



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES June 2, 2012

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Hardy Hasenfuss, Renate Kannler, Bruce Hudson, Phyllis Piotrow, Bob MacMichael, Peter Hoglund, Don Klingler, Rich Anderson, Rick Anderson, Will Kidder, Sue Little, David Payne, Joe Cardillo, Howard Hoke, Beth Swanson

Chair Bianchi called the meeting to order at 7:30am and gave a summary of what had gone on within the Town since last they met:

- They have gone out to bid for Lamson Lane and chose Holden Engineering to do the work.
- They have had conversations with the Elkins Fish & Game Club relative to allowing them to park at the old landfill location for special events. Some who live near the range were worried that this would allow for an expansion of use and thus, more noise, but it was determined that this would be a problem for Wilmot to handle, and not New London.
- Town Meeting was well-attended and was a perfect example of how small-town government works. The budget was changed from what the Board of Selectmen and Budget Committee recommended with regard to the replacing of a position within the police department.
- There was a minor issue at George's Mills pump station with another leak. It turned out to be a mechanical problem involving a broken gasket. Additionally, the alarm system did not work properly to alert anyone of the leak. It doesn't seem to have been a major leak into the lake and the samples of water in the area have come back to support this claim. They have made repairs to the pump station equipment to prevent this from happening again.
- TDS has come in to talk about getting a franchise agreement with the Town. This would create some competition in town between Comcast and TDS for cable TV service and will also bring money into the town.
- Some repair work is planned for the Town Office building, including the roof and the replacement of the boiler. The boiler, which has been leaking, has been in the building for over 25 years, has been renovated from oil to gas and it is much larger than they need for the building. The Board feels that a new boiler will be more energy efficient.
- They have had conversations about replacing the Planning and Zoning Administrator, as Peter Stanley has left for another job. They have decided to replace Mr. Stanley with a full-time hire. The Board of Selectmen has recently compared Mr. Stanley's job description with others to come up with a job description to use for hiring purposes. They have started advertising and June 20th will be the cut-off date for applications to come in. The chairs from the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, the Zoning Board of Appeals, the entire BOS and Ms. Hallquist will serve on the search committee. It is a priority to get this done as soon as possible and they hope to

have the search completed within a month. In the interim, building permits will not be processed the day they are requested, as they need to be approved by the Board of Selectmen. Planning Board issues that may come up can be assisted by the Regional Planning Commission (RPC), as the town has an ongoing contract with them.

- The next Monday night the Board of Selectmen will talk about reappointments to committees. The committees filled by appointments include the Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Recreation Commission, Community Advisory Committee (CAC), the Economic Development Committee and the Fire Wards. The town has put out an ad to notify citizens of vacancies and they have heard back from some interested people already. The CAC is not regulated by RSAs and so the Selectmen can appoint as they wish. There are currently 28 members and there are two people whose three-year terms are up. If these people would like to continue with another term, they may do so. He suggested that the CAC members should think of people who may like to join them and ask them to come forward. Chair Bianchi thought it said somewhere in the rules that if someone misses three CAC meetings in a row, due to lack of interest or availability, they could be replaced by someone else. Ms. Helm said that chairmen of the boards have been encouraged to search out people who could suitably fill their vacancies. People who step forward to serve will get a chance to do so in some way.
- It was noted that tax bills have gone out and will arrive in mailboxes soon, if they haven't already.

Mr. MacMichael complimented the Board of Selectmen on the new flag pole outside of the Town Office. Ms. Helm noted that she worked with Dick Leach on the project; she didn't do it on her own. She also wanted to thank Richard Lee for arranging to have Bob Harrington and Mike Murphy install the pole, as they did a wonderful job putting it up and she was so happy with the outcome.

Mr. Hoke asked when the Pleasant Street sidewalk would be finished, as he wanted to do some renovations to his building and wanted to wait until the sidewalk was completed. Chair Bianchi said that Mr. Lee indicated it would be done this summer and completed before the start of school.

Mr. Hoke also asked about a stop sign at Gould Road. Ms. Hallquist said she spoke with Mr. Lee about this issue and his solution to the problem (people who miss the stop sign and proceed directly onto Pleasant Street) is as follows: (1) paint a white stop line on the road; (2) install a larger, brighter stop sign; (3) add a red reflective panel to the post of the stop sign; (4) paint "Stop Ahead" on the road preceding the stop sign and (5) add a "stop ahead" sign on a post.

