this year and have received a lot of wonderful feedback on that. They had about 75 more people through the information booth per month since having a part-time employee in the booth during the weekends in the summer.

Welfare

Ms. Hallquist said this is level funded this year as Ms. Cook did not see a need to increase it. The request is \$16,000.

New London Hospital Ambulance

It was noted there was a 2% increase. Ms. Piotrow asked if anyone had approached the hospital with regards to the dispatch issue in Town and that there may be a chance they may be asked to contribute to the service. Ms. Hallquist said they are aware of the issue but discussions have not been held on the specifics of how they will contribute to dispatching.

Chair Wilson said an issue that has come up in the past is the availability of the ambulance for emergency services particularly when there seems to be a financial advantage to transport people from one hospital to another through the use of one of their ambulances. He wondered if they had a formal written agreement with the hospital. Chief Lyon said after the ambulance study was done by MRI last year a contract was drawn up but he wasn't sure if the Town had signed it. Chair Wilson brought up the letter from Bruce King of the hospital to the Town with regards to this issue. He recalled that this has been an issue over the years and thought going forward they should have an agreement in place.

Don Griffin, CFO of New London Hospital, was at the meeting. He said he knows they have had a similar arrangement with other towns for the past several years. He didn't recall in the time he has been with the hospital, the dispatch issue coming up. Bruce King brought the issue to his attention and finds the concept interesting. He thought to some extent, Chief Lyon had a valid point. Like any other business, they spread their costs to their clients. If the Town was to charge them for dispatch they would have to spread the cost for this as well. If towns drop out of the service, the ambulance service will still cost the same and the costs will have to be covered by fewer towns. The ambulance service generally runs at a loss or they just break even. They are doing their share to maintain a quality service and put \$150,000 into equipment this year and do make runs to Dartmouth-Hitchcock for transports to offset those costs.

Mr. Griffin thought a 2% increase was a modest increase that towns could accept. Mr. Homan said they are trying to determine if they should regionalize dispatch. If they decide to do this, the Hospital will have to independently contract for dispatch. Mr. Griffin said he understood and thanked Mr. Homan for the clarification.

Mr. Ensign said a discussion with Mr. King was had and it went very well. He brought up the dispatch issue at that time and he thought going forward the hospital would need to engage in the whole process. They are currently outside the formula. He added that using the ambulances for transports can cause an issue to arise in the event that more than one emergency takes place in Town in close proximity, an ambulance won't be available.

Mr. Green said in the past they discussed unfunded runs by the ambulance, when patients are not transported to the hospital after being called to a site. Mr. Griffin said this still happens and they still have some free care that runs through their profit and loss statements. This year it was a little lower than in past years and he thought this was because people are growing aware of what the costs are. They have reduced the cost of their service to make it more affordable. Generally, the cost is between \$600 and \$1,000 to bring someone to the hospital. They are unable to withhold services to someone because they cannot pay. Mr. Griffin hoped to keep lowering costs, but having to add funds to cover dispatch would prohibit this to some extent.

Ms. Piotrow asked how they determine whether to use an ambulance or a helicopter. Mr. Griffin said it is all a matter of communication between the EMTs and the hospital. Chief Lyon said it is not difficult to

determine the need for the helicopter; it all depends on the condition and injury-type of the patient. The cost for helicopter transport is paid by the patient and not the Town.

New Hampshire Municipal Association (NHMA)

Ms. Hallquist said this association keeps the towns up to date on current laws, provides workshops and free legal advice to towns and cities. The 12% increase they are asking for is most likely due to their own increase in costs. There are no added services she was aware of. Currently, LGC has been disbanded and the entities that remain are Property Liability Trust, NHMA, and Health Trust. Instead of being one large organization, they have had to separate due to the lawsuit against LGC.

Ms. Hallquist said the Town gets support from the legislative front. Some of the boards benefit from the workshops and the materials they get. Any of the Planning Board or Budget Committee members could call them for legal advice, as members. They do not represent the town in court, however, they may submit an amicus brief should the Town have a case in the Supreme Court that addresses an issue that could apply to other towns as well.

Conservation Commission – Bob Brown, Chair

Mr. Brown said the request for the Conservation Commission was down this year. Part of their budget is printing. They are trying to do as much in-house printing for trail maps as possible. Each year they bring in about \$500 into the General Fund from the sale of trail maps, which they pay to print. As a result of the Phillips Forestry project, the town netted slightly over \$7,200 which also went into the General Fund. These two items comprise about half of their budget. The total request does not include FICA or Workman's Comp or the Recording Secretary. The amount they are asking for is down a small percentage.

Mr. Homan wondered why a donation to Ausbon Sargent wouldn't be done through the non-profit section rather than as part of the Conservation Commission's budget. Mr. Cardillo said this is how it has been done for a long time.

Mr. Brown said they are considering a warrant article that has been presented to the Selectmen and are waiting for feedback before they go any further.

