



# TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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## BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES December 30, 2013

### **PRESENT:**

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

### **ALSO PRESENT:**

Scott Blewitt, Recreation Director  
Pat Blanchard, Budget Committee  
Bruce Hudson & Renate Kannler, New London Residents  
Laura Lorio, Recreation Commission  
Nancy Rollins, New London Resident  
Gayle Hedrington, WNTK  
Jay Lyon, Fire Chief

Chair Helm called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

### Receipt of Correspondence Regarding Skating Rink

The Board noted receipt of an email that expressed concern with the condition of the ice skating rink. Mr. Blewitt noted that he did read the correspondence and pointed out that he has been creating skating rinks for the past 20 years, including the Newport and Sunapee rinks, so he has the experience needed to maintain New London's rink. He noted that perhaps he may have jumped the gun and had it installed a little too early; a few days before Thanksgiving. Since he was not sure of the history of how New London's rink operated in the past, so as a result perhaps it went up too early. People who saw the rink up were anxious to go skating and skated on it before it was fully frozen. Mr. Blewitt felt that 80% of the rink has been in good shape but there are some parts that have been a problem. He suggested that he should have put up more of a barrier to keep people off the ice before it was completely ready. Now that cold weather is here, the rink will get in glass-like condition. Mr. Blewitt said he prefers to spray light coats of water over the ice over a long period of time. Letting the hose run and flooding the rink for an hour will cause the ice on top to freeze but it will not freeze below the surface. The Town of Sunapee opened their rink the previous day but closed it the next day to allow it to freeze over. Newport doesn't have a rink yet but it should go in the end of December, as usual. He planned to go work on the rink after the meeting that night and throughout the remainder of the week.

Chair Helm asked if it was too late to put ropes around the rink to insure people go in only where the warming hut is. Mr. Blewitt said this could be done and he could snow-blow an entrance wherever they would like people to enter. He said he could make additional signage to let people know when the rink is closed. The Board thanked Mr. Blewitt for addressing the issues of the condition of the rink.

Request to Approve Trail Agreements

The Board reviewed trail agreements as submitted by the Conservation Commission (CC) that will allow the CC to maintain trails across private property (owned by the Vernons). The Conservation Commission approved of the agreement and recommended that it be signed by the Selectmen.

**IT WAS MOVED (Janet Kidder) AND SECONDED (Peter Bianchi) to accept the recommendation of the Conservation Commission to approve the trail agreement with the owners of the two lots.**

**THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Personnel policy change- holiday pay for part-time employees

Ms. Hallquist noted that the Personnel Committee suggested that the Selectmen change the policy which states that part-time employees are not paid holiday pay when they work a holiday. In making this recommendation the Committee felt this would encourage part-timers to work so the full-time employees could have holidays off. Ms. Hallquist said this would save the Town money because part-time employees generally make less per hour than the full-time employees. Therefore, it would cost the town less should the part-time employees work instead of the full-time staff. There are nine holidays that would be covered by this policy. This change will give part-time employees the incentive to work a holiday.

**IT WAS MOVED (Peter Bianchi) AND SECONDED (Janet Kidder) to change the personnel policy as recommended by the Personnel Committee, to allow part-time employees who work on a holiday to be paid at the rate of time and one half, for the holiday hours worked THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Budget

*Recreation*

The Board reviewed the budget request as submitted by Scott Blewitt, Recreation Director. Chair Helm noted there were no budget increases for 2014/2015. Mr. Blewitt noted that the Elkins bath house will need to have some upgrades to make it handicapped accessible, and this cost is not included in his budget as facilities are covered in another area of the budget.

Selectman Kidder asked Mr. Blewitt if he thought there was enough money budgeted for the swimming programs, as he had mentioned earlier that some raises were in order. Mr. Blewitt noted that after last year's swim season, he felt both he and the two beach managers could get a better handle on the weather and when to open and close. He believed they could save some money in this regard and be able to pay the lifeguards a bit more. He was confident that there would be enough money in the budget.

