

Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
February 6, 2010
7:30 AM

Meeting Attendees:

Larry Ballin (Chair), Tina Helm (Selectman), Jessie Levine (Town Administrator), Peter Bianchi, Robert Lavoie, DJ Lavoie, Jack Harrod, Hardy Hasenfuss, Rick Anderson, Gary Lineberry, Peter Messer, Bob MacMichael, Noel Weinstein, Stephanie Wheeler, Joe McCarthy, Vahan Sarkisian, Karen Hoglund, Michael Doheny, Ray Ettenborough, Marilyn Kidder, Steve Landrigan, Gary Markoff, Ann Loeffler

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

He began by sharing that Town Administrator Jessie Levine had won entrance into the “40 under 40 in New Hampshire” award winners chosen by the Union Leader and Business and Industry Association.

Packets of budget information and a draft of the town warrant were passed around to each member of the committee. Chair Ballin noted that the Board of Selectmen has been working in Concord to extend the collar on the statewide property tax, which would help keep them from becoming a donor town again. He reported that the House Finance Committee voted to kill one of the bills (HB1674 to extend the collar on statewide property tax) and the other would be watered down. He also noted that Representative Randy Foose did not vote in a favorable manner to continue these bills. Chair Ballin read a petition prepared by the Selectmen that the committee was encouraged to sign, which showed their position against the donor town tax. He said that some of the testimony against the bill was from towns like Windham and Bedford because they claimed to need New London’s money to continue excellence in education. Chair Ballin said he felt it was acceptable to give money to towns such as Claremont to help with things of a necessary manner, but was not in favor of giving money to certain towns that might use it to build a new football stadium.

Chair Ballin shared that should New London become a donor town again, the amount the taxpayers would be responsible for could range from between \$.30 per \$1,000 dollars to as much as \$1 per \$1,000 dollars.

Hardy Hassenfuss brought up that the LLC tax was another thing people should be concerned with. He said that he had written an email to Representative Foose and had never heard back. He commented that those with LLCs will be hit hard.

Chair Ballin shared that Monday morning’s Selectmen’s meeting would include information sessions on single stream recycling, as well as the proposal for a cell tower near the Transfer Station. Gary Markoff asked who wanted to put in the tower. He was hoping that AT&T would be one of the subletters of the tower so that people in Town could use their iPhones and perhaps the new iPad. Currently, reception for these AT&T services is scattered. Chair Ballin suggested that it would be okay for Mr. Markoff to put pressure on the owners of the cell tower when the time came to attract subletters.

Ms. Kidder asked what the approximate income to the Town would be. Ms. Levine said that they are still in negotiations but that she did have some details to offer. The base rent for the tower would be \$1500/month. In addition, they would receive \$250/month for each additional subletter. They would be contracted into a five-year lease seven renewal options of five years each. Ms. Levine said that they added a clause that allows them to renegotiate the contract before the fourth term (20 years). Ms. Levine also noted that there was a 3% escalator factored in for each additional year. She added that the vote at Town Meeting would authorize the Board of Selectmen to negotiate the lease. The Planning Board would work with the tower company on the site details. She added that the Planning Board meetings were public and all are welcome to attend. Ms. Levine said that a representative would be coming to the Board of

Selectmen's meeting on Monday morning and would be able to answer further questions regarding the style of the tower.

Ms. Kidder said she would have a problem if they had a tower installed and then had providers subletting who offered no service to anyone in New London. She opined that if it didn't do any good to the Town's residents, she didn't think it was a good idea. She wanted to know what the benefit was to New London, aside from just income.

Ms. Levine said that the reason a tower is being discussed is because there have been complaints of service dropping off in the area around the Transfer Station. Mr. Markoff added that from an economic perspective, this was a good source of revenue. Once the tower is up, they control the rates. He opined that the negotiating value of the site can go up dramatically and can insure good revenue for a long time to come.

