



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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BOARD OF SELECTMEN/BUDGET COMMITTEE JOINT MEETING MINUTES January 31, 2018 6:30 PM

PRESENT:

G. William Helm, Jr., Chairman

Nancy Rollins, Selectman

Janet Kidder, Selectman

Budget Committee Members: Robert Prohl (Chair), Phyllis Piotrow (Vice Chair), Bruce Hudson, Suzanne Jesseman, Chris Lorio, Joe Cardillo, Lyndsay Lund, Absent: Tyler Beck

STAFF PRESENT:

Kimberly Hallquist, Town Administrator

Wendy Johnson, Finance Officer

ALSO PRESENT:

Jay Lyon, Fire Chief

John Raby, *Intertown Record*

Emily Cobb, Police Lieutenant

Donna Larrow, Police Administrative Assistant

David Cook, New London resident

Celeste Cook, Welfare Officer

Peter Bianchi, New London Resident

Chair Helm opened the joint meeting at 6:30 PM.

Chair Helm reviewed the Selectmen's proposal to include bond issue of \$500,000 on the Warrant for the purchase of land for the future needs of the town. He explained that for the last several months, the Selectmen have held non-public sessions to discuss property issues in town. They have looked at various locations and have been in discussions with New London Hospital for the property on Newport Road under the power lines. The hospital's land is being reserved for their potential Senior Living project, although it may free up again and be available so that is one possibility.

Chair Helm noted that there have also been discussions with Colby-Sawyer College to see if there were any opportunities there. On Friday, Sue Stuebner, President of Colby Sawyer College, submitted the following information: "The College is open to selling the facilities building on Main Street to the town. It would be contingent upon assessments being completed by the town and the college as well as the Board of Trustees, and the determination that the sale is mutually beneficial." The garage is currently their maintenance building.

There are also other options to explore. The Sigma Data Building, Powers point property and the Bewley property are all for sale. There have been discussions about the shopping center where the former Colonial Pharmacy and McKenna's restaurant used to be. There have been extensive

discussions with the school district regarding the land they own in town. There have been wetland studies on a few of these properties, so this has been in process for a while.

Chair Helm pointed out that the proposal of the Planning board and the CIP committee has heightened this issue recently as they have listed a new Police/Dispatch facility as the top priority. This ties into the discussions about the Buker building and its possible uses. The Selectmen have not had a discussion as to whether they support building a new Police Station, but it is a priority and has been talked about a great deal. This proposal tonight would be for the Police/Dispatch. It isn't a Transfer station project or a Conservation project. There are no current commitments but if an opportunity arises sometime between this town meeting and the next town meeting, the Selectmen feel it is prudent to have the ability be able to act on the availability of a piece of property. There is a date in March to be able to vote on this and another date in March of 2019 and if anything comes up in between there is the option of doing an emergency town meeting. Chair Helm would like support for this warrant article.

Selectman Rollins stated as they do their due diligence on this, one thing that is important is looking at property that has proximity to the center of town and should those properties go on the market, they want to be ready if anything becomes available. Even if we put this on the warrant article and it's approved doesn't mean that we have to spend it, but we should have the money available.

Chair Helm added that what they have seen in other towns and what they perceive in New London is that they will need at least two acres, and based on current sales in New London, a 2-acre house lot costs between \$100,000 - \$150,000. Some are cheaper, but it depends on location. Commercial property is more expensive than residential property. The Buley property on the corner of County Road and Newport Road which includes three parcels is on the market for \$350,000. The piece of land that the hospital owns next to the Outing Club has been assessed for \$150,000. Sigma Deta would like \$1.4 million for their building on Newport Road which is the building as well as land.

Chair Prohl stated that people in town have asked why they are buying land when it's unclear what is being built on it. He feels it would be much stronger and more informative to have a vote at town meeting and state what it is for.

Chair Helm stated in his comments he said Police Station and did not say they don't know what they want to do with it. He said they hadn't done any detailed discussion as to what it would look like. Chief Anderson made a proposal regarding the size of a Police station he'd like to have in his budget submission but that's as close as they've come. When they were talking with the SAU about their land they didn't have drawings done to say exactly what they wanted to put on it.

