

New London Planning Board – Minutes of Meeting of October 13, 2009

APPROVED

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Cottrill (Chair), Jeff Hollinger (Vice-Chair), Michael Doheny (Secretary), Tina Helm (Board of Selectmen Representative), Emma Crane (Conservation Commission Representative), Michele Holton (ar7:30), John Tilley (Alternate)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Karen Ebel, Deirdre Sheerr-Gross (alternate).

ALSO PRESENT: Peter Stanley (Zoning Board Administrator), Ken McWilliams (Town Planner), Jessie Levine (Town Administrator)

Chair Cottrill suggested rearranging the agenda and leave the review of the CIP for the end. There were no objections. Mr. Tilley was asked to sit in on behalf of Karen Ebel, who was absent.

The first item for the agenda was to determine whether the Elkins Final Plan and the Hazard Mitigation Plan should be included in the Master Plan.

Ms. Levine said that she had just returned from a presentation for a grant for work to be done in Elkins, and she had told them in the presentation that the afore-mentioned information would be voted in tonight to be present in the Master Plan. All were in agreement to include both plans as an appendix to the Master Plan with appropriate reference to each plan.

IT WAS MOVED (Jeff Hollinger) AND SECONDED (Emma Crane) to add the two chapters on the Elkins Final Plan and the Hazard Mitigation Plan into the Master Plan as an appendix, with appropriate reference to each plan.

THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

Ms. Helm asked if there should be a note included within the Master Plan that acknowledged that some of the data was outdated. Chair Cottrill asked Mr. McWilliams to make a note of that, with the Elkins information, in particular.

The last item on the agenda was to review and discuss the CIP programs. Chair Cottrill noted that the Department Heads had met with the Capital Improvement Program committee on July 6 & 8, and August 10 & 12. The outcome of those meetings was presented in the packet of information supplied by Ms. Levine. Chair Cottrill said the PB's function is primarily a planning function taking into account the needs of the various departments and the Master Plan document. After review by the PB, the document is forwarded to the Budget Committee.

Ms. Levine said that they have probably seen several iterations of the CIP in the past and that most of the changes in the current document were in terms of style. One significant change to the content was the removal of Table #22, which included projections of revenue and expenditure. Since so much of the table was based on assumptions, it did not have much value from a planning standpoint. Ms. Levine said that the meat of the CIP is the summary which is Table #20, updated after all the departmental reasons. She explained that this table is what provides the guideline for planning. Ms. Levine indicated that it currently shows five years, but that it actually is planned out to the next 10 years.

Ms. Levine said one of the things she high-lighted, was what had come about from last year's "2009" CIP process, with reference to what actually made it into the budgets. The first column represented the group meetings, then the Planning Board's approval of it, and then Budget Committee's final numbers.

Ms. Levine noted that the CIP committee did not approve funding for the Conservation Commission and that that was the only group that was not included in the table.

Starting at the top of the list on Table 20, Chair Cottrill asked about the cruiser replacement. Ms. Levine noted that this had been pushed off for a year last year, and so this year the amount went up to \$25,000. She said that a lot of funds were like that, as things were pushed off last year for this year. She explained that the Public Works Department extended by one year, one vehicle in the lineup to help spread out the costs a bit better. Ms. Levine indicated that what was being requested for 2010 was less than the original 2009 CIP.

Ms. Helm asked what was included in the fire expense and if it included the repairs to the ladder truck that came unexpectedly this year. Mr. Stanley said the expenses for the Fire Department included all fire apparatus. Ms. Levine said that they anticipate purchasing a new fire truck in 2013 rather than 2012.

Mr. Doheny asked about the replacement of equipment and the funds that go with this plan. He noted that both the Fire Department and Public Works Department funds have almost \$500,000 in them for equipment. He wondered why the Town needed to add any more money to them. Ms. Levine said that in order to sustain the fund and to keep the tax level the same, they would need to make deposits into the funds every year. Mr. Stanley said that they would need a very large amount of money to purchase a piece of equipment and wouldn't want to use all the money in the fund on one piece of equipment. He said it is important to deposit enough money annually so that when it is time to make the purchase, adequate funds will be on hand, thus the annual deposit and level tax burden.

