



# TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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## CITIZEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES October 11, 2014

### **Present:**

Janet Kidder, Chair  
Peter Bianchi, Selectman  
Nancy Rollins, Selectman  
Kim Hallquist, Town Administrator  
Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer

### **Governing Boards and Administration of Agencies Served by New London Dispatching:**

Connie Jones, Selectman from Grantham  
Melissa White, Town Administrator from Grantham  
Ricia McMahon, Selectman from Sutton  
Ed Thornson, Selectman from Newbury  
Dick Wright, Selectman from Newbury  
Dennis Pavlicek, Town Administrator from Newbury  
Josh Trow, Selectman from Sunapee  
Nicholas Brodich, Selectman from Wilmot  
Jim Harding, Selectman from Croydon  
Pamela Drewniak, New London Hospital Ambulance  
Ed Andersen, New London Police Chief

### **Also Present:**

CAC Members: Phyllis Piotrow, Hardy Hasenfuss, Jack Sheehan, Joe Cardillo, Chris Lorio, Bud Dick  
Tina Helm, New London Resident  
Mark & Thelma Kaplan, New London Residents  
Dave Kidder, New London Resident  
Tom Scully, Wilmot Fire Chief  
Richard Lee, Croydon Police Chief  
Heidi Dunlop, New London Dispatch Supervisor  
David White, Wilmot Police Chief

Chair Kidder called the meeting to order at 9:00am and thanked the representatives from the towns of Grantham, Sutton, Newbury, Sunapee, Wilmot, Croydon, and from New London Hospital for attending the meeting. She started the meeting by recognizing that 17 people from New London and Sunapee climbed to the top of Mount Kearsarge on September 26<sup>th</sup>, carrying the new repeater equipment for installation on the tower there. She was thankful for the combined efforts of all involved to do this work.

Chair Kidder asked the members of the towns and New London Hospital Ambulance to state their names and how long they have been in their current position:

Ed Thornson, Newbury Selectman – Has been a Selectman for four months  
Dick Wright – Newbury Selectman – Has been a Selectman for 11 years  
Dennis Pavlicek – Newbury Town Administrator – Has been serving Newbury for 17 years  
Josh Trow – Sunapee Selectman – Has been a Selectman for three years

Melissa White – Grantham Town Administrator – Has been serving Grantham for seven years  
Connie Jones – Grantham Selectman – Has been a Selectman for 16 years  
Nancy Rollins – New London Selectman – Has been a Selectman for one year  
Peter Bianchi – New London Selectman – Serving a second term as a Selectman  
Janet Kidder – New London Selectman – Has been a Selectman for two years  
Kim Hallquist – New London Town Administrator – Has been serving New London for three years  
Pamela Drewniak – Ambulance Service Coordinator for New London Hospital  
Jim Harding - Croydon Selectman – Has been a Selectman for 21 years  
Nicholas Brodich – Wilmot Selectman – Has been a Selectman for six years  
Ricia McMahon – Sutton Selectman – Has been a Selectman for four years

Chair Kidder said that their goal was to discuss dispatch in New London and get feedback on the future of the service from the participating towns. She said they would adjourn the meeting by 10:30am.

Bud Dick, CAC member, stood and noted that as a member of the Energy Committee, he wanted to announce that a meeting regarding the “Solarize the Upper Valley” initiative would be held the following week.

#### Dispatch Summary – Kim Hallquist

Ms. Hallquist said New London has been discussing dispatching fees and the formula they use to determine them for more than a year. The town has investigated various funding formulas used by other dispatching centers. For example, Lakes Region Fire uses a different formula than New London does, and it is based on valuation and population. New London attempted to use a similar funding formula but it was not well received because fees went up significantly, and allowed New London's to go down. Feedback at the time was that higher rates were not appropriate because the town had not invested in its dispatching equipment. Therefore, the last bill that went out used the same funding formula that has been used for the past several years which is based on a user fee plus a percentage of the dispatching budget paid as a percentage of calls for service.

Ms. Hallquist explained that New London has recently invested in a new repeater on Mount Kearsarge. New London voters also appropriated money for a new dispatching console, which would be partially paid for through a grant. It was noted that Chief Andersen and Chief Cahill (Police Chief from Sunapee) worked together to write the grant that was awarded. Ms. Hallquist noted that both 50/50 and 100% funding grants are available. She said Chief Andersen has applied for a 100% grant for another repeater to go up on Mount Sunapee. This equipment will further improve the coverage from New London dispatching.

