



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES Discussion of the 1941 Building October 5, 2013

PRESENT:

Tina Helm, Chair
Peter Bianchi, Selectman
Janet Kidder, Selectman
Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer

ALSO PRESENT:

Tom DeMille, Sue Little, Hardy Hasenfuss, Howard Hoke, Barbara Brown, Carol Foss, Don & Liz Klingler, Rick & Margaret Anderson, Pat Blanchard, Jim Wheeler, Julie & Peter Machen, Pete Hoglund, Sue Greenbaum, Bud Dick, Ace Eaton, Mark Kaplan, John Goodlin, Kevin Tarleton, Dan Wolf, Peggy Prew, Laura Lorio, Will Kidder, Marilyn Kidder, Sue Clough, Winsor Chase, Barbara Chase, Celeste Cook, Carolyn Fraley, Hank Otto, Archie Mountain, Tom Little, Bruce Hudson, Joe Cardillo, William Ross, Michael Wood, Lisa Ensign Wood, Noel Weinstein, Kim Bonin, Marie Rossachacj, Phyllis Piotrow, Donald Bent, David Webster, Vahan Sarkisian, Merry Armentrout, Casey Buiso, Dave Kidder, Cicely Markoff, Bill Zimmerman

Chair Helm called the meeting to order at 7:35am. She explained that the Selectmen had appointed a committee to study the public/private partnership possibilities that would enable the 1941 Building to become a useful part of the community in the form of a community center. The committee has since disbanded as a Town-appointed group and has re-formed under 501(c)(3) status.

Dave Kidder was given the floor to begin the presentation. He recognized committee members who were present: Cicely Markoff, Bill Zimmerman, Casey Buiso, Mark Kaplan, and Ace Eaton. Mr. Kidder said working with the Town and the public/private idea works and feels it will serve the needs of the community well. They are all interested in making the town a better place. With the loss of King Ridge, the Middle School and NORSK, they have lost revenue in town. They see the community building as a focal point in the town and they wanted community input on the project.

Mr. Kidder explained they were working on the first phase at this point, which includes the cafeteria through to the first 1941 Building wall. The actual 1941 Building will be addressed in Phase 3 of the project, once the building has been sprinkled. \$100,000 would be needed to replace the roof over the kitchen/cafe area and \$125,000 for other renovations including handicapped access to the rear of the building.

Mr. Kidder said the idea is to bring the Recreation Director into the building to direct the whole facility. The private sector would provide him with secretarial help, back-up, etc. Phase 2 would involve creating storage area for the Recreation equipment he has or needs. Mr. Kidder noted the sprinkling of a portion of the building still needs to be done. They would like to include an elevator as well.

Mr. Kidder said he would be happy to give some tours of the building on Saturday mornings to those interested. He sees this project as an investment in the community as it would bring different groups

together. It would be a regionally used building and all would be welcome. Mr. Kidder noted the positive cooperation between the School Board and the committee and gave the floor to Casey Biuso to discuss programming at the community center.

Ms. Buiso said a year ago that weekend the committee met to start discussing the possibilities of converting the building into a community center. The Town voted at the May Town Meeting to keep the building off the market. They have been working on an engineering plan to find out how the center could be sustainable and not a burden on the community, as well as how to make it an uplifting attribute to the community. They want public input to find out how others would like to use the space and how they feel it would fit within the community.

Ace Eaton said their group is a private group and is expecting to raise the funds for all the renovations needed in the building. They will only work with the town on ongoing operations. If they can't raise the money to renovate the property, they won't ask the Town for any money for ongoing operations.

Ms. Buiso said while the Town holds the lease, the 1941 Community Center Group will be raising funds by bringing in larger foundations that will benefit the town. They want to make sure the building and the groups using the building stay healthy.

With regards to programming, Ms. Buiso explained that the Community Center Group won't be offering or running any programs. They are merely space developers and are addressing the need for space in the town. It is currently a struggle to find space in the town to meet where there is sufficient room, adequate bathrooms, and parking. At some point they'd like to have an intimate stage with great mechanics to offer a place for performing arts groups to come. Eventually they'd like to work on a central calendaring or scheduling system to centralize all the programming which would help the groups that will come in and work with them. This will add more people taking classes, more income and more fundraising. The building committee feels that this would help the citizens get better connected, help groups to find more volunteers, and help more families and people to come to the town. People will recognize the possibilities of lifetime programming for all ages. Ms. Buiso said they are still trying to make this work and make it the right project. They want to open the cafeteria first to address the needs for space in the town.

