

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONER BUDGET MEETING  
3855 Dartmouth College Highway  
North Haverhill, NH 03774  
April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020

PRESENT: Commissioners Lauer, Piper, Morris, County Administrator Libby and Administrative Assistant Norcross

OTHERS PRESENT: Nursing Home Administrator Labore

Commissioner Lauer called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and read the following statement:

As Chair of the Grafton County Commissioners, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is a physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting. In accordance with the Emergency Order, I am confirming that we are:

a) Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means:

We are utilizing Lifesize for this electronic meeting. All members of the Commission have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through attending at the physical location.

b) Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting:

We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting. The meeting notice is also provided on the website of the Commission at [www.co.grafton.nh.us](http://www.co.grafton.nh.us).

Please note that all votes that are being taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote.

Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance. When each member states their presence, please also state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to-Know law.

Commissioner Lauer called the roll. Commissioner Lauer stated "yes" and there is no one in the room with her during this meeting. Commissioner Piper stated "yes" and there is no one in the room with her during this meeting. Commissioner Morris stated "yes" and there is no one in the room with her during this meeting.

Commissioner Lauer asked if everyone had a chance to read the minutes from the April 16<sup>th</sup> Budget meeting. Commissioner Piper had edits.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Piper moved to approve the minutes from the April 16<sup>th</sup> Budget meeting as amended. Commissioner Morris seconded the motion. Commissioner Lauer called the roll. Commissioner Piper “yes”, Commissioner Morris “yes”, Commissioner Lauer “yes”. Commissioner Lauer stated that the majority of the board voted “yes” and the motion passes.

CA Libby sent the Commissioners the check registers that are in need of approval they are 47-48 and 1156-1160.

**-MOTION:** Commissioner Morris moved to approve the check registers. Commissioner Piper seconded the motion. Commissioner Lauer called the roll. Commissioner Piper “yes”, Commissioner Morris “yes”, Commissioner Lauer “yes”. Commissioner Lauer stated that the majority of the board voted “yes” and the motion passes.

Probation and Parole Lease Renewal – CA Libby stated that a while ago the Commissioners gave the state a proposal for a three (3) year renewal with a 5% increase two (2) years in a row. The state has responded and said that the Commissioners’ proposal is not financially feasible for them. They have requested a 2% increase in year one (1), 2% increase in year two (2) and no increase in year three (3). Commissioner Lauer stated that part of the state’s justification is that there has been no improvement in their space. She stated that by the 3<sup>rd</sup> year that could change. Commissioner Piper stated that she would like to counter again and is thinking 3 or 3.5%. She stated that she is willing to compromise with the state but the County’s expenses are going up too. The Commissioners further discussed the issue and agreed on a counter offer of 3.5%. CA Libby will send that counterproposal to them.

Nursing Home Administrator Labore arrived to discuss a few items with the Commissioners. He stated that they had a resident test positive for COVID-19 yesterday. He explained that over the weekend the resident had been experiencing signs of a UTI. Lab work was done and came back to show she had two (2) bacteria and an extremely high white blood count. She also had a fever and was started on antibiotics. She was responding to the antibiotics and they all thought they had it figured out. Then on Tuesday afternoon their Nurse Practitioner, after hearing of the staff member testing positive, wanted to test the resident anyways to make sure that this wasn’t part of what was going on. The test was done Tuesday evening and they had the results the next afternoon which was positive. They called the Public Health Department and went through the process to get a return call. He stated that he had not heard back from them and felt it would be better to have all residents on Profile Unit tested because there was a cutoff time that evening that they needed to get testing done to have it brought down to Lebanon. They then got the call from the Public Health Nurse and updated her as to what they did. They are in a wait and see right now. He explained to the Public Health Nurse that they do have a dedicated COVID – 19 unit in the building but he was told to hold off on moving that resident there for now pending the test results of the other residents on that unit. If there are no more positives they can then discuss what the next steps will be. They have put a system in place where they have separate entrance and exit on profile for staff to enter and leave so they are not walking through the unit. They are

expecting the rest of the test results by 5:00. NHA Labore also noted that at 3:30am this morning one of the residents on their Granite Unit started showing symptoms so that resident has been tested as well. The Commissioners asked how the resident with the confirmed case is doing. NHA Labore stated that the resident's symptoms are not consistent with COVID-19. He stated that she is holding her own. Commissioner Morris asked if staff members on the Profile Unit were tested as well. He stated that they were told not to test staff at this point. The Commissioners feel very strongly that all staff needs to be tested because there is asymptomatic transmission. NHA the guidance from the state is cautionary, let's wait to see what these results are before they decide if everyone in the building needs to be tested.

## Budget Discussion

Reduced Revenue – NHA Labore submitted a reduction in the nursing home's projected revenue for FY '21 in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic. CA Libby stated that the outcome of today's COVID-19 testing is important. If there is widespread Covid-19 in the building that is a whole different situation. NHA Labore stated that the reduced census is in part due to the national guidelines and if CMS will ever take them out of lockdown, even through the summer. They feel dropping the census down further to 120 is where they need to be.

