



# TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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## CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

April 18, 2015

Syd Crook Conference Room

### **PRESENT:**

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

### **ALSO PRESENT:**

Bob and Emma Crane, Sue Little, Jack Sheehan, Rob and Maureen Prohl, John Wilson, John Cannon, Peter Hoglund, Phyllis Piotrow, Donn and Elizabeth Klingler, Will Kidder, Bud Dick, Bruce Hudson, Thelma Kaplan, Renate Kannler, Celeste Cook, Hank Otto

The meeting was called to order by Chair Janet Kidder at 7:30 AM. She noted the Selectmen had hoped to hold this morning's meeting at the Highway Department, but because of inclement weather, they decided an indoors venue would work better.

Chair Kidder pointed out the first edition of a town newsletter called "Municipal Matters," created by Town Administrator Kim Hallquist, which addresses various topics of interest and the status of ongoing community/town projects. Ms. Hallquist is planning to issue these newsletters on a regular basis. Extra copies are available for anyone interested in taking one home. Chair Kidder thanked Ms. Hallquist for providing another medium to facilitate communication between the town and community members.

Ms. Hallquist reminded committee members that Town Meeting elections will take place on Tuesday, May 12 and Town Meeting on Wednesday, May 13. The warrant is posted. All materials related to Town Meeting have been put on our website. Ms. Hallquist noted that probably the biggest item is the \$350,000 requested by the town to update the exterior of the Academy Building. The siding is deteriorating and Selectmen have determined there is rot beneath the boards. The town proposes to take off all the siding and repair the sheathing. At this point, it is difficult to determine how much damage there is. Windows in the Academy Building might be replaced, as well. If there is any money left over after the project has been completed, the town will use it for reparations to Whipple Hall. If this project is approved by the voters, the Selectmen will then talk to bankers and negotiate the best deal they can.

In the area of the fiscal 2016 budget, the Selectman have requested funding for a 4% increase across the board for all employees. The Highway Department is requesting one additional employee. In 2013, a full-time employee left that department and Richard Lee attempted to use part-time people to fill the gap. That strategy did not work out well, so the full-time position has been reinstated, which is supported by both the Selectmen and Budget Committee. The debt service – principle and interest area is up 55% due to the fact the first payment on the Sunapee wastewater treatment bond is coming due. Taxpayers will be paying one-third of the bill, and sewer users are responsible for two-thirds. Another increase in debt service will be the first payment on the \$350,000 requested to repair the Academy Building (if it is approved), which would be approximately \$45,000. Capital reserve is up 20% - Highway Department

equipment is a big ticket item, new fire vehicles, library improvements, and GIS mapping – which has to be done – are all on the list. Two new capital reserves are on the warrant – one for fire department radios at \$15,000, and \$5,000 for the communications/dispatch department.

Another area where costs are increasing is property liability insurance, which is up by 36%. Ms. Hallquist noted it is not easy to insure a town because things happen – like a flood at the library, for example. The Selectmen have looked at the commercial market because there is so much exposure and are aware that the town's current insurer, Property Liability Trust, will not be writing insurance after 2017. Primex will be around to fill the void, but it is expensive.

Ms. Hallquist related that capital purchases this year will include fire utility vehicles, Public Works is buying a new pickup truck, bucket loader and one ton dump truck and sander, the Recreation Department is putting in new docks and bath house at the Elkins beach, the Police Department SUV is being replaced, and a new pickup truck will be purchased for the Sewer Department. The other items in the budget are common expenses. She asked if anyone on the committee had any questions. There were none.

Selectmen Bianchi mentioned the town will receive \$244,000 in extra revenues when it closes some capital reserve accounts that are no longer needed. This is a one-time kick in revenue to offset the tax rate.