Joe Cardillo said there would be a request for \$75,000 going forward to be considered by the Town. He asked if the group could speak to the dollar amount needed for each phase. He also wondered where they were at with the private piece with regards to initial capital expenditures.

Ms. Buiso said \$125,000 - \$150,000 will be needed, not including the roof expenses. Basic operations asked of the town include heat and lights. All large renovations would be privately fundraised. They have about 3-5 years before they have to replace the roof. 2nd phase numbers are still being figured out. They have seed money to work on this and are working with larger foundations that will offer larger donations.

Ms. Markoff wanted to give confidence that the large numbers will be privately raised but was not at liberty to mention any names. Phase 1-D(?) will be paid for solely by private monies.

Ms. Buiso said they are still in negotiations for a long-term lease (for example, 55 years). They will have some safety nets built into the lease to insure the Town can get out of the deal should it not work out. She was not sure the price of the lease per year, but hoped it would be \$1/year. Mr. Kidder commented that in the past, several leases have been put together and they have all been \$1/year.

Don Bent was uneasy that the district owned the building and the Town was leasing it from them. Mr. Kidder said this was being discussed but felt it was more advantageous to the Town at this time to work

within a lease. Mr. Bent suggested that it might not be wise to advertise a benefit of the community center as its potential to attract more people to the town; many of those who live in town don't want more people coming in! Ms. Buiso said this would be a healthy increase in the community and would be seen as a positive thing.

Tom Little said he went to the 1941 Building as a student and was interested in the project. He was concerned with the other end of the property (SAU) as they had put a lot of money into the part of the building they understood was a "throw-away" building when it was a middle school. They have a 10-year lease with a tenant there now, as well as the SAU being housed there. He wondered if the plan they are considering was similar to what the Outing Club is doing with regards to programming. Ms. Buiso said this should be seen as more of a partnership. They don't want to compete with the Outing Club and the community center will be there to create partnerships.

Bill Ross wondered if the \$75,000 included personnel or staff salaries. It was noted that it did not. Mr. Ross pointed out that Phase 2 was three and a half times the size of Phase 1 and wondered if the cost for heat and electricity for this area be much more than the \$75,000 they will be asking of the Town for just Phase 1? Mr. Kidder said the \$75,000 is what the district is asking to pay for heat and electricity for the whole building. Ms. Buiso said they are working on opening up the building little by little to insure it fits into the community.

Mr. Eaton said those using the space will contribute financially to do so. This is how they will help minimize the cost of operations to the Town.

Pat Blanchard wondered what groups had expressed interest in using space in the community center. Ms. Buiso said that Adventures In Learning (AIL), Center for the Arts, and others have expressed interest. She added that there is a real need for space for small and large groups, alike.

Laura Lorio said the Recreation Department could really use more space. Scott Blewitt, the new Recreation Director, can offer one class at a time right now because of space constraints. He could do much more with additional space.

It was asked if the college had been approached with regards to using the space. Ms. Buiso said they have to some extent. She felt there was a lot of opportunity with the college and for the college students to work within the programs to be offered at the center.

Tom DeMille from the Barn Playhouse said they are definitely interested in using the space. Their junior program has grown and they don't have room to do what they want to do with them. They have camps in the summer and winter and they also need rehearsal space for all groups. They are putting together a long-term/short-term needs assessment on what it is they are looking for.

Vahan Sarkisian preferred the Town owned the building but if not possible, thought a 99 year lease would be better than one for 55 years. He would prefer the handicapped access be located at the front of the building. Ms. Buiso said they will offer handicapped access in the front and the back but right now their handicapped parking is in the back. This is all part of the negotiations. They will need to deal with traffic patterns, which will include working with/around small children and school busses. Mr. Kidder showed the layout of the building and noted that at some point, they will actually have three handicapped accesses.

Mr. Sarkisian wondered if the Recreation Director would get an increase in salary if/when he moves into the building. Ms. Buiso said this will be up to the Town and their negotiations with the Recreation

Director. Mr. Sarkisian wondered why it was taking so long to negotiate the lease. Ms. Biuso said there was a lot of baggage with this project when they took it on. They had to clear this all away and start over which meant a new engineering report. Kim Hallquist (Town Administrator) is running the negotiations. It was noted that this is the first time the Town has been involved in any lease negotiations for the building.

