



# TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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## CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES April 6, 2013

### **PRESENT:**

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

### **ALSO PRESENT:**

Jack Harrod, Peter Hoglund, Celeste Cook, Hardy Hasenfuss, Teri Bingham, Renate Kannler, Bruce Hudson, Sue Clough, Phyllis Piotrow, David Payne, Howard Hoke, Sue Little, Rob Prohl, Maureen Prohl, Rick Anderson, Donn Klingler, Will Kidder, Gary Markoff, Rich Anderson, Bud Dick, Bob MacMichael, Rich Anderson, Carolyn Lockhart, Doug Homan, David Cook, Liz Meller, Sarah Smith, Mat Davis.

Chair Bianchi called the meeting to order at 7:30am. He gave the floor to Ms. Hallquist to give an update on what has happened in the Town during the last week. Before she spoke, Chair Bianchi commended her for the hours she has kept and the pressures she has endured due to recent events.

Ms. Hallquist began by apologizing for what the citizens of New London have been going through since Police Chief David Seastrand resigned on Thursday. She observed that citizens go through a lot of emotions when something like this happens in a small town, and many of those emotions are not good. She appreciated the fact that everyone within the Town was having a very difficult time.

She updated the members of what had happened during the last couple of weeks:

Ms. Hallquist said that Chief Seastrand came to her office on March 13 to inform her that he was being investigated by the Attorney General's Office. It was a criminal investigation, although he indicated that he had no idea what the charges were. She called the Attorney General's office and spoke with Jane Young, Senior Assistant Attorney General, who confirmed that an investigation was underway. Attorney Young understood and sympathized with the position the Town was in, but nevertheless could not share information about the nature of the investigation. Over the next two weeks, Ms. Hallquist met with investigators from the Attorney General's office to help them acquire the information they needed. She added that the Town has cooperated fully with the Attorney General's Office. Ms. Hallquist noted that she spoke often with Chief Seastrand, to evaluate his fitness for duty, noting that she was concerned because of the stress he was under. At no time did she recommend to the Board of Selectmen that he be put on leave. The previous Sunday (March 31st) she spoke with Chief Seastrand, and he informed her that he would be informing the Selectmen at their meeting of April 1<sup>st</sup> that he decided to retire, with his last day being April 30<sup>th</sup>. This did not surprise her as he had discussed his pending retirement with her back in December, he was just trying to figure out exactly when. Then, on Thursday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, Chief Seastrand came to her office and submitted his resignation, effective immediately. Chief Seastrand indicated that his resignation was the result of a negotiation with the Attorney General's Office – they would close the case in return for his immediate resignation. The Selectmen met and appointed Sergeant Edward

Anderson as Acting Chief, effective immediately (Sgt. Anderson had previously been appointed Acting Chief effective May 1<sup>st</sup>, after the retirement of Chief Seastrand).

Ms. Hallquist noted that on Thursday afternoon she and Selectman Helm met with the staff of the Police Department. The purpose of the meeting was to convey the support of the Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator during this difficult time.

Ms. Hallquist recognized all of the employees from the Town of New London both in and around the office, who have had to deal with the press and the pressures of this event. She remarked that everyone has been supporting each other and doing their jobs on behalf of the Town. She noted that her priority on Friday was to speak with New London citizens who had questions or who wanted to express their thoughts on the matter. In the days and weeks ahead they will likely hear more about this issue. She has informed the Town's insurance company in the event that a lawsuit is filed against the Town. Ms. Hallquist noted that she has been contacted by the offices of the Towns of Sunapee (Town Manager Donna Nashawaty) and Newbury (Town Administrator Dennis Pavlicek) with offers of help and support. Police Chief David Cahill has also offered his help. Ms. Hallquist concluded that while current events have been excruciating for all, she is confident that they will all move forward as a community. She encouraged all citizens to call, e-mail or stop by the office to discuss this, or any other town related issue.

Ms. Helm said that this had been a long and stressful week. On Thursday afternoon, the Police Department was assured, through their presence at the meeting, that the Selectmen are there in support of them. She said everyone should be assumed innocent until proven guilty. Chief Seastrand has served the Town so well for so many years. She acknowledged that this was a tough time.

Ms. Kidder thought Chief Seastrand is a fine and honorable man. She said anyone can make an accusation about anyone. Police Officers are in a vulnerable spot and there is no reason to believe Chief Seastrand did anything wrong.

Ms. Cook said she had the highest regard for Chief Seastrand and has worked with him in her role of Welfare Officer. This accusation is so foreign to what she knows about Chief Seastrand, it is difficult for her to even comprehend. She hoped he would be able to get his life back and move forward.

