



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES December 1, 2012

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Jack Harrod, Hardy Hasenfuss, Peter Hoglund, Jack Sheehan, Phyllis Piotrow, Sue Little, Celeste Cook, Donn Klingler, Bruce Hudson, Renate Kannler, Rick Anderson, Joe Cardillo, Peter Hoglund, Vahan Sarkisian, Rob Prohl, Maureen Prohl, Bob MacMichael, Rich Anderson, Dave Payne, Beth Swanson, Gary Markoff, Dave Cook, Howard Hoke

Chair Bianchi called the meeting to order at 7:30am. He said he would open the meeting by explaining some of the things that had gone on since the last CAC meeting.

Chair Bianchi noted that the Chamber of Commerce has made a presentation to the Board of Selectmen regarding the reinstatement of the Hospital Days midway. They are trying to figure out how this could be done as the midway is expensive but the event brings people into town and this helps the local economy. They have requested that the town supply police coverage without charge to help them with this challenge. The Board of Selectmen agreed to provide this service at no charge to the Chamber.

Chair Bianchi said that they have started the work on the Bucklin Beach bath house. The roof has been repaired and the rest of the remodel will be done in the spring. There will be an added singular unisex bathroom that is separate from the men's/women's bathroom/changing room. Mr. Hudson asked who was overseeing the project. Chair Bianchi said that no one has been assigned yet. Chris Gaherty from Springfield is doing the work. Chair Bianchi had another local builder come and check the work done to the roof, and it was reported that it looked good.

Chair Bianchi explained that the tax bills were sent out. The town portion of the bill was down considerably at \$3.93. The total was \$15.03 per thousand. The Board of Selectmen authorized the use of \$400,000 from the unassigned fund balance to offset taxes. The year prior they used \$265,000. Mr. Markoff asked if there was a statutory limit as to how much the unassigned fund balance could have in it. Ms. Johnson said there were guidelines they have to follow. Mr. Markoff said that the school board hopes to put a warrant article on the ballot this year to create a similar fund, as they currently have to return all un-used monies at the end of each budget year. Ms. Hallquist said that the money in the fund balance is available for use through a vote at Town Meeting, however it is not to provide the Town the ability to overspend budgets.

There was some discussion of the situation in Hopkinton, NH where their highway garage burned down. The building was appraised by the town's insurance carrier, Local Government Center (LGC) at \$1 million dollars but LGC would only pay \$700,000 to cover the total loss. The town brought a lawsuit

against LGC to settle this issue. Ms. Hallquist noted that as a result of Hopkinton's experience, they will work to figure out the value of New London's buildings to make sure they have enough money to replace them if they had a total loss. Ms. Johnson noted that LGC has always been great with claims and paying quickly. Mr. Markoff was curious about the financial status of LGC and thought this should be reviewed. Ms. Hallquist agreed and noted that this information was available to the public through LGC's website. Mr. Payne said that all insurance companies are rated and LGC's rating should be looked at.

Mr. Harrod applauded the work that had been done on the Pleasant Street sidewalk as it is now complete. Mr. Markoff asked about the intersection at Gould Road as Mr. Hoke had mentioned that it was dangerous. Mr. Hoke said that the larger sign, the reflectors added, shrubs that were cut, and other measures, have helped with the safety of the intersection.

Mr. MacMichael said the cupola at the Town Hall needed to be repaired. He hoped this would be done soon. This sentiment was felt by many. Chair Bianchi said there are many maintenance issues they plan to address this coming year. The furnace in the academy building has been replaced with a much smaller and efficient unit. They anticipate a 20-30% savings in propane due to the switch.

Mr. Sarkisian asked about the broken clock at the Baptist Church. Chair Bianchi said that Bruce Parsons looked at it and determined that it was the face-board that needed to be re-done. Mr. Sarkisian asked why it hasn't been taken care of yet. Chair Bianchi said that it would be taken care of but it hadn't been brought to their attention until sometime during the last 3-4 months. It is on the list with the other maintenance items they plan to take care of. There was no money to pay for repairs to the clock in the current budget cycle. Mr. Sarkisian asked if they had a list of maintenance issues they plan to tend to that he could see. Chair Bianchi said that there was nothing written at that time, but they would be creating one. They want to find someone who could keep tabs on the buildings and have them make recommendations on things that needed to be taken care of. Mr. Sarkisian said he thought they should have a revolving list with the most crucial items that needed to be done on it. Ms. Hallquist said that lists have no doubt been made in the past, but building maintenance is something that should be appropriated for every year. Ms. Little thought they should increase the capital reserve for maintenance for buildings as delayed maintenance is more expensive than preventative or regular maintenance.

Mr. Cardillo asked if the selectmen were looking to create a facilities manager position in the town this budget season. Chair Bianchi said they were. There is no doubt; they need a go-to person to oversee all the buildings.

Ms. Kannler asked why the Town owns the clock on the church. Mr. Sarkisian said that historically, the church was the meeting house for the Town. Mr. Markoff suggested gifting the clock to the church and letting them take care of its repair/maintenance. Mr. Hoke said that the church has had difficulty paying for it in the last 20 years and so the town has helped. Mr. MacMichael said that the clock has never worked properly. Ms. Kannler said the clock is beautiful and is a typical New England landmark and they should keep it going.

Chair Bianchi noted that the Town has had an issue with unauthorized people shooting at Shepard Pit. The Public Works Department uses the area to crush and store glass, and the Police Department uses it as a shooting range as well. Recently, there was an incident where some bullets were being shot from out of the pit and through to someone's property. They have put new locks on the gate, and put signs up to deter unauthorized people from being in the area. The nearby property owners are very happy with what has been done and it is hoped that the issue has been resolved. The area will be opened this winter for the cross country ski program, as usual.

