



# TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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## NEW LONDON BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, January 10, 2024

Whipple Memorial Town Hall

6:30 PM

**BUDGET COMMITTEE PRESENT:** Colin Beasley (Vice Chair), John Wilson, Hannah Bianchi, Mark Christensen, Melissa Leintz, Charles Kelsey, Lyndsay Harkins, Lou Botta, Bebe Casey, Selectman Representative

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Chris Lorio

**STAFF:** Kimberly Hallquist, Town Administrator, Lynn Lewis, Finance Officer

**ALSO PRESENT:** Robert Harrington, DPW Director; Police Chief Emily Cobb; Fire Chief Jay Lyon; Bob Brown, Conservation Commission Chair, Celeste Cook, Welfare Officer; Peter Nichols, Housing Commission Chair; Putnam Kidder, Recreation Director; Doug Baxter; Charlene Baxter; John Doyle; Joe Cardillo; Mark Vernon; Rob Prohl; Rich Epstein; Karen Epstein; John Ellis; Audrey Chijner; Kathy Thomas; Beth Hayward; Sandy Schmid

In the absence of Chair Lorio, Vice-Chair Beasley chaired the meeting and called the meeting to order at 6:30PM.

There was a discussion about the meeting minutes from December 20<sup>th</sup> regarding clarification of transfer station comments. It was agreed to move the lines regarding the Transfer Station into the same paragraph.

It was noted that in the minutes from December 13<sup>th</sup>, there were grammatical errors on page 2 and 3.

**MOTION WAS MADE (Lou Botta) and SECONDED (Melissa Leintz) to approve the minutes of December 6<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> as amended. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### Selectmen's Report

Selectman Casey reported that Jamie Hess, Chair of the Energy Committee spoke to the Selectmen regarding purchasing of the solar panels and a goal of having the Town on 100% renewable electricity by 2030.

Selectman Casey reported that Steve Solomon from the Tracy Memorial Library discussed the need for the roof to be replaced and requested a bond be placed on the warrant. Selectman Casey noted that the Selectmen feel that a bond would not be prudent and instead the funds can be found elsewhere in the budget.

A 2% COLA for employees was agreed upon for the coming budget year and the budget worksheets have been updated accordingly. The cost was approximately \$132,000 and the \$150,000 placeholder was removed.

The Selectmen voted on previously agreed Capital Reserve items.

The Conservation Commission requested \$10,000 be set up in a Capital Reserve account to help with the management of properties. The Selectmen did not support this request.

A petition warrant article was submitted asking to purchase a property next to the Police Station.

Vice-chair Beasley asked for clarification of the cost of the COLA. Lynn Lewis stated that it included changes from the wage study along with the COLA.

Vice-Chair Beasley also asked about Bill Helm's proposal for capital reserves to pay for repairs to the Library. Selectman Casey stated that they had not yet discussed this and would do so at the next meeting.

### **Chamber of Commerce**

There was no one present from the Chamber of Commerce, so Kim Hallquist gave a brief description of the organization. They have increased their request to \$15,000.

### **Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Planning Region Planning Commission (RPC)**

There was no one present from the RPC. Kim Hallquist explained that they provide planning assistance and manage household hazardous waste drives. Lou Botta stated that they are helping with our hazard mitigation plan. Peter Nichols, Housing Chair spoke to the value of the RPC.

### **New London Hospital**

Lisa Cohen, CFO and Derick Aumann, Director of New London Hospital Ambulance explained their request to help with the ambulance costs. Lou Botta spoke of the quality of life we enjoy in New London with the hospital and an ambulance service so accessible.

### **Council on Aging (COA) Chapin Senior Center**

Rob Prohl explained that they have 2 employees and a budget of \$245,000 of which approximately \$72,000 comes from Towns. They serve about 2000 New London residents and many volunteers come from New London.

### **Lake Sunapee VNA**

Representatives were not available for questions. No questions were asked.

### **Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)**

Charlene Baxter explained that they currently serve 13 families with 27 children in New London. They do work all over the region.

### **Community Action Program (CAP)**

Beth Hayward thanked New London for their support. They stated that they are making a level funded request. They service 38 towns and 2 counties.

### **New London Garden Club**

Sandy Schmid explained that they work very hard to keep New London beautiful. Melissa Leintz and Lou Botta stated that they thought the Garden Club does a great job.

