

GRAFTON COUNTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Administration Building
North Haverhill, NH 03774
April 22nd, 2024

PRESENT: Reps. Sykes, Baldwin, Bolton, Morse, Murphy – via Teams, Simon and Stringham, County Administrator Libby, Assistant County Administrator Burbank, and Commissioner Ahern

OTHERS PRESENT: Register Monahan

Rep. Sykes called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM and began with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Rep. Morse.

Rep. Baldwin called the roll. A quorum was declared with six (6) Representatives physically present and one (1) present via Teams.

Rep. Sykes stated that the first item of business to take care of was approval of the minutes from the March 25th meeting.

MOTION: Rep. Bolton moved to approve the minutes from the March 25th meeting. Rep. Stringham seconded the motion. Rep. Baldwin called the roll: Rep. Baldwin “yes”, Rep. Bolton “yes”, Rep. Morse “yes”, Rep. Murphy “yes”, Rep. Simon “yes”, Rep. Stringham “yes”, Rep. Sykes “yes”. With seven (7) votes in favor and none in opposition, the motion passes.

Rep. Sykes stated that the purpose of today’s meeting is to come up with salary recommendations for Grafton County Elected Officials to present to the full Delegation on May 6th.

Rep. Stringham stated that he is grateful for the work done in advance to provide summaries of the salaries for Elected Officials in similar positions across all counties in New Hampshire. He stated they were provided a salary history for the Elected Officials from 2011 to the present. He stated that the current inflation rate is around 3%. These are all two (2) year elected officials, and the salaries they vote for will apply for 2025 and 2026. Rep. Stringham stated that what he sees as a base is 3% per year as the cost-of-living increases for each of these positions, and then they can look at any positions that warrant special attention. He stated that he would recommend 3% per year for all positions as a starting point for discussion.

Rep. Stringham noted that the total salary for all seven (7) positions being discussed is roughly \$300,000, and the total budget is roughly \$55 million. Although this is a small piece of the budget, he feels it is very important that they have these salaries set at a level that will attract good people for these important jobs.

Rep. Simon asked what benefits are offered. CA Libby stated that Elected Officials have the option of contributing to the New Hampshire Retirement System. She noted that the County’s

health insurance will change in the new year. The plans will have the same coverage but higher deductibles and copays. Employees contribute 20% to the more expensive plan, with a handful grandfathered in at 15%, and employees who choose the lower-cost plan will contribute 10%.

Rep. Sykes stated that he has always strongly advocated that you get what you pay for. Because it is an elected position, they need to set transparent salaries. He noted that he also feels it is irrelevant that Grafton County is a “smaller county” because the complexities of the job are the same. He stated that these positions have a strong bearing on how the County is managed and operated over the course of the two (2) years, and they need to be mindful of that. The Executive Committee’s primary responsibility is overseeing the budget. The day-to-day responsibilities fall to these Elected Officials, and he feels they do not want to be penny-wise and pound-foolish in these decisions. Rep. Sykes stated that he supports the 3% increase per year as it mirrors what the cost of living has done over the last two (2) years.

Rep. Morse asked if they could discuss each position individually and decide whether they feel the 3% per year is appropriate for each position. She stated that these are all unique positions, and she wants to ensure they are all on the same page to represent each position adequately. Rep. Simon asked if Rep. Morse felt some should be increased by more than 3%. Rep. Morse explained that in looking at the positions, how some have increased over time, and what each position does, this would give them the opportunity to say they feel 3% across the board is adequate or if there has been a position that has been more stagnant that they should be taking a look at.

Rep. Stringham stated that in looking at what Carroll County has done, they have kept the Commissioner Chairman position the same as the other two (2) Commissioners, where they have not done that in years past. Most other counties have a higher amount for the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners. He stated that he does not know how much extra work the Chairman has and whether that is appropriate or not to have that position making more, or if they normalize it and keep all three (3) Commissioner positions the same. Rep. Simon asked Commissioner Ahern if there was a major difference in the role of the Chairman. Commissioner Ahern stated that some of them run for public office, not for the money, but for the opportunity to provide service to the people. Commissioner Ahern stated that part of that public service is to keep taxes down. He noted that the County Attorney and the Sheriff both need to have a lot of good experience and the Register of Deeds needs to know deeds, transfers, and items like that. He stated that he does not want to take anything away from the Commissioners, as they have responsibilities as well. He stated that he feels the Chairman of the Board does a lot more work than the other two (2) Commissioners. Rep. Sykes noted that not everyone has the work schedule, homelife or luxury to be able to run for public office with little pay. He stated that pay is part of the mix that may possibly open up the opportunity for other candidates to run for office.

Rep. Morse asked if CA Libby and Commissioner Ahern agree that the additional pay for the Chairman of the Commissioners is adequate for the additional workload or if it would make sense to raise it more. Commissioner Ahern stated that the Chairman has to take care of a lot of extra paperwork during meetings. He added that the current chairman is involved in many

organizations, so she can know what is going on in the other Counties and is able to provide a lot of information, but ultimately, it is the Delegation's decision.