Phyllis Piotrow stated that there are two unknowns. The first is what would be the use, possibly a Police Station, as has been stated, and second, what piece of land would it be? She stated they are expecting the town to vote on two unknowns. Chair Helm stated again, they know what the possible use is and that it will most likely be used for a Police Station.

Lyndsay Lund stated that when opportunity arises, they need to act. She wants to be proactive rather than reactive. She doesn't want another year to go by because hands are tied.

Chris Lorio agrees and feels this is an opportunity to be proactive to purchase land we will need for something. There are one or two things they could potentially build on it. Property costs will continue to rise in the future so it's a good move to do it now and not delay it.

Bruce Hudson wanted to know what happens to the \$500,000 from one fiscal year to the next?

Wendy Johnson stated they wouldn't be making payments or borrowing the money unless they bought property.

Joe Cardillo stated that now that it's clear that this is for a police station, he remembers when Chief Anderson recently went before the Budget Committee to add a ninth officer. This was approved by the Selectmen and the Budget Committee and discussed growth and what other things would be needed. The Chief of Police clearly addressed that he would not ask for a new facility if he was given a ninth officer. He also has a problem with the fact that the decision falls into the hands of three people, the Selectmen. They will have the authority to buy the land. He believes the citizens and the voters should have a say. He recalls a land purchase two years ago and funds were coming from money the town already had in a fund, and the three selectmen were not on the same page. There was one Selectman in favor, one against and one had to abstain. He feels it should be properly vetted. He doesn't feel they would miss any opportunity. If they felt strongly they should start a land acquisition fund. They have the authority to make an offer and hold a special town meeting if necessary.

Ms. Hallquist stated that to get a special town meeting would mean going to court for permission and the town would have to demonstrate why the issue wasn't addressed at the annual town meeting in March when citizens expect to vote on such issues. Given the amount of discussion on the topic to date, she felt it would be hard to argue that it was unknown at the time of the annual meeting.

Peter Bianchi stated that in the \$875,000 bond issued last year, one part of that was to study the needs for the Police Department, Whipple Hall and the Buker building. It is his understanding that this has not been done. Also, we have money in the conservation fund that cannot be spent except for at town meeting. He can't recall when there has ever been a time that the town of New London appropriated money that gave the Select board complete authority to spend it without coming back to town meeting. He feels giving the Select board a blank check to go and buy a piece of property without the town authorizing it is a poor precedent to set.

Celeste Cook described this as "vision", noting that this is the first time in many years that she's heard a proactive stance in this community. She feels most of the people in this community want to move forward, not backward.

Lyndsay Lund stated the Selectmen are not hiding their intent for the bond, pointing that that the Selectmen are the people the town has elected to make decisions.

Chair Prohl wondered if it was possible to identify a piece of property to start negotiations between now and March. Chair Helm stated that as long as the Hospital property has not been settled for the senior living community, he doesn't want to rule out the two piece of land they have discussed. He doesn't see the hospital resolving this within the next 60 days but does think it will be within the next year.

Phyllis Piotrow stated that the case has not been made to the public that there is a need for a new police department.

Chris Lorio feels we have three Selectmen who are all on the same page and know what they want to do with the money. If they don't do something now, they will be here a year from now having the same discussion and opportunities may have passed.

David Cook agrees that the Police Chief has not made a good case in the past for a new facility. He noted that he understands that the rate on borrowing on bonds will go up, so there may be an incentive to borrow now to lock in a rate, but he feels the rates have moved slowly so wouldn't argue strongly for taking action now. He has been a chairman of a CIP committee in two different towns and suggested that New London should have a CIP committee as well. He feels the Selectmen are obligated in their elected positions to use their best judgment as to what they want to do.

Chair Prohl asked how they arrived at the \$500,000 amount. Chair Helm stated it was based on the numbers they got on several parcels of land so they felt it was the appropriate amount.

Joe Cardillo stated that two areas that need to be addressed are Recreation and Police. He discussed land that was bought with conservation money and that they might be able to build a community or recreation center on that land. Now, that land will be for conservation use. Chair Helm stated that there will be a warrant article putting a conservation easement on all of that land on East Pleasant Street.

