

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

3855 Dartmouth College Highway

North Haverhill, NH 03774

September 15<sup>th</sup> 2021

PRESENT: Commissioners Piper, Lauer, Ahern, CA Dorsett, FD Libby and Administrative Assistant Norcross.

OTHERS PRESENT: Register Monahan

Commissioner Piper called the meeting to order at 9:45AM and began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

CA Dorsett submitted a document to the Commissioners outlining the process that has been put in place for the approval of ARPA Funds. He stated that he went over the process and sent these documents in August to Chairman Sykes and Vice-Chairman Gordon of the Executive Committee and stated that this is how he interpreted what the Executive Committee envisioned for the process and they agreed with the memo. CA Dorsett stated that a question was brought up at yesterday's meeting as to whether or not the Commissioners should send recommendations to the Executive Committee or are they going to do their own thing. He stated that the Executive Committee is expecting recommendations from the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Ahern stated that he feels that whatever the Commissioners do is a useless endeavor. He stated that the Delegation may not have any agreement with the Commissioners and they are able to take or leave anything the Commissioners suggest. Commissioner Piper stated that the Executive Committee does have oversight and decision making over grants and she agrees with Commissioner Ahern. She stated that she recommends that they are selective about what they recommend in order to be able to make a strong case.

Commissioner Ahern stated that he is looking at these requests in light of the present day situation that our country and state is in, which is a state of complete turmoil. He is also looking at this as a County Home and Correctional Facility as to what their primary purpose is. He stated that right or wrong, the County has been handed \$17,458,302. People have seen that and in his opinion, they are going hog-wild. Whatever the Commissioners do today may not amount to anything down the road.

Commissioner Piper noted that Rep. Gordon has suggested that he would be looking for County money to be dispersed to towns and municipalities. She is wondering if they should be selective in their recommendations and in the sense that some of these proposals are a stretch to meet the criteria for ARPA funds. She feels that if the Executive Committee thinks that the Commissioners' criteria or standards are loose they may be tempted to take more of the decision-making away from them. Commissioner Piper stated that the Executive Committee tends to rely on their own judgement versus the Commissioners' and therefore she would like to be able to make their strongest case regarding any proposal .

## **Sheriff Department**

CA Dorsett stated that this request is for more Hygienic Uniforms and he has no recommendation.

Commissioner Lauer stated that she believes that they can send all the requests to the Executive Committee but that does not mean they have to recommend it.

The Commissioners discussed the Sheriff Department's request for new sanitary uniforms and all agreed to not recommend it. Commissioner Piper stated that these funds provide a way for Department Heads to get items that have not been budgeted for. FD Libby noted that if Department Heads include these items in the budget it will affect Grafton County taxpayers whereas using ARPA does not directly affect Grafton County taxpayers. Commissioner Piper stated that that was a very good point.

Commissioner Lauer stated that in listening to the Sheriff he was not in favor of this request but was listening to his employees.

CA Dorsett stated that he (CA Dorsett) is looking at what is critical to county operations and what can be seed money to have an impact on taxpayers and the operations within the facility.

## **Department of Corrections**

### **Whole Body Thermal Scanner**

CA Dorsett stated that this is an important tool for increased efficiency and safety. Criticalness to operation was stated lower than Camera system and could potentially wait for further consideration in coming round.

The Commissioners agreed to not recommend this request.

FD Libby asked if the Commissioners are not recommending a request, if that means they are taking it off the table completely or can a Department Head request it again in another round.

Commissioner Ahern stated that he would not mind tabling the request. He felt the thermal body scanner would be necessary for safety reasons. This would help the Correctional Officers in catching contraband. He stated that inmates are crafty in getting these items into the facility and feels that this can help the Correctional Officers and felt this would provide some benefit. The Commissioners agreed to table this request.

Commissioner Piper noted that in terms of either not recommending or tabling a request, she feels the uniform request by the Sheriff is not COVID related and she does not recommend it. She stated that as the Sheriff didn't particularly support this request but was proposing it at the request of his employees, he can put it through the regular budget process. She noted that even during the regular budgeting process, she would consider this a want versus a need.

### Video Surveillance System

Commissioner Piper stated that she sees the need for this system for facility operations. CA Dorsett stated that it is functioning right now but is at risk of failure which would have a high impact on operations. It creates reduced safety and higher liability. He stated that under the Revenue Loss portion of ARPA funds it specifically states about protection of critical infrastructure. Commissioner Piper stated that she is going to be conservative on this first round and therefore she is going to say table to this request. Commissioner Lauer stated that if the current system were in better shape she would not be as supportive. It is already affecting the ability of the Sheriff's department to look at the videos. This system has been used in the past to protect the county against lawsuits from inmates. She would recommend it but not at the highest priority. Commissioner Ahern stated that he would recommend it for similar reasons as Commissioner Lauer. He stated that we have an obligation to make sure the DoC is operating safely. By doing this, the Commissioners are telling the Correctional Officers they care about their safety and respect what they are doing.

