

Coös County Commissioners
Budget Work Session
Coös County Nursing Hospital - W. Stewartstown, NH
February 7, 2018

Present: Commissioners Paul Grenier and Rick Samson; County Administrator Jennifer Fish; Superintendent Ben Champagne; Nursing Home Administrator Louise Belanger, Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; Director of Finance Carrie Klebe; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris; Sheriff Brian Valerino; Captain Keith Roberge; Register of Deeds Tanya Batchelder; and Todd Rich, Wireless Partners.

1. Commissioner Grenier opened the Budget Work Session at 9:10 a.m. He explained that Commissioner Brady would not be attending the budget work session and the meeting would be an abbreviated version of the agenda because the meeting was not properly noticed on the website. He continued that Todd Rich from Wireless Partners would make his presentation and there would be a brief overview of budget changes. Commissioner Grenier led the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. A motion was made by Commissioner Samson, seconded by Commissioner Grenier to eliminate the following items from the agenda: Item 5 Discussion of February 23, 2018 meeting; Item 6 Any other business; and, Item 7 Nonpublic session. All approved 2-0.

A motion was made by Commissioner Samson, seconded by Commissioner Grenier to approve the agenda, as amended. All approved 2-0.

3. Hearing of the Public:

Todd Rich of Wireless Partners provided some background information including that he has been in business for three years. The business provides 4G and LG service in rural markets. They have been working with Verizon and have recently built towers in certain areas of Coös County. He has looked at several locations in the Stewartstown area. Two of the areas are located on County-owned land. Mr. Rich requested leasing a 100' x 100' area for 50 years. The lease would renew automatically every five years with the option to terminate the lease by either party at which point the tower would be taken down and the land would be brought back to its original format. The tower is a 190' lattice tower that is designed on paper first based on the land area. The tower is also constructed to accommodate five other carriers in the future. The tower would provide Verizon service for people traveling as well as the first responders in the area.

Mr. Rich continued that if the County enters into an agreement with Wireless Partners, there would be a three-four month period of contracts and permits prior to breaking ground. He also stated that there is a deadline. Commissioner Grenier stated that the County Commissioners have no legal authority outside of a meeting. He asked that all correspondence and future discussions be through the County Administrator. She will forward all information to the Commissioners. The Delegation will need to authorize the lease. Commissioner Grenier continued that the Board has a scheduled meeting on February 14 at which point the Board could approve the proposal contingent on the Delegation's final approval. The Delegation will be meeting on February 23 and could authorize the lease agreement.

Mr. Rich noted that every tower that has been built has the same terms. The \$30,000 payment is non-negotiable. It is a \$500 per month payment with automatic renewal every five years. The

payment will increase 10% after the renewal. Mr. Rich provided a digital photo of a few areas that were proposed for the tower. Two of the areas were on County-owned land: off Back Pond Road and beside the Recycling Center. The preferred choice was the Recycling Center area. Commissioner Grenier questioned the security aspect in regards to the inmates at the Recycling Center. Superintendent Champagne asked how often would the equipment be checked. Mr. Rich stated that there are no daily, weekly or monthly checks. There would be limited access to the area once the road construction is complete. There was a brief discussion of relocating the road direction to the recycling center for better access. Mr. Rich stated that he will be discussing the best location with his engineer. He is also working on the border crossings with Canaan and Beecher Falls, Vermont.

Commissioner Grenier directed Mr. Rich to submit the preferred location and all documentation to the County Administrator in order for the item to be placed on the February 14 agenda for approval contingent on Delegation final approval on February 23. Both Commissioner Grenier and Commissioner Samson supported the proposal. Mr. Rich was asked to attend the February 23 meeting in Berlin to answer Delegation questions.

4. 2018 Budget Discussion:

Commissioner Grenier noted that no decisions or votes would be made on the proposed budget. He asked the Finance Director to provide an overview of changes. Some of the noted changes were as follows: health insurance line items decreased; and the FICA line items increased. There were changes in the Nursing, Dietary and Department of Corrections budgets. Smartlinx has been budgeted through June. Revenue changes were made to the nursing homes budgets due to the change in room rates. The loan for the water system was included in both the appropriations and revenues.

