



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES April 14, 2012

PRESENT:

Mark Kaplan, Chair
Tina Helm, Selectman
Peter Bianchi, Selectman
Kimberly Hallquist, Town Administrator
Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer

ALSO PRESENT:

Hardy Hasenfuss, Jack Harrod, Renate Kannler, Bruce Hudson, Maureen Prohl, Rob Prohl, Phyllis Piotrow, Bob MacMichael, Peter Hogle, Don Klingler, Rick Anderson, Will Kidder, Terri Bingham, Ann Loeffler, Rip Cross, Gary Markoff, Carolyn Lockhart

Chair Kaplan called the meeting to order at 7:30am.

He noted that Committee Member David Payne was ill and was in the hospital. Ms. Helm said that she heard from Mrs. Payne that the prognosis was good.

Ms. Helm also noted that their next CAC meeting was scheduled for May 5th. Instead of a traditional meeting, she suggested that it be a “thank-you” coffee for Chair Kaplan, who would be retiring in May. She hoped the members of the CAC would join the Board of Selectmen at 8:30am for coffee and light refreshments. Ms. Helm thought this would be an appropriate venue for Chair Kaplan’s 15+ years of service to the Town of New London.

Ms. Helm also said that many people have asked her why there is no flag in front of the Town Office since it is a town government building. She has spoken with New London resident, Dick Leach, who has agreed to collect money for a flag pole fund. They hope to install a flag pole and flag by Memorial Day. Ms. Helm passed around some information with regards to how and where to send donations. She added that Richard Lee (Public Works Director) will install the flag pole.

Chair Kaplan referred to the information handed out at the meeting regarding the budget and Town Warrant. He read off the names of those running for open offices and offered to review the warrant articles that will come before the town at Town Meeting. He pointed out that the total budget is 1.7% less than the last budget year.

Mr. Markoff expressed concern that with the Town Meeting being held in May, and the school meeting held in March, not as many New London voters are participating in the school meeting election and meeting process. He admitted that he was caught unaware of the impact on the school election when the switch to May Town Meeting was discussed. Chair Kaplan said that Town Meeting voted this in last year and they thought they should try it for several years to see how it goes. If they had a lot of people who can come in May because they were not in town in March, it would be worth keeping in May. If it doesn’t seem to make any difference in attendance, it may be possible to move it back to March. He felt it was too early to tell at this point, not having had the first May Town Meeting yet.

Mr. Markoff said he would like to move the meeting back to March due to the fact that the voting in New London for the school board was significantly below the normal turnout. It was noted that the school vote must occur in March and could not be moved to May. Mr. Markoff noted that as a consequence of the poor voting, there was an item that the New London wanted which did not pass due to the low numbers of voting. The item he was referring to was the Resource Officer position. In New London there was a 2:1 in favor for having the officer but the vote was turned down because Warner and Bradford overwhelmed the absence of New London's numbers. He felt this would be a continuing problem with the voting in the future especially with regards to the budget. This year the School Board's budget and the Budget Committee's budget were exactly the same amount, so it wasn't that noticeable, but he was concerned about future votes when the absence of New London voters would be a significant impact.

Ms. Helm said that after the elections, Dan Wolfe called her as he was upset by the low numbers of voters for the school vote. She reminded Mr. Wolfe that they had talked about this possibility early on and that it could be a problem. Ms. Helm said that she had offered to help get the word out with some neighborhood coffees and informational sessions to get people on board to getting out and vote. Mr. Wolfe agreed that not enough was done on the part of school officials to raise awareness. She said that there is a gentleman in Bradford who wants to work on better communication for future voting. Ms. Helm said she has once again volunteered to help. She reminded Mr. Markoff that the public had voted for the change in Town Meeting and felt they should give it a chance and work out the kinks to make it work.

Ms. Bingham thought it important that at Town Meeting the school voting issue be emphasized; people need to get out to vote for the school in March even though Town Meeting is in May. Chair Kaplan said that the Resource Officer position has been brought up the past four years and has not been passed even with New London voting on a large scale. He thought it was unfair to pick that particular issue and say that is why they should have Town Meeting in March instead of May. Mr. Markoff said that they cannot compare prior years' vote on the Resource Officer with this year. The position had been changed to part-time and was only \$35,000/year.