Ms. Hallquist informed committee members that the handle bags at the Transfer Station are no longer being distributed because they are very expensive. The bags are only supposed to be used for paper, not other items. Because the bags are so popular, the town has decided to provide them again, but in doing so will try to educate people about the proper way to use them. There was a question asked about why people couldn't put paper in piles instead of using bags, but Kim said bags must be used. It's more orderly. The Transfer Station is considering using a different sort of bag for rubbish. Chair Kidder remarked that Richard Lee had suggested the town try to get a bank or business to sponsor the cost of the bags by putting the company's logo on them. Celeste Cook wondered what other towns do. Ms. Hallquist replied that Andover has single stream recycling and can dump all the trash together. Chair Kidder commented that Andover is not saving money on single stream recycling and it would be more expensive for New London to reconfigure the trash set-up for single stream. Selectman Bianchi commented that he thinks recycling is a global issue and noted the market for paper is down.

Phyllis Piotrow mentioned she had heard from Police Chief Ed Anderson that there has been a big increase in calls about drug problems, scams and frauds, and improper use of the Park and Ride area. People like the idea of having an unmarked vehicle for surveillance so it is not obvious that police are observing a particular area.

Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer, briefly reviewed this year's budget. She noted the town was a little over three-quarters of the way through 2015 and as far as her department is concerned, it was a very smooth year. The town has had a full staff for the most part. There is currently a dispatcher position open, but all other positions are filled. She predicted salary and benefits should be right on target and on budget. Due to the long winter, heating costs are a little over budget. The Highway Department has had to order much more salt and sand than planned, and this budget item will be over by about \$20,000. However, the Highway Department overtime budget has not been over-spent, which she considers remarkable. Ms. Johnson reported that the town has spent about 76% of the budget, with one quarter to go. An audience member commented that the town should give Richard Lee a special commendation for all the good work his department performed this winter.

Selectman Peter Bianchi updated committee members on current Planning Board activities. He noted that one of the key undertakings of the board lately has been reviewing various zoning amendments. The board settled on modifying two of the amendments, both of which will be on the ballot at Town Meeting. One amendment concerns the “sign” ordinance, which has been revised with input from owners of local businesses. Mr. Bianchi commented that signs may sound like a simple issue, but it is very complex and has taken many hours of the committee’s time.

The other amendment which has been redone concerns occupancy rules – how many unrelated people can live in a building or apartment. The current rule limits that number to five; after much discussion and research into what other local communities require, the Planning Board initially recommended that the number be change to three. The Fire Department was also in agreement, citing safety issues. However, once word got around about the suggested change, there was a big push-back from Colby-Sawyer College because of the impact on campus housing. The College was very concerned, as were people who had large homes and were considering renting to students. After listening to their arguments, the board decided to leave the number of unrelated people allowed to live in one residence at five. Selectman Bianchi noted that trying to define “family” in this day and age can be daunting.

Coming up, the Planning Board has begun discussion on next year’s changes to the zoning amendments, and one of the big topics will be overlay districts – streams, steep slopes, etc. The Planning Board is also working on town-wide space needs as part of a recommendation made on the Capital Improvements Plan. Selectman Bianchi told the committee members that when these types of issues arise, agendas of meetings are always posted, and noted public input is very important. He urged anyone with questions or concerns to call Bill Helm or any of the Planning Board members.

Nancy Rollins is the Selectboard’s representative to the Budget Committee, and she thanked Rob Prohl for his leadership. She noted the budget process this year was a good, deliberative procedure, and everyone worked very hard. The Budget Committee tried to be thoughtful about meeting obligations and being fair to taxpayers. The committee and Selectmen met several times to be sure both bodies were in sync, and then held a public hearing. Rob Prohl suggested they try to begin the new fiscal year with a joint meeting to talk about process and lay out expectations for department heads.