The Commissioners agreed to recommend this request.

### Human Resources

#### DoC and Nursing Home Stipend

Commissioner Piper stated that she is going to listen to the HR Director, Finance Director, and County Administrator when they say these two departments are bleeding staff. They are down many positions and it is very clear that this stipend is to try to stop the bleeding. She stated that FD Libby had mentioned that this is a stopgap measure; any increases to wages from the wage study will not go through until the next budget cycle. It is a high priority. FD Libby stated that they cannot get contract Correctional Officers and they cannot shut the doors to admissions. Commissioner Lauer stated that she strongly recommends this proposal. Commissioner Ahern asked if there is something more going on underlying. In one of the requests, a question is morale. He asked at what point they say the County cannot do anymore and stated that he worries about the policy they are setting. The Commissioners all agreed to recommend this request.

#### Premium Pay for Employees

The Commissioners had asked FD Libby to run the numbers for a \$6,000 bonus for full time and \$3,000 for part time proposal versus the \$2,400 as presented by Human Resources. FD Libby stated that she has included the County Attorney's Office and Register of Deeds Office Elected Officials but she is unsure if they are able to include them under RSA 23:7 because the Delegation sets the compensation for Elected Officials and this will come through payroll. Commissioner Lauer stated that she feels they should ask the Delegation to authorize it. The new total for these requests \$273,492.00. FD Libby noted that it would decrease \$12,000 if the Elected Officials were not included and would total \$261,492.00. Register Monahan was present at the meeting and said that she does not want the bonus if it were to be approved. She asked if

the County Attorney was aware of this proposal as an elected official. CA Dorsett stated that she knows the overall concept is being discussed. Commissioner Piper stated that she needs to be notified. RD Monahan stated that it is an embarrassment if it goes against the RSA. It makes it look like they are grasping for something they are not even asking for. FD Libby stated that it was done just to include everyone and to give the Commissioners a number. They would have done the work-through of the specifics; it was just a concept and a number. Commissioner Piper stated that she had asked FD Libby to take a middle number between the Register of Deeds \$10,000 request and the HR Director's \$2,400 request. The Commissioners agreed on \$6,000. RD Monahan stated that it opens up a can of worms public relations-wise for the Elected Officials that were not involved in the decision. Commissioner Piper stated that the Commissioners could decide if they want to do this and then discuss it with the County Attorney and work out details with the RSA to decide if it would be a violation. FD Libby stated that there is an RSA that explains how Elected Officials compensation is set, which is by the Delegation bi-annually for the two (2) year term. RD Monahan stated that historically in the minutes from 2000 on, there have been exceptions made to that RSA. FD Libby stated that this was not true. A raise was given at the time a salary was set, the amount was set for year one (1) and then for year two (2). It was not changing it after the vote.

Commissioner Piper stated that the Alternative Sentencing Director has expressed concerns about this proposal, stating that it should be extended to everyone, even remote workers because of the stress that everyone suffered during COVID. FD Libby stated that the bonus could not be extended through ARPA because it specifically states premium pay is for employees who were on site and if an employee was working remotely, they do not qualify. FD Libby stated that the document that the Commissioners have is a synopsis of examples but she has the detailed document that outlines those rules that she can provide the Commissioners. Commissioner Piper stated that she is worried that the document she is reading from can be interpreted as supporting the Alternative Sentencing Director's perspective. She stated that the form she is reading from states that it offers additional support to those who have and will bear the greatest health risk because of their service in critical infrastructure sectors. This does not say anything about being on site and she could see some people argue that health risks can also be behavioral health risks, the mental and emotional stress.

Commissioner Piper requested to go into nonpublic session.

**MOTION:** \* 10:41 AM Commissioner Lauer 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 Ahern 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.

\* 10:50AM 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 Lauer seconded the motion. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Ahern “yes” Commissioner Piper “yes”; Commissioner Lauer “yes”. Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted “yes” and would now return to public session.