### **Lake Protective Associations**

Messer Pond Protective Association – Audrey Chijner stated that they have been working on the control of invasive species since 2007.

Pleasant Lake Protective Association – Charlene Baxter stated that she and her husband, Doug, coordinated the lake host program and staffed the lake from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

Little Lake Sunapee Protective Association – Kathy Thomas informed the board that they perform the same functions as the others and 65% of their budget comes from the Town.

Lake Sunapee Protective – there was no representative present and no questions were asked.

### **Care of Trees**

A member of the board asked about the care of trees line item. Kim Hallquist stated the line item was managed by Bob Harrington and Dave Carey, our Tree Warden, they use this to remove trees or prune trees as necessary.

### **Health Administration**

Kim informed the Board that our Health Officer is Dr. Nick Baer. He handles test pits for septic systems, water testing on the lakes, and any other health issues that arise.

### **Welfare**

Celeste Cook stated that people's needs are very fluid and last year was the worst year she has seen and it is all housing related. Bebe Casey asked if the cancellation of rental assistance had an impact. Celeste said yes and the Town is required to step in to help. Lou Botta asked if there were any additional state programs and Celeste stated that there were not.

### **Recreation**

Putnam Kidder presented his recreation budget. There was discussion about what was included in staff wages. Putnam responded that it is the lifeguards and beach attendants. They are looking to staff 7 days a week this year. The computer licenses allocation was the Rec Dept portion of the VC3 bill. The Elkins Beach equipment increase is for a new metal picnic bench. Conferences and training includes all of the lifeguard trainings and certifications.

### **Patriotic Purposes**

These funds have not been used regularly in the past few years but there is a new group that will be using these funds this year.

### **Archives**

There were no questions for the archives budget.

### **Conservation Commission**

Bob Brown discussed the Bog Walkway project and the intern that is doing work on maintaining all of the trails in New London. He stated that they have periodic issues with wetlands and beavers and need time and money to keep the water moving. He requested a Trust fund of \$10,000 to help with this but the Selectmen did not approve this.

There was discussion about the \$3,000 reduction by the Board of Selectmen in the annual appropriation. Bob stated that they had much success with fundraising for the Bog so they will continue to do so.

Colin Beasley suggested that they might request a change in purpose to the Conservation Capital Reserve to include infrastructure upgrades. Bob Brown said they would consider that.

### **Energy Committee**

There was no one from Energy Committee

### **Housing Committee**

Peter Nichols stated that they are trying to address the housing issues in New London. They have hired a consultant to help with new ideas. They have submitted a level funding request.

## **Revenue**

There was discussion about the meals and rooms tax being low. Lynn Lewis stated that they are conservative, and the State Department of Revenue (DRA) sets this number just prior to setting the tax rate. Lyndsey Harkins asked why we come in low when it has been higher every year and is it possible to come in at the higher level that is indicated by the previous years. It was noted that the Budget Committee could decide to increase these amounts as they feel is appropriate.

Colin Besley asked if we had recently reviewed the fees that the Town charges. Kim Hallquist stated that she recalled the fees to use Whipple was reviewed most recently; the Town could look at building permit fees, copy costs however the largest fees, motor vehicles, cannot be changed by the town as they are set by law.

There was discussion about dispatch rates. The Board of Selectmen set those rates in the summer based on calls from the previous years. There were questions about how the fees are distributed between participating towns and the new choices they will have. There was also a question regarding the difficulty in switching to a new dispatch service. Chief Cobb stated that all the Police Departments have signed up for the records management portion of the new dispatch software. If the fire department in a town did not sign on, their fee would be removed. She stated that it would be a big undertaking for a town to leave and her intention with the new software is that we will remain competitive so towns will stay.

## **Other business**

The next meeting will be on Friday, January 19<sup>th</sup> at 5 pm. If anyone has questions, they would like to submit in advance, they are welcome to do so.

John Wilson asked if we were going to discuss the petition warrant article. On the agenda for next meeting is Capital Reserves, Capital Outlays and the other warrant article. Petition warrant articles can be submitted as late as February 6<sup>th</sup> – the day before the public hearing. The BOS can also add money articles up until the public hearing. After the hearing they can add non-money articles, but they historically do not add anything after the hearing. Often, the Budget Committee meets and when they adjourn, the Board of Selectmen meets to finish up the warrant.