The budget surplus analysis was reviewed by the Director of Finance. The surplus was projected at \$2.9 million and the unaudited figure was \$2.2 million. Commissioner Grenier asked for a total amount previously set aside for the water system. The current balance was \$292,000 for the water system funds. He suggested leaving \$15,000 in the line item to pay for incidentals and applying the remainder to the undesignated fund balance.

Commissioner Grenier reviewed the proposed appropriations and revenues of the Nursing Hospital budget with Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills. Ms. Mills noted that repairs were needed to the generator with an estimated cost of \$3,200. Commissioner Samson asked if the price included labor and other costs. Ms. Mills replied that it was only for the part. Other costs will be charged to building repairs line item. The revenues decreased due to the reduction in the Medicaid rate effective January 1, 2018. Several residents have moved from private pay to Medicaid and that caused a significant decrease. Commissioner Grenier noted that there is an \$850,000 increase in the county tax. The Delegation will not pass a budget with that type of an increase. Commissioner Grenier noted that the total County budget will need to decrease by \$400,000. Commissioner Grenier suggested that Ms. Mills review the revenues.

Commissioner Grenier reviewed the proposed appropriations and revenues of the Nursing Home budget with Administrator Louise Belanger. Mrs. Belanger explained that reducing line items pertaining to skilled is difficult because the facility has not been skilled for a full year. Commissioner Grenier asked that Mrs. Belanger review revenues. Mrs. Belanger also noted that if we want people

in the nursing homes the articles in the local newspapers need to promote positivity in the nursing homes.

Commissioner Samson asked the nursing home administrators for the total amount of changes proposed in the budget compared to the December figures. Ms. Mills replied (\$175,975) in appropriations and (\$242,880) in revenue. Mrs. Belanger replied (\$195,375) in appropriations and \$210,830 in revenue.

Commissioner Grenier requested the following from the following departments:

Department of Corrections: a decrease of \$50,000

Sheriff's Department: a decrease of \$25,000 - \$30,000

Registry of Deeds: revisit revenues for an increase of \$20,000 - \$25,000

Commissioner Grenier proposed level funding Outside Agencies requests to the 2017 figures. The Utility Valuation Defense Fund line item and new 2018 requests: Caleb Caregivers, ServiceLink and Energy Assistant Services were eliminated. The Funerals: County Assisted Person line item was reduce to \$2,500; the Food Pantry line item reduce to \$5,000. The County cannot afford funding new programs.

Ms. Mills noted that the Board had asked at the November Budget Work Session that the shift differential proposal for the night and evening shifts be presented in February. The total impact for the West Stewartstown Nursing Hospital would be \$142,190. Commissioner Grenier stated that he could not support the request. However, he suggested presenting the information at the February 23 meeting. Commissioner Samson stated that he would not vote in favor of the budget if the shift differentials were not included in the budget. Staff have been underpaid for too long. The turnover rate is unacceptable. Residents are important but employees are more important. If an employee is comfortable, it is passed on to the residents. Ms. Belanger noted that the effect on her budget would be about \$130,000. Commissioner Grenier noted this would require an additional \$270,000 between the two facilities. The West Stewartstown Nursing Hospital lost \$4.7 million over the last year. Commissioner Samson also noted that \$190,000 is given to outside agencies.

Superintendent Champagne suggested a weekend rate change for all shifts at the Department of Corrections. Shifts are not the issue at the Department of Corrections. Weekend coverage is the greatest issue. He did not agree that only second and third shifts would benefit from the rate change. Ms. Mills noted that her proposal was \$1.50 for evenings and \$2.50 for nights. Mrs. Belanger stated that her figure was based on the original proposal. She would be doing this only for her nursing department as that is where is in need of help. She noted that the Superintendent's proposal was a great idea. Weekends are also an issue at the nursing home. Commissioner Samson questioned if the union would accept the proposal. Commissioner Grenier stated that he would not reopen a union contract until the proposal was ready to go. Commissioner Samson agreed that the Superintendent's proposal was a good idea. Ms. Belanger noted that the contracts expire 12/31/18. The increase cannot be given only to licensed staff. It has been done in the past and it created a battlefield atmosphere at her facility. The nursing department is currently working at minimum staff on the 3-11 and 11-7 shifts.

Commissioner Grenier stated that all recommended changes to appropriations and revenues will be reviewed at the February 14 Commissioners' Meeting in Berlin.

On a motion made by Commissioner Samson, seconded by Commissioner Grenier the meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m. All approved 2-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Samson, Clerk