

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING

Administration Building

North Haverhill, NH 03774

April 17, 2025

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

OTHERS: Register Monahan – via Teams, Nick De Mayo – via Teams, Omer C. Ahern Jr. – via Teams

Budget Discussion

CA Libby explained that when the Nursing Home presented their budget, she was bothered by the salary lines in the nursing budget. She stated that she has projected their salary balances at year-end. The LNA, LPN, and RN lines will be over-expenditure at year-end, and the budget for next year shows either no increase or minimal increases in those lines. CA Libby explained that she reached out to the Finance Director at the Nursing Home to see if the numbers were accurate and found out they were not. An additional approximately \$700,000 is needed in the nursing salary lines. One (1) of the increases sent to her in that total amount was in the contract nursing line of \$120,000. She stated that she does not think they should increase that line. As the Nursing Home increases the nursing staff, it needs to make efforts to reduce the contract nursing line. As far as the salary lines, they cannot take that out. NHA Labore has recommended increasing the census projections for next year. CA Libby cautioned that there needs to be 100% certainty that it is possible to maintain a census of 123 residents to meet those revenue projections. She stated that not meeting those projections is a problem. Commissioner McLeod noted that she was worried more about the payer mix. Vermont Medicaid pays more than New Hampshire, and asked if they can focus on those payor sources. CA Libby stated that the Nursing Home has been pretty close to the payer mix that they have projected.

CA Libby stated that regarding the full budget, her suggestion for the Commissioners is to go back to the beginning and review each department budget.

CA Libby reported that the County State Finance Committee met yesterday, and NHA Labore was told that the contact at DHHS can provide them with an estimated ProShare payment. She stated that if DHHS has projected ProShare figures, that will be very helpful.

Expenses

Commissioner Piper noted that tinkering with small line items can decrease staff's ability to attend training or deliver quality services.

County Attorney

Assistant County Attorney – Commissioner Hedberg stated that she felt they would be penny-wise and pound-foolish to remove an employee they already have. Losing this attorney would impact them in other ways. She noted that the County Attorney’s Office is not hiring an extra person; they are just funding it in the budget this year rather than using ARPA funds.

Commissioner Piper stated that she understands Commissioner Hedberg’s reasoning for wanting to keep the position, but she does not support it based on past discussions. She does not support any new positions. She thinks other departments made good cases for their positions as well, and she will not pick one position over another.

Commissioner Piper stated that she does not see anything else to cut in the County Attorney’s budget besides the position. Commissioner McLeod suggested looking at the Expert Costs and SVP line items, as those line items have not been used. They could be reduced and still have the line item there. Commissioner Piper stated that she does not see how a \$2,000 cut will benefit the taxpayers. Commissioner McLeod stated they could ask the department heads to tighten their budgets. Commissioner Piper noted that they have always done that. She stated that when there is such an enormous increase and they fully fund social services or add new positions, she does not feel the need to show the public that they are making small cuts.

CA Libby stated that the encumbrance balance for Expert Costs is \$25,000, and the SVP line is \$12,500. The Commissioners further discussed those two (2) lines and were all in agreement to cut the Expert Costs to \$5,000 and the SVP to \$5,000 as well.

Commissioner Hedberg stated that if they need to decrease the budget and do not fund any new positions, the Alternative Sentencing Case Manager and the Assistant County Attorney positions are roughly \$200,000. She has a hard time supporting removing those two (2) positions, but they could reduce the budget by a large chunk of funding. The department heads had good reasons to keep the positions in the budget, but their budget outlook this week is more dire than last week, and she is looking more at these budgets, even though she is not comfortable with it.

CA Libby stated that when there are requests for six (6) new positions, the Commissioners then have to prioritize one department over another, and they have received justification for these positions from several departments. She stated that, unfortunately, this may be the budget where the Commissioners say they cannot fund any new positions. Commissioner Piper noted that this has been done in the past. Commissioner McLeod stated they could not fund new positions and let the department heads make their case to the Delegation. CA Libby noted that more information will be available by the time the departments meet with the Executive Committee, and they can make changes at that time.

The Commissioners agreed to no new positions in this budget.

Alternative Sentencing

CA Libby noted that there will be additional small decreases in this budget that were associated with the new position that was not funded.

Information Technology

CA Libby stated that the computer replacement schedule is flexible. She will see if she can make some reductions in this line. The new positions will also be eliminated, which will change this line.

