

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING
Administration Building
North Haverhill, NH 03774
November 14th, 2023

PRESENT: Commissioners Piper, Ahern, McLeod, County Administrator (CA) Libby,
Administrative Assistant Norcross.

OTHERS: Register Monahan, DoC Superintendent Lethbridge, Interim Farm Manager White,
Helen Mrema, Irene Lambert, John Vail

Commissioner Piper called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM and began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Department of Corrections Superintendent Lethbridge

The Commissioners welcomed Supt. Lethbridge to Grafton County. Supt. Lethbridge stated that everyone has been very welcoming, and he is looking forward to the challenge. He stated that the DoC appears to be a well-run, professional organization. The staff he has met with seem very passionate about their jobs and have ideas for improving the organization. Supt. Lethbridge stated that he wants to keep things as is, but there are opportunities to make the organization even better than it is now, and he is looking forward to being a part of that process.

MOTION: Commissioner Ahern moved to appoint Timothy Lethbridge as the Grafton County Department of Corrections Superintendent per RSA 30-B:3, effective November 13th, 2023. Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

CA Libby stated that she has a request to send to the NHAC Certification Board to certify Supt. Lethbridge, under section 300c of the New Hampshire Association of Counties Code of Administrative Rules and Certification Standards. This will take into consideration his current certifications from the State of Florida. She stated that she believes the only thing Supt. Lethbridge will have to complete is the physical fitness certification tests, which will be held in Rockingham County. Commissioner Piper signed off on the request.

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

Agenda Items:

1. Commissioner Piper asked if everyone had a chance to read the minutes from the November 7th meeting. Commissioner Piper and Commissioner McLeod had a few clarification edits.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to approve the minutes from the November 7th meeting as amended. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

County Attorney Hornick arrived and gave the following report:

1. Atty. Hornick reported that Eric Bates was awarded the Detective Sgt. Robert Bruno award at the North Country Foundation First Responders Awards Dinner last Friday night.
2. Atty. Hornick wanted to remind the Commissioners that Felonies First sunsets on January 1st. She has been assigning prosecutors to the different courts around where they live so they can become more aware of what is happening in Circuit Court. She explained that she is trying to prepare the prosecutors for when they are tasked to address Circuit Court. She has been trying to alleviate the Police Chiefs' concerns about how this will affect their departments. Commissioner Ahern stated that he wants to make sure this transition will not cause delays for those being brought to their courts. Atty. Hornick explained that Chief Justice Nadeau's plan, when she came up with Felonies First, was to try to be more efficient with felonies and bring the process of early case resolution. She stated this was successful in Strafford County but never gained traction in other counties, especially Grafton County. She believes there should be fewer delays with the ending of Felonies First.
3. Atty. Hornick requested a nonpublic session to discuss a personnel matter.

MOTION: * 10:34 AM Commissioner Ahern moved to enter into a 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.

*10:57 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.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to approve an out-of-cycle step increase for an Attorney's Office employee as requested by County Attorney Hornick. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion. Commissioner Ahern "yes," Commissioner McLeod, "yes," Commissioner Piper "no". With the vote being two (2) in favor and one (1) in opposition, the motion passes.

4. Atty. Hornick stated that the Commissioners and Executive Committee previously approved using ARPA funds to hire an Assistant County Attorney, and this employee is doing very well.

She explained that this employee has proven to her that the nine (9) Assistant County Attorney benchmark in their office will be necessary, and she will be requesting to keep him full-time once the ARPA funding is gone.

Agenda Items:

1. West Central Behavioral Health – CA Libby explained that West Central Behavioral Health receives social service funding from the County, and at the end of the fiscal year, the County reaches out to social service agencies in June and gives them a date that their 4th quarter funding request is due. She stated that if the County does not hear back from an agency by that date, they will then reach out to any agencies. West Central Behavioral Health was sent emails on June 23rd and July 18th. The final email on July 18th stated that if they did not respond by the end of that business day, their funds would be forfeited because if funds are not drawn down at the end of the fiscal year, they lapse into the general fund. CA Libby went on to explain that on October 30th, the Chief Financial Officer of West Central reached out to the County and stated that the person in charge of submitting requests for funding forgot to submit the request, and they have asked if they could submit their request now. The CFO stated this employee has never missed a request in the past, explained that they are dealing with short staffing, and requested that the Commissioners allow them to submit their request as they rely on Grafton County’s funding. CA Libby stated that the funds have lapsed into the fund balance, and she told West Central that the Commissioners would need to make that decision. The request was for \$10,000, which would have to be taken from the fund balance or from this year’s budget and covered with funds that were not spent out of this current year.

