

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING
3855 Dartmouth College Highway
North Haverhill, NH 03774
March 2, 2021

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Sheriff Stiegler, Detective Combs, Tim Benitez – US Secret Service, HR Director Clough, Nursing Home Administrator Labore, DoC Supt. Elliott, Farm Manager Nelson, County Attorney Hornick, Andre Sanders, Tiffany LaPointe, Sarah Pepper

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

Employee Council – Andre Sanders, Tiffany LaPointe, Sarah Pepper

The Employee Council met with the Commissioners to present their requests for the FY22 budget. The submitted the following requests:

- Cola 2.0%
- Return of Buyback - Proposed wording is attached
- Add 2.5 days to ET Max Accrual
- Perfect Attendance for bonus days - tri-monthly instead of annually
- Retirement benefits at 55 with 35 years for all employees that qualify

Commissioner Piper thanked the Employee Council for presenting a COLA request within the range that has been done in the past. The Employee Council took time to discuss each of the requests with the Commissioners and answered questions. The Commissioners thanked them for coming to meet with them and stated that they will take the time to further discuss the requests.

Sheriff Stiegler – Special Presentation

Sheriff Stiegler introduced Tim Benitez and stated that he is the United States Secret Service Special Agent in charge of both New Hampshire and Vermont. He stated that T. Benitez is here today to make a presentation of an award that is given to the top fifty (50) forensic examiners of the year throughout the country. He noted that no one from New England has ever received this award and he is proud to announce that Grafton County's own Detective Justin Combs is the recipient of the award. T. Benitez presented Detective Combs with the United States Secret Service National Computer Forensic Institute Award and stated that he is an extremely valuable asset to Grafton County and the State of New Hampshire as a whole. The Commissioners congratulated Detective Combs and thanked him for all of his hard work and dedication.

HR Director Clough arrived and gave the following report:

Grafton County Human Resources Report
Karen Clough, Human Resources Director
March 2, 2021

HR Activity Report (02/02/2021-03/01/2021)

• **New Hires**

Department	#	Position(s)
Nursing Home	6 (2 FT, 2 PT, 2 PD)	1 FT Unit Aide, 1 FT Housekeeper 2 PT Dietary Aide, 2 per diem

LNA's

Commissioners' Office	1 (1 FT)	1 FT County Administrator
DOC	2 (1 FT, 1 PT)	1 FT CO, 1 PT CO
Sheriff's Dept.	1 (1 FT)	1 FT Dispatcher

• **Separations**

Departments	#	
Nursing Home	9 (2 FT, 7 PD)	1 FT LNA, 1 Per diem MNA, 1 FT Driver/LNA 6 Per Diem LNA's

Reasons:

Resigned personal reasons/no reason given-1
Termination – 1
Retirement – 1
Not meeting Per Diem Requirements - 6

- **Status Changes/ dept transfers: 1 Part time Dietary Aide to FT Unit Aide (LNA program), 1 FT Dispatcher to PT Dispatcher, 1 FT LNA to Social Service Assistant, 1 FT RN to ADON**

Active Leave of Absences as of March 1, 2021

Department	#	
Nursing Home – Nursing	18	(13 are intermittent, 13 for self, 5 for family)
Nursing Home – Non-Nursing	6	(3 are intermittent, 3 for family, 3 for self)
DOC	2	(0 intermittent, 2 self)
Maintenance	1	(1 intermittent self)
Sheriff's Dept.	2	(2 intermittent family)
TOTAL:	29	

Scheduled to orient 03/03

1 FT Dietary Aide
1 Per Diem LNA

Current Jobs posted/advertised

LNA's (12.55 FTE's vacant)
RN/LPN (10.15 FTE's vacant combined)
CO's
Cook – PT DOC

PT Housekeeper
RN House Supervisor
Staff Development Director
Deputy Sheriff
Social Service Director

