

Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
March 5, 2011
7:30am

Meeting Attendees:

Tina Helm (Chair, Selectmen), Peter Bianchi (Selectman), Mark Kaplan (Selectman), Jack Harrod, Hardy Hasenfuss, Rick Anderson, Raymond Ettenborough, Phyllis Piotrow, Dave Payne, Beth Swanson, Bob MacMichael, Terri Bingham, Rich Anderson, Joe McCarthy, Karen Hogle, David Dunning, Will Kidder, Vahan Sarkisian, Jack Sheehan, Joe Cardillo, DJ and Robert Lavoie, Howard, Hoke, Carolyn Lockhart, W. Michael Todd, Jim Wheeler

Chair Helm called the **MEETING TO ORDER** at 7:30 AM.

Chair Helm announced that they would be discussing what they feel are important skills and attributes for the Town Administrator (TA) position, which will be vacant as of April 15th. She also thanked Linda Jackman, Administrative Assistant, who was there early to set up for the meeting and clean up from the auditors who were in the office until late the previous night.

Chair Helm explained that the decision of who would be hired as the new TA would ultimately be up to the Board of Selectmen, but she said she was eager to hear the thoughts and considerations of the CAC members. She added that this would be her last meeting as chair of the Board of Selectmen, even if she is re-elected to sit on the board. She thanked all those in attendance for their civil and helpful participation in the past. There were also a number of people whose terms were up with the CAC as of Town Meeting, including Michael Doheny, Rick Anderson, Ray Attenborough, Karen Hogle, Bob Lavoie, Joe McCarthy, Vahan Sarkisian, and David Dunning. She thanked them for their service.

Chair Helm reminded the attendees that there would be a potluck supper held the Wednesday before Town Meeting at 5:30 PM. She also thanked Joe McCarthy for his offer to drive people to the polls and to Town Meeting, free of charge.

Chair Helm referred to the current job description for the TA position and asked the CAC members to give their thoughts and objectives.

Mr. Payne thought they should take 4-5 towns and look at their job descriptions to find aspects of their positions that they like. He felt the New London description was a bit “fluffy” and could be firmed up a bit. He also thought they should consider having a residency requirement for the position. Mr. Payne also thought this should have an attached organization chart so the prospective new hire knows who the direct line reports were, etc.

Ms. Piotrow thought that it was a hard job to fill with all the qualifications required. She listed the five key tasks, and the five key skills she believed the new hire should have. Skills: be able to deal with people effectively, handle numerical data skillfully, know what federal, state and local regulations are, and to exhibit honesty and integrity. Tasks (she actually had six of these): supervise departments, provide support to the Board of Selectmen, negotiate with all contractors, answer and respond to public queries, prepare budgets, and serve as a liaison with government officials at all levels.

Mr. Lavoie commented that the fluff at the end of the job description, which Mr. Payne was referring to, was a standard type of description that determines the grade level for the job. Ms. Hardy added that those words were included in every job description for anyone who works for the town and is recommended by the LGC.

Mr. Sheehan thought there was some overlap between the TA job and the Finance Officer's job. He wondered if the TA or the Finance Officer should be preparing the budgets. As they consider the position, they should think about whether there is some duplication of effort there. Chair Helm said that that was something they have been thinking about, and noted that this was also discussed at the recent Candidates Night. Mr. Kaplan felt that the job had two arms. One is administrative and involves carrying forward the ideas of the Board of Selectmen. The second is to sift through the quotations gathered by the Finance Officer.

Mr. Hasenfuss said that they need to decide if the TA and the Finance Officer should report to the Board of Selectmen directly or if the Finance Officer should report to the TA, who would report to the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Sarkisian didn't think the latter would be the best method. By allowing the TA to report directly to the Board of Selectmen, it would give him/her complete control. If that happens, they wouldn't even need the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Cross asked if the salary would be included as part of the grade. Mr. Bianchi said that the position is considered a grade 16, which is highest grade. He explained that in a ten year span, the low is \$70,380 and the high is \$86,210. This is pay only without benefits. Mr. Bianchi said that the amount is adjusted every year; if the COLA goes up, the limits go up. He also agreed that they should narrow the attributes in the description. They should define proficiency in areas and prioritize the level of skill. Mr. Harrod felt that experience is necessary.

