

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING
3855 Dartmouth College Highway
North Haverhill, MA 03774
April 22, 2021

PRESENT: Commissioners Piper, Lauer, Ahern, County Administrator Dorsett, Finance Director Libby, and Temp Admin Jessica Jackson

OTHERS PRESENT: Register Monahan, Alex Nuti di Biase (via Zoom)

Commissioner Piper called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM and began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Proposed Budget and New Adjustments - FD Libby presented the Board of Commissioners with new information regarding the current state of the budget which reflected additional cuts that have been proposed across departments. These adjustments resulted in a 0.72% increase and a 0.38% increase in the bottom line budget. FD Libby explained that the new proposed budget adjustments includes no new positions, step increases for all employees, a 2% COLA, Earned Time Buy-back, and with no increase in shift differentials as was originally proposed.
2. Department of Corrections Budget Adjustments - FD Libby reported that she had reached out to Tom Elliott and Craig Labore at the Department of Corrections and Nursing Home and requested that they go through their budget and to let FD Libby know if they could make any additional cuts to their budget without harming operations. Tom was able to cut an additional \$50,000 on the 003 Correctional Officer salary line item. Once FD Libby factored in retirement and social security, DoC cuts were able to result in a \$67,000 cut. FD Libby reported that the Nursing Home was also able to propose additional budget reductions in the amount of \$81,250. FD Libby also presented a detailed revised budget from the Nursing Home showing where these reductions would occur.

Commissioner Piper asked how a department head would be able to reduce a salary line, and FD Libby explained that Tom in particular is operating on a reduced staffing schedule on account of the low inmate population. Tom's original budget proposal did not factor in these reduced staffing patterns and so in keeping with these patterns, was able to reduce the salary line for the DoC's bottom line.

Commissioner Ahern expressed concerns about reduced staffing being dangerous due to courts opening up again and the possibility of a higher inmate population being possible, and FD Libby confirmed there would not be issues, explaining that the DoC is forecasted to be \$300,000 underexpended this year. FD Libby also reminded the Commissioners that there is constant turnover and open positions at the jail. FD Libby explained that the DoC was comfortable making these cuts.

2. Nursing Home Budget Adjustments - FD Libby reported that the Nursing Home also proposed some additional reductions to the L&A and RN salary lines in the amounts of

\$50,000 and \$13,000 respectively. The Nursing Home was also able to reduce their Social Services budget as a new employee was hired who is being paid less than what they had originally budgeted for. (Additional specific reductions were discussed later in the meeting).

3. Finance Director's Additional Cuts - FD Libby stated that most of the lines on the budget adjustments had been discussed already in previous meetings, but explained some additional areas in which she was able to cut the budget.

-HRD Karen Clough was able to reduce the HR postage line to level funding., resulting in a reduction of \$989.

-FD Libby proposed to cut \$500 from the Commissioner's Education line, \$2500 from the Gaspay 75 Actuary line, and to cut the Travel line to what was budgeted in 2019. The total proposed cuts to the Commissioners' budget equal \$7,650.

-FD Libby was also able to reduce the IT budget by \$4,000 which was to be allocated to the HR Badge System. The badge system had already been replaced out of the HR budget, so this line item was not necessary for the IT department's proposed budget.

-FD Libby also reduced the TAN interest by \$2,500 as there is still \$7,500 available, which should provide ample coverage.

-FD Libby was also comfortable in reducing the Unemployment budget by an additional \$2,500.

-FD Libby cited additional adjustments of \$11,564.00 to be added to the Nursing Home budget, which was discussed later in the meeting.

- FD Libby also increased the Proshare to \$2 million and the Bed Tax Revenue at the nursing home. The Bed Tax Revenue was originally cut back by \$150,000 by Craig, but in reviewing the Census for this year, this will be cleared and the Bed Tax Revenue should be level-funded, resulting in \$250,000 additional revenue.

-FD Libby reported that she went back over the Surplus and increased it an additional \$500,000 to a total of \$4 million, which may need to be ratcheted back next year if required.

