



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES September 27, 2010

PRESENT:

Christina Helm, Chair, Board of Selectmen
Mark Kaplan, Selectman
Peter Bianchi, Selectman
Jessie Levine, Town Administrator

ALSO PRESENT:

Peter Messer, New London resident
Carolyn Ellison, New London resident
Jim Wheeler, New London resident (Budget Committee)
John Wilson, New London resident (Budget Committee)
Bill Helm, New London resident (Budget Committee)
Steve Ensign, New London resident (Board of Firewards)
Sandra Licks, Library Director
Richard Lee, Public Works Director
David Seastrand, Police Chief
Jay Lyon, Fire Chief
Carolyn Fraley, Finance Officer
Chad Denning, Recreation Director
Linda Hardy, Town Clerk/Tax Collector
Peter Stanley, Zoning Administrator

Chair Helm called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Meeting Minutes: Mr. Kaplan moved to approve the minutes of September 20, 2010, seconded by Mr. Bianchi. Mr. Bianchi asked to correct the language on page 7 regarding giving away books to Kearsarge Regional High School graduates to be clear that referred to New London graduates. There being no further changes, the minutes passed as amended, 3-0.

Salary Study: Ms. Levine presented a memo and attached spreadsheets with the results of a salary study that compared New London's full-time positions (with the exception of the Library) to similar positions in towns sized 3000-6000 in population. Ms. Levine said that she recommends a cost-of-living adjustment for some positions of 1.7%, which is an average of the September 2009-August 2010 Northeast CPIs.

Ms. Levine reviewed each position and how each position fell in the percentile of that category. She said that overall, New London's salaries were in the 60th percentile of the high range of the other towns. There are some positions that are the highest paid, such as the Land Use & Assessing Clerk and positions in the Public Works Department, and other positions that are high in percentile and outside of New London's salary grade ranges. She would most likely not recommend a raise for these positions at this time. She then said that there are some positions that appear to be underpaid when compared to other towns and that she would most likely recommend for a salary adjustment in the next budget.

Ms. Levine referred to the memo attachments where the percentile of each position was shown in order from highest to lowest, as follows:

Percentiles	
Land Use & Assessing Coordinator	100%
DPW - Foreman	100%
DPW - Heavy Equipment Operator	100%
DPW - Heavy Equipment Operator	96%
Director of Public Works	92%
Recreation Director	89%
Dispatcher	88%
Zoning Administrator	87%
Public Works AA	82%
Detective I	80%
Town Administrator	79%
Police Chief	79%
Town Clerk/Tax Collector	77%
DPW - Heavy Equipment Operator	74%
Deputy Town Clerk/Tax Collector	69%
Police AA	68%
Fire Chief	64%
Dispatcher	63%
Administrative Assistant	61%
Patrol Officer	60%
Laborer	58%
Finance Officer	55%
Recycling Attendant	50%
Detective II	50%
Dispatcher	50%
Patrol Officer	48%
Sergeant	45%
Heavy Equipment	44%
Patrol Officer	44%
Transfer Station Supervisor	37%
Recycling Attendant	36%
Laborer	32%
Wastewater Operator	23%
Dispatcher – Starting Pay	18%
Laborer – Starting Pay	16%
Firefighter	8%
Patrol Officer – Starting Pay	5%
Average	60%
Median	61%

Mr. Kaplan commended Ms. Levine on the thoroughness of the study, and Chair Helm seconded the comment.

Mr. Bianchi said that he had done his own study using the same data. He took the list of towns and went through every position to relate them to our positions using the salary study that the Finance Officer had

provided to him last year. He studied the maximum and minimum range for each position and calculated the average for each range and what New London is paying, and documented New London's rank in every category. He did not include the Zoning Administrator position because he could not correlate it to the positions in the other towns, and he did not include the full-time firefighter position because he could not find New London in the data. He compared the remaining positions to the other towns and added the 1.5% COLA increase that was given to employees in 2010.

