



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES January 7, 2012

PRESENT:

Mark Kaplan, Chairman
Tina Helm, Selectman
Peter Bianchi, Selectman
Kimberly Hallquist, Town Administrator

ALSO PRESENT:

Hardy Hasenfuss, Jack Harrod, Renate Kannler, Rick Anderson, Celeste Cook, Beth Swanson, Terri Bingham, Rip Cross, David Payne, Vahan Sarkisian, Phyllis Piotrow, Bob MacMichael, Howard Hoke, Jack Sheehan, Rich Anderson, Andy Deegan, Maureen Prohl, Dorothy Horan

Chair Kaplan called the meeting to order at 7:30am. He asked the attendees to consider the upcoming meeting schedule for future CAC meetings. The following dates were set for the remainder of 2012:

February 4, March 3, April 14, May 5, June 2, July 7, August 11, September 8, October 6, November 3, and December 1. Meetings would remain at 7:30am and be held in the Syd Crook conference room at the Town Office Building.

Mr. Harrod noted that new members were generally appointed after Town Meeting. He wondered if those members would join in May now that Town Meeting had moved to May. Chair Kaplan confirmed that this is the case.

Mr. Bianchi noted that the Board of Selectmen has been working diligently on the Town budget over the past few weeks with a lot of help from Department Heads, Kim Hallquist and Wendy Johnson (Finance Officer). He believed their expenditures were very good and may even be down from last year. They will hand the budget over to the Budget Committee on Monday night. At that point the budget will be in the hands of the Budget Committee, who will hold public hearings and make the final decisions on it. It was noted that this budget was difficult to create in some aspects, as the new fiscal year change-over has caused them to have to make some guesses as to how much things will cost after June 30th, most importantly with regards to insurance. Ms. Helm commented that they have been working very hard and it has been worth it. She encouraged them all to attend the Budget meetings so that they can support or articulate their opinions. They need input from as many people as possible to make a successful budget.

Mr. Hasenfuss asked about the income side of the budget and if it has changed. Chair Kaplan said that one item they gain revenue from is car registrations, which is variable depending on the cost of the car and the number of years the car is kept.

Ms. Swanson said that all of the snow fencing at Bucklin Beach is lying on the ground and she doesn't know if it is supposed to be like that. Mr. MacMichael said the State used to poke holes in the ice to keep the snow fence up. They used wooden fence at that time. Now they only use the plastic fencing which has all fallen down. Ms. Hallquist said she would notify the State.

Ms. Piotrow said she believed that the facility at Bucklin Beach was in need of work. She thought the people who own lakeshore property and don't use the beach were the ones who vote against upgrades to the building. She felt it was a major recreation facility for the Town of New London in the summer and for those who do not have lakeshore property. She didn't think, in its current state, the beach house was something they should be proud of.

Ms. Cook asked for an update on the Elkin's project. Chair Kaplan said they received about 10 responses from the Request for Qualifications (RFQ). The Elkins Subcommittee will meet with the Board of Selectmen to decide on which firm to choose. Mr. Bianchi said that the process and procedures that have to be used when using federal money and grants make it difficult to proceed with ease.

Mr. Sheehan said he doesn't use Bucklin Beach and lives on the lake, but still believes the facility should be kept up. He liked the option with the dormers best.

Mr. Sarkisian said they should consider the cost of things to the town and what they get for them. He questioned the full-time positions of Recreation Director and Zoning Inspector. Mr. Sarkisian commented that New London is a town of less than 5,000 people. Having the two positions is a large amount of money to pay for their full-time work. He felt it was too bad that they couldn't bring the Outing Club in to work with the Town. He also believes that there doesn't need to be a Zoning Inspector.

Mr. Bianchi explained that the position is of a Zoning Code Enforcer. This person makes sure that buildings meet the zoning codes, setbacks, etc. If there are violations, he goes and checks them out. They have expanded his duties to work with the Planning Board to cut back on costs of hiring a Town Planner. The Planning Budget has been reduced due to this fact. Ms. Helm said he is also updating past files that have not been kept as tightly as they should have been in the past. Mr. Harrod added that they are not paying for a Town Planner any more, which cost the town \$32,000. Mr. Sarkisian noted that he was unaware of the cost savings from not hiring a Town Planner and appreciated the information.

Chair Kaplan added that there was more public input when there was first talk of hiring a Recreation Director than at any other meeting. There was overwhelming support at Town Meeting for this position. Chair Kaplan also noted that they spent a lot of time trying to put the Outing Club and the Recreation Departments together, but it did not work out. Ms. Helm noted that people can tend to get territorial about some things and can have a hard time working together.

Ms. Prohl said her husband was on the committee when they were first getting a Recreation Department director. It was initially a part-time position and has grown to a full-time position. They tried, even at that time, to get the Outing Club and the Recreation Department to be able to work together and it didn't work.

