



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES September 8, 2012

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Terri Bingham, Hardy Hasenfuss, Dave Payne, Jack Harrod, Will Kidder, Peter Hoglund, Donn Klingler, Bruce Hudson, Renate Kannler, Celeste Cook, Phyllis Piotrow, Gary Markoff, Joe Cardillo, Rip Cross, Doug MacMichael, Rick Anderson, Maureen Prohl, Ann Loeffler, Rich Anderson

Chair Bianchi called the meeting to order at 7:30am. He indicated that since the last CAC meeting there had been two new hires in the Town. The full-time police officer position was filled by Joshua Fisher from Sunapee. The Zoning/Planning Administrator position has been filled by Lucy St. John from Concord, who started on August 29th. She will be working five days/week, 8am – 4pm.

Chair Bianchi said that the Board of Selectmen held a non-resident taxpayer meeting in August. The biggest topic was the weekend hours of the Transfer Station. He assumed that there would be some changes made to have the facility open more hours on the weekends.

Chair Bianchi noted that that coming Wednesday, the Employee Personnel Committee will start to work on reviewing the Personnel Policy for the town to make comments to the Board for possible changes.

The Town has recently sent out a request for bids for the Bucklin Beach Bathhouse upgrade. They have appropriated about \$36,000 for these upgrades to the building, including the addition of an ADA compliant bathroom.

Chair Bianchi said that the Board of Selectmen will make a decision the following Monday night to choose a company to replace the boiler in the Town Office building. They hope to experience a substantial decrease in their propane usage after the replacement. Mr. Harrod suggested installing additional insulation as well, as an energy audit done in the building revealed significant heat leakage in the area of the boiler. Chair Bianchi said that the two bids they are considering are between \$13,000 and \$15,000.

Chair Bianchi said that the auditors were in the office two weeks ago and they hope to get their MS-5 in October to be able to set the tax rate. The Town seems to be in good shape financially. Having been without two full-time positions for a period of time has helped them to not over-spend the budgets.

Mr. Markoff said that the School Board came up with their first draft of the school budget the previous night. As of Wednesday at 4pm, they were planning on presenting a reduced budget. Then they heard they

would be hit with higher retirement costs. It will be about a \$400,000 difference; they will see a .8% increase.

Chair Bianchi gave an update on the status of the Pleasant Street sidewalk project. The Public Works Department has completed the drainage and is waiting for the curbing to be done by a subcontractor. They will then be able to grade and pave the sidewalk.

Chair Bianchi reported that, with regards to the Elkins project, they are still negotiating with one of the engineering firms. The firm, who will come to the next Board of Selectmen's meeting, will hopefully provide further details and information that has been requested of them. There are many regulations to follow when using Federal funds, which makes for a lengthy and detailed process. They hope to have the engineering firm finalized within the next month or so.

Ms. Prohl asked if the school district had some ideas for the use of the 1941 building. Mr. Markoff said that there is going to be a Request for Proposal (RFP) put out state-wide for any and all proposals for the 1941 building. To date, there hasn't been anyone who has come to present on behalf of any group that has achieved any momentum, which is why the RFP is now being sent out. Ms. Prohl asked if there was an ad hoc group formed, as mentioned in the newspaper. Mr. Markoff said that at one time there was an agreement in place saying that no other group could move forward with plans if this one group could meet a specific financial threshold. The threshold was not met and the agreement has lapsed.

Mr. Hudson asked what the RFP was for. Mr. Markoff said that it is for anyone who wants to come in with an idea to buy/lease/renovate/transform the building. In other towns where regional schools have closed, the town has been able to buy the building back from the district with the understanding that they must then be financially responsible for the maintenance of the building. The town will take on a liability even if the cost of the building was just \$1.

Ms. Piotrow recalled that the ad hoc group Mr. Markoff was talking about was called "The 1941 Group" and was made up of past graduates of the school. She thought they were interested in using the building to house a fine arts program. It was not successful.

Voter ID in New Hampshire

Chair Bianchi said that there will be some changes with regards to the need for ID to vote in the future. He turned the floor over to Ms. Linda Hardy, Town Clerk/Tax Collector, to explain further.

Ms. Hardy said that the Voter ID law was passed and the details of it have been printed in the Kearsarge Shopper. Four surrounding towns sponsored the ad. The law is being enacted in steps and it is not required to show a picture ID until after September 1, 2013. Until then, including the election that Tuesday, clerks will ask voters to show their ID. If the voter does not have an ID, the ballot clerk will give them an information sheet about the new law. For this coming election, "ID" can be as simple as the clerks, Michael Todd or other officials knowing the voter, but as of September 1, 2013 an actual ID will be required.