Commissioner Lauer asked if the budget also included the requested Nursing Home Capital, and FD Libby confirmed it does, with the exception of the requested budget for paving as Commissioners Ahern and Piper had decided to cut the paving line.

Commissioner Piper mentioned the Commissioners would still be planning to make a presentation to the Rotary Club to see if some items from the Nursing Home budget could be funded. Commissioner Ahern reported that he had checked in with Rotary Club, and learned that there is a specific process when asking for money. There is a request for grant application which would need to be completed on the Plymouth Rotary Club website. Commissioner Ahern still needs to talk to NHA Labore about this. The request must be filled out separate from the presentation Commissioner Ahern wants NHA Labore to make to the Rotary Club. Commissioner Ahern questioned where the additional \$500,000 for the Surplus came from? FD Libby stated the \$500,000 is included in the overall budget. FD Libby said the board can wait a couple weeks for treasury guidance before the Board of Commissioners finalizes the budget.

4. County Attorney Budget

FD Libby Confirmed that the CA Revenue on the first page is all grants which are certain and all are guaranteed except Roving Advocate which is a new application.

Regarding item 170 (Education and Conference) has already been cut to \$4,000 by the County Attorney. Commissioner Piper agrees and thinks this is safe. Commissioner Piper noted that for items 270, 280, 285, the law requires that this team is available.

Commissioner Ahern stated that if these particular items came into being, these are unfunded mandates being shifted from the state to the local government (county) and that the Department of Justice can ensure these costs are be shared by the state. Ultimately, it is up to the legislators to stand up regarding this.

Commissioner Ahern referred to the 3/25 minutes regarding item 370, and Commissioner Piper mentioned she had a note that these are litigation expenses that the Attorney General stopped paying. Commissioner Ahern said this should not be the responsibility of the Grafton County taxpayers.

Commissioner Piper had a note on page 2 regarding item 380 Postage, that per the County Attorney, this line can be cut. After conferring with FD Libby regarding this cost in previous years, the Commissioners agreed to cut this line to \$1,000 as business resumes in the legal sector post-pandemic. FD Libby also mentioned that \$225 was budgeted to lines 290 and 370 for the same thing and was going to cut the \$225 from 290.

The Commissioners moved on to examine page 3 “Dues and Licenses.” Commissioner Piper mentioned she has item 890 Plymouth Satellite Office for Child Advocacy Center crossed off. Commissioner Ahern stated he also had a line through this item. CA Dorsett asked if there had been talk about sharing a space with Renee? FD Libby explained that the County Attorney would need one room in which to conduct interviews and one room where the interviews could be monitored. Commissioner Lauer confirmed that a separate room is required for observation when children are involved, and as such Renee’s office would not be suitable for item 890. Commissioner Ahern stated this is why the board had agreed they would not be giving money to Whole Village because the board is already paying for two places in Whole Village for Alternate Sentencing and the County Attorney. Commissioner Piper stated that the board will have to speak with the County Attorney further regarding the rent at Whole Village and line 970 for new equipment. CA Dorsett reached out to the County Attorney via digital channels to make inquiry.

FD Libby stated that the VAWA grant of \$107,614 is offset by a \$30,000 grant, the expenses of which consist of wages and benefits.

FD Libby proceeded to indicate that department 4112 is County funded, this is the victim witness program which the County is responsible for, and department 4113 is 100% grant funded, reiterating that the Roving Advocate is 100% grant offset.

Commissioner Ahern referred to the IT budget which includes printers and scanners and was wondering why the County Attorney is budgeting for their own equipment. FD

Libby confirmed she was not sure why the County Attorney would have a line item in their proposed budget for equipment as all other departments obtained equipment on the IT Department's budget. Commissioner Lauer stated in looking at the IT Budget that equipment was not budgeted for the County Attorney's office.

5. IT Budget

Commissioner Piper stated that per conversation with Brent, lines 170 and 700 can both be cut as they are not needed. The other Commissioners agreed. Commissioner Piper stated that regarding item 820, that there are no spare systems left. Commissioner Lauer confirmed that IT is out of spare parts and needs this line increased. The Commissioners agreed this item would stay in the proposed budget.

