

GRAFTON COUNTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUDGET MEETING

Administration Building

North Haverhill, NH 03774

June 9, 2025

PRESENT: Reps. Baldwin, Bolton, Bjelobrk, Franz, Oppel, Sellers, Spahr, Stringham, and Sykes. Commissioner Piper – via Teams, Commissioner McLeod, Commissioner Hedberg, County Administrator Libby, Assistant County Administrator Elsholz, and Administrative Assistant Norcross.

OTHERS PRESENT: Register Monahan, DoC Superintendent Lethbridge, Farm Manager Libby, Sally Browne

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

Department of Corrections – Superintendent Lethbridge

Revenue

Federal Inmates - Supt. Lethbridge stated that he has reduced the number of anticipated federal inmates based on the actual numbers they are seeing. He said that it is rare for Grafton County to be asked to hold a federal inmate, noting that their only contract is with the Federal Marshal's Service.

Community Corrections – Supt. Lethbridge stated that the \$15,000 increase in this revenue is due to their projections regarding law changes related to failures to appear and law violations while out on bond or pretrial release. The law has become more restrictive, and they anticipate holding more inmates. They also expect that more inmates will be placed on electronic monitoring upon release.

Rep. Oppel asked about Community Corrections. Supt. Lethbridge explained that Community Corrections is a branch of the Department of Corrections that works with the court system. He stated that if the Judge releases someone from the DOC pending their trial, they can place that person on pretrial services, where DOC officers check on them weekly. In addition, if someone is sentenced to the DoC and is low risk to the community, they can be put out on Electronic Monitoring or house arrest for low-level offenders. The DoC officers also go to their homes to conduct checks, much like probation and parole officers.

Rep. Bolton stated that regarding the Sheriff who wants to obtain certification for one of their deputies to be trained with ICE, he asked if those people will be held at the DoC as well. Supt. Lethbridge explained that a bill has passed and will take effect on January 1st. He stated that his understanding is that if they are holding someone on a New Hampshire state charge that also has an immigration detainer, they will be obligated to hold them 48 hours until ICE can pick them up. They are not obligated to accept new arrivals solely on the basis of an immigration detainer. Supt. Lethbridge stated that he is comfortable with that and it should not be a large increase for them because they are short-term holds that would be held in intake and would be isolated from

any other inmate but noted that if they have been in their facility for some time on a New Hampshire charge, they should be acclimated.

Rep. Sykes stated that the Community Corrections revenue is increasing based on anticipated RSAs. He asked if the Governor had signed them. Supt. Lethbridge explained that one new law they are mainly basing the increase on is a bill that took effect this past January, and they are seeing increases as a result.

B. Expenses

Department of Corrections

Contract Services – Supt. Lethbridge explained that with the addition of transport in custody officers, he would like to add psychological evaluations to the hiring process, as these officers carry firearms. This is very common in policing, and he feels they should hold themselves to a similar standard in Corrections.

Supt. Lethbridge noted an increase in their Jail Management System software, which had previously been supplied by the vendor that handles the phones in the jail. He explained that the FCC has issued a new rule applicable to Correctional Facilities that restricts the amount companies can charge for inmate communications and prevents any kind of commission from being paid to the Jails. The DoC previously had their Jail Management System software paid for by IC Solutions, who handles their phones, as a commission to the jail, but that is now prohibited.

Supt. Lethbridge stated that the vast majority of the increase is salary-related and there are no new positions.

Education and Training – Supt. Lethbridge stated that the taser contract was previously funded through ARPA and is now being incorporated into the budget, which is why this line shows an increase.

Rep. Franz stated that all expenses seem to be up. Supt. Lethbridge explained that all salary lines are up, and many of the other increases they see are due to the anticipated increase in inmate population. Commissioner McLeod added that with the change in bail reform, they are anticipating seeing an increase in inmate population.

Rep. Bolton asked why the consultant line has decreased by \$5,000. Supt. Lethbridge explained that they tried to identify as many items as possible in their budget that could be funded through Opioid Abatement Funds, and this line was one of those that was removed to be funded through those funds.