Mr. Bianchi said that his approach was different from Ms. Levine's. He took the 51 towns in the 3000-6000 population category and in each case, New London was ranked extremely high – first in many cases and second in many others. When he compared our salary schedule to similar towns, New London is right at the top. Ms. Bianchi felt that what was important is that New London is unique in that it has the College, Clough Center, Bittersweet, and the Hospital. According to population information from the Office of Energy and Planning, New London has 921 “group-quartered” residents who live on campus or in other housing arrangements. Mr. Bianchi believes that those 921 people should be deducted from the New London's population when comparing New London to other towns, because without the group-quartered residents, New London has only 3,535 single-family homes. He said that comparing a town of 3,535 to a town of 6000 people means that we are comparing ourselves to towns twice the size.

Mr. Bianchi said that he has drawn no conclusions and has no recommendation based on his study, but he wanted the other Selectmen to know where New London stands for comparable towns. Ms. Levine said that if the College and other group-quartered populations were removed, we would be comparable in size to Canaan, Greenland and Walpole. She asked Mr. Bianchi if he felt like those were appropriate comparisons. Mr. Bianchi replied that LGC has size categories of 2000-5000 and 5,000-10,000 and we should be in the smaller category. Ms. Levine said that she had suggested 3000-6000 because it was 1500 higher and lower than New London's population, so we would be right in the middle. Mr. Bianchi said that some towns of 5000+ in population need greater services because they do not have any group-quartered population. He said that the group-quartered population only bears on the fire and police services in New London but does not affect the remainder of town. He firmly believes that if the College had 5000 or 500 students, it would not affect how we run the Library or the Public Works Department. He said that we would plow the sidewalks the exact same way no matter how many people were at the College. We should not be comparing ourselves to towns that have 5800 people living in single-family homes.

Mr. Kaplan disagreed with Mr. Bianchi's position and said that New London has the College and has a high number of retirees who live here and deserve the services that everyone else gets. He said this is a community and everyone is a part of it. Mr. Bianchi said that he is not saying they do not deserve the services; he is saying that there are 1100 people at the College and we do not plow for the College and do not provide services for people in the Clough Center.

Ms. Levine said that between the Hospital and the College, 600 to 700 employees travel our roads to get to and from work. Mr. Bianchi said that if we had 6000 residents and no group quarters, we would need bigger infrastructure to accommodate them. Mr. Kaplan said that does not change anything and we cannot say that we have less work to do because the College is there. He said that it is an interesting argument but has no bearing on what we are talking about.

Ms. Helm asked if there were any other towns in the 3000-6000 range that have group quarters, and Ms. Levine said that Henniker also has a large student population. Ms. Levine said that perhaps OEP separated the group-quarter figure because it added a burden to those towns with smaller populations and there was extra work and services required in hosting group quarters. Mr. Kaplan said that it doesn't matter; the College is there and we cannot pretend that it's not.

Mr. Bianchi said that it's very simple. If the College down-sized, there would be no need for the DPW to be decreased proportionally. We would have the same number of roads with or without the students. The fact that people go to Hannaford's for work does not make a difference for us.

Mr. Kaplan said that the Selectmen directed the Department Heads to bring in a budget with 2% increase, and he does not think that the Selectmen should micromanage. He said that we have very good department heads who know what they're doing. We now have broad outlines of where our town falls, and if we say they should have a 2% budget and it's within the 2% budget, then he is happy with that.

Chair Helm said that we are fortunate in the services we receive and the employees we have, and we need to be competitive in our wages. On the other hand, she said, we need to be respectful of the people who are hurting in this economy, and there are institutions such as DHMC or New London Hospital that are freezing salaries.

Mr. Bianchi said that he is at a loss. He has been talking to different people in his realm of acquaintances about the fact that we will see a \$1 million increase in taxes as a donor town, there has been no decision about the Sunapee Wastewater Treatment Plant yet, and our budget has not been determined. If nothing else happens, he said, we will have a \$1 million increase, yet this board and administration wants to spend more money.

Mr. Bianchi moved that all salaries for Town employees be frozen at 2010 levels for the full 18-month budget.

