

GRAFTON COUNTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUDGET MEETING
Administration Building
North Haverhill, NH 03774
June 12, 2023

PRESENT: Reps. Sykes, Simon, Murphy, Bolton, Sellers, Stringham, Commissioners Piper, and Ahern, County Administrator Libby, Administrative Assistant Norcross

OTHERS PRESENT: County Attorney Hornick, Register Monahan

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

County Attorney's Office – County Attorney Hornick

A. Revenue

1. Atty. Hornick stated that the County Attorney's Office does not bring in much for revenue but they do receive the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA) and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants that offset the costs for the Victim Witness Coordinators and prosecutors.

3. Circuit Court Prosecution - Atty. Hornick explained that there are two (2) attorneys under their umbrella that paid for in full by the Circuit Court Prosecution agreements in place that fall under their revenue.

B. Expense

County Attorney's Office

1. Investigative Services – Atty. Hornick explained that the Investigator position is being slowly incorporated into the budget. It was an ARPA expense but because it is a permanent position, the first year it was paid 75% out of ARPA and 25% out of the County budget. This year it is 50% split between each and eventually will be fully incorporated into the budget. She noted that the cost of this position might decrease as this employee may be dropping down to part-time.

2. Contract Services – There is a decrease this line item due to handling shredding in house.

3. Dues & Licenses – Atty. Hornick explained with the use of body worn cameras across the state with all law enforcement agencies and now the State Police as well, she is concerned about complying with the Department of Justice rules for confidentiality and the ability to transfer information across the internet. Evidence.com is a program that different police departments are using with respect to their body worn cameras in order to download and upload footage. It provides a platform to share that information seamlessly and confidentially. She noted that for the County Attorney's Office, Evidence.com would allow their office to upload and download much quicker, taking away much of the time spent waiting for that information to download.

This software will also transcribe the information from those cameras as well, which will streamline the process. She stated that right now they do not have a certified transcriptionist in their office and have to hire someone for that.

Rep. Sellers asked how Evidence.com would help save the County money. Atty. Hornick explained that they are requesting this software in preparation to be more efficient in the courtroom and meet the demands of the Public Defenders to uphold the constitutional rights of defendants. Because the body worn cameras are becoming required, this is one more thing that the County Attorney's Office is going to have to provide appropriately to the defendant or public defenders. It helps with editing and redaction of body worn camera footage.

5. Travel Expense – Atty. Hornick stated that they are increasing this line in anticipation of felonies first going away January 1st. She explained that the anticipation is that her office will assist with the different Circuit Court Prosecutors in the first several months of this ending.

6. Equipment Rental – Atty. Hornick noted a decrease in this line due to paying off their copier.

Atty. Hornick answered questions from the Committee.

VAWA Grant

Assistant County Attorney – Atty. Hornick explained that this increase is due to this attorney moving to the Lead position this year.

Medical Referee

Atty. Hornick explained that this line covers the Medical examiners that attend untimely deaths within Grafton County. This line has increased because the costs have increased and as well as seeing an increase in fatal overdoses.

Register of Deeds – Register Monahan

A. Revenue

Register Monahan provided a document that outlines the Register of Deeds revenue sources and reviewed that with the Committee.

1. Recording Fees - Register Monahan reported a slight decrease in this line due to a decrease in the volume of documents that are being recorded.

2. Transfer Tax – Register Monahan explained that this is the 4% the County receives out of the state's portion.

B. Expense

1. Clerical – Register Monahan stated she has included \$40,000 in this line for overtime or part time work.

2. Travel Expense/Education & Conference - Register Monahan stated that she has increased both of these lines slightly but noted that the line is still half of what it used to be and noted that that she used to attend two (2) national conferences and the NHAC Conference. She explained that the Register of Deeds Affiliate is having a hard time meeting due to everyone being understaffed but there are some big issues they are facing and they will be getting together more often to handle those issues. Register Monahan noted that the new microfilm project requires her to travel more as well.

4. Microfilm – Register Monahan stated that this project was delayed and they did not do the new storage in this fiscal year. She stated that she would likely encumber the funds for this project.

