

NEW LONDON PLANNING BOARD WORK SESSION OCTOBER 14, 2008

MEMBERS PRESENT: Karen Ebel (Chairman), Tom Cottrill (Vice-Chairman), Dale Conly, Celeste Cook, Kenneth McWilliams (Planner), Alternate Deirdre Sheerr-Gross, and Alternate Michele Holton. Larry Ballin (Selectmen's Representative) arrived at 7:05 PM.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Michael Doheny, Jeff Hollinger,

Chair Karen Ebel called the **MEETING TO ORDER** at 7:00 PM. Chair Ebel asked Alternate Michele Holton to sit in for PB Member Michael Doheny, and she asked Alternate Deirdre Sheerr-Gross to sit in for PB Member Jeff Hollinger.

I. REVISED MASTER PLAN CHAPTER V – HOUSING

Chair Ebel advised PB members that updated data for Table V-10 Student Residency Colby-Sawyer College 1970-2008 had been distributed as a hand-out and that Table V-11 Off-Campus Student Residency Breakdown would be revised as soon as the 2008 data became available.

Chair Ebel asked if there were any additional revisions that should be made to Chapter V.

A. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS (page 2): Zoning Administrator Peter Stanley pointed out that “village” after New London in the first sentence should be deleted.

B. RENTAL HOUSING COSTS:

(Page 17) PB Member Cook asked if there were data more recent than 2000. She opined that the data presented were unrealistic and that it was not possible to find a rental for less than \$750 in New London.

Ken McWilliams replied that there more recent data available for counties, but not for towns.

Zoning Administrator Stanley opined that there was a glut of rental properties available in New London and that, if a property owner offered a rental at \$750, there would be no one to rent it. He said that most of the local real estate offices had someone who specialized in rentals. He suggested those people would be a good source of information. Mr. McWilliams responded that such information would be anecdotal, not statistical. Chair Ebel asked PB Member Holton, a local realtor, if she would be responsible for gathering data from local realtors and providing the information to Mr. McWilliams. PB Member Holton agreed to do so. PB Member Sheerr-Gross said that a footnote could be added to explain that the data were anecdotal. Chair Ebel asked PB Member Holton to also collect information about how long various types of properties in each price range (Table V-4, page 17) remained on the market.

PB Member Sheerr-Gross suggested that the next Master Plan Update might be scheduled closer to the next Census. Chair Ebel responded that the Census results generally became available about four years after the data collection. She advised that the PB had discussed the possibility of scheduling the next Master Plan Update to coincide with the availability of Census data.

Resident Robert Lavoie questioned the relevancy of including all of the data that the Master Plan contains. He said that the data were interesting to know, but they were not always relevant to include in the Master Plan. Mr. McWilliams responded that the PB was updating the currently existing Master Plan that contains lots of data, not writing a new plan. Mr. Lavoie recommended eliminating some of the tables and charts and data and updating the Master Plan more often.

II. MASTER PLAN CHAPTER VI - ECONOMIC BASE

Chair Ebel opined that review of this chapter was problematic because results of the Community Survey were not yet available. She advised that the audience included two individuals whose input would be welcome: Robert Bryant (Lake Sunapee Region Chamber of Commerce) and Stephen Heavener (CRDC Economic

Development Solutions) who was consulting with the Board of Selectmen in regard to the proposed Community Center.

Chair Ebel explained the manner in which the review of a Master Plan chapter usually progressed, and she encouraged Mr. Bryant and Mr. Heavener to contribute to the discussion of the Chapter VI - Economic Base as the PB reviews the draft.

Stephen Heavener said that he had anecdotal information based on interviews that he had conducted with individuals. He said that the Board of Selectmen were trying to determine what approach to take in presenting financing of the proposed Community Center to voters as a means of restoring activity on Main Street in the wake of the Kearsarge Regional Middle School (KRMS) departure. Mr. Heavener advised that the report that he would be submitting would guide the Board of Selectmen.

Chair Ebel asked if, in the classic situation, CRDC had been invited to deal with a specific issue or to come in to conduct an evaluation of the situation. Mr. Heavener replied that CRDC was interested in job creation, business revenue, and growth and activity. The goal was to enhance the business environment. He said that CRDC would like to have a long-term tactical consulting relationship with the town.