Rich Anderson, CAC member, was there to review the School Budget. He is a member of the Municipal Budget Committee (MBC) of the school district. Their job is to review the budget. The school board deals with budget matters and personnel, etc. Mr. Anderson said that he was one of two members from New London on the MBC. He invited and encouraged the members of the CAC to come to the deliberative session, which would be held at 9am that morning. He commented that traditionally, there is poor turnout at the meeting even though there are seven towns represented there.

Mr. Anderson said that with New London changing their town meeting to May, the school will still vote in March along with the other six towns. New London has always been a leader in the voting, and if the school and town elections are separate in March, his fear is that they won't have anyone from New London voting. He urged them to vote in March and to let their neighbors know to do the same.

Mr. Anderson said the efforts of the school board and the administration has been great. They have worked diligently to try and save money while also trying to maintain the quality of the education they are offering the kids. The quality of the school system affects all of their property values.

Mr. Anderson said they would be bringing a 1.9% decrease in the school board budget. The key is where these cuts will come from. He noted that another cut like this would not occur next year. This year they had a large bond issue that has fallen off of their ledger, reducing payments by \$700,000 this year. In their initial planning they were planning on 10-12% increase in health insurance premiums. Instead, they found it to be only a 2.5% increase.

This year they will budget \$120,000 to pay a contractor to conduct teacher evaluations. This is significant because the new one-year contract they are proposing (the teachers have been without a contract for the last two years) enforces teacher performance. This is not common in teacher contracts in New Hampshire.

Mr. Anderson said that there were two main items to be discussed, which were the budget number and the collective bargaining agreement (CBA). There are no give-backs regarding the last two years; they will not make up for what teachers did not get over the last two years when they were without a contract. The contract includes a one-step increase for all teachers as well as a 1% increase in their base pay. Teachers at the top of the step system will get a 1.5% increase in their pay and no additional step. Mr. Anderson said that they have not had any increases since 2009. He reiterated that this was a one-year contract.

Ms. Bingham asked if the teacher performance will come into play for raises or only when someone is being let go. Mr. Anderson said they are starting to move in the direction where performance is taken into account instead of length of time teaching but for now, they will only consider performance when a teacher is being considered for termination.

Ms. Piotrow asked if the coaching of teachers is included in the evaluation. Mr. Anderson said that this was so. Should a teacher be found in need of getting up to speed, a plan would be put into place to try and assist the teacher to get on track.

Ms. Swanson asked why they were choosing to have an outside review done instead of having the people within the system do the review. Mr. Anderson said that it had to do with a fear of bias. The Administration will still be doing their own evaluations, but there will also be an independent contractor to compare their results.

Mr. Hasenfuss said there is an "Angie's List" now-a-days and why not include teachers in the study. It could be devised at very little cost. Mr. Anderson said he feared using a system where there are no regulations. Evaluating teachers is what this contracted firm does. Mr. Harrod agreed and quoted "An expert is someone from out of town."

Mr. Sarkisian said he heard that there are steps and salaries and everyone is getting a raise. He wondered why people at the top step are still getting a raise. Why are they giving them more money? Mr. Anderson said that it is all based on a base system. After some time, inflation will erode any increases that are given. The base level is increased to counteract that. A teacher with 25 years experience will be penalized for being there longer if they are not given a percentage above the step, once they have reached the top. It could be considered a COLA. Mr. Anderson commented that the School Board voted 9-0 and the MBC voted 8-0 in favor of this contract.

Mr. Sarkisian said he didn't understand why the school system has continued to give raises when the outside world is taking money, insurance and benefits away from people. Mr. Anderson said that the past few years the MBC budget (which has been lower) has passed and the School Board budget did not. This year this wasn't the case. They agreed with the number the School Board came up with. He was hopeful that the voters in New London would come out and vote in March.

Chair Kaplan asked what the school does in regards to health insurance. Are they bound by a union contract or are they able to go out for bid. Mr. Anderson said the CBA will offer more healthcare plans to the teachers, who may choose as they wish. One plan is a catastrophic plan that will cost the teacher and the district less money. It will provide coverage only in the case when a teacher was to become very ill. The old contract offered two plans - a POS or a HMO.

Mr. Payne thought this was a good budget and he congratulated the MBC and the School Board on it. He believed the decrease to actually be just .5% after applying the articles. He suggested putting a sentence in there somewhere that explained that the decrease went from 1.9% to 0.5%. He wanted to see a bottom number. Mr. Anderson said several of the articles are for trust funds. Those are not expenses, in his opinion, because the money is being put aside to make sure that they don't get slammed with a big expense in the future. Mr. Payne commented that it is still an expense and the money comes from the taxpayers. Mr. Anderson said they are very limited as to what they can say in the warrant articles.

