

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING
Administration Building
North Haverhill, NH 03774
April 18, 2024

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

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

Commissioner McLeod reported that she had talked to Mr. Hatch and had a good conversation. They discussed a plan to move forward, and H. Hatch reiterated that it was a Commissioners decision to do what they wanted. She stated that it is important, timing-wise, to start the cropping next week. The County received bids they looked at but considered that the relationship with Hatchland is important as well. Commissioner McLeod stated that she and H. Hatch talked a lot about the management of the farm. CA Libby noted that she thinks this is a big conversation to have as they move forward and have a lengthy discussion about the management of the farm and the future goals. She would like to reserve time to discuss some ideas she has. She stated that if the Commissioners could move forward on these bids, it would start them in the right direction for this season, and then they further discuss the future.

Commissioner McLeod stated that it is not just working the farm but the management of the farm as well. They need to see if the dairy herd is going in the right direction for them to go in, and they need to look at the equipment to see what is useful. One of the points made was that without good management, there is a gap in income that they fill in with taxpayer money, which is not appropriate. Commissioner McLeod stated that she thinks they should move forward with the bids for this year. She noted that they had closed the loop with this and thought it was important to have the discussions they had with H. Hatch.

Commissioner Ahern stated that before FarmDOC was introduced, the County had a review of the dairy operation by John Porter, who is an expert in dairy farming. He made some good recommendations about what the County needed to do to improve the milking operation. He feels there is a need to ensure Grafton County can produce its own food. Commissioner Piper stated that she was grateful for Commissioner McLeod's conversation with H. Hatch and the questioning she brought to the discussion. The situation has to be fixed, and that does not mean not having the farm. In her opinion, they rely too much on operational advice and not on what's best for all taxpayers and all concerned. She hopes they can get this done because it is very important.

CA Libby explained that the Commissioners had the discussion last Thursday and thought a motion was made to reject the bids. Still, after reviewing the recording, a formal motion was not technically made, so they were not formally rejected. She stated that the County received three (3) bids, and Murdo Limlaw was the lowest bid. Commissioner McLeod stated that M. Limlaw is close by, and when there are problems, someone who is closer by who can help would be better.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to accept the bids for custom corn cropping, grass haylage and dry haying from Murdo Limlaw. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Budget Review

CA Libby reported that with the department reductions, the budget has a 2.46% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes. She did not receive reductions from the Register of Deeds or UNH Extension but noted that COA Lee has not been in the office.

CA Libby reviewed the reductions made in the larger budgets that make up most of the decrease.

Nursing Home Reductions – CA Libby stated that most of the Nursing Home reductions were salary reductions they made due to staffing projections. Commissioner Ahern stated that he had lunch at the nursing home and that the baker did a great job. He does not see the need for the baker to go through any additional training. CA Libby expressed concerns and stated that from a training standpoint, she does not agree. Employees need to continue with their learning. Commissioner Ahern stated that they are still dealing with increased costs, and any increase in the budget increases the cost to the taxpayers. CA Libby stated that she does not think the County should be the sacrificial lamb because the school and town taxes are increasing. There are still things that need to be done at the County. He stated that the increase was around \$10,000 for those baking classes. CA Libby clarified that the education and training line has increased \$1,200 to cover the cost of that class. Commissioner Ahern thanked CA Libby for clarifying that number.

Contract Nursing – CA Libby stated that the contract nursing line is currently budgeted at \$2.8 million. NHA Labore has said they are averaging \$200,000 a month, and she thinks the \$2.8 million is a safe place to leave it.

Department of Corrections Reductions—CA Libby stated that the DoC reduced the coverage hours in the salary lines by \$59,000. They also cut \$6,200 from the prisoner clothing line, \$24,000 from the medical line, and \$6,000 from security repair and maintenance.

Maintenance Reductions—CA Libby stated that Supt. Oakes changed pagers and overtime hours, reduced the education and conference line, three (3) of the fuel lines, the gas and oil line, and four (4) repair and maintenance lines, for a total of \$48,000 in reductions.

Social Service Funding

Commissioner Piper stated that she feels the Commissioners could put the \$36,000 for VNA back in the budget, noting that this was a very important agency that has always been funded but did not last year due to an oversight on their end. She stated that she is pleased with the 2.46% tax increase and would like to keep that, but she would suggest adding this funding back in.

Commissioner Piper stated that she liked Commissioner McLeod’s suggestion to come up with a new funding formula. The Commissioners had a lengthy discussion regarding Social Services

funding and reviewed different possibilities for reductions in that budget and what those changes would do to the amount to be raised by taxes. The Commissioners agreed that they would go back to this discussion next week.

