

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING
Department of Corrections
North Haverhill, NH 03774
May 10, 2023

PRESENT: Commissioners Piper, Commissioner Ahern and McLeod, County Administrator Libby and Administrative Assistant Norcross

OTHERS: Employee Council – see attached sign in sheet, Director Andross, Supt. Oakes, Interim Farm Manager White.

Commissioner Piper called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Employee Council

Commissioner Piper started the meeting with the Employee Council by stating that this is the Commissioners' final offer. There was a request for \$3; there was a counter of \$1, with the other added offers. She stated that there was then another counter from Employee Council and they stated the employees were not interested in the other benefits and were only looking for the \$3. The Commissioners are offering \$2/hr. and the \$1,000 ARPA bonuses for part time employees and \$2,000 for full time employees as well as the increased shift differentials, increased earned time buy back and full basic life insurance coverage. Commissioner Piper stated that the Commissioners are being told that the employees represented by the Employee Council have a set figure of \$3 in their head. She is unsure how that happened because it has always been a negotiation. The Commissioners have met the Employee Council more than half-way.

Commissioner McLeod stated that she did not support the majority of the board. Her interest is making sure county services are taken care of. She does not believe the \$2 is adequate and does not believe the budget meets the needs of the taxpayers when the County is spending \$ 4 million in contract nursing. Commissioner McLeod stated that she believes the way to fix these issues is to pay market salaries. The ARPA bonus will help retain current employees but not bring in new employees. She further explained that work force is a huge issue and this offer prevents the County from moving into this new world. She stated that she supports the \$3/hr. request based on "market" and what the employees are asking of the Board of Commissioners.

A. Sanders thanked the Commissioners for putting in the time and effort into the Employee Council request. He added that coming back with the one-time bonus shows that the Commissioners were hearing the employees but he could not help but agree with Commissioner McLeod. He stated that their intention was not to make the Commissioners feel they were being forced into \$3/hr. Commissioner Piper stated that she disagrees with Commissioner McLeod's discussion. They value the employees and thanked them for the work they put into this request. A. Sanders stated that he does not believe they were demanding. The Employee Council does feel strongly, that to bring them to market value and the outside world, \$3 would have been better felt across the board rather than a one-time payout but he understands this is the Commissioners' final offer. T. LaPointe added that they brought the offers that were felt

uniformly throughout the Employee Council. When the Employee Council came back with the counter-offer of the same \$3, they felt it was needed and they wanted to express how deeply they felt about it. She stated that the Employee Council felt this was the year they could achieve catching up with the outside world with the one-time larger increase. She noted that some employees have responded back with asking if they could meet in the middle at \$2.50 and a .50-cent bonus. T. LaPointe asked what would happen if the Executive Committee does not approve the \$2,000. Commissioner Piper stated that she does not anticipate that happening but if it did, the Board of Commissioners would have to review the offer. T. LaPointe added that the employees also thought the Commissioners might have been impressed that all the employees were unified and that does not happen every year. She stated that it was not that their request was not negotiable but they felt very strongly that they deserved the \$3. Commissioner Ahern stated that this has been a very difficult decision-making process for him. He is hoping the Executive Committee will approve the \$2,000 bonus. Commissioner Ahern thanked the employees for all of their hard work.

A. Sanders asked what the Commissioners are doing in terms of recruitment and retention. Commissioner Piper stated that just because the majority of the board did not support the \$3 does not mean they are not working towards recruitment and retention. She noted that Commissioner McLeod asked HR Director Clough whether \$3/hr. would fix the problem and HR Director Clough stated that she did not think so. It would help to retain people but in today's market, it would not help to recruit. HR Director Clough stated that was not accurate and what she had stated was she said that it will not fix their problems but it is not going to hurt their problems. She stated that she could not guarantee in a year after a \$3 raise that all vacant positions would be filled. She cannot guarantee to the Board of Commissioners that \$3 will fix their problems but it will not hurt. Commissioner Piper stated that the Board of Commissioners have spent a lot of money and worked with the County Administrator and HR Director last year on the wage study that was meant to target employees on the lower end of the wage scale. She stated that they are all in this together. They have had different department heads weigh in on ways to help. They are extremely mindful of the need to be able to provide county services. This is all taxpayer funded and she asked what happens if taxpayers continue to get a loss and no return on their investment. Commissioner Piper stated that in taking a global view, they should all be happy that they are employed because there are many people out there that are unemployed. A. Sanders noted that statistically there are twice as many vacant jobs as there are unemployed people. Commissioner Piper asked what the employees would like to give up and asked if they would like to give up health insurance. She stated this should be on the table. A. Sanders stated that no one is complaining about the benefits that the County offers. Commissioner Piper stated that public employment offers stellar benefits and that is not the same as some get in the private sector. Public employment offers stability, stellar benefits and steady increases each year.

