



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

375 MAIN STREET • NEW LONDON, NH 03257 • NEWLONDON.NH.GOV

NEW LONDON BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, January 15, 2025
Whipple Memorial Town Hall
6:30 PM

BUDGET COMMITTEE PRESENT: Chris Lorio (Chair), Lou Botta (Vice Chair), John Wilson, Mark Christensen, Charles Kelsey, Karen Epstein, Megan Brown, John Tilley, Lyndsay Harkins, Bebe Casey, Selectman Representative

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Sam Clarke, Department of Public Works Director
Adam Ricker, Planning & Zoning Admin.
Fire Chief Jay Lyon
John Ellis, New London resident
Rich Epstein, New London resident
Janet Kidder, Selectman
Mary Rakow, New London resident
Pete Hogland, New London resident
Rich Andersen, New London resident
Jackie Christensen, Recreation Commission
Richard Tutwiler, Tracy Library Director

Putnam Kidder, Recreation Director
Police Chief Emily Cobb
Will Kidder, Town Clerk-Tax Collector
Jerry Coogan, New London resident
Bill Helm, Selectboard Chair
Tom Carley, Library Trustee
Charlene Baxter, New London resident
Karen Hoglund, New London resident
Cara Leone, Recreation Commission
Tim Paradis, Planning Board Chair
David Paradis, New London resident

Chair Lorio called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM and thanked all for coming out to the meeting and for their interest in the process. He noted that meeting minutes would be approved at the next meeting.

Selectmen's Report

Selectman Casey provided the following report:

- **Water Commissioners' Meeting:** the discussion focused on conservation strategies and their potential impacts. The Commissioners presented differing opinions on the effectiveness of conservation efforts, but the dialogue remained productive. The Selectmen and Commissioners agreed to maintain ongoing collaboration and communication to address shared concerns and implement best practices.
- **Police Facilities Advisory Committee:** they discussed plans for a new police facility with a placeholder of \$2 million in the budget for acquisition and design costs. The Garvey property on Seamans Road has been identified as the proposed site, with a purchase price of \$350,000. Legal counsel is finalizing the purchase and sale agreement. The Selectmen are working on warrant articles related to the facility to be presented at the March town meeting, with funding sourced through a bond. Selectman Casey noted that the advisory committee emphasized the importance of clear communication with the public regarding these developments.
- **Fire Department Budget Amendment:** The Selectmen approved Chief Lyon's proposal to add a full-

time firefighter position to address staffing gaps. She noted that this amendment aligns with long-term staffing plans and community safety priorities.

- **Town Meeting Schedule Adjustment:** Selectmen voted to move the start time of the annual town meeting from 7 PM to 6 PM, responding to community feedback. This change will also help if the meeting is longer due to interest in the warrant articles.

FY2026 Budget Review

Revised Fire Department Budget Request

Chief Lyon presented his request for a modification in his budget for an additional full-time firefighter to address staffing shortages during nights and weekends. He explained that the current staffing model relies heavily on 9 on-call officers to handle 926 calls annually, with approximately 750 calls handled by these officers. Chief Lyon observed that societal changes, including increased focus on family and personal commitments, have decreased volunteer availability.

After much discussion and planning, the Board of Firewards and Chief concluded that a possible solution would be to apply for the federal SAFER grant (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) to secure funding for three additional full-time firefighters. The SAFER grant would cover 100% of salaries for three years, significantly reducing the tax burden during the initial three years. The plan now is to address the staff shortage in a phased hiring approach:

- Year 1: Hire one additional firefighter.
- Years 3 and 4: Hire two additional firefighters if the grant is awarded.

Chief Lyon explained that the plan was always to apply for three firefighters, three full-time firefighters in addition to the three full-time firefighters the department currently has: the Chief, Andrew Sarnovitz, and Mike Matthey, and then there's Jenna Edmonds, who's a per diem firefighter. In 1987, the department had 34 members who all lived in town. 30 of those 34 members worked in town. Today, we have just over 40 members, only 17 live in town and 11 work in town, including the three full-time staff and the per diem person discussed earlier. Two of the other members who work in town are police officers and then there are several retirees.

