

Memo

To: New London Board of Selectmen
From: Philip Sherman
Date: May 16, 2022
Re: Selectman Helm's proposals with regard to the Building and Facilities Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to offer my thoughts on Selectman Helm's proposals, and I will limit my comments to the plan to abolish the Building and Facilities Committee (BFC). Let me start by saying that I believe we are all focused on what is best for the town, and I personally will continue to assist in whatever manner the Selectmen deem best. As shown in both Selectman Rollins's draft charter in the 3/18/19 selectman minutes, and clarified in the 4/5/21 approved charter, we are to provide analysis, advise and recommendations to the Selectmen, including some specific tasks which are identified.

Regarding replacing the BFC with specific scope, term limited, committees, please consider the benefits a standing committee provides with regard to both expertise and continuity. The background brought to the BFC in not only building construction and maintenance, but also in site acquisition, legal and political affairs, previous discussions on an issue, historic structures, space planning, code compliance, and project management. While the specific skills needed for a given task have been provided through tasks assigned to individuals and subcommittees, the broad experience brought to the table has resulted in advice to the Selectmen that sits on a solid foundation formed from multiple views.

As has been pointed out many times, the Selectmen, and in fact town employees, often do not have the time to focus on longer range needs. The Master Plan and the CIP provide only a limited view of building needs. The BFC work plan, setting forth longer range needs, the required annual review of this document, and the ongoing task to develop a facilities management system require efforts that should not start and stop based on each new committees, perhaps populated without continuity. While specific committees might handle a specific task, who is left looking broadly at what tasks might require handling?

Let me offer a few suggestions for further discussion:

- Rework the BFC charter to alleviate any concerns with the scope of the BFC. The charter should come from the Selectmen with input from the BFC, not the other way around.
- Consider clear lines of demarcation between the BFC and the CIP. Perhaps the BFC should provide the requested technical advice (think white papers) and project management where requested, while the CIP, in whatever form it takes, provides advice on whether a given item should be pursued and what priority it should take (think overall strategy). On some issues, this could be an iterative process between the two groups.
- Requests for BFC analysis should be specific, with agreed upon deadlines, whether ongoing or project specific tasks. Consider whether these should be written instructions, not simply statements in meeting minutes, which would give the chance to focus on specific wording.

- Consider terms of membership on the BFC that align with the Selectmen election schedule, to allow new members of the BOS to have an immediate say on who is providing advice to the BOS.
- Understanding the impact of all of this will take time and reasoned consideration, therefore I suggest that the proposal to abolish the BFC, as well as other proposals from Mr. Helm, be studied in depth prior to making changes, with input from not only the BFC, but the CIP and other interested parties. This would allow a clearer understanding of the perceived problems and result in a structure that makes sense over time.

Lastly, I'll provide responses to specific issues that were brought up at the 5/12/22 meeting:

- It was stated that after some 75 meetings, the BFC had accomplished little. On the contrary, in three short years, we have provided the requested building wide assessment about space needs and major requirements, and we are well underway with regard to the facilities management plan with a first report to be presented soon. We have discussed and researched at length the provision of a town building inspector. As requested, we completed a detailed review of how the NLPD would fit into a renovated Buker building (which took 24 meetings), and the resulting need to house the recreation department at another location. We have assisted DPW with an analysis of transfer station trailer storage, which will relieve pressure on the Pleasant Street site and provide a home for the road roller. We provided advice on the purchase of additional land behind DPW. We assessed the need for a town wide review of storage needs, including proposed digitization of many town records. We provided an analysis of office space needs. We assisted town employees in managing both the Whipple utilities project and the shade-acoustic-A/V project, and we have begun preparatory work on the final phase work. And lately, we have assessed PD sites as requested. As a contributor to many of these accomplishments, I take strong exception to the statements made.
- Two inquiries were made as to why the BFC had not found a site for a replacement police station. The fact is that the BFC was not requested to look at this until late fall of 2021, either in the draft or final charter, or by other request of the selectmen.
- The comment was made that BFC review of the PD site selection committee report was not beneficial. After discussion at two BFC meetings, it was decided that the BFC would specifically not question the conclusions of the sub-committee. As the author of most of the clarifications requested of the sub-committee, I want to be clear that the intent was to request changes to the report in order to reduce questions downstream. The response from one of the sub-committee members, upon review of my requests, was that most of the requested information had been discussed and reflected in various meeting minutes but not in the report. This makes my point. The fact that the draft report identifies desired needs for a site, and then the analysis of the three sites frequently is not consistent with the identified needs reflects a need to provide a more orderly and complete report or risk endless questions coming up at a later date. Further, the BFC will provide the analysis and recommendations as to the steps required to move things forward, as this was not within the charge of the sub-committee.

In conclusion, thank you for the insights and volunteer time each of you offer as Selectmen, and appreciate your consideration of the points made above. I look forward to the chance to discuss these matters further.