



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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NEW LONDON BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES October 29, 2025 Syd Crook Room - 6:00 PM

BUDGET COMMITTEE PRESENT: Charles Kelsey (Chair), Chris Lorio (Vice Chair), Lou Botta, Kim Ilg, Cynthia Ruis (via Zoom), Karen Epstein, Megan Brown, Lyndsay Harkins, Richard Anderson, Select Board Representative. Absent: John Tilley

STAFF: Ashley Seybold, Town Administrator; Lynn Lewis, Finance Officer, Richard Tutwiler, Library Director,

ALSO PRESENT: Residents: Doug Baxter, Robert Bowers, John Wilson, Tom Carley, Library Trustee and Treasurer

Agenda:

Agenda Review, New and updated materials, Approval of October 15, 2025, Meeting Minutes, Select Board Report, Pleasant Lake Protective Association Request to support loan for a Watershed Assessment, Tracy Library – Budget Presentation & Review.

Chair Kelsey called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Meeting Minutes:

1. New and updated budget materials: Documents provided to members were noted for inclusion in the budget materials. These included an updated version of the Fire Department Wage and Strategic View report compiled by Jay Lyons, Chief, and a Tax Rate Comparison Document.

Lynn Lewis, Finance Officer presented a document comparing New London's tax rates to those of similar towns, as identified by Municipal Resources, Inc. (MRI). These towns have colleges, hospitals, and similar demographics to New London. The aim was to provide context for New London's tax rates in relation to other comparable communities. The document included data on municipal, county, and school tax rates, as well as total property valuations for each town. New London is neither the highest nor the lowest in terms of overall and municipal tax rates. Chris Lorio asked why there was variability in county tax rates among towns located within the same county. Lynn Lewis did not know the reason and would find out why. It was noted that Moultonboro has a lower tax rate compared to New London despite a high property valuation which is due to lakefront properties and commercial development.

Kim Ilg (bank lending officer) mentioned the significance of tax rates for residential lenders and homebuyers, noting that the towns around Lake Sunapee (Sunapee, Newbury, and New London) generally have lower tax rates than a town such as Sutton, and the rates were deterrents to affordability.

A personal anecdote was offered about choosing between living in Newbury and Sutton based on the allocation of mortgage payments towards equity versus taxes.

2. Approval of October 15 Meeting Minutes: The committee reviewed the minutes from the October 15th meeting. Karen Epstein proposed one adjustment to the minutes on page 2, under the MS535 review: The second to last sentence "However, this was the reason the study of dispatch services was delayed" change to read, "However, this was the reason the study on the Department of Public Works building was delayed."

IT WAS MOVED (Meg Brown) AND SECONDED (Lou Botta) to approve the Minutes of October 15, 2025, as adjusted. Vote: Chris Lorio – Yes, Cynthia Ruis- Yes (via Zoom), Lou Botta – Yes, Megan Brown - Yes, Kim Ilg- Yes, Karen Epstein – Yes, Richard Anderson – Yes, Lyndsay Harkins – Yes, Charles Kelsey – Yes. **THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. Select Board Update: Richard Anderson provided a comprehensive summary of key items addressed by the Select Board including: an update on the Select Board's recent budget review meetings that lasted 3.5 hours and 2 hours respectively, and without arriving on a final budget.

The New London-Springfield Water Precinct gave a presentation on the engineering report findings to increase water capacity at Colby Point. This included improving the condition of the existing wells (2 wells) and adding an additional well. The project's estimated cost is \$5,100,000. The Precinct made the case that as an entity it could not afford this project cost and felt that if the Town of New London wants to grow beyond its historic growth rate (adding 2-3 homes per year) it should bear the related cost.

The Select Board was given an in-depth presentation from the group tasked with examining whether the town should consider moving to an SB2 format as opposed to a traditional Town Meeting. The report (a public document posted on the Town website) covered pros and cons to an SB2 format. One of the primary drivers to consider a change was a possible increase in participation via timing of the deliberative session and absentee voting. However, there was evidence in their research of other towns that this was not a certainty. A comparison was made to the Kearsarge Regional School Budget which is essentially a SB2 model, and that excepting last year, the Deliberative Session that determines the warrants to be voted upon had minimal attendance. The Select Board has not decided yet to put forth a warrant article to propose adoption of an SB2 model.