Chief Lyon explained that if the grant is not awarded, the concern would also be that from a fiscal standpoint, the department would not be able to address current needs for another 18 months. So we're looking at six months to when the budget would be implemented July 1st and then it would be another calendar year. And the concern is how are we going to fix the staffing shortages that we have today if we didn't receive the grant and then at the end of the three years, what's the tax impact if we did receive it? So those are some of the concerns that he has and why the request for one full-time firefighter now.

Charlie Kelsey noted that he had six questions:

1. Will overtime and per-diem costs decrease?

Answer: Chief Lyon explained that while overtime may not significantly decrease due to unpredictable call volumes, reliance on per-diem staff would be reduced with the addition of a full-time firefighter.

2. Does the proposal align with national staffing standards?

Answer: Chief Lyon confirmed that the proposal aligns with NFPA 1710 and 1720 guidelines for staffing and response times, ensuring compliance with industry best practices.

3. What happens if the SAFER grant is not awarded?

Answer: The phased hiring approach allows for gradual progress toward staffing goals, minimizing sudden tax increases. The department would adjust plans and potentially defer hiring additional personnel without compromising essential services.

4. How does the SAFER grant align with long-term departmental goals?

Answer: Chief Lyon highlighted that the grant helps address immediate staffing challenges and supports the department's ability to manage increasing demand for emergency response services.

5. What is the impact on current staffing levels?

Answer: On-call and per-diem staff will continue to play a vital role, but the new firefighter would improve coverage and alleviate the burden on these personnel, particularly during high-demand times.

6. How does this proposal align with mutual aid agreements?

Answer: Improved staffing enhances the department's capacity to assist neighboring communities during major incidents while ensuring adequate resources remain available for local emergencies.

Following an extensive discussion, the committee expressed support for Chief Lyon's proposal, acknowledging its alignment with both immediate and long-term community safety priorities. Members recognized the potential benefits of the SAFER grant in mitigating tax burdens and ensuring sustainable staffing solutions. The phased approach was deemed practical and fiscally responsible, with a strong emphasis on preparing for contingencies should the grant not be secured.

Recreation Department Budget

Putnam Kidder, Recreation Director, began his presentation by noting that he has spoken with Chiefs Coob and Lyon regarding the personnel support needed for the Halloween event, and they informed him that \$8,000 is adequate funding, so he can reduce his budget in that area by \$2,000, while maintaining the event quality.

Putnam reviewed the scenarios he and the Recreation Commission prepared to address potential cuts in the Recreation budget:

Scenario 1: Eliminate beach attendants; increase lifeguard responsibilities and pay- savings \$7,040

- Special Events- Halloween Staffing Funds -\$2,000
- Waterfront Staff Wages-Eliminate Beach Attendant Position, -\$17,745
- Waterfront Wages- Raise average number of guards daily from 5 to 6 and increase average pay for guards from \$15.70 to \$16.70, guards start Memorial Day weekend +\$13,063
- Estimated FICA Reduction- Due to changing staffing, -\$358
- Increased reliance on lifeguards for boat programs and beach maintenance.

Scenario 2: Eliminate pre-season beach staffing; reduce lifeguard coverage by nine days – savings \$20,145

- Special Events- Halloween Staffing Funds -\$2,000
- Waterfront Staff Wages- Eliminate Beach Attendant Position -\$17,745
- Waterfront Wages- Raise average number of guards daily from 5 to 6 and increase average pay for guards from \$15.70 to \$16.70, guards start last day of Kearsarge +\$6750
- Waterfront Staff Wages- Reduce guard days by 9 and start on last day of Kearsarge schools, -\$6309
- Estimated FICA Reduction- Due to changing staffing, -\$841
- Reflects adjusted school schedule alignment.

