

Town of Newington, NH

PLANNING BOARD

Meeting Minutes, Monday, August 9, 2021

- Call to Order:** Chair Denis Hebert called the August 9, 2021, meeting at 6:08 p.m., followed by the pledge of allegiance.
- Present:** Chair Denis Hebert; Vice-Chair Erika Mantz; Board Members: Russ Cooke; Christopher Cross; Ben Johnson and Peter Welch; Alternate Board members, Rick Stern and Jim Weiner; Town Planner, John Krebs and Jane Kendall, Recorder
- Absent:** Board of Selectmen's Representative, Bob Blonigan
- Public Guests:** Budget Committee Chair, John Lamson

I) **Old Business:** Continuation of Discussion on 2021 Capital Improvements Program

Town Planner, John Krebs provided examples of a Capital Improvements Program (CIP) that he had done for another town a couple of years ago, and a template as an example. Mr. Krebs said that he had also written other CIP's when he worked for Rockingham Planning Commission (CIP, but those included a lot of filler, which he didn't feel was necessary Newington.

Mr. Krebs said he looked at other towns, and suggested that Newington consider creating a spreadsheet that they update in one meeting every year as the Town of Farmington does, which would cut down on the number of meetings necessary to recreate a new CIP every ten years. Mr. Krebs then passed out a worksheet that each department could use, and rank their requests by priority. Mr. Krebs said he would tell departments that they needed to be realistic in the necessity of their requests as the CIP would be worthless if it became a wish list.

Mr. Krebs said he talked to the fire and police chiefs, who said they didn't think had a need for new facilities now, but they might want to do a study on what would best suit their needs in the future.

Mr. Krebs said Newington's population was not growing, but the commercial, industrial and office zones might prompt additional municipal services that were difficult to predict. Alternate Board member, Jim Weiner agreed, but said that some things were known that could be used to predict needs. Chair Hebert commented that municipal needs were different than departmental needs.

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Mr. Krebs said Board member, Chris Cross had commented that his taxes were increasing each year, and it would be helpful to investigate the issue further. Mr. Cross stated that his home hadn't changed, yet his taxes had increased five times from what they were 25 years before.

Mr. Cross said revenues from the utility companies in the Industrial Zone were down, and although the value of homes was up in the New Hampshire Seacoast region, he didn't believe there was going to be 2-3% growth in the town budget.

Mr. Cross said the Board of Selectmen control the budgets, but every year warrant articles were approved at Town Meeting, which adds to the budget for the year.

Budget Committee Chair, John Lamson said the Budget Committee speaks to the Board of Selectmen on behalf of the compelling arguments that the police and fire departments make each year, along with the school and the library, so it is often hard to trim around the edges, but he hoped that the new CIP would help determine the actual budget needs better. Mr. Krebs said the Board could review the department requests, and decide whether they should include everything before finalizing the CIP.

Mr. Weiner asked if they should stick with a minimum dollar amount of \$10,000 for CIP requests. Mr. Krebs said he thought that the threshold should be above the cost of a cruiser, and Mr. Lamson agreed. Chair Hebert noted that the CIP threshold was \$50,000 ten years ago, and the cost of a cruiser had probably gone up.

Alternate Board member, Rick Stern suggested that they increase the threshold to \$75,000, and Mr. Lamson agreed, saying that amount could be swallowed in the annual budget. Mr. Krebs said the one exception would be a study that might only be \$35,000.

Board member, Russ Cooke asked if the Budget Committee thought that the police department budget would take care of their vehicle costs and maintenance rather than being part of CIP. Mr. Lamson agreed that it was part of the budget.

Mr. Cooke asked if cruisers were purchased each year, and Mr. Lamson said they were.

Mr. Krebs said the definition of capital expense was a non-reoccurring expense, so some of the fire department trucks were part of the CIP and not their budget.

Mr. Cooke said he wanted to know what the Town's inventory of assets, buildings, and vehicles were, and Mr. Krebs pointed out that all the assets were listed in the Newington Annual Report each year.