Rep. Stringham asked how many additional staff would be needed if the DoC were closer to a full census. Supt. Lethbridge stated that last month, they had an average daily census of 82. Their bed count is 160 beds. He stated that the key thing to remember is that a jail is not a hotel, and by the time they hit 80% capacity, they are full because he has housing units for certain

classifications, and he cannot mix those inmates. He stated that 120 is about where they would be full due to where they can house inmates. He stated that he would like to get three (3) more officers, noting that some positions were cut when they raised salaries, and said that this was a significant turnaround for the facility. They have increased their staffing numbers, but if they were to get to that census of 120, they would need roughly 3-4 more officers. Supt. Lethbridge explained that one (1) officer can handle a housing unit, and whether that unit is full or empty, they have to staff it. Rep. Stringham stated that in the budget notes, it states that the Commissioners did not fund a reinstated position, and asked Supt. Lethbridge to explain. Supt. Lethbridge stated that four (4) positions were previously cut from the budget to fund the salary increases. Last year, the Commissioners funded the reinstatement of one (1) of those positions. His plan is to ask for one (1) more each year but this year that was not able to happen. He will ask again next year.

Rep. Spahr asked about the increase in the health insurance and if they are doing anything to look at best practices. Supt. Lethbridge explained that they have been doing well with staffing. More positions filled are a part of the reason their health insurance increased. Commissioner McLeod noted that they offered a higher deductible plan, and many employees took advantage of that, which helped with costs. CA Libby stated that their average increase for health insurance is 6.8%, noting that this is not a large increase overall when compared to health insurance, and that last year their GMR was 25%. They conducted extensive research last year to develop financially feasible insurance plans. When they received the rates from Health Trust this year, they felt that was the best they could do. CA Libby also noted that the County has had very high claims rates the last few years. Anthem Direct and School Care both declined to provide a quote to the County based on their claims rates.

Community Corrections

Rep. Oppel asked about the Community Corrections line. Supt. Lethbridge explained that this is what funds the Community Corrections unit, which consists of officers who check on individuals on pretrial release or under electronic monitoring. This budget includes salaries and all associated costs for that department. He stated that this unit has a Lieutenant, a Sergeant, and two (2) Officers. There is one (1) more officer who works with both checking on inmates as well as handling the Operation Impact program that visits the schools.

Rep. Oppel asked if the Opioid Abatement Funds are reflected anywhere in the budget. CA Libby explained that the Opioid Abatement Fund is a fund over which the Commissioners have discretion in authorizing expenditures; therefore, it is not reflected in the budget. She stated that she can provide a list of what has been spent and what has been authorized to be spent out of those funds.

Rep. Bjelobrk asked how many individuals are in the Community Corrections program. Supt. Lethbridge stated that last month, there were twenty-nine (29).

Medical Dental/Ambulance – Rep. Sellers asked about the increase. Supt. Lethbridge stated that this covers all of the out-of-facility costs. It is more expensive now due to inflation, and some of the increase is attributed to the anticipated rise in the census. Supt. Lethbridge stated that the

statutory changes took place this January and they are trying to project out eighteen (18) months the best they can.

Register Monahan

Revenue

Register Monahan stated that last year, Rep. Rochefort had questioned her about raising revenue because, at the state level, they had heard that deeds would remain flat. She stated that she countered by stating that Grafton County was about to explode in development. She stated that they are growing and generating revenue, whether it is a good or bad action. She explained that the Registry of Deeds receives a 4% commission on the LCHIP fee and the real estate transfer tax for certain documents.

Rep. Sellers asked if revenue is up because of more business or an increase in pricing. Register Monahan stated that it is both.

Rep. Oppel stated that, according to the estimates on the House side, they anticipate the real estate transfer tax remaining flat for FY2026. He noted that Register Monahan is projecting a different outcome for Grafton County. Register Monahan stated that the key will be the generational land coming out of current use. She noted that the growth in the south is flatter, and things are turning around in Grafton County, especially with the Dartmouth Hitchcock population. The interns are here for a year or two (2), and there is a lot of transition that happens in Lebanon and Hanover.