Mr. Harrod said he voted in the school election but felt that people were cynical and didn't think their vote mattered this year as the two budgets were identical.

Ms. Prohl felt that people should vote whether the budgets are the same or not. She didn't see the budgets being equal as minimizing her need to vote, but that after significant "watchdog" procedures, the School Board and the Municipal Budget Committee happened to agree. Also, she would bring up the numbers of people who vote is more important rather than the issues. Thirdly, she said that the School District still has a communication committee but didn't think they did a good job getting the information out. If they want people to come out and vote, they have to work hard at it.

Mr. Bianchi said if they want to change the Town Meeting back to March, there has to be an article on the Town Warrant. This was not done in the necessary timeframe and so if people want it changed for 2014, they can, but only if the question is put on the Warrant in 2013. He thought New London should look out for their citizens and how to run the town. If this process coincides with the school, that is great. If they get very low numbers at Town Meeting, they will need to reanalyze when they hold the meeting. Mr. Markoff said he had the numbers that show who is influencing the school district as a voting population. He didn't realize how small a vote New London actually got. He said he would provide the metrics on how the votes went and would like a few minutes at another meeting to discuss it to show how other items were affected.

Ms. Helm asked the CAC members what they would suggest doing to make sure that people get out to vote on May 8th.

Ms. Piotrow said it seemed they were talking about scheduling and there are important substantive issues as to whether there should be a Resource Officer or not. The D.A.R.E. program has been shown to be ineffective. Changing the name of a security person to a "Resource Officer" concerns her. She thought there were pros and cons about the position but people need to be more educated on it. Mr. Markoff said he only brought the topic up to illustrate that New London's 2:1 vote for the Resource Officer was buried by the rest of the votes in the district. He realized if there were other items up for a vote that were important to the town of New London, it could happen again.

Mr. Bianchi said that traditionally New London has been pro-education when the School Board has tried to cut the budget. Ms. Helm said the possibility for changing the Town Meeting date this for the next year is gone. For the next year they should discuss it. She wondered if anyone would be in favor of the Town taking out an ad in the Kearsarge Shopper or the Intertown Record to encourage people to come out and vote for their officials and other issues. Mr. Markoff suggested sending this plea out via the town's email list as well. Mr. Hasenfuss wondered if they could have a campaign at Town Meeting for people to put down their email addresses as it is an effective way of contacting people, and would save thousands of dollars in advertising.

Mr. Cross suggested getting a spot on WNTK. Ms. Bingham suggested using the electric signboard to encourage people to vote.

With regards to Articles 15 and 16 (sponsored by the Conservation Commission), Chair Kaplan gave the floor to Peter Stanley, Planning & Zoning Administrator, to discuss.

Mr. Stanley said that currently, the Town can only purchase land with the fund they have in the Capital Reserves and are not able to purchase an easement. They have wanted to donate towards conservation projects in the town as opposed to taking the lead and having to come up with all the money. They found that if re-worded, they could make a contribution to a non-profit, third party for the purpose of protecting land, in the form of a conservation easement. Key parcels of land in town have been protected to give the town the look of being rural even though they have the fourth highest density in the region. The purpose of adopting the new language is to allow the town to contribute to someone like the Land Trust, the Forest Society, etc. that can help them accomplish one of their conservation goals in New London. By doing this, they save money, the property stays on the tax rolls because the Town does not actually own the property, and they have no responsibility towards maintaining the property.

Last year this issue was confused with the notion of doing projects outside of New London. Mr. Stanley stressed that any money being spent due to these changes would be on New London property only. Mr. Bianchi said that should Article 15 pass, any spending still has to come before the Board of Selectmen, the Budget Committee, and gain approval at Town Meeting. It is not giving the Conservation Commission the power to do what they want, at will. Mr. Bianchi added that the Board of Selectmen was in favor of the article. Mr. Stanley specified that Article 16 changes the way the capital reserve is defined to enable them to use the money in the way Article 15 is written.

