



TOWN OF
NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MEETING MINUTES
November 26, 2013**

PRESENT:

Tina Helm, Chair
Peter Bianchi, Selectman
Janet Kidder, Selectman
Kimberly Hallquist, Town Administrator
Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer

ALSO PRESENT:

Donna Larrow, Dispatch & Fire
Amy Rankins, Administration
Dave Zuger, Police Department
John Early, Public Works
Jo-Ann Roy, Library
Jason Lyon, Fire Chief
Merry Armentrout, *Intertown Record*
Sandra Licks, Library Director
Scott Blewitt, Recreation Director
Doug Homan, Budget Committee
Bill Green, Budget Committee
Phyllis Piotrow, Budget Committee
Richard Lee, Public Works Director
Heather Wood, Dispatch
Lucy St. John, Planning & Zoning Administrator
Joe Cardillo, Budget Committee

Chair Helm called the meeting to order at 8:00am.

Employee Personnel Committee -- Presentation

Ms. Rankins noted that the Committee met on several occasions over the past several months to discuss various issues including communications with the Board of Selectmen, performance based raises, holiday pay for part-time employees, public relations and health insurance. She pointed out that Sergeant Dave Zuger replaced Ed Andersen as a member. All other members remained the same from the previous year.

Ms. Rankins reported that with regards to communication, a survey had been conducted of the employees and it was the overall consensus that they appreciate the efforts the Selectmen are making to enhance communication. They would be in favor of more round table discussions or having the Select Board attend occasional staff meetings.

Sergeant Zuger noted that with regards to raises, they are currently given across the board. It is the committee's desire to award performance-based raises. In the current system the hard-working employees may feel that their hard work is not being valued because those who don't work as hard get the same raise. Those not working as hard also don't have an incentive to work harder as they get a raise regardless of their personal performance. Sergeant Zuger said there were towns that use a numerical system that indicate when a qualifying merit raise has been earned. He didn't feel that this would increase the amount of money spent for raises as not everyone would get a raise. He added that everyone would get a COLA raise and only some would get a merit raise

Ms. Larrow explained that part-time employees are not eligible for holiday pay or time and a half if they work a holiday. She noted that this was a change some years ago as there was a time when part-time employees were given holiday pay if they worked. She noted that part-time employees would rather stay home if they are to receive straight pay. Therefore they are paying their full-time employees time and a half and holiday pay to work. To compensate part-time at time and a half it would actually provide a savings for the town because part-time employees make less per hour. Ms. Larrow added that there isn't a financial reason not to do this and it would help part-time employees to feel like they are a part of their department and the town.

Mr. Early said the employee group and Ms. Hallquist met with three insurance providers in November. All had comparable health and dental coverage. The committee suggests remaining with Health Trust for the first six months of 2014. At that time if they choose to switch to another company, they'd have a chance to review the other companies further and educate employees on their options. Mr. Early felt their group learned a lot about how the insurance companies work and how they come up with their premiums.

Ms. Roy said the committee feels the residents hold a high standard with regards to living in New London. It is important to maintain the employees' morale and to recognize that they are afraid of losing existing benefits and being compensated in a manner that does not keep up with cost of living adjustments. A high turnover causes stress and adds expense in having to train new employees.

Chair Helm thanked the group for their hard work. She liked the dialogue that comes from the model of the group and wondered how the learning they received about insurance and how it works could be expanded to the residents and employees as well. Selectman Kidder appreciated the points the Committee made that were important to them. She noted that the Board would consider their comments and move forward with their information. Selectman Bianchi felt performance-based raises is a good idea. He wondered who would determine if a raise was warranted? The Department Head, the Town Administrator? He noted that the school district is offering merit-based pay and has had to hire someone to determine whether a raise is warranted so to avoid claims of favoritism between teachers. Sergeant Zuger said he thought it would be the Department Head but would be interested in how the school is handling it as he recognized certain pitfalls having to do with personality conflicts. Selectman Bianchi thought the school had

budgeted something in the amount of \$150,000 for this position. He thought a Department Head would know their workers and the positions best and should be the one to determine merit raises.