Ms. Levine said that they have added to the lease the requirement for free space for emergency communications. They also added a requirement for a bond so if the tower stops being used and if the tower company walks away, the Town will have the money to take it down.

Mr. Weinstein asked if the 3% escalator was included to cover for inflation and were they able to raise the rates. Ms. Levine said that they can raise the rates at the beginning of the fourth renewal term (20 years).

Mr. Markoff asked how Ms. Levine priced this for the Town. Ms. Levine said that she looked at other towns that have the same kind of arrangement. He asked how variable the numbers were. Ms. Levine said that the lowest was \$1,000/month and the highest total she saw was \$2,100 but this figure didn't break out the base and the attachments. With the base price and the attachments, they will bring in about \$2,000/month. Ms. Levine added that the lease has a 30-month option, whereby the Town will be paid by the tower company for up to 30 months while they are doing testing and surveying of the site, just to hold the option of putting a tower in that location.

Ms. Kidder said perhaps they could ask how many subletters they typically have. Mr. Markoff estimated that they would have between five and eight. Ms. Levine said they weren't trying to minimize the impact of a tower and they had thought of doing a blanket approval on the warrant to allow towers on Town property wherever the Selectmen deemed appropriate, but Chair Ballin shared that this town has a history of problems with towers and they should be sensitive towards this and go to Town Meeting one at a time.

Mr. Weinstein asked if there were any health or noise problems associated with the tower. Mr. Hasenfuss asked if they were aware of the microwave effects that are conducted by such towers. He said it could be hazardous to those working at the Transfer Station who are around the tower every day. Both Jack Harrod and Mr. Hasenfuss explained some examples of other countries having problems with microwaves and that perhaps this issue should be raised at the meeting on Monday with the representative. Ms. Levine agreed to bring up this topic at the meeting.

Mr. Sarkisian said he had a problem that the Town is going into the private sector to put up a tower. Ms. Levine said the cell tower company has to comply with all the same zoning rules and regulations regardless of where the tower is sited; in other words, the fact that the tower is on town property does not waive the site plan requirements. She explained that the cell tower company liked the Transfer Station site better than any other in the area, and if they lose this site they likely install one on Burpee Hill. Mr. Sarkisian said that about 20 years ago towers were up in metropolitan areas and now they are filling in areas where reception isn't good. He opined that this tower would not be so much for the people in Town, but more for those traveling on I-89. He also explained that he recalled the Town discouraging

towers being erected in the past but now that the Town sees it as a money-making option, they are doing it themselves. Mr. Sarkisian explained that he wanted to put a tower up several years ago and was discouraged from doing so. Ms. Levine said that this must have happened prior to the cell phone tower regulations had been passed in the Town a few years ago. She said that she does not recall denying Mr. Sarkisian a tower, and she has been here almost ten years. Mr. Sarkisian suggested talking to a private installer about details of the tower to talk about figures and details of them. Mr. Sarkisian said he would provide names and contact information of some private installers to Ms. Levine.

Mr. Harrod said he didn't understand how single stream recycling would be advantageous and asked why they wanted to do it. Chair Ballin said that it was mostly for ease of operation, to lower the handling costs of recyclables, and to serve as an incentive for people to recycle more. Ms. Levine added that more types of plastics would be accepted to recycle. Ms. Helm said that it would be more for the ease of the Townspeople not having to separate their recyclables. Ms. Levine shared that some condominium developments don't recycle because they don't have anyone to handle the separate materials. She felt that the Town is missing a portion of the available recyclable material because everyone isn't recycling.

