

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING  
Administration Building  
North Haverhill, NH 03774  
May 5, 2022

PRESENT: Commissioners Piper, Lauer and Ahern, County Administrator Libby,  
Administrative Assistant Norcross.

OTHERS PRESENT: FM Nelson, Employee Council – Tiffany LaPoint, Sarah Pepper, Andre  
Sanders

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

### **Farm Budget – Farm Manager Nelson**

Commissioner Ahern stated that many people out there question why the County has a farm. He feels the farm is important to the Nursing Home and Department of Corrections. He asked if the farm budgeted to make a profit. CA Libby stated that it is not making and has not made a profit in years.

FM Nelson stated that Commissioner Ahern had questions for him regarding the farm. The first question was if he worked for a private farm enterprise system, how he would navigate through tough times if he did not have a county budget. FM Nelson explained that on a private farm the size of the County farm, there would be an off farm income and you would have a spouse that would have a job with benefits. He noted that a couple of years ago the County Farm ran into troubled times with turnover of help. They came closest to breaking even when two (2) employees were not taking health insurance and they operated understaffed. He explained that if you look at a family farm, there are many times that, there are people are undercompensated for their efforts. If you are hiring labor, you are utilizing immigrant labor, which has economic benefits.

FM Nelson stated that the second question Commissioner Ahern had was regarding fertilizer. He explained that they have manure that they can use but it is not enough to get the quality of product and yield they need to get them through the year. He is trying not to use it on the first cut. They need to put the fertilizer on the potatoes to get the yield they need. There is a good return on fertilizer and that input makes it worthwhile to get the extra cut of hay and get the quality of feed they need to feed a high producing herd of cows.

FM Nelson addressed Commissioner Ahern's last question regarding sawdust and if FM Nelson has reached out to Cersosimo in Rumney. FM Nelson explained that when he took over as interim Farm Manager, the farm switched from kiln dried shavings to green spruce fir bedding from Brian Amey, some of which is coming from Milan, NH. He explained that they have created more risk to their cows by doing this but the benefit is going from spending \$1,600-\$1,700 a trailer load and getting 3 weeks of time per load, to almost a month using the green sawdust. The bedding from Cersosimo is \$15/ton. He has reached out to a couple of haulers. One

(1) person will not haul, and the other does not have an appropriate way to cover the sawdust to haul that distance without it blowing out. Cersosimo has pine sawdust, maple and ash. He is not sure how that would work under the cows, it may be too damp but he is willing to try. He noted that he is with Brian Amey and he knows that he will have a supply when he needs it. He explained that when you jump around vendor to vendor you might be scrambling to find the supply. Commissioner Ahern stated that he is concerned because the cost of fuel is going up and delivery from Milan, NH is further than Rumney. When he talked with the mill manager in Cersosimo, he said he can deliver the supply needed and he can do that permanently. The only issue is the delivery.

### **Budget Discussion**

Dispatch Capital Reserve Contribution – CA Libby explained that each year they contribute to the capital reserve account so they have money in that fund to spend for equipment and upgrades. Traditionally up until roughly four (4) years ago, they always contributed 10% of Dispatch revenue from the towns. This current fiscal year they have budgeted \$25,000. CA Libby has reduced the percentage in the proposed budget year to 5%, which is \$32,000. The Commissioners agreed to leave it at \$32,000 until the end of the discussion.

Sheriff's Department Cruiser Gas – CA Libby stated that this year has \$38,000 budgeted for fuel. The Sheriff increased this to \$50,000 not knowing what is going to happen with fuel prices. She has lowered that to level funding at \$38,000. She stated that this is a gamble and it may be wise to increase a little over level funding. The Commissioners discussed this and agreed to leave it level funded.

