



# TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

375 MAIN STREET • NEW LONDON, NH 03257 • WWW.NL-NH.COM

**CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**and**  
*Forum on the 1941 New London Central School Building*  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**October 6, 2012**

**PRESENT:**

Peter Bianchi, Chair  
Tina Helm, Selectman  
Janet Kidder, Selectman  
Kimberly Hallquist, Town Administrator  
Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer

**ALSO PRESENT:** There were approximately 53 attendees, including: Bob MacMichael, Howard Hoke, Rob Prohl, Gusta Teach, Sue Little, Thelma Kaplan, Mark Kaplan, Bruce Hudson, Renate Kannler, Casey Biuso, Rip Cross, Karen Ebel, Tom Little, Gary Markoff, Steve Theroux, Peg Theroux, Marilyn Kidder, Will Kidder, Paul Bradicich, John Kiernan Jr., John Goudlin, Cicely Markoff, Dr. Catherine Todd, Bud Dick, David Kidder, Fred Downey, Austin Eaton, Peggy Prew, Hoyt Chapin, Diana Piotrow, Jim Wheeler, Joe Cardillo, R. Wendell Phillips, Noel Weinstein, Tom DeMille, William Ross, Bill Helm, Phyllis Piotrow, Carolyn Lockhart, Beth Swanson, Jen Tockman, Celeste Cook, David Cook, Ann Loeffler, Liz Klingler, Donn Klingler, Peter Hoglund, Jack Sheehan, Pat Sheehan, Vahan Sarkisian, David Webster, Gerry Gold, Hardy Hasenfuss, Terry Bingham, Sue Clough, Rick Anderson

Chair Bianchi opened the meeting at 7:31am. He welcomed the public to the meeting and said they were gathered to receive input about the fate of the 1941 building, formerly the New London Central School. He explained that Dan Wolf, Chair of the School Board, came to the Board of Selectmen about a month ago and informed them that the School Board sent out an RFP (request for proposal) to find out if there is interest in the use of the building that might encourage the development of the currently vacant building, by sale or lease. It is an expense to the school district to keep the building maintained throughout the winter. Chair Bianchi pointed out that there were photographs around the hall showing the building in question, as well as the tax map of the property.

Since 1966, any school building or land that was given to the school district and was no longer needed by the school district could be sold back to the towns. Chair Bianchi found that in 1981, Newbury closed their building and at the very next school meeting an article came forward to sell the building back to Newbury for \$1. The 1941 building, cafeteria, the SAU, the areas leased to the Outing Club, and the fields in the back are owned by the school district. The RFP went out for the 1941 building only but Mr. Wolf said that the school board was open to any valid suggestions for the use of the building, including the cafeteria.

Chair Bianchi noted that they wanted varied input and short remarks from the attendees so as many people as possible could speak. He suggested that people would be permitted to speak only once until all others who wished to speak had done so.

Mr. Hoke asked what happened to the idea of a warrant article that said when a school is closed, they would offer the property back to the town for \$1? He asked if it is the school district's decision to allow the Town to buy the property back for \$1 and then the Town could decide what to do with it? The town is now trying to make a detailed proposal about a property they don't own. Chair Bianchi said that Mr. Wolf told them that it does not seem that the school district is interested in selling the property. They want to lease it to keep their options open should the population expand so much that they need it for a school again.

Terry Bingham said that in the *Intertown Record* there were some conditions noted for whoever ended up with the building. One condition was that they had to occupy the space within a year. Chair Bianchi said the RFP indicated that for the proposal to be considered, they had to go on a mandatory tour of the building and that proposals had to be in by October 26<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Wolf understood that the Town of New London has no money right now but said that the school board is willing to be flexible to work with people who have a proposal. They want to get this property off their roll because it is an expense to the school district. Ms. Bingham said if they decide to lease the building, would the Town take over its maintenance? Chair Bianchi said that this is why they are there; to discuss these details. It is a \$50,000 yearly expense to maintain the building.

Gary Markoff, New London Representative to the School Board said that there is an ongoing maintenance issue with the building and if someone purchased it for \$1 and didn't move into it immediately, it would deteriorate. It is already doing so after sitting for as long as it has. Mr. Markoff felt the building was an asset to the town and to the school and it doesn't speak well to either of them if it falls to disarray. They are looking to remove the financial obligation of that asset off of their books and at the same time they would prefer that the Town take it, but this would not be required. They want the Town to have whatever room they need but there are some other legitimate players in this scenario. The School Board wants to get the process going.

Noel Weinstein asked what the position of the Board of Selectmen was. Chair Bianchi said that he thought the Town should have control of the building for the use of various services in town. He didn't know if it should be public or private or if the Town would appropriate money to do this.