Mr. Kaplan said that he cannot agree with that motion. The Selectmen instructed department heads to hold costs to 2%, and he does not think that should be changed at this point. He does not think it is fair to keep moving the goal posts. Mr. Bianchi replied that every motion that he has made to do any responsible cutting, even small, has not been seconded. If there is no second to his motion, then let's move on, he said.

Chair Helm seconded the motion for the purpose of discussion because she said that there is a roomful of people who have come tonight and they should be heard. Mr. Bianchi reiterated that he is more than happy with our employees and he did not make the motion to penalize or be derogatory against the employees. He is not out to say they are not doing a good job but the Town has to be cognizant of the economic times and we need to hold the tax rate down.

Resident Peter Messer said that he would like to hear from the department heads present and if they would be distressed if salaries were frozen.

Police Chief Dave Seastrand said that personally, he will be okay if his salary is frozen, but his employees need an increase. He said that they are having as tough a time as people in New London. Overall, the Town has been generous and he thanked the Selectmen for that. He understands that these are tough economic times and does not want the employees to be the straw that breaks the camel's back, but he believes that there are employees who are undercompensated.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Linda Hardy said that if health benefits will end up costing more, then employees lose if there is no salary adjustment; it would not just be that salaries are frozen, but they would be making less. She said that it is all part of a package and at the very least employees merit some progress, and she did not think that a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) should be disputed because it reflects the increased cost of living.

John Wilson said that the Budget Committee will review the budget and will have more time to read over and digest what Ms. Levine and Mr. Bianchi have prepared. He knows the October 4th budget

presentation is coming up and he was worried about this budget schedule all along because there are only a few days to understand everything that's been presented tonight.

Mr. Helm asked how much it cost to give employees a 1% salary increase and Ms. Levine said that total salaries are about \$1.2 million, so it's about \$12,000. Mr. Helm agreed with Linda Hardy that the bigger issue is the cost of health care, which can make thousands of dollars of difference on the budget, and that the whole picture of employee costs needs to be looked at together.

Public Works Director Richard Lee said that if employee pay is frozen and they have to take another hit on health care (they took one last year), then it would be a double-whammy. He said that costs are going up and health plays into that; if the Selectmen change the health plan and do not give a raise, then there would be a double hit on employees.

Resident Carolyn Ellison said that she feels for the whole issue, but as a business person, her income has gone down and she is paying more for medical insurance. Her experience is no different except that she is not a Town employee. She said that when we talk about freezing salaries, there are a lot of people who have experienced pay decreases.

Resident Steve Ensign said that he has great respect for what the Board of Selectmen is doing and understands that they are frustrated by things outside of their control, such as the school or county costs. He said that the Town's portion of the tax bill is just a fraction, and we need to try to find some way to stop the other costs because we can't make it all up in our budget. He said that there should be some way to address the people whose pay scale is out of line in either pay study; there are some employees who need attention. With respect to healthcare, Mr. Ensign said that the hospitals are beset by something beyond their control, with more emergency room visits and changes in reimbursements. He said that is an unfair comparison; yes, it is affecting people we know, but there is a different set of circumstances. He said that the Fire Department spent a fair amount of time to identify the appropriate pay level to attract and keep qualified people, and we are vulnerable to losing good people to other towns. He reiterated that if we find that there are needs in our salary structure, we should find a way to recognize that.

Chair Helm asked if there was any more discussion on the motion. There being none, she called for a vote. **The motion failed 2-1 (Helm and Kaplan opposed, Bianchi in favor).**

Chair Helm recommending moving on to healthcare, and reminded everyone that there will be no resolution tonight but that the Selectmen are looking for as much direction as they possibly can.

Ms. Levine referred to the memo and attached spreadsheets summarizing the health insurance bids. She said that the Town had received three responses to its request for proposals, which was due September 15, 2010: one from Anthem, one from LGC, and one from Primex. The Primex bid was significantly higher than the other two, so Ms. Levine said she did not include that in the final comparison. Ms. Levine said that the Town's two current plans came in with a reduced rate, and she recommended staying with that plan even though the rates are higher than the Anthem rates, which have a less expensive prescription plan and some level of deductible.

