

GRAFTON COUNTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUDGET MEETING

Administration Building

North Haverhill, NH 03774

June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024

PRESENT: Reps. Sykes, Baldwin, Bolton, Stringham, Murphy, Morse, Simon, County Administrator Libby, Assistant County Administrator Burbank, Administrative Assistant Norcross, Commissioner Piper, Commissioner Ahern, Commissioner McLeod

OTHERS PRESENT: Sheriff Stiegler, Register Monahan, Nick De Mayo

Rep. Sykes called the meeting to order at 9:00 am and began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Rep. Sykes asked if everyone had a chance to read the minutes from the May 20<sup>th</sup>, June 7<sup>th</sup>, and June 10<sup>th</sup> meetings.

**MOTION:** Rep. Morse moved to approve the minutes from the May 20<sup>th</sup>, June 7<sup>th</sup> and June 10<sup>th</sup> meetings. 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.” The vote was seven (7) in favor and none in opposition, so the motion passed.

ARPA Request – CA Libby stated that this request is for Phase 1 of the architect and engineering costs for the new Courthouse. She noted that most of the Executive Committee was a part of the tour of the Courthouse last week and they have all received the EH Danson report from 2021 as well as the summary from Supt. Oakes of the primary concerns he has identified. CA Libby explained that the Commissioners have appointed a building committee and they would like to move forward with a design for a new building. The ARPA request would cover the design costs, and it would then need to go to a full Delegation meeting for a bond vote. CA Libby added that a bond vote would likely be held after January with a new delegation. Rep. Stringham stated that during the tour of the Courthouse, they observed that a lot of infrastructure in the building is significantly aged. The question is whether to spend money on a new courthouse or the same money if not more, to rehab the current facility with more aggravation. The amount of money being discussed for this exercise seems reasonable. Rep. Murphy stated that from the tour, he learned that rehab that building would be throwing good money after bad. It was built poorly, and he learned how badly the current Courthouse would be renovated.

Rep. Sykes asked who was on the Courthouse Building Committee. Commissioner Piper stated that the Committee is made up of CA Libby, Supt. Oakes, and Commissioner Ahern. Rep. Sykes asked why there was not a member of the Delegation on the committee as they are the ones who will have the final vote and explained that having someone on the committee would help them better understand the process and request. CA Libby stated that public meetings can be attended, but the Commissioners would have to appoint someone for that committee. Sheriff Stiegler stated that he is perplexed as to why the Sheriff is not on this committee, as that person is involved in the day-to-day operations of the Courthouse. Register Monahan added that she also submitted a formal written request to be on the committee, which was not allowed. She asked

who would decide on whether the Register of Deeds would or would not move into the courthouse. Commissioner Piper stated that she was initially on the committee but could not attend the meetings. therefore, Commissioner Ahern is now on the Committee, and she explained that each department will have a session with the committee to discuss their needs. CA Libby explained that the advice they received from an architect on how to put the process together said to have a committee of 3-5 members. She stated that they thought a small committee would work with each of the departments to address their needs. The Commissioners and Register of Deeds would decide whether or not to move that department into the Courthouse, and the Sheriff would be involved in the security of the building. She explained that when the DoC building committee was established, the Superintendent was on the Committee because it was one (1) department with one (1) Superintendent. The courthouse has multiple departments, and the committee will work with all of them to address their needs. Rep. Sykes stated that this is a multipurpose building and he would be disinclined to expand the Committee in that direction. CA Libby noted that the meetings are currently on hold pending this ARPA request and getting an architect on board. Rep. Morse stated that expanding committees can get messy quickly. Once there is a schedule established, the Executive Committee could have someone attend the meeting and have them report back to the full Committee. Rep. Sykes stated that he would be more comfortable if they had an assigned person to attend the meetings and added that it would be helpful if the meeting schedule for the Courthouse Building Committee were sent to the Delegation so they are aware.

Rep. Sykes stated that he was initially skeptical that building is cheaper than renovating, but after touring the building, he understands the need for a new building and feels they need to move forward with the process.

**MOTION:** Rep. Morse moved to authorize \$761,130 in ARPA funding for the architecture and engineering fees for Phase I of the Grafton County Courthouse project. Rep. Bolton 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.” The vote was seven (7) in favor and none in opposition, so the motion passed.

## **Budget Discussion**

### *A. Revenue*

Rep. Stringham stated that many changes were made after learning of the Proshare payment. He thought the changes made from the Commissioners' budget to their discussion were all positive. He suggested that the Executive Committee support the modifications that were made and include them in the Executive Committee budget.