Selectmen Rollins explained there will be a warrant article asking that the Town of New London return to a March annual meeting date. Depending on the outcome of that vote, she noted the budget process may rapidly speed up next year. Maureen Prohl asked what the turnout was for the recent school meeting and was told it was 195 people. Peter Bianchi noted that the voting population is about 3,600, so the proportion was clearly very low. Mrs. Prohl pointed out that school district costs are the Town of New London’s biggest bill every year. Chair Kidder observed that there were no big school issues this year, which is probably why turnout was so sparse, but she agreed it was troubling so few people took the time to vote. Bruce Hudson mentioned that the deliberative session of the school meeting is where things can be changed, but the turnout there was minimal, too. Rob Prohl noted many other towns are having the same problems. Ms. Rollins wondered whether the Selectmen should use municipal matters as a vehicle to help get the word out about these issues, which are very important to the town. There are many new people in town who should be educated on the implications of voting/not voting. Communication could be improved between the school board and the towns.

The Selectmen continue to feel they should examine overall employee compensation and benefits. Apparently the Municipal Association is not able to assist. Previously, Property Liability Trust was hired by the Town to come up with a sound formulary to set labor grades, and used a method based on reasonable increases of steps within that labor grade. If a person is hired at a certain step level, having additional steps helps in terms of basing an increase on the employee’s job evaluation, and is good for

staff morale. Doing this annually also can assist with training issues and accounts for reasonable job growth. Unfortunately, Property Liability Trust no longer exists and it may be necessary to hire a consultant to assist with this process. Selectman Rollins noted that with the exception of the town administrator's position, job descriptions have not been updated since 2006. She emphasized that the board needs to look at a number of things and are trying to determine the best way to move forward. They are considering putting together a small committee, including folks from the community, to manage this project. Maureen Prohl commented that steps can standardize the process, but the town needs an evaluation instrument that makes it more cohesive for the department heads to appraise an employee's performance. Selectman Rollins has experience in state government and observed that its performance evaluations are based on competencies. She said there are good tools out there, and the board should look at them. These tools should work for both employee and supervisor. Kim Hallquist commented that the biggest problem is funding. If the town is going to have a step system, there has to be funding. Once someone gets to the top of their pay grade, they only get cost of living increases. In the past the town has been giving across the board increases. Selectmen Rollins reiterated that the board could use some input from community members.

Chair Kidder apprised committee members about recent Recreation Committee activities, noting the skating rink was very popular this winter. The Public Works Department installed a spigot at the warming hut in order to make ice; previously a hose had to be put in at the New London Inn and run across the parking lot. In addition, the maintenance facilities manager insulated the warming hut, so now it's warm! Chair Kidder noted that the Recreation Department has received \$675 in donations to help children attend summer camp. Interestingly enough, the Highway Department personnel each donated money so they could sponsor a child. The recent Easter Egg Hunt was a rousing success – about 3,000 eggs were put around the town common and every one of them was found by the children participating. All staff positions are filled for summer camp and swimming. Chair Kidder advised anyone interested in signing up for any of the programs to go the Recreation website. Ms. Kidder read a note from an Elkins resident, thanking the Recreation Department for all the activities it provides to the town.

Chair Kidder asked for questions.

Phyllis Piotrow asked about the current status of the ambulance problem – Newport at the last minute has decided to discontinue its support to the Town of New London. Chair Kidder responded that from a cost standpoint, Newport does not want to back-up New London and other towns, but our town still does have an ambulance service. Kim Hallquist is meeting with Jay Lyon, Steve Ensign and Bruce King (New London Hospital) on Monday to talk about some options. Kim noted that Newport had financial reasons for wanting to halt its support.