Nurse Recruitment – Commissioner Ahern asked about bringing in nurses from other countries to work at the Nursing Home. HR Director Clough stated that they have done that in the past. It is about a twelve (12) month process that is very expensive and in their experience with it, the nurses do not want to stay in New Hampshire. NHA Labore noted that this is a nationwide nursing shortage; they are not the only ones who are dealing with this issue. HR Director Clough stated that they had an LNA here at the Nursing Home who had her RN degree in the Philippines that was not honored here in the states. She had to work here and put herself through nursing school to earn the degree again. She is still an RN at the Nursing Home but worked as an LNA here for many years while she worked to earn that degree again. NHA Labore stated that if the Commissioners are looking at wanting legislative changes these are the types of things they need to look at that can make more of an impact. He noted that there has been talk of getting Licensed Practical Nursing Programs back in the Community College system. He stated that Vermont Technical College has done an extremely good job at putting these programs in place, but New Hampshire has yet to move forward with it. This is because the New Hampshire Nurses Association and other legislative leaders have recently come out and said that the goal is to have Registered Nurses and that Licensed Practical Nurses should not be in practice. He stated that this is the wrong thought process. HR Director Clough stated that the LPN is the stepping-stone that many people want to take. Commissioner Ahern requested more information regarding this and he will reach out to some of the state senators.

HR Director Clough stated that in September she was approached by Commissioner Lauer to get the wage structures from the other counties. She stated that recently Commissioner Piper approached the HR Affiliate for the same information and believes that Commissioner Piper has received the information but HR Director has compiled it for all of the Commissioners. She asked the Board what they were looking for from this and what do they want her to do with it. Last budget season there was considerable shock from the delegates, that the county employees had been receiving roughly 5% increases per year. That dismay came from folks who were traditionally supportive of taxpayer funding as well as folks who were less so. She stated that folks talked to her privately about it as well. Former Rep. Stringham reminded them that because of Covid, elected officials' salaries were frozen, understandably, where county employees got the usual 5% and that did not go over well. There was supposed to be a subcommittee of the Executive Committee to study the issue as well as a letter written by Rep. French and Stringham. Neither of these initiatives were accomplished, but the concern is still there. Commissioner Piper stated that they are going to learn methods from HR Director Clough on how they determine wages. She stated that Supt. Oakes had previously brought up a good point. He brought to their attention during a BOC meeting that there is no middle ground for a step increase. It is either 0% or 3%. He said the system is broken. Commissioner Piper agreed. Commissioner Piper stated that she wants to examine the methods by which the county provides salary increases and wanted to see the wage structures of other counties for this reason. Commissioner Lauer stated that looking at it is the appropriate thing to do but she does not have

the expertise to do so and she thinks HR needs assistance as well, as they do not have the manpower to handle this kind of study. Commissioner Ahern stated that he agrees they need to look into this situation. HR Director Clough handed out the information from all of the counties to the Commissioners. The Commissioners stated that they will review the document and have a further discussion.

NHA Labore arrived and gave the following report:

Grafton County Nursing Home
Commissioner's Report:
March 2, 2021

Census

FY '21 Budgeted Census:

Medicare: 3
Medicaid: 82
VA: 1
Hospice: 0
Private: 22
Total: 108

Medicare: 4
Medicaid: 94 (Daily rate= \$198.33)
VA: 2
Private: 23

Monthly Admissions/Discharges

Admissions: 3
Deceased Residents: 1
Discharges: 0

Other Topics:

COVID 19- Staff Testing – NHA Labore stated that the nursing home has found themselves victim of the outbreaks at PSU and Dartmouth. He explained that when the threshold in Grafton County rises above 10% it requires staff testing twice a week. This will probably continue over the next several weeks. The county positivity rate is just over 15%. This is all predominately due to the outbreaks at Dartmouth College and PSU. He stated that CMS regulations state that he is required to suspend their visitation program as well due to the positivity rate. He has decided to continue having their visitations and not cancel them because of what is happening on college campuses. He stated that if there were many cases here in Haverhill that would be a different situation, but he feels the families and residents should not be punished. He noted that he does not see any repercussions from a regulation standpoint for his decision.

