

Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
March 6, 2010
7:30am

Meeting Attendees:

Larry Ballin (Chair), Mark Kaplan (Selectman), Jessie Levine, (Town Administrator), Peter Bianchi, Robert Lavoie, Dave Payne, Jack Harrod, Hardy Hasenfuss, Rick Anderson, Cindy Snay, Joe McCarthy, Peter Messer, Bob MacMichael, Noel Weinstein, Vahan Sarkisian, Karen Hoglund, Gary Markoff, Bill Clough, Barbara Brown, Howard Hoke, Stephanie Wheeler, Rich Anderson

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

He opened the meeting saying that he had hoped to have someone there from the school board to discuss the School Resource Officer position for the Town of Sutton but that unfortunately, no one was available.

Chair Ballin announced that the states to receive “Race to the Top” funding for schools across the country had been chosen and that New Hampshire was not one of them. According to the Kearsarge School District, they felt they were a good candidate. Now that the funding is not there, they will have to come up with another plan for their property (the old Middle School) in Town. He noted there would be a second round chosen in June but that it was questionable as for the amounts of money available. Chair Ballin said the State submitted an application for funding and the towns would then need to apply to them directly for funding. Mr. Markoff opined that the decisions on which states received funding were made in a political manner. Mr. Kaplan agreed. He said that states like New York did not expect to get any funding due to the fact that they didn’t feel their application was as complete as it should have been.

Noel Weinstein asked about the possibility of the Town purchasing the school’s property in New London. Chair Ballin said that it was not for sale.

Mr. Kaplan shared that the USDA announced that they would be granting 43% of the funding for the wastewater treatment plant. The towns of New London and Sunapee had been anticipating around 35% funding for the project, and so this is great news. This amount of government funding reduces the amount New London will need to borrow. Chair Ballin explained that this was one-time funding and they needed to get the bond passed this year. Mr. Weinstein felt it was interesting that if they did nothing, and then due to system failure they were mandated to make the upgrades by the State, it would then become a town issue and everyone would have to pay the same amount.

Peter Bianchi asked if the bond article explained percentages. Ms. Levine said it did not. He asked if there was any place on the Town Meeting floor that would explain to the people that it was 1/3 - 2/3 split in cost. He also wanted to know if those percentages could change. He thought if they vote for the bond, they won’t know exactly what they were agreeing to. Mr. Kaplan said that the Board of Selectmen took a vote and decided it would be paid for on a 1/3 - 2/3 split between all taxpayers (1/3) and sewer users (2/3). To change that decision, it would have to be voted on again by the Board of Selectmen. Kaplan explained that this was their intention and the only way it could change was if a lot of people came to a meeting and persuaded them to take another vote.

Ms. Levine said that if the Town isn’t behind the bond, it becomes a revenue bond, which is subject to a higher interest rate. They were advised to leave the allocation out of the warrant article entirely. In the past they have always done what has been agreed on by the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Kaplan noted that the hospital and the college were the largest users of the new system and would be paying the most.

When asked, Ms. Levine explained that all users to the system contribute 25 million gallons/year. The college contributes about seven million. The hospital contributes about three million.

Mr. Weinstein asked if the breakdown of the cost to taxpayers/sewer users would be mentioned at Town Meeting. Chair Ballin said that it was in the presentation of the article and that they felt comfortable with it. He felt people would understand the benefit of a quality sewer system as they do with the milfoil plan which protects the area lakes.

Bob MacMichael said he was a selectman when they had a problem with sewage in Sutton. He said that they polluted Keazar Lake and had to pay a lot. There were many hard feelings. After that, a lot of people wanted to go to Franklin with the sewer system, and then they decided to go with Sutton. Mr. MacMichael said that they have to do something, as he didn't want to have another problem like they did with Keazar Lake.

Chair Ballin said they are would be voting on Tuesday on the bond issue. New London will vote on Wednesday night. If Sunapee votes it down on Tuesday, they will table the article at New London Town Meeting. Mr. Kaplan said that it would be unlikely that the bond would not pass in Sunapee because they are only paying for 1/3 of the total and have put a substantial amount of money away for this already, and don't have to bond the entire thing.

Mr. Bianchi asked if the Sunapee sewer system is paid for by their sewer users. Ms. Levine answered in the affirmative and said that they pay a lot less for the sewer in Sunapee. She added that New London has among the highest rates of any other towns in the state.