The Select Board reviewed the Fire Department's budget request, which included the addition of two new full-time firefighters, a request the Select Board did not support. Richard Anderson expressed concern about the Fire Department budget increasing from \$333,000 in 2019 to a proposed \$1,080,000 in 2027. Additionally, the Select Board discussed the degree of mutual aid provided by New London to other towns and that many of the surrounding towns do not employ full-time firefighters. However, the Select Board added \$25,000 to the Fire Department budget to enhance member recruitment efforts, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training, and increased stipends for weekend and evening shifts. Specifically, it was proposed offering a \$200 stipend to firefighters who complete Firefighter 1 training and remain on the department for a year, as well as a \$1,000 stipend for EMTs who remain on the department for a year. The request to purchase an additional vehicle for the Fire Inspector (\$85,000) was deferred for one year.

The funding request by the Chamber of Commerce was discussed noting that New London is the only town that was requested to increase its contribution over last year, and as such the Select Board decided to maintain the current funding level of \$12,500.

The Select Board budget discussion also addressed the issue of Cost-Of-Living Adjustments (COLAs) and Step Increases for town employees. The current system provides for a 2.5% step increase, ostensibly merit-based, but with 44 out of 45 full-time employees receiving the full step. There was a discussion about adding a COLA on top of the step increase, with varying opinions on the appropriate percentage. The Consumer Price Increase (CPI) forecast for the next 12 months was projected to be between 2.5% and

3.5%. The Select Board deemed an overall 4.0% increase (COLA and Step) reasonable and fair.

Ashely Seybold mentioned that Newbury is undergoing a wage study and waiting a year to communicate any changes to employees. However, Newbury is instituting a 3% increase this year.

Richard Anderson noted the importance of capital reserves, and that the Select Board increased some of those numbers to ensure that the Town does not run into a scenario in which they are stuck trying to make the numbers work in the last two months of a fiscal year, as occurred this year.

John Wilson questioned the practice of putting money in capital reserves that don't have a specific use purpose and whether the Select Board had the discretion to spend these reserves. Lynn Lewis indicated the Select Board does have the discretion but that it was for certain (not all) expenditures.

Karen Epstein requested Lynn Lewis provide the Budget Committee with an updated budget summary sheet and the department detail budget reflecting changes from the original submission. Lynn Lewis said she would make this available once the Select Board completes its final budget.

Lyndsay Lund Harkins asked about the state of the current water system before considering any expansion. Charles Kelsey responded during the review conducted with Karen Epstein it appeared that the water system is being well maintained and that the Precinct is doing a very good job managing the system.

Harkins also asked about the procedure for the Select Board to remove / reduce a budget item in the Fire Department before the Chief presents to the Budget Committee. Charles Kelsey clarified the Budget Committee's role in developing its own budget, which may differ from the Select Board's.

Lyndsay Lund Harkins asked whether there has been any consideration given to the potential for a regional fire department. Ahsley Seybold mentioned that those conversations are beginning with Chief Lyon and that he is open to exploring the idea.

Charles proposed that the Budget Committee generate a set of recommendations beyond the operating budget that might provide lower operating expenses, and to share those recommendations with the Select Board and Town Administrator. Kelsey used 2 examples: exploring regionalized fire services and a sharing / leasing arrangement for large equipment such as a road grader. Kelsey agreed prepare a draft of recommendations for the committee to consider and endorse as part of their budget development process.

4. Pleasant Lake Protective Association Clean Water State Fund Loan

Doug Baxter, President, Pleasant Lake Protective Association (PLPA) and John Wilson, PLPA Board Member presented a proposal for securing a Clean Water State Revolving Funds Loan. (The source of the loan is from the State of New Hampshire and Federal Government through the Clean Water Protection Act.) Following is the document presented outlining the proposal, the request for support, the obligations, and the process for securing a loan:

“Clean Water State Revolving Funds Loan

October 28, 2025 (v4)

Pleasant Lake is a jewel of a lake. The results of our water testing, which we conduct five times a year, are excellent, the numbers well within the healthy lake parameters put out by NHDES. Sadly, the lake has experienced Cyanobacteria blooms in the last few years. Two of these blooms were substantial and were located at the Town beach and boat launch. The blooms closed the beach. Fortunately, they were short lived. Unfortunately, we are not sure what the exact mechanism is that leads to their occurrence.

