

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING  
Administration Building  
North Haverhill, NH 03774  
April 24, 2025

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

OTHERS: Andre Sanders, Mariah Johnson

**Employee Council – Andre Sanders and Mariah Johnson**

The Commissioners presented the attached proposal to the Employee Council.

A. Sanders stated that he liked the increase in the accrual rate and the amount that can be accrued. He asked when the discussions with the holidays and meals would take place. CA Libby stated that they could have ongoing discussions. She stated that where it is not a Commissioner level item, she feels it would be best for those involved directly to have those conversations.

A. Sanders asked how the Commissioners decided on a 2% COLA. Commissioner McLeod explained that she felt that, with the impact to the residents of the County, as much as the Commissioners would like to give a 3%, the impact on the budget this year is not workable for them. They feel that 2% is what they could do. She added that a 2% COLA has a big impact on the budget but they also feel it's important to recognize the work of the employees. The Commissioners pushed it beyond what they felt they could do and feel it is a fair compromise. She stated that they do not have the surplus they normally have to offset taxes.

CA Libby explained that the County has an overall fund balance and the last number of years the Delegation has chosen to use larger amounts of that balance to lower the tax rates or make the tax rate zero. The County also used \$5 million to match the federal broadband grant. That overall fund balance has dropped and the Commissioners have a policy that the County is supposed to maintain a surplus of 8-16%. Last year in an effort to decrease the tax increase, they dropped the surplus down to 6%. CA Libby stated that this year they do not have the surplus to use to help offset the amount to be raised by taxes. They decreased the amount of surplus to be used by \$2.5 million over what was used last year and that is the main driver in the tax increase this year.

CA Libby added that the County had received two (2) prior ProShare payments of \$4.5 million and \$4.2 million and last year the payment was \$750,000, which was unexpected. There was \$2.6 in the revenue budget and that unexpected decrease was also a big factor in the surplus.

Commissioner Hedberg noted that there were items in the budget covered by ARPA that were not one-time purchases. There were a few that were unanticipated contracts with ARPA that now the county has to pick up in the budget. Commissioner McLeod stated that the Commissioners put off capital expenses as well, noting that they wanted to make sure that the employees were taken

care of. A. Sanders asked if step increases were on the chopping block. The Commissioners stated that they are not, steps are included in the budget.

CA Libby asked if the Employee Council could plan to come back to meet with the Commissioners on May 6<sup>th</sup> at 9am, after they have had time to review the Commissioners' proposal.

### **Budget Discussion**

CA Libby submitted a revised copy of the County Attorney's budget after the request regarding the budget that was made on Tuesday. There is a \$36,637.00 total increase in her budget over what had been discussed.

CA Libby stated that she spoke to Nursing Home Administrator Labore about the Phlebotomy class and there is no reduction that can be made. There is no charge from Cottage Hospital when they come and draw labs. She explained that this is a refresher course for nurses but NHA Labore has stated that it could be less than the \$4,000 that was budgeted. It depends on how many nurses take the course.

Commissioner Piper stated that she thinks that the Commissioners and the department heads have done a good job. There are a few small line items she has looked at but she does not see the point of carving out small amounts, given that those small amounts are not the problem, it is the large ticket items. Commissioner Hedberg stated that she agrees and feels they should discuss the County Attorney request. They went through the budget line by line and came to a good consensus.

CA Libby stated that Atty. Hornick has an attorney retiring and someone who is a good candidate for that position. She is asking for overlap until this person retires. The cost is \$36,637.00. Commissioner Hedberg stated that it is not a large dollar amount but because they have made the decision to not allow other departments to do the same thing, she would not be in favor of it. She noted that the Registry of Deeds and Department of Corrections have asked for something similar and she feels they should not pick one department over another. If the candidate was interested, they could apply for the job once the current attorney retires. Commissioner Piper stated that she agrees. She added that not funding this position is not a blind siding as this has been a temporary position the entire time. She understands Atty. Hornick's desire to have this person on board to train but she feels it is a want and not a need. Commissioner Piper stated that no new positions means no new positions, regardless if it is for six (6) months or not.

CA Libby recommended, as a courtesy, to wait until the May 6<sup>th</sup> meeting to make a motion to finalize the budget, when they can meet again with the Employee Council. She suggested that the Commissioners get to a point today where they feel the budget is done. She noted that she met yesterday with the Union and gave them the same proposal. She thinks the Union is waiting to see what the Employee Council does.



CA Libby stated that the bottom line of the budget is \$57,707,051.00 which is a 2.64% increase in expenditures over last year and a 9.32% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes.

Commissioner Piper stated that she is not in consensus on some of the items but she is in the minority and is comfortable with that. She understands, as this is her 8<sup>th</sup> budget, all the moving parts. This is a very tight year.

CA Libby stated that it is very hard. The budget comes out with a percentage increase but she explained that this does not mean that any one community is going to see that increase. Some communities will come back with decreases and some will come in with an increase. A 9.32% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes does not mean someone's taxes are going up that much. Commissioner Piper stated that it is based on the assessed valuation of the towns and how the DRA comes up with the individual tax rates per town. CA Libby noted that the years they had a 0% increase, there were still towns that received an increase.