Scenario 3: Reduce lifeguard and attendant schedules from 7 days/week to 6 days/week – savings \$10,560

- Waterfront Staff Wages- Lifeguards start on Memorial Day and Beach Attendants start last week of June and all staff work six days a week instead of seven days-\$7,952
- Special Events- Halloween Staffing Funds -\$2,000
- Estimated FICA Reduction- Due to changing staffing -\$608

Putnam concluded by noting that his preference would be for his original budget, minus the \$2,000 in the Halloween event, to be accepted; however, if cuts must be made, he would prefer scenario #2.

It was noted that the Recreation budget, as originally submitted, was reduced from the prior year.

John Wilson asked for clarification of what the Beach Attendants do. Putnam noted that their main duties are beach cleanup: raking the beaches, picking up trash as necessary, and they are also monitoring the bathrooms, restocking when needed. He noted that they are not cleaning the bathrooms, but they're restocking any supplies in the bathroom, soap, toilet paper, things like that. They are also managing the boat loan program, which includes kayaks and paddleboards at both beaches. They're helping people get those in and out, and they're managing the paperwork for that.

John Tilley, observing the difficulty that everyone has in hiring lifeguards, questioned the idea of eliminating attendants who are generally easier to hire because they do not require certification like lifeguards, and they often become lifeguards for the town in the future.

Karen Epstein asked about the Selectmen's decision to reduce the Recreation Budget by \$50,000. Selectman Casey noted that the Selectmen did reduce the budget by \$50,000, and it was taken from the full-time salary line. Ms. Epstein asked what the Selectmen's concerns were in reducing the budget. Selectman Casey noted there was discussion of possibly not needing full-time in the winter because of less programming. She stressed that she felt the town does need a full-time recreation department with robust programming.

There was a discussion of the impact of the Recreation Commission's vote at the previous meeting to put the \$50,000 back into the budget. Chair Lorio noted that it is for the Selectmen to decide whether the position will be full-time or part-time.

Charlie Kelsey noted that after hearing Putnam's explanation of the various options, he is in favor of scenario #2 because he does not see it as materially compromising the effectiveness of the beach programming or supporting the beaches.

IT WAS MOVED (Charlie Kelsey) and SECONDED (John Wilson) to reduce the Halloween line by \$2,000 and the waterfront wage line by \$18,145 as detailed in scenario #2.

Vote on the motion: In favor: Wilson, Epstein, Kelsey. Opposed: Casey, Harkins, Lorio, Botta, Brown, Christensen.

Abstained: Tilley

The motion failed.

IT WAS MOVED (Mark Christensen) and SECONDED (Lyndsay Harkins) to approve the original Recreation Department request of \$236,929.

Vote on the motion: In Favor: Casey, Harkins, Lorio, Botta, Brown, Tilley, Christensen. Opposed: Wilson, Epstein, Kelsey. The motion passed.

Review of Capital Reserves

Kim Hallquist, Town Administrator, reviewed the Selectmen's decisions on deposits and planned expenditures from the various funds:

Fire self-contained breathing apparatus: scheduled to be a deposit of \$54,000, and the Chief looks to spend \$350,000 to purchase some fire breathing apparatus in this fiscal year.

Fire truck: The town entered into an agreement some years ago for the purchase of the truck, which is \$407,303, with a deposit of \$116,000.

Highway equipment replacement fund: the deposit the selectmen are recommending is \$500,000. Currently, we are looking to purchase \$268,000 for a backhoe and a zero-turn mower.

Sidewalk capital reserve: \$100,000 deposit, and to spend \$60,000 for various sidewalk projects.

Tracy Memorial Library repairs: the selectmen are recommending a deposit of \$200,000, and the library trustees expect to spend \$60,000 for exterior repairs.

Town building maintenance fund: the deposit is requested at \$100,000; there are no scheduled expenditures now. That obviously could change. The selectmen are agents to expend on that, so there could be things that come up that the selectmen would decide to spend some money on.