Ms. Helm concurred with Chair Bianchi. She would like to keep the building in town. Now that the old SAU building has been taken down, she thought it was evident that the 1941 building was a wonderful, old building. She felt it would be a shame to have it torn down and a parking lot put there instead. Ms. Helm wanted everyone to dream about what they could see for the future of the building. They all needed to understand that there would be a financial responsibility to the town if they gained ownership of it. She believed that if the Town doesn't make some sort of financial commitment to the project, it wouldn't move forward. She would like to move toward getting some sort of a warrant article together for the May Town Meeting so they could get a sense of how many taxpayers would want to proceed. She hoped to have some rough numbers together before that time.

Ms. Kidder said she was in favor of keeping the building within the New London community and felt that the Town would have to step up to the plate, financially. They could get some individuals and companies to donate towards the cause, but the Town has to be willing to increase the tax rate to do this.

Dave Kidder said that one of the problems with buying the building is that unless they make a break in it somewhere, it would be impossible to buy just the 1941 portion. He thought they should consider that over the last 40-50 years they lost King Ridge, the High School, the Middle School, and the NORSK Ski Area. These are all things that brought people to New London and created economic activity. The hospital and college have expressed interest in the building but the Town needs to think about this as an

investment in their community and not as an expenditure of tax dollars. They need more people to come into town to spend their money.

Bud Dick said he and his wife have owned restaurants in town and belong to several non-profits within New London. In his past life he purchased (among others) an abandoned property at Sugarloaf and revitalized it. He has been working with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to upgrade and re-purpose buildings similar to the 1941 building. He thought they should look at it going forward; it is an amazing structure. The building is a well-constructed piece of real estate. He noted that Mr. Kidder had mentioned the lost opportunities within town and pointed out that everything he mentioned was part of tourism, which is the nation's largest industry. To not capitalize on that property would be a crime.

Steve Theroux thought it critical that they retain the building and sustain the viability of it. They are in a time of historically low interest rates. Bonding would be inside a \$50,000 annual cost to the town.

Dave Cook said he represented the Kearsarge Community Band who is interested in the possibility of being users of the 1941 property. He would like to explore if the improvements of the building might be of interest to his organization. They are a customer and would like to be involved in the planning for the building. The discussion he heard that morning sounded suspiciously like something the Master Plan had dealt with. He wondered if the Master Plan discussed this property at all. Ms. Kidder said that it did not, as the Middle School was still in operation when the last Master Plan was created. Mr. Cook thought this was an ideal position where master planning should be involved.

Vahan Sarkisian said that as a tax payer he felt it was imperative that the town own the property. He didn't want to lease it unless it was a 200-300 year lease. Filling the building with organizations wouldn't be a problem as there is a need in town for this kind of space.

Joe Cardillo said it would be the school board's decision who they decide to work with. Nothing compels them to do anything for \$1. He was a selectman in Newbury when they acquired the building the school had been housed in. He noted that there was not a lot of competition for it at the time. He thought they should own the whole parcel in question and not lease all or part of it. New London could then do something like condos, or lease back portions of it for school district needs. They could continue the lease with the Outing Club and move forward. If they had to, they could maintain it for a while and not move in immediately. They could mothball it for a year and save on the heat until they decide what group to put in there. Or the town could bond some money and move forward. He didn't think they should lease it. He said if there was a million dollar offer in front of the school district, they would be obligated to look at it.

Mark Kaplan said that there had been no negative remarks expressed that morning; people want the building. The only possible negative is if they are prepared to spend \$50,000 to keep it up until they decide what to do with it. Those are future decisions. It will cost them five cents on the tax rate to raise this amount. Once they answer this question, they are telling the select board how to proceed.

Rob Prohl recalled that when Dan Wolf came to the last Board of Selectmen's meeting he said that the building was not being offered to the Town because of the land that came with it. They may need that land for another school building in the future. Is there a way to hold some of the land for school district use in the future if it is needed? Mr. Markoff said that the school board is open to negotiating any type of terms and they have no fixed position. It is all open for negotiation.

Rip Cross wondered if there were any concealed conditions that were compelling reasons not to purchase the building. Chair Bianchi said that any upgrade of a building causes the potential for asbestos and the

need for sprinklers. The building is extremely sound. It has new windows and the water supply has been re-done. It is in very good shape, structurally. They have already installed sprinklers in the cafeteria.

Wendell Phillips said that a few years ago in Wellesley, MA he helped convert an old elementary school into condominiums with a parking garage underground. He offered some preliminary sketches to the Board of Selectmen to be included with their considerations.