NCHC – NHA Labore stated that he wanted to thank North Country Health Consortium for helping the nursing home put on another Covid vaccination clinic last week. He stated that they had an additional five (5) residents and ten (10) staff members get vaccinated and it went very

well. NHA Labore noted that the vaccine does not mean the nursing home is safe from Covid but it does help them.

FarmDoC Discussion – Farm Manager Nelson & Supt. Elliott

Farm Manager Nelson stated that he visited with Heather Bryant from UNH Extension to discuss this year's farm stand situation. They are all in agreement that it would be better to focus on the less labor-intensive crops this year due to the lack of labor. He stated that he would be happy with a plan moving forward pushing potatoes, pumpkins and winter squash, as those are their big sellers. He hopes to have Covid behind them and the labor situation change after this next season.

FM Nelson explained that across the road behind the farm stand is not a garden, it is a vegetable production field and this year it would contain three (3) or four (4) cover crops as a study for UNH Cooperative Extension. This would give the garden a rest for this year in terms of vegetables and all of the row crops would be down on the river meadow. Supt. Elliott stated that the farm stand would not be open during the summer months. They would open during the fall months to sell these few crops. Commissioner Ahern stated that he is against this proposal. He has been doing a lot of thinking on the labor issue. He stated that he is concerned in this set of circumstances about not having a surplus of food stored here in case of a worst-case scenario of an interruption in their food supply delivery. He thinks it is a mistake not to have vegetables and he respectfully disagrees with their analysis. He looked at the root cellar in Sullivan County and it is different from what he remembers.

FD Libby stated that FM Nelson met with John Porter again and he did not feel it would be worth it to purchase the equipment to process milk for what they would actually use on the complex. J. Porter still feels they should look at reducing the herd. Supt. Elliott stated that he has only used 166 gallons of milk for the year. CA Dorsett stated that in looking at it there are a lot of good questions out there. He thinks they need to take some time to take a solid look at it and get pricing, then look at the potential return on investment. They are gearing up for the 2021 farm stand season and they need to make decisions right now for what they will do for this year to make it with what they know right now. It seems like the idea for this year is to focus more on potatoes to get through this season while focusing on the FarmDoC and discussing what they want to do in the future. Commissioner Lauer stated that the early crops that are labor intensive are not what bring in the majority of the revenue. FD Libby stated that the differences in the revenue when they started harvesting potatoes is substantial and that is where the money is.

Commissioner Ahern stated that he is concerned about winter storage crops; if there is an issue with food service, those vegetables will be what get them through. Commissioner Piper stated that H. Bryant has weighed in and the two (2) employees who work with the farm stand and garden have weighed in with how they feel. She understands that the FarmDoc is interconnected but she is talking about the farm stand and the labor shortage that they are facing right now. She stated that with this particular issue right now it sounds like the biggest motivator for Commissioner Ahern is that there is a food supply in the event of some type of national or state emergency. She noted that she does not share that same concern. Supt. Elliott stated that they

have no desire to slow down the Farmstand or shut it down. They love the Farmstand but this summer they do not have the help they need to accomplish what they have over the last 20 years.

MOTION: Commissioner Lauer moved to accept Supt. Elliott and Farm Manager Nelson's recommendation to plant sweet corn for the DoC and Nursing Home only, potatoes, winter squash and pumpkins for this year. Commissioner Piper seconded the motion.

Discussion – Commissioner Piper stated that this is for this summer only. They do not know what Covid is going to do. This is temporary. Commissioner Lauer stated that she encourages them to increase these three (3) crops over and above what they would normally plant. Supt. Elliott stated that he plans on taking as much as he can to store for the winter. Supt. Elliott noted that they did a verbal poll at their affiliate meeting for inmate population and it is very low across the board.