Ms. Swanson asked how the recruiting would work. Chair Helm said that she assumed they would move swiftly after the elections to set some parameters. Her personal goal is to have an interim administrator and work on the job description further. They've had the current TA for 10 years and they don't want to rush to fill the position. They want to be thoughtful and take the time to do it right.

Mr. Bianchi said that there are headhunters who can help with the search. They have a letter from MRI (Municipal Resources, Inc.) explaining their abilities in this field, and it was noted that LGC offers the same service, of which there are different degrees. Whether they choose this method or not will be discussed by the board. He thought there should be a broad search done and then have an 8-10 person committee to screen the applicants before they are brought to the Board of Selectmen. Chair Helm said they have received feedback that LGC advising for this type of service may not be as helpful to them as some other organizations. Mr. Bianchi said that MRI had three levels of service. They also have an interim service. Ms. Swanson cautioned about working under an interim director, as she has done so at the hospital, which was not successful in her opinion.

Ms. Hogleund heard that there had been some talk of combining the Finance Officer's position with the TA position. Her opinion was that they should keep the positions separate. Chair Helm said that this is something that was suggested to them and they will look into it. Ms. Hogleund felt that the TA has plenty to do just with administration. She also thought it would be important to find someone from New London or someone willing to move to New London, so they have a vested interest in what was happening in town. Mr. Bianchi said that when Ms. Levine took the job 10 years ago, she had no municipal experience. He shared that Ms. Levine had commented she thought it would be good to hire someone with a better municipal background than she had to begin with.

Mr. Sarkisian asked what the time limit was on the search. Chair Helm said that because of the upcoming elections, they didn't want to move forward until the members of the Board of Selectmen were determined. Then, they will move ahead but they have not set a time limit yet. Mr. Sarkisian didn't think the board should wait for the elections to be over and felt there was no reason why they couldn't start the ball rolling at that point. He opined that it was a waste of time to wait. Mr. Sarkisian felt they should

advertise the position in the local circulations and they would probably get the same amount of success by than by using an organization to find a replacement.

Mr. Hoke recommended that the person who receives the money and the one who writes checks should be separate. He also said that the fact that Ms. Levine was an English major and was a good communicator enabled her to be extremely effective in her job. She could also listen and hear what people were saying. Understanding budgets is important, but it is good to find someone who can demonstrate that they are a good communicator. Interacting with the public is absolutely critical. Mr. Hoke opined that a mastery of the English language is just as important as the understanding of budgets.

Ms. Lockhart asked if there was someone among the town's employees who could fill position on an interim position. Chair Helm agreed that this would be the first place they would look.

Mr. Ettenborough asked how large the pool was they would look at. Chair Helm said that was one of the things they would look at when they put the criteria in place. Mr. Kaplan said they would be looking within the State of New Hampshire. Having someone from this state would mean it is more likely that they will understand what Concord does and how they, in a small town, relate to Concord and know what is going on. He didn't know how many people would respond to the advertisement.

Mr. Harrod said that this vacancy has been covered in the press so the word is already out there and some may be considering applying.

Ms. Hardy said she heard that the Board of Selectmen may be looking to change the scope of the position in that there may not be as many supervisory requirements. She said she also hoped the town office staff would be included in the group of people to interview the prospective person. Mr. Bianchi said that would be his personal approach, but that it wasn't necessarily the way it would be handled. He added that they haven't had a meeting to change the job qualifications. He felt it helpful to find what people are looking for in the position. The position has evolved a lot since the job description that was created in 2006. Chair Helm said that what they have had was pretty good and she would be cautious to make major changes to the description without thoughtful consideration.