Ms. Lockhart asked under what conditions the town of New London gave the building and land to the school district. Was there a financial gain? Chair Bianchi said that the documents from 1966 list what each town was going to contribute to the newly formed KRSD. The whole property, as well as schools in the other six towns, was given to the district. Ms. Lockhart thought that having seen King Ridge go for a similar amount of money, she would hate to see it happen again with this building. They should own it outright. If people lease it they will be more reluctant to renovate it because they don't own it. With a lease, the school could decide in 10-20 years that they want the building back.

Chair Bianchi said that even if the school board said to the Town that they could buy the building for \$1, they don't have any money budgeted until May unless they hold a special town meeting.

Mr. Hasenfuss said he represented the Council on Aging (COA) and they have had a tremendous increase of people getting older and older in town. They have also had a 50% increase in the services COA provides within the last several years. They are running out of space and need to use other spaces in town. A building owned by the town would be ideal as they would be serving the same population that is paying the taxes. If they don't own the property, they are doing themselves a disservice. Mr. Hasenfuss recalled that Mr. Wolf said that there was a lot of land with the parcel. If the Town gave the whole parcel to the school district, he felt it would be unfair for the district not to do the same for the Town. The other towns got their properties back for \$1. They shouldn't mess with leases.

Celeste Cook said if they don't have any money budgeted, were they in the position to borrow \$50,000 at a low interest rate? Mr. Theroux said that the Town has a line of credit that is unused, which is \$1,000,000 or more. In any event, they could tap into that line of credit ahead of purchasing the building.

Ann Loeffler said her dream would be that the Town owns the space. All the non-profits in town need more meeting space. Currently there is no large meeting space available that would accommodate 100 people or more. To help non-profits, which help the town, would be great. Her dream would also be to provide some elder housing upstairs and have community things housed downstairs. Ms. Loeffler felt that this building would be a great location for the town's food pantry.

Gusta Teach was there to represent a group called "The Friends of 1941." They have a group of people who would jump at an opportunity to lease space from the Town for their meetings and other opportunities. She hoped the Town would be convinced to purchase the building for \$1.

Casey Biuso said she spoke for the younger families in town. It would be great to have space for the families and classes that could be provided with them in mind. She felt that Chad Denning does such a good job with the Recreation Department; why not give him more space to expand what he already offers.

Bob MacMichael from Elkins said he worked on the 1941 building when they started building it. He helped dig the footings. He should have been attending the other school at the time but said he had "ADD" and so tended to avoid school. He is 87 years old now and has been a member of the town his whole life and feels that New London is a great town to live in. Mr. MacMichael said that the people at the meeting would have to write a check to get this thing going because even though he wished he could,

he can't. The younger generations will have to make this work. He recalled that the hospital was made what it is by getting support from people who wanted to see a nice hospital in town. He hoped they could iron out the wrinkles and save the building for the future.

The Chairman of the New London Barn Playhouse, Tom DeMille, said that there is a critical need for rehearsal space in town. Oftentimes, they have to compete with other groups to use Whipple Hall. It would be perfect for them and felt it would be a "no-brainer" to go forward with purchasing the building.

Diane Piotrow said that she is an architect and has worked on the plans with Fred Downey on the original proposal. She went to many groups in town and tried to identify the potential uses of the building. Since that time, the situation has completely changed. In the past seven years, there has been a tremendous increase in need for space for all of the different groups. The time is now.

Chair Bianchi read aloud comments made by Larry Ballin (past Select Board member) who called the office, as he was not able to attend the meeting in person. Mr. Ballin is not in favor of any public money going into the 1941 building. He did not feel there was enough opportunity to collect rental money to keep it going once it was renovated.

Peg Theroux said there are amazing opportunities with the property, including outside uses with the many trails for cross-country skiers and dog walking. She didn't want to lose those opportunities.

Cicely Markoff said that with regards to the younger population, they need more space for kids to play. Middle School kids don't have a place to go, and she felt it important to keep the young population strong, keep the building vital, and encompass all ages in this effort.

Beth Swanson said it would be great to have something going on in town after 5:00pm. It would also be beneficial to have an intergenerational place in town.

Mr. Cross thought perhaps some seed money could be gathered from the interested groups to get the project started.

Dave Kidder said that he is currently reading a book called "Rise of the Creative Class" which has to do with people who are creatively looking at communities that can satisfy their wants and needs. This building gives the town the opportunity to do this exactly, within the context of their town. It is a perfect example of a public/private cooperation that can work. Town and private funds could come together to create a great, viable project.