Surplus to Reduce Taxes –Rep. Stringham stated that testimony he heard was that having the fund balance at 5%, while lower than what has been in the last few years, is adequate to get the County through the following year. He is comfortable supporting the 5% fund balance. Rep. Simon stated that he had expressed concerns last year about using as much of the fund balance as they did, and some of those issues have manifested. He stated that, in his opinion, because they

are still using a substantial amount to reduce the amount to be raised by taxes, they will not have that next year and will see a significant tax increase. Rep. Sykes stated that the purpose of the undesignated fund balance, in his opinion, is to have funds there in the event something happens. He thinks that if they can keep it at 5%, they will be lucky given everything that has happened. Rep. Morse stated that there is value in Rep. Simon's position and asked where he would like to see it go. Rep. Simon stated that he is trying to balance both sides. She explained that when they increase spending, they are increasing the burden on the taxpayers. He is recommending that they take careful consideration of expenses they might increase, but by dropping the undesignated fund balance down to 5% at this point, if something happens, they will have to continue to borrow more money. They may have the victory today of a lower tax increase, but they are driving closer to the cliff. He would like to stay at the 8%, be transparent about what they have done, and because of the decisions that needed to be made, they needed to increase taxes. Rep. Simon asked if there is a plan in the future to go back to 8% or if they are going to keep using the fund balance until there is none, and they then have to hit the taxpayers with a very large increase.

CA Libby stated that she cannot predict what will happen with ProShare next year, as it is based on their FY2024 audit. She would say what happened this year was a one-time thing and they removed the issue that caused it. She would predict that they would return to the \$2 million range for ProShare payments that they have received in the past. She explained that they are budgeting very tight and the ProShare payment will not grow. She would like to grow the fund balance to the 8% but that depends on their performance. She is much more comfortable with being at 8%, but she understands what that means for taxpayers. Rep. Murphy stated that the ProShare was an unanticipated black swan event.

CA Libby stated that they would be looking at a 9.43% tax increase if they were to leave the surplus at 8% or a 3.07% tax increase if they were to leave the surplus at 5%. She suggested that the Executive Committee go through the expense portion of the budget before they decide on the fund balance.

### *B. Expenses*

CA Libby noted that any departments with elected officials have new salary figures that are not listed in the budget books and need to be adjusted.

### Register of Deeds

Rep. Morse stated that this is where Register Monahan requested to decrease her legal line to put her office supply line back to the original level of funding. Register Monahan was present at the meeting and stated that she would request to zero out the legal fees lines and bring the office supply line to \$11,000. Rep. Sykes asked if Register Monahan does not anticipate incurring any legal fees. Register Monahan explained that she has spoken with other Registers, and their legal lines are paid for out of the Commissioners' budget. CA Libby added that the Commissioners' Office covers the legal lines for all other departments. The Register of Deeds is the only department with a legal line and the line has not been used. The Executive Committee agreed to remove the \$5,000 from the legal line.

**MOTION:** Rep. Stringham moved to zero the legal line and increase the office supply line by \$5,000 to \$11,000. Rep. Simon seconded the motion.

Discussion: Rep. Simon noted the overall decrease in the Register of Deeds budget.

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 passed.

### Information Technology

Rep. Simon stated that he thinks it would be in the County's best interest to pursue the IT Director because he feels they might be able to offset the support cost with SNS. Rep. Stringham stated that he would suggest positions such as the IT Director and Kronos software could be somehow partially allocated to the Nursing Home and they could get Medicaid payments back in the future. He suggested possibly allocating by employees per department. He would like to encourage the county to do things that way.

### Maintenance

Rep. Stringham suggested reducing the electric line items based on current expenses at nine (9) months and increasing it slightly from the nine (9) month mark. He noted that they could reduce the budget by roughly \$77,000 by doing that. CA Libby stated that she would like to ask Supt. Oakes about the rate projection. The Committee discussed this further and we in agreement not to make reductions to the electric lines.

### Grafton Regional Development Corporation

Rep. Simon stated that he would like to know whether the County's investment is successful going forward.

### Department of Corrections

Rep. Stringham believes despite the fantastic facility the County has, there is an opportunity to save millions of dollars in the budget by reaching an agreement with another facility and closing the Department of Corrections. He stated that he continues to support looking at these options, as having a facility is a significant cost. He stated that there is an opportunity to serve the taxpayers by looking at these options. Rep. Sykes asked Commissioner Piper if this has ever been discussed at the NHAC level. Commissioner Piper stated that Grafton County has reached out to Coos County regarding regionalizing, but they are not interested. She noted that there also has been some discussion among counties in the state about regionalization. Rep. Stringham stated that Vermont is sending prisoners to Mississippi, and when they went to make contracts, he thought it would be an opportunity for Grafton County to take federal inmates, but the State of Vermont put out requirements for the inmates that were not feasible for Grafton County. Commissioner Piper stated that accepting a contract from Vermont would be costly for the

taxpayers due to the changes that would need to be made in order to accommodate the federal inmates.