Peter Bianchi asked what the cost for a new compactor and new equipment to handle this change would be. Ms. Levine said that they don't know the cost of this yet. Mr. Bianchi said that perhaps another building would need to be built to house this program and equipment. Ms. Levine said the compactor would not be the same size as the one that handles the trash. It would be smaller and they wouldn't need any new trailers or a new building. Mr. Bianchi asked about the commercial haulers. Ms. Levine said that for recycling, they are only handling cardboard now, so that wouldn't change. Right now they have a trash dumpster and a cardboard dumpster. If single stream is adopted, they'd have a trash dumpster and one dumpster for all recycling. Chair Ballin said that it is not mandatory in the Town to recycle and they are thinking of going towards "Pay as You Throw" to help the citizens look more closely at waste management and recycling.

Ms. Kidder asked, as a user, how the single stream program would work. Ms. Levine said that trash would go in the same as usual and that all recyclables would get tossed into the same area at the same time. She noted that they have the option to still separate glass, due to their successful glass crushing program. Ms. Kidder suggested providing (at a cost) disposable containers to put recyclable materials in for each home. Ms. Helm said they were trying to diminish the use of disposable items. Ms. Kidder agreed and thought maybe they could use the blue plastic bins that they currently use.

Mr. Weinstein asked from an environmental standpoint, how this changed the lifecycle of the garbage beyond the Town's Transfer Station. Chair Ballin said that there were some challenges of the system, for example, to keep glass shards out of the fiber of recycled paper. The paper created with shards of glass in it may not be as high quality if things weren't separated. He explained that this was a problem for the vendor to sort out. Chair Ballin said that he's had some questions about what would come of the lower grade plastics. He said that they bundle it up and send it to India or somewhere else to be recycled again. He would like to make sure there is a following of that stream to make sure it isn't be dumped into the ocean.

Mr. Weinstein asked if there was a cost benefit to single stream. Ms. Levine said there was not. She said that there was the potential for some revenue from recycling but it will not be as high as when they were separating and recycling themselves. However, there is cost avoidance; the more they recycle, they'll be taking more trips to Penacook and fewer trips to the landfill in Berlin. She said that this change wouldn't eliminate a trailer from the fleet, but that trailer would be used differently and would be used for shorter trips.

Ms. Levine said that with the combination of "Pay as You Throw" (PAYT) and single stream they would not be able to eliminate a position. Mr. Harrod opined that with PAYT it would actually require more people to work at the Transfer Station to make sure people were throwing away approved items. Ms. Levine said that at present, the attendants spend the majority of their time keeping track making sure people are recycling correctly. Once the new program is implemented, they would be able to spend less time with monitoring recycling and more time monitoring the trash disposal.

Chair Ballin said that they were trying to look for ways to decrease Transfer Station costs on the budget. If people decrease the amount of trash they create and recycle more, they will pay less.

Mr. Sarkisian said that in his experience, this sort of program yields an added expense for people to clean up trash that has been dumped illegally. Ms. Levine said that this has not been the case in New Hampshire. She has done some research of other towns and has found very little illegal dumping happening as a result of this sort of program.

Mr. Bianchi said he thought New London had a good record for recycling as a Town. He wondered why the trash/recycling programs needed to change. Ms. Levine said that voluntarily recycling has been reasonably successful but that New London does not recycle as much as other towns that use "PAYT." She opined that the amount of recycling could be better. Mr. Hassenfuss thought it would be helpful to compare those towns that have PAYT vs. towns like New London and what the difference in recycling was. Ms. Levine said that she would gather some information and make a comparison.

Ms. Loeffler asked what would happen if the Coop's single stream facility was not constructed. Ms. Levine said that she and Richard Lee (Public Works Director) had recently met with Mike Durfor of the Northeast Resource Recovery Association (NRRA), and as a result she modified the warrant article to seek permission to enter into a contract for single stream, but not necessarily with just the Coop. Ms. Levine noted that there were ways out of the contract but that getting out of it couldn't be justified just because the Town didn't like the program; it would have to be of a financial nature.

Mr. Doheny said that currently, the recycling program is frustrating to him because a lot of different kinds of plastics are not accepted. He said that he would like to recycle more but isn't able to because the Transfer Station currently doesn't accept all types of plastics.