Selectman Bianchi asked if the budget included the revolving fund. Mr. Blewitt said it did not. Selectman Bianchi noted that although he understands that it isn't part of the budget, it is money that is spent on recreation. He noted that it is difficult to see how much is in the fund, what it is used for, or who pays for it. The funds in the revolving account do not come under the scrutiny of the Selectmen or Budget Committee. Ms. Hallquist observed that revolving funds are designed by statute to be outside of the budgeting process and specifically allow recreation fees to be put into the account and spent for recreation purposes, without a further vote of town meeting. Recreation Departments bring in fees and spend out of the account and this kind of set-up works well. It was noted that the Revolving Fund was established by Town Meeting in 2004.

Selectman Bianchi said the fund seems to keep increasing. Ms. Hallquist said that the fund increases when people pay for things, such as day camp but then expenses are paid and the fund goes back down. Mr. Blewitt said he welcomed any suggestions on how to make spending out of the fund more transparent. He noted that some paddle-boards were purchased from the revolving account and said it is the philosophy of the Recreation Commission of what they deem as appropriate spending of the fund. It also depends on how much money the Town wants to keep in the account.

Ms. Lorio said the fund allows for them to bring in a little more money through activities and then to allow them to do other, free events for the town, such as the Easter Egg Hunt and Halloween events. Selectman Bianchi said that this is all a fuzzy area on how the money is brought in and is used. Ms. Lorio understood his concern, but said that the Recreation Commission reviews everything and is aware of where the money is and where it is going.

Ms. Hallquist said all the funds are documented, going in and out, and it is transparent; the information is available to anyone who wants to see it. Selectman Bianchi said he wasn't accusing anyone of being devious with regards to the money, but the fact that it wasn't listed as a part of the Recreation budget, made it unclear as to what the Recreation budget really was.

Ms. Blanchard wasn't comfortable with the fact that the money coming in for the swim program stay in the fund and isn't used to pay the lifeguards, who are paid from the regular operating budget. If the money collected for the swim program is used for the salaries, she thought there would be a deficit in the revolving account. Ms. Hallquist said there is no requirement that the fees that come in must be used to offset the program the funds are generated from, thus swim instructors can be paid from the operating budget. She noted that Mr. Blewitt works on just about every program that is offered through the Recreation Department, but his salary isn't paid from the revolving account; he is paid through the operating budget. They can pay for any recreation purpose out of that account and it is up to the Recreation Commission to determine these details. Expenditures from the revolving account are approved by the Recreation Director and by the Town Administrator.

Selectman Kidder said for 2014, they budgeted \$19,750 for health and dental for the Recreation Director. The figure has changed to \$10,750. Ms. Johnson said last year when they didn't have a

Recreation Director yet, she budgeted the highest cost insurance policy. Since Mr. Blewitt takes the insurance buy-out, the payment is less than what she had anticipated.

Selectman Bianchi said he thought they should approve all the budgets at the end, once they have seen what all the departments have brought in. This would give them an idea of the overall budget and then they could determine if any cuts could/should be made at that time.

#### *Executive Budget*

- *Administration*

Ms. Hallquist said they have lost Linda Jackman as a full-time employee and so the budget for full-time wages and health and retirement benefits will be about \$30,000 less. Modest increases for conferences, travel and meals is included in the budget request. She recommends they bring these budgets back to the 2013 levels. They also may want to consider putting \$1,000 into the Selectmen's Discretionary Account, which could be used for things like the employee holiday party. In the past the Town has been awarded wellness grants from its insurance carrier (Health Trust) and this money has been used for the expenses of the holiday party. However, to do this, employees are required to sit through a wellness seminar during the party. It might be nice to be able to just offer a party without the seminar being part of it.

Ms. Hallquist noted that this is the area that includes Selectmen's salary, so if the Selectmen wanted to change that line item, it could be requested.

- *Assessing*

Ms. Hallquist noted that the Tri-Town Joint Assessing Board adopted a budget representing a little under 7% increase.

- *Legal*

Ms. Hallquist said Legal Services will be over this year due to the cases they currently are engaged in. It was recommended that they go back to the amount they had before last year, which would be an increase of \$5,000 for a total of \$25,000.