American Red Cross

Mr. Cardillo said this was not a new request; they had the request last year but did not fund it. Chair Wilson said in the past they had decided that it was up to the Budget Committee as to what charitable giving should be done and the things they do give to give the Town specific services. Ms. Piotrow said they didn't have any specific information about services they have offered to the Town. Ms. Hallquist said she plans to use the Red Cross to conduct emergency shelter training.

Chief Lyon said when there is a major need, like the ice storms, the Red Cross' resources are spread thin. When this happens, they rely on their town resources instead of those of the Red Cross. Mr. Homan thought only organizations that were giving demonstrated, ongoing services to the Town should receive funding.

New London Garden Club

Selectman Kidder felt the Town should respond to the request from Crockett Corner as they do so much for the Town and have never asked for money. The Garden Club has hired Pleasant Acres Property Management to maintain the State-owned entrance to the Town, as the State is not keeping it up. Chair Wilson said he didn't think anyone questioned the need for landscaping this area. He wondered if it could be done in-house. Mr. Homan thought they should look at in-house staff mowing this area. He thought

they had the staff to handle this kind of thing and opined that the Town could get permission from the State to maintain this area.

Court Appointed Special Advocates - CASA

Ms. Hallquist said volunteers are appointed to help children through the court system. Ms. Blanchard felt this was a great organization but like the Red Cross, it should be supported by people and not by a town.

Ms. Blanchard said she was concerned with the Community Center discussion. In her mind she couldn't support the initiative due to the issues with the roof, unless the roof's repair was made part of phase 1.

IT WAS MOVED (Pat Blanchard) AND SECONDED (Bill Green) that the Budget Committee wouldn't support phase 1 of the Community Center unless replacement of the roof was made part of that phase.

Mr. Green said it isn't a bad idea but there is risk by having a piecemeal approach. They were running out of time for budgeting and he didn't know how the issue should be discussed. Ms. Blanchard thought it would take quite a while to get an estimate for the roof. Chair Wilson said this was an issue that would require a large chunk of their time in the not too distant future. They were hoping that by that evening they would have some lease information, which they all feel is important in their decision-making process. They hope this can happen soon. Because of how things are scheduled, they will have to consider adding a special meeting to deal with this issue. A resolution could be made that evening to pass on to the 1941 committee to let them know the roof issue needs to be resolved before they can make a decision.

Mr. Homan said the roof was incidental to the big picture, which was the liability that would be dumped in the laps of the taxpayers. They have not been given the information that was promised a year ago and he refused to consider the subject until he gets that information. Mr. Wheeler agreed with Mr. Homan noting that last year the the Budget Committee deliberated with the 1941 Committee and agreed to make the \$10,000 appropriation to hold the building so they could get the report together. The 1941 Committee didn't do it, but put together an atrocious report instead. He didn't think it was a viable project, especially when they have to think about the money they have to spend on the buildings the Town already owns. He hoped the taxpayers wouldn't be asked to vote on this issue through a petition warrant article.

Ms. Piotrow thought a vote shouldn't be taken on this matter as it wasn't on the agenda and no one from the committee was present. She thought the committee should be asked for more information. Ms. Blanchard said they keep asking for information but are not getting it.

Mr. Prohl said there are many unanswered questions and issues. The lease is one of the biggest issues. There may be some confusion as to where the responsibility lies with regard to the lease, due to it being a public/private partnership. They need to work quickly to figure out what they are going to do. Ms. Buiso had said that if they don't have the Town's support, they will not go through with a petition warrant article.

Mr. Cardillo said the only public part they are at right now is the Selectmen's vote. He thought the lease was the least of their worries. It could be structured with exit strategies but he thought what is lacking is what will the entire project cost if they were to tackle the whole thing. The committee has said they are not prepared with those numbers. The Budget Committee must know these numbers to be able to wrap their heads around the big picture.

Mr. Prohl said he wasn't aware of the roof issue early on and thought if the current owners of the building wanted to lease it to someone else, they should be the ones who pay to repair it. It would be another story

if they were going to simply give the building to the Town. He thought they should figure out if the roof is safe before putting anyone under it.

Mr. Wheeler said last year the Budget Committee indicated the need for doing an entire engineering report that would give them the information they need. The 1941 Building Committee never did this study and ended up coming up with a superficial report.

Chair Wilson said, speaking as a member of the Budget Committee and not as the Chair, there was a lot of unanswered questions or things that the 1941 committee “danced” around, such as what to do with asbestos or lead paint in the building.

Mr. Homan thought they should give the 1941 Committee a chance to defend themselves and it wouldn't be fair to make any decisions without their input.

Mr. Wheeler said they didn't know what kind of shape Whipple Hall was in until they started looking closer at it. That building is 50 years newer than the 1941 Building. He worried that the cafeteria roof was the tip of the iceberg of problems with the 1941 building.

Mr. Homan said maybe this was the plan of the 1941 Building Committee; that they would have a vacuum of information and would urge the taxpayers that they should be simply trusted. He hoped if it ended up on the warrant, they'd have a way to get the information out to the populous so they could make an informed decision. Mr. Prohl said he'd like to see the vote be “do you want the 1941 Building for \$1 to renovate?” Mr. Wheeler said this would be asking the Town to make a decision based on no knowledge. Mr. Homan said the Town did that when they agreed to put up \$10,000 to secure the lease.

