

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' BUDGET MEETING
3855 Dartmouth College Highway
North Haverhill, NH 03774
April 15th 2021

PRESENT: Commissioners Piper, Lauer, Ahern, County Administrator Dorsett, Finance Director Libby and Administrative Assistant Norcross.
Commissioner Piper called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. HR Director Clough arrived to discuss questions regarding her budget.

Wage Study

Commissioner Piper explained that they are trying to keep the tax increase down. She stated that since they had all of that input HR Director Clough collected from other counties did HR Clough believe that they would still need to perform a wage structure study. HR Director Clough stated that it is our due diligence to do something at this point with the wage structure. The \$40,000 is for a complete comp and classification study and to look at the pay structure they have now, and how they can take that and implement a merit-based structure. HRD Clough stated that the County could get quotes for both, if the County is looking at just salaries and not structure. HRD Clough thinks it is beneficial for the Board of Commissioners to look at getting away from steps and go in a range. You can modify a range; there is not much they can modify with the step system that is currently in place. The BOC needs to look at the different options they have and HRD Clough feels it is beneficial to look at the different pay systems.

Commissioner Piper stated that it has to be a lean year because of the loss of revenue despite the fact that some department heads brought in level funded budgets. She wants what is best for their county functions, but she truly does not believe that a wage study in terms of competitiveness would solve significant problems in any department. In terms of the structure they have currently, she thinks that 5% on the public dollar is too much, especially when you get to employees who make a 6-figure salary. She stated that personally, she would not support a study that has the possibility of someone getting a four (4) or five (5) % increase per year.

Commissioner Ahern stated that he agrees with Commissioner Piper. He made a general comment for the whole budget that he does not want to see any increase in the taxes. He would like to suggest cutting an amount out of a budget and leave it to the department heads as to where that money will come from out of their own budgets. Commissioner Piper stated that she supports freezing step increases this year and giving a 2% COLA. For her the county includes everybody, employees and residents. She thinks that the county is a good place to work; it is a beneficial place to work in terms of benefits and salary. If the BOC freezes a step increase, the County's vital functions are still being offered to residents and that is important. The budget that she approves will continue to offer quality services. She is trying to find things in the budget that can be cut that will make a difference in the tax increase; step increases account for a large amount. This can be done without services to county or nursing home residents suffering. Commissioner Lauer stated that she would like to see both a COLA and step increases if possible. She asked if they had to freeze step increases, would the additional statement that they

are doing a wage salary survey to ensure they are competitive diminish the impact of freezing them.

FD Libby stated that recruitment is a problem campus wide and that is important to remember when discussing wages. HR Director Clough stated that she has budgeted \$40,000 in her budget to do the wage study. She has justified why it is there, why she feels this is very important and it is up to the Commissioners if they want to fund it. Commissioner Piper stated, when a department head in a public session says the system is broken because he has to give a so-so employee a 3% merit increase when he would like to give a lesser amount as encouragement, something needs to change. HR Director Clough stated that there is a way not to give a 3% raise. If she has an employee who has issues, she will give them three (3) months to improve, or six (6) months, and give them 1.5% half way through if their performance is improving. Commissioner Piper asked if HR Director Clough could work with department heads on this issue. HR Director Clough stated that she could provide more information and education to department heads and elected officials.

Commissioner Lauer stated that if they are going to prioritize the salaries and revamp the system then we need that \$40,000 in the budget. Commissioner Piper noted that the county offers an excellent health insurance policy and Department Heads include lines in their budgets for employee recognition and morale. She does not believe that there will be serious changes either way from a lack of a competitive wage study for one year but she believes that it is imperative that we get a wage structure study to come up with a system that is more sustainable to tax payers. HR Director Clough stated that it is not as simple as taking once piece out. It is a very intense and detailed process. She is not sure you can do this piece of it without doing the wage comparison. HR Director Clough stated that Commissioner Ahern made a statement that the county cannot outdo the private sector. Private businesses have more money to fund a more competitive wage. HR Director Clough asked if with that statement, theoretically this is the reason governments have step increases and COLAs in place. Commissioner Piper stated that after the discussion, she agrees they have to have the wage study in order to change the structure.

MOTION: * 10:18 AM Commissioner Ahern moved to enter into non-public session for the purposes RSA 91-A: 3, II (a) 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 the BOC would now go into non-public session.

* 10:20 AM Commissioner Piper declared the meeting back in public session. Commissioner Piper stated that it sounds like they are seeing the wage study is needed to revise the pay structure for next year. *Commissioner Piper and Commissioner Ahern both stated that they do not want step increases this year and that needs to be negotiated with the Union as well.*

HR Director Clough stated that the Commissioners need to bear in mind that the 5% is what the employees have received in the past. The Commissioners should meet in the middle. She asked the Commissioners not to cut the employees short this year. If the Commissioners are looking to freeze step increases to please meet in the middle with the COLA. Commissioner Piper stated that she appreciates HR Director Clough asking what she did on behalf of the employees.

MOTION: * 10:20 AM Commissioner Ahern 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 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.

* 11:08 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.