- *Personnel Administration*

Ms. Hallquist urged the Selectmen not to eliminate Tuition Reimbursement this year even though they haven't used it recently. They may want to start encouraging employees to seek higher education. With regard to the Employee benefits line, this is for the insurance deductible, which is \$10,000. She thought for the number of employees who have used it, which are few, it is a morale boosting benefit that should be kept. The Health Insurance Deductible is \$1,000 per policy. She has heard this is something that is very much appreciated by the employees. Ms. Johnson said about \$4,000 per calendar year has been used in the last couple of years.

Ms. Hallquist said she was interested in requesting finds to improve the town's website but given the more pressing needs in other areas of the budget, she would like to use some of the training funds to train current employees on how to improve the website.

Selectman Bianchi said the assessors' costs have gone up every year. This was something they should look into. New London pays approximately 1/3 of the total, which adds up to about a quarter of a million dollars. Ms. Hallquist said this is for two people's salaries, benefits, training, mileage and computer software. She said the employees are actually employed by the Town of Newbury and they go by Newbury's rates. She stressed that their assessors are highly regarded in the State and felt that although a larger firm may be less expensive, Mr. Bernaiche and Ms. McAllister are worth the cost in terms of expertise in the area of assessing and in the access New London taxpayers have to them for property assessment purposes.

Selectman Bianchi added that when they talk about pay increases in the Town, they should be aware they are not using the FY2014 figures as a baseline; they would use the FY2013 plus 2%. He noted that the FY2014 budgeted amount included 27 pay periods, not the 26 that will be budgeted for in FY2015.

- *Finance*

Ms. Johnson noted that the finance budget includes yearly licensing fees for the software they use, including Vision (assessing software), and Muni Smart. This line is expected to increase. There are not a lot of costs that are going down; postage will go up .03/stamp. Selectman Bianchi questioned why the postage line was increased more than the percentage increase of stamps. Ms. Johnson said they never put in an increase from when the postage went up to .46 cents. This increase will account for both increases.

Selectman Kidder thought the Selectmen, who put in a lot of time into the Town, should get the same amount as the highest paid "volunteer" for the Town (the highest paid elected official is the Treasurer and that position is paid \$3,000/year.) Selectman Bianchi thought it seemed kind of self-serving to make this change while they sat on the Board. If they start cutting things and someone gets a \$1,000 cut, they may turn back to the Selectmen and question their own raise. He agreed that they do put in a lot of time and that it was warranted. Selectman Kidder thought that it was only fair to increase the amount they are given to show that the position was a respected one and to encourage others to run.

Chair Helm thought they could put in the files that in two more years, the increase is put into effect. She felt uncomfortable putting more money in the budget for themselves. Selectman Kidder said she would feel more uncomfortable if the amount was more but didn't feel this was a problem. Ms. Hallquist pointed out that since the Selectmen must create a budget, it will always be uncomfortable for the sitting selectmen to make such a change, but it has to go through that Board first.

Mr. Hudson asked for a summary on the Recreation budget as compared with last year. Ms. Johnson said every budget appears to be down this year because of the extra pay-period anomaly. Last year Recreation was at \$155,129 and this year, before any raises are put in, it is at \$145,724.

#### Town Administrator's Report

Ms. Hallquist said the first phase of Police Chief interviews went well. She will firm up the date for the Citizens' Committee the week after New Year's. The Board of Selectmen need to provide

a charge to this committee to let them know what is expected of them. The Committee's recommendation will be given to the Selectmen. Once the Selectmen interview the candidates and decide to offer the position to one of them, there will be background checks and testing necessary before they can start. Selectman Bianchi thought the next agenda for the meeting on January 6<sup>th</sup> should include the Selectmen coming up with a charge for the Citizens' Committee.

Chair Helm wondered if Ms. Hallquist could provide to the Citizen's Committee the list of questions NOT to ask the applicants.

#### Committee Reports

There were none.

#### Other Business

##### *Colby-Sawyer presentation*

Chair Helm said she attended a presentation that took place at Colby-Sawyer College from a media class that included brochures that had been made up to promote walking tours of the town. She noted that she was quite impressed by the presentation and by the brochures that were created. She passed around the brochures for her colleagues to peruse.

