

## GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING

Administration Building

North Haverhill, NH 03774

April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026

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

OTHERS: Nick De Mayo – via Teams

Commissioner McLeod called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM.

### Budget Deliberations

CA Libby reviewed the budget comparisons with the Commissioners. She noted a big decrease in the nursing home revenue of \$465,232.00. She stated that after an early look at the surplus, she thinks they will be able to use \$1.7 in surplus to offset taxes, which is was used in the current year. CA Libby explained that operating revenues are flat, with a .37% increase, and the expenditures are up 10.16%. This is driving the 18.9% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes as a starting point. The total budget requests are \$63,514,035,00, an increase of \$5,856,865.00, which is the 10.16% increase.

CA Libby stated that NHA Labore decided to decrease the ProShare payment revenue by roughly \$1 million because the last two (2) years they have not done that, and what they received for ProShare payments has been below what was budgeted. CA Libby stated that she thinks this year's Proshare payment will be higher than last year, and she also thinks this year's payment will be their new normal, but they do not know what that is yet. She hopes to know what that payment will be in the next couple of weeks, and they can adjust that point.

Commissioner Hedberg noted for members of the public online that this is a starting point with the budget and not where they will end up. She asked CA Libby when they will have a ProShare payment estimate. CA Libby stated they hope to have the estimate by the end of the month.

Commissioner Hedberg stated that with the information given to the Commissioners for health insurance, if they could get input from the employees and they agreed to it, she would be in favor of switching health insurance companies. For the savings and having similar plans, it would be a worthwhile thing to do. Commissioner Piper stated that she agrees that it is something to put on the table. Commissioner McLeod agreed as well. CA Libby noted that they are still negotiating with the union.

### Social Services

CA Libby stated she heard from Families Flourish Northeast, and they stated that with these funds (and some match funds from NHCF), they will be able to start serving the community by the end of 2026. The physical location itself will open in Summer 2027. The Commissioners agreed not to fund this program at this time, as they are not serving clients yet.

## Department of Corrections

Commissioner McLeod stated that one (1) of the large increases in this budget is reinstating two (2) full-time correctional officer positions and the request for two (2) new night nurse positions. Commissioner Piper asked if the rest of the increase was due to the increased overtime. CA Libby noted that there are significant increases in overtime in all of the line items. Commissioner McLeod asked which is more expensive, two (2) new correctional positions or the increase in overtime. Commissioner McLeod suggested asking Supt. Lethbridge, what he could do if they were to offer only one (1) of the two (2) requested new officer positions. Commissioner Piper stated that this is Supt. Lethbridge's department, and she wonders if they should level fund these lines and ask him to go from there. Commissioner Hedberg added that there will be increases in the budget due to the increased census. The case they made for the additional medical personnel will save money on overtime costs and medical costs.

Commissioner Piper stated that Supt. Lethbridge made a thorough case for everything he asked for, but if they ask him to come back and defend his requests, he will make the same thorough argument. Commissioner McLeod suggested asking Supt. Lethbridge, what he could do with one (1) full-time officer in the maximum security unit instead of two (2). Commissioner Piper stated that it seems to her that the nighttime nurses are more beneficial to everyone. She wonders about starting with not funding the reinstated positions that were removed from a prior budget.

Commissioner McLeod noted that they have a 20% increase in inmate populations, and there is a need to keep their officers safe. Commissioner Hedberg suggested having a nonpublic session with Supt. Lethbridge, regarding security, as he had mentioned security issues, but did not want to discuss them in a public session. The Commissioners also agreed to ask Supt. Lethbridge to talk with his nursing staff about the request for new positions and what they could make work.