5. Computer Software – Register Monahan stated that she decreased this line as they are seeing a reduction in document count. She noted that some of the prices are fixed and the bulk of the cost is per document.

C. Surcharge

Register Monahan stated that she is not looking to make any large purchases this year. She is keeping the \$5,000 for miscellaneous expenses in the event they need it.

Register Monahan answered questions from the Committee.

Human Services, Social Services, Commissioners' & Misc. – CA Libby

A. Misc. Revenue

1. Abandoned Property - CA Libby stated that any abandoned property that goes to the state that is within Grafton County after seven (7) years, the County is paid a percentage of those funds on a yearly basis. She explained that she has a running total that the County receives and uses an average of five (5) to budget for, as she does not know what that revenue total will be each year.

2. Federal PILT – CA Libby explained that this line is revenue the County receives from the federal forestlands that are located within Grafton County. This is also an average that she uses based on previous years.

2. Interest – CA Libby stated that there is a \$350,000 in this line, which is a \$300,000 increase over the current fiscal year. She noted that in the current fiscal year they would exceed \$500,000. There was a dramatic rise in interest rates last fall and rates are projected to stay the same or slightly decrease.

3. Courthouse Rent – This line includes rent from the Circuit and Superior Courts, DMV, and motorcycle training classes.

4. Recoveries – CA Libby stated that the County has averaged \$100,000 for many years. This year is a much lower year than normal but she is hoping it will bounce back.

5. Enhanced FMAP – CA Libby reported that the quarterly Enhanced FMAP payments would be ending now that the federal health emergency is over. The payments are decreasing each quarter. The County will be receiving some but she does not have a way to project what they will be.

Surplus to Reduce Taxes – CA Libby explained every year, starting in February she starts doing projections and that is what they start discussions of what the Commissioners would be able to possibly use in the budget. She stated that in New Hampshire, there is no governing agency that tells counties what they should have in surplus. There are recommendations from various entities so Grafton County created a policy where they are to retain 8%-16% of the overall operating budget as an unassigned fund balance. CA Libby explained that right now using May numbers, if they were use the \$6.4 million in surplus to reduce taxes, the County would have a \$9.4 million undesignated fund balance left. That figure in relation to the proposed budget would still be 17.5% and on the high end of their range. Rep. Sykes stated that the proposed targeted increase with the nurses would add \$300,000 to the budget, which means that their decrease in the amount to be raised by taxes will be changing. He stated that he is interested to know what that number would be so he can relate it to surplus and the discussion as to whether they increase the amount of surplus used to reduce taxes. CA Libby stated that if the County uses a large amount of surplus and next year something happens and those funds are not there, it will be an automatic large tax increase. She stated that she does not want to see the budget have large fluctuations from year to year. CA Libby further discussed the surplus with the Committee and answered questions.

Commissioners' Office

1. Assistant County Administrator – CA Libby explained that last year during the budget the Commissioners' Office budget had a Finance Director position. Six (6) months of funding for that position was reduced and throughout the year herself and the Commissioners have come up with an Assistant County Administrator position and this position is about to be filled. The budget now shows a full year salary.

2. Consultant – CA Libby stated that she had left \$5,000 in this line last year in case they needed a consultant but has decreased it to \$3,500 for next fiscal year.

3. Telephone – CA Libby stated that the phone costs are increasing due to the new system that is being installed.

Information Technology

CA Libby explained that the County contracts with SNS for IT services.

CA Libby explained that the County receives a subsidy through USAC and contracts with NETC to manage the subsidy. She stated that the County receives 65% subsidy to offset the healthcare

IT costs. 15% of that subsidy goes to NETC and 50% goes to the County to offset healthcare IT costs. The County receives \$170,000 to offset to the SNS costs.

Rep. Sellers asked how the service from SNS was. Commissioner Piper stated that the customer service is not what they expected.

Telephone – CA Libby stated that the County has copper lines that run alarm receivers, elevators and fail over analog lines. These will be charged differently with the new system and are reflected in this budget.

New Equipment – This line accounts for the new computer replacement throughout the County. CA Libby noted that all computers are on a rotating replacement schedule.

