



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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BOARD OF SELECTMEN NON-RESIDENT TAXPAYER MEETING MINUTES August 9, 2014

PRESENT:

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

STAFF: Linda Hardy, Tax Collector; Jay Lyon, Fire Chief, Ed Anderson, Police Chief; Norm Bernaiche, Chief Tax Assessor, Richard Lee, Public Works Director, Scott Blewitt, Recreation Director

Chair Janet Kidder opened the meeting at 7:30 AM and welcomed attendees. She introduced town staff and noted that after committees of New London residents and law enforcement officials from the Merrimack County Sheriff's Department had interviewed a number of well-qualified candidates for the position of Police Chief, Ed Andersen was appointed. Ed began his career with the New London Police Department as a cadet.

The Town of New London currently has 36 full-time employees.

Chair Kidder remarked that the Town celebrated Hospital Days a week ago and said the Chamber of Commerce was to be congratulated for taking charge of the activities. She noted that many groups worked with the Chamber, including the New London Recreation Department. Director Scott Blewitt, his staff, and volunteers organized twelve different activities for all ages (from the watermelon races to the Triathlon). Chair Kidder thanked the Police Department for a great job making sure pedestrian and automobile traffic moved smoothly, and noted they were available for the entire week to answer questions and give directions. The Fire Department was front and center with the trucks and other activities for children. The Highway Department had the task of clean-up and dealing with a huge weekend at the transfer station. She thanked all staff who assisted with Hospital Day activities.

Chair Kidder advised that the beaches in Elkins and Bucklin are very busy this summer and the town's waterfront staff has undergone considerable training in emergency situations, in conjunction with the Town of Sunapee's staff. The town's Fire Department participated in safety training as well. She related that a female swimmer at Elkins got into trouble on July 25, had to be rescued by lifeguards, and was briefly hospitalized. Chair Kidder said she wished to publicly recognize the lifeguards involved for their quick work. They are: Ryan Pasculano, Patrick Moore, and Jack Bryck. She reported that the woman is doing well, and the town recently received a letter from the physician who attended the woman, noting the lifeguards did a remarkable job. Nancy Rollins commented that a local newspaper, the *Intertown Record*, recently wrote a wonderful article about this rescue.

Chair Kidder said folks may have read that the beach at the State Park on Lake Sunapee was closed for a day due to high levels of bacteria, and assured the audience that both Elkins and Bucklin beaches have been tested for bacteria and are safe.

With regard to the New London Transfer Station, Chair Kidder was pleased to announce that it is now open on Sundays, due to requests from the very group in attendance today. She noted that one additional benefit of Sunday hours was that the staff now removes rubbish from the beach areas on Sunday and, previously, this

was not done until Tuesday. After heavy usage on Saturday, this has been an unintended positive consequence.

Chair Kidder provided updates regarding several ongoing projects in the Town of New London:

1. The upgrade to the Sunapee Wastewater Treatment Plant is now scheduled to be substantially completed in September. Therefore, payment of this project will be part of the FY2016 budget (the town is currently in the FY2015 budget cycle). New London's share of the project is \$5.5 million (64.56% of the cost of the plant).
2. Construction for sidewalk improvements in Elkins is scheduled for the spring of 2015.
3. The Public Works Department has repaired the cracks in the face of the dam at Elkins and restored the area of the boat launch. The town was able to experience significant savings with the work being done by Director Richard Lee and his staff. No algae has been reported at Elkins this summer.
4. Based on a vote at this year's town meeting, the Selectmen appointed a committee to study single stream recycling. The report is due in November.

Chair Kidder noted that the FY2015 operating budget is down 0.3%. She reported that the new tax rate will be set in the fall. Property in town is being revaluated this year. Norm Bernaiche was asked to give a short review on this process.

Chief Assessor Bernaiche reported that the assessors are currently in the final stages of completing revaluations in New London for 2014. He explained that the two assessors are in charge of properties located in Sunapee, New London, and Newbury, and they attempt to cover one town per year. The assessors are performing field reviews at this time. He noted their target is market value, which is not a finite number – it's a range. They are looking at averages. Real estate assessments this year could go up or down. Mr. Bernaiche noted that all information regarding new tax rates and the revaluation process would be available on the town's website and he encouraged taxpayers to make use of this information. The website will list the amount of a property's old assessment and the new valuation.