Mr. Kaplan said that if we continue to do the same thing, the costs are less. He asked what the impact would be of freezing salaries. Ms. Levine said that if nothing changes for the next 12 months, then employees should be no worse off.

Mr. Bianchi said that the Selectmen have just received all of this information and it will take him a while to assimilate it. He asked the other two Selectmen if there were any interest in changing the employees' share of the health premiums. Ms. Levine referred to one of the spreadsheets in the salary study that compared New London's cost sharing to the other communities. She said that New London is slightly higher than the average but there is room to move.

Mr. Kaplan asked the department heads present whether the employees were happy or unhappy with the current plans. Linda Hardy said that last year the Town went from the three-tier to the two-tier insurance with a higher co-pay and higher prescription costs. She has been satisfied with the plan but it has cost employees more. She said that it forced her and other employees to make changes in lifestyle and in medications to lower their personal out-of-pocket costs and the new plan made people more aware of their personal costs. She thinks it was an appropriate choice. Chair Helm said that it is a point well made that it is every individual's responsibility to do what they can for their own wellness.

Resident Bill Helm said that he would like to offer his personal opinion (not a household opinion) and observations based on his experience, and that is that health care should make users more interested in the costs. The reason the prescription costs are higher is to get people to go to generic drugs, and almost all new plans have different co-pays for primary care or specialists to get people to go to primary care first rather than going directly to specialists. He said that emergency room co-pays are higher so that people do not use the ER for primary care purposes. There is a reason, in other words, why the less expensive plan has higher co-pays and deductibles – it is not to penalize the employees but to get people to think about their use of health care. He said that these days it is a luxury feature of a health plan not to have an inpatient/outpatient deductible. He urged the Selectmen to think about the total cost of the plans to the Town, and if they can purchase the existing plans for \$596,000, then what can they do for \$496,000 if the employees make smarter choices. He suggested that the budget could come in at less than 2% and begin the process of getting users to be more interested in choices without going to HSAs and without going backwards on wages. He suggested that employees could be told that if they help with healthcare, then the Selectmen may be more interested in a wage increase. He reminded the Selectmen that employees will also save money with lower cost health plans; it does not necessarily have to cost the employees more if they use health care better. As a country, he said, we have to move forward with people not feeling like healthcare is free. He said that employees will not know until they try.

Finance Officer Carol Fraley said that there have been significant changes in health care over the past three to four years, with plan changes, coverage changes, co-pay increases. Every year, she said, the employees have taken a hit. Mr. Helm said that it is a complicated subject and he is not suggesting that employees should take a hit, but healthcare is half of the cost of payroll and should be examined.

Zoning Administrator Peter Stanley said that one thing that attracts people to the lower paid jobs in town government as compared to hospitals is that there are reliable and reasonable benefits provided. If the Selectmen remove the principal attractor, then the Town may lose good people over time. He said people can get lousy benefits anywhere but generally the pay is better elsewhere. If the Town wants to save money, it should cut services. For instance, Mr. Stanley said, the Town has accepted roads as new town roads, which requires more employees and more equipment over time. If the Town wants to lower costs, it should examine services and not take it out on the backs of employees.

Chief Seastrand said that his employees are concerned about healthcare because some have children with special needs and they are getting to the point where they cannot afford anymore increases. He is concerned that if the plans change substantially then the employees may look somewhere else for work.

Richard Lee said that his employees have not chimed in about changing plans because it has not been on the table yet. He said that he is sure he will hear more if there is discussion about making a change. He said that people may not go to the doctor or the emergency room when they should if there is a high deductible.

Recreation Director Chad Denning said that the single biggest piece of his compensation package and the main reason he has chosen to work in the public sector is that families are taken care of. He said that he has a health family that is active, and they only go to the doctor when there is something serious. To his family, increased co-pays and in and outpatient costs would make a difference. Ms. Fraley said that the

employee Joint Loss and Wellness Committee has worked hard on educating employees about wellness lifestyles and she has sat down with employees to help them reduce costs by making better use of prescription options. Mr. Denning said that a lot of employees are exercising at lunchtime or other times to maintain good health and stay out of the doctors' office.