Mr. Payne said they need to use some search firm as it was an important filter. He felt they wouldn't get good qualified people if they just sent the announcement to everyone.

Ms. Lavoie asked how long they could go without a full-time TA and focus all their efforts towards finding a permanent TA. Mr. Kaplan said that there was nothing wrong with that approach but that they have to look at the overall picture. The job description shows that Ms. Levine has been doing all of those things. Someone in the position temporarily will likely miss some of the things that need to be done. If they keep going with a temp, they will wind up getting further and further behind. It is difficult to say how long it will take to find a permanent TA, but it isn't going to take forever.

Ms. Bingham felt it important if they talk to a research firm that they have the employees' input of what they think is important to have in a new TA. They can help pinpoint qualities that are important to them. These things could be communicated to the search firm to help with the search. Mr. Kaplan said they have a precedent for this. If they narrow it to three people, those three would meet with town employees. Ms. Bingham felt it important to look at this aspect at the beginning of the search, not at the end. Chair Helm said that the administrative staff would sit down with them to discuss their wants/needs.

Mr. Sheehan said they have the potential to shift to the 18 month budget and fiscal year. He wondered how they saw this position with the transition. Mr. Kaplan said that between March 8th and Ms. Levine's

leaving on April 15th, they would line out a program so that what needs to be done when she was gone, so that it would get done.

Ms. Piotrow wondered what the most important thing that needed to be done over the next 3-6 months was. Was it the 18-month shift or the sewer plant and the negotiations of how it would be funded, etc? She asked the Board of Selectmen what the most important thing the TA would have to do in the new year. Mr. Kaplan asked Ms. Hardy what she envisioned, with regards to the day to day functions of the office. Ms. Hardy said that the sewer would better be handled by the Board of Selectmen and that the TA would be the one getting paperwork done, answering the day to day questions and phone calls. She thought an interim would handle the day to day and assist the selectmen.

Chair Helm said the Board of Selectmen has been meeting every other week and suggested that starting after Town Meeting they should meet once a week to remain on top of things. She thought that the three of them have good experience and they will go forward to make the transition. There may be a few things that need to be put on the back burner for a while. Mr. Bianchi said that after Town Meeting, the die is cast on the key issues including the sewer, the budget, the Elkins project, and sidewalk projects. He didn't think New London would need to do much in the coming months with the sewer, but as far as major decisions, they will already be made at Town Meeting.

Mr. Cross said that as a Board of Selectmen, they need to be prepared to answer tough questions from the public about spending money. He would rather see them defer some things and focus on getting a permanent TA. The townspeople will look for some conviction from the Board of Selectmen before voting at Town Meeting.

Mr. Bianchi said that they won't be able to define how much money they will get from grants they have applied for, as the State and Federal governments budgets are in flux.

Mr. Kaplan said that if the town votes the \$5.2 million bond issue, they will be able to go forward with the sewer. They will then try to get the grant. If they don't get it, they will have the authority to go forward with the project. They have run out of time with this project. There are contractors, engineers and those who will oversee it. The same goes for the library; they know what needs to be done and they will do it. He felt they were in good shape. Whether or not the town will believe this, he doesn't know. They may have their own anxieties.

Mr. Sheehan said that going back to idea of an interim TA, that they should be careful. They have competent Department Heads already. Instead of hiring an interim TA, would it not be better to have one of the Board of Selectmen meet weekly or daily or every other day with 3-5 key Department Heads and run the town that way with an interim board while they went through the search process. Mr. Bianchi agreed that the Board of Selectmen would need to be more involved. They have depended a lot on Ms. Levine, who has done the heavy lifting on a lot of projects. They have Department Heads who have been working for the town and are very involved in a lot of the projects.

Chair Helm said she would be interested in taking a straw vote about how many of those in attendance were in favor or against an interim TA. Ms. Piotrow wondered if there was someone who has served as a past Selectman who would volunteer to help in this transition. Ms. Swanson thought they should just be careful about an interim; they may need someone to just step in to take the position.

