



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES November 3, 2012

PRESENT:

Peter Bianchi, Chair
Tina Helm, Selectman
Janet Kidder, Selectman
Kimberly Hallquist, Town Administrator

ALSO PRESENT:

Jack Harrod, Hardy Hasenfuss, Peter Hoglund, Sue Clough, Jack Sheehan, Phyllis Piotrow, Sue Little, Celeste Cook, Will Kidder, Donn Klingler, Bruce Hudson, Renate Kannler, Rick Anderson, Joe Cardillo, Rip Cross, Peter Hoglund, Vahan Sarkisian, Rob Prohl, Maureen Prohl, Bob MacMichael, Ann Loeffler, Carolyn Lockhart, Howard Hoke, Rich Anderson

Chair Bianchi opened the meeting at 7:30am. He noted that since the last meeting, much had transpired. He suggested that members read the minutes of the regular Board of Selectmen meetings to keep abreast of the house-keeping things that have gone on. To name a few items, they have re-keyed some of the locks on town buildings, put in a new furnace and are working on repairing the panic buttons at the Town Office, worked on abatements, and there were legal, personnel and planning issues attended to.

Chair Bianchi noted an incident that occurred recently at Shepherd Pit on Mountain Road. The Town uses this area for stockpiling gravel and glass and it is also used as a shooting range for the Police Department. Some people were in the area shooting, causing a dangerous situation for a nearby residence. Steps will be taken to keep unauthorized shooting in that area, including locking the gate at the entrance, putting fencing and signage up.

Chair Bianchi added that the Town will not be accepting brush until further notice. The facility the brush is usually taken to is overwhelmed and cannot take any more. They are not sure what will happen in the future or how long they will not be able to accept brush at the stump dump.

Chair Bianchi shared that they are still working on the Pleasant Street sidewalk. They hope to have the paving finished on Monday. Landscaping and finish work will be completed in the spring.

Chair Bianchi noted that the 1941 Building Committee met to come up with a proposal for the use of the building on behalf of the Town. They submitted their proposal on October 25th and on the 15th of November the school board will discuss the proposals and get more information from the Town. Only one other proposal came forward, which was from Mount Royal Academy.

Chair Bianchi said that they are working on the budget process for next year. They have an unofficial estimate of the tax rate for 2012, which gives a figure of approximately \$3.93 for the town tax rate. The town portion last year was \$5.86. If this portion remains at the projected level, taxpayers will have a lower tax bill. They have begun to speak with department heads about the upcoming budget preparation. Retirement is going up considerably, as is the health insurance. Chair Bianchi noted that deferred maintenance on town buildings is something they need to consider for this budget season. He understood

that people have other concerns that will use taxpayer money and he was curious if any of the members of the committee could share their suggestions for what they thought needed to be done.

Mr. Hoke said there seems to be a spring letting water out on Lakeshore Road that is at the base of his driveway. He was afraid of the water turning to ice this winter and felt this was a significant problem. He has tried to dig to divert the water but was unsuccessful. Additionally, he wanted to say that with the Pleasant Street sidewalk project, he was very pleased with the cooperation and good communication with all those involved. The workers have been accommodating to truck deliveries and their work schedule at the Country Press. Chair Bianchi said the whole project, with the exception of the curbing, was done by the Public Works Department. Mr. Hoke said that they worked very hard and felt they did a good job keeping the traffic flowing.

Ms. Loeffler asked about the dam in Elkins. Chair Bianchi said they will be appropriating money for the feasibility study at Town Meeting. Nothing has really changed with this issue at this point. The State said they would be flexible to work with the Town and the dam upgrade, in conjunction with the other projects scheduled to be completed in that area.

Ms. Cook said that they have talked in the past about having someone to oversee the buildings in town. She wondered if the Board of Selectmen would be moving forward with this initiative. Chair Bianchi agreed that the Board is thinking about adding this kind of a position and thought it might be part of the Public Works Department. Ms. Helm said that there is a lengthy list of areas where an in-house building manager would help enormously, identifying when things need attention, and it could save the town a lot of money with a person on staff who is able to do smaller projects in-house instead of going out to bid.

Mr. Sarkisian said when maintenance is put off it costs a lot more money. He added that he has been talking to Mr. Lee about getting a small roller for maintaining dirt roads. One reason the gravel roads deteriorate is because crowns are not put on the roads during grading, which results in the water not shedding off properly. The highway department needs a roller to compress the material that is put on the road. Roads last four times longer when rolled. He has been building roads for 50 years and it upsets him to see this process continuing. He thought this would be a simple method to help save money.