Library Director Sandra Licks said that her employees have adjusted to the most recent change but she thinks that further change would cause concern.

Chair Helm said that she does not think that the Town can make drastic changes in both health plans and salaries. She asked Ms. Levine for her opinion. Ms. Levine said that if the Selectmen change the employer/employee contributions, then this would make it more expensive for employees to stay on the same plan. Mr. Bianchi said this discussion should be kept alive and that it will be brought up again in the future. He thinks the percentage paid now by the Town is generous and has to be looked at.

Chair Helm referred to Ms. Levine's memo and asked whether employees take advantage of the wellness incentives offered by LGC. Ms. Levine said that they do, in two ways: Amy Rankins has applied for and received a wellness grant to educate employees about and incentivize exercise and good health, and employees can also take an annual personal health analysis questionnaire and receive payment from LGC for completing the questionnaire and reimbursement for going to the gym or personal trainers or even working out on their own time. Chair Helm asked how much benefit is derived to the Town and Ms. Levine said that it is hard to quantify.

Chair Helm said that it seems there is not much more to do tonight, as the Selectmen need time to process the information provided. She suggested that the three Selectmen come prepared to next week's meeting to have a more in-depth discussion. Mr. Bianchi said that in the future it would be helpful to have the information as far in advance as possible. He feels blindsided to have to make a decision without having the information in advance. Ms. Levine said that she was not suggesting that a decision should be made tonight because it should be in context of the entire budget discussion that will begin next week.

Mr. Ensign said that he has heard the conversation weave between compensation adjustments and savings in healthcare, and he thinks the two are mutually exclusive. He said that adjustment of salaries for each position should have no bearing on health care. If the Town can achieve savings in health, that's wonderful, but if the disposable income goes down, then it's not compensation back to the employees.

Ms. Fraley pointed out that the spreadsheet summarizing the healthcare bids made it look like the employees had the most expensive plan. She said that there are other plans that are more expensive that the Town did not seek bids on that are not included in the summary.

Chair Helm closed the discussion on salaries and healthcare.

Department of Public Works Position: Chair Helm said that the full-time position in the DPW had been advertised. Ms. Levine said that she had put in the advertisement to get the process going because if they hire someone, he or she will have to be on before winter. She said that she knows that the Selectmen had not discussed the position but it is in this year's budget and she had planned to return to the Selectmen before a hiring decision was made.

Mr. Bianchi said that he thinks he has been clear all along that he did not want any current employees let go, but the perfect opportunity to make a substantial cut and attempt to reign in costs is to not fill this position. He said that he has no intention of saving \$1 million to compensate for the school increase, but if he can save \$100,000 that would be a good savings. He said that cutting the budget and lowering the tax rate will not be painless, and one way to do it is to not fill the empty position at this time and to do more with part-time help.

He referred to Ms. Levine's memo on the DPW position and said that it is true that some work may go uncompleted, and that this position is the one that rides in the snowblower. He asked if we had to clear every inch of snow or if we could not have the sidewalks plowed immediately. He said that he has gone through the elected officials training and he understands that there is no liability if the sidewalks are not sanded and plowed, as long as there is a plan of attack and we follow it. He thinks the Town could tighten its belts and attempt to use more part-time help in the summer and winter.

Richard Lee said that he has already removed one part-time position and that is no longer in the budget. He still uses one part-timer in the summer to work on the cemeteries. Mr. Bianchi said that for every dollar spent on salaries, 60 cents goes to benefits, so this is an attempt to offset the expenses that we have no control over.