CA Libby added that this year's budget is going through a lot. She explained that the inmate population increased rapidly from July to November but has flatlined since then. She stated that they are now preparing the budget, looking at what happened from July to November and budgeting for the worst-case scenario. She feels they need to step back, see if this year was an anomaly, and if November – March is their new normal. CA Libby stated that there is an increase in population, but it is not 20%. She also noted that the proposed medical line has an astronomical increase, and they likely will not spend that amount in the current fiscal year. She has been having Supt. Lethbridge provide an average daily population for the whole year. The average daily population as of the end of February was 98. In the existing budget, they budgeted for 100. The population exploded in the beginning of the year but has slowed down since November. CA Libby stated that she thinks they need to think more about the strategy going forward and what is actually needed.

Commissioner McLeod feels Supt. Lethbridge needs to go through these numbers again. Commissioner Hedberg noted that some figures associated with inmate population have doubled in his proposed budget from last year, and even if the population increase did reach the 20% increase that they have budgeted for, these line items should only increase by 20% as well.

Commissioner Piper stated that these wish list budgets that come in initially have the department head's best foot put forward, and that is what Supt. Lethbridge has done. They can ask Supt. Lethbridge about these things and challenge him, but in the interest of time, the County Administrator is their professional budgeter, and they would not have known some of this if CA Libby hadn't pointed out that she believes this is overbudgeting. She is more interested in what CA Libby and the nursing staff at the DoC have to say.

Commissioner Hedberg stated that she would like to hear more specifics on security from Supt. Lethbridge. She noted that some of the costs in the DoC budget will be possibly funded through Opioid Abatement Funds, roughly \$37,000.

### Capital Outlay Requests

Commissioner Piper stated that the Nursing Home has its own capital reserve, but the Department of Corrections does not, and therefore, this is taxpayer-funded. She noted that Supt. Lethbridge had stated that the dryer and dishwasher requests in his capital requests were supported by maintenance. Commissioner McLeod stated that these are operational needs. CA Libby stated that ARPA interest and LATCF funds are still available, and if these are needed operational costs, they should look at funding them through these other sources, as they have done in the past. She noted that these funds will be gone eventually, and building in pieces of the capital requests is a good idea, rather than zeroing out the capital requests.

Commissioner Piper stated that the question keeps coming up as to why there is no capital budget for the courthouse, and she wanted to note that the request has been brought up, but it has been declined every time. She stated that they are either going to pay for it here or in the capital budget, but either way, they will have to pay for it.

The Commissioners agreed to have Supt. Lethbridge in next Thursday to further discuss his budget

### Nursing Home

#### *Revenue*

Commissioner Hedberg noted concerns about the federal government and Medicaid cuts over the next few years. They were looking at decreasing the portion that the federal government will pay. The Commissioners further discussed these concerns and agreed to have NHA Labore come in and further discuss the payor mix and rates.

#### *Nursing Home Admin*

CA Libby noted that some of the large increases in this budget are being driven by allocations from other departments, and that is out of NHA Labore's control.

#### *Nursing*

CA Libby stated that the nursing budget has a \$1.9 million increase, noting that the LNA line is up \$870,000, but the contract nursing line is only down \$100,000. Commissioner Piper asked if this was due to the COLA and step increases. CA Libby stated that there are no new positions, and she feels they need more explanation because the numbers do not make sense. Even if they were to double the current six (6) month numbers and add a COLA, the proposed budget is still significantly more. CA Libby explained that the problem is that the nursing home does not budget for positions. They budget for what halfway through the current year is. What they have seen happen over the last few years is that their staffing levels dipped so low, and the nursing home kept budgeting for those low numbers. Now that we have hired our own staff, the nursing home is trying to play catch-up in the budget to pay for those positions. CA Libby stated that, in her opinion, this is not how they should budget. Commissioner Hedberg asked how the nursing home budgets for the vacant positions that are shown in the monthly HR reports. CA Libby stated that they do not budget for them at the nursing home. She explained that the Department of Corrections budgets for every FTE that is approved in the budget.