Commissioner Piper stated that if they need the contract nursing to provide the services, how they are able to cut it by potentially \$200,000-\$400,000. NHA Labore stated that this is depending on the census. With them having a lower census there will, in theory, be less need for agency staff. Commissioner Lauer asked if they have a voluntary overtime in place to help with the contract nursing by allowing the County's staff to pick up extra shifts. NHA Labore stated that some staff do take overtime but its small amounts; the staff do not tend to take eight (8) hour blocks. He explained to the Commissioners that it is a double-edged sword. You don't want to burn out the current staff either by working so much. NHA Labore stated that he thinks they can reduce the contract nursing line even further but he feels \$400,000 is aggressive. CA Libby stated that Belknap County has a Shift Bonus Program in place. They have been using it and it has helped reduce some agency usage. She stated that she thinks they should take some time to research it and put it together for July 1<sup>st</sup>. After discussion the Commissioners agreed to a \$300,000 reduction in the contract nursing line with the agreement that they will be looking at the overtime incentive bonus for next fiscal year.

NHA Labore stated that he would like to discuss the new MNA positions that the Commissioners have discussed cutting from the budget. He explained that they currently they have three (3) staff that are trying to get into MNA programs but were unable to because there hasn't been enough interest to start up a program. The group doing the LNA training program offers an MNA program and were willing to do one of those here for the Nursing Home. Had everything gone well without the virus they would have had another LNA class graduating right now and would have another one going which would have allowed MNAs to work in that function rather than being pulled to the floor. His feeling is including those MNAs could help influence, assuming they can get another LNA Program up and graduated, the agency nursing numbers. He stated that they do currently have 3 MNAs working in the facility but they have had to fill in as LNAs and not able to work in the MNA capacity. NHA Labore stated that they can still run the program because their education line increase includes the LNA training program in the Nursing

Department. He stated that he can use the Administration Education Line towards those LNAs who have expressed interest in the MNA program. He could put them through the program to get the training and then if they are needed they can work in that function. CA Libby stated that if they are able to get rid of the contract LNAs, which have added a large expense to the amount they have used, and can get up to full staffing levels with LNAs, theoretically they may have some money left in the contract nursing line that they could put back towards the MNAs if they have that ability. She stated that she does not see them being in that position by July 1<sup>st</sup> but believes there is some flexibility within the nursing salary lines to do some of the MNA stuff without adding the full \$132,000 for the three (3) full time positions. NHA Labore agreed with that as did the Commissioners.

NHA Labore asked if the Commissioners have any expectations for him in regards to the news of the positive COVID-19 tests. He stated that there were six (6) deaths yesterday and four (4) of them were linked to long term facility but those facilities weren't listed. Commissioner Lauer stated that does not want to do anything until the rest of the tests results come in. Commissioner Morris stated that she thinks NHA Labore should be the only one to talk to the media. Commissioner Piper stated that if the media reaches out to the Commissioners, they can say that they have had a positive test but refer them to NHA Labore for details. NHA Labore stated that he will send out a letter to the families regarding the positive test in a resident once they receive the test results from the rest of the Profile residents. The Commissioners thanked NHA Labore and all of his staff for their hard work.

CA Libby stated that FM Knapton is very concerned about the farm revenue in the coming months due to the Pandemic. FM Knapton has done a lot of thinking and averaging and she has come up with what reductions she feels need to be made to the farm revenue projects for FY'21.

CA Libby had put together the following list of potential reductions for the Commissioners to discuss.

Commissioner Piper wanted to discuss the Parking Lot Paving even though this isn't on CA Libby's list. The Commissioners discussed this and feel that it would be prudent to postpone it this year.

Finance Director Position – CA Libby stated that she feels they need one and can justify it, at the same time she has done this for 18 years and if she has to do this again for another year she can. She stated that if they are prioritizing and trying to get the lowest tax increase maybe this is not the year to do that.

PT Alternative Sentencing Position – Commissioner Piper stated that AS Director DePalo stated this position would be extremely helpful and she would be reluctant to cut it. Commissioner Morris stated that she did not hear any justification for it. As the Commissioners further discussed they felt that they could remove this from this year's budget proposal.

PT Maintenance Position – CA Libby stated that the DoC used to handle the grounds maintenance around the building and now has asked Maintenance to take it over as their part

time employee who normally does this has stated they are not coming back this summer. The Commissioners discussed this further and decided that they were not going to fund any new part-time positions in this budget.

Commissioner Piper stated that she feels the Finance Director is a priority.

CA Libby stated that they are in a hard place of trying to put together a budget with so many unknowns. She stated that Cheshire County has essentially gone on lockdown. They have put into place hiring freezes, no discretionary spending because their concern is their towns are not going to be able to pay their tax bills in December which will leave them in a hard place. The economic impacts of this pandemic are going to be felt for a long time.