Commissioner Piper asked if they should extend this amount to the \$261,492.00 under the premium pay and extend it to everyone under the lost revenue section for ARPA funds, for morale purposes, given the Alternative Sentencing Director’s comments. Commissioner Lauer stated that the reason for giving premium pay is that these are the people who could not stay safely at home and quarantine. They came out into the public, dealt with the public, or dealt with their coworkers. That to her is the reason for giving the premium pay because they took that risk. Commissioner Piper stated that that is true. The Commissioners agreed to increase the payment to \$6,000. Commissioner Piper noted that they are not giving this to Corrections and Nursing Home employees. This is for the departments that did not receive a stipend.

### **Register of Deeds**

#### **Premium Pay**

CA Dorsett stated that he thinks that the amended proposal would cover this request. Register Monahan stated that she is not sure about that and she would like the opportunity to present her case to the Executive Committee. Commissioner Piper asked Register Monahan to present her case again. Register Monahan stated that there was the initial stress of people who were treating people bad but there also has to be consideration of the additional spike in workload for the Register of Deeds who went above and beyond. She wanted to talk about the ratio of impact on these four (4) employees for what they produced county wide, the generation of revenue and the value to each citizen of Grafton County. They went above and beyond the expectations of what the job entails. They took the temperatures of the public to enter into their office to do research, which was never an expectation of their job. Commissioner Piper stated that HR took temperatures at the front door, but Deeds staff did as well before allowing public into their office. Register Monahan stated that they had their own thermometer for when they opened their office back up by appointment to the public. She noted that she could get dates of when they were opened and closed to the public to the Commissioners. She stated that N. Clement from HR was great about opening the door and should be recognized for the risks she took. She noted that her staff did open their door on occasion, if someone was desperate for a deed that did not have the internet. Business did not slow down during COVID as it did for many, it spiked. Her staff were doing their normal job, plus the job of the missing employee and the increased workload. Commissioner Piper asked if a compromise could be reached with the stipends but not the extra vacation week. Register Monahan stated that there has to be some differential, she is talking about four employees, not \$1 million. She stated that four people ran this department. She is unsure of the cost of the vacation. It is a Band-Aid to soothe feelings as two people went above and beyond the other two. She stated that two of her staff members had to work on site and the other two employees did not have to use their vacation while they were home for two weeks.



Commissioner Ahern stated that it is hard when they are working with good people. Part of what they recommended would already include Deeds staff. Register Monahan stated that would be willing to drop it down to \$8,000 and \$7,000 but the stress that her staff went through and the argumentative public, while everyone else was at home. Commissioner Lauer asked if they could leave the money for Deeds at \$6,000 in the premium pay but then do a bonus out of lost revenue. She understands that the Deeds staff has done extra work and maybe it is a bonus we are discussing. Register Monahan stated that she is asking for consideration for how long her staff has been here and the fact that they have been maxed out on the wage scale and only receive COLAs.

Commissioner Piper stated that she appreciates that Register Monahan is advocating for her department. She asked if Register Monahan could make an argument for this additional pay for her employees that cannot be made by many other departments. She stated that there are other long-term employees in other departments and asked Register Monahan what makes her department unique. Register Monahan stated that the classification of the jobs stops them from advancing. They work with no expectation of a raise other than a COLA.

FD Libby stated that she completely understands what Register Monahan is saying but she noted that there are many employees who have an increased workload. She stated that her Payroll Coordinator has been maxed out and has had an incredibly busy last year. She has had to figure out how to get stipends into paychecks, she has had to deal with the very large payroll conversion during COVID and she has worked countless extra hours. FD Libby stated that she is sure every department can tell you the same about their employees. She commends Register Monahan for advocating for her employees but she wants the Commissioners to know that if they make this decision, they will have many more department heads coming to advocate for their employees as well.

Register Monahan stated that the point of view from her employees is that they have been treated unfairly. Commissioner Piper stated that this is why they tried to choose a mid-point universally to treat everyone fairly and they chose \$6,000. She asked what if they did \$8,000 bonuses; it had been mentioned that Register Monahan's proposal could be applied universally.

Commissioner Piper asked Register Monahan why her employees feel they have been treated unfairly. Register Monahan stated that she had requested the encumbrance last year for bonuses that was necessary to smooth things over, to win the trust of the younger staff members so they will stay. They had a staff member retire and they reduced their levels out of the ability to trust each other on a daily basis passing each other in the hallway. Her concern is the level of risk that her team is taking. The federal government recognized the risk of handling of other materials. She noted that a lot of it was e recording. She stated that Payroll was on the phone doing work but was not taking the temperature of the public at the window. Commissioner Piper stated that it sounds like Register Monahan is stating that her department has a heightened level of risk over some other departments.

