



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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NEW LONDON BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES November 12, 2025 Whipple Memorial Town Hall - 6:00 PM

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

STAFF: Jay Lyon, Fire Chief, Emily Cobb, Police Chief, Wil Kidder, Town Clerk & Tax Collector, Putnam Kidder, Recreation Director, Lynn Lewis, Finance Officer, Ashley Seybold, Town Administrator.

ALSO PRESENT: Residents: Robert Bowers, Colin Beasley, John Ellis, Stephen Ensign, Tom Carley, Peter Lauridsen, Joan Conroy (?), Janet Kidder, plus others not noted via an attendance sheet.

Agenda: Budget Review and Public Comment Process; Consent Agenda: Approval of October 29, 2025, Meeting Minutes; Budget Presentation Fire Department; Budget Presentation Police & Dispatch; Budget Presentation Emergency Management; Action Items.

Chair Kelsey called the meeting to order followed by recognition and thanks to the Veterans and First Responders in attendance. To help facilitate the meeting Kelsey asked the public audience who would like to speak on any agenda items. Stephen Ensign indicated that he would do so.

Kelsey indicated that committee member Cynthia Ruis was unable to attend the meeting due to a family emergency, however, she had sent a statement along that she wished to be shared with the committee. Kelsey read the following: "I had planned to attend tonight's meeting in person to share these comments but was unexpectedly called to Florida for a family emergency. I wanted raise concerns about Budget Committee members participating via Zoom. In an email exchange it was intimated that that regular virtual meeting attendance reflects a lack of commitment. However, I believe that joining remotely demonstrates a commitment to attend, to stay informed, contribute, and engage even when professional or family obligations make in-person attendance difficult. Those who step up to run for and serve on this Committee should be appreciated for their dedication, not questioned for how they meet that obligation. Given our ever-changing meeting schedule—often announced with limited notice—it would be helpful for the Committee to formally discuss and clarify its policy on remote participation. My understanding is that this Committee has the authority to set its own meeting practices and determine what best serves both members and the public. Thank you, Cynthia Ruis." Kelsey indicated that remote participation has been a point of concern and discussion. However, it would not be discussed at this meeting but instead at a future one.

1. Consent Agenda: Approval of October 29, 2025, Meeting Minutes: Kelsey asked the committee members for any additional input on the meeting minutes. There were none and Kelsey called for a motion to accept them.

IT WAS MOVED (Lou Botta) AND SECONDED (Kim Ilg) to approve the Minutes of October 29, 2025. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

2. Fire Department Budget Presentation: Steve Ensign, Fire Warden, provided his (and the Board of Fire Warden's) viewpoints regarding the plan to presented to add more full-time fire fighters to staff the department. Ensign acknowledged the financial pressures on the town while emphasizing the importance of the proposed staffing plan as a proactive measure to ensure the safety of the town's residents today and into the future. The Board fully supports the plan as (scrutinized by the Board of Fire Warden's) and presented by Chief, Jay Lyon to the Select Board. Ensign acknowledged the Select Board's decision not to support the additional staffing. Ensign stated that the Fire Wards will continue to advocate for the full staffing plan. Ensign further highlighted the relatively small net cost associated with the expense when considering potential savings from the health plan expense. Ensign commented on the Select Board's allocation of \$25,000 for incentivizing current members instead of hiring an additional person, expressing concern about the long-term implications if this approach is insufficient. Ensign asked for the Budget Committee's support.

Chief, Jay Lyon highlighted and explained budget increases related to: A separate cell phone for the incoming Chief; vehicle maintenance, and the cost of service and annual testing for the Ladder truck; replacement of personal protective equipment (PPE) and gear with (PFAS – free gear that carries a substantially higher cost (\$4,500 per set of jacket and pant); conference and training; \$25,000 added by the Select Board for incentives, certifications and recruitment expense; reduction in worker's compensation.