Rep. Franz asked about tapestry. Register Monahan explained that tapestry is the system Fidlar designed for the title industry. The benefit to the title industry is that they can view 350 counties in the same system without logging in and out. She stated that the system is expensive for them, but they pass the cost down to their clients. The County makes good money and does not have to do anything; it is just a different way to access the database.

Online Services – Register Monahan stated that when they transitioned, most professional accounts wanted Laredo. Everyone signed up in January, so that is when they see the bulk of the revenue.

Rep. Sykes read an article about the increase in quick claim deed fraud and asked if we are informing our citizens about it and what actions they should take. Register Monahan stated that she has a free program that is available, and the information is on both of their websites.

Expense

Staffing – Register Monahan stated that last year, her deputy of 34 years retired really quickly, and this took her by surprise. She came in under budget last year because of the loss of that employee. She noted that she has always said that when her two (2) long term employees retire, she will need two (2) people to replace each one. Register Monahan stated that she thinks she needs to hire another deputy. They were unsure how everyone in the office would be able to

handle the workload, and she decided to hold with the four (4) employees they had and did not replace the position of her employee who retired. Register Monahan stated that they are a family and respect each other. She did not want to throw another entity until they were all running smoothly, and she was confident that everyone could handle what they were given. She stated that they are at that point now, but also noted that they are all at the same age and the responsible thing for her to do is bring in another deputy, as in a few years, they will not have any institutional knowledge in the office. Register Monahan stated that the Commissioners talk about keeping people in their homes, and that is what her staff does. They counsel people and direct them on their financial issues. Register Monahan stated that she cannot hire a person who has never bought a house or understands subdivisions, as they are counseling people every day. She stated that she needs to start thinking about bringing in a person to give them a long learning curve to understand her office.

Education and Conference – Register Monahan increased this line for her and her staff to attend the NHAC conference. She noted that she no longer travels to out-of-state conferences, as she does not see the value in doing so when everything is online.

Legal Fees – Register Monahan stated that last year her budget was reduced and she did not respond to the Commissioners' request to cut another 1.5% because she had already reduced her budget by not replacing the person who retired. She stated that she agreed to give up her legal line. She explained that she does, on occasion, need to go to court for legal issues. She has asked the Commissioners and Administration, both in writing and in person, to investigate the legal definition and clarify what surcharge means for her equipment. She stated that it had been abused by administrations in the past, and her request was denied. She doesn't know if she will ask for legal help and be rejected.

Rep. Oppel asked if she is expecting to spend the rest of their funding for office supplies in the last quarter, where they are only halfway expended through nine (9) months. Register Monahan stated that, regarding her printing, binding, and books line, this is used for subscriptions and has been a line she uses to print documents. She also stated that they purchase the bulk of their paper and envelopes in June, so they do not store them during the winter months. Rep. Oppel suggested that they may be able to use some of those funds that are not fully expended for the legal line.

Travel Expense – Register Monahan noted an increase in this line and stated that the Register of Deeds Affiliate is now meeting in person.

Computer Software – Register Monahan stated that this line is based on volume, and therefore, she has to estimate this line at the worst-case scenario.

Surcharge – Register Monahan stated that there are disagreements at the Register of Deeds Affiliate on this. Some Commissioners have Registers put software contracts under surcharge. She feels that software contracts are a general operating expense, and it is not sustainable if they try to use the entire surcharge each year. She stated that she would like to replace the sprinkler system with a non-aqueous system, but it has not progressed because of the term 'equipment' attached. She stated that they have put a lot of work into the vault, and she would invite anyone who wants to see the work that has been done. Register Monahan stated that she wants to explore

uses for equipment that would enhance the physical condition of the records, as the next step is to implement environmental controls, and that is why she has requested a legal opinion.

Misc Expense – Register Monahan stated that she likes to keep \$5,000 in this line in the event she needs to replace a piece of equipment.

Farm Manager Libby

Revenue

FM Libby stated that the projected revenue has increased by \$20,000. He noted that they are trying to increase the livestock they sell, noting that they sell fresh cows, heifers, and piglets.