Ms. Hardy remarked that this new law will slow down the process at check-in with the ballot clerks especially in November. If voters do not have their ID at this point, they will be required to sign an affidavit to say they are who they claim to be. Those forms will be sent to the attorney general who will send a letter to the voter to check and make sure it was really them who voted. Ms. Hardy expected people to be flabbergasted because the clerks know them but they still cannot vote without an ID. Unfortunately, this is what the law requires. In November, if a voter signs the affidavit and has no ID available to them, the Town Clerk has an additional form (voucher) that will be signed and sealed by her,

which can be taken to the DMV in Concord or Claremont to obtain a free voter ID. It is going to say in red "Voter Identification Only."

Ms. Bingham asked if someone would be voting absentee in November, how it would work. Ms. Hardy said that there is no provision for ID being required for an absentee vote. She added that this is how voting would go for all future school and town elections.

Ms. Hardy added that New London will experience another voting change due to the fact that they are a college town. The definition of domicile was changed. When registering to vote there is wording that says if they claim New Hampshire to be their domicile, they will have to apply for and obtain a driver's license in New Hampshire. It used to be that a Colby-Sawyer College student could claim New Hampshire as their domicile because they stay in the state a large portion of the year. Now they have to sign an affidavit saying they will apply for a drivers' license in New Hampshire, etc., which can (and has) caused students to lose their financial aid from another state where the students had claimed as their domicile.

Mr. Hasnefuss asked if other states had similar laws, as he saw this as a way to eliminate most of the college students from voting in elections. Ms. Hardy said that students can always vote via absentee ballot in their home state.

Ms. Piotrow asked if the population of the Town of New London in the census includes the students living domiciled in New London in April when the census was taken. Their town representation is based on this number and adds to the complication.

Ms. Cook said she would work with her contact at Colby-Sawyer College to educate the students about this new definition and let them know what they need to do to claim residency or to file for absentee ballot in their home state.

Ms. Piotrow noted that the Town Clerks are against this new law. Ms. Hardy said they worked with the Secretary of State to try to overturn this law but they were not successful. Mr. Harrod said this law is set up for large cities where the clerks do not know everyone. Ms. Hardy said the Town Clerk also works with the checklist supervisors to keep the list up to date with removing deceased people, etc. She added that students do not tend to vote in the state or local elections, but mostly just the presidential elections.

Chair Bianchi said he is concerned that people will not vote because it is too much of a hassle to bring an ID. Mr. Markoff suggested that if an affidavit has to be signed during voting, that those people be removed from the line so they do not hold up the voting for others who have an ID. Chair Bianchi said that there is a tremendous turnout from the older people in town who may have given up their license and may not have an ID. Ms. Cook said that voting is a social happening for the older people. She hoped that people would tell their older friends that they can still vote and to still come. She was concerned that many did not even know there was a primary coming up.

Ms. Kannler said she did not think it would be as bad as people thought. She had to bring her citizenship papers when voting long ago in Mass. You cannot even buy Sudafed at the pharmacy without a license.

Ms. Helm asked if COA could put something in their newsletter to explain that some of the volunteer drivers could bring people to Claremont or Concord to get the free voter ID cards. Mr. Hasenfuss said that was something he could do. Ms. Bingham asked what they had to show as a voter ID. Ms. Hardy said they did not have to show anything. The signed voucher from the Town Clerk would suffice. She said that they may be required to show residency and they are asked some questions to prove it. They are already

registered voters and are in the system. They must have a voucher from the Town Clerk to go to the DMV to get the free ID.

Mr. Markoff said that they had feared a similar confusion with the changing over of the tax bills in the Town. He felt they did a great job educating people and he suggested continuing the education about this new law to make the transition easier. Ms. Hardy said that after the voting on Tuesday, they could keep the education going and give people time to get the voter ID if necessary.

Ms. Hardy said that in the primary election, anyone can go in as an undeclared voter and can choose which ballot they want. The party they vote for designates them as being part of that party. They can then go back to undeclared status after the ballot goes into the machine. This cannot be done after that time except for 90 days prior to the next primary. In the general election, both parties are together on the ballot so people can vote for whomever they wish. They are not asked for their party designation at that time.

Ms. Hardy noted that if someone does not have their ID by the next election, the voucher will have expired. They would need to sign another affidavit and get another voucher.

Chair Bianchi felt they were lucky to have people working for their town who are educated in this process and he had faith in how they would handle the elections.

Ms. Bingham thought it would be a good idea if the procedures for voting were on the Town's website. Ms. Hardy said that they were already there. She said the sample ballots are on there, as is the whole sheet of information about the ID from the State. Links to absentee ballot applications are there as well.