Mr. Cooke said he thought adding staff would also be a capital improvement as well, and that salaries also didn't take retirement costs into account. Mr. Krebs noted that the State's definition of capital expenditures did not include personnel, but it cost a lot to hire a new police officer, so they should ask departments if they intended to hire anyone new as he didn't think it fair when a salary of \$110,000 with benefits was the same as a new fire truck over ten years.

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Chair Hebert commented that there used to be a vote on new hires during Town Meeting 15-18 years earlier, but now personnel costs were in department budgets, so there was no sense of why budgets went up, so he thought that was good to have personnel in CIP when full-time salaries were sometimes as much as \$130,00.

Mr. Lamson responded that personnel costs were an obligation that continued, and he was concerned that allowing it in the CIP would prompt wish list requests. Mr. Lamson went on to say that the Budget Committee would rather know about increases in needs so that they could decide how to manage them. Mr. Lamson said that service demand increases might be different, however, and Mr. Krebs agreed.

Chair Hebert said it was important to understand that expenditure approvals were still required even if they were listed in the CIP.

Mr. Krebs commented that he often heard arguments by older residents against long-term saving for a large cost items. Chair Hebert said that the intent of the Planning Board's CIP recommendations was to avoid spikes to the budget. Mr. Lamson responded that the Budget Committee and the Board of Selectmen made recommendations at Town Meeting whether to fund requests with bonds, leases, or savings, but the CIP would help them know what was needed and when.

Chair Hebert noted that the fire department used to have their maintenance costs and new truck purchases in one fund, but had difficulty with saving for new trucks because they kept spending their budget on maintenance of the older trucks. Mr. Lamson agreed that were maintaining equipment longer than they should have, so the Budget Committee wanted to know if there were heavy maintenance costs, and the cost of new trucks so they could determine the best way to fund those costs.

Mr. Lamson asked if the school expenditures were included in the CIP. Mr. Cross noted that the capacity for NPS was expanded to accommodate 120 students in 1996. Mr. Lamson commented that they were under capacity with 60 students now, and felt that they should commit to maintaining the existing structure.

Mr. Lamson added that this was an example of why he hoped that research would be done so that unnecessary requests were not on the CIP list.

Mr. Cross said he was willing to fund municipal services that residents vote for, but he didn't think they could say that they only wanted to fund existing expenses because there was equipment and buildings that would need maintenance. Mr. Cross said he wanted to see the actual budget projections from the departments, and suggested that there be a penalty if there was a deviation to encourage departments to plan better.

Chair Hebert responded that the CIP was the Planning Board's recommendation to the Budget Committee to determine funding, and the Planning Board wouldn't make the recommendation if a request didn't seem reasonable. Mr. Lamson agreed that the list needed to be as necessary and accurate as possible.

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Chair Hebert noted that the CIP supported permitted zoning uses, and the CIP would allow the Town to garner impact fees if a proposal came in that wasn't included in the Master Plan.

Mr. Krebs asked if the Sewer Department was considered part of the Town. Mr. Stern replied that the sewer department was supported by users, and funded by commercial entities in town. Mr. Lamson said it was useful to know what the capacity of the sewer plant was for planning purposes.

Mr. Stern said all equipment purchases, expectations, and longevity were entered in the sewer department's data system as a requirement by the State, and he recommended something similar for other departments in Town.

Mr. Krebs asked what other departments should be included in the CIP, and Mr. Weiner asked if the Cemetery Committee, Conservation Commission, Economic Development Committee (EDC) might put in requests for the CIP. Mr. Krebs replied that he could ask the EDC, but he didn't think they would have any needs.

Chair Hebert said he would speak to the Board of Selectmen regarding Fox Point, and other Town properties.

Chair Hebert added that Peter Welch was the Town dockmaster, and might make a request for the Town docks.

Mr. Krebs said the Conservation Commission might need additional funds for a conservation easement. Mr. Lamson said the Conservation Commission had a conservation fund that they made annual contributions to, and he didn't anticipate the need for any additional property needs for the cemetery.