Commissioner Ahern asked how the complex is doing with replacing staff issues in IT. CA Dorsett replied that no one in the pool is qualified per Brent, but that per communication on 4/22, there might be one person being considered. Regarding item 970, FD Libby confirmed there is a new number on this line as it was reduced by \$4,000. The new number is \$15,950. Commissioner Piper stated that she has no reductions for the software budget and she has a note that software is 60% recoverable through fees. Commissioner Lauer confirmed that software definitely needs to be updated, there are compatibility issues with state police. FD Libby added that the software issues impact 11 other police departments. FD Libby and the Commissioners agreed to remove \$8,000 from the proposed budget for a cluster of servers. CA Dorsett reminded the Commissioners that this expense can be covered by COVID money if that money becomes available.

6. Farm Budget

Commissioner Ahern mentioned that there seemed to be a good amount of livestock in spite of livestock sales. Commissioner Lauer asked if it might be possible for the farm to increase their revenue line given that they are already over revenue by \$8K (forecasted \$30,000, already at \$38,000 in sales). FD Libby mentioned that due to livestock sales, the revenue was forecast to be lower next year, and that the board could check with Grant about the possibility of increasing the revenue line to \$35,000 or \$40,000. Commissioner Ahern mentioned that he thinks many families would be interested in buying cows for the sake of self-reliance/resiliency. AC Dorsett offered to talk to Grant about increasing the farm's revenue line. Grant also allowed the board to eliminate all of the farm's capital budget as he can wait a year for additional funds.

FD Libby reported that after the cuts discussed, the Commissioners had made an additional \$38,775 in reductions to the overall budget.

7. Nursing Home

The Commissioners went over the line reductions presented by FD Libby in her report from the Nursing Home. In summary, Nursing Home Admin costs were increased by \$64,660, which was due to the Bed Tax increase, but an additional \$31,840.00 in reductions came from the Food budget, \$70,819.50 in cuts were proposed to the Nursing budget, \$750 cut from the Health Information Management budget, \$4,800 cut from the Plant Operation budget, \$3,468 cut from the Laundry budget, \$6,400 cut from the

Housekeeping budget, \$3,798 cut from the Contract Services budget, and \$12,237.71 cut from the Social Services budget.

FD Libby clarified that shift differentials were still included in the Nursing Home budget requests, but they have already been removed from the overall budget. The Nursing Home reduced the minor repair line request because this budget comes from Maintenance.

Commissioner Piper confirmed that the transfer to Capital Reserve was not needed and FD Libby confirmed that this line was zeroed out. Commissioner Lauer would like to see if the replacement of the Awnings could be funded by the Rotary Club.

FD Libby reported that after these cuts, the proposed budget has the County down to a 0.58% tax increase (\$157,000 increase) and a 0.3% increase in the bottom line, which is pretty much a level funded budget.

Commissioner Lauer thinks that especially with the additional impacts from the retirement system and COVID, the County is in a great place with the proposed budget. Commissioner Ahern stated that he had confidence in the department heads and elected officials to accomplish the budget.

8. Social Services

Commissioner Lauer confirmed the board would stick with no new agencies for a level funding. Commissioner Lauer stated that existing agencies have been vetted by multiple people, they do a tremendous value for the County and are worth supporting, but it's unfair to ask taxpayers to do any more than what they did last year. Commissioner Piper stated that given the discussion last budget season, former Commissioner Marcia Morris narrowed down the list of eligible agencies as they related to County statutory mandates and that's why Whole Village and Tri-County Cap Fuel were taken out. Commissioner Piper confirmed that the County is not in a position to take on new agencies this year. Commissioner Lauer agreed and said that the County can't be everything for everybody and that they need to look out for employees and taxpayers.

9. Register of Deeds - Register Monahan arrived to follow up regarding the Register of Deeds proposed budget. Register Monahan confirmed that she was comfortable with the revenue line given in the last meeting as she does not believe there will be as much available inventory in the County.

