



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES July 12, 2014

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Paul Lazdowski, Thelma Kaplan, Rose Bernard, Sue Little, Jack Sheehan, Katharine Fischer, Phyllis Piotrow, Bruce Hudson, Renate Kannler, Hardy Hasenfuss, Robert Crane, Donn Klingler, Elizabeth Klingler, Kate Turcotte, Roger Smith, Hank Otto, Marianne McEnrue

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 am. Chair Kidder welcomed new members of the Citizens Advisory Committee and introduced the other two Selectmen, our Town Administrator, and Finance Officer. She asked each member of the committee to go around the table and say a few words about their personal background and skills. Kim Hallquist commented that she was struck by the magnitude of local citizen volunteerism. She noted the Town always gets a great turnout for CAC meetings, which makes the staff's job easier, and reminded members to feel free to call her if they have any questions or need information. Peter Bianchi said that every year after town meeting, the Selectmen put out a notice asking for committee volunteers – this year has seen a huge response from people willing to serve.

Chair Kidder noted that a couple of issues had recently been brought to her attention:

- Several people have been concerned by the number of boats moored on Pleasant Lake near the beach at Elkins. Chair Kidder noted that the State of New Hampshire regulates the number of moorings on the big lakes, but does not do so for Little Lake Sunapee and Pleasant Lake. However, the caveat for these two lakes is that the boat owner cannot cross private land to get to a mooring. An additional regulation is the boats have to be safe and away from swim lanes. Chair Kidder asked New London Representative David Kidder to check state regulations to determine if the group of boats moored on the two lakes is legitimate. David reported that there have been no problems with the number of boats moored in Elkins and Little Lake Sunapee. It is legal as long as there is access over public land.
- Chair Kidder was asked about why the Public Works Department is mowing the land across from the Flying Goose restaurant. She explained that the Garden Club felt it was important that this intersection be maintained properly because it is an entrance to the town. However, since it is a state road, there has not been much maintenance due to budget constraints; therefore the Garden Club elected to pay a private landscaping contractor to do the work. However, it has become too expensive for the Garden Club to continue paying for this service, so they asked if the Town would consider taking on this cost. Richard Lee, our Public Works Director, then volunteered to have town staff do the mowing. Jack Sheehan commented that he thought it was a good idea for the town to do

the cutting in this area. It benefits us all. Chair Kidder responded that this was not a huge expense to the Public Works Department, but is saving the Garden Club a significant amount of money.

Donn Klingler inquired whether the Town of New London has any provisions on the books about the way trucks brake as they are coming down a hill. He noted that on South Pleasant Street and Wilmot Center Road there is a good deal of construction going on, and a lot of trucks coming down hills. He is concerned that the trucks could be tearing up these roads. Peter Bianchi said that many trucks have engine brakes on them, which use the compression of the engine to slow down the trucks, so when one sees a truck going downhill and the sound changes pitch, this is no different than using the brakes. It does not affect the roads. New London does not have a “no engine brake zone” as do some other towns.

Mr. Klingler wondered whether there were any plans to put benches and chairs near the far end of the New London town green. He said there was an art exhibit last weekend which some people did not attend because there is no place to sit down there. Chair Kidder responded that Richard Lee has found a company that has attractive, sturdy benches, and she would be glad to talk to him about that.

Katharine Fischer asked what the procedure was if someone wanted a speed limit sign posted on a road. Kim answered that she could take care of this. If a sign is missing, she will talk to Richard Lee about replacing it.

Phyllis Piotrow noted that there is a “great big hole” in the entrance to the Post Office, and she wondered whether we could ask them to repair it. Chair Kidder said she could send a letter to the shopping center, as the owner of the property is required to maintain it.

Ms. Piotrow also asked about the status of the lawsuit against the town. Kim Hallquist replied that the town’s insurance company – Property Liability Trust - has been served and will be defending the case. The insurance company will select the attorney for this lawsuit, and they and the town will be conferring on a regular basis.

(Janet Kidder left the meeting at 7:55 AM).

Peter Bianchi commented that this year after Town Meeting, the response from the public to a request for volunteers was huge. The Selectboard has never seen so many people willing to serve. He observed that most of the committees are manned by volunteers, except for the Budget Committee and the Selectboard. Terms are usually three years. The Town has been fortunate to have many good people working on these committees. From time to time, they will ask a member who has served a number of years to step down when their term has expired so that other people have a chance to put their skills to use. That does not mean the person resigning has been fired. The Selectboard wants as much input from as wide a slice of the population of New London as possible to get the pulse of the town. They are currently working on term limits for all boards and committees.

