

PUBLIC HEARING ON COMMISSIONERS' FY24 PROPOSED BUDGET

Administration Building

North Haverhill, NH 03774

May 22, 2023

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

OTHERS: See attached sign in sheet

Commissioner Piper called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Commissioner Piper reviewed the attached presentation

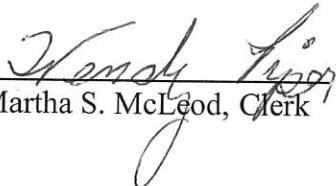
Mary Ruppert was present for the meeting and stated that she was there with her husband as constituents. She reported that her background is in homecare and hospice and stated that not all the people here looking for jobs have been here their whole lives. She stated that the County needs to look at what they are paying their employees. She asked if the County still has 130 licensed beds. Nursing Home Administrator Labore stated that there are 135 licensed beds and they are staffing for 94. M. Ruppert asked if they are meeting the needs of the constituents. She noted that the Veterans Home has 90 beds not filled and 60 people on the waiting list. She asked what the County needs to do to meet that need and one of those items is addressing the wages for those employees. She stated that the County is sending \$4 million to contract agencies and asked what the County could do with putting a portion of that \$ 4 million back in the county's pocket for its own employees.

Commissioner Piper thanked M. Ruppert for her very good comments. She stated that the nursing shortage is a nationwide problem and to remedy the problem, County is evaluating all of the data it has. There has been legislation introduced and the County has been working with the federal government agencies. They want to do something that *will* work so the question is what will work. There are many different perspectives and data available on this issue. Commissioner Piper stated that this is a very challenging shortage to fill, in the sense of the County's geographical location. Young nurses coming out of Nursing School do not want to work in geriatrics and nursing homes and they are advised by their instructors against going to work there. She went on to explain that an idea has been on the table to raise wages to reflect what contract nursing agencies are paying, but the fear is that just paying more money may not combat the problem. However, all ideas are on the table. M. Ruppert stated that the County has to be brave and be willing to take a step that no one else will take. Rep. Sykes stated that everything M. Ruppert has stated resonates with him on a personal level. He has been on the Grafton County Executive Committee of the Delegation for ten (10) years. The Delegation is always trying to find ways to attract retain and compensate with what the County can afford. He stated that it is really important that M. Ruppert showed up today and hammered home that message. When the Executive Committee has their budget discussions, a majority of the time is spent on this very issue. Rep. Sellers noted that LNAs are hired and put through the LNA class offered by the County, and he stated that the Executive Committee also approved some extra money today for this purpose. He is well aware of the money issues.

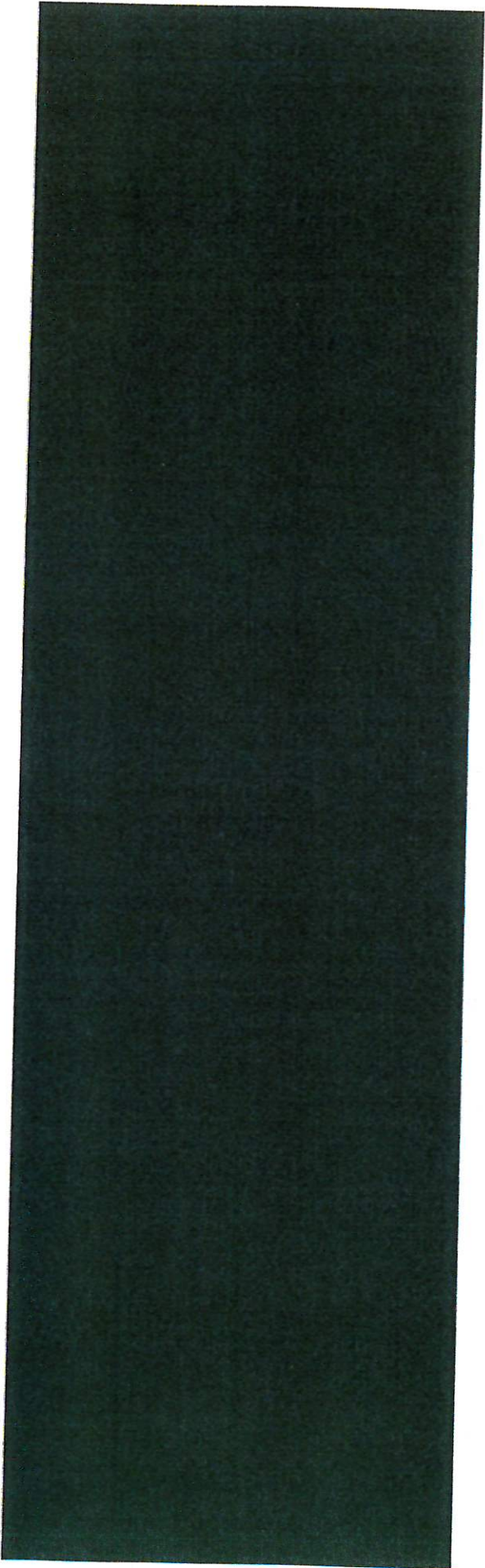
Commissioner Piper thanked everyone for coming.