Mr. Kidder said the private/public partnership is a new concept for the Town and felt that Ms. Hallquist was a good negotiator. He felt whatever came out of it would be workable.

Hardy Hasenfuss, representing COA, said they are looking at their space needs for the future. They have some constraints in their building (no elevator) so can only use the downstairs rooms for meetings. There is not much of a possibility to expand their current space. They would like to offer lunches as part of their programming but are not able to do so at this time. They can't come back with their definite needs in the near future, but feels a center like this close by to their own space will provide opportunities for them.

Ms. Cook saw the space being used for meals for homeless, low-income people. A group of people could get together once/week or once/month. She referenced the daily meals offered by the LISTEN center, which are well-attended. Ms. Biuso agreed and felt there were great opportunities available to form partnerships with groups like LISTEN, the United Way, and the college.

Mr. Bent said this was initially a multi-community effort but was hearing it to be more for the Town of New London. Ms. Biuso said they are naming it the New London Community Center because it is in New London but the doors are open for any groups who want to come in and use the space.

Mr. Hoke asked if when the cafeteria was open for use, would the rest of the 1941 Building be open for limited use. Ms. Biuso said this was not a possibility as it wasn't yet sprinkled. Mr. Hoke said he thought the possibility of having somewhere to offer a meal in the community would be great. He noted the Masons, who he knew would like to use the space instead of their tiny one. He added that when major capital improvements are done, there is a sharing of expense between the lease-holders and the leasing entity. If there isn't a shared partnership and there isn't a goal to purchase the building, that wouldn't be typical.

Ms. Machen noted that at this point, AIL does need space but it had not come to their board or been discussed about the use of a community center. She indicated that not everyone knew about this opportunity yet.

Ms. Piotrow wondered about the land surrounding the building. Ms. Biuso said this was not included in the lease. Mr. Kidder said the playing fields are leased to the Outing Club until 2018. Mr. Wolf said in prior discussions of leases, they were stopped because benchmarks were not met. The land was not included with the building but there were easements and use rights for the parking and access. The sprinkler system throughout the cafeteria belongs to the district so at this point it needs to be a lease. The school district felt that a lease should be used because, should they ever need the building again for a school, they could do so. He offered that it was true that the school was not suitable to be used as such due to regulations, but they have refurbished the building and have found a way to make it useful.

Mr. Cardillo said he had no doubt that there may be some needs for space in the community. He understood that the school district would want to know that this is a viable effort before they put a lease in place. He thought they needed to know total costs for all the phases and going forward. He said they would need financial information sooner than later before they agree to move forward as a town. Ms. Biuso said they are still trying to find the best model that will fit the town. When they come to the town in December they will disclose everything to them and will have the financials ready. If they reach

December and there isn't enough money or interest, they won't even bother presenting any information. All the meetings they will present at are public and everyone is welcome to attend.

Chair Helm said this information would be presented at a regular Selectmen's meeting, which is always a public forum.

Mr. Eaton said since May, the private group has raised the funds to do the engineering (over \$12,000), and are working on getting the rest in place. They need input from everyone regarding the other uses for the building.

Ms. Lorio said as a member of Recreation Commission and a mother of children she is happy to see this project moving forward.

Bud Dick shared that Monday through Friday at 8am a box truck comes to Hannaford to pick up outdated products. This is a program started by the Rotary. This has grown to a corporate-wide donation program by Hannaford and extends to meat, produce, and deli. They have collected over 100 tons of food between three stores, which has gone to five different food pantries. Mr. Dick said he has been involved in the restoration of old buildings in the past and in public/private partnerships in small towns. He suggested one kind of sprinkling that uses plastic piping and is less expensive. He noted that there are three experienced grant writers in the area and that grants are out there to help with these renovations. Ms. Markoff said they have looked into this and did not find many sizeable grants. She would keep this funding source in mind during her fundraising efforts.

Ms. Biuso said there were great minds in the community and felt they could make great things happen in their town together.

Mr. Hoke said the upgrade of the facility to accommodate use will be a private investment. If donors want to give to have the facility upgraded to be useful, it's private, not public. The rent, heat and electricity are \$75,000. Whatever the private part decides is the budget to upgrade is private. They shouldn't get hung up on this. The committee is a group of developers who have been doing this a long time and know how the numbers work.

Ms. Cook said as community members, the committee should be applauded for the work they are doing. The meeting attendees applauded. Ms. Biuso thanked the attendees for their support.

The meeting adjourned at 8:46am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London