Ms. Hallquist reminded those at the meeting that a study was done by Primex regarding the various options for dispatch in New London and took into consideration scenarios should the service stay in New London or be outsourced to another agency. All towns were sent a copy of the report when it was released in September and it is posted on-line. The report noted that there are options to outsource dispatching, which would be less expensive than what New London currently pays, but outsourcing would mean a loss of local control. The New London Fire and Police Departments value the small agency they have in town because there is more control and faster response times. There are benefits of a small local dispatch. Ms. Hallquist noted that like New London, the other towns have options to get dispatching elsewhere and one of the things in question is whether those towns also value a small regional dispatching center, even if it costs more than at one of the other agencies.

Ms. Hallquist noted that she and the Finance Officer prepared six potential fee formulas for 2015 dispatch billing and what the resulting fees would be for each. This information was previously sent to all

agencies for review. She noted that the calls for service used were the ones from the 2014 billing cycle as the 2015 numbers would not be available until the end of October.

Scenario #1: Use exactly the same funding scenario as was used last year. This includes a \$3,000 base fee and then a percentage of the remaining costs based on calls from each town.

Scenario #2: Use the same funding formula from last year but add in costs for the building expenses and administrative costs and equipment maintenance contracts. The bills to the towns have not included these expenses in the past. It was noted that equipment maintenance contracts has not been part of the budget for several years but it will be going forward. The New London Board of Selectmen are currently in favor of this option, although no formal vote has been taken.

Scenario #3 - #6: These scenarios are all variations on Option #2, with some including capital expenses spread over 5 years, or all in one year, and the building and administrative fee portion. She noted that New London's voters approved appropriation in May of about \$87,000 for the Mount Kearsarge repeater and one new console.

Ms. Hallquist offered that this was the first time all the governing boards have met in the same room and it was their chance to talk about how they want to see things going forward. She noted that the rates for 2015 dispatching services will be sent out soon so the various participating towns can have the figures ready for their March Town Meetings.

Chair Kidder asked that each representative give their thoughts.

Selectman McMahan from Sutton said her town is pleased to be part of the regional approach to dispatch. While her board, rescue personnel and police chief have not had a full discussion on the Primex report, she feels that seeing the costs amortized over the years would be less burdensome for a smaller town. Selectman McMahan opined that she appreciates that capital expenditures were not included in several of the scenarios. It was nice to have multiple choices to discuss.

Selectman Brodich from Wilmot asked if the new equipment paid for by recent appropriations would be owned by New London. Ms. Hallquist answered in the affirmative. Selectman Brodich was concerned that member towns might be asked to pay for the equipment all at once or even over several years. He said Wilmot is a "fluid" alliance and he would not like to lock into paying for equipment that they may not use should they decide to go elsewhere for dispatching down the road. Selectman Brodich was glad the Selectmen from New London were in favor of Option #2. He thinks it is good the towns are working together because they needed each other; should one town leave the agency, costs would go up significantly for everyone else, especially New London.

Selectman Brodich asked, with regards to Option #2, how many years had the member town contributions been calculated without taking the new charges they were thinking of into account. He suggested that figuring out the formula was more art than science. Ms. Hallquist said she wasn't sure that any of these things had ever been included in the dispatching fees for the other towns. For purposes of the scenarios presented, 5% was used to calculate the building expenses for dispatching. She added that the figures are not cast in stone at this point. Chief Andersen noted that for the 20 years he has worked for New London, the other towns were never charged for heat, electricity or oversight related to dispatch.

Selectman Harding from Croydon saw nothing wrong with Option #2. He understands that costs keep going up and up and they have to go along with it.

Pam Drewniak from New London Hospital agreed with Selectman Harding from Croydon. She said the hospital is dealing with all the surrounding towns and Option #2 is representative of a typical way to bill for overhead. She was there to support the towns and was glad to see them all working together.

Selectman Connie Jones from Grantham said her town is in a unique situation, as they are currently dispatched by three different agencies; Hanover Dispatch for Fire, Newport Dispatch for Police, and New London Dispatch for the F.A.S.T. Squad (EMS). At this point Grantham will be staying neutral. This discussion makes her think about what they should do in regards to dispatching in general; it is hard to have three different services. They like the service they get from New London but it would probably be better for them to consolidate everything into one.

Chair Kidder said New London has talked about the possibility of breaking up dispatch in an effort to save money. Selectman Jones said that for Grantham, it doesn't make a lot of sense for Fire and EMS because they go to the same calls but are dispatched by two different agencies.