Ms. Kidder thought it would be great to talk to a private enterprise regarding the single stream program. Ms. Levine said that "Bestway" hauls the recycling from Belmont to Connecticut. She said that they had an option of New London hauling the recycling directly to Connecticut, which would give them the best payback, or they could haul the materials to Belmont and pay or receive the going rate for "single stream." She said that there would be no long term contract in doing that. Ms. Levine said that recycling is a volatile market due to the economy, especially the overseas economy.

Ms. Levine indicated that on Wednesday, February 17 at 6 PM would be a public bond hearing for the upgraded sewer system.

Ms. Levine indicated that filings for town elections had been completed. Those running for Board of Selectmen chair were Peter Bianchi and Larry Ballin. Chair Ballin shared that there was currently no Town Moderator candidate and he asked the group to think about those they may know who would be a good fit for the position. Also, there was no one running for the Town's School Board seat.

With regards to the warrant that was handed out, Mr. Bianchi asked about the appropriations for the capital reserve fund. He said that it should show the balance as 12/31/09. Ms. Levine said that they do that as a separate handout at Town Meeting and that could not be included in the warrant article.

Mr. Harrod asked why only \$1 existed in many accounts. Ms. Levine said that the dollar counts as a place holder to keep the fund open for discussion at Town Meeting. If the line item had been zero, then Town Meeting cannot amend that item on the floor.

Ms. Loeffler asked about the petition warrant article from the Conservation Commission. Chair Ballin said that this was covered under Article 18.

Mr. Sarkisian asked about Article 4. He wanted an explanation as to why the executive expenses went from \$349,581 to \$370,017. Ms. Levine explained that this would be the first year that Zoning Administrator's full-time position would be funded for a whole year. Last year it was only full-time for part of the year.

Mr. Sarkisian also asked about the increase to cover the elections this year. It went up \$14,000 from last year. Mr. Harrod said that the costs are increased this year due to the primary, the general election, and Town Meeting. Ms. Levine said that also included a \$6,000 software upgrade for the Town Clerk related to auto registration. They are still online with the State, which used to generate renewal letters. They need to purchase their own software to be able to generate their own letters and save time.

Mr. Bianchi said that at the last Board of Selectmen's meeting they talked about the procedure for amending an article. He said that if the wish is to amend something in article 4, for example, by amending the total, does the money have to come out of the line item that was specified. Ms. Levine said that she would check on this with Cotton Cleveland.

Ms. Levine explained that the finance budget includes the finance officer, tax collector, audit (which went up by \$2,000 due to fixed assets), telephone and computer support costs, mapping, server replacement (\$8,000), and health and dental insurance increase.

Mr. Harrod asked why personnel administration came down. Ms. Levine said that raises were placed under one heading under personnel administration before, but are now allocated throughout all departments. She added that the Board of Selectmen reduced the employee tuition reimbursement from \$10,000 to \$7,000.

Mr. Sarkisian asked why the Cemeteries fund went down so much. Chair Ballin explained that it was because they had budgeted to replace the Old Main Street cemetery fence last year.

Bob Lavoie asked when they planned to collect payments for sewer users, as explained in Article 3. Ms. Levine said that it would be in 2011. She explained that it may be pushed out even further depending on when the project is funded by the USDA.

Mr. Bianchi asked if they don't get the 35% reimbursement from the federal government and they decide not to go through with the project, how that would leave the Town. He wondered if the system did or did not need to be replaced. Ms. Helm said that eventually they would be forced to upgrade it if the system fails. She said that this way, they are being proactive and if they wait until it fails they will lose control over how they can manage it. Ms. Levine said that part of the concern was making sure the article passed so that they could try and get the 35% grant. To do the project now with 35% from the federal government will cost less than doing it all themselves in a few years with no available grant funds.