Chair Cottrill asked if the "expended" column took into consideration today's cost for things. Ms. Levine said that it has been figured at a 7% increase for inflation.

Ms. Levine noted that Richard Lee (Director of the Public Works Department) had moved ahead (sooner) some purchases to get better deals. For instance, the backhoe and excavator were replaced at the same time this year to get a better deal on new equipment. Coming into this year Mr. Lee pushed forward the 10-wheel dump truck and a few other pieces of equipment. The longer they plan to keep the equipment, the less has to be contributed each year to the funds.

Chair Cottrill asked how the inflation rate of 7% was determined. Ms. Levine said that it was a group decision and was based on steel prices. Ms. Levine said that currently, the prices for steel have leveled off.

Mr. Stanley offered that the concept of saving money to make a purchase, as opposed to borrowing money costs less. He also added that Ms. Levine was correct about there being no wild swings in the tax rate by saving for big things rather than borrowing. By saving now for items that the Town needs, they are saving everyone money.

Ms. Levine commented that the CIP plan should be considered a planning document and not a budgeting document. Mr. Hollinger agreed and said that if you put the money away, and a good deal came up, the money would be there and could be used when needed. This would help to save money. He gave the example of the paving that was put off by the Town and then, when a good price came along, they paved and ended up saving money. Mr. Hollinger said that he was totally in favor of the way the budget is being planned.

Chair Cottrill asked about the land fund in Table #20. Specifically, he asked about the recent purchase of the land between the Town Office building and the New London Inn and if the Conservation Commission fund was used to buy that land. Ms. Levine said the fund was not used for that purchase because the

Conservation Commission didn't see the land as a conservation land, but more as a preservation piece of land.

Moving on, Mr. Hollinger asked about the physical condition of the library. Ms. Levine said that it was much better than it was last year and that they had been slowly making improvements. She said that Table #17 was the library's schedule of improvements over the next 10 years. She added that one of the library's trustees, David Harris, is an expert in energy conservation measures and has been guiding them on window replacement and insulation. They will be making some upgrades around the circulation desk that will be paid for by a donation.

Mr. Doheny asked about Main Street and what could be done to get it fixed. Ms. Levine said that the state would be holding a series of meetings starting on the 28th of October. The first meeting will be held in Newbury at 1:00pm and the second would be in Andover at 4:00pm. She said that Main Street has been in the "10 year plan" to be repaired, but that it was removed for consideration by the State. She said that it would be helpful if people from New London attend the meeting to help get Main Street back in the plan.

Chair Cottrill asked how they decided to do work on Crockett's Corner. Ms. Levine said that after the second fatality, they sent letters to the state about how dangerous it was. The state decided to go ahead and make changes to the corner involving resurfacing the area and changing the lanes to keep traffic slowed and less dangerous.

Mr. Doheny asked if they needed to start doing the project of repairing Main Street themselves. Ms. Levine said that there was a Main Street Capital Improvement fund of \$50,000 which was created to repair sidewalks when the state was repairing the Main Street. Since the Main Street project didn't seem to be happening, the Town stopped putting money into the fund. She shared that to repair Main Street, it would cost approximately \$4,000,000. Ms. Helm said that if the town were to step forward and pay to repair the road, then the State could assume that they don't need to take care of these things in the future. Ms. Levine said the State is considering paving Main Street next summer, but opined that it would be a waste of money due to the fact that the road still needs major underlying repairs, not just resurfacing.

Mr. Tilley asked if it would be beneficial to have a lot of people attend the meetings on the October 28th. Ms. Levine said that she is trying to get bodies out there and is working on getting the selectmen's argument in line. She opined that presence from the Town is important, as are comments by the general public.

Ms. Crane spoke on behalf of the Conservation Commission regarding the \$50,000 that the CIP had removed from the budget for the second year in a row. She said that they went along with budget committee's decision to drop the amount they had asked for last year because they thought it would be put in for this year. Chair Cottrill commented that as the Planning Board, they can adjust the numbers in the CIP however they want. When the Budget Committee gets it back again, it will be up to them to decide what stays in and what is taken out. He added that if you look back in the 1998 Master Plan regarding the land the Conservation Commission wanted to purchase at that time, there were many parcels of land on the "wish list." Chair Cottrill said that if one of those parcels were to become available, they would need to decide what method would work best to obtain them. They could use the money in the fund, secure a bond, save for the future, or fundraise. Mr. Stanley commented that all of those options were available, and could be used in conjunction with one another. Chair Cottrill asked if \$380,000, the amount in the fund, would be enough, should parcels of land they are interested in, become available. Ms. Crane felt that it was not enough.