Ms. Piotrow said that there has been some public discussion of the appearance of the TDS building in the town as it seems to be out of character with the rest of the area. She indicated that she spoke with Ms. Hallquist about her suggesting to TDS that they consider making the front of the building more attractive in conjunction with coming into town with their additional services.

Ms. Piotrow said that the legislature is still deciding on requirements for voting in New Hampshire. She has been checking town websites to see if it is clear of what voters should do. The Grantham website is the best, she thought. New London's website makes it hard to find information about voting. She suggested that as soon as they find out the voting requirements in the next few weeks, they make a special point of making this information easily accessible from the front page of the website. The text could be taken word for word from the Secretary of State. The League of Women Voters will have a candidate forum on Tuesday, October 30th for the different State candidates.

Chair Bianchi said he thought a constitutional amendment would be put in place for the next election. It

could mean doing away with donor towns. If New London becomes a donor town again, that would mean \$1 million dollars of their tax dollars would be taken away and not seen again in their town. He urged people to keep informed as it was a critical issue for the town. Ms. Helm added that they have asked Mark Kaplan (former Board of Selectmen Chair) to remain as a representative of the town on this issue in Concord. He agreed to do so. Ms. Piotrow said the League of Women Voters would be hosting a talk on June 15th about Constitutional Amendments (12:00pm) at the Millstone Restaurant.

Ms. Little asked how they know that the poles in town can hold up all the wires required with these new proposed services. Chair Bianchi said he didn't know. The Town doesn't own the poles and they have to put their faith in the companies who do own them. He noted that the Town should be getting some income soon from the utilities due to a pole tax that was reinstated.

Mr. Hasenfuss asked about the cell tower at the Transfer Station and if there were any updates. Chair Bianchi said that the company has an option on to lease town land to put the tower up and rent space on it. They haven't done anything yet except lease the land. He noted that before they could install the tower they will need Planning Board and ZBA approvals. Ms. Hallquist said they have paid their option fee. It was thought they may be having a problem getting leases for the space.

Chair Bianchi said that at a past Town Meeting the Board of Selectmen were given permission to negotiate for Single Stream Recycling. At that time the company they spoke with in Concord didn't convince them that it was something they wanted to get involved with, so the Board decided not to enter into a contract with them. Since then, other towns have pulled out of the agreement and recently the whole project has shut down because the biggest user, the City of Concord, pulled out of the project.

Ms. Piotrow noted an article in the Valley News regarding the State shutting off street lights to save money. New London has 30 lights that could be shut off. She wondered what kind of control the Town had over this possibility. Chair Bianchi said that the Town did receive a letter about this but he thought the lights they were planning to shut off were the lights at the entrance and exits of the ramps. Ms. Hallquist said that the Board of Selectmen can ask the State to reconsider and noted that the State is still deciding which lights they want to turn off. She noted that there may be an option for the Town to pay for the expense of the lights on their own. Ms. Helm said that the letter they received said that safety would not be compromised with the turning off of the lights. Chair Bianchi said they expect a final list of the exact lights that would be targeted and they could deal with those at that time.

Ms. Kannler asked if there were any updates with the sewer project in Sunapee. Chair Bianchi said that the project had gone out to bid last week but they don't have details on who responded or what has come in yet for bids. The work will not be completed for a year to a year and a half yet.

Mr. Rick Anderson said that the Conservation Commission is developing a five-page homeowner's guide on Japanese Knotweed, which is plentiful in New London. It will be presented to the Board of Selectmen when complete. They are working closely with the State to make sure it is worded properly. Homeowners can do certain things on their own property with some flexibility but most property owners have rights of way near the streets and can't do anything in these areas except to cut the invasive species. The Town will need to get involved to rid this invasive species by getting certifications and education on using specific herbicides. Ms. Kannler asked what the State was doing to help with this problem. Mr. Anderson said that they are doing more than they used to, but thought that organization and funding were problems they were facing. They are planning to spray at Four Corners this summer and will likely use Round-Up or an equivalent. If sprayed at certain times of year, a light spray of this herbicide will interrupt Knotweed's natural growth, but noted that this is a multi-year process.

Ms. Little said that Japanese Knotweed can come into your yard by a bird or by buying a shrub that has a little piece of it on it. Digging at it and chopping it up makes it worse. In two years, her neighbor's small growth of Knotweed increased multi-fold until it was covering half of his front yard. It is invading everything and grows like wildfire and kills everything in its wake. Mr. Anderson said that the Town and homeowners will have to work together on this.