Energy projects: the selectmen are recommending a deposit of \$20,000, and there may be an expenditure of \$150,000 for a solar array at the stump dump. The Energy Committee is looking for grant money, and so that may, assuming if we get the grant, we may not spend capital reserve funds, but it will be available.

General Cemetery: The plan is to do the same thing as last year by taking the maintenance expenditures out of the operating budget, and we are using funds that are available in the capital reserves. Those expenditures are \$15,000.

Sewer department. The deposit is recommended at \$66,000 with an expenditure of \$163,000 for a utility truck and the George's Mills pump station alarm upgrade.

Ms. Hallquist also pointed out that the presentation by Rob Prohl and Mark Vernon, Conservation Commission, when they discussed the recommended \$75,000 deposit into the conservation land acquisition fund. The selectmen have not funded that request

Discussion by the committee:

Charles Kelsey questioned whether the \$500,000 being allocated to highway equipment could be less if lease options were considered. Lynn Lewis, Finance Officer, noted that the \$500,000 deposit is in anticipation of expenditures in future years.

Karen Epstein questioned whether joining Community Power and choosing the renewable energy option would allow the town to avoid the expense of adding solar arrays and ancillary items like fencing. Jamie Hess, Energy Committee Chair, informed the Committee that the grant the town applied for was not approved. He noted that the town could still install the solar array using its own money and then apply for a rebate from the IRS which would be \$45,000 coming back to the town. Mr. Hess thanked the Selectmen for including \$20,000 into the energy project capital reserve fund but noted that it is short of the \$30,000 voters supported as yearly payments into the fund in 2019. With regard to Ms. Epstein's comments on the renewable energy option with Community Power, it is significantly more money but it would be worth an analysis to see if that option as compared to having solar arrays owned by the town, would save money over time.

John Wilson asked for a review of sidewalk plans and funding. Sam Clarke, Public Works Director, explained that he is working on a 7-year project plan. They will start at the Catholic Church and go to Newport Road. He pointed out that there is still a bond on the road due to the Water Main project so they will not be going into that area yet. This year he expects that \$60,000 will be spent. There was a discussion of whether the deposit into the fund could be reduced from \$100,000 to \$60,000.

IT WAS MOVED (John Wilson) and SECONDED (Charlie Kelsey) to reduce the deposit into the Sidewalk Capital Reserve Fund from \$100,000 to \$60,000.

Discussion: Lyndsay Harkins asked if it was possible to speed up the 7-year project by adding more money. Mr. Clarke explained that the 7-year project was also designed with the thought of availability of public works staff and also being unsure of what will be found when layouts of the sidewalk is done and rights of way are considered. Ms. Harkins noted that the public is very anxious to get the sidewalks into shape, so she questioned reducing the capital reserve fund. Selectman Casey pointed to the CIP and the plans for the coming years, suggesting they keep the CRF as proposed.

Mark Christensen stressed that in his 6 years on the Budget Committee he has been patient with what he sees as horrible condition of the sidewalks. He suggested that they not reduce the funding.

Vote on the motion: In favor: Wilson, Kelsey. Opposed: Casey, Harkins, Lorio, Botta, Epstein, Brown, Tilley, Christensen. The motion failed.

John Wilson asked if the Town Buildings CRF is slated to get a deposit of \$100,000 and asked if it could be reduced to \$50,000. Mr. Clarke suggested that the funding remain unchanged, noting that they are currently doing a study of the maintenance needs of all town buildings so there will likely be recommendations for expenditures there and he is also looking to replace the boiler at the highway department that recently failed and that cost will be about \$50,000.

There was a discussion about the deposits to capital reserve funds that must go through the budget and the funds where the selectmen are agents to expend, the items are not subject to Budget Committee review, however they are discussed so that the committee can be informed about the need to make deposits into the various funds.

