

COÖS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
Coös County Administrative Offices
34 County Farm Road – Stewartstown, NH
February 20, 2024

Present: Commissioners Thomas Brady (*zoom*), Raymond Gorman, Robert Théberge; County Administrator Mark Brady; Superintendent of Corrections Ben Champagne; Director of Finance Carrie Klebe; Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; Nursing Home Administrator Louise Belanger; HR Coordinator Morgan DeBlois; County Treasurer Sue Collins; Captain Keith Roberge; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris; and a member of the press.

1. The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Ray Gorman at 9:02 a.m. and followed with the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. A motion was made by Commissioner Gorman, seconded by Commissioner Théberge to allow Commissioner Brady to join the meeting via zoom. The motion was approved 2-0.
3. Approval of the agenda: A motion was made by Commissioner Théberge, seconded by Commissioner Brady to amend the agenda as follows: Add the execution of the Tax Anticipation Note documents and non-public RSA 91-A:3, II(a). The motion was approved 3-0. A motion was made by Commissioner Théberge, seconded by Commissioner Brady to approve the agenda, as amended. The motion was approved 3-0.
4. Tax Anticipation Notes: The Finance Director distributed the TANs documents for signatures. A motion was made by Commissioner Théberge, seconded by Commissioner Brady to authorize the Board to sign the Tax Anticipation Note for up to \$11,000,000 with interest at 3.99%. The motion was approved 3-0.
5. Hearing of the Public: There was none.
6. Review/ Action Proposed 2024 Coös County Budget: The County Administrator noted that the budget included revisions based on the BerryDunn report and meeting with the nursing home administrators. The proposed budget was at the same level as in December.

The Director of Finance began the review of the proposed budget. She noted that the budget included a three percent (3%) cost of living adjustment (COLA) for non-union employees and the AFSCME union employees in Berlin. The SEA 2% COLA was previously included in the budget presented in December. IT contract services increased in all departments.

There is a decrease in the W. Stewartstown Nursing Hospital (WSNH) budget of \$174,880. The County Administrator noted that the expenditures were based on staffing for an average census of 72 and revenues on a census of 65 – that is an increase in 5 from the December budget. The County Treasurer noted that an increase in census should result in an increase in MQIP revenue.

The Coös County Nursing Home (Berlin) budget increased by \$169,028. A position was added in the housekeeping department that was not included in the December budget proposal. Also, there were 14 projects that were funded by GOFERR in the 2023 budget. Those projects are ongoing and the County match (60%) to GOFERR funds was not included in the December proposed budget.

Commissioner Brady inquired if there were facility funds available and could it be used to offset some of the cost. The Director of Finance replied that there was \$415,331 as of December 31, 2023. Commissioner Brady suggested taking 60% of the windows project cost and using the facility funds.

The County Administration budget increased by \$99,840 due to the Grant & Contracts positions being moved from the Finance Department.

The Sheriff's Department increased by \$170,270 primarily due to two grants – the Northern Borders Grant (\$86,313) and an increase to the Drug Task Force Grant (\$60,000). Captain Roberge said these grants were pass throughs, i.e., paid for themselves without affecting the county tax.

The Finance Director reduced state assistance programs by \$300,000.

The Department of Corrections budget increased by \$115,620 primarily due to an unanticipated resignation; the three percent cost of living increase for the non-union employees and health insurance increases. The Superintendent noted that the cost of the heating project was less than projected and those funds could be utilized elsewhere.

Interest: short term notes increased based on the rate of the TAN note.

County Specials: \$16,000 was budgeted for a lower parking lot at the Administrative Offices.

The total change to the county section of the budget was an increase of \$206,190.

The County Treasurer inquired if any county tax dollars were used for the renovations to the administrative building. The Finance Director replied that ARPA and Opioid grant funding were used and no county tax dollars.

The Director of Finance continued with the revenue section of the proposed budget:

- WSNH increased by \$517,580.
- Berlin decreased by \$23,520. The County Administrator noted that the Nursing Home Administrator had adjusted revenue for a census of 80 residents, an increase of 8 from the December budget.
- Sheriff's Department increased by \$239,000.
- Surplus to reduce taxes \$800,000.

Commissioner Brady directed the County Administrator to continue working on making further reductions to the budget. The Board will meet on Tuesday, February 27 to take final action.

Commissioner Gorman stated that departments need to look where they could be more efficient and reduce the budget. Taxpayers are concerned and he expressed disappointment that there was little change to this budget from December.

Commissioner Théberge stated that he worries about the senior citizens who are on fixed income. The budget needs to be reduced.

Commissioner Brady concluded that the Board appreciates all the work that has been done to this point.

Commissioner Brady left the meeting at this point.

7. Review/ Action Proposed 2024 Unincorporated Places Budget: Most of the changes related to the proposed three percent cost of living. Dispatch services also increased in certain Unincorporated Places.
8. Other Business:
 - a. Commissioner Gorman requested a letter of support for Northern Dispatch. He will be forwarding the information to the County Administrator. A motion was made by Commissioner Théberge, seconded by Commissioner Gorman to authorize the letter of support for the Northern Borders Regional Commission. The motion was approved 2-0.
9. A motion was made by Commissioner Théberge, seconded by Commissioner Gorman to enter nonpublic session per RSA 91-A:3, II(a) at 10:54 a.m. The motion was approved 2-0.

A motion was made by Commissioner Théberge, seconded by Commissioner Gorman to come out of nonpublic session at 11:23 a.m. The motion was approved 2-0.

A motion was made by Commissioner Théberge, seconded by Commissioner Gorman to deny the tuition loan request. The motion was approved 2-0.

A motion was made by Commissioner Gorman, seconded by Commissioner Théberge to adjourn the meeting at 11:25 a.m. The motion was approved 2-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Commissioner Robert Théberge, Clerk