6:30 PM with no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,


Martha S. McLeod, Clerk

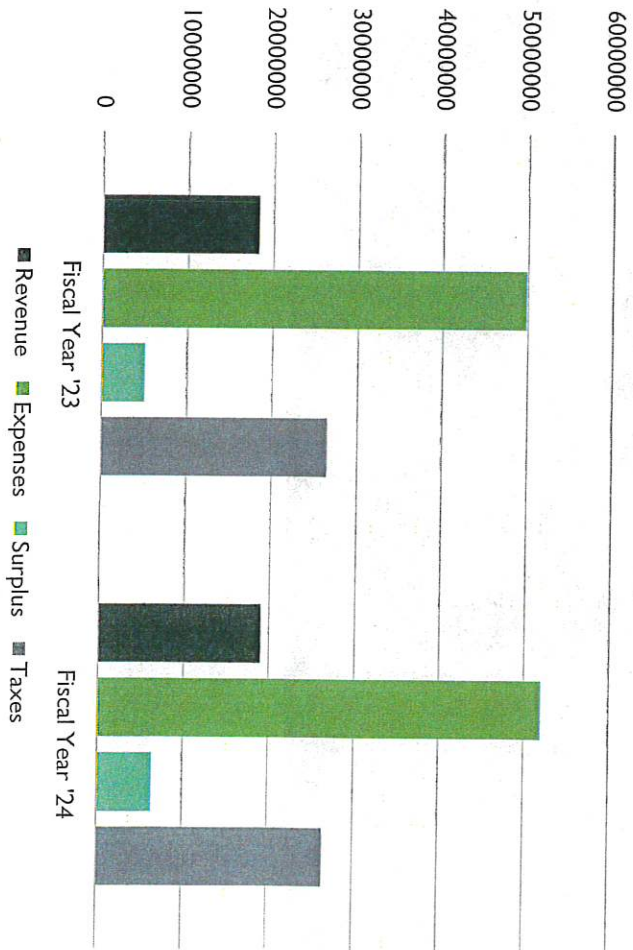
FISCAL YEAR 2024
COMMISSIONERS' PROPOSED BUDGET



