

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

Administration Building

North Haverhill, NH 03774

May 6th, 2025

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

OTHERS: Andre Sanders, Mariah Johnson, Angela Wheeler, Nursing Home Administrator Labore

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

Employee Council – Andre Sanders, Mariah Johnson & Angela Wheeler

A. Sanders introduced Angela Wheeler, from the Department of Corrections, and stated that she is the newest member of the Employee Council Board.

A. Sanders stated that the budget is tight but after speaking with the employees, they felt strongly about a 3% COLA, as a counter to the Commissioners 2% offer. He reported that the employees liked the increase in earned time and the discussions that will happen with the meals and holiday payout. Commissioner Hedberg stated that the Commissioners would need to discuss the counteroffer to the COLA in nonpublic session. The Employee Council members left the meeting.

MOTION: * 9:03 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.

* 9:07 AM Commissioner McLeod declared the meeting back in public session.

The Employee Council members returned.

Commissioner McLeod stated that the Commissioners appreciated the request of a 3% COLA and that it was lower than the original 3.5% request, but they do not feel they can do the 3%. She explained that the Commissioners made many cuts to the budget to get to their offer of 2% and they do not feel as though they have any other options left. The Commissioners are pleased to hear that the Employee Council is happy with the other items that have been offered. Commissioner McLeod stated that the Commissioners appreciate the work the employees do.

Commissioner Piper stated that CA Libby did an excellent job explaining why the budget is tight this year. She knows that the Commissioners always have a tight budget but this year it is the anticipated loss of revenue in ProShare, as well as the lack of surplus available. Both of which are items the Commissioners do not have any control over. The undesignated fund balance is supposed to be 8%-14% of the budget and this year it is at 5% and therefore they are not able to use as much to reduce the amount to be raised by taxes.

A. Wheeler stated that, with all due respect, she would like to iterate that the employees work hard every day to keep the county going and she feels that the Farm could be cut more, since they do not bring any revenue. It takes taxpayer funding to run the farm and she feels it would be better to cut that budget to fund the employees who do keep the county running on a daily basis.

Commissioner McLeod stated that she appreciates that and tends to agree with A. Wheeler. Commissioner Hedberg added that the Commissioners have gone line by line in the budget over the last several weeks to get the COLA up to a 2%, noting that they originally did not think 2% was possible. A. Wheeler stated that she would not be doing the employees any service if she did not make that statement. Commissioner Hedberg stated that A. Wheeler is doing what she is supposed to be doing. Commissioner Piper thanked A. Wheeler and stated that she has heard this argument before and agrees with Commissioner McLeod but would not say that she supports it. She added that the sustainability of the Farm has been discussed for years. Commissioner Hedberg added that this is not the final stage of the budget, the Employee Council is welcome to present their case to the Executive Committee. Asst. CA Elsholz asked if the Employee Council has ever gone to the Executive Committee. A. Sanders stated that they have never been invited or offered to meet with the Executive Committee. The Commissioners stated that they are welcome to meet with the Executive Committee and can be added to those meeting schedules.

NHA Labore arrived and gave the following report(* see attached)

1. Questions Re: May 2nd NHAC County/State Finance Review – Commissioner Hedberg stated that the federal government is looking to get rid of the bed tax. She asked how that affects the Nursing Home. NHA Labore stated it would affect them from a revenue standpoint. He stated that the County/State Finance meeting last month, Henry Lipman talked about what he is hearing from his peers. It could range from 2.5%-5% and H. Lipman feels it will be a 5% tax. NHA Labore stated that if it were to go down to 5%, the Nursing Home would lose revenue but feels they could withstand it, especially with their goal of keeping the census at the higher end. If it were to be cut to 2.5%, they would then have a problem.