Rep. Sellers asked what is included in the miscellaneous farm revenue. FM Libby stated that they have begun accepting heifers for rent. The County charges other farmers to keep their heifers when they are not out to pasture, and that revenue is included in this line. He noted that the farm produces enough feed for their own animals and to feed the extras as well. He stated that they also receive revenue for items they sell, items they no longer need. He was tasked to clean up the farm and get rid of items they no longer needed.

Expenses

FM Libby reported a slight overall decrease in expenses. He explained that he had decided to eliminate the chickens, as they were not generating a profit from them or their eggs. Rep. Oppel asked if the decision was strictly financial or if it was in part due to the avian flu. FM Libby stated that their chickens were separated, and therefore he did not worry about avian flu with them as much. However, he noted concerns with the cow herd and the pigeons on the property.

Rep. Sellers stated that the overall expenses are \$665,000, and the income is \$230,000 less than that. He asked how they could turn that around or break even. FM Libby stated that since October, they have made progress. The budgeted gap is around \$250,000, and he projects that the actual expenses will be less than that. He hopes that FY26 will come in even closer to closing that gap.

Rep. Spahr asked where the value is on the farm. FM Libby stated that historically, the value has been in the inmates being productive. They also train inmates while they work on the farm to equip them with skills they can utilize once they are released. He added that the farm also partners with the UNH Extension, and there are numerous benefits.

Rep. Oppel stated that the revenue was much better than expected, but everything else seems flat, and he is curious what FM Libby sees in changes that he feels can help him break even. FM Libby stated that his experience is in business and personnel management. They have done a good job trying to sell livestock, and they hope the production of milk will be higher. He stated that the things they cannot control that worry him are the tariffs. While they do not affect them yet, the uncertainty of milk prices and costs worry him.

Rep. Sykes stated that there was a significant effort to improve the genetics of the herd and asked about their progress. FM Libby stated that it is outside his expertise, and B. White handles that exclusively. He stated that they care about the genetics of the herd, but they are not going to spend \$10,000 to have the top bull in the country. They will look to improve genetics at a lower cost, but noted that the genetics are still very good.

Rep. Franz asked how they are going to double the sale of produce. FM Libby explained that last year, they had a crop failure and had no potatoes. The gardens that they sell produce from at the farm stand also had weed issues, and that will not happen this year.

Rep. Bjelobrk asked why the County pays real estate taxes. CA Libby stated that the County pays taxes on the farm buildings and acreage that is considered farmland. She stated that they do not pay taxes on any other property here.

Rep. Bolton asked why the County cannot look into hops and hemp. There are many breweries that would be interested in purchasing from the County. Rep. Sykes asked what is keeping FM Libby from doing hops. FM Libby stated that it would be a lack of knowledge, but he can look into it. He stated that they look at what brings the best value to their land. He considered not planting as much feed corn and instead raising other crops or partnering with other farmers, but it would not be as profitable as raising feed corn. Rep. Sykes asked if the UNH Extension could analyze what other crops would be profitable.

Rep. Sellers stated that the Town of Haverhill is asking for \$13,000 in taxes on the Farm that is losing money. He stated that they need to examine legislation to prevent towns from taxing County Farms. CA Libby stated that she would follow up with the Town of Haverhill to get more information as to why they tax the Farm.

Social Services and Grafton County Economic Development Council – Commissioners McLeod, Piper and Hedberg

GRDC

Commissioner McLeod stated that the County funds \$40,000 to GRDC. She noted that the GRDC provides the Commissioners with quarterly updates on the work being done throughout the County. Rep. Sykes stated that they have had GRDC come and visit the Executive Committee to provide updates in the past, but that has not been done recently.

Rep. Oppel stated that he hoped they could have them in soon. He is wondering how much awareness there is around the County of what GRDC is doing, particularly in the childcare area, as it is a problem across the state, not just Grafton County. He would love to understand what the County could do, specifically what the GRDC could do, to increase awareness of the opportunities available. Commissioner McLeod noted that GRDC has visited all the family-owned childcare businesses in the North Country. Rep. Oppel stated that he would like to sit down with GRDC and discuss the full scope of programs and what they are doing to raise awareness of those programs. CA Libby stated that she can schedule Anne Duncan Cooley to attend the September Executive Committee meeting and provide an overall presentation.