Ms. Swanson said they all have to look at wage increases and benefits. Educators are paid well and have great benefits. With the economy the way it is, many people are losing their jobs or benefits.

Mr. Hoke said that discussions he has heard before is that people are happy that the school budget was going down and then are mad later because their taxes don't go down. He felt people get frustrated and that it was too complicated for the average person to understand. He agreed that they should add a sentence giving the bottom line if the articles pass. Mr. Anderson said that no one should anticipate a large windfall of money after a decrease in the school budget. He noted that the school district is trying to do things to save money. For example, the principal in New London is retiring and they are not replacing him. They will try and cover the position among other administrators. He commented that people talk about the money at the deliberative session but no one asks about how the kids are doing, how they are testing, and what the quality of the education is. Ms. Piotrow wondered why they don't present that information at the same time the budget is presented.

Ms. Kannler said the school board and MBC meetings are very enlightening and not many people show up. Many of the questions asked that morning are answered at the meetings. She commended the MBC and the School Board on their work. She opined that today's teachers have to do more and more difficult things due to the breakdown of the families. Ms. Helm thanked Ms. Kannler and her husband for coming to the Board of Selectmen meetings and other meetings, and gaining an understanding of how things work in the town and the school.

Mr. Bianchi said that there was a rumor that someone would be coming in with a petition article. Mr. Anderson said that nothing was submitted by the deadline in December.

Mr. Anderson said that the last warrant article was for a Resource Officer, which is a police officer for the school system. They reduced the position from \$70,000 to \$35,000. He had voted against it previously, but by cutting it in half he felt it made more sense. He hoped they would consider supporting the position.

Ms. Prohl asked if it was considered that the Police Departments of the seven towns get involved in covering that position. If New London has 28% of the kids, they could contribute 28% of the time of an

officer and the other towns could do the same with their own police departments. Mr. Anderson said they had considered that previously, but one major idea of having one officer is being able to make a relationship between students and the officer. They want the students to feel comfortable going to the officer should something happen or if something negative may be happening in the future.

Ms. Bingham thought the “story” was better told if the MBC and School Board are up front with it, including the articles and the total if everything passes. People want to know how the kids are doing.

Mr. Bianchi said the CAC met last year the morning of the deliberative session. He suggested they all go to the meeting. Only one person from the CAC actually went. If they want to get their voices heard, they need to go to the meeting.

Ms. Swanson asked if they talk about how the schools are doing or if the discussion is merely budget-related at the deliberative session. Mr. Bianchi said that this meeting is about money. The School Board meetings talk about the performance of the schools, etc.

Ms. Kannler said that the superintendent is at the school board meetings and there are representatives from the special needs department. They inform everyone about what the teachers are doing, programs that are being conducted, and what any weaknesses are.

Ms. Prohl said that every year the bar on testing goes up. Across the country, school districts are starting to fall off. She felt the bar was set arbitrarily. More and more schools are becoming in need of help. They are now looking at the bar and are considering changing it as it is costing too much money getting schools to reach it. She worked at Simons for 21 years and last year was the first year they were in need of improvement. Ms. Helm said that teachers have to teach more and more to the test instead of teaching the material. Ms. Prohl said teachers are now mental health counselors, babysitters, and so much more to the students besides just their teachers.

Mr. Bianchi said that New London received the Excellence in Teaching award but it is believed it could not be earned today. He was a teacher at the High School in 1965 and worked with the board that started the step program, of which he was not proud. It was a different time when most of the teachers were women who taught because they loved the students. They weren't seen as being paid enough after many years of working, and so they instituted the step program.

Mr. Hoke asked if the result of the process of governance for the school district is better today than when the meeting was held in a town meeting style government. Mr. Bianchi said he disliked those meetings where people were bused in, it was crowded and the meeting was long. But he felt it was better at that time because people had a chance to voice their opinion. Mr. Hoke admitted that he wasn't going to the deliberative session as he found it a total waste of time. He may make efforts to return to the town meeting style of government. The quality of the result is significantly better at those types of meetings. Ms. Helm added that they are missing the sense of community now. The town meeting model stimulated that sense and an important connection.

Ms. Piotrow felt the deliberative meeting needed to be better publicized, starting in the fall. Mr. Bianchi disagreed, pointing out that this meeting has been going on for many years and he felt it was well publicized.

Mr. Klingler compared education then to now. He said that it had a lot to do with the role of women. They were either nurses or teachers and were from the local community. Everyone knew them. That has

changed. The talented women are not in education any more but are lawyers and doctors now. This is one reason why the community is less involved today.

Ms. Helm noted that March 13th was Election Day. Mr. Hoke suggested marking their calendars for next year's school deliberative session so they can plan on attending.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London