

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING

Administration Building
North Haverhill, NH 03774
April 25th, 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 9:00AM and began with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Commissioner Ahern.

Budget Discussion

Review of Current Status – FY2025 Budget

Commissioner Piper asked if anyone had any changes they wanted to make. Commissioner Ahern asked that there be no increase in the County tax rate. He would like to see, with the exception of elder services, a cut of 30% in the social services agencies. He has the greatest respect for their employees but also thinks they are very well compensated in many areas. He would like to see a cut in the employees' extras of \$7,500. He needs to see a 0% or less in the County tax burden.

CA Libby reviewed the list of agencies that would receive a 30% reduction in funding at Commissioner Ahern's request. The total reduction would be \$87,300.00 and give a 2.13% tax increase.

Commissioner Piper stated that defending the IT Director would be difficult to the Executive Committee. The Commissioners know this position is the first step to possibly dissolving the relationship with SNS.

Security Position Request – CA Libby stated that HR Director Clough did a rough salary estimate for the budget of \$66,700-91,700 but explained that they are not ready for a new security position as of July 1st. There needs to be more discussion. She stated that there is \$85,000 in the budget for the nightwatchmen position, and she would need to talk to Supt. Lethbridge and Interim FM White about the possibility of restructuring those positions. There is only one (1) part time nightwatchman on staff right now, noting that one (1) is out on FMLA and therefore not all nights of the week are covered. The DoC is assisting in doing barn checks at well. CA Libby discussed the possibility of hiring a consultant and contractor to do an assessment who would give advice as to what was needed before they hired someone. The Campus Security Committee did not want to miss the opportunity to miss funding being included in the budget, but she feels there is a lot more discussion to be had regarding this position. She stated that Interim FM White would probably state he likes having the nightwatchmen at night, but she wonders how effective they are only being there 4 nights a week.

The Commissioners discussed the issue of Wi-Fi in the barn. CA Libby stated that they have looked into getting Wi-Fi in the barn, but they have been told it would cost \$20,000 and

therefore she has held off until they can look further into it. She noted that the Wi-Fi is needed for the collar system Interim FM White wants for the cows.

Commissioner Ahern stated that they have made substantial changes for the Farm and asked if the Farm can increase revenue from milk. CA Libby stated that the Board of Commissioners voted to reduce the herd based on recommendations from multiple sources and noted that there are reasons why they decided to reduce the herd, based on inmate labor and staff time. She explained that in order for the farm to be self-sufficient if there is no inmate labor, milking 55 cows was the number the farm staff were comfortable with. Commissioner Ahern stated that he would like to give the Interim Farm Manager some type of leeway if he felt he could handle an increase in the number of cows they are milking. He wants to give flexibility to the Farm Manager. CA Libby noted that increasing the herd also increases the expenses. Commissioner Ahern stated that milk is important, and he does not want Interim FM White to be stuck at 55 milking cows if he believes they can milk more.

Commissioner McLeod noted that the Farm is costing the County \$280,000 to exist. Commissioner Ahern stated that the Farm provides training for the inmates at the DoC when they work, and he gave an example of an inmate who went on to grow vegetables after his release. With the custom cropping they approved, it sounds like there may be a savings there. Commissioner Piper stated that she would not be comfortable changing that policy now because of the recommendations from John Porter and the entire Board agreed on that. Commissioner Piper stated that what Commissioner McLeod is worried about is the sustainability of the farm. Commissioner Piper stated that doesn't think the numbers add up to invest in the dairy. Commissioner McLeod stated that the Commissioners need to understand the value of the farm and if the residents of the County are getting value from the farm. She added that most of the time they are getting labor from the inmates, and not sure if the inmates are getting value from the farm. Commissioner McLeod stated that she feels they are not giving the inmates the right resources to keep them out of the jail once they are released. She feels that they could invest in programs that the inmates could use as soon as they are released. Commissioner McLeod stated that they are not giving inmates the skills they need when they are released, and they are expected not to come back to the DoC. She's not sure if the Farm is the right investment, she would rather invest in recovery programs.

Commissioner Piper stated that she thinks that there is no wiggle room for the new positions they are asking for but feels the Delegation might have an issue with the half year IT Director. She originally wanted to prioritize social services that target the two (2) statutory functions, recidivism, and frail elders. After listening to the discussion, she is not sure how she feels about VNA's funding. She is looking for consistency and possibly level funding all agencies, which would eliminate VNA and Twin Pines funding. Commissioner McLeod feels they should leave that funding in as VNA is important to the elders and the elder population is increasing and the need for homecare is important. CA Libby stated that she feels the IT Director is very defensible.