Sheriff

Commissioner McLeod stated that she would like to consider removing at least one (1) Deputy position. Commissioner Piper asked why they would want to remove one (1) Deputy position if that department is already short-staffed. Commissioner McLeod stated that she would recommend removing one (1) or two (2) positions, which would be about \$155,000. She explained that she has heard clearly from constituents that they do not want to pay for the ICE contract. The County is currently doing that in this budget, and they need to make a statement that they are not interested in paying for the cost of that contract. The County is not being reimbursed for the time spent doing that work. This would let the taxpayers know they are not paying for this. She stated that 400 people have signed a petition. The County is hearing from people that this is a concern. Commissioner Hedberg stated that she agrees it is a concern, but she is also concerned about decreasing the Sheriff's Department staff. They would potentially be shorting the safety of their citizens, for the standard Sheriff duties. Those petitions are impactful, and they can use them to get rid of the contract, if possible, without taking away the jobs they need the Sheriff's Department to do. Commissioner Hedberg added that they can take money away, but there is still latitude within the budget for the department head to use their funds the way they want to. She believes removing the funding will not do what they would like it to do and she is not in favor of doing this.

Commissioner McLeod stated that she understands Commissioner Hedberg's point, but she is making a statement. She is making a choice on how she uses taxpayer funds. Sheriff Myers is using her county resources for this contract. Commissioner Hedberg stated that Sheriff Myers could still use her money, whether they take two (2) deputy positions from her budget. She stated that she is very against the agreement for many reasons, but defunding the Sheriff's Department might cause more harm than good.

Commissioner Piper stated that she supports most of what Commissioner Hedberg said. She understands the petitions and that the County serves 88,000 people. She stated that taking out two (2) positions is starving a constitutional office, and she thinks that sends a very bad signal to taxpayers that they are willing to underfund the Sheriff's Department. Commissioner Piper explained that she does not share all of the same feelings about the contract, but they are responsible for the safety of their citizens, and this would undermine that.

Commissioner McLeod stated that over the last two (2) years, the one (1) thing she has heard repeatedly is that constituents feel the Sheriff's Department is overfunded by the role they play. The department is more equipped than what is needed in the County, in terms of vehicles and equipment. Commissioner Piper stated that she has also heard a constituent who was worried about the Sheriff's Department padding the budget. She thinks there is no doubt in the previous Board of Commissioners' minds that the previous Sheriff padded the budget.

Commissioner Hedberg asked about the long-term purchase agreements for the equipment for \$47,920. CA Libby explained that this was for the Axon contract that the previous Sheriff entered into for body-worn and in-car cameras. This was supposed to be an ARPA-paid expenditure, but the previous Sheriff upgraded the body cameras partway into the contract and added an additional year and additional monthly costs. She stated that the County is obligated to these contracts. This will be an expense for the next two (2) budgets but will likely be an ongoing expense. CA Libby stated that as the contracts expire, she expects the Sheriff's Dep will renew them for different things.

Maintenance

CA Libby stated that most of this budget relies on other sources, telling Supt. Oakes what utilities will cost. She stated that regarding the contracted services, this campus is in good condition because of Supt. Oakes and his staff and the department's preventive maintenance routines. She does not feel taking that funding out is good, long-term, for the County.

Commissioner Hedberg stated that she felt Supt. Oakes' explanation on Tuesday on replacing the storage tank was very convincing, and she believes that it is a life safety issue. She feels they need to put the \$67,700 back in the budget. CA Libby suggested that they take this out of the budget and fund it with either LATCF or ARPA interest. The Commissioners agreed.

Campus Security

CA Libby said she eliminated this budget with the cut to new positions.

County Cap

CA Libby stated that she suggests that they budget for the Senate sticking to the statute which would be a 2% increase versus a 3%. That reduces the budget by \$80,000. She explained that when the Executive Committee does the budget, they will have more information and can make changes to this if needed. CA Libby suggested that the Commissioners talk to the three (3) Senators in Grafton County and discuss the importance of the increase being 2%. 2% is in the law, and if they go to 3%, they violate their own RSA.

Grafton Regional Development Corporation

Commissioner Piper stated that she understood that this money was awarded as seed money to get the council going. She has questioned whether they need to fund this. She has asked for it to be decreased, and it has been decreased twice, going from \$50,000 to \$40,000. Any significant reduction has not been approved by Delegation since she has been here, but she does feel GRDC has done excellent work. Commissioner Hedberg stated that for \$40,000, GRDC is doing a lot of work for Grafton County. Decreasing it would not greatly help them in terms of the budget and potentially hurt the County. Commissioner McLeod agreed, noting that it is a great partnership and GRDC does a lot for Grafton County.

Department of Corrections

Supplies – Commissioner Piper noted a \$5,000 increase in this line and asked they can level fund. CA Libby stated that she will find out what the increase in this line is due too.

CA Libby requested a nonpublic session to discuss the nightwatchman positions.

MOTION: * 10:57 AM Commissioner Hedberg 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 Piper 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.