Commissioner Hedberg stated that she felt they worked hard and did a good job. She asked Commissioner Piper if she is not in agreement or in consensus, if there was something she wants to go back and look at that she feels they should change. Commissioner Piper thanked Commissioner Hedberg and stated that she feels they have talked everything out. Given the tight fit this year, offering a 2% COLA was generous and she was happy that the majority of the board did not support any new positions. She stated that there is discretionary spending and it has been brought to her attention, the question of why the Commissioners fund items that are off campus rather than on campus, and that is always difficult.

Commissioner McLeod stated that she supports the budget. She thinks for the employees, they need to be held harmless. It is not their fault that the Commissioners and Delegation have used the surplus in the past year, to the point that they have. Commissioner McLeod also stated that she thinks social services are critically important. She hopes this will be the beginning to the County getting back on track with the surplus. She stated that she reminds people as she talks with them, that equalized valuations might be higher because there is more assessed value in the communities. She thinks the Delegation will have better information when they work on the budget. Commissioner McLeod stated that she feels this is what the Commissioners can do with the information they have now. She noted that if they look at what could have been done different, maybe they should have listened to CA Libby and not taken as much out of the surplus. They could have then made more realistic increases as they came to the budgets.

Commissioner Hedberg reported that she saw their Congressional Representative, Maggie Goodlander, and M. Goodlander asked about the Nursing Home. Commissioner Hedberg stated that she discussed the Commissioners' fears about the cuts to Medicaid. M. Goodlander may be reaching out to come visit the Nursing Home. She has visited other county Nursing Home's. Commissioner Hedberg stated that if she hears from her, she will work with CA Libby and NHA Labore. M. Goodlander is trying to bring back to Washington, real life concerns with nursing homes.

Commissioner McLeod stated that she was speaking with someone who is trying to get their family member into the nursing home but the Nursing Home does not have the capacity to handle some of the types of individuals. The Nursing Home may still not have the staff to be able to take in everyone that wants to be admitted. The Commissioners further discussed the need for the nursing home admissions.

The Commissioners set a date of May 20<sup>th</sup> for their public hearing on the budget. CA Libby stated that they will move the meeting to the afternoon. She will set a time as they get closer and can look at what is on the agenda.

CA Libby stated that she learned that SB62 passed the Senate and yesterday passed the House Criminal Justice Committee. The bill states that neither the State or County, municipalities or other political subdivision of the state shall prohibit or impede any State, County or local law enforcement agency from applying for entry or entering into agreement with the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement to participate in the federal 287(g) program.

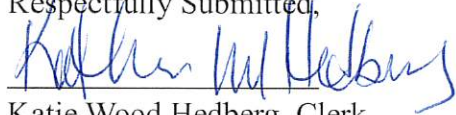
Commissioner McLeod stated that she wished they would have known this before they agreed on the budget or she would have pushed again to reduce the Sheriff's budget by the amount it costs to participate in the MOA. CA Libby stated that if the bill passes there is nothing the Commissioners can do with the contract. Commissioner McLeod asked CA Libby to check with legal counsel and ask if the Commissioners cannot prohibit the contract, do they have to fund it. Commissioner Piper stated that it seems dangerous to not adequately fund the Sheriff's Department. Commissioner McLeod stated that Sheriff Myers can make the decision to take up county funds for this, besides helping county residents. Commissioner Piper stated that county residents would suffer if the deputy positions were not funded; 88,000 residents would suffer. Commissioner McLeod stated that if Sheriff Myers is diverting the funds to this program, it would be her decision that would make the people suffer. Commissioner McLeod stated that the next thing the Sheriff's Department will ask for funds to do this on top of her normal duties.

The Commissioners further discussed the partnership with ICE in the State of New Hampshire and their concerns regarding it.

CA Libby reminded the Commissioners that there is no meeting next week.

10:04 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Katie Wood Hedberg', written over a horizontal line.

Katie Wood Hedberg, Clerk





# GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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3855 Dartmouth College Highway Box 1  
North Haverhill, NH 03774

April 24, 2025

TO: Employee Council  
FROM: Grafton County Commissioners  
SUBJECT: FY 2026 Requests

The Employee Council requested:

- 3.5% COLA.
- Meals available for all shifts
- Holidays to be paid in the 24hrs of the holiday (0000 hours to 2359 hours)
- Earned Time accrual rate increased to the same as department heads.

**The Commissioners would like to propose the following:**

- A COLA of 2%.
- The meal issue is one that we feel will need more discussion with the nursing home and the jail and does not relate to budgetary items. We are happy to continue this conversation but think it should be done outside of items that have a budgetary impact.
- Holidays to be paid we feel is another issue that should be addressed outside of the budget process. We would encourage the Employee Council to continue discussions with HR and the County Administrator to see if there can be a consensus on this issue.
- It is our understanding the HR Director Clough has given the Employee Council a proposal for increasing ET accruals. Please let us know if this is acceptable to you.

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## COMMISSIONERS

Wendy A. Piper  
Martha S. McLeod  
Katie Wood Hedberg

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