

COÖS COUNTY DELEGATION
2012 ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING
Saturday, March 10, 2012 - 9:00 a.m.
Coös County Nursing Home - Berlin, NH

Present: Representatives John Tholl-Chair; Herb Richardson-Vice Chair; Yvonne Thomas-Clerk; Gary Coulombe, Duffy Daugherty, Evalyn Merrick (*arrived 9:50 a.m.*), Larry Rappaport, Bill Remick (*arrived 11:55 a.m.*), Robert Théberge and Marc Tremblay. Also present: County Commissioners “Bing” Judd and Thomas Brady; County Administrator Suzanne Collins; Director of Finance Jennifer Fish; Superintendent Craig Hamelin; Nursing Home Administrator Louise Belanger; Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; County Attorney Robert Mekeel; Sheriff Gerald Marcou; Chief Deputy Keith Roberge; Registrar of Deeds Carole Lamirande; County Treasurer Fred King; Assistant County Attorney John McCormick; Larry Barker, Cooperative Extension; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris, representatives of agencies supported by the County, members of the press and the public.

Chairman Tholl called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. He asked everyone to rise for the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Tholl stated that the Delegation members requested individual party caucuses. At 9:45 a.m. the Delegation members returned to the meeting.

The roll was called by the Clerk, Representative Yvonne Thomas. There were 9 members present.

Review & Approval of Minutes: A motion was made by Representative Rappaport, seconded by Representative Tremblay to approve the minutes of the February 6, 2012 meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved by a voice vote.

Subcommittee Reports: Chairman Tholl reported that subcommittee reports had been reviewed at the second public hearing held on March 2, 2012.

Appropriations Budget: Chairman Tholl stated that he would read the bottom line for each department and began with the Coös County Nursing Hospital budget. Representative Rappaport presented a motion, seconded by Representative Daugherty that the nursing hospital budget be reduced from \$9,519,760 by 7%. Representative Richardson asked for a figure. Jennifer Fish calculated the amount to be a reduction of \$666,383 and the revised calculated amount was \$8,853,377. Representative Rappaport explained that he understands there are extremely good people at the facility. However the economy is severe and the taxpayers need to be coddled and cannot afford increases of any kind.

Representative Richardson stated that the new amount was approximately \$37,000 less than the amount expended in 2011. The cost of fuel and food has gone up. He cannot cut services to the citizens of Coös and he will not vote in favor of this motion.

Representative Daugherty stated that none of his neighbors can afford increases of any kind. They are worried about meals and jobs. His conscience cannot support this increase. He was in favor of keeping the 2011 expended figure but no increase.

Representative Théberge stated that he understood the economic situation but did not believe in cutting the nursing homes. He could not vote in favor.

Representative Coulombe noted that the reason for increases in the budget came from funding cuts from the State. Representative Théberge added that it was downshift from the State level.

Chairman Tholl understood that Coös County is the only county with two nursing homes, the county with the highest unemployment rate and with the lowest population. He would like to see some kind of reduction to the budget but not in such a way that it will hinder the nursing home residents. He added that he is favor of combining the two nursing homes but could not support the reduction.

Sue Collins informed the Delegation that she had received a call on Friday from LGC (Local Government Center) stating that there would be a reduction in the guaranteed maximum rate for the health insurance premiums on July 1 with a savings of \$109,400 for the last six months of 2012. For the nursing hospital budget that will be a savings of \$47,800.

Representative Merrick also agreed that areas needed to decrease but not the elderly.

Representative Daugherty stated that he was not throwing the elderly under the bus but millions are being spent elsewhere. Asking for a flat tax approach was not out of realm of reason. He has the same concern for nursing home residents as he has expressed in past years.

Representative Rappaport also added that he was not throwing the elderly under the bus but the nursing home did not spend anywhere near the amount budgeted in 2011. If a department is short, line item transfers can be done.

Chairman Tholl repeated the motion. The motion failed by roll call vote 2-7.

A motion was made by Representative Merrick, seconded by Representative Richardson to cut \$6,000 for the sound-proofing the family room. Chairman Tholl asked if the motion could be amended to include the \$47,800 in health insurance premium adjustments. Both Representatives agreed with the amendment. A motion was made by Representative Merrick, seconded by Representative Richardson to adopt the amount of \$9,465,960 in appropriations for the West Stewartstown Nursing Hospital. The motion passed by roll call vote 7-2.

The Chair continued with the Berlin Nursing Home budget. The health insurance decrease in this budget was \$48,550. Representative Rappaport presented a motion, seconded by Representative Daugherty that the nursing home budget be reduced from \$9,913,200 to \$9,513,000 a reduction of \$400,000 or 4%. Representative Rappaport added that the determination of the specific line item cuts were to be made by the Commissioners and Administrators.