* 11:05 PM 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.

DoC Capital Outlay—CA Libby stated that the cameras are an annual expense until they replace all analog cameras. She suggested either taking a year off from the camera replacement or only funding part of it. She noted that they have had to do this in the past with beds or other things on cycle replacement cycles. She stated that she could talk to Supt. Lethbridge and see if they can reduce the camera replacement cycle for next year.

The Commissioners agreed to fund the Windows computer upgrades out of LATCF or ARPA interest, as they are a one-time expense.

Farm

Commissioner McLeod stated that they are still continuing to lose money with the farm. CA Libby noted that she suspects this year they will have a loss, but will have a small loss in comparison to what the budgeted loss was. Which is an enormous accomplishment over where they have been. She stated that FM Libby is looking for all avenues to cut costs and increase revenues. Commissioner McLeod stated that it is good that they brought in a Farm Manager to look at these things, but they are still asking taxpayers to fund this.

Commissioner Hedberg agreed that they must keep a close eye on the farm.

Social Services

CA Libby stated that this budget is what was discussed and funded at \$500,000 based on standardized funding for agencies. Commissioner Piper stated that she had advocated for a percentage cut and understood neither of her colleagues supported it. She wondered if they could put 50% of this budget onto one of the other federal sources, given the circumstances of this budget. Commissioner Hedberg stated that she appreciates that thought, but if they cut \$250,000 and fund it elsewhere, it would almost wipe out those other funds. She is not sure that is what they would want to do with those funds, in the event that there is an emergency that arises and those funds are needed. Commissioner McLeod stated that she agrees, and it would need to be added back to the budget next year, which would have a large impact.

CA Libby then reviewed the miscellaneous expense budgets with the Commissioners.

Nursing Home

CA Libby stated that in the Nursing Home Admin budget, there is a \$115,000 increase in the bed tax. She recommended they fund it at \$925,000. She knows they increased based off revenue increase projections but her recommendation is \$925,000. She has not run this by NHA Labore yet and stated that if he has an issue with it, she will relay that back to the Commissioners.

Cable TV – CA Libby noted that this line item was moved to this budget. It used to be in the Social Services budget. She stated that it is not a new expense and this is all offset with revenue.

Nursing

Education and Conference – Commissioner Hedberg stated that she understands the reasoning for the phlebotomy class but wonders if they are they able to save money from the Cottage Hospital contract if people are not able to come from the hospital to draw blood. CA Libby

stated that she is not aware of a monthly contract to Cottage Hospital. She stated that she would follow up with NHA Labore.

Contract Services

Emergency Preparedness – Commissioner Piper stated that she appreciates NHA Labore’s argument but in fairness to other departments, no new positions across the board. Commissioner McLeod noted that it is not actually a position. NHA Labore is trying to get a consultant in to do this work that he has been asking for, for years, to be compliant with CMS. Commissioner Piper stated that the Nursing Home is currently meeting CMS requirements, and it seems like this is a want and not a need. CA Libby noted that NHA Labore had offered to remove this from the budget to reduce costs. The Commissioners removed the \$78,000.

Capital Outlay

DoC Commercial Dryer – CA Libby stated that this is equipment at the end of its life. She stated that by not funding it, the Commissioners are going to kick the can down the road, and it is going to break. Commissioner Piper asked if they could use other federal sources, as this is a one-time expense. CA Libby stated that they could. The Commissioners agreed to fund the above-ground storage tank and the commercial dryer out of the other federal funds.

MOTION: * 12:16 PM Commissioner Hedberg 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 Piper 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.

* 12:34 PM 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 stated that the budget has a 3.5% increase in expenditures. She explained that the biggest concern is that they have less surplus to use to help offset the tax increase. She added that they also do not know what ProShare numbers will be, and CA Libby will work on finding out more information on that for next week. Commissioner McLeod also noted that they faced an error of \$500,000 in the Nursing Home expenses. The Commissioners have removed a

number of capital items as well as new positions. Commissioner Hedberg agreed, noting that the numbers they thought they were working on ended up having a \$500,000 error in expenses.

Commissioner Hedberg stated that she felt the Commissioners did a good job today on a really hard subject with three (3) different viewpoints. They were able to work together to reach a consensus.

Public Comment:


Register Monahan added the following comment via Teams:

“Do you understand that I am not asking for a new position? I am asking for 6 months to protect the office. I am replacing a position that we sacrificed for last year’s budget on a person who retired last year and was not replaced.”

CA Libby responded that this is the same situation as the FTEs that were removed from the Department of Corrections budget. They are replacement positions, but technically, they are additional positions to this year’s budget.

12:39 PM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,



Katie Wood Hedberg, Clerk