Sergeant Zuger said he was familiar with the Lebanon Police Department's method, which is the department he worked for prior to working in New London. They use a numerical system to rate an employee to determine if a merit raise was earned. He noted that there is an appeal procedure to allow employees to challenge a decision that was made if the employee disagreed with their rating.

Chair Helm said she was also in favor of merit-based raises. She thought it helpful to find out what other towns do. It was something they should move forward with. Ms. Rankins noted that New London used to have a merit-based raise system and it was determined by percentages. It included a combination of a cost of living adjustment and a merit raise. This was in the early 90's and she could look back and see the details of how it worked.

Selectman Bianchi asked if someone was doing a very poor job and rated low on the evaluations, would it be grounds for dismissal. Sergeant Zuger said that was something the Department Heads have to look at. Each department does things differently and perhaps this kind of evaluation would shed light on those employees who need to improve in their work. Ms. Rankins said she hoped that kind of situation would be identified quickly and remedied.

Ms. Hallquist thanked the committee and thought they did a good job. She agreed with all of their recommendations and thought they could all be implemented fairly easily.

Ms. Rankins said her suggestion with regards to health insurance was to have the vendor they choose come and give a session or two to the employees on the changes occurring in insurance and where insurance dollars are going. She noted that she could easily arrange such a presentation.

Chair Helm asked about the online portal Ms. Rankins has created and maintains. Ms. Rankins said it is going well and she is updating things regularly. She's happy to get comments from anyone who has them to give.

Ms. Hardy thought all departments were currently doing evaluations using the 1-5 number rating that had been used to give merit raises in the past. She added that the employee handbook identifies the procedure for dealing with under-performing employees. Ms. Hardy opined that the new portal is terrific and Ms. Rankins has done a great job with it.

Chair Helm said the employees do so much in the town to contribute to the quality of life of the citizens who live there. Personally, she feels protected and has the services they need; she feels fortunate to live in New London.

Chair Helm thanked John Early and the staff at the Transfer Station for their work on getting Sunday Transfer Station hours to become a reality.

Dispatch Study and Update

Ms. Hallquist explained that during the FY2014 budget season a commitment was made to look into dispatching fees. David Seastrand, Doug Homan and she agreed to conduct research to try and find out exactly how much New London was paying for dispatch in comparison to other towns, to better evaluate the cost to New London taxpayers. She contacted other dispatching centers and towns to find out about rates. In 2013 New London paid 62% of the operating budget and the remaining 38% was paid by the 7 towns that get service from New London.

Ms. Hallquist explained that it is difficult to compare costs using calls for service as different dispatching centers define a call differently. However, at over \$200,000 for dispatching charged to New London, it is clear that New London pays a higher cost than other towns of similar size. Ms. Hallquist stressed that her research looked at only cost, it did not include quality of services, whether other centers could take on New London as a customer or an evaluation of the added benefit that New London taxpayers get with in-house dispatching.

Ms. Hallquist noted that she looked at the overall cost of dispatching on several towns and compared it to the population and valuation of the town, and noted that New London is significantly higher in those categories. She noted that the only town she looked at that was higher per resident was Moultonborough, however it was much lower when you look at the valuation measurement. Moultonborough also has an in-house dispatching. In summary, if New London wants to lower its costs and get more in line with what other towns are paying for dispatching services, the Board should consider revising the formula used to set fees. Currently that formula is based on calls-for-service. However, using such a formula means that towns can lower calls by having their staff handle routine calls, while New London must staff the dispatching center whether calls are coming in or not. She suggested a new formula and met with all the towns which are not in favor of it because their costs go up significantly. She stressed that the other towns appreciate that the amount New London is paying is higher than it should be, and they realized their costs are probably lower than they could get elsewhere, however, they feel that not enough resources have been put into the department over the last several years to warrant an increase in cost. If they decide to increase across the board, towns could leave the service. There are no long-term contracts in place. If someone leaves, New London has to absorb those extra costs.