NHA Labore then answered questions the Commissioners had from the May 2nd County/State Finance meeting. He stated that the Nursing Home Affiliate met on Friday after the Executive Committee meeting. He explained that if the state were to move down the road in looking at the PACE program, not all counties are set up to get a program like that up and running. If they were to look at the dual eligible program, which is another managed long-term service and supports program, the counties would lose their bed tax revenue or ProShare payments. He feels they, as counties, should be talking about taking more ownership over long term services and supports

programs. They should be advocating for more of a role in the eligibility process and terminations. NHA Labore explained that they would do that by reinstating their Human Services Departments. There are costs but the County would have greater control and ability to keep the revenue sources they have now, that they would lose if they look at those other options. Commissioner McLeod agreed and stated that right now the counties do not have a role, and the state is not investing in what is needed. She noted that the PACE programs would benefit the densely populated areas but not the rural areas. NHA Labore stated that he would like to see counties partner and create hubs to defray personnel costs. This would allow the counties to have a more hands-on approach with these programs. He stated that they have a better chance of getting systems in place and creating real opportunities for change. NHA Labore stated that as these discussions play out, that is what he will be advocating for. He will keep the Commissioners informed.

Commissioner Piper asked for a clarification regarding HB 547. She stated that a compromise was reached, that they would advocate for the 2% cap and it would give back the credit. She asked to clarify, if the agreement was that President Cathy Stacey would talk to the Senate and advocate for the 2% cap and credit. NHA Labore stated that was correct. If the Senate came back with a counter, that is where C. Stacey would come back to the Executive Committee and talk it through.

2. Proposed July 1st Medicaid Rate – NHA Labore stated that they are looking at getting a projection of their rate by next Wednesday. The budget is still in the works and this projection will be based on the overall rate calculation methodology that the department uses. It will have no reflection of a 3% rate cut at that point. He explained that as the budget plays out, whatever the rate is on July 1st, he believes that will then be reduced by the 3%.

Agenda Items

1. Commissioner McLeod asked if everyone had a chance to read the minutes from the 4/17/25, 4/22/25 and 4/24/25 meetings. Commissioner Piper had a couple of grammatical edits in the April 22nd meeting.

Commissioner Piper had the following clarification edit in the April 24th minutes:

- Page 2, Paragraph 5 – Commissioner Piper changed the sentence “She added that this is not a blind siding as this has been a temporary position the entire time” to “ She added that not funding this position is not a blind siding as this has been a temporary position the entire time”

Commissioner Hedberg stated that Commissioner McLeod was listed as attending via Teams when she was in person in the April 24th minutes and that was her only correction.

MOTION: Commissioner Piper moved to approve the minutes from the 4/17/25, 4/22/25 and 4/24/25 meetings as amended. Commissioner Hedberg seconded the motion and all were in favor.

2. The Commissioners signed check registers 1145-1149, 1151, 2025-04.25.2025.
3. Commissioner McLeod signed a 2023 Micro CDFA drawdown request for GRDC in the amount of \$4,128.00.
4. Jail Inspection Letter – Commissioner McLeod read and signed a letter that outlines the Commissioners’ inspection of the DoC.
5. Finalize 2026 Budget – Asst. CA Elsholz stated that the budget has been reduced slightly, from a 9.34% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes to a 9.14%. She stated that they missed removing the 4/5s nightwatchman position that was incorporated into the Department of Corrections budget.

Commissioner McLeod stated that she still feels they should reduce the Sheriff’s budget. She explained that they have heard in the news reports that the cost of doing this work with ICE is quite high, noting that it is roughly \$17,000 per person that is picked up, with some as high as \$30,000. She does not think county taxpayers should be funding the federal government’s work. Commissioner McLeod added that she supports the 2% COLA and thinks they overall did a good job going line by line and finding items they could put off or making cuts.

