

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING  
Administration Building  
North Haverhill, NH 03774  
April 10, 2025

PRESENT: Commissioners Piper, McLeod, Hedberg, County Administrator Libby, Assistant County Administrator Elsholz, and Administrative Assistant. Norcross

OTHERS: Nick De Mayo – via Teams

Commissioner McLeod called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

**MOTION:** \* 9:09 AM Commissioner Piper moved to enter into a non-public session for the purpose 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 Hedberg seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. Commissioner McLeod called the roll. Commissioner Piper said, "Yes", Commissioner Hedberg said, "Yes," and Commissioner McLeod said, "Yes." Commissioner McLeod stated that a majority of the board voted "yes" and would now go into non-public session.

\* 9:35 AM Commissioner McLeod declared the meeting back in public session.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Hedberg 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 Piper seconded the motion. Commissioner McLeod called the roll. Commissioner Piper, "Yes," Commissioner Hedberg, "yes," Commissioner McLeod, "yes." Commissioner McLeod stated that a majority of the board voted "yes," and the motion passed.

Commissioner McLeod left the meeting and joined electronically, according to RSA 91-A: 2, with the reason being she was unable to attend the meeting in person. Electronic participation was at her request. It was noted that a roll call must take all votes.

CA Libby discussed the revenue comparison and budget. She stated that there is a \$1,933,899 increase in the overall budget based on the budgets as presented, or 3.44 %. She noted that there is a 3.31% increase in revenues. CA Libby explained that if the County were in a position this year where the surplus was sufficient to use the same amount as last year to help offset taxes, they would be starting at a 3.92% tax increase, but they are not in that position. She stated that they do not have the surplus to use this year. She explained that she does not have final March numbers yet but has done an estimate, which is based on receiving \$1,650,000 for a proshare payment this year. Given this, she is estimating that they can use \$2 million to reduce taxes,

which would leave the county at 5.25% in the undesignated fund balance. The recommended amount in the policy is between 8% and 16%. CA Libby stated that overall, a reasonable budget was presented, but noted that this does not include a COLA for employees. The reduction in the amount of surplus used to \$2 million causes an automatic 10% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes.

Commissioner Hedberg stated that there is a lot of unknown information at this time that will affect this budget going forward. CA Libby stated that the Commissioners can release the budget and state that it will change as they go through the budget process with the Executive Committee. She also noted that they are taking a big risk with the Nursing Home revenue budgeted as it is, because there are so many unknowns at this point.

As a starting point, CA Libby recommended discussing the Employee Council requests, then identifying the areas of the budget that the Commissioners want to examine, and coming up with specific departments that they want to have come back. The Commissioners also need to discuss social service funding and capital requests.

Commissioner Piper stated that she will recommend, at this point, no COLA, which would leave the employees at a 3% step increase, and that 3% increase is the cost of living. She stated that if they added both, they would raise salaries by 5-6%. She thinks it is fair to the public that any salary increases are held to the CPI increase, which is around 3%.

CA Libby stated that salary negotiations are normally done in a nonpublic session. She would like the Commissioners to discuss this today so she can invite the employee council back to meet with them and continue the dialogue.

**MOTION:** \* 9:59 AM Commissioner Piper 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 Hedberg seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. Commissioner McLeod called the roll. Commissioner Piper said, "Yes", Commissioner Hedberg said, "Yes," and Commissioner McLeod said, "Yes." Commissioner McLeod stated that a majority of the board voted "yes" and would now go into non-public session.

\* 10:45 AM Commissioner McLeod declared the meeting back in public session.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Hedberg 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 Piper seconded the motion. Commissioner McLeod called the roll. Commissioner Piper "Yes," Commissioner Hedberg "yes," Commissioner McLeod "yes." Commissioner McLeod stated that a majority of the board voted "yes," and the motion passed.

## Capital Outlay Requests

### *Sheriff*

Commissioner Hedberg questioned the need for three (3) new cruisers if the Sheriff's Department is short-staffed and not putting as many miles on their cruisers. The Commissioners further discussed the importance of the cruisers and agreed to one (1) in the budget and see if they can fund the other two (2) using funds such as LATCF or ARPA interest.

### *Maintenance*

Commissioner McLeod asked why the dryer at the DoC is coming out of the maintenance capital budget. She stated that regarding the replacement of the above-ground storage tank, the Commissioners have been hearing about it all year; sometimes it is a crisis, and sometimes it is not. CA Libby noted that if they have evidence to support the tank is corroding and they know it will eventually cause an issue with the generator that is a life safety issue, they should look at replacing it but maybe from a different pool of funds such as the LATCF funds or ARPA interest as this is a one-time purchase. Commissioner Piper expressed concerns about the economy going forward and worries about using these other funds for purchases if they are not necessary. She stated that she does not think they need crack sealing and pavement markings, and should also wait on the storage tank. They should hold on to those other funds as much as possible, not knowing what they may need them for. Commissioner McLeod stated that these funds are available for these items if they become a real crisis. Commissioner Hedberg stated that she worries about damaging the generator as it is a life safety issue, by not replacing the above-ground storage tank. Commissioner Piper suggested funding only the commercial dryer. Commissioner McLeod agreed but felt it needs to come out of another budget. It is not appropriate to be in the maintenance budget. The Commissioners zeroed out the maintenance capital budget.