Ms. Levine said that in the past, the CIP decided that if they were going to be serious about this fund, they needed to put some money into it to make it useful. Mr. McWilliams said the concept was to put \$50,000 per year into the fund so as to build the fund but this was the second year that no money had been put into it. Mr. Stanley said that years ago, several towns in New Hampshire went in together to get a large bond to have a large amount of money available to purchase land if it should come up. Chair Cottrill said that several years ago, Hopkinton put five million into their conservation fund. Ms. Levine said that New London specifically chose not to do this because it didn't seem to be as open a concept with the taxpayers. They felt that depositing annually was a much better approach. By doing it in this way, spending of the money has to be approved by the taxpayers instead of just approved by the Conservation Commission.

Chair Cottrill asked how the Clark Pond property was purchased. Mr. Stanley said that it was purchased from the fund with cash. Ms. Levine said \$275,000 was approved but only \$225,000 was spent due to less acreage. The approval to spend this money was passed at Town Meeting. Ms. Crane noted that if anyone had been to Clark Pond, they would see that there were two trails that make a loop, which are also used as a cross country ski loop. She opined this was a smart purchase and is beneficial and useful for the Town.

Chair Cottrill said that Andy Deegan (Conservation Commission Chair) wanted to get the \$50,000 per year deposit back into the budget but that it was voted down 3:1 at the CIP committee level. Ms. Helm said that she remembered the discussion and noted that it seemed there was no immediate need for the money, and that adding to the fund was not necessary. Ms. Levine said that each person who voted against the \$50,000 had a specific reason why they decided not to vote for the fund deposit.

Mr. Stanley said there have been periodic negotiations with pieces of land that they know are going to be available sometime in the near future. For example, there was some acreage near Otter Pond that the Conservation Commission is interested in. He noted that waterfront property won't be in the \$200,000-\$300,000 price range. Mr. Stanley said that there would also be inexpensive pieces of land, including wetlands, which would probably come up for sale. Ms. Levine said that it all just depends on how the parcels of land are paid for. They can either be saved for ahead of time, or they can wait and pay for them when they become available by bonding or fundraising. Chair Cottrill asked if one of the pieces came on the market that was in the 1998 plan, could the Commission use fund money as a down payment to hold the property. Ms. Levine said that they could not. The money can't be used unless it is approved at Town Meeting. A private donor would have to put money down for the Town in order to hold the parcel until the remaining funds could be raised.

Chair Cottrill asked if they should inject the Conservation Commission fund with \$50,000 or if they should consider a lesser amount, like half of the targeted amount. Mr. Tilley asked what the most expensive piece of property on the list was, and what are they talking about in a goal amount for the fund so there could be a comparison. Mr. Doheny said that a sufficient amount for the fund to have would be \$5,000,000. He believed that that amount would cover just about anything that would come up. Mr. Tilley said there should be some sort of calculation to figure out what is appropriate to deposit each year, as funding \$50,000 per year may not be enough. He was unsure of how it all worked and felt he needed to know more.

Mr. Hollinger opined that if the money was there in the fund, it would make it easier to purchase a parcel, should it become available. If the cost of the parcel was a lot more than what they have to spend, they will end up having to bond it anyway. Mr. Stanley said the intent was to have \$500,000 in the fund. If it becomes depleted, they would build it up again to get back to that goal. He said this amount allowed for "seed money" with which to hold a property while other methods were used to purchase it. Mr. Hollinger believed that they should put at least \$25,000 in the fund this year and that they should get used to putting something for the fund back into the budget to comply with the goals of the Master Plan as created by the

people of the town. Mr. Tilley asked if it was sensible to state the goal amount for the fund. He thought that perhaps it would be easier to encourage everyone if there was a stated target amount.

