



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES May 3, 2014

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Joe Cardillo, Renate Kannler, Bruce Hudson, Hank Otto, Celeste Cook, , Peter Hoglund, Hardy Hasenfuss, Sue Little, Will Kidder, Phyllis Piotrow, Rob Prohl, Maureen Prohl, Vahan Sarkisian, Doug Homan

The meeting was called to order at 7:31am. Chair Helm asked for a moment of silence in honor of Bob MacMichael, who passed away on April 29. He was remembered fondly as the “Mayor of Elkins” and everyone agreed that he will be sorely missed. The date, time and place for Bob’s memorial service was given.

Chair Helm commented that there were two recent Letters to the Editor in the April 29, 2014 issue of the Intertown Record which she felt contained inaccurate information regarding several issues the Town of New London is currently working on:

- A statement was made that renovations to Whipple Hall could cost \$500,000. This is false; the Selectmen have not yet gotten definitive numbers.
- A statement was made that setting aside money for cleaning the old sewer lagoons would cost \$100,000 or more – the Selectmen did allocate an amount to be set aside for this purpose, but the Budget Committee removed it from the warrant.
- A statement was made that upgrading Dispatch could cost up to \$1 million – again, this is false and neither the Selectmen nor the Budget Committee would allow the Town to commit \$1 million to this project. Selectmen are still evaluating dispatch costs.

Chair Helm emphasized that these were her own personal comments and she was not speaking on behalf of the Board of Selectmen.

Joe Cardillo advised that he planned to write a Letter to the Editor which will encourage people to come to Town Meeting and vote. He felt it was important not to disparage opposing views.

The 2014 Annual Town Report was distributed and briefly reviewed by committee members. Chair Helm noted that the Selectmen elected to list both the Selectmen’s and Budget Committee recommendations side-by-side on the warrant this year. There are three specific expenditures the Selectmen felt should have been included in the budget which the Budget Committee cut. It was decided to list both budgets to give townspeople an understanding of each group’s reasoning and let them decide which to support. The

Selectmen can explain why these differences exist. It was also noted that Articles could be amended from the floor at Town Meeting.

With regard to Article 4 (Public Safety), Chair Helm informed committee members that because of an immediate need to fix the locks in the Police Department, the difference between the Selectmen and Budget Committee budget recommendations in this regard no longer exists as the locks have been repaired. The defective locks were creating a fire hazard. Ms. Hallquist said that four locks had failed since the last budget hearing and the Police Chief asked if all of the locks could be replaced immediately, within the current budget and she agreed that the expenditure was appropriate. Ms. Hallquist noted that this expenditure does not mean that cameras for the Police Department would not be purchased and pointed out that cruisers cameras are already installed.

Phyllis Piotrow asked if there was any particular controversy attached to the Planning Board amendments. Selectman Bianchi said much time and effort went into these changes. The Planning Board scheduled several work sessions for people interested in certain Articles, and then held two public meetings. His opinion is that there are no red flags regarding the zoning amendments.

Maureen Prohl inquired whether there was a description of what it means to “tamper with vegetation” within 50 feet of the shoreline. Selectman Bianchi answered that it is permissible to trim brush, but his understanding is if someone has a stump 20 feet from the shoreline, they cannot remove it. Putting any type of structure within this boundary is not allowed. The one exception is putting a dock to the land, but doing so in a way that creates the least impact on the 50 feet.

Maureen Prohl also asked how it was going with the person hired for the new 20-hour a week maintenance position to do projects on town buildings. Chair Helm responded that the Selectmen are working on getting jobs done in a timelier manner. The person filling this position also has another job and he was assured when he accepted the position that the New London position was flexible, however it is causing issues with jobs not getting done when needed.

Phyllis Piotrow inquired whether the Selectmen are happy with the work done on the gazebo on the Town Common. Chair Helm said yes, but the job ended up costing more than was originally anticipated. Some painting still needs to be done. She commented that some of the work on the original gazebo was handled by volunteers and there was not proper oversight. The new roofing contractor found a ridge that was causing ice and water to back up and stay there, and this caused the rot. The roof has been reconfigured so there will be no more ice back-ups.