Ms. Levine referenced the Town Report and thanked Howard Hoke for the nice job.

With regards to the report, Dave Payne asked how many residents there were in New London and if they include all the students in this number. Ms. Levine said that in the 2000 census 600 of the 4,100 residents were college students. Now that they are up to 1,200 college students, the number is higher. She said that there would be a census taken this year. Mr. Harrod noted that it is stated on the census form that they need to indicate themselves as a resident of New London if they receive their census while living in the Town.

Barbara Brown had a comment regarding the School District budget. She felt the deliberative session held on January 9 was poorly attended. There was an explanation by the Chief of Sutton Police regarding the position of resource officer. The town has four officers and three schools to cover, in addition to I-89. She stressed that people have to think about what is going on in the School District and attend meetings. Chair Ballin said that both the School Board and the Municipal Budget Committee are recommending the position this year.

Marilyn Kidder asked if anything, based on the population, would include the college students. Ms. Levine answered in the affirmative. Even though the population is misrepresented, it may have some advantages somewhere along the lines. Ms. Levine said the USDA considers anything under 50,000 people to be "rural." The number of students added does not really an impact the numbers regarding things like that. She explained that both the Police Department and the Fire Department are impacted due to these additional people living in Town. Mr. Harrod said that when students are gone in the summer, the total number of residents almost doubles due to the people who come here at that time. It was also noted that there are many in Town who stay for the summer from Gordon Research. Mr. Hoke asked if it would be appropriate for the Masons and other non-profit organizations to submit reports to the Town Report. Ms. Levine said she would welcome all non-profits to include reports as long

as it didn't raise the price of printing it. She said she would rather have printed pages rather than blank ones. Ms. Levine went on to say that non-profit based groups often ask for money from businesses and the Town and felt it was a good place to show what they are doing in and for the Town.

Bob Lavoie said there were more advantages for having an accurate census (for grants, etc.) and would encourage everyone to fill out their census and send it in.

Vahan Sarkisian felt the report was beautiful and only had one problem, which was with the financial information print being too small. Ms. Levine said it was a huge Excel spreadsheet and that they are required by law to submit it to voters. She said that they can provide a larger format, if requested, but that there was no way to get the information all onto one page without the font being very small. She said she could put it on the website. After some discussion, Mr. Hoke indicated to Ms. Levine that they could fit the spreadsheet over two pages in next year's edition, by changing the orientation of the information on the page.

Mr. Payne shared that he finds it very irritating that they have a school budget with a lot of add-ons. He wanted to know why they can't offer one budget that includes everything in it. Ms. Levine answered that some add-ons are required, by law, to be voted on by voters. Two of them are warrant articles. The position of School Resource Officer is petitioned, so that makes it a separate issue. She added that some are capital items which must also be voted on.

Ms. Brown said that some add-ons, like for roof replacement and special education, and they have to vote to approve the use of the funds.

Mr. Harrod asked if there had been any mention of Town Moderator candidates. Chair Ballin said that one name was brought up to him but there was nothing definite as of yet.

Gary Markoff thanked all who were in attendance at the last meeting who nominated him for the position of School Board Representative from New London (after he had left the meeting early). He said that he has spent a lot of time making spreadsheets to find where their tax money is going. 65% (?) of their tax dollars are going towards education either in a national or local area. Mr. Markoff said that he has a large tax bill and small children and would like the chance to make a difference for all of them and to identify issues that should be addressed regarding the budget.

Mr. Markoff said that he wasn't sure why there was such a small difference in the Municipal Budget Committee (MBC) and the School Board (SB) budget totals. The question was posed at MBC member, Rich Anderson. Mr. Anderson said that sometimes there is no gap at all in the two budgets. When the MBC has a chance to look at the numbers, they decide if everything looks reasonable. The issue is whether or not they want to present a unified approach to the voters. The reality is that there is not as much room as people would imagine for cuts in the budget. The money goes towards heating, text books, etc. Mr. Anderson said that there has been a very different philosophical change in belief among the MBC members recently. That explains why there was a \$500,000 difference in the budgets last year. They just didn't want to ask for a substantial increase during this economic climate. The original budget was 13% higher, and they were eager to try and keep it close to the CPI. They selected 1.9%. At the end of the day there were a few items that the MBC differed with the SB. The SB recommended a 2% increase for the administrative staff and para-educators. They weren't sure if that increase in wages was appropriate at that time. Mr. Anderson's argument was that they were 99.5% in agreement so the difference of less than \$100,000 was not that big a deal. He noted that some people on the MBC did not agree with this sentiment.