Commissioner Piper stated that she believes that there are still, respecting all viewpoints, a few areas of expenditures that could be reduced and she has talked about them. She added that she was very interested in what A. Wheeler brought up this morning regarding the farm. Commissioner Piper stated that she has seen the competition among constituents who are wanting funding and she appreciated what was said. She wished that generally, the county funding could be trimmed, through targeting. In the future she would like to have discussion about targeting. Commissioner Piper noted that she has heard strong arguments from the Delegation regarding the Farm and questioning if this is something that benefits enough of Grafton County residents. She thinks FM Libby has done a good job increasing revenue but this is an expense that they carry every year. They have an enormous problem with funding the care for the elderly and disabled because the disabled are included in Long Term Services and Supports. She wishes they could support community services for this population more robustly and wonders about that in targeting their social services budget.

Commissioner Hedberg stated that she felt they worked really hard to try and come to a majority consensus on the overall dollar amount despite a difference of opinions. She certainly hears Commissioner McLeod’s concerns about reducing the Sheriff’s budget, but her fear is that it will hurt other people, and not necessarily where they want to target the decrease because they cannot direct where the money is spent. She is afraid they will lose other services their citizens need. She does not want to change the finances at the moment, despite the grave concerns about what is happening. Commissioner Hedberg noted that the monies spent on outside organizations, through social service funding, are very helpful to their elderly and disabled populations.

Commissioner Piper stated that a previous Board of Commissioners agreed to give the new Farm Manager time to break even. Commissioner Hedberg stated that she thinks they are all looking in the same direction. Commissioner McLeod added that they wanted someone in place as a business manager and feels that FM Libby is managing that. They will see how this year ends but noted that the Farm Manager has worked to address some of the Commissioners' concerns.

MOTION: Commissioner Hedberg moved to approve the overall budget of \$57,657,147.00 with \$29,828,722.00 to be raised by taxes or a 9.14% increase. Commissioner Piper seconded the motion.

Discussion: Commissioner Piper stated that, with all due respect to her fellow Commissioners, for the reasons she has stated prior to today and today as well, she will be voting against the budget.

The Commissioners voted on the motion. Commissioner McLeod and Commissioner Hedberg were in favor, Commissioner Piper was opposed. With the vote being two (2) in favor and one (1) in opposition, the motion passes.

Courthouse Building Update – Commissioner Hedberg stated that the Courthouse Building Committee had a meeting with the architects last Monday. The architects came forward with more details of space proposals. Those proposals had been distributed to all department heads prior to the meeting so they could come back with any concerns. Supt. Oakes had found several small things that he wanted addressed. Commissioner Hedberg stated that on May 19th, they will meet again to incorporate the small changes that were made. They hope to still be on the timeline to have a formal presentation and Commissioner vote on the project. Commissioner McLeod asked when that formal presentation would be. Commissioner Hedberg stated that the final report will be done within the first two (2) weeks of June.

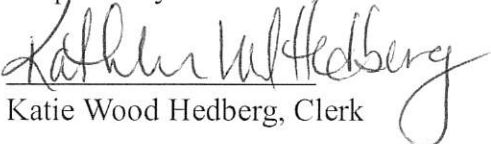
Commissioner Hedberg then reviewed the proposed floor plans with the Commissioners.

Commissioner's Issues:

1. Commissioner Piper stated that at the NHAC meeting, the biggest discussion was around HB547. A compromise was reached and there was agreement on it.

10:47 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,


Katie Wood Hedberg, Clerk

Grafton County Nursing Home Commissioner's Report: May 6, 2025

Census

Medicare: 6
NH Medicaid: 71 (9 Pending)
VT. Medicaid: 18 (1 Pending)
VA: 7
Hospice: 1
Private: 17
Total Census: 120

FY '25 Budgeted Census

Medicare: 3
NH Medicaid: 69
VT. Medicaid: 20
VA: 7
Hospice: 0
Private: 17
Budgeted Census: 116

Monthly Admissions/Discharges

Admissions: 6
Deceased Residents: 5
Discharges: 2

Other Topics:

- 1) Questions Re: May 2nd NHAC County/State Finance Review
- 2) Proposed July 1st Medicaid Rate