PB Member Conly asked what type of specific data Mr. Heavener was seeking. Mr. Heavener responded that he had originally thought that he'd be able to quantify the loss activity due to the absence of KRMS; of course, less than a year has elapsed. He said that he could not quantify the lost revenue directly related to that loss due to the changes in the economy. PB Member Conly asked how CRDC would evaluate projected gains if the Community Center were to become a reality. Chair Ebel asked how CRDC would determine if the proposed Community Center was the best investment of \$1.5 million in taxpayer dollars. She asked whether the more customary approach was to do an economic development analysis for the town and suggest ways to enhance economic activity. Since the town had never invested in economic development projects before, she wondered whether a community center was necessarily what would be recommended in that context. Other economic boosters might be light industry, more retail, or whatever. Mr. Heavener agreed that the current study was unusual in that it focused on a specific project, rather than an overall plan for the town, but that was what the contract was for. He reiterated that he would be pleased to have an on-going economic strategic planning relationship with New London. Mr. Heavener said that it was not possible to quantify the value of programming to be offered by the proposed Community Center. PB Member Ballin opined that the cultural value would enhance real estate growth, business, and the economic base. He opined that the question was would the public investment of funds enhance private investment in the project.

Chair Ebel asked Mr. Bryant to share their opinions of the business community. Mr. Bryant responded that it was his sense that business owners did not feel great about the current economic outcast, frequently did not support each other, and did not believe that the Chamber of Commerce did enough for New London specifically. He said that businesses would like the Chamber to put more emphasis on New London, rather than on the region. He said that an enormous number of New London residents did not shop in New London. He opined that a community center would help New London become a destination.

Mr. Bryant said that the proposed Community Center would provide room for training customer service people. He opined that customer service training was needed badly, because the Chamber had gotten complaints. PB Member Ballin asked with what towns/cities organizations in New London were being compared in regard to customer service. He said that many people comment on how friendly customer service is compared to other places. Mr. Bryant said that the quality of customer service varied greatly from place to place. He advised that people used the Chamber of Commerce as a Better Business Bureau.

PB Member Holton said that the Lake Sunapee Region Visiting Nurse Association found it very difficult to find enough meeting rooms or clinic venues without paying high rental fees. She said that even New London Hospital, in spite of its expansion, was very interested in more meeting rooms. Both organizations, therefore, supported the project. Mr. Heavener asked the PB members to send him their comments regarding the proposed community center. He said that he had not yet spoken with either the New London Hospital or the Lake Sunapee Region Visiting Nurse Association. PB Member Cook said that she thought that New London Hospital had written a letter to the Board of Selectmen in support of the Community Center for meeting space.

Zoning Administrator Stanley said that the area that New London drew from for business was one of relatively low density. He opined that the town would need to make a big change commercially to attract people as a destination for business. He cited what Manchester, Vermont and Freeport, Maine had done, as examples. He said that New London was a small town, surrounded by other small towns. Mr. Heavener said that critical mass was very important from a retail perspective. He opined that it was important to know the status quo and how it impacted on the tax rate. Chair Ebel said that she had heard a lot of concern about duplication of services already being provided by other established businesses, like the New London Barn Playhouse.

Resident Robert Lavoie said that he believed that there were conflicting goals between economic development activities by the Board of Selectmen and New London residents. PB Member Ballin opined that the town didn't want only houses without services to support them. PB Member Holton said that the departure of KRMS was a blow, and there was a very historical building sitting in the middle of town ready to be used.

A. EMPLOYMENT

Chair Ebel asked if all of the data in the Economic Base chapter was as recent as possible. Ken McWilliams replied that he was not aware of anything more recent. She asked him to call the New Hampshire Department of Employment Security for verification. Mr. Heavener advised that they did projections. It was agreed that charts of 2000 data were fairly useless. PB Member Ballin said that the Master Plan was only updated every ten years and that one needed to watch trends.

Page 1, line 4: Chair Ebel pointed out that "200" should be "2000".

Pages 2 and 3: Resident Rosemary Fulton questioned the Tables VI-1 through VI-4 inasmuch as the column headings indicated percentages; however, the data included were not percentages. Mr. McWilliams said that he would make the necessary corrections in the tables.

B. WORKERS COMMUTING PATTERNS

Page 5, Paragraph 1: Chair Ebel asked if the "1645" in line one should be "1699", as on page 3. She also asked if the 47.1% applied to the year 2000. Mr. McWilliams said that he would review the data.

Stephen Heavener asked if "3490" was the total population in 2000.

Page 8, Figure VI-2: PB Member Ballin asked that the legend be enlarged. Zoning Administrator Stanley recommended places labels directly on the columns.