Peter also noted there are no attendance requirements for volunteers, but it is important to have people coming to meetings. Some attendance problems have been observed with a couple of the committees and the Selectboard is working to get more consistent participation. Nancy Rollins echoed Peter Bianchi’s comments. She cautioned that the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Adjustment can be very time-consuming commitments.

Phyllis Piotrow requested updates from the Selectmen regarding three budget issues:

- Is anything going to be done with the 1941 school building?
- Are we going to outsource dispatch?
- Has a system been developed for pay based on performance?

Nancy Rollins replied that the dispatch question is on the agenda for the next Selectmen's meeting on July 15. She emphasized that this was a public meeting and open to all. Kim Hallquist said the Selectmen had asked her to look into hiring a consultant to do an assessment of the communications department. Kim advised the group that Heather Wood, the communications administrator, recently resigned and took a job in Hanover – a real loss to New London. Dispatching is currently being supervised by Ed Andersen, our Police Chief, and he is doing a great job. The Selectmen have decided to keep it this way for the next six months.

Primex Insurance Company, which has many former police and fire chiefs on staff, has offered to have Bob Barry (former Concord police chief) do an assessment of the dispatch system for no cost to the town. He did a similar assessment for Concord in 2008. Mr. Barry will be meeting with Jay Lyon and Ed Andersen in the future. Kim noted that she feels a person outside New London should perform the assessment and will recommend this to the Selectboard. People here are passionate about keeping the dispatching in New London. Peter Bianchi commented that at this point in time, he thinks the responsibility of the Board is to gather as much factual information as they can so when they make a decision it will be based on realistic and accurate data. This matter will come before the town and the public will have an opportunity to express their wishes, but it is important not to make a decision as critical to the safety of New London that is not based on facts, without any prejudice one way or the other. Mr. Bianchi also noted that the Budget Committee would be informed of this decision. Phyllis Piotrow asked if the Selectboard is going to look at towns that have had these services outsourced to see if they are happy with it. Mr. Bianchi replied in the affirmative, saying the intent is to get as much information as possible within a reasonable time limit.

With regard to the 1941 school building, Mr. Bianchi said there is no longer an issue at this time. The original intent was to have a public/private partnership, but after a great deal of hard work by a private group, there did not seem to be enough money available from private contributions. He noted that this really is a school district issue. There might be other private companies willing to come forward. The school district will insure and maintain it.

Peter Bianchi addressed the merit pay issue. He said a committee of town employees has worked hard on changes to the personnel policy and issues related to employer/employee. They will be meeting next month and he agrees that exploring a performance-based pay structure is a good thing for the town.

The Board recently affirmed a one and a half percent increase across the board, which is standard.

The Selectmen

will be coming up with guidelines for merit pay. The town currently has 37 full-time employees.

Mr. Bianchi said that every year, the Selectboard assigns its members to serve on various town committees. Nancy Rollins will be on the Budget Committee; Peter is on the Planning Board. He said that the Planning Board has a tremendous job ahead in trying to get zoning regulations uniform. There will be changes to come and he wants to make sure people know Zoning Board meetings are open to the public. The Board would like some input from townspeople, especially about signs, which has been an ongoing issue. There will probably be some changes to vote on at the next Town Meeting. When work sessions are advertised for the Planning Board, he urged CAC members to attend these meetings. Mr. Bianchi noted that our zoning regulations are 120 pages long and sometimes they get confusing. We want

our regulations to be user-friendly, but we have to balance the business community needs with what folks feel is best for the Town of New London. Input is critical.

Phyllis Piotrow observed that this is an election year – she asked what the state/town rules were about where political signs can be posted?. Kim Hallquist replied that New London doesn't have any specific rules about political signs. They are not allowed to be posted on town properties, but private citizens can have signs on their own property unless there are safety concerns. The state says political signs can be put in a state right-of-way if abutters do not mind. Kim observed that people in New London do not like signs – even “for sale” signs. Sometimes the town has to send a letter to the real estate people reiterating the rules for signs. Nancy Rollins agreed that the town wants the rules for posting signs to be as clear as possible, but emphasized that if the ordinance does not allow it, then the town cannot allow it.