Because of this and because of other concerns the Pleasant Lake Protective Association has about maintaining the quality of the lake, it has initiated contact first with Colby Sawyer College who conducted a yearlong survey of the lake and lately with FB Environmental to learn what solutions might be applied to control any quality issues. Our most recent testing was deep water core sampling and dissolved oxygen testing to understand better what involvement materials in the depths of the lake may play.

What we have come to realize is that we need a complete analysis of what is going on in and around our wonderful lake in the form of a study which ultimately becomes a Watershed Management Plan. Many New Hampshire lakes have gone this route. A typical cost for one of these plans is about \$100,000. In the past there have been grants available to pay for these plans. These grants are presently very limited in size and availability.

What is available is a loan called a Clean Water State Revolving Funds loan. This is a loan for which we can apply through the Town. The loans are funded by the Federal and the State governments together. The nominal interest rate is 1%. When the Watershed Management Plan is completed, usually within two years, but as many as five years, the loan is forgiven. The cost to PLPA would be between \$1000 and \$5000 interest for the \$100,000 loan. In short, \$1000 would most likely get Pleasant Lake \$100,000 to pay for the plan. PLPA would be responsible for interest costs.

These loans can only be offered to municipalities. The municipalities, in this case, would be the nominal recipients of the loan. They are invoiced, usually monthly, by the company creating the plan. The Town, together with PLPA, would review the invoices along with the Finance Officer and upon their approval, the invoices would be submitted to the State for a disbursement from the loan to the Town which would then in turn pay the company creating the plan. There would be no cost to the Town at all.

Before the loan can be secured, the Town would need to vote in favor of a warrant article which would appropriate the \$100,000. The warrant article would definitely spell out that there would be no financial obligation to the New London taxpayer. We have sample warrant articles which other towns have approved. Pleasant Lake Protective Association would guarantee the repayment of the loan in the event the terms of the loan were not met and the loan could not be forgiven, a very unlikely event. This could be spelled out in the warrant article.

We need your help. The Selectboard has agreed that giving us this assistance, at no cost to the Town, benefits the entire Town and that they will bring forward and support a warrant article for the appropriation of this loan at the March 2026 Town meeting. Now we are asking for the Budget Committee's support for this same warrant article."

John Wilson reiterated that by securing a warrant article early in the application process would give PLPA "points" and a head start over other municipalities competing for the same funds.

Lyndsay Lund Harkins raised a question about the town's liability for remediation should the study reveal issues with septic systems or other sources of pollution. Wilson replied that it was premature to draw a conclusion before the wetlands study was performed, however, he and Doug Baxter conveyed their

suspicion that the primary polluting source was storm water runoff. Karen Epstein asked for clarification that the PLPA had enough in reserves to guarantee the loan. Doug Baxter replied that they do. Harkins asked if the loan forgiveness was guaranteed as part of the terms, and Wilson responded that it was, if the terms are met within a certain time limit which is also negotiable. Epstein also asked whether the company who performs these types of assessment and plans has room on their schedule to take it on within the timeframe of the loan term and conditions. Wilson and Baxter responded they are excellent at what they do and have indicated they have the capacity and time. Wilson indicated that PLPA will pursue a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) through the Department of Environmental Services (DES) to award the contract for the work.

IT WAS MOVED (Chris Lorio) AND SECONDED (Kim Ilg) to approve the Pleasant Lake Protective Association's request for the Town to request a CWSRF loan of up to \$100,000 for a watershed assessment and management plan and the development of a warrant article for consideration at the March 2026 annual Town Meeting. Vote: Chris Lorio – Yes, Cynthia Ruisis- Yes (via Zoom), Lou Botta – Yes, Megan Brown - Yes, Kim Ilg- Yes, Karen Epstein – Yes, Richard Anderson – Yes, Lyndsay Harkins – Yes, Charles Kelsey – Yes. **THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**

5. Tracy Memorial Library Budget Presentation: Richard Tutwiler, Library Director, and Tom Carley, Library Trustee and Treasurer, presented the Tracy Memorial Library budget request.