Mr. Markoff felt that Chief Seastrand's integrity was not being protected. He said if it was him he would be fighting like crazy to prove his innocence and not resigning. If he had to resign, he would want it made known that he was innocent. He is uncomfortable that Chief Seastrand's integrity was hanging by a rope. Perhaps the community should stand up behind him, as he has done just that for the community in many ways. Chair Bianchi said he felt the community was standing behind him Chief Seastrand 100%.

Ms. Helm said because of the legal ramifications of this and having no idea where it will go, they need to hold tight for a while and make sure they are "dealing with a full deck of cards." She felt Chief Seastrand knew they were all behind him. She told the department the other day that if they needed help dealing with this issue, they should feel comfortable contacting the Selectmen. Mr. Markoff said perhaps a letter should go to Chief Seastrand from the Town to show support. Chair Bianchi asked if this request could be taken under advisement. Mr. Homan suggested being very cautious about any statement at this time. Ms. Piotrow said she has heard many comments that Chief Seastrand is a great person but the only question she can't answer in her own mind, is that he negotiated a plea bargain at the Attorney General's Office. She thought he should try to prove his innocence. To her, that was the elephant in the room. Chair Bianchi said that it was not the prerogative of the Board of Selectmen to try and get into the mind of Chief Seastrand and figure out why he made the agreement. Mr. Homan said if it is not a negotiated settlement and if a civil suit comes to the Town, all this information will come out. Chair Bianchi said he

and the rest of the Selectmen were supporting Chief Seastrand and they should continue to do so, let things settle down and see what happens. Ms. Helm said as elected officials of the Town, the Selectmen have to be extremely careful what comes from their mouths.

Ms. Helm said she did not support a Town initiative at this point however letters to Mr. Seastrand can always be sent directly from citizens. Mr. Cardillo agreed with Ms. Helm and said as individuals, they could give Mr. Seastrand their support. He commended Ms. Hallquist for the good work she has done handling the press. He thought everyone needed to take time to let things settle and come to terms with their feelings about this.

A meeting attendee who was not a member of the CAC said that one co-ed was interviewed on WMUR and she said that members of the police department look at them in a “creepy” way. It upset her to think that students on the campus feel as though they were prey for the New London Police Department. Mr. Cardillo said they have to sit back and see how this plays out over time. Mr. Homan wondered if the Town could request an expanded investigation from the Attorney General’s Office. Chair Bianchi said that the Attorney General said the investigation was over. An individual who was not a member of the CAC thought that if this event was not investigated fully, the Police Department would never be able to go on campus without being seen with some suspicion.

Ms. Bingham wondered if the Town had spoken with the college at all about this. She felt the Town and school were aligned and did not think the comment made by the student should go unresolved. Ms. Hallquist said that she is going to speak with President Tom Galligan. It was noted that President Galligan sent out a press release saying that the college, Town and the Police Department have always had a good relationship and they expect that to continue. Ms. Helm asked the members of the CAC to bear with them as this was quite a slam to the Town this past week.

Mr. Cardillo said there will be questions that come from the operations systems of this issue and that is where the CAC can get involved as an advisory board. Chair Bianchi said there will be no attempt to hide anything and they will be completely transparent. Legal implications may make it so they cannot disclose everything, however. He commended Ms. Hallquist again for the tremendous job she has done working with citizens and the press. Ms. Kannler suggested if members of the CAC are approached by citizens for information, they should forward these people to Ms. Hallquist.

On to other business, Chair Bianchi said they have filled both vacant patrol positions in the Police Department. The new officers are David Keith and Eben Lamson. The newest officer was sworn in on Monday during the Selectmen’s Meeting. One of the officers must undergo training to get certified (3 month training) while the other is already certified in another state so will only have to go through training to get certified in New Hampshire (3 weeks).

Ms. Helm said it was moving when Eben was appointed and sworn in, as his father Russ, a retired State Trooper and current part-time officer for New London, presented his son with the badge he will now wear as New London’s newest police officer.

Chair Bianchi said that they appointed an Interim Recreation Director, Scott Blewitt, in February. Scott worked full-time for Newport Recreation and is still working part-time for Sunapee Recreation. At the Selectmen’s meeting on Monday, they voted to fill the position with a full-time position when the interim period is over (June). They will post the position at that time and open it up to anyone who may be interested in applying. By then, the important groundwork of getting the beaches and the summer program set up and moving forward will be done. Chair Bianchi felt Mr. Blewitt was doing a great job so far.

Chair Bianchi said that the 1941 Building Committee has been charged to study the school and look into various aspects of it. The Selectmen have voted to include a warrant article to appropriate \$10,000 to purchase an option to enter into a long-term lease for the building. This will keep the building off the market for one year while the Town studies the building and makes a decision if they want to enter into a lease with the School District. This will be a separate warrant article for vote at Town Meeting. The article will be discussed by the Budget Committee at their Public Hearing on Tuesday (April 9<sup>th</sup>).