There was a discussion about Capital Reserves and the possibility of needing two meetings to get through all the questions. The reconciliation might happen after that if it is needed. It will not be needed if the Budget Committee agrees with the Selectboard's budget or the Selectboard goes along with the Budget Committee's budget.

Colin Beasley requested that we get clarification on whether we can take money from the Town Building Repairs and Maintenance CRF for the \$100,000 town Office expansion. Would this qualify for the funds in the CRF? Need clarification from the Trustees. May possibly use ARPA funds for this expansion. Maybe this should not be in this bucket.

At the Selectmen's meeting, there were discussions about what to take from Capital Reserves and what to bond. There is concern about adding additional bonds when we may go out for other bonds later. There is a fiscal policy that suggests a limit to the debt service the Town should incur. There was a request to send the fiscal policy to committee members which should be looked at regarding choices made when discussing the Capital Reserves.

Kim Hallquist looked up the fiscal policy and it states that debt service cannot exceed 10% of the general budget. This would allow approximately 1 million in debt service and we are at approximately 40% of that.

Colin Beasley stated that by obtaining a bond for the Library repairs, you then free up the money allocated for the capital reserve to use elsewhere. Also need to look at how the new bond can affect other

items that may come in the future.

Joe Cardillo stated that we cannot control all fees, but we can raise the fee per car to \$10. We should implement this. Budget Committee should be involved in this discussion. Our surplus can defray the tax rate but can we create an expendable fund that we can add to with money from the surplus. We are playing catch up for lowering transfers to capital reserves last year and we should get creative. Possibly for solar panels buyback.

Kim Hallquist stated that voters can choose to spend the surplus as they see fit and have done so in the past.

Colin Beasley explained the spreadsheet that he had the finance officer create by merging the Capital Reserve Funds and the CIP. He recommended that the Budget Committee look to the large expenses that will be coming in the years ahead.

Lou Botta also added that we need to consider population growth when we plan ahead. We need to look at our departments and make sure they can meet demands.

Bebe Casey asked if the Budget Committee had in the past looked at the planning for the future. John Wilson stated that they have not but Fire and Public works have predicted replacement vehicles.

Colin Beasley asked about ARPA funds and if the budget committee can allocate these funds. Kim Hallquist stated that they can recommend the use of them as long as they follow the guidelines such as not paying down debt. Money must be committed this year but spent by next year.

There was a discussion regarding Chief Cobb's thoughts on the question of what she could cut from her budget and what she would add if provided with more or less funding. This topic was addressed previously at the Selectmen's budget review and later at a Budget Committee meeting.

Colin Beasley reviewed action items:

Water main replacement project: Jay Lyon gave the details of the water main replacement timeline. The Water Precinct sent out requests for bids and are looking to start the work at the end of April or beginning of May with sensitivity to Colby-Sawyer graduation and the Barn Playhouse. They intend to do it in three phases.

Colin Beasley asked if we should be making assumptions this year regarding sidewalks or wait until 2026. Kim Hallquist stated that Bob Harrington previously asked for \$120,000 for sidewalks and Town Meeting approved it. Bob Harrington stated that the engineer recommended that we do nothing to the sidewalks until the water main replacement is complete.

Colin Beasley asked that a list of committees that work on Master Plan priorities be given to the Budget Committee. Kim Hallquist will provide the information for the next meeting.

John Ellis discussed the school deliberative session where they discussed the expenditure fund and they are working on a plan of all buildings and the improvements they need. He asked if we know what we need for each town building. Colin Beasley noted that they have the CIP and what the department heads suggest is needed and there is Asset Management Software in the budget to begin managing the buildings along with the CIP. They don't have the plan yet but they will get it.

The next meeting will be held on December 19<sup>th</sup>.

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lynn Lewis  
Finance Officer

Note: RSA 91-A:2, II provides that “Minutes of all such meetings, including nonpublic sessions, shall include the names of members, persons appearing before the public bodies, and a brief description of the subject matter discussed and final decisions.” A video of the entire meeting may be available for viewing on the town website, [NewLondon.NH.gov](http://NewLondon.NH.gov), if more than the brief description contained in these meeting minutes is desired.