Commissioner Piper asked if they could ask NHA Labore to work with the Finance Director to change that. CA Libby stated that they could ask how the nursing home goes about budgeting, see what they say, and then ask them that question. She also explained that there are enormous increases in retirement and health insurance. The retirement is driven by the increase in wages, and when she ran the numbers based on the current wages, with the increases, it still does not add up to the amount that has been budgeted. CA Libby stated that they do not pay retirement contributions on part-time or per-diem staff, and it appears that they may be budgeted for those positions. The Commissioners agreed to ask for more realistic numbers.

Reiki for Residents – Commissioner Hedberg said this could be helpful for patients with dementia, but it is \$8,000. Commissioner Piper stated that members of the public have stated they would rather see residents get this service than the county paying to provide it for the staff. Members of the public would like to know that the nursing home is going the extra mile for their elderly family members and not the staff. Commissioner McLeod noted that it is also providing a calming outlet for staff. Commissioner Piper stated that she is not unsympathetic to that, but she does believe there are always budgeted means to provide staff support.

Commissioner Piper stated that she wanted to go back to the discussion on the difference in budgeting for the nursing home. She stated that this is an ongoing problem and asked if they are going to bring NHA Labore in, can they bring the Finance Director in as well to justify this method of budgeting? She stated that they all have their jobs to do, and this is not the Commissioners' job. She stated that it would be nice to be all on the same page. CA Libby explained that it would be NHA Labore's role as the department head. If he needs to talk about how budgeting is done with his staff, that is his job and not the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Piper asked who NHA Labore's boss is, and CA Libby stated that she was. Commissioner Piper stated, respectfully, if there has been a long standing challenge as there has been in the past, she thinks this should be resolved if it is causing problems when the Commissioners are preparing the budget. She added that she has been here long enough to understand that some department heads are not as good at their job as the Commissioners think they are, and they end up paying for that through inefficiencies. She does not understand why this inefficient method of budgeting is not being corrected. Commissioner Piper stated that she is

not NHA Labore's boss, and she feels this falls on the County Administrator to have that conversation. If CA Libby needs the help of the Board, they are the ones elected to have oversight, and she wants to know why they are letting these things go. This is a challenge CA Libby has to deal with every year, and she is trying to support her. If the nursing home were to use what appears to be an incorrect method of budgeting, which is causing the Commissioners to have a 20-minute conversation and frustration for CA Libby, all she is asking for is a conversation with NHA Labore about making the budget more accurate. She has extreme trust in CA Libby's budgeting and takes her word as gold. CA Libby stated that a conversation with NHA Labore on how these numbers are developed is a fair conversation to have.

### *Housekeeping*

Commissioner McLeod stated that this budget has an additional temporary 40 hours a week, starting January 1<sup>st</sup>, due to the retirement of two (2) long-term employees. CA Libby noted that this total line increase is not due to only that position. She stated that this line includes COLAs and step increases as well. She stated that she will put together a spreadsheet of all new positions and associated costs as she does every year for the Commissioners to review.

### *Capital Reserve*

Commissioner McLeod noted that her only concern about the capital reserve requests is while the money is there for these requests, she worries about not leaving much left in the reserve. She stated that she does not foresee a large ProShare payment in the future to help build this reserve back up.

### Capital Outlay

The Commissioners reviewed the various departments' capital outlay requests. Commissioner McLeod asked if the department heads could prioritize their requests.

### Budget Discussions

Commissioner Hedberg stated that a large piece of the increase in the County Attorney's budget is due to the Investigator position. This position was originally funded through ARPA and has been slowly worked into the budget over the last few years, noting that last year it was split 50/50. She stated that this is not a new position; it has been funded separately, but since ARPA funds are no longer available, it is being fully incorporated into their budget.

Commissioner Hedberg also noted that there are increases in education lines and travel lines in many departments due to Grafton County hosting this year's New Hampshire Association of Counties Conference. She explained that while she wants to be mindful of costs, she does not feel like they can tell employees they cannot attend the conference that Grafton County is hosting this year.