Social Services

Rep. Sellers asked why Lakes Region Mental Health Center and West Central Behavioral Health are reduced when they are having more mental health problems. Commissioner McLeod explained that the Commissioners have looked at how they have funded agencies over the years. She stated that there are agencies doing the same amount of work for the same number of people, but are getting different amounts of funding. The Commissioners attempted to standardize funding more closely based on organizational types and the number of people they serve. She noted that they have also reviewed the application and streamlined the process, as well as standardized the funding. Commissioner McLeod noted that they also looked into Opioid Abatement funding and if any of these agencies could receive funding through that as well.

Rep. Sellers stated that Visions is up \$10,000 and Tri County Cap went up \$13,000. Commissioner McLeod stated that these agencies are for housing and are critical services. CA Libby explained that Tri County Cap put in one (1) application for all of their programs, and it is all combined into one (1) account. She stated that they are not receiving an increase; it is just all combined into one budget. Commissioner McLeod noted that, as part of standardizing their funding, the Commissioners felt the increase to the Visions for Creative Housing was appropriate. Commissioner Piper stated that Visions is located in her district, and she appreciates the work spearheaded by Commissioner McLeod to streamline this process. She is not sure in her district with West Central and how booming that is, some agencies have less funding, and some have been increased. She stated that she did not vote for this budget, and she is very pleased to see the hard questions being asked, especially regarding the County, as government grows exponentially. She is extremely proud of Grafton County and the work done by the administrative staff and department heads, but they need to review some of these expenditures for refinement. She stated that Visions for Creative Housing is not a housing application; it is long-term services and supports. This is a community for individuals with developmental disabilities. Commissioner Piper stated that she was the one who first interviewed their President, and she asked, in terms of funding, if there were individuals in their organization who would have to be in the Nursing Home if this were not funded. At that time, there was an individual who would have required 24-hour care. Commissioner Piper stated that she questions whether this amount of funding is always necessary for all of these agencies. Rep. Sykes stated that he is happy if Commissioner Piper has explanations to give, but he is not ready for her views on the budget at this time. Commissioner Piper stated that she wished she had been addressed more respectfully and would reserve her comments for the deliberative sessions of the Executive Committee. She is addressing Visions for Creative Housing and did not speak before on GRDC. She noted that she was responsible for two (2) 5% cuts to GRDC in the past. This was the first time she voted against the budget, and she will discuss that later. She stated that Visions needs to be looked at more closely, as do all of the agencies. Rep. Hedberg stated that she read through every application and annual report from the agencies, noting that they tried to look at the number of people in Grafton County who were being served.

Rep. Oppel asked why Headrest was zeroed out. Rep. Sykes stated that the Medical Director recently resigned because he did not feel they were fulfilling their mission. The city feels that it is not fulfilling its mission as well and is looking at steps to take to recover funding. There are

important concerns about the organization. CA Libby stated that Headrest did not apply for funding.

Rep. Franz asked CA Libby why the funding through nine (9) months is under expended for most agencies. CA Libby explained that many agencies had not submitted their 3rd quarter requests before these numbers were run. She stated that all of this funding will likely be expended. It is rare for them not to receive the full funding requests. She stated that most of these figures for the nine (9) months are more like six (6) month figures.

Rep. Stringham asked why Responders Together was zeroed out. Commissioner McLeod stated that the Commissioners were unable to determine how to fit them into their funding. She noted that the application did not provide them with all the necessary information either.

Rep. Sellers asked if there is more room in the budget to reduce. Commissioner McLeod stated that they made cuts that amounted to roughly \$1 million to reduce the budget. She stated that at the time, they only had 6-month figures, and now the Executive Committee has 9-month figures. Commissioner Hedberg stated that, looking at the budget as a whole, new positions were not funded. Regarding the Social Services budget, many of these services enable people to remain in their homes, thereby saving the County money by avoiding the need for nursing home or correctional facility placement. Commissioner Piper stated that the question of whether there are areas of the budget that can be cut is, of course, that is a matter for the Executive Committee. She has already suggested some places and stated that she respectfully disagrees with the budget. She thinks they should look at the things she has already mentioned. She knows that she and Rep. Stringham tried to work on this a few years ago. She stated that she appreciates the work of Grafton County employees, but they must recognize that there is usually a 5% increase every year. For those making \$60,000, it is not much, but still more than those in the private sector. When they look at the larger department head salaries, they are receiving \$7,000 increases. She stated that she and Rep. Stringham recognized this several years ago and attempted to revise the way increases are given, but have not been able to do so.