Renate Kannler had a question about a house that is in disrepair, which might have abandoned vehicles on the property. She wonders what the town's responsibility would be to clean it up. Peter Bianchi said that unless the property is a health or safety hazard, the town cannot do anything. He agreed it is hard for folks to deal with these problem properties.

Jack Sheehan wanted to go back to zoning regulations and the Planning Board. He asked how the Town is doing on following up after a building permit has been issued. He's been hearing there is not a lot of follow-up in the field to see that people are in compliance with approved building permits. Peter Bianchi answered that Lucy St. John, Planning and Zoning Administrator, has not gone out on the road to check the houses, but sometimes the town gets calls from neighbors. In that case, Lucy and Kim Hallquist will go to check the property. The typical response would be a letter to the applicant. Mr. Bianchi noted there is follow-up, but not as much as in the past. Kim also mentioned that the town does not now have a building inspector. Mr. Sheehan said he was primarily concerned with set-back requirements. Kim responded that the town does not have a surveyor and presumes the builder knows the proper spot to put an addition or building.

Elizabeth Klingler said she is concerned about the number of cars that park at Elkins beach. There are often so many that people are trapped and can't move their cars to get out. She wondered if it might be a good idea to have a policeman regularly drive by to check on that. Peter Bianchi said he believes the life guards telephone the police if they become concerned about the parking. He noted that this area also houses a post office, to which people need access. Kim Hallquist said she would talk to Ed Andersen about the situation on Monday. Peter noted that beach parking has always been an issue and he feels the police should keep an eye on the situation.

Thelma Kaplan wondered if the Town of New London was growing or decreasing in population. Peter Bianchi says the most recent census was in 2010. We can track building permits, but he doesn't really know if the population is up or down. Kim Hallquist said building permits have been pretty steady, but New London is an aging town. We have concerns about not bringing in younger residents. Peter noted that New London's zoning is prohibitive for a young family to come in and start from scratch. Whether we should increase density in town is really an issue. We require two-acre lots now. Not sure how to balance this with getting young people into town. Nancy Rollins noted that smaller houses in town sell quickly. We also observed that there is not much rental property for young people. It was agreed that the town should try and get a handle on demographics and try to track them. Peter added that New London does not have an overabundance of job opportunities for people.

Sue Little said that clean industry and housing were addressed in great detail in the Master Plan. These good ideas just continue to sit in that plan. She asked how the town could move forward with these issues. Peter Bianchi commented that our commercial zone is very small. We need to decide if we want

to expand the commercial zone in town. Sue Little commented that she thought there were obvious places to do that on the outskirts of town. Kim noted there was an economic committee in town some years ago, so she knows there was an attempt to work on this, but it didn't go anywhere because of zoning issues. Peter also reminded everyone that we have to worry about water and sewer issues, and the Town has no control over the Water Department. The Zoning and Planning Boards would also have to be involved in these discussions.

Phyllis Piotrow asked if there has been any movement on the two empty lots across from the Visiting Nursing Association. She said both lots are for sale and the same owner owns these lots. No one on the Selectboard knew if there had been any recent activity on the property.

Phyllis Piotrow inquired whether this was a revaluation year? Kim Hallquist responded that it was.

Thelma Kaplan asked whether there was any chance of getting the school district to sell the 1941 school building to New London? Peter replied that the school district did not want to sell it to the town because of future possible expansion. The whole school district would have to vote on this and it would be a petition article.

Bruce Hudson asked if the dispatch question was at the top of the Selectmen's list and Peter Bianchi said yes. Mr. Hudson asked for an update of the single stream recycling issue. He wondered if it was safe to say both these issues would be resolved before budgeting session starts. Peter Bianchi replied that if all goes well, there will soon be a lot more information. He thinks single stream has a better chance of giving us something definitive because it is a simpler issue. Peter said he hoped to have all the information on single stream in by the end of summer.

Peter Bianchi noted that the fiscal year ended at the end of June, so we started fiscal year 2015 on July 1. Wendy Johnson is currently closing the books on 2014. Peter said once they get final costs for 2014 and results from revaluation, they can then set the tax rate. In answer to Phyllis Piotrow's question about whether the town overspent in 2014, Wendy said there will be a decent surplus.

Selectmen's meetings are on Tuesdays at 6 PM throughout July.

The meeting adjourned at 9:03 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Work, Recording Secretary
Town of New London