The committee was asked for their questions; Karen Epstein asked about \$32,200 increase in conferences and training. Chief Lyon deferred to Lynn Lewis, Finance Officer. Ms. Lewis noted it as the proposed \$25,000 with allocation to be determine by the Fire Department. Chief Lyon noted \$7,200 has been proposed to pay for Level I and Level II classes. Ms. Epstein asked about the Workmen's Compensation being down, Lynn Lewis explained that it is an allocation per the PRIMEX Insurance coverage based on experience of the pool and is the actual bill. Chair Kelsey asked about overtime expense stating the three-year actual annual average expense calculates at \$15,323, while the current requested amount is \$47,160. Chief Lyon explained the difficulty in using the three-year average and forecasting overtime expenses in general. Chief Lyon offered to provide a breakdown of the calculations he made. Kelsey asked if the budget request for overtime included the additional firefighter position. Chief Lyon acknowledged that it did and that the amount could be adjusted downward if the additional FTE is not approved. Kelsey asked about gas expense indicating the three-year average expense is \$8,330, while the current ask is \$14,700. Chief Lyon explained this estimate is contingent on the number of calls and potential unpredictable use of fuel related to large-scale incidents, but he indicated this line item might be reduced by \$1,500 - \$2,000. Kelsey asked for a better understanding of the staffing proposal. Chief Lyon provided context for the staffing model, emphasizing that it's not solely based on call volume but also on factors like community demographics, the unique infrastructure of New London, and the need to support New London Hospital's EMS services. He explained that the Fire Department currently responds to 277 out of 699

EMS calls from New London Hospital and aims to increase coverage with additional staffing. Kelsey asked of the 926 calls last year were there any that the department could not respond to adequately with staff or apparatus. Chief Lyon confirmed that the department has and did respond to all calls. Chief Lyon shared his concerns about declining volunteerism, with fewer members living and working in town compared to the past. In characterizing the current state of the department Chef Lyon used an analogy of a flight co-pilot informing the pilot during flight of building adverse flight conditions to make the point to emphasize the importance of addressing staffing needs proactively to prevent potential adversity in responding to emergency calls. Chief Lyon discussed the challenges of volunteer retention and the limited success of past incentive programs. He acknowledged suggestions from the select board regarding volunteer recruitment and training incentives. Chief Lyon defined the request for a full-time position as being a critical need. Chris Lorio asked if advertising sign at the fire station has resulted in any interest. Chief Lyon indicated that no one to date has approached the station requesting information about volunteering. Lorio asked Richard Anderson to elaborate on the Select Board's rationale for not approving the position. Anderson summarized the rationale and clarified that the decision was not to postpone the position for a year, but rather not to approve it for the current year and take some proactive steps now to address the challenges. He reiterated that future considerations would be made. Richard Anderson noted his concern about the unsustainable trajectory of the overall budget, and his concern about the contiguous towns not having any full-time firefighters. He commented about the Fire Department's budget going up 85% over the past 4 years, and the tripling of the budget over the last 7 years, as originally proposed. Mr. Anderson discussed the fundamental disagreement, and it is why incentives are proposed with the view that every dollar added (to incentivize) on will increase the likelihood that someone will respond. The current number of 35 Firefighters being on the roster was discussed. Chief Lyon noted that he would not consider someone who shows up 3 times a year as being on the roster. Mr. Anderson noted the incentives of funding EMT training and paying a bonus if they are still on the roster after a year. He noted the need to keep in mind the people who struggle to pay their taxes in Town given the growth of the Town's budget at around 10% a year. Chief Lyon responded that what he is proposing is the bare minimum, and that the Fire Department is the only organization in the Town using volunteers to cover hours of service. He dismissed that the Fire Department has not done everything possible to meet the need through incentives and noted this requested position is a stop gap measure. The Fire Department has tried to put off hiring a full-time person through many alternatives and incentives. Chief Lyon said he takes offense at being continually compared to contiguous towns. He noted that Sunapee is seeking to hire a full-time firefighter and the advanced age profile of the Newbury Fire Department's volunteers. Mr. Anderson described what New London is facing with expenditure for the Police Department, Department of Public Works, and the Water Precinct hoping that New London can assist it with a potential up to \$5,000,000 expenditure. Kim Ilg asked about funds that come back to us from contiguous towns. Chief Lyon stated that mutual aid is reciprocated back and forth between the contiguous towns and gave some examples and that New London has been the recipient from some communities more than we have provided. While New London may be the only one with full time Fire Department, Ms. Ilg noted that all are contributing. Mr. Anderson clarified the Selectmen's position that not funding this position this year it is not a deferment. Rather, the answer this year is no, and next year the Select Board will look at all other departments in the (context) for the overall budget. Karen Epstein commented this budget process reviews the entire budget and is not taking the Fire Department in isolation of that broader review, and that there may be opportunities to find savings, and deferments identified within other