Chair Helm asked Richard Lee to speak about the impact on services. Mr. Lee said that if it snows 10", this position is out there constantly to keep the snow off the sidewalks. If there is a delay, the machine will not be able to cut through the accumulated snow and the bigger snowblower or loader might have to be used, which is how sidewalks were cleared 20 years ago. He said that if that is required then it would take one of the truck drivers to operate the loader at a higher rate of pay. He thinks it will cost more in the long run. He said that it is not just about clearing 10" of snow off the sidewalks, but the state plows 12' of the travel lane and 8' of parking onto the sidewalks. That is heavy snow and if it packs down, they can't get rid of it. He added that there are businesses on Main Street that rely on having the front sidewalk cleared, and if the sidewalks are not open by 9:30 then his phone starts jumping off the desk.

Mr. Messer said that there has been discussion about having one less person in the police or public works departments, and he wants to hear if they can get along with one less person. Mr. Lee said that he does not think the position would be filled by a part-timer. Chief Seastrand said that the PD does use part-time staff already.

Mr. Kaplan said that if we reduce the hours, we reduce services. He said that a full-time position works 2000 hours a year, and even more with overtime. If we do away with 2000 hours, we will provide fewer services because you can't do in 1000 hours what you were doing in 2000 hours. He said he thinks this is micromanaging; if the department heads tell him they need these positions and services will be provided, then he is satisfied, but for the Selectmen to tell them to do it with one less person is micromanaging.

Mr. Messer said it seems like Mr. Lee has something against part-time help, but it would eliminate the need to pay benefits and that is a lot of money. Mr. Messer said there are capable people out there looking for even part-time jobs.

Mr. Kaplan said he does not want to see us lose the services and he asked Mr. Lee what the full-time person did when it is not snowing. Mr. Lee said that he serviced and maintained the snowblower and other equipment, cut brush, and other projects; they do not sit around between snowstorms. Mr. Lee said that part-time people do not like to be called out at midnight to work for four hours and then not get called out again for another two weeks. He said that Mother Nature is willy-nilly and it was tough enough to get part-time people to work regular hours in the cemeteries, let alone to get someone to come in during storms and who will properly take care of equipment.

Mr. Messer said that it sounds like Mr. Lee is telling him that he cannot operate with part-time help, and Mr. Lee replied "not and do what we're expected to do."

Mr. Messer said that in this economy, there are a lot of people looking for work. Ms. Levine said that there were over 60 applications for this position, so it might help the local economy to fill the position. Mr. Bianchi said that it is not the Town's sole purpose to provide economic benefit. Ms. Levine said that she did not say it was their sole purpose; their purpose is to provide the services that they have been discussing.

Chair Helm asked what would happen if the Selectmen recommend that this position remain frozen until the budget is established. Ms. Levine said that would save money in the current year's budget but the funds have already been budgeted and will be raised by taxes. She said it would be helpful for the Selectmen to make the decision because she would not want to hire someone now only to have to lay them off after January 1.

Mr. Bianchi said that he had to disagree with Mr. Kaplan. He has seen nothing to indicate that we won't have the biggest tax rate jump in five years.

Mr. Kaplan said that the budget for 2010 contains 14 people in the Department of Public Works. **Mr. Kaplan moved to fill the open full-time position in the Department of Public Works, seconded by Chair Helm. There was no further discussion and the motion passed 2-1 (Kaplan and Helm in favor, Bianchi opposed).**

Town Administrator Job Description: Ms. Levine said that at a number of Selectmen's meetings, the question has been raised about her job description and/or her role in working with the Selectmen, and she wanted to have a discussion so that she could be in synch with the current Board of Selectmen. Ms. Levine said that in 2006, when the wage & salary study was done, they spent a lot of time updating the job descriptions to make sure they reflected all employees' current positions. These are not boilerplate.

Chair Helm said that she has read and re-read the job description and she is overwhelmed by the number of directives involved and amazed at how well Ms. Levine does so many of the major duties. She said the discussion should proceed as to whether anything should be changed or re-defined. Mr. Kaplan said his response to reading the job description is that Ms. Levine should never leave because they could not get anyone else to fill the job.