Mr. Sarkisian said that he has been living in the town about 30 years and thinks it runs pretty well. They have Department Heads who do a good job. He didn't see a problem with letting the town run itself. Mr. Sarkisian felt that having the Board of Selectmen meet weekly would be good. He also thought they

should consider putting together a search committee. Having an interim didn't impress him much, as they will have to waste time finding an interim. Without an interim, they could move forward so much more quickly. Ms. Hoglund agreed. With a Board of Selectmen member overseeing things, it would give them a good view of all that Ms. Levine does. She suggested holding the weekly Board of Selectmen's meetings in the evening when more townspeople could attend and participate.

A straw vote was taken and it was found that just a few people were interested in having an interim. The rest preferred to go in another direction.

Ms. Jackman said that they still have Ms. Levine for a month and she anticipated that she would have all her "ducks in a row" and knew that she could accomplish a lot within her short timeline. She said that she would be in favor of having an interim, as there are questions coming in all the time she doesn't know how to answer them. She thinks that a hands-off interim who can answer the large questions would be good. The department heads are competent and can answer questions. Ms. Hardy said that she pictured it as someone would be in that office for more than just the big issues. There are people in the office willing to take over tasks part-time along with their regular duties. She keeps thinking of the word "administrative" which is the paperwork, the phones, etc. Someone needs to be there to do the day-to-day things. She felt that person could be part time, between 15-20 hours/week. Ms. Piotrow felt they shouldn't decide whether or not they should get an interim right now. She felt there could be other arrangements made from people already working for the town who could help.

Ms. Lavoie said they need to consider how the town would function without Ms. Levine for a short period of time. People on the staff should be able to pull together and spread out responsibilities and get things done. If she has done her job right, there shouldn't be a problem. They have been without a TA before and the town has survived. They should give credit to the staff and to Ms. Levine for getting things to run so smoothly.

Mr. Cardillo agreed that the Department Heads are running well. He wondered if the 15-20 hours suggested for the interim basis would be temporary or permanent. Ms. Hardy said that it would be just temporary for the interim.

Mr. Sarkisian said that New London was not unusual to be in this position. Many municipalities in the country go through this process and they shouldn't be worried about the situation. He agreed that if Ms. Levine has done her job correctly, they should be able to carry on if she is unable to serve for a period of time.

Mr. Dunning said that in his experience, they need to be careful when getting an interim. He had an experience where he was involved in spending a year and a half trying to get the right person for a position, but there turned out to be personality traits that existed that didn't show up on paper. They should have done more homework checking on references. He urged them to do their homework.

Ms. Bingham asked if Ms. Levine had said anything about what she thought about the interim period as to whether or not the town needed someone. Chair Helm said that this is still evolving and they need to get more information.

Ms. Lockhart felt there were two layers to the role of TA: a public face for the town, and administering the town offices and pulling all the strings together. It would be helpful if they decide that they have something printed up as the "go-to" person for certain types of questions. They should know who to contact for budget questions, etc., and those names and numbers should be published. She commented that Ms. Levine does a good job with written communication. It would be interesting to give an applicant

a hypothetical situation that they might face as the TA and ask them to give a written evaluation of the situation and how they would explain it to the town. This will help figure out how the person will communicate and how they would respond. Chair Helm felt that would be a valuable consideration.

Chair Helm said that Neil Wallace thought they should think about the uniqueness of New London when looking for a replacement. Ms. Lockhart commented that when they get a wrong number in town, they usually know who it is! Mr. Dunning said that the atmosphere is unique, as it is a college town. People will migrate to New London if they like that type of town. Mr. Sarkisian said that it is unique if they look at the map, as there are three lakes; it is a nice New England town that is halfway between Boston and Burlington. He added that there is a bus that goes to Boston that stops every two hours. Mr. Harrod said that there are a lot of college students and elderly, but not much in between.

