

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING
Administration Building
North Haverhill, NH 03774
April 11, 2024

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

OTHERS: Howard Hatch, Preston Hatch

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

H. Hatch and P. Hatch were present, and Commissioner Piper requested to go into a nonpublic session.

MOTION: * 9:03 AM Commissioner McLeod moved to enter into a 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). Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Ahern said "yes," Commissioner McLeod said "yes," and Commissioner Piper said "yes," and Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted "yes" and would now go into non-public session.

*10:16 AM Commissioner Piper declared the meeting back in public session.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod 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 Ahern "Yes," Commissioner McLeod said, "Yes," Commissioner Piper said, "Yes." Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted "yes," and the motion passes.

MOTION: Commissioner Ahern moved, because time was of the essence and based on the County Administrator's recommendation, to accept Murdo Limlaw's low bid for the dry haying, grass haylage, and custom corn cropping services. There was no second to the motion.

Commissioner McLeod stated that the RFP that the County put out did not feel to her to have the complete information they needed to get back. She stated that she would suggest rejecting all of the bids and that she could make a motion to do that. Commissioner Ahern respectfully disagreed with Commissioner McLeod, stating that this is agriculture, and they are dealing with something that is not perfect. He stated that the County is making things worse by delaying this. The

County, in good faith, asked for these proposals, and these vendors put forth proposals that would take care of what is needed in the County. He stated that he wants to make sure that Interim FM White is happy with the bids from Murdo Limlaw. Commissioner Ahern added that the farm's equipment was not in good condition.

Commissioner Piper seconded the motion. Commissioner Piper said, "Yes." Commissioner McLeod said, "Yes." Commissioner Ahern said, "No."

Commissioner McLeod stated that their job is to set policy, and this is an important policy. She appreciates Interim FM White's input but would like to continue the partnership with Hatchland Farm with a contract put in place, so both parties know what is expected of them. She would like to act on that and move forward with a written agreement with the current partner for another year while they have further discussions. Commissioner Ahern stated that Hatchland Farm is not a partner; they are a neighbor who did the work last year and added that neighbors help each other out the best they can, but that does not make it a partnership because there are many liabilities. Commissioner McLeod stated that this is why they need something in writing like they would have done with these bids if they were to have moved forward with them. She thinks they should have a similar process. CA Libby stated that the County would have a contract with Hatchland Farm if they had bid for these services, but they did not because they did not want to. Commissioner McLeod stated that the RFP did not clearly outline the work they wanted done. Commissioner Ahern respectfully disagreed.

Budget Discussion:

CA Libby stated that the budget is at a 10.73% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes or \$2.8 million. CA Libby said that the Commissioners wanted a 3% or less increase in the amount to be raised by taxes. Where they are starting, the budget needs to be cut by \$2.1 million. CA Libby went through the projected surplus. She reported that it does look better, and there is room to increase the amount used to offset taxes. She explained that on the expense side, with the reduction to the health insurance and the new deductible plan options, these reductions continue with offering two (2) plans. She stated that from her perspective, keeping the two (2) plans is very important for the Commissioners to take into consideration. She thinks the Commissioners should be proud of their employees' benefits. The benefits and adjustments made last year allowed them to recruit very good staff members. She stated that they know benefits are not a high priority but that health insurance is very important. CA Libby stated that she feels if the County can offer competitive pay and still keep better health insurance plans than other employers, people are going to choose to work at Grafton County.

CA Libby reviewed the recommendations she offered the Commissioners as options for them to consider in the budget to reduce and/or cut potentially.

She recommended leaving money in the budget for capital because it will be an ongoing cost. If they were to cut those costs, the County would be setting itself up for a larger increase in the future. She explained that she left some of the capital items in and then took the others and recommended that the Commissioners either review them to make cuts or request ARPA funding to make these purchases.

CA Libby explained that she went through all the new position requests and changed the start dates for the IT Director and the Maintenance Assistant. positions, so they only fund them for half the year to start, rather than eliminate it. She explained that she feels the IT Director position is something the Commissioners need to consider, and she is trying to reduce the full impact of that position in this budget. She reviewed the rest of the new position requests with the Commissioners and stated that an option the Commissioners could look at would be only funding one (1) of the two (2) new position requests for both the Sheriff's Department and the DoC. She noted that this is a starting point for conversation.

She stated that if the Commissioners were to do all that was just discussed, it would reduce the amount to be raised by taxes by \$1,672,000 and bring it to 2.36%. CA Libby stated that for discussion purposes, she looked at what it would cost for a 3% COLA, which would bring the tax increase up to a 5.57% increase. She stated that her thought was that if the Commissioners wanted to go that route, they could go back and ask all departments to reduce their budgets by 1.25% to get that tax increase back down to roughly 3%. She stated that this puts it on the Department Heads to make those decisions.

Commissioner Piper stated that she thinks this is very good work.

Commissioner Piper requested to go into a nonpublic session.

MOTION: * 10:34 AM Commissioner McLeod 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 Ahern seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Ahern said "yes," Commissioner McLeod said "yes," and Commissioner Piper said "yes," and Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted "yes" and would now go into non-public session.

*10:59 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 said, "Yes," Commissioner Piper said, "Yes." Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted "yes," and the motion passes.

Budget Discussion Cont.

The Commissioners further discussed the new positions. Commissioner Piper stated that she is sorry they are not able to give the DoC more. CA Libby stated that she agrees, but where they are back to being five (5) officers down if they reinstate one (1) officer at the DoC instead of two

(2) officers, they can try to work one (1) in each year. CA Libby noted that it is not the best situation, but everyone will need to make sacrifices this year.

Commissioner Ahern stated that he does not want to see them cut anything that will affect safety. We have approved the vehicle for the Sheriff's Department. When that is delivered, is that strictly the property of the Sheriff? CA Libby stated it will have the Sheriff's logo, but Grafton County owns it. Commissioner Ahern asked if the DoC was asking for the same vehicle. CA Libby stated that the DoC is asking to replace their two (2) 2014 cruisers with over 100,000 miles. She said that, in her opinion, given that the jail has gotten (10) years out of their cruisers, they are being taken care of.

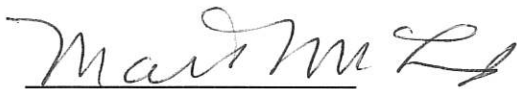
Commissioner Ahern discussed various line items in the Nursing Home that he felt could be cut. CA Libby stated that with the plan being to go back to department heads and have them make cuts, they will be forced to look at these things, and she feels the Commissioners need to leave the decision of what to cut to the Department Heads.

Commissioner McLeod stated that the County is receiving the full \$569 for VT Medicaid residents because the quality of the facilities and services is at the highest level. She stated that they want to be careful not to do anything to impact that.

CA Libby stated that she will ask the Department Heads to send her their reductions by next Wednesday. Then, hopefully, the Commissioners will be able to review and make their decisions next Thursday.

11:20 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,



Martha S. McLeod, Clerk