Capital Outlay Requests/ARPA

CA Libby recommended leaving some capital funding in the budget as that is an ongoing cost each year. She reviewed a list of suggestions for capital items she took out of the budget for possible ARPA requests, totaling \$411,105.

Commissioner Ahern said he would like to remove one of the cruisers being looked at to be funded through ARPA. He stated that the Sheriff discusses not having enough staff, and he does not feel they need to purchase three (3) more cruisers to staff them. CA Libby explained that the Sheriff's Department has a cruiser replacement schedule. She stated that they buy cruisers every year and replace the oldest in the fleet. She noted that they used always to purchase three (3) cruisers, but in the last few years, that number has been reduced to two (2) for budget reasons.

Commissioner Ahern asked if other items in the budget could be paid for with ARPA funds. CA Libby stated that she needs the Commissioners to examine the big picture. She explained that they do not want to cut operational yearly costs out of this budget and will have to come back into the budget next year. She stated that it is great to solve the problem this year, but they have to think about next year, and they are starting the budget with a large increase when these items are added back in.

CA Libby noted that she does not feel the farm needs the \$30,000 in contingency out of ARPA funds now because of the custom cropping vote the Commissioners earlier in the meeting.

CA Libby stated that she will put together this ARPA request for the Executive Committee at their May meeting.

Commissioner Piper asked if money could be cut from the Employee Recognition Dinner budget of \$7,000. CA Libby stated that she does not have the list of employees receiving jackets and pins this year. Commissioner Piper stated that she feels this could be trimmed, given the circumstances and the low attendance at the dinner. CA Libby recommended using next Thursday's "if needed" date to finalize the budget, and she can have the numbers for the jackets and pins as well. She would not feel comfortable cutting that line until she had a number. Commissioner Piper stated that they had removed one (1) of Supt. Oakes' capital requests of \$23,000 and this reduction was not discussed with him, and they have budgeted \$7,000 for the Employee Recognition Dinner in the Commissioner's Department. She asked why they could not cut that. CA Libby stated that she needs to find out the cost for jackets and pins, and the Commissioners can cut everything else besides that cost. Commissioner Piper stated that they used to do an Employee Recognition dinner, but the attendance has gone down, and they might be cutting that. She explained the background of the jackets to Commissioner McLeod. Because of the employee's anniversary date, the County (1) year bought all the employees celebrating an anniversary a fleece jacket, which is a \$1,800 expense. She thought that this was a one (1) year thing. She stated that once those jackets were given out, many employees said that they hoped to

get one next year. Because of that one anniversary year, they have put themselves in a position to have this cost every year. Commissioner McLeod suggested letting the cost of the jackets come out of each individual department. Commissioner Piper stated that she is aware that this is unpopular, but she represents a different constituency. CA Libby stated that she remembers the discussion on the jackets differently because when they started the jackets, it was stated that they would do them from now on for employees as a new recognition. It was never a one-year deal. Commissioner Piper noted that if she had understood it that way, she would have never supported it, noting that they also provide a prime rib dinner each year. She noted that some people who received the jacket were not celebrating an anniversary date. She knows that other counties do not provide costly prime rib dinners. Commissioner McLeod asked what others do, and Commissioner Piper responded that they provide pizza, on campus. Commissioner McLeod stated that she does not have an opinion on it as this was her first year attending it.

Commissioner Piper stated that they are looking to trim and not create tails. Commissioner McLeod stated that she is looking at larger items.

Commissioner Piper stated that they will continue with a 2.46% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes and meet next week.

Register of Deeds—Commissioner Piper asked about taking 1.5% from the Register of Deeds budget as they have not received her requested reductions. The Commissioners agreed to reduce the supply line by 50% to \$6,000 and noted that the six (6) month figures are low.

Other Considerations – CA Libby stated that the Campus Security Committee has asked about a security position. This position is in the works regarding what that will cost and is not included in the budget. She explained that from the feedback she has received from the CSC, which is an offset of the Joint Loss Management Committee, both committees are very much in favor of advocating money be put in the budget to fund this position at some point in the next fiscal year. HR Director Clough is still compiling information on the salary. Commissioner Piper is very sympathetic to the situation but thinks it can wait another year. CA Libby stated that they could discuss the nightwatchmen position and the \$85,000 that is budgeted for that, discuss how effective that position is now, and if that position can be shifted around. Commissioner Ahern noted that this is a very important position.

MOTION: * 10:58 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.

*11:11 PM 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.

11:15 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martha S. McLeod', written over a horizontal line.

Martha S. McLeod, Clerk