



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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BOARD OF SELECTMEN CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING MEETING MINUTES

Whipple Memorial Town Hall

July 8, 2019

6:00 PM

SELECTMEN PRESENT:

Nancy Rollins, Chairman
Janet Kidder, Selectman
John Cannon, Selectman

CONSERVATION COMMISSION:

Bob Brown, Chairman
Ruth White, Member
Mark Vernon, Member
Maggie Ford, Member
Joseph Kubit, Planning Board Rep.

ALSO PRESENT:

Kim Hallquist, Town Administrator; Bob Harrington, Public Works Director; Ed Andersen, Police Chief, Jay Lyon, Fire Chief; Leigh Bosse, *The Messenger*

New London residents: Donald & Susan Cox, Gerry Gold, John Wilson, Marcia Goulart, Steve Ensign, David Payne, Bev Payne, Doug Lyon, Vahan Sarkisian, Joe Cardillo, Mike Gelcius, Jennifer Vitiello, George Widmer, Sue Andrews, Edward Ordman, Heidi Tobin, Betsy Tine, George Green, Jennifer Estern, Thomas and Nancy Donnelly, Wes Nichols, Greg Berger

Selectman Rollins called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Purchase of Conservation Land: Map 098-014

Bob Brown, Chair of the Conservation Commission stated the Conservation Commission would like to discuss a project nicknamed Low Plain 200. This is parcel 098-014 and is 30.4 acres of undeveloped land; with frontage on Route 11 and Shaker Street.

This parcel has been on the desirable lands list for a long time and is now available for purchase. It is mostly forest land, with some wetlands and is contiguous with the 169 acres known as Low Plain. The Low Plain area offers walking, hiking, sightseeing, birding and has a one-mile long hiking trail. It is town owned land that is managed by the Conservation Commission and was recently certified as a Tree Farm. The present Low Plain is under easement by New Hampshire Fish and Game.

The 30-acre parcel that is the subject of the public hearing would be a perfect addition to Low Plain and would bring the total area to approximately 200 acres. In addition, these lands are an important part of the Pleasant Lake watershed. This preserved land will also help protect the town gateways.

This 30-acre parcel is assessed at \$268,000 and is being offered at \$225,000 which is 16% below the assessed value. Mr. Brown noted that the Conservation Commission feels this to be a fair price. The seller is unable to wait until the March 2020 meeting and would like to move on this within 30 days. The

Commission feels it would be risky to wait and thus would like to use the Mary Haddad fund to purchase this land now.

Selectman Kidder stated that Mary Haddad left approximately \$900,000 to the Town of New London in her will. The purpose of this bequest is for the preservation and maintenance of open land, park land, town forest and trails or paths for the benefit of citizens of New London. Some of this money was used to purchase Clark Lookout so there is approximately \$600,000 remaining in this trust.

Selectman Kidder feels Mary Haddad would very much be in favor of the purchase of the parcel in question as Mary liked to hike and walk the trails in town; Low Plain is an area she cared a great deal about and adding on to this property is definitely within the spirit of what Mary had in mind. Selectman Kidder would urge everyone to approve this and the Conservation Commission, the Recreation Commission and the Board of Selectmen are all in favor of this. These are the three groups that need to weigh in on any potential purchase using this fund.

Chair Brown also added that a private fundraising effort is in process and he is pleased to announce that as of right now, they have received pledges that total \$25,000. This will help cover incidental expenses related to the land purchase. They will not be using New London taxpayer dollars in this acquisition.

Vahan Sarkisian asked if the town would remain the owner of this property. Chair Brown stated yes. Mr. Sarkisian asked if there was any intention of turning it over to Ausbon Sargent at Town Meeting in March. Chair Brown responded probably not since the existing Low Plain is under New Hampshire Fish and Game Conservation Easement. It would be more logical to speak with them first rather than create a whole new easement. This property would be open to the public for recreational use.

Bev Payne loves the Low Plain property. She stated it is a gorgeous piece of land and we should do whatever we can to protect it. She is in favor of buying this land.