Ms. White, Grantham Town Administrator, asked how New London calculates the number of calls that come into dispatch. Chief Andersen said if a call comes in for 911 or if someone asks for EMS to come, this generates a call log, which counts as a call. They don't charge for calls that are informational in nature, only for calls that result in units being sent out on the road. Ms. White agreed with Ms. Jones' remarks about the difficulties with having dispatch broken up into three services. She noted that there is a lag between the tones for Fire and EMS of between two and five minutes, which is not ideal.

John Trow, Selectman from Sunapee, said his Select Board lets the Fire and Police Departments offer feedback on how they feel with regards to New London dispatch. It is felt that there has been a lack of communication between New London and the other towns. There are no quarterly meetings held, which was something that used to be done or was at least attempted. He offered that it is nice to know those on dispatch and there is very little interaction between the dispatch staff and the communities they serve.

Selectman Trow said he heard the budget for training in dispatch was cut this year. Ms. Hallquist said this was not true and in fact they increased the budget for training and increased labor to all two dispatchers to be on duty during the busy times. Selectman Trow opined that it seemed like dispatch has been working well at this point. He feels that New London should have built in the costs for running a dispatch program from the beginning and at this point the increased costs being suggested seem to be reactionary. He wished for better communication going forward. Chair Kidder agreed that having regular meetings with the member towns would be a good thing to do.

Richard Wright, Selectman from Newbury said his town is very satisfied with the service they receive from New London Dispatch. He offered that it would be more costly and difficult to outsource to another agency, and too expensive to create their own dispatch service. He thinks it fair and equitable to share in the costs to keep New London Dispatch going. Selectman Wright said the service seems to work very well and dividing it up into some other system didn't seem practical to him. The Newbury Selectmen will have to justify the added expenses to their tax payers but he feels they can do this by explaining Option #2.

Ed Thorson, Selectman from Newbury agreed with Selectman Wright's comments. He said it is beneficial to have all dispatching coming from the same place. Otherwise there is a lag especially since a 911 call has to go from Concord, to Bradford and then to Newbury. They have some dead spots they know of that are being worked on but understands those problems have to do with topography.

Chair Kidder said over the years money hasn't been spent on equipment when it should have been. The voters in each town will have to support this new way of paying for dispatch. She was pleased to hear the member towns like the service they have been receiving.

Dennis Pavlicek, Town Administrator for Newbury, said he feels the Police and Fire Departments are supportive of dispatch, but there were other areas, such as Public Works, that utilize New London Dispatch as well. In the winter it is good to know that dispatch is out there for them. Additionally, New London Dispatch employs local dispatchers who know the area and know where to send people. Considering the costs they are responsible for, it is pretty good compared to what it could be if they were to go somewhere else.

Selectman McMahon asked if New London was looking to add more towns to their dispatch service and if they knew of any towns that were looking to leave the service. Chair Kidder said she didn't think there were any towns looking to leave. Chief Andersen said he has had some towns approach him since hearing of the upgrades that were being done. If the grant they just applied for is awarded (a repeater on Mount Sunapee), it will include an infrastructure change in New London which will make it a simulcast system. This will improve the coverage they have for Grantham and for the other towns. They will become a more valuable dispatch agency. The town of Goshen left because when New London Dispatch went to a narrow-band technology, their coverage went from 50% to 0%. With the simulcast system, Goshen's coverage would increase to 90%. By adding more towns they could reduce the cost for everyone and therefore be able to compete with dispatching services offered from other towns.

Ms. White asked about the time period used to calculate calls per town. Ms. Hallquist said it was November 1<sup>st</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup>. She added that they consider a three-year average so a high-call volume over one year won't spike a town's costs, year to year.

Ms. Drewniak offered that dispatching through one system is beneficial, coming from a patient-care point of view. If an ambulance has to switch back and forth between different dispatchers, there could be confusion and delays. She added that State level EMS is going to regional dispatching to better coordinate with each other. She was looking at dispatching as it pertains to patient care.

Selectman Bianchi said he is glad to hear people are happy with New London dispatch and he feels they are doing a good job as well. He has heard that some citizens in his town feel New London should continue the level of service within dispatch and expand it to other towns. He explained that the Town of New London put up \$86,000 of taxpayer money to improve dispatch for all the towns and they could be looking at hundreds of thousands of dollars more in capital expenses, which some of his constituents fear could be borne solely on the shoulders of New London. If another infrastructure is put in place and New London has to pay for it all, it will create an extra burden for New London. This is something the Town will have to consider for a long-term basis. If they don't get grants and the costs are not shared by the other towns, these costs will all be borne by the taxpayers of New London. Selectman Bianchi said this was something that everyone should be sensitive to.