Mr. Bernaiche commented that some of the problems the assessors have encountered in revaluating properties are the condos, with sale prices all over the place. Some are selling for less now than what they cost to build. He said smaller, lake-side camp properties are not moving price-wise much right now; bigger, more expensive homes are performing well in the market. Turn-key properties are also selling well. Dated homes and ones in disrepair are not moving very quickly. Mr. Bernaiche expects to discount the assessments on some of these dated homes since they are not as desirable as they used to be. There have been six or seven foreclosures in the low end of the market range. One of the things noticed by assessors is that all the homes built in the 70's, 80's and 90's – which were considered to be high-quality homes – are over-rated and probably their assessments will go down. He expects the grand list should go up because there is a lot of property on the lake.

Mr. Bernaiche asked for questions and there were none. He informed the audience that he is currently scheduling appointments for people who want a formal review, and asked them to call the main office, at 526-4821, extensions 10 or 20, and ask for Amy Rankins.

Recreation Director Scott Blewitt said he wished to publicly congratulate the three lifeguards who rescued the woman at Elkins Beach on July 25, and repeated their names. Mr. Blewitt noted that he has been the director at the Recreation Department for 13 months and said it is a pleasure to work there. He wants to be able to cover all ages and interests. The department is adding new programs, such as a senior citizen archery class, bird watching, day camps, and teen trips. He welcomes any suggestions anyone might have. Mr. Blewitt emphasized that Whipple Hall is a very busy building, where regular karate and art classes are held. At the beaches, the Recreation Department has added 4 new paddleboards, and the facilities are clean and beautiful. They have 170 participants enrolled in the swimming lessons. The department adjusted the schedule and

prices for the lessons – offering three two-week sessions – which has worked out well and increased revenue from the swimming lessons.

Fire Chief Jay Lyon thanked everyone for their support of the Fire Department. He noted the ladder truck is now a year old. He reported there has been a string of building fires in Sunapee and Newbury because of lightning strikes, and said those situations are unfortunate. Because New London has only three pieces of equipment to operate, he is grateful to have five fire stations that can come together from other towns, depending on where the fire is located. Chief Lyon reported the two top reasons for calls are weather events and people. In the winter, the department deals with chimney fires. There were more medical assists this year to New London Hospital. Chief Lyon noted the Fire Department recently hosted a great event at the Fire Station in conjunction with Hospital Day; he also mentioned the Firefighter's Muster, which had teams competing against each other. October is Fire Prevention Month – 540 children came through the station that month (last year). He reminded everyone the department is always looking for new volunteers and reiterated that he was grateful for the support of the town. He asked for questions, and there were none.

Linda Hardy, Tax Collector, spoke briefly about changes that have taken place in her department. She said taxpayers will find her office now has glassed-in windows in front of the desks, which improves the traffic flow and gives them more privacy and room to work. Another change instituted at the beginning of this year was the option of online bill payment for all transactions – sewer payments, driver's license, dog license, etc. – which has been very popular with the public. People are really appreciative of having this option available. She noted that taxpayers can also receive their bills in an e-mail, or go online to find that information. Ms. Hardy is also happy to announce there is a new deputy tax collector in the office – Linda Nicklos – who is working out very well. Chair Kidder added that the glass partition was put into the tax collector's office on the recommendation of the town's insurance company, which considered this a safety issue.

The Police Department added a new sergeant to their staff during the year and also instituted bike patrols on Main Street and in business areas this summer, said Ed Andersen, Police Chief. They replaced their server and improved the camera system in their cruisers and in the office. The "Stuff the Cruiser" event held this year doubled the amount of money raised from the year before. Chief Andersen indicated that the department was trying to get more information out to towns via newspapers. He said this effort has gone over very well with citizens, who were not aware how busy the Police Department is. Chief Andersen noted the department is now fully staffed, which has made a huge difference in morale. The Police Department currently has responsibility for dispatching, and is hoping to apply for a 50/50 grant or 100 percent grant to replace consoles. Chief Andersen said the department has an open door policy at the Police Station and has started a citizen ride-along program, which is popular with the public. He asked for questions and there were none.