Representative Merrick agreed that the budget could be reduced but needed clarification. Representative Coulombe noted that the nursing hospital budget had a reduction of less than 1% and this motion would cut Berlin's by 4%. He could not support the inequity. Representative Thérberge understood the need to cut but asked that if this was going to be the trend through the whole budget. He suggested that the Delegation should have met with the Commissioners prior to the budget meeting to discuss. Representative Richardson added that he had no problem with one item change but could not accept a bottom line cut. He also added that he did not agree with the political parties discussing the budget in caucuses prior to the meeting. He stated that budget discussions should be held in public. Representative Daugherty stated that the Delegation has no way of knowing where to cut and therefore must look at the bottom line. People who work on the budget will know where to cut.

Commissioner Brady stated that the budget is reviewed thoroughly by the Commissioners for days and they present the lowest budget possible. He was offended by the Delegation's remarks that the Commissioners had not done their job. Chairman Tholl noted that the same two Commissioners are always in attendance.

Representative Coulombe stated that the Commissioners had done a good job with the budget.

Representative Rappaport stated that he did not mean to imply that the Commissioners were incapable. The amount budgeted and the amount spent was too large. Representative Th  berge also agreed with the Chair's comment. Representative Tremblay stated that the Delegation should remain civil and agreed that the taxpayers cannot continually sustain a 7 percent increase. In the long run, members of the Delegation all want what is good for the County.

Commissioner Judd added that the Commissioners worked hard to keep the budget down. It was not a 7 percent increase on the total budget but 2 percent. Both nursing home budgets were cut due to state cuts. Fred King stated that surplus is needed in case of legislative changes. He reminded the Delegation that the surplus is always used to reduce property taxes. Sue Collins also added that the amount to be raised by taxes is up 7 percent because of the Medicaid rate reduction in both nursing homes and the Medicaid Quality Incentive Payment has not turned out as the legislators believed it would be as a result of House Bill 2.

Chairman Tholl repeated the motion. The motion failed by roll call vote 2-7.

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Tremblay to adopt the amount of \$9,864,650 in appropriations for the Berlin Nursing Home. The motion passed by roll call vote 7-2.

The Chair continued with the individual County Government budgets. The Chair asked if there were health insurance adjustments. Sue replied yes and a total adjusted amount could be included in the final resolution.

Chairman Tholl stated that the County Attorney's budget of \$394,600 could be reduced by \$10,000 as the County Attorney had requested to reduce the contracted services line item from \$20,000 to \$10,000. Attorney Mekeel also added that if the Delegation was looking to save money they should not make his department return to the courthouse.

There was discussion pertaining to the request of 6.5% increase for the assistant county attorney's salary. Chairman Tholl was leery to approve the request as no other county employees were receiving cost of living increases. It would not be fair.

Representative Richardson stated that he had received the information he requested at a previous meeting about the number of employees receiving step increases. He was surprised at the amount of employees receiving step increases and those who were not. He felt that the employees who have worked for the county over 10 years get punished and are not being rewarded fairly.

Commissioner Brady noted that the step increases have already been received by these employees. Jennifer Fish explained that employees who have been working for the county seven years or more obtain a longevity step at the end of the year.

Representative Richardson asked if the Assistant County Attorney received either the step increase or the longevity bonus. Sue answered neither. He has not been an employee for seven years and he works at the pleasure of the County Attorney. Attorney Mekeel stated that Mr. McCormick is a valuable and dedicated employee. He would forego many things in his budget to fund this request. Sheriff Marcou also spoke in support of this raise.

The Chair stated that the County Attorney's budget appropriation would remain at \$394,600. Any changes in line items can be handled with line item transfers to the Delegation.

Representative Th  berge questioned the need for the new furniture. Attorney Mekeel replied that the existing furniture that survived the move will be used at the courthouse and that currently his office is using some of the bank's furniture. It was agreed that the \$10,000 savings in contracted services would cover a raise for the Assistant County Attorney and furniture for the new offices.

Chairman Tholl asked that Carole Lamirande be recognized for her years of service to Co  s County. She was given a standing ovation by all in attendance.

The Sheriff's Department budget was \$824,850. A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Merrick to amend the budget by \$3,500 to purchase a mobile radio to replace the radio on loan from the Dalton Police Department which must be returned no later than March 13, 2012. The motion passed by roll call vote 9-0.

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Merrick to increase the gasoline budget by \$5,000 to make it \$57,500. Representative Daugherty stated he would vote against the increase as the Sheriff had indicated that he could live within the budgeted amount. Sheriff Marcou replied that he hoped to stay within the budgeted amount. The gasoline is budgeted at \$3.50/gallon. If the price per gallon stops at \$4, he can try but if the price per gallon goes over \$4.50 he will not be able to stay within the budgeted amount. He added that if the price per gallon goes to \$4.50 he will need \$14,000. The proposed \$5,000 will help. Representative Daugherty suggested not doing anything for now and possibly do line item transfers or even a supplemental budget later during the year. Representative Richardson noted that whatever the Sheriff does not spend will be returned to fund balance at the end of the year. The cost of a supplemental budget may be higher than the increase requested. Chairman Tholl stated that he would abstain from voting as he works for the Sheriff's Department. The motion passed by roll call vote 6 in favor, 2 opposed and 1 abstained.