Commissioner Piper stated that she would like to discuss the Employee Recognition Dinner. She explained that she understands it is a small line item but that they have asked departments to trim their budgets. CA Libby stated that she has removed the \$4,000 from the budget for the

recognition dinner. Commissioner Piper stated that she does not think, with all of the constituencies they have to serve, that the yearly expense of \$3,500 for jackets and pins is something she understood as permanent, and she does not care if other people understood it differently, but as the person with the vote, that is how she understood it. She is reluctant to have an automatic \$3,500 given that the dinner is also problematic. Commissioner Piper stated that other counties do other things. She wants to be open-minded and innovative and think about what awards the employees the most. She noted that Rockingham County rewards its employees with a pizza dinner on campus and Carroll County bought everyone a Christmas Ham, through Market Basket and it cost them \$800. CA Libby stated that the jackets have been very well received and appreciated. She explained that they are in the final year of getting all employees jackets. CA Libby asked Admin. Assistant Norcross to explain the cycle of the jackets as she is the one who puts in the order. S. Norcross explained that the County has given jackets for four (4) years and this upcoming year would be the 5th year. This would be the last year that all employees reaching milestone years would receive their jackets and going forward only employees hitting their five (5) year milestones would receive the one because the 10 year and up employees would have already received theirs previously. Once an employee receives a jacket, they will not receive one again and therefore the number of jackets being purchased after this upcoming year will drop significantly, to roughly 10-15 employees, and that would be the amount each year going forward. Commissioner Piper stated that was extremely important information and agreed to keep the jackets and pins but end the dinner due to the lack of attendance. The Commissioners discussed other ideas they can do for employees to replace the dinner, such as light refreshments and inviting those milestone employees in to receive their jackets and pins. CA Libby stated that she would look into those ideas further.

Commissioner Ahern stated that he believes there are still things that can be cut in the budget and believes the budget can be 0%. Commissioner McLeod asked if that is realistic given the world they now live in. CA Libby explained that the County has had no tax increase for three (3) years in a row and that is not sustainable. Commissioner Ahern stated that the Nursing Home has beds that are not filled and discussed the regulations that prevent that from happening. CA Libby stated that the Nursing Home does not have the staff to fill those, but they are making good strides and noted that revenue is up \$2.5 million. Commissioner Piper stated that after a very thorough discussion, they are at a 2.46% tax increase, and she is happy with that.

CA Libby added that the Commissioners have done due diligence in going through the budget. She explained that last year the County had a .06% decrease and the Town of Wentworth still saw a 18% increase in their County taxes. The Commissioners can set their budget but that is not what each town is going to pay as it is based on equalized valuation.

Commissioner Piper thanked S. Norcross for the information on the employee recognition jackets and stated that this was important.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to recommend an operating budget of \$56,335,660 for FY2025 with \$27,169,027 to be raised by taxes or a 2.46% increase. Commissioner Piper seconded the motion. Commissioner Ahern “no”, Commissioner McLeod “yes”, Commissioner Piper “yes”. With the vote being two (2) in favor and one (1) in opposition the motion passes.

Capital Outlay/ARPA

CA Libby submitted the attached list of requests totaling \$411,105.00.

Commissioner McLeod wanted to note the policy change in the DoC with officers being armed who would be going out into the Community. She stated that it is an important time to consider this, and Supt. Lethbridge is doing a fantastic job. She noted that ARPA funds are the appropriate way to fund this.

CA Libby stated that there is roughly \$2.5 million in ARPA funding left and she recommends reserving some of that for the architect and engineering for the courthouse.

Maintenance Storage Shed Expansion – CA Libby stated that the Commissioners removed this from the Capital budget and did not include it in the ARPA lists. This request was primarily for the storage of the boom lift and is \$23,000. Commissioner McLeod stated that she thinks it is a good investment to keep that piece of equipment under cover and help make it last longer. The Commissioners discussed it, and all agreed to add it to the ARPA request.

MOTION: Commissioner McLeod moved to accept the request for capital requests to be funded through ARPA in the amount of \$434,130.00. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

CA Libby stated that these ARPA requests will go to the Executive Committee at their May 20th meeting.

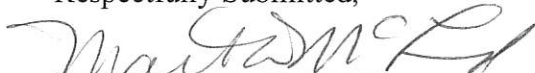
Public Hearing Date – The Commissioners discussed the date for their public hearing on the proposed budget and set a date of May 28th at 6pm.

Commissioner McLeod stated that the Town of Franconia, along with a group of people, is applying for Northern Borders funding and has asked for a letter of support from the County for the grant submission. They are building a community skating rink and summertime pickle ball courts. Commissioner McLeod stated that there will be warming space, bathrooms, and storage space. The grant has to be submitted by May 3rd and she noted that the grant writing and work will be done all by volunteers.

MOTION: Commissioner Ahern moved that the County submit a letter of support for the Franconia rink project. Commissioner Piper seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

10:48 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,


Martha S. McLeod, Clerk