Ms. Hallquist said New London has 60% of the calls so far this year. They have to pay for someone to be in dispatch 24 hours/day. She noted that Sunapee, the biggest user after New London, has indicated a desire to do its own dispatching. The \$53,000 fee that Sunapee pays would have to be absorbed by New London and the remaining towns if Sunapee leaves. Ms. Hallquist noted that New London has had in-house dispatching since 1976 which gives New London control over how dispatching is handled, which would not be true if the town got services elsewhere. She also noted that many have expressed that citizens like having it in their town. These factors would have to be considered if the Board decides to investigate services outside of town. Ms. Hallquist noted that she would be speaking with New London Hospital ambulance about having them begin to pay for dispatching services as well.

Selectman Bianchi said New London paid \$239,000 for dispatch last year. He didn't think it was a model the taxpayers of New London should continue to use. He thought the Select Board needed to look at what the alternatives are. He didn't know if the other towns would like to form an inter-municipal agreement, such as they do with the assessing service with Sunapee and Newbury. This would help pay for capital improvements to replace dispatch equipment, which is costly.

Selectman Kidder thought they should look into other agencies to see if reception is good enough to use them. She thought they should consider the negatives of losing their own dispatch service. Chair Helm said they don't even know if they could be accepted by another agency.

Rob Prohl wondered what the cost to the Town would be if they put repeaters in different locations to increase reception. Ms. Hallquist said a grant has been applied for that would add one repeater. The town's 50% share would be \$37,000 if the grant is awarded. She noted that they have been advised that the cost for this equipment is coming down. She wasn't sure how much it would cost as it depended on how many towns were included in the service. Her plan for FY2015 was to consider the fact that \$37,000 is a possibility to have to pay and spread it out amongst the towns.

Chief Lyon said if they went to Lakes Region, they'd have to purchase a different frequency pager, which costs over \$530 each. With regards to the meeting last week with the other towns, Chief Lyon felt the Town Administrator did a great job representing the Town. He said people were willing to pay more but there has to be a product that is of value to them. He thought a lot of the towns were candid and prompted good discussion. Chief Lyon felt the infrastructure needed to be improved and said the current infrastructure is why Goshen left as there is no radio coverage there. He said as a safety standpoint, it is vital that officers can communicate with dispatch and get assistance when needed. Topography is a challenge.

Mr. Cardillo was glad the hospital was going to be asked to help with funding the dispatch program. He felt the current model they are using made New London vulnerable because towns can leave the service at any time, leaving New London in the lurch. He felt they needed a contract with towns. If they have to make huge capital improvements, everyone in the service is benefiting from it and should be paying in. He thought a 7-10 year commitment should be implemented by all the towns in the service. Selectman Bianchi agreed with Mr. Cardillo's thoughts.

Ms. Piotrow said that she, Rob Prohl and Doug Homan met with Dispatch and the Police Department. It is a complicated issue with many different variables. Two areas to explore are the time schedule to get the other towns on board for this budget cycle, and the formula they use to determine cost per town. Ms. Piotrow stated that New London records many different things as service calls that other towns do not. She wondered how New London benefited by having so many more calls than other towns and felt it hard to quantify the benefits to the police department and the fire department based on the current system.

Chief Andersen said their dispatch records calls; Goshen doesn't. When he does things like a house check, he doesn't call it in as a service call through dispatch, but will enter this as what he has done during his shift. Goshen averages 300-400 call per year where an action is needed. Sunapee's call for service is the same as not everything goes through dispatch. They are about to sign a contract with the towns in the service for one year. His overall view from the meeting was that the towns do not want to leave New London dispatch service but their concern is that the infrastructure hasn't been maintained. Sunapee was not happy with the service they were getting as it wasn't what they were told they would get.

Chief Andersen said Newport dispatch was not very well-run under the past chief. It has improved over time but New London's radios would not work with the Newport service. He didn't foresee a problem getting contracts signed with the other towns as he didn't feel they wanted to go through all it takes to transfer to another town for service.

Mr. Green said the towns that have been with New London for so many years have likely been part of a conditioning process for not paying enough for the service they are getting. If New London asks them to share in the cost for capital, and then ask for an increase in what they've been paying, this will be a huge increase in what they are used to. New London needs to figure out what they need to pay in equipment to make the service better. He thought they should really look into what their alternatives were.

