

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING  
3855 Dartmouth College Highway  
North Haverhill, NH 03774  
March 11, 2021

PRESENT: Commissioners Piper, Lauer, Ahern, County Administrator Dorsett, Finance Director Libby and Administrative Assistant Norcross

OTHERS PRESENT: Sheriff Stiegler, Director Andross, Office Assistant Paronto, UNH Office Administrator Lee, Conservation District – Pam Gilbert, Gary Peters, Linda Brownson, Treasurer Hill, HR Director Clough

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

**Sheriff's Department & Dispatch – Sheriff Stiegler, Director of Communications Andross, Office Assistant/Dispatcher Paronto**

*Dispatch Revenue*

Dispatch Fees – Director Andross stated that three (3) major projects are impacting line. He stated that one (1) is the next phase of the replacement of their radio infrastructure. 100% of equipment costs and installation costs are all grant funded. He noted that during 2021 they believe they will be gaining some customers in Southwest Coos County and their neighbors in VT. He stated that this results in an increase in Dispatch fees due to proposed revenue for the Lancaster area towns.

Alarm Monitoring –Director Andross stated that they have campus monitoring as well as some outlying customers who do pay for monitoring.

Commissioner Ahern stated that he recognizes land wise, that Grafton County is one of the largest counties in New Hampshire. He noted that he is finishing a two (2) year term as Selectman in Wentworth and many towns have different budget cycles in the county. When the County went up on dispatch fees in the middle of the fiscal year it hurt towns that are not on the same budget cycle as the county is. He stated that he hopes they will take into account if there is another increase that not all towns are on a fiscal year. Director Andross noted that a majority of the increase in the revenue item is from new customers who we have never billed before; this number might not be exact as they may not all be here on July 1<sup>st</sup>. He understands the local tax burden and noted that when the County went to fiscal year billing 5 or 6 years ago, the towns were contacted about it and they did not complain. They were asked when the change occurred and no one had any concerns. Commissioner Piper asked about last year when they reduced the dispatch fees and why this year they are increasing them. Director Andross stated that last year they tried to start following the other county models of not charging for dispatch fees for towns within Grafton County. If they take on the potential new agencies outside of Grafton County that is part of the increase. This year's increase is also due to the potential software upgrade. T.

Paronto noted that there might not be an increase to these towns as some of them may have an outside software contract that they will no longer be paying for. Director Andross noted that the increase Wentworth had a number of years ago was due to an increase in police activity. Dispatch fees are based upon a town's usage and Wentworth saw an unusually large uptick in activity that year. He noted that the Commissioners capped that increase.

#### *Dispatch Expense*

Dispatchers – Director Andross stated that he has included a full time position for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the year.

Overtime – Director Andross explained there is an increase in this line due to not having part time staff that are able to work. They then have to use full time people to fill shifts and therefore pay overtime.

Health Insurance – With the potential new hire, they are budgeting the family plan. They are also filling two (2) positions soon so those numbers may change as well.

Equipment Repair & Maintenance – Director Andross explained that the Lancaster area towns have a fairly new radio system that was funded around 2016. They currently have a maintenance agreement with Ossipee Mountain Electronic and the plan is for the County to assume their maintenance agreement.

Education & Conference – He noted that they have not expended nearly as much on education and conference this year due to Covid.

#### *Capital Reserve*

Communication Infrastructure– Director Andross stated that this is money that is budgeted in the event that they run into issues that the county is responsible to repair or replace.

#### *Sheriff Revenue*

Sheriff's Dept. Fees – Sheriff Stiegler stated that he has decreased this line item as he does not feel the courts are going to take off very quickly once they reopen.

Sale of Equipment – This line has a decrease due to only selling two (2) cruisers instead of three (3).

Dist. Court Prisoner Security – Sheriff Stiegler noted that he has also decreased this line item not knowing how the inmate population will be.

#### *Sheriff Expense*

Uniform Allowance – Sheriff Stiegler noted that he needs to ask for an amendment to this line. Since preparing the budget he has had another deputy state they will retire sometime after the start of the new year. By July, he will need to equip two (2) new deputies and needs to increase



\$3,000 per deputy for an additional \$6,000 totaling \$15,000.

Equipment Repair and Maintenance – Sheriff Stiegler stated that every car is involved in this line item for regular repair and maintenance.

Commissioner Ahern requested to go into nonpublic session.

**MOTION:** \* 10:46 AM Commissioner Ahern moved to enter into non-public session for the purposes of consideration of the acquisition, sale, or lease of real or personal property which, if discussed in public, would likely benefit a party or parties whose interests are adverse to those of the general community according to RSA 91-A: 3, II (d)

Commissioner Lauer seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote.

Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Lauer “yes”; Commissioner Ahern “yes” Commissioner Piper “yes” Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted “yes” and would now go into non-public session.

\* 11:00 AM Commissioner Piper declared the meeting back in public session.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Ahern 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 Lauer seconded the motion. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Lauer “yes” Commissioner Ahern “yes” Commissioner Piper “yes”. Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted “yes” and the motion passes.

Commissioner Ahern asked if there is any type of reimbursement from defendants who plead guilty for cybercrimes. Sheriff Stiegler stated that there were not. Commissioner Piper noted that the digital forensic investigating is growing at a fast pace, at the expense of Grafton County taxpayers. Sheriff Stiegler stated that if you can do it regionally, the taxpayers are already paying for a regional service so why not include this. He stated that he could see establishing a fee for agencies outside of Grafton County. He noted in the grand scheme of the budget, this is a small fee for the service they provide. Commissioner Piper stated that she is in favor of establishing a fee for the digital forensic investigations for agencies out of state and outside Grafton County. She stated that the County has charged for Dispatch fees in the County and asked why this service is being put on the backs of Grafton county taxpayers alone. The fundamental question is whether the county wants to provide this as a courtesy or have the towns pay for it. Commissioner Lauer agreed that a fee should be considered. CA Dorsett stated that if it is a courtesy it is spread evenly throughout all the towns. The Commissioners agreed to discuss this topic further and get more information.

### *Capital Outlay*

Sheriff Stiegler stated that there is a decrease in the Capital Outlay due to upgrades that were made last year that will not be happening this year as well as purchasing one (1) less cruiser.

Less Lethal Equipment – Commissioner Piper stated that she does not remember sending the

signal that they were going to purchase less lethal equipment. Sheriff Stiegler stated that this is a very effective tool but it is not 100% needed. He stated that he could piece this together versus purchasing all at one time. Commissioner Ahern noted that he thinks so highly of the people in the Sheriff's Department that he does not feel they need less lethal equipment.

#### **UNH Extension – County Office Administrator Donna Lee**

COA Lee stated that the Dairy State Specialist position has not been approved for this current year. It is in pause mode right now, so UNH will not be providing the \$5,000 reimbursement to Grafton County for that position in FY22.

#### **Conservation District – Linda Bronson, Gary Peters, Pam Gilbert**

The County supports the Administrative Assistant position for the Conservation District. The increase in this budget is directly related to that position.

Other materials were provided for the Commissioners review.

#### **Treasurer – Karen Liot Hill**

Interest – Treasurer Hill explained that Covid has wreaked havoc on interest rates and they are expecting that the low interest rates will continue. They are projecting \$25,000 in revenue from interest next year from the \$120,000 from this year.

#### **Human Resources – Director Karen Clough**

Commissioner Piper stated that Sheriff Stiegler had suggested that if the Wages in Lieu of Health Insurance were increased, it might encourage employees not to take health insurance, which in turn is a savings to the county. She thought this was a good idea and asked if we could look into it. CA Dorsett asked what the payout is. HR Director Clough stated that employees receive \$1,800. He thought that maybe if it were increased to closer to a family deductible it would be more appealing for someone to go onto their spouse's insurance if they had the deductible covered. HR Director Clough stated this would only benefit a small member of people, as some employees would have to have a large payout to make it worth going on their spouse's expensive insurance through a private company. Commissioner Lauer asked how many employees take this. HR Director Clough stated that she does not know the exact amount but knows it is not many. CA Dorsett stated that he feels it is worthwhile to look at, as it may be good savings if more people took advantage of it. Commissioner Piper stated that she agrees it is worth looking at. It has the potential to be significant to the taxpayers.

Salaries – HR Director Clough stated that this includes step increases for two (2) employees. She noted that two (2) employees are at max.

Retirement – HR Director Clough noted that this increase is due to the increased rates set by the retirement system.



Education and Conferences – This line includes the Nurse Practitioner education and training, annual Employment Law update at Sheehan, Phinney, Bass & Green for HR staff, County conference and varied continuing education courses.

Employee Recruitment/Retention – HR Director Clough stated that this line includes drug screen test kits and lab costs for testing. Employee Engagement/recognition programs, career fairs and recruitment expenses

Allocated Service – Nursing Home – HR Director Clough stated that 80% of HR budget, which includes hiring, orientation, benefits, employee relations, labor relations, policies/procedures, is allocated back to the Nursing Home.