Selectman Rollins said she is happy with the group's positive remarks about dispatch. The ability to share operating costs up front seems reasonable to her. With regards to communication, she hopes they can all walk away with the thought they will come together more often. Selectman Rollins said everyone should consider the potential, over a period of time, to apportion some of the capital costs going forward. She said these things would continue to be costly and they should think about how the costs could be shared across the board.

Selectman McMahon recalled that in the past, there had been a discussion about the role of the hospital in the costs, yet the hospital isn't included in any of the options. She wondered why. Ms. Hallquist said each call for service that comes in goes on each town's respective bills. It is the calls from towns like Springfield and Andover, which New London does not generally dispatch for, that are considered uncompensated calls and are listed under the hospital. There are under 100 of these calls per year, which is not that many in the grand scheme of things. Ms. Hallquist said she looks at the hospital and ambulance as a service that is provided to the town, similar to the fire and police departments. She doesn't want to send a huge bill to the hospital for so few calls. It is similar to a mutual aid service. Ms. Hallquist said it is a different situation with the hospital and there hasn't been an in-depth discussion about how the hospital should be included in the billing.

Selectman Thorson asked if there had been any consideration of creating a compact between all the member towns and having New London become a user town that happens to have the service operate out of one of their own buildings. This would result in a more robust service in the long run, although it would be a big undertaking and would cost a lot for start-up costs. Selectman Kidder said this was something to consider.

Jack Sheehan, a taxpayer from New London said he agrees with the comments Selectman Bianchi made about this being a partnership and doesn't understand why there hasn't been any capital costs shared between the towns in the past.

Chair Kidder said it has been felt that the service they have been providing, with the equipment they have, is not what it should be. It has not been upgraded or maintained over the years. The Town of New London feels they needed to increase the service and equipment before asking other towns to share the capital costs.

Mr. Sheehan asked if New London paid for the capital costs, what commitment would the other towns make to show their continued support New London Dispatch. If other towns decide to get out and go somewhere else, there isn't any penalty or provision for them to leave. He feels there should be a commitment made by the towns.

Additionally, Mr. Sheehan said that after analyzing the data, he noticed that New London averages more calls per person than any other member town. Perhaps the other towns are using the dispatch service appropriately, but the calls coming in from New London were by those using it as a resource to get information, such as to ask for the hours the transfer station is open.

Chief Andersen said Dispatch doesn't count informational calls in their call log. They only count a call if they have to send out a public safety person. He offered that the Town Report shows a list of all the calls, by type, that came in over the year.

Joe Cardillo said the towns need to form some type of group similar to the School District and the Wastewater Treatment Facility (Sunapee sewer system). By being a part of such a group, each participant has to bear the capital costs the program requires. To protect the towns, they need to create an agreement. Currently, there is nothing that binds any of the towns, which puts all the towns, especially New London, in a tough position. He thinks it a terrific idea to keep dispatch in New London, to start at ground-zero with an agreement that locks towns in for 3-5 years, and to use a formula that shows some capital reserves being put away. He didn't think it was equitable and fair to not include capital costs for each of the towns.

Selectman Kidder reminded those at the meeting that they are just talking about a one year time frame at this point. Most voters would vote "no" if asked for a 50% increase. The idea for next year is to use

Option #2. Future boards will consider what works best for the Town under the circumstances they will be living within. She agreed that it would be nice to have a contract or document saying the member towns will participate for a period of time, going forward.

Mark Kaplan said he is satisfied with the services they receive from Fire/Police/EMS and doesn't mind paying a little more money so he feels secure. If the Town suggested putting \$40,000 per year away to keep the services going, he would be fine with it. He said this is part of doing business in New London and the other towns should be aware of this. At some point the rates may change but the member towns should know that the service and equipment will not be deteriorated. Mr. Kaplan wanted dispatch to stay in New London.

Selectman Trow said depending on the service, Sunapee would be willing to pay what is asked. When purchasing a service, there is an expectation. If they know there will always be a dispatcher available of a certain level of training, it would make Sunapee more willing to pay more than if they had a brand new dispatcher on who has less training. Goals that should be put in place are experienced dispatchers and current equipment. If towns are being asked to pay more for a service, the towns will expect a better service.