### **Employee Council – Tiffany LaPoint, Sarah Pepper, Andre Sanders.**

T. LaPoint explained that in regards to the wage scale, she does not think the wage scale is as much of a problem as a lack of a COLA. The wage scale brought the positions to market level positions and they feel that a COLA would be the extra that employees are looking for. A COLA now would be that one extra thing to keep it going and keep on top with knowing that the market will change and not stay here forever. She stated that they do not believe that asking for a COLA would be unreasonable. A. Sanders noted that the County is roughly down 70 employees or 15% of staffing. They feel the wage study was a good start however; they want the employees to rant and rave in a positive manner. With overtime and lack of staffing there is not a lot of positivity, there is a lot of negativity about not receiving a COLA. If there were no wage study, they would have been asking for market value cola. They have not seen or been above a national average for a cost of living increase. He stated that, had we not done a wage study and asked for the CPI, there is reasonable thought that they should ask for a small COLA.

CA Libby stated that the overall cost of a 2% COLA would be \$477,000. T. LaPoint stated that people are leaving the County for other positions. She does not want to come across as employees that are looking for more but many people were thinking there was going to be a COLA. Given the current times and for the employees that have stuck it out and stayed, the wage study and a small COLA would show employees that the County appreciates them staying. Commissioner Piper stated that she understands what T. LaPoint is saying, that the wage study

brought positions up to market value and a small COLA is viewed as a reward. She noted that the Commissioners raised substantially the recommended \$2,400 bonus to \$6,000. The Commissioners viewed this substantial bonus for employees' work during Covid as a reward or show of appreciation. T. LaPoint stated that they do appreciate that, they are looking to have something to sustain moving forward. Commissioner Lauer stated that everyone is getting an increase based on that wage study to bring the positions up to market value. The COLA is meant to help keep the wage charts marketable. A. Sanders noted that this wage study is going into effect halfway through 2022 and the data they were given at the last meeting was from 2021. Commissioner Piper stated that the County was only 3% behind market value. She noted that she wants to remind all employees that the way the County is able to compete with the private market is through the excellent benefits package.

Commissioner Ahern stated that when you come to work for Grafton County you have a solid job and there are no layoffs. T. LaPoint asked if the Union is receiving a COLA. CA Libby stated that they are negotiating with the Union and a COLA was not requested. Commissioner Piper explained that the Commissioners are working to finalize the budget today and they will have a decision regarding the COLA by the end of the meeting. She went on to state that she appreciates the Employee Council Reps coming back to meet with them but is very comfortable with the results of the wage study for the health of the campus as a whole. Commissioner Lauer noted that she understands the concerns that the salary data that was used in the study was only good through December 2021. They need to give it some thought.

**MOTION:** \* 9:53 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 Lauer seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Lauer "yes"; Commissioner Ahern "yes" Commissioner Piper "yes" Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted "yes" and would now go into non-public session.

\* 10:13 AM Commissioner Piper declared the meeting back in public session.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Lauer 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 Ahern seconded the motion. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Lauer "yes" Commissioner Ahern "yes" Commissioner Piper "yes". Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted "yes" and the motion passes.

### **Budget Discussion**

CA Libby stated that the starting point before the Commissioners talk about ARPA was a 7.02% increase. They are now at 6.9% and this is the true increase in the amount to be raised by taxes. She explained that the further changes to the budget increased 25% of social service funding

through ARPA proposal to all of the social service being funding through the ARPA funds. She eliminated the longevity, Education and Conference lines and travel and left those in the regular operating budget. She explained that in doing this they would be replacing \$1,904,031 of our budgeted operating expenses with revenue loss from ARPA Funds. This would put the budget at a .16% reduction in the amount to be raised by taxes. This also is a .93% decrease in expense budget

CA Libby noted that she included the Capital items that the Commissioners removed from the budget in the ARPA request. This would increase the ARPA request to \$2,063,003.