Chair Bianchi said that there was an 81% turnout at the elections from New London. Things went smoothly and everyone who helped did a wonderful job. Ms. Cook said that they registered around 551 people. 300+ were college students but there were many who had been purged from the list and had to be re-registered. She thought that large elections should be moved to the gym in the future to cut down on confusion and offer more space. Overall, there were around 500 absentee ballots. Ms. Hallquist indicated that college students who are from out of town are considered residents of New London once they register to vote in New London.

There was some discussion about the wind turbine that Colby-Sawyer College is planning to erect. They did a balloon test a couple of weeks ago and it was determined that the turbine would not be visible from most vantage points. It would have a 12' span with very little noise and is meant for teaching purposes only.

Chair Bianchi said that Detective Chris Currier has resigned as he is trying to get into the FBI. There is also a vacancy in the Public Works Department that needs to be filled. The Public Works position has had many applicants already. Mr. Prohl asked if there had been any discussion to not fill the Police Department position. Chair Bianchi said that it was budgeted for this budget cycle to fill a vacant position in the Police Department so they feel they must fill it. There had been some discussion about this but after the last Town Meeting it was thought that a full complement of officers was what the town wanted. Chief Seastrand has the go-ahead from the Board of Selectmen to fill the position when and how he feels appropriate.

Chair Bianchi said that Norm Bernaiche (former Chief Assessor) will be returning to New London after leaving to work in Keene. There were not a lot of viable candidates who had applied for his position. Kris McAllister (Assistant Assessor) had been taking care of things in the interim. Mr. Cardillo wondered about the split between each of the three towns with regards to paying for the assessing services. Ms. Hallquist said that it is determined by the number of parcels in a town, not the valuation.

Chair Bianchi shared that there was a cell tower lease negotiated by the Board of Selectmen over 18 months ago. The contract was signed by a company that had an option to put a cell tower up at the transfer station. It was a \$1,500, 18-month lease deal renewable for \$1,000 for having another 12 months to use the land. Nothing happened in the 18 months and there has been no renewal. They now have no contractual obligation with anyone on that property. The company they were dealing with couldn't sell space on the tower to make it a go. Mr. Markoff said there were three major tower leases that the town should be in touch with. If the town wants this service, these were the companies that should be communicated with. Mr. Cardillo suggested contacting Bob Vinacore (owner of WNTK) who owns a tower at Exit 18 and has some experience with this process.

Chair Bianchi noted that the budget process had started and that the Board of Selectmen has heard from the Recreation and Public Works department heads. At the next meeting, the Board of Selectmen will talk to the Police and Fire departments. The meeting following, they will meet with the Library and Administration, which will include a discussion of the maintenance of the buildings.

Chair Bianchi said that the past Wednesday they had a meeting with a committee of employees who reviewed the Town's personnel policy. They reported to the select board on what their findings were. There were five people on the committee and it was a chance for employees to review the personnel policy which had not been reviewed since 2007. Input was received but no decisions were made. Mr. Sarkisian asked if the Board of Selectmen would present their thoughts and plans on this topic to the CAC. Ms. Hallquist said the renewal of the insurance plan with LGC will be made prior to the next CAC meeting but the personnel policy in general will all be discussed in public forum.

Ms. Kannler commented that the information from the employees was very well presented. Mr. Cardillo agreed and said that they covered a lot of things. He felt that the real challenge for the Board of Selectmen would be to look at the departments and determine if their staffing levels are correct. Chair Bianchi said their goal is to be fair to the employees and to the taxpayers. Mr. Hasenfuss applauded the Town for involving the employees in this effort to update the personnel policy. Many companies/businesses do not allow this.

Chair Bianchi said that on November 26, the Town presented their proposal to a subcommittee of the school board as to what should happen to the 1941 building. Mount Royal Academy made a presentation also. At the school board meeting on December 6th the three-person committee will present their recommendations to the school board. They could recommend working with one of the groups, both of the groups, or neither of them. It was Chair Bianchi's belief that the school board would probably make a decision that night. Mr. Markoff wondered if there was an opportunity to work out an agreement with Mount Royal. Ms. Helm said that she talked to the headmaster, David Thibault, who was very positive about the town reaching out to him. They agreed that after the school board deliberates they would sit down with Mount Royal to see if they could come up with a win/win situation.

Mr. Markoff wondered why not have the Town own the building and then a portion of the building be rental space/income. Mount Royal could be a renter. He wasn't sure how much space they would need, but it would be a secured asset for the town with income possibilities. Chair Bianchi said that it didn't seem as though the school district wanted to sell the building. They want to keep the option of future school development open and if they sell the building, that option goes away. Mount Royal was concerned about being able to keep and use the fields. They also want to be able to use the cafeteria and kitchen. Without these things, Mount Royal would not be as interested in the property.

Mr. Markoff suggested that participation on Thursday night's meeting was essential. When the towns show up in force, it sends a big message to the school board.

Chair Bianchi asked if everyone was happy meeting once/month or if they'd prefer to meet less frequently. Most thought once/month was good. Mr. Payne suggested taking off January and August. Everyone thought this was a good idea.

Chair Bianchi said that Tuesday, December 4th would be a Municipal Budget Committee meeting. On January 5th the school board's deliberative session would be held. The CAC will not meet that Saturday. The next meeting would be in February. The meeting adjourned at 9:10am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London