



# TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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**DRAFT**  
**Budget Committee Meeting**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**February 12, 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:**

Kimberly Hallquist, Town Administrator  
Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Sean Carroll, *The Intertown Record*  
Ed Andersen, Acting Police Chief  
Donna Larow, Police Department Administrative Assistant  
Steve Ensign, Board of Firewards  
Jason Lyon, Fire Chief  
Jim Wheeler, Bruce Hudson, Renate Kannler, New London Residents  
Peter Bianchi, Selectman  
Tina Helm, Selectman Chair  
Heather Wood, Communications Administrator  
Lee Lemoine & Bernie Peabody, Beltronics, Inc.  
Sandra Licks, Library Director  
Richard Lee, Public Works Director  
Jack Sheehan, New London Resident  
David Cahill, Sunapee Police Chief  
Jon Korbet, Sutton Police Chief  
Robert Lee, Newbury Police Chief  
Tom Scully, Wilmot Fire Chief  
Hank Thomas, Newbury Fire Chief  
Joe McCarthy

Chair Wilson called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. He began by noting that there have been some questions as to his conduct as it relates to Robert's Rules. He said that the Chair has the right to vote, as all other members do. With regards to conflict of interest, one cannot withhold vote if there is only a perception that there is a conflict, however a member should not vote if they are to benefit monetarily or in some other way that is different from other members.

Review of Minutes

**IT WAS MOVED (Joe Cardillo) AND SECONDED (Ben Cushing) to approve the minutes of February 5, 2013, as amended. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### Selectman's Report

Selectman Kidder said the budget the Board of Selectmen are submitting to the Budget Committee has increased 2.5%. They have increased employee pay by 1.5% with additional funding set aside for performance-based bonuses. The Employee Committee will make recommendations on how these bonuses will be awarded. Mr. Homan suggested that this increase, on top of the extra pay period from last year, was actually a 4.5% increase.

Chair Wilson asked about how the debt service for the sewer was configured. It was noted that 2/3 was paid for by the users, and all taxpayers pay 1/3.

Chair Wilson asked if there were any updates to the 1941 Building lease. Selectman Kidder said there were none but that negotiations are ongoing.

### Fire Department Budget

Chair Wilson referred to Chief Lyon's letter from December 4, 2013 detailing his budget recommendations. Chair Wilson noted that the CIP includes \$18,500 for maintenance. Chief Lyon said this was true and that this year they were planning on doing the second phase of the apparatus refurbishment and this money being putting into the Capital Reserve Fund (CRF) would be completely utilized for this purpose. The estimate for the work is \$24,500 and the \$18,500 would bring them up to what they needed to get the work done. This fund would not be funded in the future as it was determined that anything having to do with the regular maintenance of apparatus should be included in the regular operations budget. In the past, \$8,000 had been put into the Emergency Repair/Refurbishment CRF fund but after this year, it wouldn't be funded at all.

Chief Lyon said they service the three pieces of apparatus twice per year and is about \$1,200 each time. When asked about the other expenses that the fund had been used for, Chief Lyon said \$850 for the Utility vehicle, summer tires for the support vehicle and the car, Knox Box (key entry system for public buildings @ \$600/each for the engine and tanker). These items total \$10,700. Chief Lyon added that he has added a \$4,000 cushion to deal with things that may come up. He hasn't done this before but felt it was important. Mr. Homan felt this was a reasonable thing to do now to gauge the need for funding in the future.

Chief Lyon said that the firefighters' rate of pay had not been increasing along with the other Town employees because he didn't make a recommendation to do so to the Board of Firewards. This year, he has made this recommendation. He explained that the Fire Department does things a little differently with raises and that increases in pay are determined by the level of training attained. The last increase for firefighters was in 2006. When asked to clarify, Chief Lyon said the \$2.50 increase they see would be for the hourly rate for on-call people overnight. There is a stipend of \$30/night and weekends would be \$60.