Mr. Sarkisian said he is hearing rumors about the library still having problems. He saw a generator there and wanted to know if they have a functioning sump pump and drainage in the lower level. He did not want to see another budget item come up at Town Meeting because the library was having more problems.

Mr. Sarkisian wondered if it was necessary for them to attend the school board meeting when deliberations are held about the 1941 building proposals. He said he did not have a problem with Mount Royal Academy and has only heard good things about them, but feels that the Town should be number one on the list to get the building.

Lastly, Mr. Sarkisian did not feel vehicles should be parking on the grass at the Town Office during the CAC meeting, when there are open spaces available.

Chair Bianchi said the library building is controlled by the library board of trustees. It is a town building and he has spoken with Bob Bowers and they are working hard to make sure all of Mr. Sarkisian's concerns are being taken care of. Ms. Hallquist noted that at a recent department head meeting, Sandra Licks (Library Director) said all the systems at the library were working perfectly and there was no leaking or flooding after the hurricane.

Ms. Helm said there is no reason why the Board of Selectmen can't work compatibly with the library board even though they are run a little differently than the other departments. She has heard promising remarks from one library trustee who is confident that they are on top of the issues that once burdened them so.

Mr. Cardillo said that a facilities manager position was brought up at a budget subcommittee meeting he attended at the library. He felt it was an important position that should be created. Chair Bianchi said the library had a custodian for years but they decided to cut it out of their budget years ago.

Mr. Hasenfuss noted that Council on Aging (COA) has tremendously increased its activities this year and are providing rides to appointments for many people from New London. He noted that this driving service also allows many people to participate in COA programs who otherwise could not, because of lack of transportation. He noted that COA will be asking for more money from the Town this year. He asked that when they do vote on the budget, please understand that this is necessary. Their part-time staff is increasing their hours due to the increase in participation.

Mr. Hasenfuss added that he agreed with Mr. Sarkisian about the 1941 building and felt that a number of them should go to the school board meeting on the 15th of November. A board will pay more attention when bodies show up. Chair Bianchi said that Jerry Frew has indicated he would like to speak to both groups to find out more information before they make their decision. Chair Bianchi was not sure at this point how they would go about this process.

Mr. Hasenfuss asked how often the minutes from Board of Selectmen meetings are posted to the website as he could not locate any from before July. Ms. Hallquist said she would show him on the website where all the minutes are posted. The minutes are put on the site after they are approved but the draft versions could go up even earlier, so people could see them earlier.

Ms. Prohl said she was at a meeting a couple of months ago and there was a large group of people from Forest Acres Road. At that meeting, Mr. Lee explained how they prioritize roads with only having a certain amount of money to spend on them. It was her understanding that Mr. Lee does not have enough money to keep up the infrastructure of the roads. She thought they should take the department head's recommendations on how much money they need to keep the roads in good shape. She also asked about the pump station in Georges Mills. Chair Bianchi said that someone is going into that station on a daily basis taking readings. They have had two spills there in the last few years and are trying to keep up with the monitoring to prevent any further accidents. They also have electronic monitoring which is connected to an alarm system that will notify a person if a malfunction is indicated. Chair Bianchi said they have had an engineer come in to determine upgrades needed to that pump station. They will need to spend more money to implement the repairs. There is some money left over in the capital reserve fund they used to build the station. It is not enough to make the repairs, however, so they would need to go to the taxpayers to raise enough funds.

Mr. Cross said they used to have signs identifying the entrance to the Town of New London. At some point they all disappeared. He wondered if there would be new ones put up. Ms. Helm said every town around them has signs but New London does not. She mentioned it to Linda Jackman who is involved in the Boy Scouts. There is an eagle scout candidate who is going to be looking for a community service project soon. She gave some information about a person who makes very nice signs (who was a vendor at Market on the Green) to the boy scouts in hopes that it would spark some ideas for the Eagle Scout's project. Ms. Helm indicated that before she left office, her goal is to get signs put back up in town.

Mr. Cross asked about a street light initiative that he heard about. He said there was a light on Main Street that does not need to be there. Mr. Harrod said they did a study three years ago and ended up taking 1/3 of the lights out of town as they were not needed, saving the town money. He noted that the police department and fire department approved the list of lights to be removed. The light on Main Street may still be on to help with visibility. Ms. Helm suggested contacting the police and/or fire departments directly to ask why that light is needed.