Mr. MacMichael said that he has lived in New London over 80 years and has seen the town governed from an 8x12 room. He couldn't think of a nicer place to live than New London. When he left for World War II, he had worked at Twin Lake Villa and didn't know what to do when he got in the service. When he came home after being all over the world he couldn't wait to leave and get out of town. His sister said that he would change his mind but he didn't realize how right she was until he left. He has seen the town grow and has had the privilege of being a selectman for nine years. Mr. MacMichael said that New London has always been beautiful and there are committees who want to see it grow in the right direction. He knows people come here for the golf course, the lake and the college. There was a time when the college was their bread and butter. He wants to choose an TA who will get along with the people, not just the employees, but someone who will make them feel comfortable and will treat them with respect.

Mr. Hasenfuss said that New London was a magnet of positive energy. There is a lot of positive energy in the government and in the town's institutions. He said there was a lot of energy in COA, religious associations and in the schools.

Mr. Cardillo said they could all talk about why they are there and are attracted to the town. He thinks they are not going to have that difficult a time attracting great candidates for this job. He thinks people are attracted to the town and will want to work in New London.

Ms. Piotrow thinks that the people in New London are wonderful, but they should not forget how much the town benefits from its geography. They didn't have water power, so there were no mills or workers who lost their jobs. She's lived in upstate NY and has seen the same thing. Towns that had the mills have suffered over the last 50 years or so. Other college towns have profited. They have to keep their mind on conservation and preserving the benefits of their geography. Also she pointed out that there have been many studies showing that the happiest and most prosperous countries are those where the levels of inequality are the lowest. She felt they should not try to be the kind of community they don't want it to be: a rich person's retirement community. She thought there should be housing and opportunities for people in the middle class. A mixed community and not high levels of inequality is ideal.

Mr. Bianchi agreed with Ms. Piotrow. He said that he has heard comments categorizing the residents of New London as "newly wed and nearly dead," and "God's waiting room." They have to somehow incorporate a younger group of people in town. It is a beautiful spot, property values are high, and property rates are lower. Mr. Bianchi said that he has concerns about the vitality of the young college population, as it is transient. They need to encourage younger people to live in the town. His four children cannot afford to live in the town, although they grew up in New London.

Mr. Sarkisian said the group in the room should get realistic. He didn't think that they could accomplish the things they are talking about with the zoning in town. There is so much land in Ausbon Sargent and other tracts, and with the zoning in town they can't do these things.

Mr. Lavoie said that one unique factor is the convenience of town. It is accessible from the highway and there is a certain amount of a commercial district available.

Chair Helm said that the greatest thing in town is that there are so many active 80-year olds. Her whole career and passion is with young families and children, and it is inspiring to be beaten on the tennis court by someone who is 80!

Ms. Lockhart said the way New London is zoned is a benefit to the town. Other towns without such zoning are not places they would want to live. She added that New London is remarkable in that their town government is practically invisible. They don't pick up the paper and see problems going on among the people in the town's government.

Mr. Dunning said that they are a bedroom community for those with higher incomes. Ms. Jackman said that there is a younger generation in town, which is proven by the fact that they have 45 Cub Scouts now in town. Ms. Swanson agreed about the number of children who are in the community and thought that it is hard for parents to participate in town government and other services as having children is hard to manage.

Mr. Ettenborough said that it had been indicated that this meeting would have been more effective if it had been held after the election. If that is the case, was there any reason the town couldn't afford to call another meeting of the CAC after the elections. Chair Helm said that it depended on the procedures and who was elected (her or Mr. Cardillo). She didn't think it appropriate for her to be part of the search process going forward if she wasn't the one to carry it on after the elections. She commented that in Vermont, decisions were made before newly elected people came on board, which led to some problems. Newly elected people should be involved in the process from the get-go.

Chair Helm thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and, it being 9:00 AM, adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London