Chief Lyon explained the hourly rates of pay for employees of the fire station:

New members: \$9.50 – \$10.50

\*After a 6-month probation period, this pay is increased by \$1.00

Level 1 Certification: \$13.75 – \$14.50

EMT certification, advanced & paramedic levels: \$14/hour with a maximum of \$18.00

When asked about the increase in the phone line item, Chief Lyon explained that the department is utilizing an app called "Active 911" which is interactive technology using cell phone coverage. It costs \$10/month per phone. The app shows how many responders are going to an emergency, how many cannot go, and shows an interactive map with an icon for each member that is responding and where they are en route. This app helps them decide whether they need to enlist the help of mutual aid or send a re-tone for

the emergency. iPads are also located in each of the apparatus to help them stay connected with the members using this app. It is \$30 for the basic service and \$10 per iPad, per month.

Chief Lyon explained that the “alpha pagers” they had in the past would send a text to the cell phones but this required dispatch to leave their console and have to keep typing in who was going to the emergency. This app does the same thing independently and in a more timely fashion.

#### Dispatch Budget

Chair Wilson noticed that the request that was initially made by the Communications Administrator for Dispatch was not what the Board of Selectmen ultimately approved in their budget. Selectman Kidder said \$97,000 for two consoles was taken out of the budget. Ms. Wood has been urged to apply for a grant which would pay 100% of the cost of the console, so the Selectmen have decided to defer appropriating the money for the consoles at this time. Selectman Kidder also indicated that Ms. Wood had made a request to hire another full-time dispatcher. The Selectmen suggested that she find more part-time help instead.

Mr. Homan asked if the Selectmen had made progress in dealing with the big picture having to do with dispatch. Selectman Kidder said they haven’t made any decisions but that they have discussed it. Mr. Homan said the equipment is either inadequate or needs to be replaced; he didn’t think ignoring the problem would make it go away. Selectman Kidder said she didn’t believe they were ignoring the problem. They are trying to get as much information as possible about what will happen if they no longer have dispatch in New London. She wasn’t sure how long it would take for them to make this decision.

Ms. Wood said the largest increase in the dispatch budget was for part-time wages. This increase is an effort to get several more part-time people to cover vacations, sick time and holidays off. Training opportunities would require relief of the dispatchers as well. Currently they have four full-time dispatchers, two part-timers (one who can work two shifts per month and one who can work 32 hours per week, some, but not all, weeks).

Mr. Cardillo said it looked like there was a 6.5% increase to continue operations in dispatch as they are right now. Mr. Homan said this increase will be absorbed by the Town of New London. Ms. Hallquist said New London pays the largest share of the dispatch budget; this year they paid 62%. Costs per town are based on calls for service, so it varies each year what all member agencies end up paying. Generally, New London pays between 60-62%. Mr. Green asked what a call for service was. Ms. Wood said it was anything that can be plugged into the Crimestar software. Calls into dispatch that require a response are recorded.

Mr. Homan questioned how the calls are counted for purposes of billing if a multiple call event (a police call that then requires fire and ambulance, for example) occurred. Ms. Wood said such an event would count as one call for service, charged to the town where the service was required. She noted that this policy has been used for as long as she can remember. Mr. Cardillo said New London does not pay for the ambulance unless New London calls for it.

Ms. Piotrow observed that she was thinking about Hilltop Place and the needs of older people. Her daughter was recently hurt and had to call 911. She was in Sutton when it happened but is a New London resident. She thought they should think more of the formula as it relates to the population instead of the number of calls that come in. Additionally, recreation is a major economic activity in New London and in the area and they need to be alert to the adequacy of ambulance service and support that may come from recreation.

Mr. Green noted that the budget for dispatch was up \$22,000 and wondered what the increase was for. Ms. Wood said it was primarily for additional part-time labor. Chair Wilson specified that roughly \$17,000 was for part-time labor.

Ms. Wood answered some questions posed to the dispatch department by the Budget Committee. With regard to the New London Hospital ambulance and where it would get dispatching service if New London outsourced its dispatching, she noted that the decision for the hospital to secure dispatching services for the ambulance would be the hospital's call, not the town's. She said that radio coverage like the services offered by Lake's Region or Concord were roughly the same as what the Fire Department has. Chief Lyon said Capital Fire Alarm and Lakes Region both have towers on top of Mt. Kearsarge. He said New London has a tower in town. Lee Lemoine & Bernie Peabody, Representatives from Beltronics (the vendor the town currently uses) were in attendance to answer questions regarding coverage and equipment needs. It was noted that Ms. Wood had been successful winning a grant for another repeater which should help a bit. There are some areas that are low-lying where coverage is not ideal.