##### *CAC Meeting Topic of Discussion*

Chair Helm asked Ms. Hallquist to check with Ms. Prohl and see if any more Master Plan discussions were still to come. Otherwise, they would come up with some other topics. Ms. Kannler thought a representative from the business community, such as the Chamber of Commerce, should come give a talk about how well they are doing in the town and what their plans are. Chair Helm said this would be a good idea and perhaps if Ms. Prohl didn't have anything to present, Jen Tockman from the Chamber or someone from Destination New London could come talk about business in New London.

Selectman Bianchi thought at some point the Planning Board would like to get some input on zoning changes. The Planning Board hasn't started working on this yet, but they may be interested in what the CAC members would have to suggest with regards to these things.

##### *Dispatching FY2015 budget*

Chair Helm said she was surprised by the dispatch proposed budget, because of the requested increases, and was thinking the Board should move forward more quickly than anticipated to gather information and figure out where they are going. She wondered how her colleagues felt about having a committee work on gathering information, observing that the Board needs information to be able to discuss this issue with citizens. They need a better idea of where they are going with this; either to keep it within the town, or to explore other options.

Selectman Bianchi agreed with Chair Helm, noting they could be equipping a dispatch center for New London that they may not have any participation in if their rates get too high. Any short-falls due to other towns leaving will become the burden of New London. Ms. Hallquist stressed that money budgeted in FY2015 does not have to be spent until June 30, 2015, which will allow time to explore this issue before making a big financial commitment. She also noted that the

town will apply for a grant so it may be that the money in the budget to replace the consoles is not needed at all. Selectman Bianchi said it is a pretty substantial increase and wondered if they should come together with a position on what they should do for the future with regards to dispatch in New London. Chair Helm said they may decide they want to keep it in the town and figure out how to make the numbers work.

Chair Helm said there is much data to gather to make a good decision; they have a lot of opinions and have had some discussion, but no real data. Chief Lyon said the citizens of New London and surrounding towns can get dispatch cheaper; it is whether the citizens want to go somewhere else. Do they want to deal with people in Hanover, Keene or other towns or keep it local where the knowledge of the town is better. He felt that dispatch hadn't been advocated for in a long time. There were issues with their communications equipment because of this and they have to decide whether it is worthwhile having the communications center within New London or if they should go elsewhere. Ms. Hallquist said there was no question that New London and other towns could get dispatch cheaper elsewhere, but the citizens need to decide whether or not they want the local service and benefits and if it is worth it for them to pay a little more for it.

Selectman Bianchi said he thought they should be prepared with facts and figures with regards to their dispatching options when it comes time for Town Meeting. They need to know the details. Ms. Hallquist noted that the budget also includes another full-time dispatcher. These positions cannot be filled with part-timers because it is a highly specialized position and it takes months to train.

Chief Lyon said it would seem like an obvious choice to go with a lower-priced service, but as a citizen in the Town, is it worth it to pay more for a good, local service? He said it depended on which side people looked at it from. If they didn't have good employees at dispatch, the decision would be easier. They have four full-time employees and a few part-timers that have done a great job. He felt Heather Wood has done a great job turning the department around and has plans in place for training and enhancing the service.

Chair Helm thought they should have a warrant article at Town Meeting to see how the Town feels about dispatch. Ms. Hallquist said they should resist the temptation to cut this from the budget before they get to Town Meeting, noting that just because it is in the budget, doesn't mean the money will be spent. Ms. Blanchard said the pros and cons and pricing differences could be provided to people at Town Meeting. Ms. Kannler agreed and said the voters would need to also understand that if any towns pull out of the service, New London would be on the hook for more money. Chair Helm said before Town Meeting, they should schedule at least one public hearing to discuss the topic.

Chief Lyon said the Town has Department Heads who are experts in their fields. He was willing to provide information about how dispatch is a part of their department and how they do their work. There were certain things that could not have a price associated with them, as far as convenience goes, such as attaining burn permits in a central location versus hiring someone to go to a location to write one. He was hired to keep NLFD as a call/volunteer fire department. Recruitment and retention are his biggest issues and for him, he would like people who are

professional, proficient and well-trained and who want to take care of the townspeople. The last thing he wants to do is to put more demands on their personnel which, although may save on full and part-time employees, it may require them to have to hire more full-time firefighters because no one will volunteer any more.