Mr. Homan wondered if the Board of Selectmen would direct Ms. Hallquist to get a quote from Lakes Region and the Merrimack Sherriff's Department services. Selectmen Bianchi said he was interested in getting quotes for any services that could show other options. Mr. Homan said it could be as low as \$75,000 total per year versus the \$200,000+ they have been paying. His concern as a taxpayer in New London was the services he gets and the money he pays. The surrounding towns are not of his concern. Mr. Homan suggested looking at the coverage the large dispatch services offer. They can already provide much better service than New London can to itself and the other area towns.

Selectman Bianchi said they can't make a quick knee-jerk reaction on this issue. They need to make sure they have the best possible information and they plan to get it. This has to be done before they decide to disband their current system. Mr. Homan said the Budget Committee hasn't been involved in this decision at all and was sure that they would want to talk about it. The problem is the infrastructure; they will have to make capital expenditures and then maintain it.

Chair Helm said Mr. Homan made some good points. There are many issues in dispatch that have gone on for a while and they need to all get on the same page. The positive of the initiative right now is that they are coming together to look at all the numbers. She would like to direct Ms. Hallquist to look into the other providers in the area to find out if they'd be able to accept New London as a client. Chair Helm said she would also like to direct Ms. Wood to put together a comprehensive list of priorities in dispatch. Ms. Wood said Beltronics is working with her department on this right now. Chair Helm said only when this information is compiled will the

Board of Selectmen be able to make an educated decision and see how the public feels about the idea of moving dispatch or keeping it in town, realizing the capital expenditures.

Chief Andersen said not to forget safety when determining which service they go with. He understood the savings in dollars but twice he has had an instance where someone was trying to take his life. One call to the New London dispatch service resulted in the quick arrival of backup. There was sure to be a faster response using the service in town than calling a larger, busier service that may take more time to get help to the scene. Chief Andersen stressed that minutes save lives. He asked them to consider this when determining how to proceed.

Richard Lee (Public Works Director) said larger services will not dispatch for the New London Public Works Department, but New London dispatch does. Mr. Cardillo wondered if other public works departments were going through New London Dispatch. Ms. Wood said if someone makes a call into dispatch, they are obligated to follow through. Mr. Cardillo wondered if there was a business model that would attract other towns than the seven they currently have. He fears they won't be able to bring any more towns in to help absorb the costs. Otherwise, the costs will just keep going up. Chair Helm said that to her knowledge, they haven't looked into growing the service. Mr. Cardillo didn't think they could afford to keep this service going as-is for another year.

Mr. Prohl suggested that Budget Committee representatives be invited to hear the dispatch discussions in the future so they can all hear it at the same time. Selectman Bianchi said the information will all be presented at public meetings and they don't plan on doing anything behind closed doors. He advised the public to keep an eye on the agendas and attend meetings as they wished.

Ms. Hallquist said the Board of Selectmen needs to decide on the fee schedule quickly as the other towns are working on their budgets and need that information. Mr. Cardillo was encouraged to hear that this is the year a change will be made. He is aware of the financial and safety issues that go along with this decision. He wondered if the other towns would agree on a slight increase through an act of good faith for the next year. They need to understand that it is a huge problem and they need to fix it. Mr. Cardillo thought this needed to be done quickly.

IT WAS MOVED (Peter Bianchi) AND SECONDED (Janet Kidder) that on Monday, Dec. 2nd the New London Board of Selectmen would come up with a fee structure for the towns serviced by New London dispatch.

Selectman Kidder said this was fine, but that doesn't mean the people of Sunapee will vote for this at their Town Meeting in March. The good news is that New London will know what the other towns have decided by the May Town Meeting. She thought they still needed a lot of information to move forward with making any changes.

Chair Helm felt that she would not be in favor of making a huge change for this next calendar year. Selectman Bianchi said he wasn't in favor of waiting longer to pull off the band-aid.

Mr. Cardillo wondered if New London Hospital would be included in the fee schedule. He thought they should be paying for the dispatch service because they use it. He thought their inclusion in the fee schedule would soften the blow to everyone.

Chair Helm called for a vote on the motion.

THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

Old/Pending Business

Ms. St. John said Mr. Mills, owner of the Flying Goose Pub had withdrawn his application for site plan review at the October 27th meeting of the planning Board. On November 4th he came to the Planning Board with a request to build a new dumpster enclosure without having a site plan. The Planning Board waived site plan review for the dumpster. When the building permit came in, it was found that where he wanted to build the dumpster enclosure did not meet the setbacks and thus she recommended the Selectmen denied the building permit request. The Selectmen agreed. Mr. Mills' next step will go to the ZBA for a variance.

Ms. St. John said the college came in Friday afternoon with a request to put in two temporary storage trailers to clean out a building in Mercer for two weeks. The Board did not see a problem approving this request.

Town Administrator's Report

Ms. Hallquist said the Fire Department is asking for permission to have alcohol at the Pay Night Dinner, which will be on December 9th at 5:00pm.

**IT WAS MOVED (Peter Bianchi) AND SECONDED (Janet Kidder) to allow alcohol at the Fire Department's Pay Night Dinner on Monday, December 9th.
THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Ms. Hallquist noted receipt of a letter from the Little Sunapee Protective Association returning \$541 to the Town in unspent "lake host" money given to the group for its annual weed monitoring efforts. Chair Helm thanked the group for returning the unspent money to the Town.

Ms. Hallquist forwarded information from Jerry Frew about the Resource Officer (RO) position. The school is working on the Memorandum of Understanding that will spell out additional details of the position and the interaction by the Town of Sutton as the employer of the RO.

With regards to the dispatch discussion, Selectmen Kidder said she would like pros and cons from Chief Lyon, Chief Andersen, Heather Wood and Richard Lee for both in-house dispatch and a larger service. She also advised Ms. Hallquist to ask those other services about what equipment New London would need to purchase to join them.

Chair Helm said this wasn't a decision she wanted to make with just the Selectmen; the voters need to have a say. Selectmen Kidder agreed with Chair Helm on this point. Allowing the public to have their say would enable them to get an education on the differences in the two options for dispatch, it would require those opposed to an in-house service to stand and speak to those

feelings, and lastly, it would give the vote to the residents. Chair Helm said she wanted the citizens to be informed in this decision.

Selectmen Kidder asked about the New London Inn's request for use of the town parking lot for overnight parking during the winter (which is currently not allowed). Ms. Hallquist noted that she has discussed this request with Mr. Lee and he is not in favor because it is too difficult to get the lot cleared of snow. This issue will be discussed during the low sand road discussion at the next Selectmen's meeting.

Approval of Minutes

IT WAS MOVED (Peter Bianchi) AND SECONDED (Janet Kidder) to accept the minutes of November 13, 2013, as amended. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

IT WAS MOVED (Peter Bianchi) AND SECONDED (Janet Kidder) to accept the minutes of November 18, 2013, as amended. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

Upcoming Meetings

December 2, 2013, 8:00am – Board of Selectmen

December 3, 2013, 5:30pm – Recreation Department (Whipple Hall)

December 3, 2013, 6:30pm – Capital Improvements Program meeting

December 4, 2013, 7:00pm – Budget Meeting

Application for Building Permit:

- Ronald S. Keller, 39 Squires Lane (Map & Lot 096-018-000) interior renovations – Permit #13-128 – Approved.
- Matthew & Kathryn Bemis, 10 Buker Way (Map & Lot 111-032-000) add window – Permit #13-129 – Approved.
- Sarah McCann, 605 Wilmot Center Road (Map & Lot 053-001-000) build 24x24 2 story garage – Permit #13-130 – Approved.
- Tom & Vicky Mills, 40 Andover Road (Map & Lot 122-001-000) relocate recycling enclosure – Permit #13-131 – DENIED
- Colby-Sawyer College, 541 Main Street (Map & Lot 085-033-000) 2 temporary trailers – Permit #13-132 – Approved.

Application for sign permit:

- Wilmot Community Association – Holiday Craft Fair – sign at info booth – approved.

Other Items to be signed:

- Disbursement voucher
- Warrant for Wastewater Charges – in the amount of \$364,984.25
- Abatement for Douglas G. Carroll, due to an error – in the amount of \$1030.30
- PWIM Services Maintenance Agreement – from 10/16/13 to 10/15/2014 – Approved.

IT WAS MOVED (Peter Bianchi) AND SECONDED (Janet Kidder) to adjourn the meeting.

THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London