Joe Cardillo asked about Article 19 – whether the Town will approve a resolution that “...corporations are not people, and that Citizens United has weakened our democracy and undermined people’s right to open and equal freedom of speech and press.” The warrant article goes on to ask that our state legislature and Congress overturn Citizens United. Mr. Cardillo wanted more information about Citizens United. Ms. Piotrow answered that the Article is intended to express concern about the recent Supreme Court decisions on the amount of money that can be donated to political candidates. Chair Helm noted that just about every town has had this as a petition article this year.

Celeste Cook inquired about the \$11,000 be set aside for performance-based bonuses and to pay for an employee Christmas party, which the Budget Committee cut in half. It was noted that the Selectmen have worked with employees on a number of issues and by supporting merit-based pay and putting it in the budget, it shows the Town’s support. It was noted that the Town used to have 40 full-time positions, and is now at 36.

With regard to Article 17, Vahan Sarkisian asked if Selectmen are recommending moving Town Meeting back to March. Chair Helm responded that she is ambivalent about it – she would like to give the present system two more years at least. She said she was aware there is concern that by separating March school elections and Town meeting, New London was not incorporating the school budget, but she is not totally convinced that moving Town meeting back to March would bring in more people. Selectman Bianchi indicated that he is in favor of moving Town Meeting back to March; it would give the town more say in the school issues being voted on in March. Selectman Kidder said that a lot of work went into moving the meeting to May and there has not been any real benefit. She also thinks that keeping the current system for another two years would be advisable. Doug Homan said where it gets important is the bond issues. He recommends the town consolidate the elections and New London should be heard on that vote. Rob Prohl observed that two of the candidates for Selectman support moving the meeting back to March. Ms. Piotrow felt this was a perfect issue to put before the townspeople at Town Meeting.

Ms. Prohl asked one of the Selectmen to summarize why the board does not support single stream recycling. Selectman Bianchi responded that a group in Concord made several presentations, but their figures did not seem, at the time, to be beneficial to the Town of New London. The Select Board voted at that time not to sign on with that particular group, which later went out of business. Selectman Bianchi observed that the Concord group needed 25 tons from New London to make it go, and New London was on the border. The Town of Concord also decided not to go in. However, this issue can be revisited. Casella is now doing single stream – there are more players in the game. Chair Helm said she was in favor of revisiting this issue and bringing new information back to the townspeople. Sue Little asked why single stream is better than recycling and Selectman Bianchi replied that it is all recycling – however single stream takes more things.

Ms. Cook inquired about Article 13 – to appropriate \$670,190 for sidewalks in Elkins and the Streetscape Project. She didn't think that project would be completed this year and emphasized that it must be done, or the Town will have to pay the grant money back. Ms. Hallquist noted that the vote must be taken this year to accept the grant and appropriate the town's 20% share, to allow construction in the Spring.

Renate Kannler felt Article 20 (to hear the reports of agents, and committees....and to transact any other business that may legally come before the meeting) needs clarification. Ms. Hallquist replied that this Article is the common last article of an annual meeting where other items may be brought up, sort of a "catch-all".

Peter Hoglund asked what was happening with the Elkins dam project (Article 9). Selectman Bianchi replied the Town is appropriating money to conduct an engineering study. Also with regard to Article 9, Ms. Cook asked about the discrepancy between the Budget Committee and the Selectmen's recommendations for sewer lagoon clean-up. Ms. Piotrow clarified that the Budget Committee cut out any funds for that project because they did not know how much money was needed, what has to be done, and when it has to be done. They want more information. Chair Helm opined that this was penny wise and pound foolish – we should be setting money aside. Mr. Cardillo noted the Town currently has \$31,000 in the lagoon clean-up fund, but we do not yet know what it will cost in the long-run. The Town is waiting for the State of NH to weigh in.