CA Dorsett stated that FD Libby ran the numbers for an \$8,000 full time and \$4,000 part time payment and it totals \$354,230.00, which is roughly a \$90,000 increase. Commissioner Lauer asked when they exceed what the Sheriff's Department received. FD Libby stated that the

Deputy Sheriffs are not included in this proposal and they only received \$2,400. She stated that she didn't know if the Commissioners wanted to include the Deputy Sheriffs to bring them up to the \$6,000 because that is what they did for the Maintenance staff. They deducted what they had received from the long-term care stipend or first responder stipend to bring them up to the \$6,000. She would recommend that she include Sheriff's Deputies to bring them up to whatever everyone else is getting.

Register Monahan stated that she does not want to hold the Commissioners up all day and she can present her case to the Executive Committee. Commissioner Ahern noted that he wants to treat everyone equal. Register Monahan stated that the risk and stress is not equal. Commissioner Piper asked if the issue for Register Monahan is not simply that her staff get rewarded for their work but that they be distinguished. Register Monahan stated that was correct. Commissioner Ahern stated that other departments would say that as well. Commissioner Piper stated that is another problem that may be faced in the future. Other department heads are not making a similar request. Commissioner Ahern stated that his stand is everyone is treated equal. Commissioner Lauer stated that she would like to table it so it can come back rather than not recommend. Commissioner Ahern agreed to table. Commissioner Piper stated that she would recommend. Register Monahan stated that she would present her case to the Executive Committee.

Contract with US Imaging to Scan Documents – The Commissioners were all in agreement that this is a high priority and highly recommend this go to the Executive Committee. Commissioner Piper stated yesterday that she appreciates Register Monahan's work in this because they received many proposals and the Register's stood out to her in terms of clarity and they all know she runs a tight ship in terms of her budget. These were very clear requests and respectful to the process.

### **Administration**

Broadband – Commissioner Ahern asked what happens if the Broadband Committee does not receive the NTIA Grant as this is not enough money. CA Dorsett stated that the plan from the beginning was to try and develop a funding package. They had looked at a \$10 million request that would be matched with private funds and grant money to hit the \$25 million goal. CA Dorsett stated that one of the main components of ARPA is broadband and infrastructure.

Septic Feasibility Study – The Commissioners discussed and agreed to recommend.

Municipal Wells Feasibility Study – The Commissioners agreed to recommend.

MicroGrid Feasibility Study – CA Dorsett stated that K. Robinson from NCIC had stated that they are getting ready to apply for a grant and this would be getting the County in a position ready to look at the next phase. The County would like to team up with UNH, private sector energy, USDA, EDA and they have all been a part of the discussion. There has been interest in Grafton County as a pilot project for islanding, or off the grid. The Commissioners agreed to recommend.

Cyber Security Upgrades – The Commissioners agreed this is high priority.

### **Nursing Home**

Assisted Living Feasibility Study – Commissioner Piper stated that NHA Labore has been talking about this for a while and it seems to her that it is becoming not cost effective to run a nursing home. The census is already below the budgeted amount. She thinks they are in trouble with the Nursing Home and they have many people who continue to need to be in assisted living. NHA Labore made a great case for it. Commissioner Ahern and Commissioner Lauer agreed.

### **Maintenance**

Generator – The Commissioners agreed to recommend.

Commissioner Piper asked why there are no requests pertaining to FarmDOC. CA Dorsett stated that part of the issue is timing. There is something that J. Porter, himself, FM Nelson, Heather Bryant and the two farm staff have been working on for the farm. They received a report from J. Porter that recommends doing a feasibility analysis of the dairy operation. They were planning on putting it in for round two in October/November. Commissioner Piper asked if they can put it in now. CA Dorsett stated that he could give them a placeholder of \$20,000. Commissioner Ahern stated that they need to be moving on FarmDoc. The Commissioners agreed to recommend putting that in this round. Commissioner Piper stated that they are going to do a \$20,000 feasibility study, can they discuss the trailer for processing milk. FD Libby stated that they have not discussed staffing or any details and is not sure if they are ready for that right now. CA Dorsett stated that he has spoken with FM Nelson about staffing and did an estimate of the hours that would need to be dedicated but have not looked at that with the current staffing model. If they do the feasibility study first, then they can look at how that fits into the overall design. Ultimately, continued operation of the dairy of the barn is not feasible in order to take it to the next level. To make future improvements they have to modernize it. The Commissioners further discussed the request and all agreed that this feasibility needs to get into the first round of ARPA requests.

11:54 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,



Omer C. Ahern, Jr  
Clerk