Mr. Cardillo said no town shows 95% coverage. Even with the improvements they make they are not improving the coverage significantly. It was noted that the towns of Sunapee and New London will do better but no other town would get to 95% coverage. Ms. Wood said land mass needs to be considered.

Mr. Cardillo asked if there was a standard throughout the state for coverage. Mr. Lemoine (Beltronics rep) said the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) set up a standard in the 80's for in-building coverage, how towers are constructed and how they affect signals having to do with radio systems. There is currently a 60' tower behind police station which every signal has to go through. The grant will allow them to add a repeater to the existing tower on King Ridge, which is 700' higher than the one in town. This will enable them to more efficiently reach all areas to be able to transmit and receive.

Mr. Lemoine noted that communications have changed; in 2013 the FCC implemented narrow-band communications protocols. This reduces the range by about 40% and this reduction in coverage has been noted. There are problematic areas. When they start engineering sites, they will be looking for higher locations. The Mt. Kearsarge site is fully-loaded and the State Police have declined the Town's request to add to that tower. The King Ridge location is a good fit for the greater New London area whether it will be just for New London or other surrounding towns. If they look to build a second site on Mt. Sunapee, they would use a building-block technique to build better service. This would be similar to how cell phone networks have built their service areas. The percentage of town-guaranteed of service is low but will rise if they take advantage of the King Ridge and Sunapee opportunities. Mr. Lemoine said they have worked with the Sheriff's Office, which is also having the same problem with their antiquated equipment. They cannot get parts for their hardware. If New London did build their own system and later on it was deemed impossible to keep the regional service, the new equipment could act as a bridge between other towns to provide a better service.

Mr. Cardillo wondered who controlled the land/area on King Ridge and Sunapee and if there was assurance that this could go through. He asked if there were already towers on Mount Sunapee or King Ridge. If so, who owns them and can New London use them too? Mr. Lemoine said that Verizon owns one of the two towers on King Ridge and the Town would need to negotiate with them. They assume Verizon will cooperate with the Town to negotiate a rate. Tower owners look at towers as income-producing entities and it is not unheard of to charge \$1,200 - \$1,400/month. Additionally, it could cost as much as \$10,000 - \$30,000 for the construction of the tower because the laborers and companies the Town would be required to use are those of Verizon. He noted that Mount Sunapee has a commercial tower with room on it but they have not yet approached them about this.

Mr. Lemoine noted that when they give cell companies a drawing of what they want to put on the tower, the cell company often signs off on it with no problems as the equipment being requested to be placed on the tower is so much smaller than what they are used to dealing with. The Town will have to be prepared to spend more money, depending on what the Town will have to pay for in hardware and installation.

Mr. Green didn't think it would take very long to figure out what the other alternatives for dispatch were and opined that this was just one alternative. Ms. Wood noted that she, Chief Lyon and Chief Andersen did an assessment of dispatch, which was submitted to the Board of Selectmen. For the Police Department, options are Merrimack County and Franklin. For the Fire Department, the options are Lakes Region, Southwest, and Capital Area Fire.

Chair Wilson wondered why having a service in New London would cost so much more than other towns within those other services. Chief Andersen said that New London has more call volume than the other towns. Mr. Homan pointed to the Town of Penacook, which lies between Concord and Manchester with 8,000 people as an example of a town with costs for dispatch at half of what New London's is. He thought there were some inaccuracies in the way New London tracks their calls. Chief Andersen said he printed their calls for service; they are not exaggerated numbers. They were given to Merrimack County. Every time "526-2626" is called to Merrimack County, they would charge New London. Mr. Homan wondered why New London wouldn't have calls forwarded to the cell phone of the Chief or officer on duty. Chief Andersen said they are not issued cell phones by the town to enable this to be done. He added that an overwhelming kind of call they get is when there are power outages. As an example, he noted that over 100 calls per hour come in to the town's dispatching center asking when the power is coming back on; people tend to call "526-2626" for a variety of non-emergency questions.