departments in that process. Chief Lyon noted the Board of Firewards being aware of stresses that the Town faces and the approach the New London Firefighter's Association has taken to fundraise to avoid those stresses with other departments. The Chief cautioned that if the decision is made that the answer is no, or to defer, based on his position, as the person in charge of operations, incident responses, training, and other complexities, he will be doing the Board of Selectmen, Fire wards, citizens, and membership a disservice if he did not advocate for funding this position. Lyon added so that it is known, and if a catastrophic situation happens, then the people will have been made aware. This situation has been known for years and is not a surprise. Lou Botta asked if the Fire Department is no longer assisting with citizens' courtesy calls. Chief Lyon said that is not the case, rather he has been asked to do a review of the service calls that the department is providing. Lyon stated that public assist calls total approximately 50 (in a year). Mr. Botta asked about how many hours it takes to train an EMT. Further discussion ensued and the estimate of hours for training is approximately 1,000, and that it is a lot to ask for an individual with a job to take that on. Ashely Seybold noted that this is an offer and that an individual would have considered it (the training and hours required). Lou Botta asked if Mutual Aid Assistance is part of the Emergency Assistant Compact. Chief Lyon replied that it is and that at this point when looking at numbers, currently mutual aid is pretty equitable. It may become appropriate for recouping some money at some point. At present, per State statute, the only time the Fire Department can bill out is based on Forestry incidents. Lou Botta asked if there is an agency that rated Fire Departments and would have an impact on homeowner insurance rates. The Chief replied that ISO, staffing, response time, apparatus, and other considerations are all part of the measures and effect on the insurance rating. Ashely Seybold responded to Kim Ilg's earlier question about New London billing of contiguous towns and noted that it is for dispatch services and should have those numbers by the end of the week.

Public Comments made at this time:

Pete Lauridsen, Resident - Spoke of his extensive background serving on the Fire Department, as Deputy Chief, and now on the Board of Firewards. Lauridsen said training for EMT is 1,000 hours, and Level I Fire Fighter is 270 hours. It is an incredible amount of time; plus, the time they spend responding. He went on to say, it is tough to get people for this and that these firefighters need to be backed up. Chief Lyon's points are very valid. While understanding the money is still a problem, we do not want to kick the can down the road, and that we will be paying for it either monetarily or not have coverage.

Colin Beasley, Resident – represented the importance for the Town to think about what service levels we are wanting from the various departments in the Town. He noted, Brandon Adam, New London Firefighter, at a recent BOS meeting noted EMT certification, and whether someone with the right skill set is available for a callout to a particular house. The only way to get that is for 24/7 coverage. Mr. Beasley discussed further that we need to consider opportunities for efficiencies and capabilities within each department. And there being opportunities in each department that could offset what the Fire Department is looking for. Further, there's a need to separate operating cost pressures from capital cost pressures. Regarding capital costs, the Town needs to think about prioritizing their investments, for the Police Department, Fire Department, Department of Public Works, Water, and whatever else. He said that there needs to be a dialogue in Town about what comes first, the financial impact over a period of time, what comes second, and what comes third. It's that financial plan that's been talked about ad nauseam and about what this Town needs. What are the priorities of this

Town? It's time we do that, because the pressures are high. Chris Lorio thanked the public for their comments.