Mr. Markoff asked to have some examples of Special Education circumstances and what the costs were. He felt it was outrageous what was happening with spending in this area. In 2005, they spent five million dollars. Just three years later it was six million being spent. This poses a 15-20% increase each year. Chair Ballin said that the property tax pays for the deficit not funded by the schools. Mr. Anderson said that Special Education is a wild card at this point and that there are legal requirements mandating what the school districts must do/provide. He said that it really has to do with how many new students move in or out of the district. Mr. Anderson added that if there is a child who has a severe handicap and can't go to school in the district, the district has to pay for their education at another facility. He explained that they have a surplus set aside to try and protect them in the instance where an unexpected high increase of kids who need services moves into the district. He said that the numbers are what they are; whatever the enrollment happens to be determines the cost.

Mr. Markoff asked that if ten kids came into the system and are renters in any of the seven districts, would their services (in the district or outside of it) be automatically paid for. Chair Ballin said that they would. Mr. Harrod noted that his son has dyslexia and when this was discovered, they were residents of the District of Columbia. Since that district could not handle the problem in their public schools, the district had to pay to send him to a private school, including transportation costs. He said that they had to do it because it is the law. Chair Ballin said that when he was diagnosed with Dyslexia in the 70's his parents had to pick up the tab for tutoring and private school.

Mr. Weinstein asked if there was any value to have some of these facilities made local. Mr. Chrisensen said that there is someone on staff who is in charge of this whole area. Whenever they can keep a child in the district, they do it. Sometimes there are situations that are too difficult to keep the child in the district.

Barbara Brown shared that she has a Masters Degree in Learning Disabilities. She explained that they have brought back a number of students who used to be out of district. One student costs over \$100,000 per year who cannot be serviced in this school district.

Mr. Bianchi said that over \$500,000 in unanticipated Special Education funding needs to be protected. If two or three kids move in who need services, this money will be needed. Ms. Brown said that the State has a catastrophic fund and towns can apply for funding, though it is not 100%. She said that the Federal Government had placed a requirement on getting children in need of services attended to, and provided funding, but over time has taken away large amounts of available money to aid in the servicing of these individuals.

Ms. Kidder asked if parents with special-needs kids would ever seek out certain districts or if they were all serviced the same. Chair Ballin said that they would maybe seek out one of the higher quality districts in the state. He noted that a town like Kearsarge may be better than towns like Pittsfield.

Mr. Markoff said that there has to be some accommodation for growth at a steady level in the Town. Some have called the growth too much but he feels it is impossible not to accommodate it. He opined that they have vulnerability in the county. They put money out for medicaid payments and prisons. He wondered how many people from this area were using these services. The amount of money being put towards these kinds of services grows every year. In one year they went up \$400,000.

Mr. Kaplan said that last week the State legislature did away with way they conduct statewide property tax. There was a collar that allowed money that was raised by property taxes to stay within the district from which it was collected. They have now done away with that. In 1.5 years time they are going to raise it(?) because the Federal money they were getting to help fund State Education would be unavailable. This constitutes over \$50 million. Increases alone are over \$150 million and so they'll need

to raise \$200 million. This will most likely be done by enforcing the Donor Town Tax. New London's share will be between 1 and 1.5 million dollars. That money will be going out and will not be staying in the district.

Mr. Markoff said that this tax would impact home sales because the total cost of home ownership would cause sellers to have to lower the price of their homes. He felt they were being overwhelmed by the donor tax issue, and additionally, not getting any funding for the Race to the Top program, he felt they were vulnerable and that the only way out was to grow some and not to contract. Many agreed with Mr. Markoff.

Chair Ballin felt they owed Mr. Markoff a vote of gratitude to see what he could do with the SB. He shared that Larry LeBoeuf did not share much at a recent meeting and perhaps he would be more forthcoming with information once Mr. Markoff was on the board. Ms. Levine said the new administration has been there two years and that they are trying to clean up the way things have been done ahead of time.