Mr. Hoke asked if this would be a one-time fee. Chair Bianchi affirmed this notion. He said that they have a one-page document describing the terms of this option. The School District will pay to maintain the building during this year of study. Mr. Hoke suggested if the lease goes through, at the 2014 Town Meeting they could be asked to appropriate money for the building. Chair Bianchi said that this was true. They would not know what needed to be done until all the studies were done. Private funding would be an integral part of the project. Reports will be made to the Board of Selectmen by the 1941 Building Committee during the year of study to keep them abreast of the anticipated costs. It was noted that this \$10,000 can be used by the school board for whatever they want.

Mr. Cardillo said he had no issue with paying \$10,000 to allow the Town the time to explore the issue further. He does take issue that the money is not being applied to anything; the final purchase price for example. This is how options work in other deals he has been involved in. Chair Bianchi said the terms they have come up with have been negotiated between the Town and the School District and at this time the \$10,000 was not looked at it this way.

Mr. Markoff said generally an option would be applied to a purchase, but they are looking to lease the building for \$1 per year. The \$10,000 is a statement by the Town that they are serious about the study and will attract other private donors to recognize the seriousness.

Mr. Hogle did not think there were any negotiations with any other parties when the School District chose New London. It was pointed out that there was another party interested in the building: Mount Royal Academy. Mr. Prohl said that the assumption at the time the Town submitted its proposal, the School Board was looking to have the Town take over the building that year. When it became apparent that this was not feasible, the Town asked for the option to give the Town more time to do some research.

Mr. Cook thought the window of low-interest loans will close quickly and abruptly. He did not feel they had an unlimited time to make a decision on this. He asked if they were taking this into account in their planning and for other capital items in the Town. Mr. Prohl, a member of the 1941 Building Committee, said that the 1941 group understands the importance of raising the necessary funds privately, noting that asking the Town to get a loan for half a million isn't feasible. He noted that if private funding does not materialize, the whole project won't go forward. The intent is not to ask the taxpayers to fund the whole thing.

Mr. Hoke thought if they consummate the deal with a lease, the Town will be accepting considerable expense for the maintenance. Perhaps the School Board could credit their bill to the Town for \$1,000/year for 10 years. It is a small amount of money but at least they would get some kind of credit towards the lease. Mr. Prohl suggested perhaps once a lease is entered into, the school district could pay \$10,000 towards a maintenance item on the building. Ms. Prohl thought the \$10,000 was fair compared to the \$50,000 the School District was paying for maintenance of the building this year.

Ms. Helm said the 1941 Building Committee is working on a very nice brochure, which has been paid for by private funds, to circulate at Town Meeting.

Chair Bianchi said the biggest single item the Town works on during the year is the budget. The Department Heads, Select Board and Budget Committee have met five times to discuss the budget. The first, and maybe final hearing, will be that coming Tuesday, April 9<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm at Whipple Hall. He urged the members of the CAC to attend the meeting and listen to what they have done and give comments. He commented that the staff and department heads have worked hard to keep the budget as moderate as possible.

Mr. Cardillo felt it was important for people to come to the meeting on April 9<sup>th</sup>. Where they stand now, the Town portion of the tax rate is looking at an increase of about 15%. Many things factor into this number. There is the Town, County and School portions. The County may go up a little, and the School increase looks to be 1.5%. The 35% of the total tax rate is looking at a 15% increase. Mr. Markoff said that the town percentage is 26% of the total bill. The County portion is 27%. Where they are making great strides in trying to reduce the tax impact managing the Town, they have zero control over the County level which is ever-increasing. He asked if they had any ability to manage or control the spending by the County. Ms. Hallquist said that their meetings are open to the public and they have a budget hearing just like the Town has. Ms. Kidder said her husband, Representative, Dave Kidder, is on the committee. She said that the County Home is a benefit of the Town and many of their elderly take advantage of that resource. She said that the County budget is up less than 1% this year.

Chair Bianchi said last year the budget voted on by town resulted in a tax rate of \$4.30. The Town applied \$400,000 of surplus to that rate which brought it down to \$3.93. Next year the projected rate is \$4.55 if they put nothing from surplus towards the tax rate. Mr. Cardillo said there were four components that go towards the tax rate: income/revenue, the Grand List, surplus and the appropriated budget. They are looking about a 3.5% increase in the operating budget. He challenged the group to come up with ideas on how to keep the rate down. He observed that it is unlikely they will have the same amount to apply to surplus this time around.

Ms. Johnson said the tax rate is set in October. At Town Meeting they will only know one of the four components necessary to actually determine the tax rate – the budget/appropriations. The exercises they are going through with budgeting are estimates only. They are spending on track of what was appropriated for FY2013 (voted at last Town Meeting) so she is not anticipating much of a surplus being added to what they already have.