Ms. Hardy asked that people have patience with the ballot clerks as they have to do many new things. She reminded everyone that the polls would be open from 8am to 7pm.

Ms. Hallquist was next on the agenda to discuss how the State had been re-districted and the Federal laws that require it. In New Hampshire, the re-districting has affected New London. They are now voting with Newbury for the House. In years past, they had been voting with Danbury and Wilmot. The other change is in the Executive Council area. New London used to be in the 2nd district but is now in District 1, with Ray Burton of Bath, NH currently holding the seat. Ms. Hallquist said that the Executive Council is pretty powerful in the State and that the Governor can't do much without the support of the Council. She felt it was important for the citizens to know who their Executive Counselor is. She was not sure if it was good or bad for New London to be in District 1, as it was considerably larger in size (not population) than District 2.

Ms. Hallquist said that the New Hampshire re-districting went to the Supreme Court. There were no evident constitutional problems with what the legislature did with the re-districting so it was not overturned. The important issue for many is that the makeup of the districts, town or wards, is either Democratic or Republican, so it is a battle. The Senate redistricting did not change that much in terms of New London. Eight towns left their district and 11 were added. Bradford, Croydon, Grantham and Springfield have joined New London's Senate district. Senator Bob Odell currently represents New London in the Senate.

Mr. Hasenfuss asked what the best source was to familiarize themselves with the people running for the open seats. Ms. Hallquist thought that perhaps the League of Women Voters might have some information. The Town does not and cannot provide campaign information from the various candidates, but there is a wealth of information on-line. Ms. Piotrow said that on Tuesday, October 30th is candidate's night for those running for Governor, Congress, Representatives and Executive Counsel. It will be held in

Whipple Hall. Mr. Markoff suggested that anyone looking for information on the candidates could find ample information by using Google.com.

Ms. Cook said that as a resident, she recognized that they have two people running for State Representative. One is David Kidder and the other is Karen Ebel, who is running for Randy Foose's seat. She thought it admirable that New London had two competent people running.

Ms. Piotrow asked what the population of New London and Newbury were. Ms. Hallquist said that New London's population is 4,000 and Newbury was about 3,000. She noted that some people have complained about the redistricting saying that towns were put together that had no common interest. This idea was found not to be relevant enough to throw out the redistricting lines. Some of the southern towns were very upset about the ways the districts were formed.

Ms. Hallquist said that Ray Burton from Bath has been on the Executive Council since the 1970's. Ms. Piotrow said he was one of the two who did not vote to de-fund Planned Parenthood and was seen by many in his party that he was not conservative enough. Ms. Helm said he spoke to Rotary the previous day and spoke about the 10-year plan for road work which was up for a new definition of the list. She said that they urged Mr. Burton not to take New London off the list.

Mr. Markoff said the school district is not in the same designation for redistricting as there are towns in both districts. Mr. Harrod said they can now get two representatives on the side of the school district.

Mr. Hudson asked where they stand on hiring a new assessor with the Town of Newbury. Ms. Hallquist said that Kris McAllister was appointed in the interim Chief Assessor. They would give her six months and then decide if they would offer the position to her or look for another hire. They have hired a firm to do data collection and hope to get a lot done and catch up. Even with Norm Bernaiche (former Assessor) on board, they were behind. It is ongoing and Ms. Hallquist said she would keep everyone updated. The thought was that it was better to have an interim than to hire someone they were not 100% comfortable with. They did not get many resumes for the Assessor's position when it was advertised.

Chair Bianchi noted that Ms. McAllister had come in to talk to them about the Grand List. New London has gone up .75%.

Mr. MacMichael asked for an update on the sidewalks and the dam in Elkins. Chair Bianchi said that the Elkins Transportation and Enhancement Grant is what the town voted for and there is money to spend. They have ranked five qualified engineering firms to do the work, and they have been in negotiations with their number one pick. The firms do not tell the town, at the time of the request for qualifications, what their price will be and they are ranked solely on ability. The Board of Selectmen is then charged to negotiate with one firm at a time to fix a price. The State has to approve their choices at all points and there are many rules and regulations that must be adhered to.