### Farm

Rep. Simon stated that he has been saying the same thing for many years. The budgeted shortfall of the farm is around \$300,000. He is not opposed to farming in Grafton County but is concerned about the farm being around for nostalgia. Grafton County is the last farm standing, and the rest of the counties have thought the same thing he does. Commissioner Ahern stated that the farm could bring in more revenue, but the farm manager's hands were tied based on help from the Department of Corrections. During Covid, Sysco told the facility that there was a chance they might not be able to deliver the food orders. He stated that the County is not making the best use of the farm operation to bring in more money. Rep. Simon stated that with all due respect to Commissioner Ahern, he has heard this for four (4) years and the complex is not able to do any of those things. This farm is the only farm that he knows that can lose \$300,000 a year and continue to operate. He is happy to support farming in the budget, but he would prefer to support farms all over the County so farming can be felt countywide. He feels that nostalgia plays too strong of a role as to why the County continues the farm.

Rep. Stringham suggested reducing the part-time employee help by \$30,000, noting that the Farm budget is running at half of the budgeted amount.

**MOTION:** Rep. Stringham moved to reduce the Farmers' Salary line by \$30,000. Rep. Simon seconded the motion.

Discussion: Rep. Bolton asked if that would impact the operation. CA Libby stated that they have not used the part-time hours this fiscal year. She suspects that with the custom cropping now in place, the farm would not need the total amount budgeted for part-time help. Rep. Sykes stated that he is concerned about reducing the part-time help and the Interim Farm Manager taking on more himself. Rep. Sykes stated that he is not inclined to support this motion. Commissioner Piper stated that she wanted to reassure everyone at the table that the status of the farm has been an ongoing conversation, and action has been taken. There is a lot of moving parts to it. They have a dairy farmer as the manager, and that has prevented them from moving into vegetables because their expertise is in dairy farming. Commissioner Piper explained that they have tried to switch the farm's focus based on professionals' recommendations. The farm has reduced the dairy herd to expand on vegetables but noted that it is not the skill set of the current and prior managers. The farm is chronically short-handed because they rely on inmates for help. The County has been told they need someone who is not a working Farm Manager and can oversee the overall farm operation. She wants to reassure everyone that the Commissioners are discussing this and she agrees with what Rep. Simon says. Rep. McLeod stated that she agrees with Rep. Simon as well. She feels nostalgia plays a role and she feels they should keep enough of the farm for UNH Extension but they need to hear from local framers as to what they think is most helpful. She stated that she thinks there are better purposes for the farm. Rep. Sykes stated that he has always supported the concept that you get what you pay for. If they need to change the culture and the way the

farm is looked at, it will only happen if they are willing to spend the money necessary to get the right people in there.

The Committee voted on the motion. Rep. Baldwin called the roll: Rep. Baldwin “no,” Rep. Bolton “no,” Rep. Morse “no,” Rep. Murphy “no,” Rep. Simon “yes,” Rep. Stringham “yes,” Rep. Sykes “no.” With two (2) votes in favor and five (5) in opposition, the motion failed.

Rep. Simon asked how long the farm is going to be allowed to fail before they say they are not going to pull it back up.

### Social Services

Rep. Stringham stated that they have made good strides in Social Service funding over the years. He has comments and requested changes. He stated that the County had four (4) new agency requests, two (2) of which he feels strongly that they meet the County’s mission. Rep. Stringham stated that he created a spreadsheet that met the same funding levels as proposed by the Commissioners, but he included the request for Tri-County Cap for energy assistance and Twin Pines. In order to fund all of the new requests, he proportionally funded the original requests from agencies.

**MOTION:** Rep. Stringham moved to approve the Social Services at the Commissioners recommended levels, with his recommended changes.

Rep. Stringham withdrew his motion.

Commissioner Piper asked that the Executive Committee stay with their two (2) categories. She explained that they have worked very hard the last few years to narrow down the social service funding to the County’s two (2) primary goals of reducing recidivism and keeping the elderly in their homes and if they change that now, they are opening this up to many more agencies. Rep. Stringham stated that for him to make a motion, he would look for input on Twin Pines and accept that the energy assistance program through Tri-County Cap does not meet the funding requirements. Rep. Sykes wanted to note that he is no longer on Tri-County Cap’s Board of Directors so when they discuss that agency, he will no longer recuse himself. Regarding Twin Pines, the requested money has always been allocated to support their operation in downtown Lebanon. Commissioner McLeod stated that she appreciates Rep. Stringham’s work in finding a way to fund all of the agencies without decreasing the amount of any agency by too much. She also noted that the delegation’s input is very important. The Committee further discussed the social service funding.