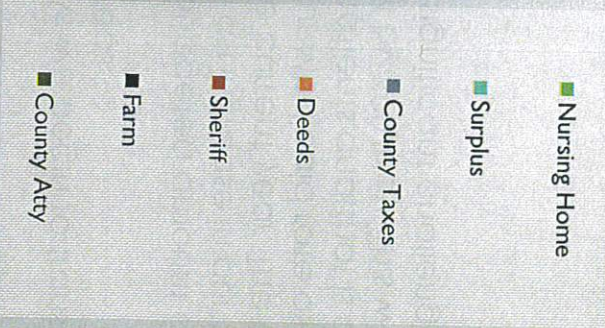
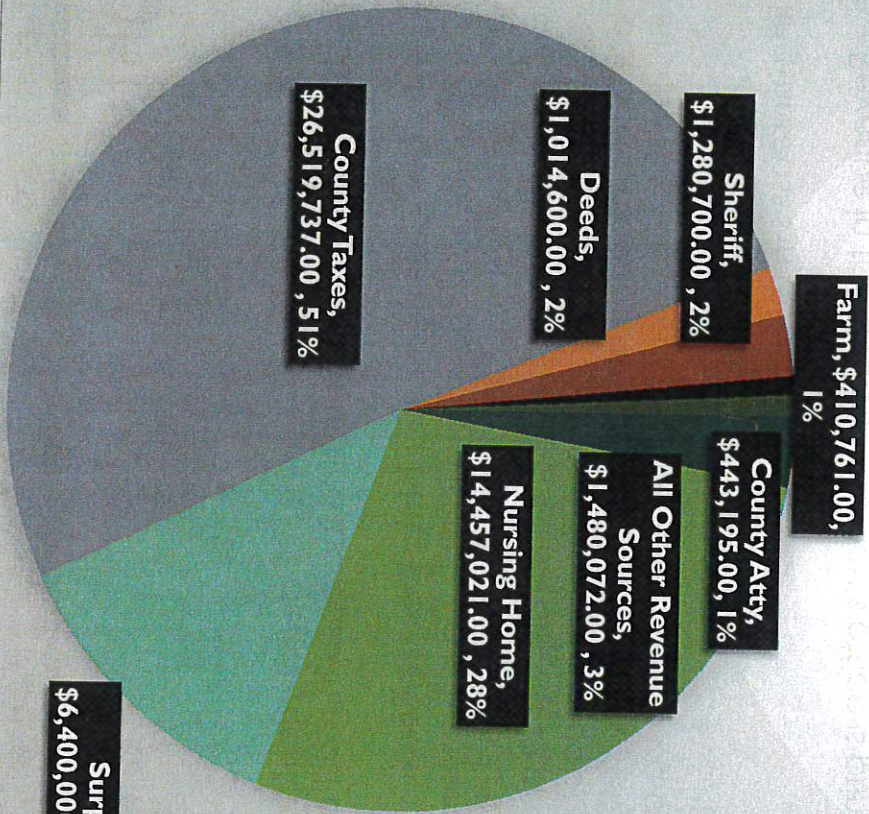
Fiscal Year '24 Budget Summary

- Revenue increased - 4.14%
- Increased Surplus Used by - 28%
- Expenses increased - 4.30%
- County Taxes decreased - .05%

FY 23 v FY '24 Comparison



REVENUE SOURCES



Revenue Highlights

Revenue has increased ~ 4.14%

The overall increase in revenue is being seen across almost all departments. As we begin to transition into a post pandemic time, revenue levels have again begun to increase in most areas.

- **Nursing Home** - The census at the nursing home has been well below our budgeted amount all of FY '23 and we are budgeting for a decreased census from FY '23. We have seen an increase in our census in the last couple of months. The budgeted census for FY '24 is for 92 vs. 100 in the current year. The estimated revenue, however, will increase by \$470,672. This is due to an increase in our Medicaid rate as well as a change in the payer sources. We are admitting more Medicare (Rehab) patients and that is a much higher reimbursement rate. We are also increasing our private pay rates for FY '24 by \$20/day. This will allow us to capture more revenue with a reduced census. Staffing continues to be a significant challenge that also impacts the census.

Other departments budgeting increases in revenue are:

- **County Attorney's Office** – Revenue in the County Attorney's office is primarily received from grant funding and charges for services for Circuit Court Prosecution. The slight increase is due to increased costs for those communities that are charged for prosecution services. These communities pay the full cost of the prosecutors, so as salary and benefit costs increase so do the charges for services.