Celeste Cook said that as the Welfare Officer in New London, she sees a tremendous need for workforce housing. Having condos in the upstairs portion of the building would generate income to maintain the rest of the building.

Mr. Cardillo said there are some time constraints they are being faced with and felt they should decide what it is they really want. He wondered who else is looking into the building and how much have they offered. He also noted that zoning was something to consider. The town controls the zoning and is not subject to its own regulations. He thought they should go in strongly and say that they don't want to lease the building; they want to own the whole thing. The Town should control it, not some other group. This should give the school district a huge comfort to sell it back to them for \$1. Chair Bianchi said that the deadline was set by the school board so they could get organized before their school meeting. Mr. Cardillo was certain that the Town wouldn't need to write a check before year-end and thought they'd have time to put an article on the warrant.

Karen Ebel said that if the Town purchases the building and it is used for a municipal purpose it doesn't have to go through zoning. If there is a private entity going in there, it is subject to zoning approval. She added that when they went through some of the analysis for planning several years ago, the community center was duplicative of a lot of services that were already offered in the town. They were not sure how they could come up with the money to continue with a community center. The town has grown so much since then and there is more of a need and desire now to go forward with this kind of a place.

Tom Little said he started first grade in the 1941 building and attended the other New London schools as well. He wondered what portion of the property they wanted to pursue. Chair Bianchi said that the center part of the building is the SAU offices. The cafeteria is not being used by the school district. It isn't in the RFP but could be included in the proposal. Mr. Little asked if there was unused space in the 1961 building that the SAU offices could move into. Chair Bianchi thought that there was. He added that they still have portable classrooms on the site, which is something else they would have to talk about.

Phyllis Piotrow thought this was an encouraging conversation. The Town should acquire the building for as little as possible for as long as possible. They should get approval to take on the maintenance costs for a year or so until they can decide what to do with it. People should not wonder what to do with the space. They should ask themselves, "what does the town need and how can we use this resource to meet these needs?"

Mr. Hasnefuss asked what it would take to have a special town meeting. Ms. Hallquist said that a court order would be needed if they were asking voters to appropriate more money. They would have to explain to the court why the town did not want to wait until the next regular Town Meeting. They can have special town meetings whenever they want (without a court order) if money isn't involved.

Mr. Hasenfuss wondered if they could get a consensus of how many people wanted to own the whole building and property. Chair Bianchi said that he would try to do this before the end of the meeting.

Ms. Helm said she would prefer to get all the information together and have an orderly proposal to give at Town Meeting in May as opposed to having a special Town Meeting. She reminded everyone that it did involve financial expense to have a special meeting and added that now is the time that many people are leaving town for the winter. Mr. Markoff said that there are people acting with legitimate interest now and if they are offered an immediate interest rather than waiting until May, they should be careful. Ms. Helm said that Mr. Wolf said there could be some flexibility with the town, so long as they had something to bring before them by the deadline.

Chair Bianchi said that besides New London, there are about five other parties who took the mandatory tour and are interested in the building.

Ms. Swanson asked if Chair Bianchi could shed some light on the other groups interested in the building. Chair Bianchi didn't want to speak for any group and didn't think it productive to go backwards in time. They want to look ahead to what they can do to move forward.

Mr. Cardillo thought that in the past, groups didn't gain momentum because of the cost. He noted that Wilmot has a community center and it is a difficult process for them to continue to raise money because there are not a lot of users. They don't want to fall into that same trap. He said that they have to have enough groups and critical mass to make this work. If the Board of Selectmen appoints a subcommittee they could communicate their thoughts to the school board. They are an energized group of citizens and

they need to show their interest to the school board. He thought Mount Royal Academy had some interest in the building as well.

Peggy Prew said she lives in New London but grew up in Springfield. She attended school in the 1941 building, went to Colby-Sawyer College, is a long-time New London Hospital employee, a founding member of the Community Band and is on the Bandstand Committee. She wondered if there was any ability for the school board to give New London first refusal if something else comes up on their plate. Mr. Markoff said he was willing to vouch for the school board that they would do this. Ms. Prew said that if they kept that in mind they could proceed without a special meeting and then present the proposal in May. Mr. Markoff said they are currently in the budget cycle for 2013/14 and it goes to a vote in January to submit the budget requirements starting in July. If a sale were to take place because the town votes “yes” in May, it would be a reduction of taxes at the school board level. The timing is relevant with this school year.

Ms. Little asked who the owner of the land and building was, exactly. Chair Bianchi said that the school district owned the property and they were permitted to lease it without going to the voters but couldn't sell it without doing so. Mr. Markoff said the lease was preferred because of the timing and budget planning.