Chair Wilson said they could possibly have a recommendation by the end of February. Mr. Green said they should set a date for when information is required. Ms. Blanchard thought the 1941 Committee believes all the questions were answered, but the Budget Committee does not feel this way. Mr. Prohl felt sure that the Budget Committee meeting minutes would make clear the position of the Budget Committee at this time and what the 1941 Committee needs to provide to the Budget Committee to address outstanding questions.

Mr. Wheeler said proof of private funding had not come forth either. Chair Wilson thought it would be best to ask the 1941 committee for further clarification. It was noted that Meghan Wilkie had requested that some of the minutes from the last Budget Meeting be amended. Mr. Homan said that in their projections for funding, \$25,000 was guaranteed from the United Way which was not actually the case. Ms. Piotrow said no one can offer funds officially until they get their 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS. Mr. Homan said this wasn't noted by the 1941 Committee at their last meeting.

Ms. Hallquist said any petitions for warrant articles could come in as late as April 8th. She wasn't talking about the 1941 Committee in particular, but just wanted the Budget Committee to know that April 8th was the cut-off for petition warrant articles.

Mr. Prohl said the members of the 1941 Committee were originally volunteers appointed by the Selectmen to determine if use of the 1941 Building was feasible or not. He, being one of the volunteers, wasn't sure if it was feasible or not. The intent was to work together with the Town to see if there was a need for a community center and if this was this the right place for it. He looked at it as a collaborative project and not “we” against “them.”

Ms. Blanchard said it would be hard to argue for or against the project at Town Meeting if they don't have enough information.

Chair Wilson suggested they request further information from the 1941 Building Committee by February 26th. They could then schedule another meeting on March 5th to discuss only that issue. At that point they could make a recommendation. Ms. Blanchard said they need to point out that specific information was needed. Ms. Piotrow said they need to stress that they are not satisfied with the information that has come forth so far.

Mr. Wheeler asked Selectman Kidder if the Selectmen had requested any further information from the 1941 Committee. Selectman Kidder said they had not.

Ms. Blanchard withdrew her previous motion.

IT WAS MOVED (Doug Homan) AND SECONDED (Bill Green) to ask the Chairman of the Budget Committee to request that the 1941 Committee provide additional information, as they are currently not able to make an informed decision with the information that has been provided. THE MOTION PASSED. Rob Prohl and Janet Kidder abstained from the vote.

Chair Wilson said he would like to see the information by February 26 at the latest. A dedicated meeting would be planned for March 5th to come to a conclusion on the Budget Committee's position.

Mr. Wheeler asked if Selectman Kidder planned to abstain from voting about the 1941 Building when the Selectmen take their vote. He noted that her husband was heading up the 1941 Building Committee. Selectman Kidder said she would certainly vote when the Selectmen were ready to make a decision; they had not yet come to a decision which is why she abstained. She pointed out that the people on the 1941 Building Committee were giving their time and expertise for no personal gain but because they think it will be a benefit to the town. She suggested that some of the remarks that evening had been rather negative and hostile. They should say thank you to these people who have spent so much time researching this effort. They stepped up to the plate and looked at a building that was sitting empty for a number of years and are trying to see if something can be done with it.

Mr. Wheeler acknowledged that both the notion to try and save the building and to get a community center in town were noble, but the building itself is a different issue. He takes exception to the fact that the committee was asked by the Budget Committee to have a thorough study and it wasn't done. Selectman Kidder stressed that there were a lot of "moving parts" when it came to studying the building. They are dealing with the school district and many people who are volunteering their own personal time. They intend to have the lease ready by Town Meeting.

Mr. Homan said this was what he feared. He applauded the work that was put into it and he only seemed hostile because promises were not fulfilled. He said a community center is a noble goal that he supports 100%. He doesn't support the Town taking on a \$3 million dollar liability that they don't understand. They are about to absorb a \$5 million dollar sewer debt. He apologized if anyone took offense to comments he had made.

Chair Wilson said he felt people were experiencing disappointment, not hostility. Ms. Blanchard said their responsibility is to the people, who trust them to make an informed decision. Many appreciate the work that the 1941 Committee has done. Selectman Kidder said that the members of the 1941 Committee are trying their best to get the answers to the Budget Committee.

Selectman Bianchi wondered if the decision of the Selectmen would impact the decision of the Budget Committee with regards to the 1941 Building. Chair Wilson said it would be his personal feeling that at some point someone would step forward with some direction and give a decision. He hoped that at the March 5th meeting they would have a recommendation.

Selectman Bianchi said on February 12th the Selectmen will hand over their budget and he wondered if the Budget Committee would expect a decision on the 1941 Building and the warrant article for \$75,000. Mr. Green hoped that the Selectmen would have their recommendation with regards to the 1941 Building.

**IT WAS MOVED (Doug Homan) AND SECONDED (Bill Green) to adjourn the meeting.
THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London