Revenue Highlights (continued)

- **The Sheriff's Department** shows an increase of \$166,000 – there is an anticipated increase in Civil process fees as well as increased volume and an increase in Dispatch fee revenue. In addition, there is an increase in grant funding received for the Drug Task Force.
- **Interest Income** - Interest rates have risen dramatically over the past 6 – 8 months and as a result when the County did investments this fiscal year rates far exceeding projections. The increased rates are projected to continue, therefore, we are budgeting to increase interest income \$300,000 for fiscal year 2024.

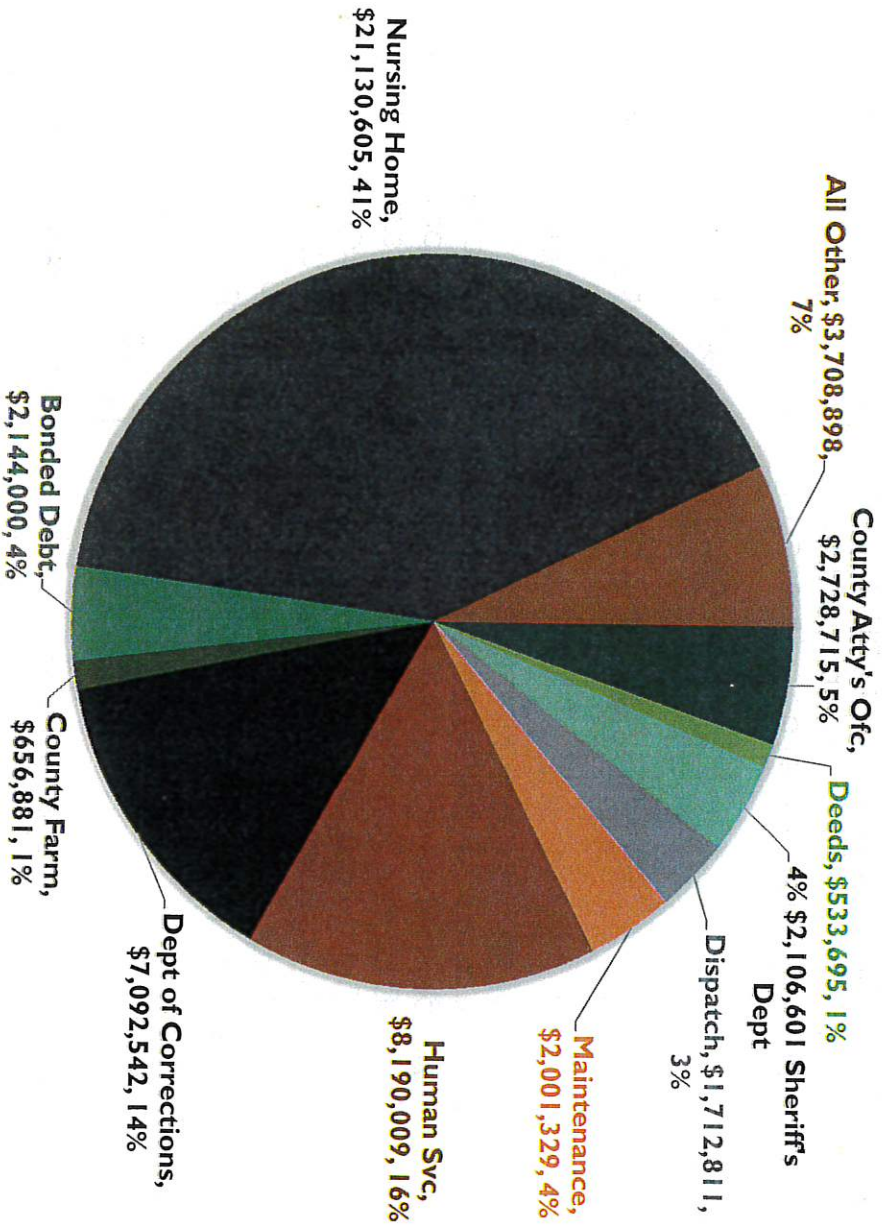
There are a few departments where there are projected decreases:

- **Register of Deeds** – The Deeds Department has seen tremendous volume during the past two and a half (2 1/2) years and generated record amounts of revenue. Recognizing that this would not continue, during last year's budget preparation, Register Monahan decreased budgeted revenues for FY '23. This has shown to be a wise decision as volume in the Registry has decreased as has revenue. In preparation of the FY '24 budget, Register Monahan is anticipating that the real estate market will continue its slow down due to lower inventory and higher interest rates and as such has reduced revenue projections for FY '24 by \$66,400.
- **Farm** – There is a \$140,000 decrease in farm revenue. During FY '23 the farm reduced the size of the milking herd from 85 to 55 in order to help alleviate staffing challenges and to be able to continue operation of the dairy farm. This has resulted in production of less milk and a reduced revenue for FY '24.

Revenue Highlights (continued)

- To offset the increases in expenditures, the Commissioners evaluated the County's fund balance position which continues to be strong and is above the recommended range.
- The recommended amount of fund balance to be held in reserve by government entities is between 8% and 16% percent of their annual budget.
- The decision was made to increase the amount of fund balance used for this year due to the circumstances. There is an additional \$1,400,000 to be used to offset taxes.
- By increasing the amount of fund balance to be used to offset taxes, Grafton County will still have a remaining fund balance of 16%. This is a healthy undesignated fund balance within the County's policy.

EXPENSE BREAKDOWN



Expenditure Highlights

- This year the request was made by both the Employee Council and the United Electrical Workers (UE) that represents employees at the nursing home for a flat dollar/hour increase instead of the traditional percentage. They felt that in these economic times this would be a fair way to give raises so that everyone received the same. The Commissioners spent a great deal of time during the budget process discussing and reviewing the requests. Eventually a 2 – 1 decision was reached to give employees a \$2.00/hour cost-of-living adjustment. In addition, the Commissioners will also be increasing shift and weekend differentials by \$1.00/hour. These shifts are the most difficult to staff. The intent is that this increased incentive will help in staffing those shifts. The new rates for fiscal year 2024 will be \$2.75/hour for second shift, \$3.75/hour for third shift and \$3.75/hour for weekend.
- There is a 5.5% increase in health insurance costs for FY '24
- NH Retirement System rates will decrease slightly.
- One of the most challenging issues that the County is currently facing is workforce. We are short staffed in many areas but primarily in our nursing department and in Corrections. These departments are 24/7 departments. The Commissioners recognize that staffing is extremely challenging and are working with the department heads to identify ways to help recruit and retain employees. The above changes and the excellent benefit package that the county offers are ways in which we hope to be competitive and be able to not only attract new employees but retain the valuable employees that we currently have.

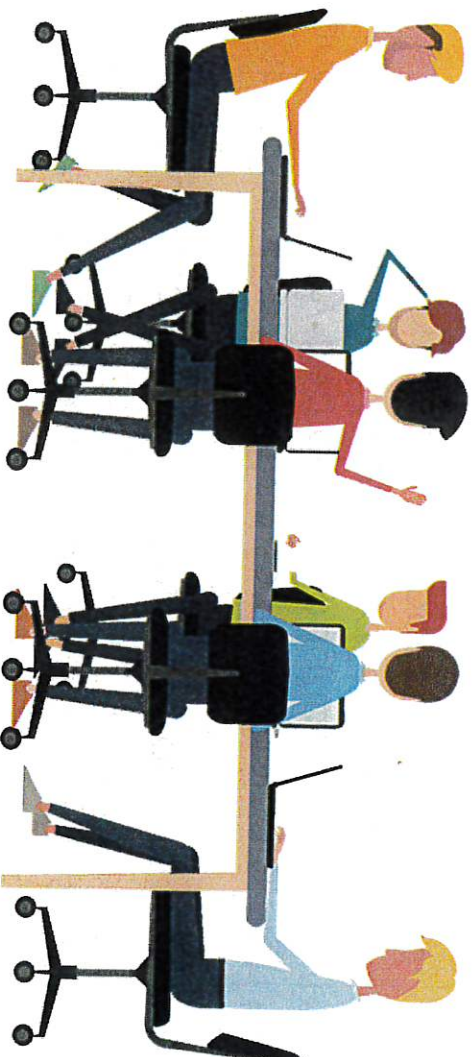
Expenditure Highlights (Continued)