Chair Bianchi said that with regards to the dam, they need to keep the State informed of their plans to upgrade it. They have \$25,000 in the fund currently and when they get enough money they will do a feasibility study to determine the next step. The State is very flexible with the Town and they also realize that they have the Elkins project going on as well. The sidewalk project is ahead of the dam project. Ms. Hallquist said that she and Richard Lee were concerned with the first engineering firm they chose in the process and thought about stopping working with them and go to the next choice. They did not feel the firm had a good vision for what New London wanted. The firm now wants to come back in on Monday to plead their case and talk about continuing negotiations with them. They seemed to be the best firm in December/January but they lost confidence in the firm once they began negotiating with them. The firm,

Pathways Engineering, will be bringing four people with them to the meeting on Monday evening. Chair Bianchi said that they are great people but the Board of Selectmen and Mr. Lee just did not feel that they were on top of the project. To be fair to Pathways, they Selectmen will listen to them on Monday night and see if they can change their mind. If not, the Board will go to the next firm on the list and begin negotiations with that firm. From what they are told, this is a typical process that is followed when not knowing the cost and the details.

Mr. Markoff asked to speak on the 1941 building issue. He said that the school board will broadcast to any/all to submit a proposal to do something with it and that none of them have to be accepted. They could demolish the building and all they would have to do is mow it which would decrease the maintenance yearly costs. He noted that he went to the Nugget Theatre (movie theatre in Hanover, NH) last Saturday night and noticed a plaque and that said the theatre was non-profit and that revenues go back to the town. He thought that this would be a good idea for New London. The physical location is there, the building is there, and it would draw people. It could be a way to attract people and become a source of revenue to the town. Perhaps the town could buy it for \$1 and retrofit it. He thought people should think about this sort of opportunity. The theatre could also be used for performance. He said the Barn Playhouse was a huge asset and felt that this sort of element was so important to the town. Mr. Markoff was not sure how much it would cost to transform the building but thought it was worth looking into.

Mr. Markoff said that he did not want the asset going out of New London's hands or being knocked down. Those who want to have a Community Center do not have the financial pull to make it happen. The Town could have the energy and support to do it and it could be a positive thing. He had no idea what it would cost but thought a lot of people would come and the college kids would frequent it as well.

Chair Bianchi said that every small town that had a building in the district had their buildings given back to them for \$1 when the schools closed. The 1941 building was the New London Elementary School and before that it was New London K-12. There has never been traction to give New London the building back. Mr. Markoff said that they are not only talking \$1 as the town would also be responsible for the maintenance of it. He wondered if the Town would take the responsibility of the building. He shares the instinct that they should keep it within the town. Mr. Markoff noted that they will not just give the building to the highest bidder, but to the bidder who presents the best use or the one that makes the most sense. If the town owns it for \$1, puts in a theatre/performance center, and maybe has a restaurant like the Common Man come in, it could be a good thing. They are in a position to do this as a town. They could make something happen if they wanted to.

Mr. Cardillo said that if the building is given to the town, the town is assuming maintenance. There is a lot of uncertainty. Does the town want it as a future asset even if they do not have a committee to create a theatre or a non-profit? It could cost a million dollars to retrofit it. He opined that they could "moth-ball" it but there would still be security issues involved. If the plan is to move forward with a group that would spearhead fundraising and find a use for it, that would be one avenue. Mr. Markoff agreed and noted they could budget for the capital expenditures for the building and not do anything with it right then. If they decide later on to do something in town, they would have the building and the location. There is nothing else available in town. This is something he would like to see as a New London taxpayer. He would like to see what it could be as an asset to the town.

Chair Bianchi noted that when he reviewed the previous CAC meeting minutes, he noted two instances where he asked if there was a sentiment in the group for the Town to get involved in the building. No one expressed an opinion either way. He was on record that the building should not be demolished. He thought it could have many uses. He asked again how others felt. Should the Town take an active role in trying to acquire the building? Mr. Hoglund asked if this would have to go to Town Meeting. Chair

Bianchi said that it would if it would involve money. He said that if they want to give support, not money, it would not go to Town Meeting.

Ms. Helm asked if the Board of Selectmen should expend energy to put forth a proposal which would involve putting something on the warrant at the May Town Meeting. If it is not the consensus of the group, they will not waste their time. Ms. Piotrow said she thought that someone on the Board of Selectmen was supposed to meet with the school district to see what they would be willing to do. That should come first. She thought the consensus was that they were in favor of moving forward. Mr. Cardillo did not think they should acquire the building unconditionally. Between now and the next meeting they should find out what it would cost to do the different things that were discussed: "mothballing" or otherwise. Mr. Markoff said the information for "mothballing" is known but he just did not have it with him. Right now, the School Board has something they are responsible for. Who wants it? They have to maintain it and it is an expense the school district. They want to sell it to get rid of the cost. It is possible they will send out the RFP and no one will respond.

By a show of hands, it was unanimous that the Selectmen should investigate the possibility of acquiring the 1941 building for the Town.

The next CAC meeting is scheduled for October 6, 2012.

The September 11th service is scheduled to be held in front of the Fire Station at 11:00.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05am.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of New London