Mr. Sheehan said from his perspective, they should focus on maintaining the existing roads rather than paving new ones. A lot of people come to town and think it is quaint to live on a gravel road. Once they have some experience living on that road, they decide they do not like it as much and want it paved. If they have limited resources, they should focus on the existing roads instead of paving new ones. If a roller helps, that in combination with maintaining the gravel roads would save some money. Additionally, he heard that a police detective has resigned. They had looked at the possibility of saving money by not re-hiring one police officer in the past and then a few individuals pushed hard to replace that position at Town Meeting. He felt as though he should have said something at that meeting but did not. If the public administrators and the police department feel they can move forward without the added person that is how it should have gone. He wondered if the Board should consider not filling this detective position as cutting back on the police department may save them some money.

Chair Bianchi said that there was a group of people at the last Town Meeting who were strongly in favor of funding the position that was not included in the budget. Ms. Helm said she learned a parliamentary lesson after that meeting; she did not ask the moderator to be called on to express her opinion, as she had an opposite opinion than what was brought forth at Town Meeting. She cautioned those at the meeting that they need to notify the moderator that they want to speak. She felt the question was called too quickly.

Mr. Hudson said the vote at Town Meeting came up at an unfortunate time, a time when emotions were high because of several crimes around the state, including the police shootings in Greenland. It was an emotional time and the individuals who got it pushed through were not involved in the budget process. He felt the Board of Selectmen, Budget Committee and everyone who was part of the process did a great job vetting the process and then in a short amount of time at Town Meeting it was voted to fill the position. They are now down one officer again and he feels that if they go and look at the shifts for 24/7 coverage, the police department should have enough without that additional officer.

Chair Bianchi said it was not a unilateral decision made but was made by several groups to not fill the position. However, he did not feel it would have been productive to get into an argument with a citizen on the floor of Town Meeting.

Mr. Sheehan asked if a position is voted in at Town Meeting and it is part of the budget that is voted on, are they required to fill the position? Ms. Hallquist said that they have to follow the will of the voters at Town Meeting unless there is an extraordinary reason not to.

Ms. Piotrow said after next week the campaign signs on public property will become clutter. She wondered if there was any public policy about getting rid of the signs. Ms. Hallquist said that the campaign groups should be picking them up.

Ms. Lockhart wondered if the Zoning/Planning Administrator position had been filled. Chair Bianchi said that it had. Lucy St. John has been with them for about two months and from his point of view, she is doing a good job and she is working hard to get up to speed. She is working full-time. Ms. Helm added that Ms. St. John has brings a strong skill-set to the town, and she is impressed with her work thus far.

Mr. Hudson said he thought they should get someone in who will perform preventative maintenance on the town's assets. If this is not done, the repairs become costly. He did not feel that it would cost that much for the town to hire this individual, but it would need to be someone who is more than a custodian. He/she has to be a "jack of all trades" who could do some general electrical, plumbing, painting, etc... If the 1941 building comes on line, they will need a town employee who is responsible to provide input and address issues in that building as well.

Mr. Hudson asked what the proposal was from the Town regarding the 1941 building. Chair Bianchi said it is public knowledge but it is not very detailed. It did not include dollar amounts but it was an indication that the Town wanted to be a player. A committee of six people came up with the proposal which included a request to lease the building for five years with an option to purchase. Ms. Helm said the charge they gave to the committee was to consider this process in stages. The first stage was to be very general. She felt the proposal that was produced is very good. The second stage will be more detailed and will talk about numbers.

Mr. Hogle said the Town gave the building to the school district and now they should give it back to the Town. He wondered if the Town had the right of first refusal. Chair Bianchi said he was not sure but that Mr. Wolf had told them everything was on the table. The school board wants to get the building off their books.

Ms. Prohl said that Mr. Wolf indicated he would need to look at the articles of agreement to see what the arrangement was for returning the buildings to the towns if/when they are not needed by the district. She did not understand why the 1941 building was any different than the other buildings that had been given back to the other towns. Chair Bianchi said the articles were created in 1966 and it does not address what should happen to the property when a school closes. In 1981 an article in the school warrant that said they wanted to close the Newbury School was listed as Article 6. To do this, the people in the town have to vote for it. The next article was to sell the building back to the town of Newbury, plus one acre of land, for \$1. Ms. Prohl thought this would set legal precedence. Ms. Helm said she looked at town reports from 1966 where the Town turned the building over to be used by the district, but so far have not located the deed. Chair Bianchi said New London's contribution was the gym and the 1941 building. The school district then built the elementary school and at that time they acquired the extra land.