C. UNEMPLOYMENT

Page 8, bottom of page: Chair Ebel noted that "FUGUE" should be "FIGURE". Resident Fulton advised that the heading referred to a table located elsewhere and the same problem occurred on page 6. Mr. McWilliams said that he would make the necessary formatting corrections to assure that table titles appear properly. In response to a PB inquiry, Mr. McWilliams advised that the data was not available on a town-wide basis, only county-wide.

D. WAGE AND INCOME INFORMATION

Page 9, Table VI-3: Chair Ebel pointed out that the data appeared as decimals, not percentages as indicated in the legend.

Page 10, Table VI-4: Resident Fulton noted that "20044" should be "2004".

E. POVERTY LEVEL

PB members asked what the poverty level was. PB Member Ballin suggested that it would be helpful to include that information. Stephen Heavener said that the Federal Department of Agriculture (FDA) poverty level was a figure pretty commonly used. Mr. McWilliams said that he would elaborate a little.

Page 13, Figure VI-7: Chair Ebel noted that the figure was showing decimals instead of percentages.

F. PROPERTY TAX BASE

Page 14: Chair Ebel asked if the 2003 tax base was the most recent available. Mr. McWilliams said that he would check with the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration.

Page 15, Figure VI-9: Chair Ebel pointed out that data was not expressed as percentages.

G. ECONOMIC ASSETS AND LIMITATIONS

Chair Ebel advised that the Master Plan Update would basically be updating the list of economic assets and limitations in the current Master Plan.

PB Member Ballin opined that the widening of I-93 would increase traffic and access to New London. PB members were also reminded of Ragged Mountain Resort's plans to direct its approaching traffic from the south to Exit 11 off I-89.

Economic Assets

Page 16, Line 1: PB Member Cook questioned including "tedious half-day".

Page 16, 3. Seasonal Residents and Tourist Markets: Chair Ebel recommended updating the paragraph on the basis of the PB's review of Chapter IV – Population.

Page 16, 5. Recreational Amenities: PB Member Ballin recommended adding the Recreation Committee to the New London Conservation Commission in regard to maintaining walking and hiking trails. Chair Ebel opined that the Outing Club should also be added. Other recreational amenities that should be added were Colby-Sawyer College's Dan and Kathleen Hogan Sports Center and Mountainside Racquet & Fitness Center.

Page 16-17, 7. Availability of Water and Sewer Services: Chair Ebel questioned the use of "considerable" in the second line on page 17. She also recommended stating that the Water System Precinct does not want to expand the boundaries of the precinct.

PB Member Ballin recommended deleting "ample" from the last line in the paragraph. Resident R. Lavoie asked why not include numbers. PB Member Ballin responded that the sewer varies because it is a joint endeavor with Sunapee and the water capacity is sometimes stretched by seasonal increases in usage. Mr. McWilliams advised that there would be an entire chapter devoted to utilities with all the details. Chair Ebel recommended inserting a note to "see Chapter x".

Page 17, 8. Low Tax Rate: PB Member Cottrill suggested adding "however, property values are assessed higher than in surrounding areas." PB Member Ballin recommended eliminating #8. Chair Ebel opined that a broader tax base and low taxes were good and should be considered an economic asset. PB Member Holton advised that only Newbury had a lower tax rate than New London in this area. Consensus was to retain the item. Stephen Heavener suggested giving examples. Chair Ebel suggested that a table might be included. Mr. McWilliams said that he could select a type of house and tax rates to insert on page 15 as an example.

Page 17, 9. Educational Attainment of Residents: Resident R. Lavoie noted that the paragraph referred to the college and asked why not include the hospital and other institutions. PB Member Ballin opined that the impact was due to the type of people attracted through contact with the college. Chair Ebel recommended revising the second sentence to read "The presence of Colby-Sawyer College and the New London Hospital, along with other factors,".

Chair Ebel opined that the Fire Department and other very satisfactory components of municipal services and New London's infrastructure should be listed as assets. It was determined that another economic asset should be added to this effect.

Resident Robert Lavoie asked if there should be any reference to the financial institutions and their health. He wondered if their presence should be listed as an asset. PB Member Ballin suggested using a broad-brush statement.

Economic Limitations

Page 17, 1. Competitive Markets: PB Member Ballin objected to the next to the last sentence, because New London already had attracted chain stores. He suggested stating that "we appreciate the smaller size of stores and businesses". Stephen Heavener questioned including "cannot compete with the larger markets". Following discussion, PB members decided that the last two sentences should be deleted.