Commissioner McLeod stated that the Sheriff's Department has an increase of almost \$125,000, and the Maintenance Department is up roughly \$229,000. CA Libby noted that \$22,000 of the

Sheriff's Department increase is due to inherited lease agreements. CA Libby noted that Sheriff Myers is giving up the Northern Shield Grant, and therefore, she needs to adjust her overtime line in the budget and reduce it. The grant line will be at \$16,000 rather than \$56,000. The deputy overtime line has been moved back to \$60,000, which is a small reduction from last year.

CA Libby asked how the Commissioners want to approach the capital outlay requests. She asked if there were items that they wanted more information on or wanted to fund from other sources. The total request for capital outlay is \$376,000, and CA Libby noted that last year there was \$72,000 in the capital outlay requests to purchase a cruiser and safety equipment. The rest of the requests were funded through either ARPA interest or LATCF funds. Commissioner McLeod stated that she would like to know what the department head's priorities are in their requests. Commissioner Hedberg noted that last year, there was a request for two (2) cruisers, and they only funded one. She expressed concerns with the increased miles on the Sheriff's department cruisers and Sheriff Myers reporting that they are doing more transports. Commissioner Piper stated that line striping and crack sealing is something that is asked for each year. CA Libby noted that the rationale behind crack sealing is it pushes out the need for paving longer. It is a preventative measure.

Commissioner McLeod stated that they have had many conversations about the farm and asked if they want to purchase new equipment for the farm. Commissioner Piper stated that she did not support the expansion with UNH Extension because she was worried about the farm. The farm is asking for a \$54,000 manure spreader. She noted that she had asked if they could invite Henry Ahern to a meeting to listen to his ideas for the farm after a long conversation with him last weekend. Commissioner Piper stated that she had mentioned her conversation with him at Tuesday's meeting, but there was no discussion after. She would like to have H. Ahern attend a meeting with the Commissioners and FM Libby.

Commissioner Piper stated that she had not said anything about slaughtering in-house as the Register of Deeds had mentioned, and she never suggested that they are selling any products or expanding what they offer to the public. Commissioner Piper suggested that she reach out to H. Ahern to see if he would be interested in coming to a meeting and then invite FM Libby.

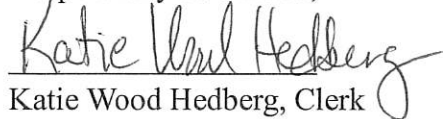
Commissioner Hedberg asked H. Ahern mentioned any ideas that he was thinking of or if it was a more general conversation. Commissioner Piper stated that H. Ahern discussed diversifying the produce. She would hate to not let a member of the public come and speak to them. Commissioner McLeod stated that she is not against listening to anyone who wants to come in, but she is concerned about expanding the farm into other areas. Commissioner Piper stated that it seems to her that they are bringing in prejudice, and she cannot represent the conversation she had accurately. The conversation about the farm has been challenging since she has been here, and she feels they should be open to conversations, as they had with H. Hatch. She and Commissioner McLeod would like to come to a resolution, and she would like to be able to do that. She asked to invite Henry Ahern in to discuss diversification. Commissioner Hedberg stated that she is happy to listen to someone.

Commissioner McLeod stated that in regard to the capital outlay, she suggested that they ask everyone to cut their capital requests in half.

Commissioner McLeod asked to discuss the meeting schedule and if there was a need to have a meeting on June 30<sup>th</sup>, which is a 5<sup>th</sup> Tuesday. Commissioner Hedberg noted that because of how the travel falls, she will be away for three (3) Tuesdays in July, the 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup>. CA Libby stated that she would need to know if one (1) of the other Commissioners is unable to meet on one of those days, so she can change the meeting date because they will need to meet during July due to year-end.

10:50 AM with no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie Wood Hedberg". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Katie Wood Hedberg, Clerk