Ms. Piotrow said the calendar this year requires an extra pay period for the employees. There is also a big increase from the State for employee retirement costs. Without dealing with percentages, one simple point people can make to those who are wondering about the increase is that these two things amount to about \$140,000. Mr. Cardillo said the only thing they can control at this point in time is the appropriated budget.

Mr. Cardillo questioned the need for a March (school vote) and a May Town Meeting. So far there was not a huge increase in attendance in moving the Town Meeting to May. He wondered if a small savings could be made in going back to one meeting.

Chair Bianchi said there is a lot of background behind the figures the Selectmen and Budget Committee have come up with. None of the figures at this point are cast in stone and they still have a lot of work to do. He hoped people would become involved and go to the budget hearing on Tuesday night to hear the presentations and discussions on various topics. Mr. Homan said it was his opinion that if they do not pay for it this year, they will have to come up with the money next year. They need to spread out the surplus they have and not use it all at once. Mr. Prohl said that the budget has been very lean and that keeps the

surplus low. The only place they could really see a decrease was through personnel and they have to decide if there are savings there. Mr. Homan said if they do not address this, they will continue to see raises in the budget every year. Increases in retirement and healthcare are killing them.

Mr. Markoff said it comes down ultimately to a philosophical approach by the Town to wrestle with this to balance out healthcare and retirement. The only way to offset these increases is to grow the tax base itself. They need to determine if development should come in to help offset these expenses. He observed that more conserved property is less property available for development that will increase the overall tax base. This is an emotional and philosophical topic in the Town.

Ms. Clough said as a member of the Conservation Commission, she understands the reasoning behind their budget being cut this year. She opined that one of the reasons people come to New London is because they have open space, wonderful trails, and a way of life that is important to the people who come to town. She hoped that this notion would be included in what happens with the Budget Committee. Mr. Rick Anderson said the percentage of conserved land in New London is less than the percentage of conserved land statewide. He did not think the amount of conserved land was getting in the way of development.

Mr. Markoff suggested holding a meeting at Whipple Hall about how the Town moves forward with the budget, development, zoning changes, etc. Ms. Helm said after Town Meeting she would like to do this as she felt they were at a crossroad. They need to look at the Master Plan and get input from the citizens.

Chair Bianchi noted that there would be no zoning amendments on the ballot this year at Town Meeting.

Chair Bianchi said the Elkins project had moved forward with the signing of the contract with Pathways Engineering. In the next few days, this contract will be submitted to the State for approval. Engineering work on the project will start and a bid document will come about. Ms. Hallquist and Richard Lee have worked hard on the project due to regulations and rules that are in place to make sure everything is done to the satisfaction of the State. More results are to come in the next week or two.

Chair Bianchi shared that the new fire truck has arrived and is a state of the art piece of equipment. Ms. Helm said that a lot of training has been going on with the firefighters to get acquainted with the new apparatus. The old ladder truck will be picked up as a trade-in when the department has finished cleaning it out.

Chair Bianchi referenced the handout showing attendance at Town Meeting, and at elections, over the years. Celeste Cook said it was rewarding working at the polls for the school vote and to see the increase of people who came to vote. Mr. Homan gathered that New London's voice was not being heard at the school vote like it used to when Town Meeting was held at the same time. Mr. Markoff said this was a dangerous precedent. Issues favored in New London could be outvoted by other towns, which was alarming to him. Mr. Harrod said the school election for most of them is irrelevant; it is a difference of \$50,000 so they do not feel it important to vote. Chair Bianchi said out of the approximately 3,000 voters in the town, only 81 showed up to the deliberative session. Ms. Cook said about 23 residents from New London were there. Chair Bianchi said that Ms. Helm drafted a letter that the Selectmen approved, which was submitted to the *Intertown Record*, encouraging people to go and vote. Ms. Hallquist also sent two Streamsend messages, and the electronic sign was put out to remind people to vote.

Chair Bianchi said signups had closed for elections this year. Each open seat has at least one candidate running. He read this of candidates running for various offices.

Mr. Markoff asked if there was any way for New London to incorporate the use of electronic balloting so they could collect people's votes without them having to go to the physical location. Ms. Hallquist said this was not available in New Hampshire yet. Absentee ballots can be used, but that is not electronic.

Chair Bianchi suggested that for the next meeting they could discuss and give feedback on the Town Report: the size, layout and design. Suggestions could be made that would be taken into consideration for next year's Town Report. It was noted that the Town no longer mails the reports out and are printing less than they used to. They print 900 copies, which can be picked up at the Town Office and the Transfer Station.

The meeting adjourned at 9:04am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary  
Town of New London