Rep. Sykes stated that they will look at each position, and unless someone brings up a suggested change, the increase will be 3% for 2025 and 3% for 2026.

Commissioner Chairman – Rep. Morse asked CA Libby for her thoughts on this position. CA Libby stated that there are four (4) counties where the position's wages are the same, and the rest are different. The chairman does have additional responsibilities, but she cannot put a dollar figure to those additional responsibilities. Rep. Sykes stated that the difference in pay right now is \$550, which, to him, is insignificant for the additional work. Rep. Stringham said he would recommend keeping the Vice-Chair and Clerk Commissioner positions at 3% increases each year and setting the Chairman position at \$1,000 higher. Rep. Murphy agreed, stating that the chairman has more responsibilities and that he would support a 3%-4% increase. There was a consensus among the Executive Committee that the Chairman position would be \$1,000, more than the 3% increase for the Vice-Chair and Clerk.

County Attorney – Rep. Simon noted that a 3% increase is more significant than the other positions because it is on the higher side of the wage scale, which is the trend statewide. He stated that 2% and 2% would still give a sizeable increase for the two (2) years, but not as much. Rep. Bolton stated that he would support 2%. Rep. Sykes stated that they struggled for a while to raise the County Attorney's pay, and in his mind, they lost an exceptionally good County Attorney because of the low pay. He does not want to do that again. Giving this position less than the majority of the other positions would get sends a message that he feels is not supported by the workload and professionalism they need in the County Attorney's Office. Rep. Sykes stated that he couldn't support it. Rep. Stringham stated that this is a critical position, and that salary is a factor in getting someone to run for office. He does feel that if they give this position a lower increase, it will discourage someone from running again or new candidates from running for office.

Sheriff – Rep. Stringham stated that this is a position that they have not made a lot of increases in the last ten (10) years. He stated that the current Sheriff has said they do not need a raise in the past, but he feels the pay levels for this position are lower than the others. Rep. Stringham proposed 4.5% for 2025 and 4.5% for 2026 or give the whole 6% in the first year, and that way, someone running for office would see a higher salary in the first year. Rep. Simon stated that this would put the salary at just under \$83,000. Rep. Morse noted that would put Grafton County fairly high compared to most other counties. CA Libby stated that the current average Sheriff's salary is \$75,744.00, and Grafton County's is \$78,000. The Committee further discussed the Sheriffs' salary, and there was a consensus of 6% in the first year.

MOTION: Rep. Stringham moved to increase the Commissioner Vice-Chair, Commissioner Clerk, Treasurer, Register of Deeds, and County Attorney positions 3% in the first year and an additional 3% in year 2, increase the Commissioner Chairman position the same as the Vice-Chair and Clerk positions plus \$1,000 in each year and the Sheriff position would increase 6% in the first year then remain level funded. Rep. Morse seconded the motion. Rep. Baldwin called the roll. Rep. Baldwin, "yes"; Rep. Bolton,

“yes”; Rep. Morse, “yes”, Rep. Simon, “yes”; Rep. Stringham, “yes”; Rep. Sykes, “yes.”
With a vote of six (6) in favor and none in opposition, the motion passed.

Rep. Sykes stated that this will be the recommendation they make to the full Delegation for their May 6th meeting.

Comment from the Delegates:

Rep. Stringham stated that there is a bill going through the House. He explained that right now, \$5 million of the \$35 million they invest goes into the New Hampshire Public Deposit Investment Pool run by the state. This money is a mutual fund. The rates that it pays vary from day to day. The money from the County that is in there is in the general fund. The bill would require only investing those funds in New Hampshire banks. The testimony they received in finance stated that it may have an adverse impact on the rate of return but has a positive impact on local banks having more money to invest in local projects. Rep. Stringham noted that groups like the New Hampshire Banking Association supported it. It passed in the Senate, and there was a hearing in the House. It is a large piece of the money at the County, and he is looking for any input from those at the County regarding the House position. Rep. Bolton stated that they were contacted in Plymouth to vote against this. There was some concern regarding out-of-state investors owning most New Hampshire banks, and this money is going out of state. Rep. Bolton stated that federal law states that banks within the state shall use the funds to help in-state interests. He stated that it does not seem like that bill would hurt them.

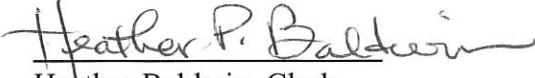
Rep. Morse asked if they would discuss ARPA funds during the budget meetings. CA Libby stated that the Commissioners would bring the Executive Committee ARPA requests during the May Executive Committee, which can be discussed in more detail at that point.

Meeting Dates:

May 6th – Delegation Meeting to Set Elected Officials Salaries.
May 20th – Executive Committee Meeting
June Budget Meetings - 6/3; 6/7; 6/10; 6/14 with 6/17 if needed.
Full Delegation Meeting 6/24

10:20 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,


Heather Baldwin, Clerk