Mr. MacMichael said that when comparing the lot on Seamans Road where they cut the trees, and what Hilary Cleveland is currently doing with her forest management, it is a big difference. He wondered if there was a way to control this type of cutting. Chair Bianchi said that there was not. The land-owners got permission to log and paid the appropriate taxes. What was done on Seamans Road was a perfect example of a horrible logging job. Mr. Coogan said he spoke with Mr. Stanley after the cutting happened and found that the owners live in Florida and didn't care, wanted to maximize the value of the land, and that the logger had been fined in the past for similar acts. Mr. Hoke said that there is a Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and several loggers in the area are certified with them. It would behoove landowners considering logging to consider the certification of the logger. They are taught how to manage and harvest properly to encourage further growth and to harvest the most possible without causing damage. Chair Bianchi said they are limited to what they can enforce in people's yards or on their property unless it is a health issue or if there are more than three unregistered cars on the property.

Ms. Kannler said that in Nashua, there were laws changed to not allow for any unregistered cars on the property. Ms. Hallquist said that there are state laws about how many unregistered vehicles constitute a junk yard and some private covenants can be made in towns/neighborhoods about cars. Mr. Bianchi noted that those issues are difficult because one person's trash is another's treasure.

Mr. Coogan asked where they were on the Elkins Transportation Grant project and how close they were to hiring a civil engineer. Chair Bianchi said they have picked five firms from the bids that came in, prioritized them as their number one choice and so on, and gave their choices to the State, who will verify that their choice is an appropriate one. They will then be able to discuss the details and the cost with the firm. There was still a question as to whether the Pleasant Lake Dam or the Elkins project should be repaired first. They have been assured by the State that they can do the work in conjunction with each other to get them both done. Right now they are just waiting to hear back from the State.

Ms. Helm asked if there were any compelling topics or concerns that the Board of Selectmen should highlight on their agendas for the coming year. Ms. Swanson asked if the Master Plan was done. Ms. Helm said it was completed in December and was available to read although it was over 350 pages in length. Chair Bianchi said that a 20-25 page summary of the document will be created by the RPC this month. Mr. Coogan thought it would be good for the town to be more proactive with the vision of the town. He thought New London was doing a good job and that they should stay the course. He didn't feel there was much outreach for public opinion when the Master Plan was being put together. Many at the meeting disagreed with this statement but noted that it was done a long time ago so wasn't fresh in everyone's mind. Chair Bianchi said there was a lot of input and committees were formed, but that there was always room for more input.

Ms. Helm asked if the Board of Selectmen provided some discussion sessions on parts of the Master Plan, would that be of interest to them/others. It was suggested by Mr. Payne to start with the CAC to review some parts and then break out into more discussions as needed.

Rick Anderson said that when the Master Plan started being put together, there were workshops offered and committees formed so that people could contribute and work on certain parts of it. He had just moved to town but remembered helping to facilitate some of the discussions at that time. Ken McWilliams

(former planner) was coordinating this at the time and it seemed to take a long time. He has read the entire draft and felt that the vision was where he wanted it to be: it included progress but was consistent with keeping the small-town feel.

Ms. Little offered that if the members of the CAC read the summary, they could discuss where they could go from there and what parts of the Master Plan they'd like to delve further into.

Ms. Helm said that the Board of Selectmen recommended that the vacant police officer position not be replaced for a year but when it went to Town Meeting, they were totally and absolutely overridden. That is the democratic process and she felt it a very civil, good meeting. She wondered if the members of the CAC felt that the Budget Committee or the Board of Selectmen were being too prudent in controlling finance.

Ms. Swanson said it seemed that there was some good effort to reduce costs on the Police Department's part. Some people had some misinformation and the number of people who are actually involved in the process is so small. Some groups speak louder than others and are heard even if their facts are not right. She wondered why the decisions that the Board of Selectmen or the Budget Committee make are able to be overruled by the citizens at Town Meeting. Ms. Helm said that Ms. Hallquist has volunteered to give a presentation on town government which would identify the ins and outs of how small towns govern, including the rules and regulations, and that issue might be a good one to start with.

Mr. Rich Anderson said they are always trying to cut costs and said he is concerned that over time, this could cause them revert to being years behind where they should be. Chair Bianchi said that if there is a way to get to the same end in a cost-effective way, it is their job to look at those options. 10% of the population of the town went to the meeting and there was a disconcerted effort to disagree with what they had decided with the Police Department position. That was fine because that is democracy. One thing he wanted to stress was that no one would be fired from the Town of New London in order to save money. In October they will set a new tax rate based on what people voted on at the May Town Meeting.