Vice-Chair Mantz suggested including the Historic District Commission as well.

Chair Hebert said they also needed to include road improvements. Mr. Lamson noted that Woodbury Avenue had already been improved by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (DOT) before it would be turned over to the Town. Mr. Weiner noted that their improvements would require a good deal of maintenance costs once the Town took it over.

Mr. Krebs asked about the Safety Lane Committee, and Chair Hebert said that committee was under the Board of Selectmen, but any road expansion fell under the purview of the Planning Board.

Mr. Krebs said he also added the transfer station. Mr. Weiner noted that the transfer station was supposed to get a new trash compactor, and he wasn't sure if it had already been budgeted and encumbered. Mr. Krebs said he would look into it.

Mr. Lamson asked if the CIP would include building repairs. Mr. Krebs said he thought that would be included in the building inspector's long term maintenance schedule.

Mr. Krebs suggested that they continue the CIP review on Monday, September 13, 2021, which was the same night that they were meeting the EDC. Mr. Krebs said he would provide a preliminary list and language draft before the next meeting. Chair

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Hebert noted that the EDC hadn't confirmed the September 13, 2021, meeting yet, but they would hold the spot for them.

Mr. Cooke said he thought it was important to coordinate the CIP with the Budget Committee. Mr. Lamson said the Board of Selectmen and the Budget Committee were working on leveling the budget.

Mr. Krebs said his goal had been to finish the CIP by the end of October 2021, but the Board had a heavy workload with additional applications and delays that had come in.

II) Additional Discussions:

Chair Hebert said the Board of Selectmen were asking the Board to submit their budget extremely early this year, and to hold the line. Chair Hebert said the Board had been holding the line since 2014, had replaced the full-time planner with a part time planner, but he was concerned that the costs of planning might increase if business continued to grow.

Chair Hebert said he would put the budget together for the Board's review before asking for a vote of recommendation.

Chair Hebert said the Board of Selectmen asked that the Board consider other uses for the old stone school such as work force housing. Chair Hebert said they could also consider the old stone school for the CIP.

Mr. Cross commented that multi-unit workforce house only seemed feasible if there was an extension of the sewer line with a pumping station. Chair Hebert responded that the ground by the old stone school perks very well, and the septic system was large enough for four households.

Chair Hebert said it was an interesting building, but restoration would be cost prohibitive. Mr. Stern said they had estimated that it would cost eight million dollars to rehab the building, remove the asbestos, and lead paint, and install elevators.

Board member, Ben Johnson commented that his company had built St. Patrick's School from scratch for eight million dollars.

Chair Hebert wondered if they could do a 100-year lease, but Mr. Stern said State law had a one-year limit.

Mr. Weiner suggested that they do nothing and let the government take it back. Mr. Cooke and Mr. Krebs agreed.

Mr. Krebs informed the Board that the Akerley's had submitted an application for a subdivision, and had been scheduled to appear on Monday, August 23, 2020 meeting along with a revised plan for the Shackford subdivision, and Subcom.

Chair Hebert noted that the applicant had submitted a variance request, so the application needed to be renoticed.

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Vice-Chair Mantz said she wanted confirmation that the applicants would present their materials to the Board, and would be prepared before the meeting, or reschedule for another meeting if they were not prepared. Vice-Chair Mantz said unprepared applicants delayed the Board's review of other applicants.

Mr. Weiner said he also wanted to be sure that the Town's engineering and wetlands consultants were available for the meetings as well.

Minutes: *Chris Cross moved to approve the Minutes for the July 26, 2021, meeting with corrections as noted. Peter Welch seconded, and all were in favor. Russ Cook abstained*

Adjournment: *Peter Welch moved to adjourn the meeting. Russ Cooke seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.*

Next Meeting: Monday, August 26, 2021

**Respectfully
Submitted by:** Jane K. Kendall, Recording Secretary