Commissioner Ahern asked if the Commissioners would need Executive Committee approval for this request. CA Libby stated that the Executive Committee would need to approve this request, and the Commissioners would be voting to make a recommendation to the Executive Committee for approval. Commissioner McLeod noted that mental health services are needed, and being short-staffed is a reason to be unable to keep up with these requests. She would vote in favor. Commissioner Ahern stated that West Central must have other sources of funding. He feels the County must think of the taxpayers. The County must keep some control. They must follow rules, and if the Commissioners keep getting requests to do things out of the ordinary and normal process, that concerns him, but he also understands the importance of mental health.

Commissioner Piper stated that this agency is in her district. She knows how hard the staff works, how many people they serve, and how dire the staffing shortages are. She would second and support a motion to recommend this to the Executive Committee. She would also suggest that when it comes time to award these grants, the County needs to be sure that they are holding these agencies accountable for management, and being able to provide the services and be accountable for the taxpayers. She noted that there might be other federal funding, and the County may need to look closely at the social services funding in terms of being sure that agencies are sound and well managed.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to forward the request from West Central Behavioral Health to the Executive Committee. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

2. Courthouse – CA Libby stated that she sent the Commissioners' motion to not include the State of New Hampshire in their plans for a new Courthouse to Sarah Lineberry from the State of New Hampshire. Lineberry responded letting CA Libby know she has a facilities meeting with the Judicial Branch and Department of Administrative Services team. The goal of S. Lineberry is to provide a status update to the County no later than November 20th. CA Libby hopes to be able to engage in conversation with those departments to discuss including the courts in any new facility that is built.

3. Town of Ashland Letter – CA Libby stated that Commissioner McLeod received a letter from the Town of Ashland stating that the County has given \$5 million to New Hampshire Electric Co-op, which is inaccurate information. The letter states that the Town of Ashland's residents have been deprived of County funding because NHEC will not provide services to their town. CA Libby stated that she is looking to clarify this false information. Commissioner Ahern stated that he would reach out to the Town of Ashland but suggested that a letter be sent to them immediately to stop this false information from spreading.

4. Broadband Meetings – CA Libby explained that Tim Egan contacted her and is trying to coordinate a meeting with the Commissioners and New Hampshire Electric Co-op. She stated that T. Egan asked for times the Commissioners are available. CA Libby stated that this was not the plan. The plan was to send out an RFP to internet service providers that would then come before a panel, and that panel would bring a recommendation forward to the Commissioners. She stated that she does not think meeting with individual internet providers in nonpublic sessions is a good idea before an RFP is sent out. She noted that she is hopeful about releasing the RFP for the Owner's Project Manager today.

5. Public Comment –John Vail from Easton stated that he was there in response to the LGBTQ issues that are ongoing in their communities. They are living in hard times, and many people are in trouble. He explained that there are two sides. On one side, people are saying these people are bad people, and the other side is saying leave us alone, and he stated that it is fair they are left alone. People are making threatening comments and gestures. He stated that it seems that any political body should be commenting publicly that these people have rights and deserve to be left alone. He thanked the Commissioners for their time.

Irene Lambert stated that she is from Littleton, NH, and lives in the heart of the town where everything is happening. She lives up the street where the art was placed on the front of the building and enjoys it. She stated that it is scary to think one person can disrupt the lives of so many in a town where it is politics versus religion. Her thought is that they are all one. It does not matter what someone chooses to be; they are all Americans and cannot take that away from anyone. If you look at the Constitution, she stated that inclusivity should be voted a yes based on that alone. I. Lambert quoted Pope Francis, "Who am I to judge?" She stated that this quote goes back to 2013, and Pope Francis was referring to the gay community. She found that to be very powerful. She thanked the Commissioners for their time.

Commissioner McLeod stated that she feels the Commissioners should pass a resolution of inclusivity so that their citizens feel welcome in this County.

Commissioner Piper stated that an email exchange was forwarded to her regarding this issue, and from what she could see from the email exchange, two (2) public members were disappointed in the lack of a second to the motion Commissioner McLeod made last week. She quoted one (1) of the emails from Helen Mrema: "Grafton County needs an inclusion statement, and we will not rest until everyone, our friends, our neighbors, our loved ones, EVERYONE, is treated with the dignity they deserve. Everyone. No exceptions". Commissioner Piper stated that her response to that is that she does not know what that means if individuals will not "rest" until a particular action is taken. She stated that she would urge everyone here and everyone who reads the minutes to respect the democratic process. She understands these resolutions were passed in a few of these towns, and now they are bringing the request to the Grafton County Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Piper stated that what she had read was that they would not rest until this resolution was passed. Mrema's comment is talking about her and Commissioner Ahern. She stated that it is a pressure campaign, and she would hope, if there were no changes today, that they would accept the outcome of the democratic process. Commissioner Piper said that she would not repeat any of her comments; they had been made clear in the last two (2) sets of minutes, and she would not be answering questions. Commissioner Piper asked for any other comments.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to approve the resolution as written in the minutes from the last meeting. There was no second to the motion.