3. Budget Presentation Police & Dispatch: Chief Cobb began the presentation of the Police Budget by distributing an updated Police Department Vehicle Fleet listing that described vehicle condition, mileage, warranties and projected year for replacement. Chief Cobb highlighted that the budget proposed for FY 2027 reflects no increase from the prior year, and that this is largely attributable to deferring the purchase of a new police command cruiser. To accommodate this requires an increase of \$5,000 in vehicle repair and maintenance. Additional modest increases include travel and meals, general equipment, and investigation supplies. Otherwise, most line items are static from last year. Chief Cobb described her overall budgeting philosophy is to look at actual expenses and what can be anticipated to increase. Karen Epstein asked about the ability to defer the purchase of cruisers and if that could go forward into other years. The Chief said that it could mean replacing two cruisers in FY 2028, however she could look at deferring one of those. Chief Cobb added that the health of the fleet is evaluated in every budget.

Dispatch: No request of new personnel in dispatch. Currently at five full-time and some part-timers. Dispatch Computer license and fee is down because the prior budget included two software programs use and fees during the transition to a new program. However, an increase was due to the expiration of a grant, paid for the license and the first year of maintenance. Chief Cobb noted computer support is up slightly, conference and training are flat, and office supplies are down. The Dispatch budget is put into the overall calculation into how New London bills the four towns participating in its Dispatch Center and based on a 3-year call for service average for each town. Karen Epstein asked about the dispatch agreement terms and the evaluation of the agreement. The Chief described the billing cycle November 1 to October 31 and that the last dispatch study was conducted in 2014 and 2015. Chief Cobb noted the possibility to alter the fee structure while also trying not to price customers out of the market from getting dispatch services from New London.

Public Comment: Tom Carley, Resident – Hoped that the Board of Selectmen would have done a study of New London's Dispatch Center before this budget cycle. He discussed dispatch centers being a commodity scale business and that our Dispatch Center has gone from servicing 11 entities to 4 and expressed concern about the one-year term of New London's Dispatch Agreements. He noted a review he prepared showing that New London is out of line in operating expenses to the tune of \$200,000 and could save those funds by outsourcing and noted potential total savings of up to \$500,000. He suggested that a request for proposal to an alternative center be done to see where we are. Chief Cobb espoused that she respectfully disagreed about the characterization of New London's dispatch service and highlighted the skill and service of New London's dispatch service providers. She also noted that the Board of Selectmen has agreed to a future study of the Dispatch Center.

4. Emergency Medical Services (EMS): Lou Botta noted the total budget of \$12,500 is steady. Highlights included: minimal increases for travel and getting additional people to assist in meeting with HHS folks. Adding \$400 in publications and public affairs. EMS will be conducting townhall meetings with condominium associations and the entire EMS Committee to inform people how to

prepare for hazards and disasters. Of the \$12,500, \$7,400 is for emergency generator reports and \$2,000 for the Hazmat Team fee.

Chris Lorio, Vice Chair, invited questions from the Committee and the public. Seeing there were none he asked for action items.

Ashley Seybold reminded the Committee that the Committee does not vote on these budgets individually each night but wait to the end.

A motion was made to adjourn. **IT WAS MOVED (Lou Botta) AND SECONDED (Meg Brown) to adjourn. THE MOTION WAS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:40PM

Action Items:

1. Remote participation policy to be discussed in a future meeting.
2. Chief Lyon to provide a sheet reflecting a breakdown of overtime expense / budget calculations including the amount of overtime attributed to the additional FTE requested.

Note: Meeting minutes prepared by Charles Kelsey, Karen Epstein and with assistance from You Tube AI conversion. The minutes do not reflect comments and conversations verbatim but capture the essence of intent and data where appropriate. The entirety of the meeting can be accessed and view on the town website.

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.