2. Sheriff’s Department/Dispatch

Commissioner Piper stated that she does not support funding the leadership academy portion of the education and conference line and would recommend cutting \$5,000. Commissioner Lauer stated that she does not want to cut it, but if they have to do it then she will.

FD Libby noted that Sheriff Stiegler did want to reduce his Cruiser Fuel line back to the \$38,000 as well as add \$10,000 in revenue.

Cruiser Repair and Maintenance – The Commissioners reduced this line by \$5,000 to \$25,000.

3. Dispatch

Remote storage rental – FD Libby stated that she would check with Director Andross to see if this is needed as they are currently storing the communications trailer in one of the towns in return for a discount in their dispatch fees. She believes that he was leaving those funds in the budget in the event they are unable to store their trailer in at that location anymore.

4. Commissioners’ Office/Misc.

Consultants – CA Dorsett stated that he would like to add \$50,000 to this line. He explained that this year, because they have the \$17 million coming in the American Rescue Act, and also to capture other opportunities that the county is already going to do and maximize the utilization of non-county funds, he would like to bring in a consultant that would help them with grant opportunities, eligibility questions, design planning and applications. He explained that this would allow the County to do a lot more with a little and respond to funding inquiries. He further

explained how he has worked with these consultants in the past to maximize funds and how a consultant would benefit the county.

Commissioner Piper asked if this work is something CA Dorsett is unable to do in his capacity as County Administrator. CA Dorsett stated that it is going to be hard to focus on one specific topic. This gets very complex as things change and if the Commissioners want to see the full potential to maximize non-county funds, from his own experience, this is how they can do a lot with a little. Commissioner Lauer stated that they do not know how the county is going to be allowed to spend the American Rescue Act Money, but if a consultant can help them legally utilize more of the \$17 million then it is worth spending the extra on the consultant. She also noted that she very much appreciates the work of Grafton Regional Development Corporation but looking at the long-term outlook she feels that this consultant could potentially bring in more to the county. Commissioner Piper noted that Cheshire County has hired a consultant as well. Commissioner Lauer thinks the GRCD has done wonderful things but this was intended to be seed money not a long-term commitment. She would be in favor of cutting the GRCD's \$45,000 funding and funding the \$50,000 for this consultant. The Commissioners were all in agreement.

5. Contingency

a. Employee Recognition Dinner

Commissioner Piper noted that they suspended the employee recognition dinner this year due to Covid. She is in support of taking this \$3,500 out of the budget. Commissioner Lauer stated that she thinks this creates a lot of good will and thinks it is a way for the Commissioners to show that they value their employees. Its value is in the message it sends. Commissioner Piper stated that this policy has not been in place for very long. Commissioner Piper stated that they have rewarded employees in other ways for a long time and struggled with getting employees for a long time but this has only been around for (5) years. It is not clear that this has an effective outcome. Commissioner Ahern stated that they need to find areas to cut and agreed to not fund it.

b. Retirement Bonus

Commissioner Piper questioned the retirement bonus and stated that she has raised questions about this before. FD Libby explained that this is \$10 per year bonus for anyone who retires after thirty (30) years of service, which is a \$300 minimum payout. Commissioner Piper stated that it is not a lot of money but Grafton County is a nice place to work and does not know if they need to provide an additional cash gift as other types of gifts have been given to people who have left. Commissioner Ahern stated that this is why employees are paid every two (2) weeks and they have retirement as well and that gives them money. Commissioner Lauer stated that she would leave it in as they decide on each employee individually on a case-by-case basis.

c. Transfer to Dispatch Capital Reserve – FD Libby stated that if they do not contribute this year and spend everything he has requested we would have \$24,721.38. She stated that they have never not contributed to the reserve so they should consider transferring something. She stated that she feels the Commissioners could contribute \$25,000 rather than \$60,000 and it would leave a \$50,000 balance in the account. This would reduce the budget by \$35,000 but still contributing to the capital reserve. The Commissioners discussed it further and agreed to fund \$25,000 to the Dispatch Capital Reserve.

6. Maintenance

The Commissioners agreed not to fund the new position in the Maintenance Budget.

The Commissioners discussed the capital outlay account and agreed to cut the asphalt paving and line stripping, repairs to the calf barn and the new Kubota vehicle. Commissioner Piper stated that Supt. Oakes said that the portable fuel filtration system wasn't need this year and they agreed to cut that as well.

7. Nursing Home Capital Reserve

FD Libby stated that they have an estimated balance of \$161,000 in NH Capital Reserve. If the Commissioners approved all expenditures, they would need to contribute \$52,000 in there to fund all the expenditures. Commissioner Piper stated that she is not in favor of the asphalt paving and line stripping as well as the ductless AC system. CA Dorsett stated that the ductless AC system might be a potential Department of Labor issue, if an employee were to complain as that office has no windows and it is next to the dryers, making it very hot. There may be rules as to the conditions an employee is asked to work. FD Libby noted that if they cut the funding for the paving. they will have enough in the reserve to cover the expenses and that would be the time to take care of the ductless a/c system.

FD Libby stated that after all of the changes the Commissioners have made, they have an expense budget that is up .41% or \$199,000 with a tax increase of 3.56%

12:57 PM with no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Omer C. Ahern, Jr
Clerk