Mr. Prohl wondered if this was an area where more public education could be done so people would understand the article more clearly. Mr. Bianchi said that last year it was confusing due to another article that was being suggested about spending money outside of New London, but this year Mr. Stanley and Bob Brown (Conservation Commission Chair) would explain it so that everyone would understand.

It was suggested to have a slide at Town Meeting to illustrate the parcel in question in Article 17.

Ms. Bingham thought having the articles available ahead of time would promote more discussion at Town Meeting. She suggested offering them online.

Ms. Prohl asked about changes in the Telecommunications Act. Mr. Stanley said they hired a third party to go through the telecommunications ordinance and update it to reflect current law and decisions from recent court cases. Cell tower height, appearance and screening issues were addressed, and their arbitrary height of towers was amended to be practical and eliminate the danger of being sued.

Chair Kaplan asked Mr. Stanley to define "Fresnel Zone" as noted in Article 12. Mr. Stanley said that it is the zone the cell tower's frequency emanates from and is shaped sort of like a tee-pee. This zone can be computed and demonstrated on maps to make a judgment on whether more towers or higher towers are needed. It is a French word and is pronounced "Fre-nel" Zone.

Mr. Markoff asked whether or not it would be determined that service intended for travelers of I-89 would also benefit the town of New London. Mr. Stanley said the town does not have a cell tower currently, but has entered into a lease to put one up at the transfer station. They are still waiting for the cell tower company to move forward.

Mr. Anderson referred to Articles 7, 8, and 9 regarding zoning issues. Mr. Stanley said they are all "house-keeping" items that needed to be specified. Article 9 was to keep the shoreland protection act in place even though the State's regulation has changed and has become less strict. This regulation is identical to what the State used to require, but it has recently changed to allow for more impervious surface.

Article 7 was to allow the crossing of man-made wetlands, as the State does not require a permit for this any longer.

Article 8 discusses a change in how New London will determine where one wetland begins and ends in an effort to protect and identify the wetlands.

Mr. Heglund asked about Article 18 with regards to Shaker Street becoming a Scenic Road. Chair Kaplan said that residents came before the Board of Selectmen to advise them that they would be putting this article on the ballot to be heard at Town Meeting. When trees or branches are to be cut down for some purpose, PSNH, telephone company, etc. has to come in to the Planning Board to get permission. It gives the landowner a little more say in what is cut or not cut. Trees that must be taken down because they are dead or a safety issue can still be taken down. Mr. Bianchi said that the residents that came in to tell them their plans for this petition warrant article were doing so because of the extensive cutting that was done on Route 103A. Chair Kaplan said that on non-scenic roads, companies are allowed to cut 12' beyond the cross-piece coming off of the telephone poles. Mr. Bianchi said this scenic road change would not impact the road, homeowners or the town to a great extent.

Mr. Cross asked for an update on the New London Ambulance as there was a big increase in cost this year. Chair Kaplan said that the hospital and participating towns brought in an excellent firm called MRI to do a survey and give them a report on the best way to move forward with the service. He felt that the firm did a terrible job although they had done a good job in the past when he had worked with them.

Chair Kaplan noted that New London is the biggest user of the service and will end up paying the largest share. Other towns will help out depending on their use of the service. Ms. Hallquist said she attended a

meeting the week prior to discuss a proposed contract between the hospital and the towns in an effort to protect the hospital from losses. There was some discussion that some of the fire/EMT people didn't feel that there was adequate back-up from the ambulance service and the discussion went in another direction at that point. They are trying to work this out before a contract can be considered. Ms. Hallquist felt that there would ultimately be a contract based on New London's use of the service. She didn't feel the study with MRI was as successful as they had hoped, and didn't know if it was because it was too big a project for the firm or if the goals were not specified.

Chair Kaplan said the towns are now working directly with the hospital to put a contract in place with each town. Mr. Bianchi said the hospital paid half of the cost of the study, which was \$10,000 and the other towns involved paid for the remaining \$10,000. He opined that it wasn't a pleasant experience and didn't feel the towns got their money's worth.

Mr. Bianchi said that the Board of Selectmen and the Budget Committee have gone through the whole budget process and a lot of work has been done to get to the figures that have been decided. All the figures can be substantiated by the Board of Selectmen, Ms. Hallquist, Ms. Johnson and the Budget Committee. The budget was approved by both committees and there are 22 pages of detailed information that is available to anyone who wants it. He didn't want to go through the budget in detail, but said if there were questions after the meeting, people could call Ms. Hallquist or Ms. Johnson to discuss.