Mr. Harrod asked about the petitioned article to give \$1,962 to the Red Cross. He wondered what that number represented. Ms. Levine said that it was figured as \$.45 per resident and that the request came from the Red Cross' central office. Chair Ballin said that they recommend for people to support the Red Cross by giving blood and by donating privately. He felt the Town does a better job managing their own situations at home.

Mr. Payne asked how a write-in candidate works. Ms. Levine said that the ballot clerks count on Tuesday night. Those written in will be called to see if they accept the position. If they choose not to do it, it is up to the supervisor of the checklist to appoint someone for one year. Cotton Cleveland will be moderating this year at Town Meeting, as her last year. Mr. Payne suggested nominating Judge DiClerico but he wasn't sure if he would accept the position. Ms. Levine said that she understood the judge could not run for public office but was interested in the position. Ms. Kidder said that she had heard Ann Bedard was considering the position.

Mr. Markoff said that when the State Representatives were at the CAC meeting, they said the funding would be going away in two years. Chair Ballin said that the tax liability collar has been a tax relief until they could figure it all out. New Hampshire has been able to cover education funding in the past but China and Japan own a lot of our National debt. He felt that they voted strictly on party lines. Chair Ballin said that basically, Randy Foose was running against the Town of New London. Mr. Harrod said that Representative Foose told him that the whole education funding issue had been put together carefully and by using donor taxes, it would help keep the system together. If they didn't enforce the donor tax, the whole situation would go back to the way it was when the Claremont lawsuit was an issue.

Mr. Kaplan asked why they couldn't just create a better system. He was told that since this was an election year, the representatives didn't want to do anything that may cost them a re-election.

Chair Ballin said that there were one or two more chances to save the collar. Mr. Kaplan felt it was already gone because the Representatives voted it down. He felt that the Senate vote was moot and nothing is going to be done and they will just wait until next year to decide on how to raise the funding. Mr. Markoff felt it was nuts and that this scenarios was going to go on and on. Ms. Levine said that the State temporarily shared revenue sharing (money the town gets from the state - just under \$60,000), and temporarily continued the meals and rooms tax (about \$200,000) and that those items will be on the chopping block for the next annual budget. Their share of the gas tax may be in jeopardy as well.

Ms. Levine explained that both Police and Fire Fighters can retire at the age of 45 with subsidized medical care for the rest of their life. The labor unions go to the retirement systems each year to get a little more. For instance, it was passed that if a police officer or firefighter is killed in line of duty, their spouse is covered even if he/she remarries. Mr. Markoff said it is predictable and coming that there are GASB rules to be identified and will be equal to a credit downgrade and increase in credit financing.

Mr. Kaplan said that Claremont had been in terrible shape as far as their school was concerned, which the Claremont School District believed to be the State's fault. They brought the case to court and won. The State could say they are taking over the school district at that point. They could double the cost of what they need to run the school. They would get their money first and the Town wouldn't get enough money to take care of the Town. Mr. Kaplan felt that the problem was that there wasn't anyone with will-power to do what is right. He opined that the majority of politicians just want to please everyone and get reelected.

Chair Ballin said suit they are involved in for their share of retirement system will be filed on Monday by the Mascenic School District. They have contributed towards fund of that lawsuit.

Mr. Weinstein said he read in Valley News about the backbone in Vermont that was making some headway. Ms. Levine explained that Mr. Weinstein was referring to the fiber optic network group (WCNH) which is trying to bring fiber to the home. They have been partnering with SWRPC, Keene, the State Commission, and the Community Development Finance Authority, and are thinking that Fairpoint will be with them as well as the UNH/Dartmouth network. Ms. Levine announced that there would be a public forum held on March 15 at 2pm in Enfield on this project. She welcomed all interested parties to attend.

Mr. Payne wanted to make a note that the Transfer Station attendants were wonderful. Chair Ballin said that this was great to hear. Karen Hogle asked if the Transfer Station would open on Sundays again. Chair Ballin said probably not.

Rick Anderson asked about the recent power outage in town and wondered how well it was handled. Chair Ballin said that they met at 8am on Friday when they realized the Town was in the midst of a serious outage. PSNH let them know they had a possible multi-day event happening. There were no guarantees for power at any time. Peter Berthiaume organized a committee and had a warming center at Whipple Hall. At 6 PM, this warming center was moved to Ware Hall at Colby-Sawyer College. If there was a need, they would have been able to accommodate people over night. There did not seem to be a need for that, however. Chair Ballin noted that there were a few Colby-Sawyer students there. By 9pm it was obvious that there wasn't a great need from the citizens so the effort was discontinued. Ms. Levine returned to New London from her scheduled vacation, on Saturday.