10. Farm DOC

Commissioner Ahern was on the State Advisory Council Meeting and was in a breakout group with Ken Lavalley. Commissioner Ahern mentioned the Farm DOC program and discussed it with Ken. Ken Lavalley said that the College can help implement the program.

Commissioner Ahern talked to Grant Nelson about getting Christmas tree seedlings. Commissioner Ahern talked to Pam Gilbert three weeks ago and discovered that the

Conservation District doesn't have any more, but is hoping that he can talk to Jim Frone about availability of seedling at the State nursery in Boscawen. Commissioner Ahern also believes there may be some seedlings growing in the Complex's back wood lot and wants to check that out. Grant feels he is ready to plant some trees out there and was asking Commissioner Ahern about the density, which Commissioner Ahern confirms is a ratio of 1 acre to 1,100 trees with planting advice for the seedlings, which would be 5ft apart, rows 6ft apart with a row down middle for tractor access. This pattern would produce up to 5ft wide trees. Grant believed this would require minimal labor, but would need to find some seedlings. Commissioner Ahern also plans to help plant them.

Commissioner Ahern reported that Heather had been talking with Dawn's Derry Equipment in upstate NY about making butter to sell, because not enough butter is being produced in NH. Commissioner Ahern listened to a meeting regarding meat processing to increase small meat processors in NH, and talked to Mary Choate about the possibility of doing this under the Farm DOC program. Mary contacted two people in the food inspection division of the NH Health and Human Services. Commissioner Ahern tasked Grant to find out the ratios and numbers for processing milk and cheese on site via a dairy trailer.

11. Closing Remarks/Executive Committee - FD Libby said that given the circumstances, it's a great budget. The Board may have some additional cuts to consider and will need to track down some answers from Marcie and Grant regarding the board's discussions. FD Libby recommended trying to finalize the budget in two weeks. FD Libby reminded the Commissioners that the Public Hearing of the budget would need to be sooner than 10 days or later than 20 days after the proposed budget is mailed out. FD Libby recommends mailing out the budget anytime during the week of May 24th. The Executive Committee typically meets later in the day around 4pm and the Public Hearing follows in the evening around 6pm, and the Commissioners will need to decide if they want to continue with this format. Currently, Monday May 24th is reserved for the initial Executive Committee Budget meeting, followed by the public hearing. The Commissioners will need to discuss the schedule for this. Other Executive Committee meetings are scheduled for June 1st, 4th, 8th, 11th, 15th (if needed) at 3pm. The Commissioners agreed that May 24th or 25th would be best for the public hearing.

FD Libby suggested the Commissioners review the notes regarding the Employee Council.

MOTION: *2:27 PM Commissioner Lauer moved to enter into 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 Ahern seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. Commissioner Piper called the roll. Commissioner Lauer "yes"; Commissioner Ahern "yes" Commissioner Piper

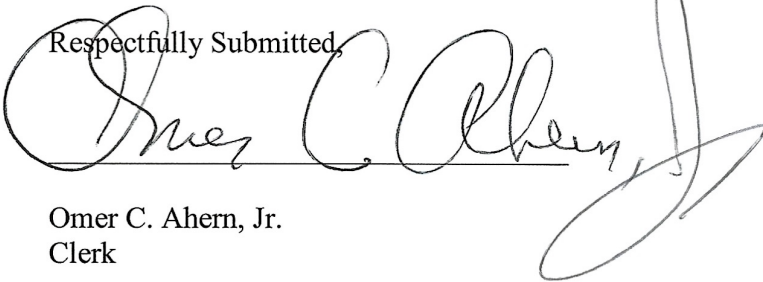
“yes” Commissioner Piper stated that a majority of the board voted “yes” and would now go into non-public session.

*3:17 PM Commissioner Ahern 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.

3:21 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. The signature is highly cursive and extends significantly to the right of the line.

Omer C. Ahern, Jr.
Clerk