The Commissioner voted on the motion. Commissioner Lauer and Commissioner Piper were in favor. Commissioner Ahern was in opposition. With the vote being two (2) in favor and one (1) in opposition the motion passes.

County Attorney Hornick arrived to discuss the FarmDoC with the Commissioners.

Commissioner Piper stated that Atty. Hornick was not present at the FarmDoC meeting and Commissioner Ahern has important questions that only she can answer. Commissioner Ahern stated that they do not have enough inmate labor because the courts are not up and running. They need inmate labor. Atty. Hornick stated that the bail reform bill that was implemented in 2018, has been tweaked but judges are required to look at several elements before they can order someone to be held pretrial. Because of this, the issues have been who in fact needs to be sentenced at the DoC. The jail itself is being looked at as a less viable option and the Alternative Sentencing programs have become a more popular component that judges are looking at unless they are talking about violence with weapons and sexual assault type offenses. She stated that working on the farm is not considered rehabilitative and she does not think that they are going to be able to help in the request for more inmate labor unless things change at the top. Atty. Hornick stated that she does not feel she can help them with the inmate shortage. Commissioner Lauer stated that even if they were allowed to let pretrial inmates work, they are typically pretrial because they are the dangerous ones who they do not want out working.

Atty. Hornick stated that they held their first jury selection last week and that it went well. She discussed the details of the day with the Commissioners and answered questions.

Commissioner Piper asked if everyone had a chance to read the minutes from the February 23rd meeting.

MOTION: Commissioner Lauer moved to approve the minutes from the February 23rd meeting. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion and all were in favor.

He Commissioners signed check registers 38-40;1170-1176.

CA Dorsett submitted the Drug Task Force grant agreement paperwork for the Commissioners to sign.

MOTION: Commissioner Lauer moved to accept the grant and authorize Sheriff Stiegler to execute all documents for the grant. Commissioner Ahern seconded the motion and all were in favor.

CA Dorsett stated that he has attended a number of meetings on the FarmDoC. He has sent it to Resilience Planning to review as well. He gave the Commissioners an update on the Broadband Committee and a presentation that NH Electric Coop had done at their last meeting. He discussed that presentation with the Commissioners and answered questions. Commissioner Piper stated that she appreciates CA Dorsett being enthusiastic in working with department heads and the other various topics that he is getting himself involved with.

Commissioner Issues:

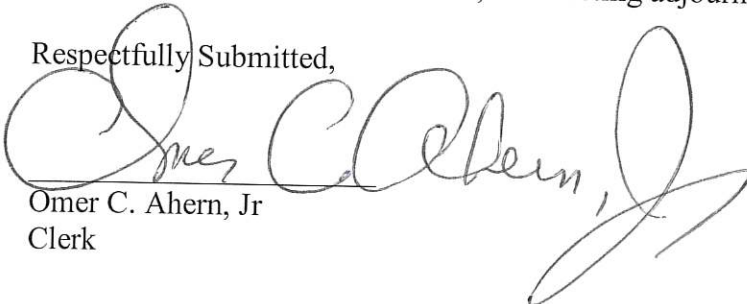
Commissioner Lauer stated that she has been working on constituent issues.

Commissioner Piper asked if they should be allotting slightly longer time slots for department heads given what happened today with them having longer discussions. FD Libby stated that typically what was allotted today was enough time for the department heads. It is not always possible to predict how many questions the Commissioners may have for them, but they do typically try to schedule for how long they feel that department head would need to discuss their items.

Commissioner Piper stated that she also wanted to ask Commissioner Ahern if he would like them to invite John Porter back to a meeting. He is the dairy specialist who came up and gave some strong recommendations that were received very well by FM Nelson. She stated that this all predates this new idea of the FarmDoC. FD Libby stated that John was here last week and met with FM Nelson & Heather Bryant from UNH Cooperative Extension. There is a report from his visit. Commissioner Ahern requested to see reports from his visits.

11:35 AM with no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,



Omer C. Ahern, Jr
Clerk