Richard Tutwiler shared the following information:

- The library is a 14,000 square foot building built in 1823, owned by the town of New London, with oversight from the Library Board of Trustees.
- The library has 13 staff members, including 4 full-time and 9 part-time employees.
- The proposed town appropriation request is \$789,618, a 4.4% increase over the last year, with an overall budget of \$848,218 (a 4.7% increase).
- The budget includes a 3% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for staff and a 2.5% step increase.
- Key increases include personnel costs (5.8% increase), energy costs (9% increase for electricity), and downloadable subscriptions (26.7% increase) some being offset by moving funds from other subscription material expenses.
- No transfer of monies is requested into the library building maintenance line for capital reserve this year. There is a request for a disbursement of \$85,000 for parking area improvements and fixes.
- Total expected library income (non-town appropriation) is expected to increase by 9.7% due to favorable Tracy Trust income receipts.
- Personnel accounts for 75.6% of the operating budget, materials 6.6%, supplies 1.4%, equipment 3.3%, programs 0.4%, maintenance 11.1%, travel 0.6%, and other 0.7%.
- Strategic plan focus areas include expanding outreach efforts, improving the library facility, increasing marketing and awareness, and innovating library programming and services.
- The director's goal is to be efficient with funds to market, building and promote partnerships, develop new ways of engaging patrons, and utilize Friends of the Library funding.
- Statistics from 2024: 2,120 card holders, 37,813 visits, 73,413 physical circulation, 20,539 digital circulation, a 40,000 physical collection.
- They held 133 youth programs, 2,658 attendees; 75 teen programs, 366 attendees; and 41 adult programs, 313 attendees.

- Richard noted that the Select Board decision to reduce the COLA to 1.5% would result in a roughly \$6,125 reduction in the appropriation request.

Questions and Comments from the Budget Committee and answers from Richard Tutwiler included:

Question: Does the \$85,000 request for the parking lot only included the area directly at the entrance to the library. Answer: It does and although it is a small area the expense includes the curbing which is in significant disrepair. The Library Facilities Committee consulted a church in town that recently repaved its parking lot at a cost of \$250,000. While the cost for the library area seems high, we felt we should stick with that amount.

Question: Does the library charge for use of its meeting space and if so, could that increase its revenue to offset operating cost. Answer: We have thought about that however, it has been agreed that we want to increase participation and access, and charging would hinder this along with making current space inaccessible.

Comment: We noted a decrease in youth engagement last year which we attributed to the school bus no longer dropping students off at the library. We made a phone call and persuaded folks to change that drop-off decision. They agreed and our numbers rebounded and are even higher than previous years.

Questions about the cost of Hoopla and its redundancy with Libby. Richard Tutwiler agreed that there is redundancy, but conveyed Hoopla is extremely popular because of ease of use and functionality so the decision to retain both is all about engagement. Questions circulations, types of media used and trends.

Comments and discussion ensued about library attendance / use; whether the library has a standby generator (which it does); clarified that the Tracy Garden is a separate entity and does not receive money from the library. Bob Bowers shared that several years ago (15yrs) the Garden created a separate 501(c)3 and all their activities and operating costs are separately funded.

Questions asked about whether staffing levels were high, just right, or low and if there was any opportunity to adjust, and any difficulty filling vacancies. Richard Tutwiler replied that staffing is at the right level and dictated the 3-floor configuration, days and hours of operation and the requirement to always have a minimum of 2 staff members on duty for service and safety. Tom Carley added that based on the configuration of full and part time positions there is little to no overtime expense. There have not been difficulties filling vacancies.

Question was asked about whether the library had a security system and that it was separate and self-standing. There is a standalone system.

Comment made suggesting the potential to combine library facilities into a municipal-wide facilities maintenance program.

Chair Kelsey thanked Richard Tutwiler and Tom Carley for their time and presentation.

A motion was made to adjourn. **IT WAS MOVED (Chris Lorio) AND SECONDED (Lou Botta) to adjourn. Vote:** Chris Lorio – Yes, Cynthia Ruisis- Yes (via Zoom), Lou Botta – Yes, Megan Brown - Yes, Kim Ilg- Yes, Karen Epstein – Yes, Richard Anderson – Yes, Lyndsay Harkins – Yes, Charles Kelsey – Yes. **THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting adjourned at 8:01pm - Meeting minutes prepared by Charles Kelsey with assistance from Zoom Teleconference AI.

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, if more than the brief description contained in these meeting minutes is desired.