Page 17, 2. Seasonal, not Year-Round Market: Chair Ebel recommended deleting the 3rd sentence, the reference to King Ridge in the 5th sentence, the 6th through the 9th sentences. Chair Ebel questioned the statement that the winter season market has been declining given that Ragged Mountain Resort and Mt. Sunapee Resort both offer year-round activities.

PB Member Sheerr-Gross suggested stating that the winter season is tempered by weather. PB Member Cottrill opined that there was a whole population of residents who leave for the winter. Chair Ebel suggested stating that the "winter is unpredictable". Stephen Heavener recommended leaving only the first two sentences. PB Member Sheerr-Gross said that she agreed that everything except the first two sentences should be deleted and then a statement that the winter is challenging and unpredictable should be added.

Page 18, 3. Small Labor Force: Resident Robert Lavoie asked if the people/businesses could not find appropriate employees, would that not warrant a Recommendation re the lack of employees being a problem.

Robert Bryant opined that the problem was retaining employees. He advised that Governor Lynch had appointed a statewide task force to submit a report in six months re the impact on the labor force of aging in state residency. Chair Ebel said there was no information on the impact in New London of a lack of a suitable workforce. PB Member Cook opined that wages needed to be livable wages. PB Member Ballin opined that restaurants would need to pay "career" wages. Zoning Administrator Stanley advised that some offered profit-sharing and health benefits. He opined that the problem was how to get skilled workers for jobs that are not mentally stimulating.

Chair Ebel recalled that when the Master Plan was last updated, many people from the business community, who had met in individual groups prior to meeting with the PB, came out to discuss expansion of the commercial district, and had provided input on other matters as well. She said that she looked forward to more participation in the planning process by the business community.

Resident D. J. Lavoie asked where there was a population projection and did it impact on this topic. Chair Ebel responded that there was a chapter of the Master Plan on Population and that it could be referenced here. Resident Robert Lavoie asked where New London residents worked. Mr. Heavener opined that the answer to that question would be helpful to businesses seeking to locate in New London. He opined that a number of potential employees might be working elsewhere. Resident Robert Lavoie asked how the table contributed to the text.

Stephen Heavener recommended striking the entire paragraph.

Page 18, 4. Perception as Pricey Market: PB Member Ballin opined that the residents of "the relatively poorer communities" might object to that description. He recommended striking both 3. Small Labor Force and 4. Perception as Pricey Market.

Resident R. Lavoie asked if the cost of living in New London wasn't higher than the cost of living in surrounding areas. He also asked if state-imposed taxes were not higher in New London than in surrounding towns.

PB Member Sheerr-Gross opined that the per capita income is higher in New London and that would be considered to be an asset. She described New London as a wealthy town.

SUMMARY AND VISION FOR THE NEW LONDON ECONOMY

Page 18, Paragraph 2: Stephen Heavener recommended deleting the first two sentences.

Chair Ebel opined that having a conversation with KIMCO, the owner of the New London Shopping Center would be beneficial. Zoning Administrator Stanley advised that he had had very good interaction with both Hannaford and KIMCO during the construction process. PB Member Ballin said it had been difficult to communicate with them. Chair Ebel said that she knew Town Administrator Jessie Levine had tried unsuccessfully to call them, and recommended sending KIMCO a letter from the PB advising them of the Master Plan Update process and soliciting comments. She opined that it would be irresponsible not to reach out to KIMCO during the planning process, because the shopping center was a major part of New London's economy. She asked Ken McWilliams to draft the letter to KIMCO.

Resident Lavoie alluded to a questionable future for the New London Shopping Center, and he opined that the PB needed to know what the plans were. Chair Ebel wondered if the college, the hospital and KIMCO had completed the Community Survey.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Chair Ebel advised that she had a problem with reviewing and/or revising recommendations before the results of the Community Survey are available because every recommendation in the draft seemed to reflect the results of the previous survey... Consensus of the PB was to defer consideration of the Recommendations until after the Community Survey results became available.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

- A. The MINUTES of the SEPTEMBER 23, 2008 meeting were APPROVED, as circulated
- B. Ken McWilliams called the PB's attention to the 2009 Zoning Amendment Schedule handed out at the beginning of the meeting. He advised that an additional work session would be needed in mid-December. PB members scheduled an additional Zoning Amendment Work Session on December 11, 2008 at 7:00 PM.

The **WORK SESSION** was **ADJOURNED** at **8:55 PM**.

Respectfully submitted,
Judith P. Condict, Recording Secretary
New London Planning Board

DATE APPROVED _____

CHAIRMAN _____