Richard Lee, Director of Public Works, said everyone is interested in the roads. He said his department does road maintenance, takes care of the wastewater facilities, and the transfer station. The department spends about \$450,000 on road maintenance materials. He noted the staff is out grading roads continuously, and is also trying to pave some additional roads and shim about two and a half miles of paved road. He noted this is an expensive part of his budget, but he is pretty proud of our roads. The department is currently monitoring the rebuilding of the Sunapee treatment plant, which should be completed by the end of September. He reminded everyone the transfer station is now open on Sundays, although it is not as busy as they thought it would be. Mr. Lee just hired a new individual to perform facility maintenance and the department has compiled a list of what work will need to be done in the future. In answer to a question from the audience about who is responsible for the upkeep of Route 103A. Mr. Lee answered it was the State of New Hampshire. He noted there has been ongoing discussion between state and district representatives about road conditions in the area.

There were several questions for Mr. Lee from the audience – one asked if King Hill was a state Road and Richard answered in the affirmative. Another audience member asked if there was anywhere in New London to dispose of painted wood products, and Richard said no. He explained there might be a facility in Newport that does this, but they charge a fee. An additional question had to do with who puts up the speed signs in

town. Mr. Lee said the Highway Department puts them up. The person asking the question said there used to be one near their house that came down and it has not been replaced – on Knights Hill Road near Marilyn Kidder's house. Mary Ropka said she was wondering about bicycle safety signs and Chair Kidder replied that the Recreation Commission is considering putting some up. Mr. Bowditch asked how the public can get new signs posted and Kim Hallquist recommended they contact her at the office - either by phone or e-mail.

Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer, noted she was in her third year in this position. She said the tax collectors do a good job collecting the money, and she spends it. She feels the process goes pretty smoothly. There are a few issues with cash flow, but the town has a very thoughtful budget and works hard to run it in a fiscally responsible manner.

Kim Hallquist, Town Administrator, reported that things are running well in the office. People who are not sure how to contact department heads often call her, and she contacts the appropriate person, who gets back to the property owner. Sometimes Ms. Hallquist visits a person at their home. She said the town tries to spend taxpayers' money in a very conservative way. The work that Richard Lee did on the boat launch was accomplished a lot cheaper than hiring an outside contractor. She feels communication between all department heads is good. She thinks residents feel they are getting a good value for their money. She urged attendees to contact her if she can answer questions about the budget, selectmen, or town officers. She recommended they check the town website for information. Mr. Hallquist reiterated that she wants to hear about what is important to people. Chair Kidder pointed out that two more people who might be helpful in the office were Kristy Heath, Administrative Assistant, and Chris Work, a clerical assistant.

John Philbrick said when he and his wife refinanced their house, they were told they were in a flood plain. FEMA had changed the areas where flood plains were situated within certain bodies of water and drew a line. Mr. Philbrick had to get a letter from an engineer saying that they were above the flood level, which cost them \$750, but they did not have to buy flood insurance. He wondered if this had been a problem with other homeowners. Chair Kidder said a few people have had the same issue.

In answer to a question about what the town's top two or three worries might be, Chair Kidder responded that most complaints are about roads – roads not paved. She did not think the town was setting aside enough money to take care of the roads. She said the town also has to make sure that deferred maintenance on its buildings starts to be done, and it cannot wait too much longer. Chair Kidder said that, overall, the town has a great staff. Nancy Rollins noted that New Hampshire has an aging infrastructure problem. The pothole problem at the town post office has been resolved right now, at least temporarily, but that building is on leased federal land and is not the town's responsibility.

Selectman Bianchi said the state has recently inspected the Pleasant Lake Dam and has decided it needs to be upgraded. Money has been set aside to pay for engineering studies, but preliminary estimates are running about \$500,000 to fix the dam. There are different opinions about whether there is a major hazard at this site. It may be an issue going forward. He noted there is a dispatch situation in town which is a concern to other towns. The town has not started paying for the new sewer plant upgrade in Sunapee yet. The Town of New London is paying about 65 percent of the cost, even though Sunapee owns the plant. This primarily affects sewer users. Two or three years down the road, some of these issues are going to have to be addressed. We have town buildings that are beautiful, but old. Some critical maintenance has not been kept up as it should have been. Bruce Bowditch asked if the town is allowed to have a long-term maintenance reserve fund. Peter Bianchi responded that the town does have a capital reserve fund, as noted in the town report.

Richard Lee was asked how many people are on the sewer system and he was unsure. Selectman Bianchi said that even with the college and hospital, it is probably less than half the town.

John Demers asked if no news is good news regarding the Shaker Road landfill. Chair Kidder replied in the affirmative.

Chair Kidder thanked everyone for coming and said she hoped to see them next year. She reminded the audience to contact any of the Selectmen or town staff if they had questions or needed assistance.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Work, Recording Secretary
Town of New London