George Widmer asked if an independent appraisal had been done on the property. Chair Brown stated no, the valuation of \$268,000 came from the Tri-Town Assessors; he feels it is accurate and fair. Mr. Widmer stated that the assessor doesn't appraise the property, taking into consideration many of the features and development potential of the parcel, and since this property is in current use, the assessed value has no relation to taxes so an independent appraisal is a good idea. He thinks Mary Haddad would want us to use her money wisely. He isn't questioning whether to buy the property or not but wonders if this is a fair price. Mr. Widmer also commented that there are wetlands and steep slopes on the property which can affect value in a negative way. He understands wanting to move quickly but presumably they don't have any other offers yet. He would hope the Selectmen would want to get an appraisal. Mr. Widmer stated there are a lot of people here tonight who are in favor of purchasing this at any price but there are a lot of townspeople that aren't here to vote and stressed that there is no harm in getting an appraisal. A member of the audience took exception to the fact that a statement was made that most people here had a preconceived idea of purchasing this property. Mr. Widmer apologized and stated he was referring to the speakers and that they were overwhelmingly in favor of it.

Sue Andrews stated she was on the Conservation Commission back when the first Low Plain property was acquired and she pointed out that this 30-acre property has been on the town's wish list for a long time and it was considered the next logical step to acquire it. Now that the family is finally interested in selling it and at a lower price than the assessed value speaks to the fact that the price is fair. It is difficult to get an appraisal quickly.

Vahan Sarkisian feels it is a fair deal and the town should buy it.

Heidi Tobin also agrees it is a fair deal. She knew Mary Haddad and believes she would give the green light to move forward. It is a fair price and a great way to give back to the community.

Joe Cardillo suggested we could make an offer contingent on getting an appraisal done. Mr. Widmer was in favor of this as well.

Doug Lyon stated he was a former chairman of Ausbon Sargent Land Trust. He noted that the issue is about risk. If the purchase is delayed it could be sold to someone else. Hope is not a strategy. This has been on the Conservation Commission's list for a long time and is an important piece of land for many reasons. Low Plain is a wonderful piece of property and is used by a lot of people. He doesn't think we should take the risk of losing it and should move forward. The price is fair and well below the assessed value. The choice is between securing this land forever or potentially losing it.

John Walking lives on Pleasant Street and stated that there is quite a slope that goes down into Low Plain. There is risk involved there because that slope provides the water to the brook that feeds into Low Plain and Pleasant Lake. It is vital to the watershed.

Wes Nichols is a resident of Shaker Street. He asked if the parcel being discussed tonight is a buildable lot. Joe Kubit, Planning Board representative to the Conservation Commission, replied it is zoned R2. Mr. Widmer noted that he was under the impression that the parcel was in the ARR Zone; Mr. Kubit disagreed.¹

The Board of Selectmen and Conservation Commission confirmed that the parcel would be purchased using the Mary Haddad funds.

The public hearing on the purchase of land abutting Low Plain, Map 098-014 by the Conservation Commission in the name of the town, was closed.

2. Parking on Main Street, Pressey Court, Sawyer Lane, Everett Park

Chair Rollins stated the purpose of this public hearing is primarily to discuss parking around the Barn Playhouse; but will also include setting new lines for parking on Main Street. She noted they have received several emails regarding these issues including two recent ones from Ed Corbin and Donna Sparks.

Police Chief Ed Anderson stated they get a lot of complaints from residents about parking around the Barn Playhouse. People park on both sides of the road, facing the wrong way, on corners and there are times when a fire truck cannot get through because parked cars leave the road too narrow to pass. This becomes a safety issue that impacts police, ambulance and fire departments. Chief Andersen recommended having the allowed parking be on the side where cars are pointed in the direction to exit the street; so they turn around upon entering, not when they exit later in the evening.

Fire Chief Jay Lyon stated that the Fire Department is not against parking and the Barn Playhouse and area businesses are important to the viability of New London. The department's concern is not being able to get to their customers and sometimes it isn't possible. Currently there aren't delineated lines so the parking has been chaotic. It's not an effort to minimize access to businesses but it's an effort to make sure people are as safe as possible.