Mr. Prohl said if they want to have some influence, they have elected school board representatives from the town and they should call them and tell them how they feel. They will be voting on this with the other school board members.

Mr. Cardillo recalled the public/private concept that was discussed at the last CAC meeting with regard to the 1941 building. More money is being asked for from COA. Also, he expects to see some zoning changes on the ballot. Some zoning changes will revolve around what the college is doing with regard to their wishes for lighting on their fields. He felt the Town needed to think about how they spend their money. Cottage Lane has 20 students living there in duplexes built by Harry Snow. He felt it was probably well thought-out as the students are clustered together and close to the college. He has heard about a problem with the number of students that are allowed to live in each dwelling. He heard this may be challenged and could go to Superior Court. He wondered if they wanted to spend a lot of money on legal issues if this goes to court. Some of the resolutions to these issues can play out in favor of the town as a whole. He has experience with planning boards putting conditions on approval for projects. He noted that he would rather see them reach some kind of agreement with the college, than to spend the money on legal fees.

Chair Bianchi said that Mr. Snow two units in each building, and planned for 8 people per unit. The town's zoning for the past 20-25 years states that a unit can consist of no more than five un-related people. Mr. Snow wanted permission to put six people in each unit and was denied as it is against the zoning. He appealed it to the ZBA who upheld the Selectmen's administrative decision. He asked for a rehearing and was denied. Chair Bianchi noted that he did not think the Town could choose to not uphold the zoning, so they had to say no to more than five people in the units. Mr. Cardillo said that he was not suggesting this, but there were ways to change these things and thought these changes could save them some money. Chair Bianchi said the only person who could contest this was the owner, Harry Snow. The college has no animosity with the Town. Tom Galligan had come in to a meeting and noted that at some point they may choose to purchase the buildings but not at this time.

Mr. Hogle asked what the college's projection was for numbers. Chair Bianchi said they are at a little over 1,400 now and their goal is 1,500. There is no zoning regulation on the size of the college.

Ms. Lockhart felt the college should not expand until they can house their students in official housing. There are houses around town (one is close to her that is owned by someone who lives in Michigan), that are being used by students. They get 2 or 3 names on a lease and sublet the apartment to more students. She thought this would happen more and more if the college did not supply enough housing. Chair Bianchi said that this is not a new problem with the college or any other town that has a college in it. Ms. Cook did not feel it was a problem as the students can decide they want to live off campus and so move into homes in town, even if the college on campus housing available. Mr. Cardillo said that even large colleges do not have enough beds for their enrollment. He did not think they could hold the college to limit their enrollment to the number of available beds.

Ms. Kanler wondered if they could come up with a list of wants and needs with a dollar value so they can work forward. Chair Bianchi said they will do that when they go through the budget process. The department heads explain everything they want to spend money on, in great detail. Everyone has legitimate wants and they have to do the best they can to manage the town's money. He added that they have an employee committee working on the personnel policy including employee benefits.

Ms. Helm noted that one person's definition of a "want" is another person's definition of a "need."

Mr. Sarkisian felt the time had come that they should have a chronological history of the 1941 building from when it was built to when it was used as a school. It should include when the other schools were sold, given back, etc. This will reduce the number of questions about the building at future meetings.

Mr. Sarkisian said he has lived in the town for 30 years and was not sure about the private "no parking" signs along Main Street. He thought it was a state highway and did not feel people had the right to put up the signs. It does not look good, gives a bad impression to visitors, and he did not think they should be there. Chair Bianchi said it is not illegal as the town has been given the right to put up no parking signs. The residents along Main Street do not want the big "no parking" signs and were either given smaller signs from the police department or bought them themselves.

Mr. MacMichael said that in 1946 he was painting the Academy Building to get it ready for Esther Currier, her husband and two children who were coming to teach in the building, as it would become a school. Colby-Sawyer College had about 350 students enrolled when he came home from WWII. If the college wanted to expand one inch, they had to go talk to Mrs. Cleveland. Mr. MacMichael said that when he was first a selectman, people would come to him when they wanted a street light and he would make sure it happened. The roads were very dark and it only cost about \$25 or \$30 per year to keep them going. He recalled that one person living on Main Street called to complain that their husband's "work light"

was out, meaning the street light. Mr. MacMichael noted that he loves the Town of New London and is happy with the way they are maintaining it.

The meeting adjourned at 9:07am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London