- The Fiscal Year 2024 budget includes one (1) new full-time position. A Dispatcher in the Dispatch Center. The need for this new position is due to the lack of availability of part-time staffing. The Dispatch Center has for years relied upon part-time staff to help cover staffing needs. Over the past several years part-time staff and their availability has decreased, leaving the need for the Director to cover shifts as well as increased overtime for full-time staff. The addition of this position would alleviate this.
- A consequence of the significant staffing issues within the nursing department has been the tremendous increase in the Contract Nursing expense. In fiscal year 2023 we are on-target to spend \$4,000,000 on these services. We have been able to cover these expenses through our budgeted staffing lines due to not being able to hire our own staff. The fiscal year 2024 budget shows a budgeted expense of \$4,100,000. Contract agencies have been able to take advantage of the nationwide nursing shortage and charge very high rates for us to use these services. Grafton County joins 9 other New Hampshire counties in working with the state and federal governments to find ways to overcome this unprecedented challenge.

Expenditure Highlights (Continued)

- The county is statutorily required to contribute to the Long Term Care and Choices for Independence Medicaid programs. The Statute established a cap that the counties contribute. That cap by statute will increase by 2%. In addition to the increase in the overall cap, the percentage of those costs that Grafton County pays has also increased. Those increases equate to an increase of \$520,907.
- There is a large increase budgeted due to rising utility costs. Grafton County Complex is a customer of Woodsville Water and Light. Unlike most major utility companies in the past year, Woodsville has not had a significant increase in electrical costs for their customers. The contract Woodsville Water and Light holds with its current supplier, however, is expiring this year and we have been advised to anticipate a large (perhaps double) increase in the cost per kilowatt hour for our electricity beginning in November, 2023. With this information we have budgeted for that anticipated increase and that has increased our electricity costs by \$372,254. We have also budgeted for a 7% increase in water costs and an 8% increase in sewage costs. The County continues to investigate ways to reduce these costs.
- The bond that was taken out in 2002 to build the addition to the Nursing Home and to do extensive renovations to the Administration building was paid off in September, 2022. This has reduced the budget by \$725,000.

The Executive Committee of the Delegation – will meet on 6/5; 6/9; 6/12 and 6/16 to deliberate and make their final recommendations and the full Delegation will meet on June 26, 2023 at 9:00 AM to vote on the FY 2024 Grafton County Budget. For more information regarding these meetings please visit: www.co.grafton.nh.us.



We would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank our elected officials, department heads and all of our employees for all of their hard work during the past year. You continue to provide outstanding services to the citizens of Grafton County. You have all done an amazing job!

Grafton County is dedicated to maintaining a high level of professionalism, safety and care throughout all departments while continuing to be conscious of our obligations to provide services and to be respectful of the impact on taxpayers.

*Thank
You*

Thank you for attending!





Public Hearing on Proposed FY24 Budget May 22nd 2023

Sign In Sheet ~ **PLEASE PRINT**

1 Heather Bryant
2 Wray Babble. LRCS
3 BEN WHITE
4 Heather Baldwin
5 Cocinne Morse
6 Tom Elliott
7 George Sykes
8 Craig Labore
9 Jerry Stringham
10 Nicole Mitchell
11 Karen Clugh
12 Mary Ruppert
13 Keneim Parker
14 Pam Gilburt
15 Donna Lee
16 Tanaya Call Newfound Area Nursing
17 Mollie Adams NANA
18 Jerry Stringham
19 Bill Botten
20 John Sellers
21 Wendy Piper
22 Omer C. Aherm Tr
23 Martha Mcleod
24 Julie Libby
25 Sam Norcross
26 Tom Andross
27 Marcie Hornick
28 Kelley Monahan
29 Jim Daves
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