Human Services

CA Libby reported that the County cap rate was frozen at the FY23 cap levels. This budget will decrease by \$100,206.00. The new total for the Nursing Home Expenses will be \$6,067,353.00, the total cost for Home and Community Based care will be \$2,022,450.00 for a total budget of \$8,089,830.00.

Conservation District

CA Libby stated that the County pays for the Administrative Assistant position and this budget covers expenses associated with that position.

Wage & Benefit

1. Education Assistance – CA Libby stated that this line has not been used in a few years but she recommends this line continue to be funded in case an employee were to utilize it.
2. Retiree Health Insurance – CA Libby explained that the County covers 100% of a single plan health insurance for retirees who are age 60 with 30 years of service or age 62 with 20 years of services.
3. Earned Time Buyback –Currently the buyback program is offered once a year. CA Libby explained that the proposal is to offer this twice a year to employees. Employees must have used 80 hours of earned time during the year and have a remaining earned time balance of 160 hours to qualify for the buy back. She stated that program this allows the County to not have to backfill shifts if employees are choosing to buy back their time, provided they fall under the requirements for the program. It does have a financial benefit to the County as well as allows the County to carry a smaller liability on their books when they report their accrued balances for compensated absences.
4. Employee Benefit Pay Out – CA Libby stated that this line almost at the \$100,000 this fiscal year. There will be a few large retirements next year and she has increased this line to reflect that.

Contingency

Outside Counsel – This line has an increase due to this year’s usage.

CA Libby stated that the original proposed budget has a .05% decrease using in the amount to be raised by taxes with using \$ 6.4 million in surplus. She explained that by adding the targeted increases for the Nursing Home as well as a \$5 targeted wage increase for Correctional Officers the tax increase would be 1.12% or roughly \$594,000. She stated that they would need to use \$7 million in surplus to offset that and would put their surplus percentage at 16.41%. Rep. Sykes stated that he would be in support of these targeted increases to try to address this problem with Correctional Officers to prevent a crisis in the facility as well the issue with contract nursing.

Commissioner Piper stated that the Commissioners have to make a decision tomorrow regarding the targeted increases for Correctional Officers. She stated that they have already approved the nursing Home increase. With the increase in payroll costs, there has also been a \$2 across the board COLA. She has always been in favor of targeted increases. The Nursing Home and Department of Corrections are the two (2) departments that the County has struggled with the longest. In her role as President of the NHAC, she is able to talk to other counties and what they are doing for their employees. She thinks that for the labor pool that Grafton County pulls from, their wages match that. Rockingham and Belknap Counties have raised their wages for Correctional Officers and it appears to have worked. With the County’s proposed increase, it brings Grafton County up to be extremely competitive. Rep. Sykes stated that in Grafton County has a smaller pool to draw from and if higher wages helps draw people from further away, that helps address the problem. They are competing statewide for employees.

Social Services & Grafton Regional Development Corporation – Commissioners

Social Services

Commissioner Piper explained that the previous Executive Committee made a good argument for limiting the scope of social service funding and the Commissioners followed those guidelines. She stated that two (2) agencies did not apply for funding this year and the Commissioners agreed to not fund any new agencies as well as level funding all agencies. Commissioner Piper answered questions from the Committee.

Grafton Regional Development Corporation

Commissioner Piper stated that the Commissioners trimmed the budget everywhere they could, noting that they did not do that to the social service agencies because they know they are suffering due to lack of funds. She explained that the Commissioners are proposing that the funding for GRDC be reduced by \$5,000. Her understanding is that several Boards of Commissioners ago, \$50,000 was given as seed money for this organization and was not done away with.

MOTION: * 11:02 AM Rep. Stringham 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). Rep. Bolton seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. Rep. Simon called the roll. Rep. Bolton “yes”, Rep. Stringham “yes”, Rep. Sellers’ Yes”, Rep. Sykes “yes”, Rep. Simon “yes”. Rep. Simon stated that the majority of the committee voted yes and would now go into nonpublic session.

*11:21 AM Rep. Sykes declared the meeting back in public session.

11:24 AM with no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,


Matthew Simon, Vice-Chair