Rep. Oppel asked if they have done a comparison on what Grafton County is paying compared to others. He wonders if they have done a study and, if so, how recent it is. He stated that the majority of expenditures are personnel. A 2% COLA is included, and the health insurance increase is 6.8%. Rep. Oppel asked if they could be told what that represents in terms of a dollar amount and what percentage of the budget it represents. CA Libby stated that a wage study was done roughly four (4) years ago, and she would send those figures to the Executive Committee.

Commissioner Piper stated that as an officer to the NHAC, she wanted to respond to a broader question. They conduct wage studies to ensure the County is at market value, thereby attracting top talent. As the President of the NHAC, she had asked that the County salaries be compared to one another and stated that not everyone does the same thing. The situation that they have at Grafton County is a step and grade system, which is a 3% increase plus a COLA. She stated that this becomes problematic when the CPI is 3%. Not all counties follow the same approach when it comes to wage increases, and she would be happy to discuss this further.

Rep. Sykes stated that he has asked for an FTE spreadsheet in the past that shows, from budget year to budget year, the number of FTEs by department so that they can track these questions. CA Libby stated that they do not track that type of information. She stated that HR has that information for the Nursing Home and the Department of Corrections. Rep. Sykes stated that he is used to seeing an accounting of employees or FTE count. If they could see the history of FTE count, that would allow them to have a more informed decision process. He suggested that they go back one (1) year for that information and then keep that information going forward.

Rep. Oppel asked how many employees are covered under collective bargaining agreements. CA Libby stated that she can get that information.

Commissioner McLeod stated that, regarding the step increase received, roughly 100 employees are at the maximum. She stated that the COLA is a separate thing that is negotiated with the employee council and unions. It is not accurate to say every employee gets a 5% increase. She also noted that they are getting back to full staffing. The Nursing Home census was down, as well as the DoC, with bail reform. They are now seeing those increases and noted that one of the biggest challenges they have is the Maintenance Department. Skilled maintenance employees with licenses are paid significantly less than they would in the private sector.

Rep. Sellers stated that it is not just the COLA and step increase, but also retirement and health insurance increases. He stated that they need to put the whole package together to get the full picture of the total overall increase for the employees.

Commissioner Piper appreciated Commissioner McLeod's comment that these are separate increases. She argues that they are often combined and frequently exceed the CPI, and they must acknowledge that this represents a philosophical difference. She also wanted to point out that it is not a small number of people who receive a step increase; it is the opposite. 95% of county employees receive the step increase.

Rep. Franz asked to clarify that step increases are in the employee policy, the COLA is not. CA Libby stated that was correct. The COLA is negotiated. Rep. Franz asked if the County pays 100% for health insurance. CA Libby stated that the County does not pay 100%. She explained that there are two (2) plans. Certain employees pay 20%, 15%, or 10% depending on what plan they have and what bargaining units they belong to. CA Libby stated that step increases are done on employee anniversary dates, and they are spread out throughout the year. She explained that some employees might get a COLA in July and their step increase in the second half of the year. Step increases are not calculated for the full year.

Rep. Sellers stated that the Commissioners are negotiating the COLA, but it is on the Delegation to pay it. They have no say over that money. Rep. Sykes stated that they can discuss that offline. Commissioner McLeod noted that they do have negotiating teams. CA Libby explained that the Delegation has the final say on the budget, but they cannot change the existing collective bargaining agreement. She stated that they have not negotiated an agreement with the Teamsters going forward. If there are financial implications for the upcoming budget, it will need to go to the Delegation for their approval.

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

Respectfully Submitted,


Heather Baldwin, Clerk