D. McLam stated that they do have good benefits, but in the 20 years he has been here, his copay has gone from 0% to 14% and now to 20% and longevity has gone away. He stated that yes, there are benefits, but not like they used to be. They are not the selling point they used to be. T. LaPointe stated that they are not dismissing the benefits. They were truly looking for a one-time pay increase. A. Sanders stated that historically, Commissioner Piper was correct, private sector had higher pay and public had better benefits but that is not the case in today's world. He would like to know what the Commissioners are doing to get them the help they need in hiring and

retaining employees. The majority of the people who have left are new hires but they have had a number of people who have left after five (5) or ten (10) years of service. Commissioner Ahern stated that 2.5 years ago he introduced FarmDOC that was a proposal to try to do more with their resources and save the county money. The decision was made not to pursue that. The other thing he feels is important is providing on campus housing. Commissioner McLeod stated that they need to have a plan in place to reduce the need for travel nurses.

HR Director Clough stated that they continue to look at the Correctional Officer and Nursing staff. Over the last two (2) years, the starting pay for Correctional Officers has gone from \$16 to \$22. That has helped, they know they can get the officers in but she stated that they need to do better at keeping them with training so they know what to expect.

HR Director Clough reported that they are working with the area high schools, job fairs as well as getting into the technical centers and focusing on the schools with criminal justice or nursing programs. They are working with the colleges with these programs to get graduates to come here. She noted that Geriatrics is the last setting new graduates want to go into. There are challenges in the nursing field. The RN and LPN shortage is national and bigger than Grafton County. HR Director Clough explained that the County wants to focus on trying to grow their own staff. The wage study did help with the dietary aids and housekeepers but COVID brought the challenge of not having LNA classes.

HR Director Clough explained that there has been discussion about putting together a committee to review the benefits and how they can tailor them to new incoming employees. This will start as soon as this budget is done so they can prepare for next year's budget and have something new in place. Commissioner Piper stated that she is very appreciative that HR Director Clough gave that long list of suggestions. She agrees that the nursing problem is nationwide and also added that there are not enough faculty to teach nursing students.

T. LaPointe stated that the employees are not unsympathetic to the taxpayers; they just did not feel the \$3 was going to put them above anyone else and felt it was a fair request.

Supt. Oakes arrived to open bids for the parking paving project that was approved through ARPA.

The Commissioners opened bids and one (1) was received as follows:

Blaktop - \$214,314.67

Supt. Oakes stated that this it is well within their budget. He has budgeted \$277,000 and recommended that the Commissioners accept the bid. Supt. Oakes noted that the cost would be \$4,702.88 less because there are two (2) options in the quote and they would only select one.

MOTION: Commissioner Ahern moved accept the bid from Blaktop Inc. for \$214,314.67. Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion.

Discussion: Commissioner Ahern asked how many requests for proposals were sent out. Supt. Oakes stated that he directly solicited a number of companies as well as posted it online.

The Commissioners voted on the motion and all were in favor.

Supt. Oakes explained that there are certain areas of the complex that will need prep work done before the paving can take place. He stated that he would like to have a local excavating company, Paige Excavating out of North Haverhill to the prep work. He stated that Paige Excavating has done work at the complex before and he does good work. Part of the funds for this portion of the project will come out of his encumbered line while the bulk will come out of ARPA. The combined amount would be \$9,713.00. Supt. Oakes stated that he would like to request the Commissioners waive the bidding process based on past experience and price from Paige Excavating.