Ms. Levine said that mid-morning on Tuesday they had a review of the Emergency Management response and it was obvious that her absence was part of the problem. She is the Public Information Officer and she was away. This prompted her to identify a backup Public Information Officer. They also realized that they need to have a central phone number for people to call for information so to not busy the Fire and Police Departments with requests for information in the middle of a crisis. They worked with TDS and created a new number: 526-9444, which is the call-in information number. It would not be manned by a person but would have an automatic recording letting people know what is going on and where they can go for help or services. They will be prompted to dial "911" for emergencies when necessary.

Ms. Levine said that the Council on Aging had purchased a generator and identified themselves as a warming center but didn't know how to advertise that information. If this sort of thing happens again the

Council on Aging will open automatically during the day to give the folks on the Management Committee some time to come up with plans for meals and overnight accommodations for residents of New London. Mr. Hasenfuss commented that the generator worked well.

Ms. Levine said that their emergency services worked very well and they were able to identify areas in need. They used the Town map to find the roads that were closed. They also conducted door to door welfare checks, targeting people of concern (those being dependent on oxygen or with other health issues).

Due to the fact that WNTK loses power when the rest of the Town does, Ms. Levine indicated that Colby-Sawyer College will use FEMA funds to purchase a generator to keep Colgate Hall going, which is where their radio station is located. The station is AM 90.9. (is it AM?)

Ms. Levine said that New London is now a part of a "Code Red" emergency system that will send phone calls out to all residents alerting them to a crisis or dangerous situation in the Town. Sunapee used it during the outage and it worked well. Unfortunately New London was not able to use it because of Ms. Levine's absence.

Joe McCarthy said that when the storm started, he had about 25 legitimate calls for emergencies, but felt that people abused "911." He said that there were about 75 unnecessary phone calls, and believed that the new emergency information number will come in handy during the next emergency situation or outage. Mr. McCarthy added that in the past, PSNH used to call and ask for a pole number when an outage has been caused by a tree being down on a line. He said that now, if there is a tree on a line, people should give the street number when they call. This will help them be better aware of the location of the downed line.

Ms. Kidder asked Ms. Levine if it was because of her absence that no email or Intertown Record announcement went out regarding the outage. Ms. Levine said that this was the case. Ms. Kidder said that if at all possible, this type of information needs to be sent out. Ms. Levine said that Sunapee and the hospital had power and that she would have gone there to send the message out if she had been in Town. She indicated that Linda Hardy is now the Information Officer back-up person and will have access to everything that she has.

Ms. Kidder said that PSNH called her home twice to see if the power was on, which she thought was amazing. The Fire Department also came to check the road. She felt it went well. Chair Ballin said that the Fire Department and the Police Department did a good job.

Ms. Brown said that there was a note at the Post Office letting people know that Whipple Hall was being used as a warming center. She heard that some people didn't know where Whipple Hall was.

Ms. Hogle said that she had heard the United States Post Office was planning to close on Saturdays. She asked if anyone had heard any news in this regard. Chair Ballin said that he had not but knew that this was a proposal. They are trying to figure out how to make the post offices more efficient. He opined that it would be interesting to see what happens.

Howard Hoke said he had two things to share. The management of the Post Office wants to eliminate Saturday deliveries. The union wants to eliminate Tuesday because a lot of overtime gets paid on Saturdays. He said that about 6-8 months ago he started getting a lot less mail on Tuesdays. The Postmaster General is taking it to the people but there was a powerful glitch in implementing this type of closure because of the position the union is in. He also mentioned that in order for the postal service to

save money, they have to cut back on deliveries. However, they are not allowed to stop the twice weekly shipments to deliver two pieces of mail and two crates of food, which are still delivered by mail, to rural areas of the country. (Was this just an example of things that were being sent, or was he referring to something in particular?) They will have to close metropolitan branches more often than not in areas where the public is using the service, to keep the rural areas open.

Bill Clough said that five years ago the postal system was closed in Sweden. He felt that this was going to happen here as well.

The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 8:57 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London