Mr. Cardillo asked how the order of names on the ballot is determined. Ms. Hallquist was not sure and noted that she believed there was a specific State law which addressed the issue. She noted that she would check with Linda Hardy and e-mail an answer to the committee members.

There was some discussion on how changing Town Meeting back to March would affect staff. It was noted that a change back to March Town Meeting would not mean the town would have to abandon the

fiscal year and return to the calendar year. Mr. Cardillo felt it would be too difficult to change back from quarterly billing to semi-annual. Wendy Johnson said the issue is very complicated and the current system is working fairly well. She made three points – (1) it would be fine to change the meeting month; (2) it is easy enough to change how many times a year we pay taxes; but (3) going back to a calendar year would be huge.

With regard to Article 9, Bruce Hudson asked who was going to provide the voters with both sides of the discussion. Chair Helm noted that they are discussing the presentations of the Articles at the next Selectmen's meeting on May 5. Mr. Homan said that Budget Committee members are now discussing this as well. Ms. Prohl suggested that at the beginning of Town Meeting, Selectmen should clarify and explain that budget recommendations are being presented differently on the warrant than in the past. There are three articles where there are differences in the budget recommendations, and the Selectmen and Budget Committee will each explain why. Selectmen thought this was an excellent idea. They are meeting with the town moderator next Monday and will discuss it with him.

There was some brief discussion about whether all Budget Committee members have been included in ongoing discussions about budget issues. It was recommended that a committee member speak to John Wilson, the chair, about transparency and the Right-to-Know law.

Mr. Hudson asked how notices were getting out about the election and Town meeting. Ms. Hallquist said she will issue a "streamsend e-mail" and there will be signs on the road and notices in papers and the Shopper as well as the town's website which has had information for several weeks.

Mr. Sarkisian commented that he felt the expenditures of the Highway Department were very high. He spoke to Richard Lee about this to get more information. Mr. Sarkisian said when he saw they paved County Road, he was utterly shocked when they ended up paving from the hospital all the way to 103A. He thinks it was unnecessary to do that much and the Town paid more than it should have. He says that if a job is put to bid, it's incumbent on the Town to accept the lowest bid. Mr. Sarkisian asked for a breakdown of the \$499,000 budgeted for highway street repair and maintenance. He was informed that he could come into the town office and review all bills paid for the job.

Mr. Cardillo advised that there is a promotion for Hospital Day coming up – stay tuned for ticket information.

Mr. Cardillo said he has had friends and neighbors ask who is registered to vote in the Town of New London. He bought a checklist and was surprised to find some of the people he knew were not registered voters. He questioned how many Colby-Sawyer students were on the checklist. It was agreed this was a discussion for another time. Mr. Cardillo recommended the Town do some research about letting Colby-Sawyer College students vote in a presidential election, and then find out how to remove them afterwards from the checklist so they do not vote in local elections.

Chair Helm asked committee members to encourage their friends and neighbors to come to Town Meeting.

Ms. Prohl showed the group a number of different brochures that Colby-Sawyer graphic design students have created about New London, including walking and driving tours of New London and Elkins. When this project is up and running, the brochures can be used in conjunction with a Smart phone; punch in a number and a picture of the building will come up on the phone. Maps will be at the Information Center.

Chair Helm took the opportunity to thank everyone at the meeting for their support and input, and noted this group was very useful to the Town. She thanked them for the honor of serving them for the last six years. Her goal was to promote the notion of teamwork on the Select Board. Hardy Hasenfuss recognized the efforts and dedication of Chair Helm over the years and asked for a round of applause to show appreciation for those efforts. The group applauded in thanks for Chair Helm's dedication.

Mr. Hudson asked if the Town could dedicate next year's Town Report to Bob MacMichael. The Select Board noted that they would.

Ms. Piotrow noted that the League of Women Voters' "candidate's night" last week had a great turnout. Another meeting is coming up and she asked everyone to encourage folks to attend.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Work, Recording Secretary
Town of New London