MOTION: Commissioner Ahern moved to waive the bidding process and accept the bid from Paige Excavating LLC for \$9,713.00. Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion and all were in favor.

Interim Farm Manager White arrived and gave the following report (* see attached)

Tom Andross arrived with the following requests:

1. Alarm Receiver Bid Waiver – Director Andross stated that this project was approved through ARPA funding. RBallen is the sole provider of the alarm receiver equipment for Digitize, Inc. and is their current provider and therefore he is requesting that the Commissioners waive the bidding process and award the project to RBallen for \$74,055.00.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to waive the bidding process and award the project to RBallen for the grant-funded amount of \$74,055.00. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion and all were in favor.

2. Overnight Travel – Director Andross stated that he has a new Dispatcher who needs to attend the mandatory NH State Police Spots training in Concord. The training is three (3) days from May 15-17th.

MOTION: Commissioner Ahern moved to approve the overnight travel. Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion and all were in favor.

3. Dispatch PCs – Director Andross stated that he attempted to engage assistance from SNS in getting the information for this purchase and they ended up having him engage with Dell. He explained that Dell has been the provider of County hardware for many years. He is requesting that the Commissioners waive the bidding process and accept the quote from Dell of \$12,024.80 for the replacement of computers in the Dispatch Center.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to waive the bidding process and award the project to Dell for \$12, 024.80. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion and all were in favor.

4. MOU Department of Safety – Director Andross explained that Grafton County has been working with the State for years, as far as sharing infrastructure. They have done projects together and have had a working relationship for many years. The Department of Safety has discovered, internally, they have had folks that no longer work there who have made agreements with folks that were never documented. Director Andross stated that the Dept. Safety has six (6) lawyers of their own and doing more work in documenting agreements. The State has asked for this agreement to not change what the State has been doing or committed to doing for years, this is only to document it. The relationship with the State has never been stronger than it is now. Director Andross noted that the State followed the same model that they use for Homeland Security grants that the Chair of the Commissioners signs off on.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to approve the Chair of the Board of Commissioners to sign for the new agreement with NH Dept. of Safety. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion and all were in favor.

Commissioner Ahern requested to go into nonpublic session.

MOTION: * 10:46 AM Commissioner Ahern moved to enter into non-public session for the purposes of matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of the public body itself, unless such person requests an open meeting. This exemption shall extend to any application for assistance or tax abatement or waiver of a fee, fine, or other levy, if based on inability to pay or poverty of the applicant according to RSA 91-A: 3, II (c). Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Ahern “yes”, Commissioner McLeod “yes” Commissioner Piper “yes” Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted “yes” and would now go into non-public session.

*11:06 AM Commissioner Piper declared the meeting back in public session.

MOTION: Commissioner Ahern moved to permanently seal the minutes from the just completed non-public session because they could affect the reputation of someone other than those of the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Ahern “yes” Commissioner McLeod “yes” Commissioner Piper “yes”. Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted “yes” and the motion passes.

Agenda Items:

1. Commissioner Piper asked if everyone had a chance to read the minutes from the May 2nd, May 3rd and May 4th meetings. Commissioner Piper and Commissioner McLeod had a few edits.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to approve the minutes from the May 2nd meeting as amended. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion and all were in favor.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to approve the minutes from the May 3rd meeting as amended. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion and all were in favor.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to approve the minutes from the May 4th meeting as amended. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion and all were in favor.

2. Facility Inspection Report – DoC – CA Libby submitted the facility inspection report from the DoC for Commissioner Piper to sign.

3. CDBG Drawdown – Commissioner Piper signed a drawdown from NHARDC for \$46,314.46.

4. FY2024 Budget- CA Libby reported that as the budget stands with the changes the Commissioners have made there is a .05% decrease in the amount to be raised by taxes. The total budget is \$52,006,086.00 and the total amount to be raised by taxes of \$26,519,737.00 or .05% decrease.