Mr. Cardillo said Newbury was a concern to him as it has tough topography and their coverage is not very good. If New London does all this work on King Ridge, etc., he thought they should have the towns in the service sign some contracts. If a year later, Newbury or Sunapee moves to another service, New London will be on the hook for more money to cover the costs. They have no contracts with the towns they service. He thought there needed to be a commitment of longer than a year.

Dave Cahill, Police Chief in Sunapee said his town has been a client of New London's since 2006. He said if New London says they are going to provide them with a service, they need to provide a service. He stressed that there have been zero upgrades to the communication equipment. How can he convince his citizens that they should stay with New London dispatch? Chief Cahill said he was committed to the New London service; he's been there since 2006, and he wrote the grant that Ms. Wood submitted to win the grant. Mr. Green asked if they were willing to invest in the service further by helping to pay capital costs for upgrades. Chief Cahill said the hospital needs to be part of the mix. It wasn't fair to keep them out. He said if they were going to charge \$20,000 and move forward, they would be committed. It has to be a two-way street. He is the Police Chief and not the Town Manager; he has a boss, so he can't say whether they would commit to paying capital costs but reiterated that they want to stay in New London if the service is there. He has been at all these meetings to say that New London needs to do something to improve the service.

Mr. Homan pointed out that there was an attempt to revise the formula to set fees to come up with a more equitable arrangement. New London pays 62% of the budget and 100% of the capital costs. No towns would consider helping with capital expenses even though everyone has gotten a great deal over the years by using New London's service. Chief Cahill didn't agree with this claim. Mr. Homan said Keene, Lakes Region, and Merrimack would all cost more than New London. The towns had an opportunity to step up to the plate when they were asked to renegotiate and they didn't. Chief Cahill said the three options his town has for dispatch are all about \$100,000 per year. New London would be asking for \$75,000 and then

\$20,000 more to upgrade the console, which would be \$95,000. They could also either go with Newport dispatch or try and do it themselves. He has to find the best service for his community. (*Note: Sunapee's 2014 fee is \$60,836 using the calls-for-service formula that has been used for the past several years*).

Mr. Cardillo said to get the service where it needs to be, it might be more like 7-figures. He felt that if this kind of capital expense is to be made, there must be a commitment on the part of the member towns so that it can be financed. Chief Cahill said there is a benefit to New London in having dispatch in their community, which should be considered. They need to look at this. His department answers 3,500 calls each year which don't go through New London dispatch. There are many little benefits to New London having their own service. Mr. Cardillo said he had been told that Fire dispatch might be better somewhere else, however now that information seems to be changing.

Chief Andersen said when Sunapee negotiated coming to New London Dispatch they were told that New London would provide a second dispatcher on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. They put forth more money and never received that second dispatcher. That was through a prior Town Administrator saying they wouldn't provide more coverage. He thought they should start the commitment on New London's part by adding a dispatcher and buying the consoles. They will need one new console regardless of whether they keep the service in New London. They have been stagnant and stale for too many years, haven't had good training or upgrades. They should start doing these small steps which will show good faith towards the other agencies. They have been approved by FCC to put police and fire on the tower at King Ridge once they can get moved there. He understood Chief Cahill's frustrations; they never got what he had negotiated for and now New London is asking for more.

Mr. Lemoine said the console system has seven-year life-cycle. Typically they cycle it out one piece per year to spread the costs out. Old equipment then becomes a spare or back-up system. The equipment that is currently in use can function as a backup once they have a new system up and running. It is old and should be treated as such and worked into the Capital Reserve so they can replace it. The problem here is that the equipment has never been properly maintained. They fix things when something breaks and have just have kept the system operational. On the mountain, there will be new equipment which would be about \$50,000. Three towers were first planned and one was to be in Goshen. They have cut this tower out. It would have helped to increase their coverage but would be very difficult to get a higher than 95% coverage especially inside buildings.

Mr. Prohl thought they should get the towns together that want a regional service and lay out the facts to see if it is something they can/want to pay for. It was noted that about \$200,000 was saved by taking Goshen out of the mix. They would still have a 95% coverage rate in New London and Sunapee.