Bob Harrington, Director of Public Works agrees with both Chief Andersen and Chief Lyon. It all boils down to safety.

¹ After the meeting, it was determined that the property in question is located in the ARR Zone, not the R2 Zone as stated.

Mr. Harrington addressed crosswalks on Main Street and noted that the state will be painting them soon. The state has decided to eliminate the one across from the Fire Department due to an issue with tip downs and a telephone pole.

After discussion with the Police and Fire Chief, they recommended allowing parking on the right-hand side for Pressey Court and Sawyer Lane with no parking on the left hand side. There will be permanent signage placed so people know where to park. The corners would remain open so the view isn't blocked when trying to pull out.

Steve Ensign suggested having people turn around and park in the direction they would be going when they leave. This would mean parking on the left. He stated they are trying to find a permanent solution to a temporary problem. He suggested having parking signage from June to September only. There isn't a need to restrict parking year-round. Bob Harrington stated he isn't opposed to posting seasonal signs.

John Cannon wants no parking signs posted near the corners near the intersection of both sides of the street so emergency vehicles have room and people can see when they are pulling out.

Joe Kubit asked if once signs are posted for no parking is there plans to enforce this. Police Chief Ed Anderson stated yes. The parking tickets are \$25.00.

Greg Berger, Spring Ledge Farm, is concerned about parking spaces going away and having more people parking in the Spring Ledge parking lot, noting that he is happy to allow the use of his lot but there have been times cars make it difficult for him to get to his home. He asked if there have been any thoughts about a long-term solution. Mr. Berger stressed that he feels that the Barn Playhouse is an important part of the town and that making provision for adequate parking is important. Chief Lyon stated they've talked about having a map to hand out to Barn Playhouse patrons that details where parking is allowed. They've also discussed talking with the SAU. It's a matter of educating the patrons.

Chair Rollins asked if there was any way that volunteers could direct people to keep things orderly. There was agreement that this was a good idea. Cones and horses could also be placed in areas that absolutely need to stay clear. Also, at the end of the show, volunteers could help people get out and this would help with the flow. Handicap parking was also addressed.

Everett Park – the recommendation for Everett Park is to park closest to the barn (the odd numbered side of the street) which is on the North side.

Marcia Goulart lives on the corner of Williams and Main Street. She thanked the town for posting permanent no parking signs and stated it has helped. She asked if people supposed to park right up to the sign. Chief Anderson stated yes, right up to the sign. Her suggestion then is that there is no parking at all there. She's noticed that you still cannot see if you are taking a left onto Main Street as large cars and SUV's block the view. She's worried that there will be accidents as a result.

Vahan Sarkisian commented on the no parking signs that are posted opposite of Dunkin Donuts. He asked about the sidewalks that jut out into the roadway. Is that due to property lines? If not, maybe it could be pushed back to allow more parking. Chair Rollins would guess property lines are the reason. Selectman Kidder noted that Main Street is a state road so it is controlled by the state and not the town. She noted that the no parking in that area may be due to the close proximity to the Fire Station.

It was noted that the striping on Main Street will be done soon by the state, and then the town will stripe the parking spaces. There will be some changes to keep fire hydrants open and to comply with regulations on open spaces before and after sidewalks, for pedestrian safety.

Mike Morgan, owner of Blue Loon Bakery, asked if it would be possible to put the crosswalk back in from the Fire Station to the sidewalk in front of the bakery, that has been eliminated by the state. He pointed out that it is an important cross section and there are a lot of people going back and forth so is a safety concern. Mr. Harrington explained that the state eliminated it due to the telephone pole and conduits in the area. Chair Rollins asked Kim Hallquist and Bob Harrington to work with Mike Morgan to look at what other options there might be.

The Selectmen have agreed to try the parking plan for Everett Park, Pressey Court and Sawyer Lane for a year and revisit it next year; if it works well the Selectmen will make it permanent.

IT WAS MOVED (Janet Kidder) AND SECONDED (John Cannon) to adjourn. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 7:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Trina Dawson

Recording Secretary
Town of New London