MOTION: * 11:24 AM Commissioner Ahern moved to enter into non-public session for the purposes of the dismissal, promotion, or compensation of any public employee or the disciplining of such employee, or the investigation of any charges against him or her, unless the employee affected (1) has a right to a meeting and (2) requests that the meeting be open, in which case the request shall be granted according to RSA 91-A: 3, II (a). Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Ahern “yes”, Commissioner McLeod “yes” Commissioner Piper “yes” Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted “yes” and would now go into non-public session.

*11:43 AM Commissioner Piper declared the meeting back in public session.

MOTION: Commissioner Ahern moved to permanently seal the minutes from the just completed non-public session because they could affect the reputation of someone other than those of the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Ahern “yes” Commissioner McLeod “yes” Commissioner Piper “yes”. Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted “yes” and the motion passes.

Commissioner Ahern stated that the Commissioners have worked very hard and have had some tough decisions regarding the budget.

Commissioner McLeod stated that she is disappointed that the County is not doing anything to significantly reduce items such as the \$4 million contract nursing line. She stated that she will vote in favor of the budget but she feels there are solutions they chose not to go with. They will continue to send 2/3 of that money to out of state to corporations rather than paying our own employees.

MOTION: Commissioner Ahern moved to approve the budget in the amount of \$52,006,086.00 with the total amount to be raised by taxes of \$26,519,737.00 or -.05%. Commissioner Piper seconded the motion and all were in favor.

CA Libby stated that the Commissioners would now need to set the date for their public hearing on the proposed budget. The Commissioners discussed dates and agreed to hold the public hearing the night of May 22nd if the Executive Committee will move their meeting to that afternoon and if the Executive Committee would not move their meeting they agreed to the 23rd of May.

5. Small Business Applications – The Commissioners reviewed and discussed the forty two (42) small business applications that were received. CA Libby noted that the dollar amount requested in the applications received is more than they have allocated in funding. She also noted that not all applications were complete. Commissioner Piper stated that she is not in favor of accepting incomplete applications. Commissioner Ahern agreed. Commissioner McLeod stated that she would be in favor of lower the max amount of funding allowed for applications so everyone who applied can receive some funding. CA Libby stated that she would go through all applications again to see who does not have all of the information needed and will create a new list for the Commissioners to further discuss next week.

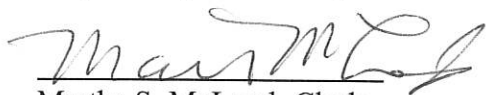
Commissioner Issues:

1. Commissioner Piper stated that she attended a Department of Transportation pre hearing for the Lebanon DOT project, because she was asked to participate on a commission that Councilor Warmington put together. She reported that during this hearing they went over the presentation and rules to ensure they have a good clear public hearing next week for the Lebanon transportation project. She explained that there is a proposal to put in a rotary at what is a confusing and dangerous intersection of three (3) different streets in Lebanon. The project is 80% federal funded and 20% through the City of Lebanon.

2. Commissioner Piper stated that she would be starting her visits to her Selectboards and City Council. She will be attending the Lebanon City Council meeting next Wednesday night.

12:37PM with no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,



Martha S. McLeod, Clerk

May 2023 Farm Report

1. There are currently 53 cows milking, averaging 83 pounds per cow. We produced 125,647 pounds of milk for the month of April. Components were 4.45% butterfat and 3.22% protein. The milk pay price in January was \$22.65 for Grafton County Farm.
2. Sold 4 litters of piglets so far. We have 2 litters on the ground and 2 more due any day now.
3. Monday May 15th the farm is purchasing 100 chickens to replace the old hens. I was able to sell about 50 old birds. We still have around 50 hens that we put in the old horse stable next to the hen house.
4. Soil samples came back and putting lime down where needed on the corn ground. Also, finishing up putting cow manure on the corn ground. Hope to have ready for planting by weekend. First cut grass is almost ready, however, can't get to the island due to high water.
5. Garden preparation is going well. Sweet corn is going to be planted across the road along with sweet potato trial and nursing home garden. Ground is almost ready for the potatoes and squash planting too.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ben White

Interim Farm Manager