Contracted Services – This includes RDS Actuarial rate (set by Healthtrust), Compensation and Classification Program Audit

Dues, Licenses & Subscriptions –HR Director Clough stated that this line includes the criminal record checks based on hiring data from FY 20. It also includes the Nurse Practitioner's annual membership to American Psychiatric Nurses Association, NH Nurse Practitioner Association, Annual SHRM Membership x 2, ANHPEHRA Dues and the Nurse Practitioner license.

Postage – The postage meter split is between HR, Nursing Home, and Commissioner's Office. The remaining budget based on actual postage usage.

Advertising – This line is based on advertising in FY 21 at the six (6) month.

Telephone- Based on usage

Travel Expense- HR Director Clough noted that this year they have not had much for travel expense due to COVID but is in hopes that will change this upcoming fiscal year.

Equipment Repair & Maintenance – This line includes Laser fiche Support Agreement in the amount of \$1050.00

Equipment Rental – This line is based on the current lease and copy utilization. Current lease for Laser Fiche expires in March 2022 and she has included 5% increase in rates for April, May & June.

Wage Study – HR Director Clough stated that she is requesting \$40,000 in her contracted services line to have a complete review of the County's wage and classification structure. The review is necessary to provide a competitive compensation package for all employees. They want to have a sound foundation in which to make wage and salary decisions that improve the County's competitiveness in employee recruitment and retention, thereby increasing employee satisfaction and lowering the cost of turnover.

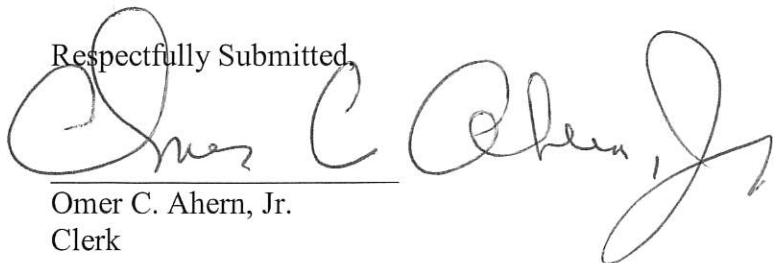
In an effort to keep the pay structures up to date and competitive, it is recommended these reviews be completed every 3-5 years. The County's last review was in 2016. It is important to

reassess and reevaluate any positions whose duties may have changed since the original study as well as have an ongoing review of FLSA OT exempt laws as they pertain to the County and a review of general economic trends prevailing in the market at the current time. She stated that along with these necessities, it has been apparent in discussion with the Board of Commissioners and the Delegation in last year's budget meetings that there is desire to review the current structure to ensure it is the best pay structure to keep the County competitive in the current market, allow the County to retain current employees and remain cost effective with budget needs.

Commissioner Piper stated that she is concerned that significantly increasing wages to attract nurses and LNAs would still not solve the problem of a shortage of labor. This shortage is throughout the state and nation. She also stated that NHA Labore has said that wages are not necessarily the problem; there is an attitude toward work in the culture different from what it was in the past. Commissioner Piper also is worried about raising property taxes to cover significantly increased wages. She stated that because of worry over increased property taxes, the NHAC took a formal position against a bill that would have raised the minimum wage to \$15. The increased wage puts upward pressure on the wages that are a little bit above it. If the minimum wage was raised to \$15, it is not the employees making under that that are affected. It is those employees who make just above it as well. NHAC Affiliates expressed concern about the impact of this wage increase on property taxes. Unlike Rockingham, Grafton County also is in a different position in the sense that she thinks that the fact that they are in an isolated place but offer competitive wages and a really nice benefits package is helpful to them in terms of hiring.. There may be an argument that the County is competitive with no new cost to tax payers. She asked Director Clough how many people have left because of pay and where were they on the pay scale. HR Director Clough stated that it is tough to say but she can get that information. On their exit questionnaire, there is a section to rate the wages and benefits and she could go through the last year's questionnaires. She noted that it is fair to say they do not generally have employees leave because of wages but it is safe to say for the positions they have a hard time filling it is because of the wages. It is not a one size fits all. Commissioner Piper stated that she could see raising wages to compete with local places such as Walmart as it would save on contract nurses, but she is not sure that the same people would be attracted to such a different job as caring for elders in a nursing facility. CA Libby stated that the issue they are having right now is filling Housekeeping and Dietary positions which is an issue they have never had before. Commissioner Piper stated that this wage study would give them the information they need to try to address the problem across the board with all positions.

12:48 PM with no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Omer C. Ahern, Jr.", is written over a horizontal line.

Omer C. Ahern, Jr.  
Clerk