Selectman Rollins said she had spoken to Virginia Irwin from Newport this week and three factors are involved: (1) the perception that Newport ambulances were not available to their own town (but no records to back this up); (2) the Medicare/Medicaid reimbursement does not cover costs; and (3) Newport simply cannot get the staff. It is increasingly becoming a challenge for towns to deliver EMT First Provider services because of the inability to secure staff. Newport is available for mutual aid. Local towns need to address the staff shortage as a regional issue, and figure out how to come up with a feeder training program at Colby-Sawyer College or other schools – possibly River Valley College in Lebanon/Claremont. Selectmen Rollins noted that Fire Chief Jay Lyon has done an excellent job with firefighters and it might be time for towns to contribute to this effort. Rob Prohl asked if the New London Fire department has the staff to do this and Ms. Rollins replied that it would be a very expensive option, one requiring more staff and another vehicle. It is a critical service and everyone needs to be clear on what the issues are. Renate Kannler asked if this was a state-wide problem and Ms. Rollins said it exists more at the rural level. It's a challenge because we are an aging society and there are less healthy, robust

people available to do the work. Also, people who live in town may have long commutes to work outside of town. She observed that after Vietnam and other war involvements, there was a plethora of EMT's who could be trained to do this work, but not so now. The training is extensive and the liability great.

Selectman Bianchi said that New London Hospital provides ambulance service in the area. This service is usually provided by private enterprise, not hospitals, so the model we are using is rather unique. When there are only a small number of people in an area, private enterprises may not be interested in coming to this region. He added that it would be extremely expensive for New London to buy and staff an ambulance service. Selectman Rollins suggested that there needs to be a differentiation between first responders going to a terrible event, and those that pick up wheelchair passengers to transport. That would make a real difference in staffing needs. She observed that more fire and police departments are increasingly having to train some of their people to be first responders. She reiterated that this was a complex issue and needs further discussion.

Maureen Prohl suggested that the Council on Aging or the Visiting Nurse Association might be able to take the burden of wheelchair transportation off an ambulance service. Ms. Rollins responded that reimbursement by Medicare/Medicaid could be an issue. Phyllis Piotrow noted that Medicare and Medicaid will only pay for the service if the person is transported to a hospital afterwards. If the person does not go to the hospital, the ambulance service is not reimbursed. There are stages of emergency and it makes a lot of difference in financial reimbursement. John Cannon stated that the real money is in the intra-facility transfers. There could also be wheelchair vans used for that purpose, instead of ambulances. A town could have an ambulance that just does scheduled transfers. EMT's have to be licensed and training takes at least six months to a year.

Phyllis Piotrow asked if New London backs up Newport and Chair Kidder responded that she did not know what area they cover. She thinks they would provide mutual aid. Newport is part of the catchment area for New London Hospital. She also noted that the ambulance is under the purview of the Selectmen of Newport, but the hospital is under its own direction. Phyllis Piotrow asked if additional money needs to be added to the budget to fund an ambulance service, would this be done by amendment at Town Meeting. Peter Bianchi answered in the affirmative. Kim Hallquist agreed that depending on how much the cost would be, it would probably be best to have someone amend the part of the budget concerning how much money the town gives to New London Hospital. Kim Hallquist noted that she would be doing another newsletter before Town Meeting, hopefully containing more information about this issue.

Selectman Bianchi brought up repairs needed to the bandstand. This was discussed at the last Selectmen's meeting. It had a new roof put on last year, but the area underneath the bandstand needs work – there is substantial rot where the planters are. The Selectboard is currently trying to get some proposals and cost estimates from contractors. There is a real time crunch since band concerts are scheduled for the first weekend in June. The cost will be covered by the Bandstand Committee. Celeste Cook commented that considering the cost, has anyone thought about taking the bandstand down and starting over? It was thought this was not an option.

Phyllis Piotrow said there is something going on between Blueberry Lane and Seamans Road. Peter Bianchi responded that there is a subdivision called Cherry Hill Homes that has been approved for eight 4-acre lots. There will be no new roads and access will be off Seamans Road or Blueberry Lane. The Planning Board has already approved the subdivision.

Chair Kidder noted that Sunapee will be revalued this year and Newbury in 2016. New London has only had about 30 people coming in for appointments to discuss their reassessments, which is less than 1% of our populations. The grand list went up less than half a percent.

The Selectmen thanked everyone for coming and the meeting was adjourned at 8:53 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Work, Recording Secretary  
Town of New London