Chair Kaplan wanted to highlight that Ms. Hallquist and Ms. Johnson came into the town cold and have worked greatly to help the Board of Selectmen and the Budget Committee to come to the conclusions they have come to. He really appreciated their hard work and felt they ought to be thanked. The CAC offered up a round of applause for Ms. Hallquist and Ms. Johnson.

Mr. Markoff asked about the interest reduction mentioned in Article 8. Mr. Bianchi said that it was because they hadn't borrowed the money yet for the sewer and won't have to pay it this year. The town is responsible for a certain amount of bonded debt and that is what the town will be paying on, minus the sewer bond. Chair Kaplan said that last year in January, Carolyn Fraley compiled a list of all the bonds they had and they were able to get a lower interest rate to save about \$40,000 in interest. Mr. Markoff felt that this could be done once again as it was done a year ago and the rates are lower now.

Mr. Harrod asked about Article 4 regarding the Police Department vacant position that will not be filled. Chair Kaplan said that there may be some people who are nervous about this. Ms. Helm said that Mr. Bianchi has consistently voiced his opinion that there are ways to save in the town's budget. One area he has identified is with staffing. He has not wanted to lay anyone off but if a job were to become vacant he felt they should try not to fill it. In the fall, the Public Works Department had a position open. They discussed it and Mr. Lee agreed to talk with his department to see if they would be willing to not fill the position for a year. In good faith, he did this and they agreed that they would try it to see if they could get along without a fifth employee. Recently they have lost a police officer who has gone to work for the State. Chief Seastrand came to her house and they spoke for a couple of hours on the subject. He said if he had to eliminate that position, he would have to eliminate the DARE program and the detective position, but there would not be any change to the coverage in the town. She didn't feel they should have a double standard with these two departments and said she would vote against hiring a new officer. When Chief Seastrand came to the meeting, she voted against filling the position for those reasons. This is just for a year and will be revisited afterwards for both the Public Works Department and the Police Department.

Mr. Bianchi said that since he became a Selectman, four positions have become open and were refilled. This was the first Police Department position that they have voted to not replace. He had done some

research on towns of New London's size and what they spend on safety and departments. They don't want to put the townspeople in jeopardy due to a lack of police force. He suggested people read the minutes if they would like more information.

Chair Kaplan said the difference in their town as opposed to others in the study Mr. Bianchi did is that New London has a college and a hospital and so it isn't a fair comparison. They want to have the best equipment at the Fire Department to take care of those possible emergencies. The Town pays for this protection that other small towns may not have the luxury of having. Chair Kaplan said that he was not in favor of not re-hiring in the Police Department or the Public Works Department. At some point they will want to re-hire those positions and will then have to come up with the money to do so.

Ms. Piotrow thought that fire danger this year would be higher than in the past and wondered if there was anything they could do to get the Fire Department more involved to express the danger. She passed photos around of her unit at Hilltop that had caught fire before she lived there. She didn't want new regulations to have to be made, but thought some preventative information would be helpful. The question was raised about the absence of a sign at the fire department alerting people of the fire danger level.

Mr. MacMichael asked about Article 9 for the Pleasant Lake Dam fund. Mr. Bianchi said that they met with the State's Dam Bureau. They have to do a feasibility study and said there was a long road ahead of them. The State is willing to let the town move along the process as long as they can show them that they are moving forward on the project. Of the 200+ dams in the state, it is not the most critical. As long as they are moving forward, they will be patient. They need to fund the project and go forward with engineering studies.

Mr. Markoff asked about the Gould Road and Pleasant Street intersection. He thought there should be a four-way stop and wondered where they were on this issue. Ms. Helm said this was on her list of things to address as it was discussed at a recent CAC meeting. As soon as Town Meeting is over they can focus more on this. It has been brought up to Mr. Lee and he is aware that there is a problem.

**IT WAS MOVED (Peter Bianchi) AND SECONDED (Tina Helm) to adjourn.
THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:03am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London