Ms. Helm asked why several years ago that New London did not participate in the bond with the other towns. Ms. Levine said that they didn't feel it was the right message to deliver to the taxpayers. They felt it was better to slowly build up a pot and to raise funds themselves. Mr. Stanley said that their plan was to build up the fund quickly and then taper off when they got closer to their goal amount. He added that Conservation Commissions were one of the few organizations that are allowed to spend their money by just having a public hearing. Ms. Levine said that Town Meeting still has to be held to approve the spending of the money.

Mr. McWilliams wondered that, for instance, if the Town wanted to use this money as a capital reserve on a land acquisition project sometime in, say, the month of May but there were about 10 months until the next Town Meeting, it seems like it would be a benefit to the Town to authorize the selectmen or Conservation Commission to use the money at their discretion. He said that it would be difficult to wait that long to get an answer on the use of the money. Mr. Stanley said that usually they can work out some sort of an arrangement to buy more time, as people know that New London supports conservation. He said it has worked quite well in the past.

Since it was a common feeling that something should be put into the Conservation Commission's fund for land, Chair Cottrill asked for a motion:

**IT WAS MOVED (Jeff Hollinger) AND SECONDED (John Tilley) that the Planning Board put \$25,000 back into the 2010 budget for the Conservation Commission land fund.
THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

M. Tilley asked if they should make a statement that the amount to be deposited into this fund should be brought up to another level in another year or so, or to just leave it how it is. Mr. Hollinger said he would leave it up to the Conservation Commission to decide what would be appropriate to ask for in the future. Mr. Doheny said they would need a recommendation from the Conservation Commission as to what the amount should be in the future. Mr. Tilley said they should really have a target number in the plan so people can understand a goal. Ms. Levine said that Andy Deegan (Chair of the Conservation Commission) was planning to come to the budget meeting on the 26th of October. Mr. Hollinger felt it was important that the Planning Board put something back in to their budget to show that they feel it is important. He felt that perhaps those on the budget committee would approve of their suggestions.

Chair Cottrill asked if there were any other elements of the document they should talk about. Ms. Levine said the only thing she had to add was that if they get the Elkins grant, they will use the sidewalk improvement fund and it would need to be bumped up in the next few years to rebuild it. Mr. Tilley asked what would be the use of the MESA building if it was purchased (in part) by the Town as a consequence of the grant. Ms. Levine said that half of the building would be used as a transportation information center (?). The other part they are not sure of yet. Mr. Doheny asked if they should assume getting the grant. She said that they have a good chance but didn't want to say for sure just yet. The number one project coming out of the nine regions would get the grant money. She felt that their proposal included many components of the town and preserved and improved things. New London's proposal was more expensive than the other towns, however. If they did win the grant, they would need \$200,000 to contribute. She said they will have about \$109,000 in the sidewalk and intersection improvement funds that could be used. Mr. Doheny asked if they should bump up the sidewalk funds. She said they could, but perhaps could wait until they hear about the grant.

Ms. Levine noted that the budget has to be finalized in February. If they do receive the grant, they will not start using the money until 2011. Mr. Doheny felt that \$40,000 per year for the next two years would be good to add to the sidewalk fund. Ms. Levine said that she would know about the grant on Tuesday, November 10th. Mr. McWilliams added this topic to the agenda for the November 10th Planning Board meeting, so that Ms. Levine could share whether or not the Town would receive the grant.

Ms. Helm asked if the recreation's budget included the boats that Mr. Denning wanted to purchase. Ms. Levine said that they were not included and that the cost of these items would come out of the regular budget.

Mr. Hollinger asked why the library budgets money for computers. Ms. Levine said the CIP asked them to have a long term plan so they could save a little bit every year.

Mr. Tilley commented that \$20,000 was too little for the library's building improvements for one year. Chair Cottrill asked Ms. Levine if she felt it was adequate. Mr. Tilley said that as someone who spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on buildings, that about \$100,000 would be, in his mind, what would be needed to keep a building like the library that going.

Other Business:

Review of the minutes from the September 22nd meeting.

Chair Cottrill noted that there was a space needed between "he" and "noted" under "Fees for Minor Subdivision."

There were no further comments, and so Chair Cottrill asked for a motion.

**IT WAS MOVED (Jeff Hollinger) AND SECONDED (Michael Doheny) to approve the Planning Board minutes from September 22, 2009, as amended.
THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary

Town of New London

Approved on: _____

Chairman: _____