### *Department of Corrections*

Commissioner Hedberg noted concerns about the computers that control the door locks running on Windows 7. CA Libby agreed, noting that it is the DoC's infrastructure. Commissioner Piper stated that, given the stress that residents/taxpayers are feeling, she would like to get the budget as low as possible. If there is a failure with these computers, she asked how difficult it is to work with the keys. CA Libby stated that it is not so much about being difficult, but it becomes a safety and security issue. Right now, the officers can run everything from central control. If these computers were down and there is a crisis, someone has to physically go to the housing unit to open and close doors. Commissioner McLeod stated that she would support leaving this in and seeing the total capital budget with the changes made. This is more of a safety issue than anything they have seen. Commissioner Piper said they should put as much of the essential capital into the other funding sources. Commissioner McLeod noted that these are critical safety issues at the DoC and should be reflected in the budget. Commissioner Hedberg agreed, noting

that they need to make sure that the DoC has the safety features it needs. CA Libby added that if the Commissioners are trying to bring the tax increase down as much as possible, they could leave the camera upgrade in the budget as an ongoing expense, but take the \$180,000 for the computers out of another source. It will take that amount out of the budget.

Commissioner McLeod stated that she would like to look at the capital budgets in the future as a percentage of the overall budget. CA Libby explained that they used to have a consistent capital budget, but ARPA funds have been used for many purchases over the last few years. Those ARPA funds are gone, and these items are returning to the budget.

#### New Positions

Commissioner Piper stated that she is in favor of not funding any new positions. She added that she felt good arguments were made for all of the positions, but she does not want to have to pick and choose which are funded. The need has been established for these positions, but she does not feel this is the year to add them. Commissioner Piper noted that new positions are a hard sell to the Delegation.

CA Libby explained that the County currently has an Assistant County Attorney funded through ARPA and will continue to be through June 30<sup>th</sup>. 100% of that position is budgeted to be picked up by the County in the upcoming budget. Commissioner Hedberg stated that it looks like they are adding one (1) position, but they are only switching funding sources for a position currently filled in the Attorney's Office. They would be cutting this position from the County Attorney's Office, and she's not in favor of that. Commissioner Piper stated that she did not think the case for continuing this position at the county's expense was any stronger than that of the other department heads.

The Commissioners further discussed the requests for new positions. CA Libby stated that the total cost of the new positions without the DoC is \$422,169. Once she has those figures, the DoC is likely to be an \$80,000 addition.

Given the Delegation's opinions on new positions, Commissioner McLeod asked what they have the strongest argument for. CA Libby noted that Commissioner Hedberg's statement regarding the County Attorney position already exists, and that the person currently working here is a good argument. Commissioner McLeod stated that she felt the best argument would be the Alternative Sentencing Case Manager. Commissioner Piper noted that she tends to agree but would want to hear from the department heads again. If she decided to fund anything, she would lean towards the Alternative Sentencing Case Manager. She added that she does not know about funding any new positions, but if they were to fund any, she thinks Alternative Sentencing would be the one she would support. Commissioner Hedberg noted that she felt the Case Manager position would be a good investment, but she worries about cutting the position from the County Attorney and the ramifications of that. It is a new line item but not a new position, as the person is currently in that role.

Commissioner McLeod stated that the County Attorney and Alternative Sentencing are her priorities. Commissioner Piper noted that she would not support both of them, and depending on where the budget lands, she may not support either of them.

### Social Services

CA Libby reported that she had made the reductions and changes she had presented and the Commissioners discussed at their last meeting. These changes brought the Social Services budget down to \$500,000. She noted that she removed funding for Responders Together.

Commissioner Piper stated that in the interest of accommodating the employee raises put forth by her colleagues and looking out for the taxpayers, she would suggest a 50% reduction in the social services budget. She explained that Grafton County is known for its generous social service funding, and some folks feel very strongly about this. It is not a statutory duty of the County.

Commissioner McLeod stated that they have this discussion every year. These agencies are partners with the County to assist in the County's statutory commitments. This helps the County keep folks in their homes who do not need to be in the Nursing Home. She feels they have done a good job picking out organizations that make a difference in the County budget and their statutory requirements. Commissioner Piper agreed with some of those thoughts. Commissioner McLeod added that these organizations are having challenging times with the federal and state unknowns.

Commissioner Piper stated that the Executive Committee has asked for outcomes or results from the Grafton Regional Development Corporation to see how effective the expenditure is. She feels the same way about social services agencies. She would like to see measurements and outcomes from their funding of these organizations. Is the result quantifiable? Commissioner McLeod agreed and stated that she thought that was a good idea and suggested that they add something to the application process. She noted that the number of people served is a good indicator of outcomes.

Commissioner Hedberg stated that client served numbers are hard to go by sometimes. In her professional career, she has worked with several of these agencies, and they have had considerable benefits for the clients served and the other agencies they work with. She thinks the County has done a good job and thinks these agencies meet the County's mission and statutory obligations. She appreciates the work that has been done. The dollar amount they are asking for is not huge in their overall budget, but it is big for the programs they are directed to.

The Commissioners discussed the agency categories and a more even level of funding for the different categories. They agreed on a \$500,000 social services budget.

### County Cap



CA Libby stated that she updated the County cap based on the Commissioners' conversation from the other day. This cap is based on the current scenario in the House budget, which is a 3% increase in the cap. She stated that if they could get it to a 2% increase in the Senate, she could take \$80,000 out of the budget. She said she would move forward with the proposed budget of \$7.8 million and update that figure if anything changes.


CA Libby stated that she would make all the changes the Commissioners discussed today and have updated numbers for them next week.

**Public Comment**

N. De Mayo asked about the 7.8% increase in the budget. Commissioner McLeod stated that there are no recommended budget increases at this time. They are still working through their budget. She noted the \$7.8 million figure discussed regarding the county cap. N. De Mayo added that the country has \$37 trillion in federal debt, and the Commissioners are still considering building a new courthouse.

11:54 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
Katie Wood Hedberg, Clerk