Mr. Anderson said that the Fire Department just had the purchase of the new fire truck approved and they got the same size ladder they always had. They got a call in Newbury to assist an emergency, and found that their ladder wasn't long enough to get to someone who had been crushed when a tree snapped. Sunapee was able to assist as their ladder was longer. In this situation, the person would not have survived even if the New London ladder could have reached him, but if there was a situation where someone could have been saved, it would have been a terrible misfortune not to save the person only because the ladder was too short. It is a good example of why they could have used a longer ladder.

Mr. Coogan observed that the town experienced a significant increase in the amount of spending from 2001-2008. In the last four years the budget has been flat and the Board of Selectmen should be commended for their work on this. He knows that when the budget was presented it was \$7.9 million dollars, which was reduced by only \$100,000 from that point. He felt the budget was very prudent and good.

Mr. Coogan went on to say that with regards to the \$75,000 police officer position, no one from the Budget Committee or the Board of Selectmen gave the philosophy of why the position was reduced. He wondered why this was the case. Chair Bianchi said that he was prepared with many facts on what was spent on policemen in other towns their size, which illustrates that they have more policemen than similar towns. After he presented the article, he didn't say anything more because Chief Seastrand was talking and he didn't feel it prudent, after talking to the Chief several times, to appear that he was "throwing him under the bus" at Town Meeting. Had anyone from the public asked a question, he would have been

happy to explain the facts and where New London stands and why they made their decision. He felt the amendment was orchestrated by others and it didn't seem to be a productive thing to do to get into a confrontational scene with Chief Seastrand at that time.

Ms. Helm said that she was a swing vote on this issue and came to Town Meeting with a written piece to share about their decision. Had she given her name to the moderator prior to the meeting, he would not have been able to let the question be called unless those who had given their names in advance had been given a chance to speak. That is an important piece of the puzzle. Ms. Hallquist suggested that anyone who raised a red voter card could have spoken, even if they didn't give their names to the Moderator in advance.

Chair Bianchi said they don't vote on line items at Town Meeting. The people spoke and they wanted to increase the budget for the Police Department by \$75,000 to enable the hiring of another officer. That is what they wanted and that is how they voted.

Mr. Rick Anderson thought the Board of Selectmen and the Budget Committee were prudent in their decision and the message from the residents was that they weren't willing to reduce certain services.

Ms. Piotrow said when she first moved to New London there was an administrative column in the *Intertown Record* and a newsletter was sent out regularly in the mail. She doesn't see that any more. Online equivalents are not the same as they are not as handy and it isn't as easy to go back and read them like a paper copy is. She thought more money should be used for communications. Chair Bianchi said that there was no funding cut from the budget for communications. Ms. Helm said that Ms. Hallquist has been getting used to being in the town and does do a publication, although it is not sent out via USPS.

Ms. Kannler opined that a town budget should be run and looked at like any other private company. They should not have the philosophy that taxpayer money is a bottomless pit and that taxes can simply be increased so the towns can make more money. She thought the Budget Committee did a great job going line by line to be prudent. She expects this out of a town committee.

Mr. Cardillo said there are people in the room who participate in the town's government year-round. He said they need to keep attuned to what people are talking about, what the Department Heads need, and how things can be run more efficiently. The Budget Committee listened to their Department Heads. The whole police situation was that the chief said it was OK to not hire and they agreed to follow his lead. It was an emotional decision brought about by recent current and local events involving the importance of police in small towns. He thought someone from the Budget Committee should have stood and explained how they got there to that decision. They work with the best information they have in front of them.

Mr. Cardillo said that the level of enforcement on the police department was created at a particular point in time and he didn't like the term that had been used lately: "man down" as in "we are operating a man down." He felt that the level of enforcement is arbitrary and so saying "we are a man down" doesn't really mean anything, except one less person from some arbitrary level that was set at some point in the past. The Budget Committee relied on their Police Chief to give them some guidance and then it changed. He felt it was important for people to be involved in the goings on of the Town all year long.

Chair Bianchi offered that the Board of Selectmen meet almost every Monday night. Agendas are posted online and they want participation. Government is not a passive thing; people have to get involved.

Mr. Cardillo commended the departments in town but believed there was still some inefficiency that should be addressed. This doesn't mean cutting more, but just analyzing how things are run. Soon they won't be able to cut any more as they will jeopardize services.

Chair Bianchi said the next meeting is Saturday, July 7th.

The meeting adjourned at 9:07am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London