Conservation Fund: The Conservation Commission requested \$75,000. Charlie Kelsey noted that while he is a fan of conservation, he pointed to the discussion at a previous meeting including efforts to collaborate with local land trusts, there is the 7,000 acres Gile Forest preserved in a neighboring town, and the fact that there are large bodies of water in town that do not count into the 25% goal of concerned land, lead him to conclude that not making a deposit into the conservation fund at this time is appropriate. The Committee agreed.

Other Warrant Articles:

Historic Marker restoration: \$40,000 to be taken from two existing trust funds. Ms. Hallquist noted that a group of citizens are leading the project to have the markers restored.

Rich Epstein noted that he spoke with a member of the Trustees of the Trust funds and understands where the money for the markers will come from. He pointed out that he has seen references in *Municipal Matters* to expenditures that do not affect the tax rate. He disagreed with the characterization of not affecting that tax rate, as it appears that it is “free money” when in fact, if it were used for other purposes, it could actually lower the tax rate. He asked that a future *Municipal Matters* article address this point. John Wilson noted that he knew one of the people who left the money to the town, and he felt that the donor wanted the money to be used in a significant way, not just to reduce the tax rate.

Website Improvements: \$25,000 to make improvements to the website to become ADA compliant and to work towards having fillable form capability so people can file building permits and other applications online. It was noted that the Town Clerk/Tax Collector office has accepted online payments for some time.

Expendable Trust: \$10,000 for payout of accumulated leave time for employees upon separation of employment. This amount was traditionally in the operating budget. By putting it into an expendable trust, the amount can stay in the fund and will not have to be appropriated each year. Deposits can be made when the fund is used.

Police Facilities: \$350,000 will be requested for the purchase of the land; the Selectmen have not yet finalized their plans for additional funds that may be appropriated for site work and other expenses. Charlie Kelsey asked about the \$2 million in the budget now. Selectman Casey noted that it is a placeholder; the amount was an estimate from Lavalley Brensinger for potential expenditures related to this next phase.

It was noted that there may be other warrant articles still to come.

Police cruiser information:

Chair Lorio noted that the Police Chief prepared information on the Chevy Tahoe after questions were raised at a previous meeting. John Wilson noted that the Chief is requesting to replace the 2020 Tahoe with 69,000 miles on it with a new one. His research shows that these vehicles get 120,000 miles, giving up about half its life by replacing. He noted that the reasoning he has heard to replace the Tahoe early is because we have 2 other cruisers that will need to be replaced and we don't want to replace 3 vehicles in one year. He concluded that he cannot support spending \$80,000 to replace a vehicle with low mileage.

Selectman Casey noted that she reached out to a family member who works for Tufts University who connected her with the fleet maintenance people who expressed surprise that the town would wait 6 years to replace a vehicle as they replace them in 3-4 years. Also, the important consideration is not miles on the vehicles it is engine hours used.

Chief Cobb noted that as she discussed in her presentation she is concerned with the age of the car and the potential mechanical issues that will likely come up. She also pointed out that the vehicles are sold and the funds go back to the town into the general fund.

Karen Epstein asked if the police cruiser was ever paid via a capital reserve fund in the past and asked if that was a way to avoid spikes in the budget. Chief Cobb noted that it was in the past but given that a cruiser is purchased nearly every year, the money was deposited into the CRF and then taken out the same year. Ms. Epstein noted that a way to approach it in a different way would be to consider using a reserve so if there was a decision to put off purchasing a vehicle the money could remain in the account.

Chair Lorio noted that the next meeting is scheduled for January 29th. Typically, the committee does not meet the week of the Martin Luther King Jr holiday, however an extra meeting may be scheduled, members will be notified.

IT WAS MOVED (Lyndsay Harkins) AND SECONDED (Megan Brown) to adjourn. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 8:41 PM.
Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Hallquist
Town Administrator

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, New London.NH.gov, if more than the brief description contained in these meeting minutes is desired.