Mr. Kaplan said there was nothing in the Town's budget for \$50,000 per year for maintenance and the school board's planning for \$50,000 per year for maintenance runs out on June 30, 2013. If the Town is serious about moving forward, they have to tell the school board that they will make a deal and take over the property for \$1 starting July 1, 2013. That way they have the opportunity in May to put it in their budget. He thought it was up to the citizens to tell the Select Board how to proceed.

Ms. Helm said she was glad that people's feelings and input had been expressed. If anyone had a desire to serve on a committee to come up with a proposal they should let them know. She reminded them that it was possible that not everyone would be able to serve on the committee as a committee that was too large could be cumbersome and non-productive.

Ms. Swanson asked what would happen if the school board took the \$50,000 out of their budget and then the town votes it down at Town Meeting? Mr. Kaplan didn't think this would happen as it seemed the majority wanted this to go forward.

Mr. Dick said his wife, who taught for 40 years, has volunteered to help them establish a day camp for kids, in the building, that would last six weeks in the summer. When she had a similar camp in another school, revenue came in at over half a million dollars. Mr. Dick added that there are many children who suffer from autism whose aid/assistance gets cut off when they graduate from high school. They are still in need of assistance in everyday life. He thought that upstairs in the building would be a good space and opportunity to house these types of people.

Mr. Wheeler said he would report the discussion to the Budget Committee meeting the following week. He feels that there is town-wide support for organizations and their needs. The strategy going forward would be to come up with some sort of proposal or offer that will help the school district get their way. The committee should look at a variety of options and work with Mr. Markoff a bit to find out the best proposal for the property. Perhaps a lease with the option to purchase would work.

Mr. Prohl thought the school board should have come to the Town first before sending out the RFP. If the Town puts a good offer on the table, the school board should give them the first right of refusal. They

have been a key supporter of the school district and it is their vote that keeps the district funded. He believed they would take care of the Town first and let them have the first right of refusal.

Rick Anderson said that there was a clear consensus at the meeting that the Town should control the space. He thought it important to keep their eye on the prize and noted that the school district has an obligation to entertain proposals from the other towns as well.

Ms. Lockhart asked if the bylaws would allow them to put the issue out by way of some kind of ballot to the townspeople. Chair Bianchi said they could do an opinion poll via email.

Sue Clough said she was very pleased to see that the groups were working together for this. She felt that having the fields was an integral part of the area. It would provide for expansion for the building at some point, housing for special needs, and they also lead to land that is preserved by Springledge Farm for hiking. Chair Bianchi said that there didn't seem to be much of a difference of opinion in the room. He asked for a show of hands of how many people were interested in purchasing the property or acquiring it for \$1. Everyone in the room raised their hand. Chair Bianchi asked how many people would be in favor of continuing the discussion if the only option was a long-term lease. The majority of the room raised their hand if this was the only option.

Mr. Hoke said that if there is a strong desire to purchase the building, they should do it.

Ms. Biuso said that the kindergarten will hopefully go full-day starting next year and they may need more classrooms for this. Also, kids who bus out of the system for special education could be brought back into the town, and part of the Outing Club pit area could be used for those purposes and decrease the cost to the school district. She would rather see them get hold of what they can and would hate to not be involved if they can't own the whole thing.

Mr. Markoff said that the response he had seen at that morning's meeting was more spectacular than he thought it would be a month ago when he attended a CAC meeting. Fred Downey and Dave Kidder had been trying to gather interest for years. This is a spectacular change and he supported it. It is critical that they consider a revenue-generating component so the building isn't just an expense.

Mr. Kaplan felt it important for everyone to remember that the Town donated the property to the school district. If the relationship between the school district and the various towns can be maintained, and if they ever need a portion of the property back, the Town will donate it again. This isn't an adversarial relationship but a cooperative relationship between the school district and the seven towns. He felt the school district would sell the building back to the town and that they did not need an absolute legalistic caveat that if the district wanted it back, the town would give it to them.

Chair Bianchi said that if people were willing to serve on a committee they should indicate this on the sign-up sheet. He said it would be a small committee and that the select board would pick from the people who are interested in serving.

Mr. Little said as an offset to the fact that they gave the property to the school district they should keep in mind that the district also inherited some debt with the 1961 building.

Ms. Loeffler said that the problem with a lease is that if they go forward with a public/private partnership, people won't want to give to a lease situation; they would be more willing to donate towards an ownership-type situation. Several agreed with this sentiment.

Chair Bianchi thanked everyone for coming and for giving their opinions. If there were any further thoughts or questions, people were welcome to come to the town office and speak with Ms. Hallquist.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary  
Town of New London