Chair Helm said she didn't think the taxpayers realized how much dispatch was costing the Town. People do appreciate the personal touch a local service provides, but they need to know the costs.

Selectman Kidder said they need to go forward and present the numbers to the Town of New London, without considering the possible participation of other towns. She noted that if the other towns decide to join them, for a price that is fair and reasonable, to them that is fine. However the Board should focus on the total, understanding that New London is responsible for the total, if other towns decide not to participate.

Chief Lyon said this could be discussed at the Department Head meeting the following day. He was interested in how the hospital could participate in this service as currently, they are not paying anything. He thought some kind of a presentation could be compiled by the Department Heads for the Selectmen's meeting on January 13<sup>th</sup>. Chair Helm thought a citizen's committee could be made up of those with experience and those without, which could help uncover some questions that need to be answered. Chief Lyon said that even if the Town decides to hire an outside service to study dispatch, that service will ask the department heads all of this same information they could provide on their own.

Selectman Kidder said they need to determine if this is a model they would be able to sustain over time. They also need to consider that they are part of Merrimack County, which offers a dispatch service. The Town pays taxes for this service but doesn't benefit from it. Chief Lyon said he wasn't sure of the abilities of Merrimack County to reach New London. Even if they did decide to invest in the better equipment for the New London service and decide to go elsewhere, this equipment could better their service if they decide, in time, to move to another service.

Chair Helm said she'd like to have a written report by the end of January, if possible. She agreed with Chief Lyon that the employees at dispatch were important and the Town valued and invested in them. Ms. Hallquist thought between Chief Andersen, Chief Lyon and Ms. Wood, they had the expertise with regards to equipment and communication. The report would include pros and cons from a technical standpoint. Selectman Kidder said the report should also be basic; how would the service change if dispatch were to move from New London? How would it affect the citizens if they had a problem?

#### Approval of Minutes

**IT WAS MOVED (Peter Bianchi) AND SECONDED (Janet Kidder) to approve the minutes of December 11, as circulated. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**IT WAS MOVED (Janet Kidder) AND SECONDED (Peter Bianchi) to approve the minutes of December 16, as amended. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Upcoming Meetings

Saturday, January 4, 7:30am Community Advisory Committee  
Monday, January 6, 8:00am Board of Selectmen  
Tuesday, January 7, 5:00pm Recreation Commission (Whipple Hall)  
Saturday, January 11, 9:00am Deliberative Session Kearsarge High School  
Tuesday, January 14, 7:00pm Planning Board  
Tuesday, January 21, New Hampshire Primary  
Wednesday, January 22, 8:00am Board of Selectmen  
Wednesday, January 22, 7:00pm Budget Committee

Other Business

Chair Helm said that the Selectmen would conduct Ms. Hallquist's employee review at the end of the January 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, in Non-public session.

Application for Building Permit:

- Herbert & Margaret Lyon, 85 Bog Road (Map/Lot 107-021-000) Install generator, Permit # 13-138 – Approved
- Richard & Elaine Murphy, 371 Hall Farm Road (Map/Lot 076-009-000) Interior renovations, Permit #13-139 – Approved
- Sally C. Keating Revocable Trust, 485 Burpee Hill Road (Map/Lot 070-011-000) Exterior renovations/roof removal and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor reformat - Approved
- Glenn Hoeft, 43 Woodland Trace (Map/Lot 094-006-000) Install generator and shed - Approved

Application for use of Town Common:

- New London Recreation Department – Winter Carnival, January 27-February 2, 2014 – Approved

Application for use of Whipple Hall:

- New London Recreation Department – Magic Show, January 31, 2014, 3-6pm – Approved

Other Items to be signed:

- Disbursement voucher
- Land Use Change Tax Warrant for Hart Family Realty 14 LB LLC – Approved
- Intent to Cut – Map & Lot 061-006-000 Pleasant Street – Approved
- Landowner Permission Agreement – 023-011-002 - Approved

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:23pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary  
Town of New London