**MOTION:** Rep. Stringham moved to fund each of the 33 agencies for a total of \$539,655.00. The exact number from each line item is adjusted to remove Tri County-Cap Energy Assistance and allocate that funding proportionally to the rest of the agencies. Rep. Baldwin seconded the motion.

Discussion: Rep. Simon stated that he would not support the motion for Commissioner Piper's argument and explained that by extending the funding to more agencies, they are putting most of the agencies in a bad position to make a few in a slightly better position. Rep. Bolton stated that he wanted to note that he does not gain any personal gain through his affiliation with Transport Central.

Rep. Baldwin called the roll. Rep. Baldwin, "yes;" Rep. Bolton, "yes;" Rep. Morse, "yes;" Rep. Murphy, "yes;" Rep. Simon, "no;" Rep. Stringham, "yes;" Rep. Sykes, "yes." With the vote being six (6) in favor and one (1) in opposition, the motion passed.

CA Libby stated that if the Executive Committee wants to maintain the 5% fund balance, they are at a 3.07% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes or \$27,331,164.00 with the bottom line of the budget at \$56,222,05.00.

**MOTION:** Rep. Baldwin moved to finalize the operating budget as proposed by the Executive Committee. Rep. Murphy seconded the motion. Rep. Baldwin, "yes;" Rep. Bolton, "yes;" Rep. Morse, "yes;" Rep. Murphy, "yes;" Rep. Simon, "no;" Rep. Stringham, "yes;" Rep. Sykes, "yes." With the vote being six (6) in favor and one (1) in opposition, the motion passed.

#### Register of Deeds Surcharge

Rep. Sykes stated that the Committee received a supplemental request from Register Monahan for \$13,000 to purchase new equipment one (1) year ahead of schedule.

**MOTION:** Rep. Simon moved to approve the \$13,000 supplemental surcharge request. Rep. Morse seconded the motion. Rep. Baldwin called the roll. Rep. Baldwin said "yes"; Rep. Bolton said "yes;" Rep. Morse said "yes;" Rep. Murphy said "yes;" Rep. Simon said "yes;" Rep. Stringham said "yes;" Rep. Sykes said "yes." The vote was seven (7) in favor and none in opposition, so the motion passed.

**MOTION:** Rep. Morse moved to approve \$22,324.00 in Register of Deeds Surcharge account expenses. 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." The vote was seven (7) in favor and none in opposition, so the motion passed.

#### *C. Capital Reserves*

##### Nursing Home Capital Reserve

**MOTION:** Rep. Stringham moved to approve \$206,564.00 in the Nursing Home Capital Reserve. Rep. Morse 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." The vote was seven (7) in favor and none in opposition, so the motion passed.

Dispatch Capital Reserve

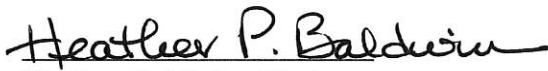
**MOTION:** Rep. Morse moved to approve the Dispatch Capital Reserve budget of \$29,000. Rep. Murphy seconded the motion. Rep. Baldwin called the roll. Rep. Baldwin, “yes”; Rep. Bolton, “yes;” Rep. Morse, “yes;” Rep. Murphy, “yes;” Rep. Simon, “yes;” Rep. Stringham, “yes;” Rep. Sykes, “yes.” The vote was seven (7) in favor and none in opposition, so the motion passed.

Rep. Simon stated that he would not be running for re-election. He thanked everyone at the County level for their work and stated that it has been an honor to be a part of the Executive Committee. Rep. Murphy said he will also not be running for office again. He has enjoyed the County work that he has done, and he appreciates everyone’s efforts. Rep. Morse stated that she will not be running as well, but she has enjoyed the County work. Rep. Sykes stated that when he talks with constituents, he talks about how vital county government is. He recognizes it is a small portion of the tax bill, but he has a large impact, and the County does very important work. Rep. Sykes thanked all those on the Executive Committee, the Commissioners, and County staff members for their hard work. Rep. Murphy also recognized the Sheriff for all of his hard work, noting that he is not running for re-election.

Comments from the public – Nick De Mayo thanked the Executive Committee for their time on behalf of the taxpayers. He asked if it was possible to get a tour of the Department of Corrections, Courthouse, Nursing Home, and Farm. CA Libby stated that she would get contact information so he could reach out to those departments. N. De Mayo asked regarding the farm why it is impossible to give some upper-class students college credits to work on the farm and train inmates. He asked what compensation the inmates receive. Sheriff Stiegler was present and stated that the judge and Supt. Lethbridge would be the one to determine that and suggested that he ask those questions of the DoC staff.

11:48 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,



Heather Baldwin, Clerk