Mr. Bianchi said that he has no problem with the major duties. The job description is straight-forward and he thinks Ms. Levine handles it well. However, he said the Town Administrator position is not statutorily-defined and is therefore only what the community makes it. The Town Administrator works at the pleasure of the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Bianchi asked what the phrase "technically authoritative" meant in the job description, and Ms. Levine said that means that the Town Administrator is expected to advise the Selectmen based on research and experience. Mr. Bianchi said that he thought the descriptive language in the job description was unnecessary. Both Chair Helm and Mr. Kaplan disagreed. Ms. Levine said that the paragraphs at the end of the job description reflect the factors that went into the pay grade analysis and that they are different for different grades of employees. Mr. Bianchi read aloud and questioned the "personal contacts" description and Ms. Levine replied that her position requires a different amount and level of personal contact than say the laborer position, which has very little interaction with the public or officials from other towns.

Mr. Kaplan said that the most important factor to him is "supervisory controls," which says that the Board of Selectmen assigns work and the employee has the responsibility to carry it out and works independently. Mr. Kaplan said that he does not micromanage, and if performance is terrible, then there is a problem with the person, not with the position.

Mr. Bianchi said that he and Mr. Kaplan have different opinions on the role of the Board of Selectmen. He said that he will not criticize what Mr. Kaplan does if Mr. Kaplan will not criticize him. Mr. Bianchi said that there is nothing in this job description that Ms. Levine is violating, but he has said it before that Ms. Levine works for and is accountable to the Selectmen. He hears comments a lot that the Selectmen work for Jessie and not the other way around, and there is a feeling that decisions have been made without the Selectmen's permission. Ms. Levine asked for examples of decisions that she has made and Mr. Bianchi said that he cannot provide examples but that is the perception.

Ms. Levine said that she thinks that more has been delegated to her in the past than the current Board feels comfortable with. For example, she said that she received an e-mail today from the Messer Pond Protective Association asking her to write a letter in support of a grant to improve stormwater runoff from the Town roads surrounding Messer Pond. She said that in the past she felt that she could have written the letter but now she would bring it to the Selectmen for discussion, and since the next few agendas will be taken up with the budget, this pushes off the discussion for six weeks or so. She said that it is the same with the cell tower lease; since she cannot negotiate and make decision on behalf of the Board, two weeks has to pass between discussions. She said that she does not at all mind working that way but cautioned that it is slowing down progress.

Chair Helm said that she thinks Ms. Levine does a good job of discriminating between what should be brought to the Selectmen for input and what is part of her administrative duties. She said that this is a new environment and anything that requires the commitment of money, including grants, should be brought to the Selectmen, especially if there is a balance that the Town has to come up with. Ms. Levine said that she has always done that.

Fire Chief Jay Lyon said that as a department head that does not answer to Ms. Levine but to the Board of Firewards that meets only every other month, he relies heavily on the Town Administrator. All department heads have a good working relationship with her and she has done a good job of public education so that people know what the department heads do. He said that he respects her knowledge of the laws relating to town government and he thanked the Selectmen for having someone in the position with a wealth of knowledge. He said that this Town Administrator has moved the town forward.

Richard Lee said that the job description is for the job, but Ms. Levine is the one filling the job. He said she holds his feet to the fire and watches out for the Town. In his experience he thinks Ms. Levine gives the Selectmen the information they need to make decisions.

Chair Helm said that the Board of Selectmen need to take ownership of their own roles; they could not possibly have all of the facts when they are not doing this full-time, but it is their responsibility to do their home work and read what Ms. Levine provides them in order to have a dialogue. She said that Ms. Levine usually provides the Selectmen with a lot of talking points.

Chief Lyon said that he appreciates people asking tough questions. He understands there are constituents who may not always agree and we should look at every department and the value of the services being provided. Mr. Lee said that the Selectmen's seat is not an easy seat to sit in; he has been there and he knows they get put in the middle a lot.

Chair Helm said that it is their role to represent everyone, and she is sure the same issues are seen in other towns.

There being no further public business, the Board of Selectmen moved to go into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3 II (a) for the discussion of the Town Administrator's contract and department head reviews. Bianchi - yes; Helm - yes; Kaplan - yes.

Upon returning to public session, the Board of Selectmen adjourned the meeting at 7:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jessie Levine, Town Administrator