Chair Ballin said that 35% was the number they negotiated with the Sunapee Sewer Commission. The engineers said if they go forward with the project, they may get as much as 45% so they may end up paying even less. Ms. Levine said that Sunapee would take out the bond and New London would pay them back. She said she wasn't positive if New London would be bonding to pay back Sunapee or the USDA directly.

Mr. Weinstein said that the *Quicklink* newsletter talked about the sewage and he had two questions. His first question was regarding two categories of people in the town: those on the Town's sewer and those people who were not. He said that there were people who should be on the Town's sewer but were not. He wanted to know where those people fell in the plan. Ms. Levine said that they were considered as not being on the Town's sewer, but perhaps that should be revisited.

Mr. Weinstein's second question was why the cost of the new system was not 100% borne by those on the sewer system. Chair Ballin felt it would be a punishing bill on the sewer users. At some point everyone in New London uses the sewer system. A functioning sewer system protects the water sheds, the quality of soils, and gives the Town the opportunity to have a vibrant commercial district. Chair Ballin said that the Town will benefit from the new sewer just as they do with milfoil protection for the lakes. He added that a functioning sewer system helps to hold property values high in the Town.

Mr. Lavoie felt that the 1/3-2/3 split in funding for the system was misleading. He claimed that sewer users would be paying eight times more than non-sewer users. He added that New London is one of the highest paying regions in New Hampshire and that the total cost of using the Town's sewer over 30 years exceeds the cost of a private sewer system.

Mr. Doheny said there is value associated with being on the sewer system. They don't have to have it inspected or maintained. He added that property values are higher for houses on the system as opposed to houses on private systems. He opined that town water and sewer are more attractive than private water and sewer systems. Mr. Doheny shared that there are towns that would put 100% of the cost on the sewer users.

Mr. Bianchi said that those hit the hardest by this sewer upgrade would be the college and the hospital. Ms. Levine said that the college would be hit hardest because they are both the Town's largest taxpayer and largest sewer user. She added that the sewer system exists, in part, because the college and hospital are present in the Town.

Mr. Sarkisian asked about one of the zoning amendments in Article 1. He wanted to know about the rationale of the language that changed the non-conforming use regulation. The current language says that if a structure is destroyed by fire or other natural disaster, it has to be rebuilt. Ms. Levine, unable to recall the exact regulations, went to retrieve a copy of the amendment to share with Mr. Sarkisian and the committee members.

Other issues in town

Mr. Doheny said it was troubling to him that no one had signed up for the Town's seat on the School Board. He wanted to know why that had happened. He wondered if there was an underlying issue such as disgust with the school board/system, or if they feel that they don't have a voice. Mr. McCarthy said that there was an opening in Wilmot that he was thinking of filling. He said that he was tired of the politics and that the whole experience was nerve wracking. He said that he had some ideas he'd like to try with the school system (such as school uniforms) but was discouraged from making any other suggestions.

Mr. Doheny said New London spent \$8 million on the school system this past year and that they should be a part of the school board. Chair Ballin said that when it came time to go to the school board meetings and debate the budget, they usually have a woeful representation from New London. He added that those who have a vested interest (teachers) pack the meetings.

Mr. Bianchi opined that the deliberative session was a waste of time. He preferred the all-day meetings of the past because it was useful to be able to amend things from beginning to end. He felt it deplorable that the Town of New London, the biggest user of the School District, can't get anyone to run for the seat.

Mr. Doheny said that the budget has gone from \$22 million to \$34 million and that 25% of that is paid by New London. He claimed that dozens of kids are going to private schools and are not graduating from Kearsarge Regional High School. He noted that Mark Christensen wasn't running again this year.

Chair Ballin said that there had been talk in the past of getting out of the district and inviting others to join, but it would be very expensive to get out, due to the fact that the Town is still obligated to pay a share of the building debt obligation. Chair Ballin said that Sunapee is very happy being a single town school district and has no interest in having an alignment with any other towns. He said that perhaps they could try and find someone for a write-in campaign. Ms. Kidder suggested putting something in the Kearsarge Shopper to let people know that there was an open seat.