Mr. Cardillo stated this now removes our ability to build anything on there even though the taxpayers and voters were told we may be able to. Chair Helm replied that subsequent discussion over the past year has convinced the Selectmen that due to of the amount of wetlands, and the fact that conservation money to purchase it, is a strong enough case to put it to the voters to put a conservation easement on it.

Selectman Kidder clarified for David Cook that there is a CIP Committee in New London and they met with all of the department heads and visited their facilities (storage, meeting rooms, dispatch). They also visited the Safety Services building in Bow, NH. The Planning Board approved the list that the CIP generated and the Police Department was the first item. It was then submitted to the Selectmen for their approval as well. They would still like a community center and have looked at various parcels of land. If anything is purchased, they would come back to the town to discuss the type of structure they would like to build.

Selectman Rollins stated that the Police Chief and the Planning Board have made a very strong case that the pipes leak, it's not the right place for dispatch or our Police force. It's also not the right place for our recreation office. There isn't a specific parcel in mind but have good options. There are limited options close to town which would be the ideal location.

IT WAS MOVED (Lyndsay Lund) AND SECONDED (Chris Lorio) to recommend the \$500,000 bond article as presented. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY. Joe Cardillo abstained due to not having enough information.

Chair Helm stated that at a recent Selectmen's meeting, they voted to spend \$50,000 to make the Buker building usable for the next several years.

Chair Helm called for a discussion of an addition of \$15,000 to FY2019 budget for parking. He explained that Colby-Sawyer College submitted a proposal for the town to lease a 24-parking space piece of property for one year at the end of Gould road for \$15,000. In the past, the Selectmen have discussed the acquisition of additional parking in town. Chair Helm feels it could relieve the pressure on Seaman's Road and Main Street for Whipple Hall and Buker. There are two national elections coming up in the current year.

Selectman Rollins was unsure what the impact would be relative to the budget process. She did agree that when there is voting, parking is clearly a challenge. She discussed moving employee parking over there to free up other spaces. Parking is also a problem with the summer recreation program. She feels it's worth having a discussion.

Selectmen Kidder agrees that if there is an opportunity to get additional parking to alleviate the problems at Whipple and Buker then we should do so. The College has agreed to maintain and plow the lot. It would be worthwhile to try it for a year to see if it is helpful.

Chris Lorio recalls that the parking lot is rocky and may need paving. He is concerned about safety issues given the condition of the parking lot. Mr. Lorio also asked if they would be willing to negotiate on the price due to the condition of the lot. Ms. Hallquist feels they may be open to that. Lighting and a cross walk are also concerns.

Chair Prohl asked how many staff would use it. Kim Hallquist replied that it would be dependent on if it was required that they use it. Six to eight police officers/dispatchers are on at one time so

personal vehicles could park there as well as the recreation department staff. There would be a discussion on whether it would be required. Chair Prohl feels that if it isn't required and in bad shape, people won't use it.

Joe Cardillo asked how the dollar amount was decided. Ms. Hallquist replied that this was the amount the College included in the proposal. This would be approximately \$50 per space, per month. He wonders if it will even get any use.

This would be an amendment to the budget so anything that will go to the budget hearing on February 7, 2018 needs to be decided tonight. Chair Prohl feels there are many unanswered questions regarding paving, lighting, crosswalks, etc.

Peter Bianchi wanted clarification regarding the price and term and was told it was \$15,000 for a one-year lease. He feels they are leasing us something that may be more of an expense than it's worth.

Chair Helm asked if it was agreed upon tonight or on February 7 at the Public Hearing, or at town meeting. It could be removed if after more discussion it was decided not to move forward.

Lieutenant Emily Cobb stated that for the Police Department, there would be concern about their personal vehicles being parked far away.

Selectman Kidder noted that with all the unanswered questions, the Selectmen should table it for now. The Board agreed.

The Joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen and Budget Committee concluded.

Respectfully submitted,

Trina Dawson, Recording Secretary
Town of New London