Heidi Dunlop, Dispatch Supervisor for New London Dispatch, said New Hampshire is currently looking to create a certification program for dispatching. She said those who work in the field of dispatching have a learning curve; sometimes people come into the job with a lot of experience, sometimes they have none. There are pros and cons to both of these scenarios. She stressed that they never have dispatchers working by themselves if they don't know what they are doing. Dispatchers all get stumped from time to time with calls they do not have training for. They don't do the same thing every day but are trained to deal with challenges that come along. There is a training manual for new dispatchers and no dispatcher is on their own prior to 12 weeks of training, unless they have certain certifications or have been previously trained.

Selectman Thorson asked if the Town of New London had considered bonding for the capital costs of dispatch. Asking the towns to pay a percentage of a five year bond could be more palatable for the other towns. Selectman Bianchi said this would assume that a town or towns would be part of the service for a period of time. Mr. Thorson agreed and he thought forming a compact between the towns should be done before any bonding was done.

Mr. Cardillo said this was a good approach as they don't all want to bear the burden all at once. He wondered if grants were dependent on county lines. Chief Andersen said some were. Mr. Cardillo wondered if a grant would allow more than one town to share the funds of said grant. Chief Andersen said New London is considered the "base agency" for grants for the dispatching center. The grant application asked for a listing of other towns they could also service. He obtained letters of recommendation from some surrounding towns that do not currently get service from New London Dispatch, as well as listing the current member towns.

David White, Wilmot Police Chief, said he is very happy with the service provided by New London Dispatch and has no complaints. He is happy to see the equipment being updated and that they are all meeting together, making progress.

Tom Scully, Wilmot Fire Chief, who also works for the New London Fire Department, said that as a member town, they look to have service provided to them. His understanding is that at some point, New London took on the costs to start up this service and invited other towns to cover the costs of running it. Due to neglect, mismanagement, and failure to maintain the service, they are where they are now. Member towns are being told that the service hasn't been at the level it should be, so they need help to

upgrade the service. Dispatch is a tremendous value in this centralized location. There are other agencies out there that would provide higher and additional services. And now New London could be asking for help paying for capital improvements? What say do the other towns have as to how the service is being run and would the towns ever have a say? The member towns are being asked to invest in something they have no control over. At Lakes Region Dispatch, towns become a part of the board and have a say in how the service is run and how money is allocated. That service is a little more expensive but the towns are getting what they are paying for. Chief Scully offered that Chief Andersen, Heidi Dunlop and Heather Wood (former Communications Administrator) have done a tremendous job increasing the level of service and now they are working on the infrastructure. Until all these pieces are in place, to ask the member towns for help with capital costs is not right. Money should have put away for these things and New London should not ask the member towns now for help obtaining them. Member towns want to pay for a service.

Chief Scully said he didn't think any emergency service user in the system wanted to leave New London Dispatch, as they see the value in using it as a mutual aid group. He believes they all want to stay. Once the level of service is where the towns want it to be, he didn't think anyone would walk away. As far as a compact goes, he questioned why a small town would want to invest thousands of dollars when they could just pay a bit more for just the service. Grants are great and they have some good people working on getting them. Chief Scully felt they have identified some problems and are fixing them, which is beneficial.

Police Chief Richard Lee from Croydon said he is extremely satisfied with the service they get from New London Dispatch. He has no complaints and feels it has worked out fine over the years. A previous dispatch center Croydon used in the past was much closer to Croydon and was less expensive than New London, but the service New London gives surpasses the closer service.

Ms. White asked how much room there was in the system to add additional towns. Chief Andersen said he felt comfortable adding two or three more towns without the need to increase staffing. The New London Board of Selectmen added funding in their budget for a second dispatcher for three or four days of the week during the busy times. Ms. White asked if New London Dispatch would remain providing Police, Fire and EMS services if more towns were added. Chief Andersen said they would.

Selectman McMahan noted that as part of her past work in the state legislature, she worked on issues with the Merrimack County Sheriff's Office and dispatching center. At that time, the county was considered the host but the agencies served weren't charged for the capital costs of the host. She thought something needed to be thought through because the Town of New London doesn't know the breaking point of each community that may cause them to move to another service.

Phyllis Piotrow said the concern in New London is the long-term effects of capital costs should other towns drop out. They need some arrangement like a service agreement for the long-term. She offered that dispatch works well because of the personnel. If they have good people there, they are what make it work. They want to keep the experienced people there to provide a better service. They shouldn't think just in terms of capital costs but rather of personnel and the service they are providing.

Chair Kidder thanked the group for attending that day and believed they would meet again soon.

The meeting adjourned at 10:26am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary  
Town of New London