Mr. Sarkisian asked about Article 5 and why it went up to \$60,000. Ms. Levine said that it is because the State closed the courthouse and now officers have to go to Newport; the increase covers overtime pay and travel costs. He asked about the Fire Department increases. Ms. Levine said that this increase accounts for a couple of pieces of equipment, including a stabilizing bar for rollovers and the upgrading of the thermal image camera. The rest are health insurance and retirement system increases, which hit Police and Fire Departments the hardest. Chair Ballin opined that Chief Lyon did a great job justifying his budget.

Mr. Sarkisian asked if the retirement system funding was mandated by the State. Ms. Levine said that to entice the towns to join the retirement system, the State had originally agreed to pay 35% of the police and firefighters' retirement costs. They have since decreased their participation to 30% for fiscal year 2010 and only 25% in fiscal year 2011. Now the Town is locked in to these programs and towns are gathering to sue the State over the unfunded mandate.

Mr. Sarkisian asked that if they can't find someone in the community to represent New London on the School Board, could the Board of Selectmen find a way to pay someone to represent the Town. He said that such a thing wasn't uncommon. Chair Ballin said that it was an interesting concept but he wasn't sure how it would work legally. This would be a paid representative going into the room with other volunteers and another representative from New London who was not being paid. Chair Ballin said they should spread the word that the seat is vacant.

Ms. Helm thought they should run an ad in the Shopper for the next 3 weeks.

Karen Hوجلund said she read some articles about a skateboard park and its possible location behind the Information Booth. She wanted to know how this was progressing and if the Board of Selectmen had given permission to use the space. Chair Ballin said that the Board of Selectmen met with a number of interested families regarding a skateboard park who sought permission to investigate the possibility of using the Little Common. The Board of Selectmen gave them permission to investigate the use of the space, but not explicit permission to use it. Chair Ballin said that they still need to come up with a plan.

Mr. Doheny, who is currently on the skateboard park committee, explained that Little Common seemed to be a good spot for their vision and that they had planned to take the matter to Town Meeting. He shared that after conversations with some people, this was found to not be the best spot and he has asked it to be removed from the warrant. Mr. Doheny explained that it would not be just a skateboard park, but rather a multi-use park with an open air amphitheatre, pergolas and picnic tables. Ms. Hoglund asked how much space the park would require. Mr. Doheny said they would need about 10,000 square feet.

Mr. Doheny said that they need to find someplace that is highly visible so it would be easy to monitor. Mr. Sarkisian asked about the space where the current ice skating rink is. Ms. Levine said that restrictions were present in the deed for that parcel of land, to only use for an ice skating park and there were to be no structures erected. Ms. Helm said that behind the former middle school would be best spot for the park. Chair Ballin said that the School Board doesn't know what they want to do with that space yet, so it is uncertain that the space behind the former school would work. Ms. Levine shared that the current idea is to create a "Kearsarge Learning Center" with some technical programs, adult education, and the High School's culinary arts program in the space. However, nothing has been finalized yet.

Bob MacMichael said that he was glad to see the Town return to having an annual potluck before Town Meeting. He was disappointed that they didn't have it last year. Ms. Levine said that last year they couldn't use the middle school cafeteria because of the closing of the school. This year they will have it in the elementary school cafeteria.

Mr. MacMichael said that he took his hat off to anyone who would go forth and take on the job of the New London representative to the School Board. He said it was a very difficult job.

Ms. Helm reminded those on the committee to call Linda Jackman at the Town Office to reserve their space for the potluck.

Mr. Messer said that someone had mentioned Gary Markoff (committee member who left the meeting early) as a good choice for the school board seat. Many on the committee felt he would be a good candidate for the position.

Chair Ballin ADJOURNED THE MEETING at 9:03 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London