Commissioner Ahern stated that he made his views perfectly clear. Commissioner McLeod stated that she found Commissioner Ahern's views to be racist, and it was disturbing to people. Commissioner Piper stated that she was delivering the results, but for the second time, the motion did not pass. She thanked everyone for coming and stated that when everyone re-read those minutes, you will perhaps see that she requested, at the last meeting, that the Commissioners could agree to disagree. That is the way the democratic process works.

Commissioner McLeod stated that in her personal views, she feels that the issue around the religious comments that Commissioner Piper made, that this was about being against someone's religion, is that people often hide behind religion when they really are racist, homophobic, and misogynistic people. In her view, this is how this is being used. She feels people should be more aware of how this is often used.

Sheriff Stiegler

Sheriff Stiegler stated that in the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS), only people who have been vetted are allowed to look at a screen with someone's records. One of the oversights made before he arrived was when the connector to the Department of Corrections was built. There is a window that is not CJIS compliant because someone can see through that window to the computer screens. Sheriff Stiegler explained that he had tried to increase security in that office, but he must do something with that door sooner rather than later. The DoC controls access to that door, and he would like to reverse how that door works. He stated that he has started to restrict people's access to the front door, and as far as the back door, the Sheriff's Department should not allow just anyone to come through that doorway. He explained that he could leave it to DoC to have control of the door but discussed a possible lock on it if need be. If Grafton

County were to be audited by CJIS, they would not be in compliance. Sheriff Stiegler stated that this is an easy fix and wanted to make the board aware of the issue. He will be working with Maintenance Supt. Oakes and DoC Supt. Lethbridge to address this issue.

Sheriff Stiegler added that the bidding process has begun to purchase their two (2) new vehicles.

Commissioner Issues:

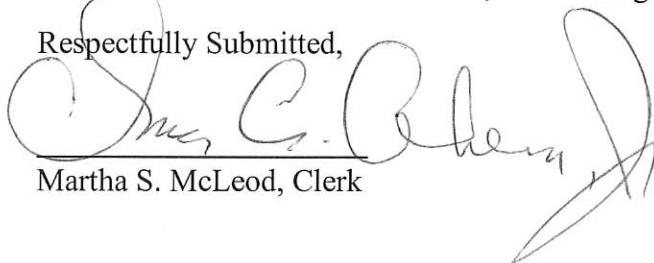
1. Commissioner McLeod received an email from Toby Tatro, an employee in the Nursing Home, regarding concerns that one (1) family has been permitted to drive up on County property to hunt, and the rest must walk as vehicles are not allowed.

Commissioner Piper stated that the Commissioners should not have expanded the policy in the first place. She stated that they made it on a case-by-case basis per request, and it was not originally that. It has now opened a proverbial can of worms, and she stated that she is not surprised this is causing an issue among employees. Commissioner Ahern noted that to be given permission to drive up on the property, someone had to have a medical or physical disability. CA Libby explained that two (2) families have permission, and one of those families has been given permission for years. CA Libby noted that the two (2) families that have been given permission have given vehicle information and license plate numbers, which are given to Dispatch, so if there are vehicles up on the property, the County knows if they have been given permission and can address that. The Commissioners agreed to send back an email to the employee explaining the rules they have put in place for driving on County property.

2. Commissioner McLeod stated that she has received several letters from constituents on the Israel-Hamas situation. They are asking that the County reaffirm its commitment to the US-Israel relationship, Israel's right to defend itself, and to help bring home all hostages held by Hamas in Gaza.

12:05 PM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,


Martha S. McLeod, Clerk

*Vice-Chairperson
for Commission McLeod*

November 2023 Farm Report

1. There are currently 54 cows milking, averaging 77 pounds per cow. We produced 130,000 pounds of milk for the month of October. Components were 4.16% butterfat and 3.23% protein. The milk pay price in October was \$21.47 for Grafton County Farm.
2. Chickens still producing well. Selling eggs and supplying the jail now that farm stand is closed. Still have a few piglets for sale and have several orders already for the spring.
3. Farm stand is now closed. Considering the rain, the vegetables did fairly well. Sweet corn, squashes and the potatoes yielded well. Still have potatoes to sell.
4. Crops went well considering the short windows and quantity of rain. We were able to take three cuttings and put in 4000 bales of hay. The corn harvest yielded very well and were able to sell some.
5. Had a very major case of pneumonia go thru the herd. Got extremely lucky and were able to save the ones that were extremely sick.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ben White

Interim Farm Manager