Mr. Ensign said the Selectmen were going to do a study and all these questions would be asked again. He wondered what the Selectmen were planning to do to provide comfort that this will go forward. Selectman Kidder said they have been doing the budget and haven't thought a lot about dispatch. Selectman Helm noted they have spent many hours on town work these past few weeks and they have felt they did some moderate upgrades to acknowledge what needed to be done to dispatch. She felt these upgrades needed to be done for not only the other towns, but for New London as well. She hoped to get this study underway soon. The major push was to get the budget to the Budget Committee and they spent a lot of time on it. She thought it was a fair budget for FY2015. Selectman Helm thought these questions were putting the cart before the horse. Chair Wilson said their questions arose due to the change in suggested appropriations for dispatch. This is an issue that keeps rearing its head and he thought it was an opportunity to get information from the knowledgeable meeting attendees that evening.

Selectman Helm thought this was a waste of time at this point because the Board of Selectmen had not done the right prep-work yet to start this conversation. It would be their goal to continue this. She felt it was a little too much to talk about at present time. Mr. Homan said they are talking about a capital expenditure. They are going to spend \$300,000 again this year for the dispatch service in New London. They are about to spend money on capital expenses in dispatch which hasn't been done since the police station was built.

Ms. Blanchard asked if they would still need these towers if they went with another agency. Mr. Homan said they would not as other larger agencies already have the technology and towers. His interest was with New London because that was where he pays his taxes and where he lives.

Chief Lyon said if looking at dispatch from a monetary aspect, it makes sense to outsource. When they look further, it may not. He said Lakes Region provides great service; they have a hazmat team, and offer trainings. His department answered 682 calls last year; 545 of them were covered by a fire officer instead of the whole department. They operate differently than most fire departments do in this regard. He said they all struggle with recruitment and retention. That is why the Town hired him full-time in 1998. If they go to a big dispatch center they will lose the personal benefits they currently have.

Mr. Homan said it would cost \$300,000 - \$400,000 more per year to have their own dispatch center. Chief Lyon said Chief Cahill was correct: his boss in Sunapee approved him using his time to work on a grant for another town. That is great. He thought they could get grants even though the amount available has been decreasing since 2001. Chief Lyon noted that Merrimack County has to replace seven towers before they can expand west. The cost for this will be distributed across many towns.

Chief Andersen said the town of Henniker is similar to New London except they don't have a hospital. They have two Administrative Assistants that cover calls during the day and only 911 calls go to Merrimack County. This is a cost that isn't shown when studies are done. Having a college in town requires more work. They have a lot of people in their cells at 12:00am. They'll need to have more officers on duty to monitor these individuals because the dispatcher won't be there to oversee them. Other costs need to be considered when switching dispatch.

Mr. Dufault asked if they would petition for 24-hours service at the window if they went to another service. Chief Andersen said no, but would prefer 6am – 6pm. They have people coming and going during these hours; most recently they had someone show up at the window because she was having a stroke.

Chief Andersen noted that he is aware of hospitals that fund full-time personnel for the towns they are located in, to help defray the added expense of assisting the facility. The city of Lebanon got an officer paid for through the hospital. Mr. Ensign said Chief Cahill mentioned the ambulance service. In recent talks with the hospital, they didn't understand that they needed or should be talking about their involvement with dispatch. He agreed that the hospital really does need to be involved. Mr. Ensign identified the integrated response they have in New London; dispatch knows where the ambulance, fire and police are when mutual aid is needed. That won't exist if they go to a regional service. Mr. Homan didn't agree with this thought.

Ms. Piotrow said Ms. Wood prepared a 31-page report that has many figures but doesn't give an estimate for converting from their own service to another. She opined that it will cost more to outsource than the figures they could immediately identify.

Mr. Cardillo hoped this would be a cooperative project between the towns and the hospital. Ms. Wood said members of the hospital/ambulance were invited to the meeting that night but did not attend.

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, February 19 at 7:00pm. The Highway and Police Department budgets will be studied.

**IT WAS MOVED (Rob Prohl) AND SECONDED (Bill Green) to adjourn.  
THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:58pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary  
Town of New London