Sheriff's Department Training - \$12,000. Commissioner Morris feels the free equipment they will receive from this conference will help them move forward in the future and build that forensic lab. CA Libby stated that this training could be free if they get put on the waiting list but there is no time frame as to when the training will become available. The Sheriff's Department will still obtain the equipment from the training whether they get put on the wait list or pay for it. The Commissioners discussed the training and agreed that they would like Sheriff Stiegler to have the training but be placed on the wait list and would also like to have him prioritize the rest of his capital.

CA Libby stated that ITM Ruggles has already agreed to reduce his contract line \$5,000

North Country Home Health and Hospice – CA Libby stated that they did not receive an application from them this year that they have funded for many years. She stated that what happened was their prior staff member who handles these applications had retired in October and her email must not have been disabled because she never received the email back. Their new employee did not start until December. When the new employee started they had reached out to the Commissioners' Office and was told that applications were coming out soon which was wrong information because the application process had already closed. She had called again yesterday to follow up and CA Libby spoke to her and explained when the applications were due and what the process was. She stated that the Commissioners typically do not accept late or incomplete applications but she is welcome to submit justification for what had happened and what the loss of funding would do for their agency. The Commissioners discussed the situation and agreed to fund their \$30,000 as they are a critical agency that meets their goals of social service funding.

Strategic Planning – Commissioner Morris stated that in her opinion this is the most important thing in the whole budget. The process that proposal from Resilience Planning would start would be a game changing process, it is fiscally prudent and they can link it with the courthouse renovations. She stated that this is a potentially money saving process. She didn't feel strongly about this until the pandemic hit. Commissioner Morris explained that this is not the full \$57,000 for the master plan, this is \$12,000 for the strategic planning portion and they can give up the \$45,000. She stated that they can do this step by step, get it started and see where it goes. She feels that Steve Whitman from Resilience Planning needs to come in and discuss it and get it off the ground. The Commissioners agreed that they can fund the \$12,000 this year.

CA Libby stated that after the Commissioners' discussions she has removed the Alternative Sentencing part time position and the Maintenance part time position, she removed the \$12,000 in for the Sheriff's Department conference and the \$105,000 for the paving, she added \$12,000 for strategic planning and \$30,000 for North Country Home Health and Hospice. The Commissioners stated that the Finance Director position will be left in. Commissioner Piper stated that this needs to be left in as it is very important that they have the County Administrator and Finance Director positions separated like the rest of the counties. The Commissioners stated that they still want the Sheriff to prioritize his capital budget.

Public Hearing – CA Libby stated that she is not sure how to do that right now. Normally they hold the public hearing the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in May. She stated that they can wait until after Memorial Day but it is hard not knowing what the Governor is doing with the stay at home order. Commissioner Morris stated that she is fine with having an electronic public meeting. CA Libby stated that they also have to have a Delegation meeting to set elected officials wages in May so they may need to do that electronically. The tentative date as of right now is May 18<sup>th</sup>. She stated that they will wait and see what happens with the Stay at Home order and then decide on how to handle these meetings.

CA Libby stated that they need to discuss the Commissioners' meeting schedule for May. She stated that Supt. Oakes sent out fuel bids to be opened to May 5<sup>th</sup> so they will need to meet then. The Commissioners agreed to add another meeting next Thursday the 30<sup>th</sup> to finalize the budget and will then meet on Tuesdays in May.

CA Libby stated that with all changes made to the budget they are at 3.67% to be raised by taxes. Commissioner Piper stated that this is better than when they started but she would still like to look at the Sheriff's Department Capital Budget once he prioritizes it.

#### Financial Reports

CA Libby stated that the last quarter of the fiscal year they will see financial impacts with less revenue. She said that during the weekly County Administrator's meeting yesterday it was discussed that the potential CARES Act 2.0 may have a Heroes fund that will provide federal monies for a Hazard Pay incentive for all front-line workers.

CA Libby noted that their biggest hit will be lost revenue.

County Administrator's Teleconference Call – CA Libby stated that they discussed the stipend pay to frontline workers. She stated that everyone who works in the Nursing Home is included so they set it up like that in the system. They are now being told that administrative staff not included. CA Libby stated that Administrative staff are vital to the Nursing Homes and are just as likely to be exposed as Nursing staff. They are all included on the Medicaid Cost Report so they should receive the stipend. CA Libby stated that she is frustrated that Governor Sununu publically announced the stipend for front line workers ten (10) days ago but the state is still not ready to distribute.

Commissioner Piper stated that she was on the weekly call last Friday. All the affiliates were giving updates. She noted that she spent 2.5 hours on the GOFER call as well.

11:21 AM With no further business the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Morris', with a large, decorative flourish at the end.

Marcia Morris,  
Clerk