CA Libby stated that all three (3) new positions requested are included in these numbers. Commissioner Ahern stated that in light of all they are trying to do, he is not in favor of any new hires. Commissioner Lauer stated that she thinks they would be irresponsible to not give Dispatch another position when they gave them new responsibilities. As far as Maintenance goes, it would appear that day-to-day maintenance is being overlooked. The Commissioners have addressed the issue of recruitment and retention many times and to not give the HR Department what they think could help address the problem would be a mistake. The statement was made that the typical ratio is 1 HR staff member to 100 employees. She thinks HR is understaffed. Commissioner Piper stated that she agrees with Commissioner Lauer on Dispatch and Maintenance but she is very concerned that a new HR position will not make a significant dent in the problem of short staffing. She asked what would happen in a couple of years when there have not been any improvements through that position. She asked Commissioner Lauer if that would bring them to the idea that they have increased the HR staff to the national average. She stated that she is often asked about the nursing staff shortage and the cost of contract nurses and said that providing this position allows residents to know what they are doing everything they possibly can to recruit and retain and that they are doing everything they can to get the contract nursing down because there will be a dedicated professional addressing those problems. When that does not happen ,however, because of the situation that they are in, what they are doing in hiring another position is allowing the HR department to grow. This is the decision that has to be made, the cost benefit analysis.

Commissioner Ahern stated that if they hire a new position in HR, they are going to pour 5 gallons of gasoline on the discontent of other County employees. He stated that it would bring up the question of why is the county going to hire a new administrative position rather than putting money towards the Nursing Home and the DoC. CA Libby stated that this is a position that would be used to try to help the understaffing in those departments. Commissioner Piper stated that the comment Commissioner Lauer made is true. They have starved HR needs across the departments over the last three (3) budget cycles and there comes a time when that is irrational when there is a demonstrated need.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Lauer moved to fund all three (3) new positions. Commissioner Ahern second the motion for discussion purposes. Commissioner Lauer “yes”, Commissioner Piper “yes”, Commissioner Ahern “no”. With the vote being two (2) in favor and one (1) in opposition the motion passes.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Lauer moved to recommend an operating budget of \$48,284,943 with \$26,928,933 in the amount to be raised by taxes and there will be an additional request of \$1,904,000 in operating costs to be funded from ARPA. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion for discussion purposes.

Discussion – Commissioner Ahern does not see how he can in vote in good conscience on the motion because of his concerns about the positions. The fact that CA Libby and the Commissioners have worked so hard to come up with a .16% reduction in the amount to be raised by taxes but they have discussed the danger in the artificial lowering of the budget using ARPA funds. CA Libby noted that a 2.97% increase in expenses before using ARPA funds is very impressive during this time.

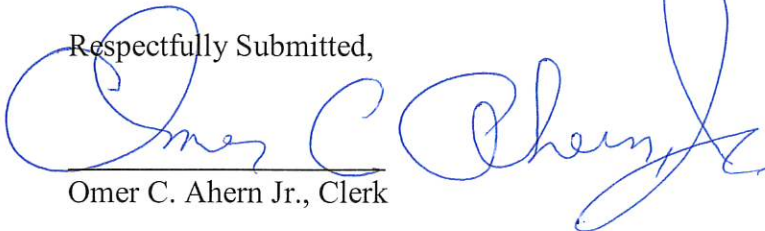
Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Lauer “yes”, Commissioner Ahern “no” Commissioner Piper “yes”. With the vote being two (2) in favor and one (1) in opposition the motion passes.

Public Hearing – CA Libby stated that if the budgets were sent out by next Wednesday they can have the public hearing on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Executive Committee and Delegation are here that day as well but in the morning. She stated that she was unsure if they should move those meetings to later in the day and have the public hearing that evening. The Commissioners agreed to discuss moving the Delegation meeting to later in the day.

Commissioner Lauer stated that the Bethlehem Energy Committee contacted her and would like to meet with the Commissioners and propose that the County give \$50,000 to every town in Grafton County for energy projects. CA Libby stated that she would be contacting them and put them on the agenda for a future meeting.

10:48 AM with no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,



Omer C. Ahern Jr., Clerk