The Corrections Department budget had a decrease of \$7,700 due to the decrease in health insurance rates.

Larry Barker stated that the University System is facing another cut of \$1.7 million in 2013. However, the President of the University and the Board of Trustees value the extension offices and they will not be affected in the second year of the biennium.

A motion was made by Representative Coulombe, seconded by Representative Richardson to reduce the Delegation expense line item by \$2,000. Representative Daugherty suggested zeroing the line item. Representative Richardson disagreed. If a representative does not want the money for per diem and travel, it can be returned to the County. Representatives Coulombe and Tremblay stated that they would support Representative Daugherty. Sue noted that funds have already been expended from the line item this year so it could not be zeroed out. Commissioner Brady questioned what this would mean to other people who might be interested in running for office. Is this also another way to obtain re-election? Sue asked if the statute indicated that the Delegation shall be paid \$25 plus mileage. The Chair stated he would research the law during the break.

The Delegation recessed for lunch.

The meeting reconvened and Chairman Tholl stated that the law states that the County "shall" pay the Delegation per diem and mileage. The motion to appropriate \$5,000 passed by roll call vote 9-1.

The Chair continued with the review of the budget.

Representative Richardson stated that in the past the \$45,000 for economic development was been split in three groups \$15,000/\$15,000/\$15,000. He stated that he did not see any breakdown like that this year.

Sue replied that in 2011 \$15,000 was earmarked for Tri-County CAP for its economic development position. The balance was appropriated for economic development organizations submitting projects to the Commissioners who in cooperation with the Delegation could fund a project or projects. No other applications for funds came forward so in 2011 the only \$15,000 that expended was for Tri County CAP.

Representative Richardson suggested that the \$45,000 be appropriated with the Commissioners to decide on applications for funding. Sue stated that during budget preparation GREAT from Groveton came forward and requested \$10,000 for this year's budget and CAP requested \$15,000.

Representative Richardson replied that rather than earmark it for specific organizations he would leave it up to the Commissioners to allocate it. Different initiatives were mentioned like the Chambers of Commerce, welcome centers and CAP.

Chairman Tholl repeated that the Delegation is making a general suggestion that the Commissioners would make the determination of who to fund.

Commissioner Judd stated that the Commissioners have talked about breaking the \$45,000 down into say up to \$5,000 for any one town and that would give nine towns a chance to apply for up to \$5,000. If that idea does not work, in another year it could change. This would give an opportunity to review real good proposals. The \$5,000 limit would cut down on some requests. He said he knew of some towns right now that would like \$5,000. Chairman Tholl replied all of them. The selectmen of the towns are the ones who would be handling any grants from the County. For example, the Colebrook Chamber of Commerce could come in for like \$5,000, Pittsburg might come in for \$5,000; Lancaster might come in for \$5,000. It could be anyone in the County and the Board would see how this would work.

Representative Th  berge asked if any of the money had been appropriated so far this year and Sue replied no.

Representative Richardson suggested calling it a pilot program to try and help each. Chairman Tholl agreed.

Chairman Tholl stated the revised total county government budget was \$10,676,525.

A motion was made by Representative Daugherty, seconded by Representative Rappaport to reduce the county government budget to \$9,929,160. He explained that the amount exceeds last year's expended amount and is sufficient to run the County. Chairman Tholl stated that this was a reduction of \$447,365. Representative Merrick asked how Representative Daugherty came to that amount and he replied it was a 7 percent reduction. Representative Th  berge stated that the programs in this budget are critical programs that the County supports.

Chairman Tholl stated that all budgets are needed and did not believe in cutting the public safety budgets. Representative Merrick stated that the Commissioners and Delegation have done a good job. The State has cut and downshifted to the taxpayers. Now the County has to pick up the slack. People that are known to the Delegation benefit from some of these programs. Representative Coulombe inquired from other Delegation members and Commissioners if any members of the general public had been in contact with them about reducing the budget. The reply was no. Commissioner Brady noted that some "hoped

that the state reps get old and need a nursing home someday”. Representative Coulombe noted that if the Board or Delegation has not been contacted then where is the problem with the budget.

Sue noted that 60% of the County budget is state assistance programs. If payment is not made to the State, the County is charged around 8% interest and the State stops making payments to the two nursing homes. Commissioner Brady noted that the increase in the budget was due to the State Assistance Program increase of \$345,531.

The Chair re-read the motion. The motion failed by a roll call vote of 2-8.

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Remick to approve the total expenditures of \$31,574,235. The motion passed by a roll call vote of 8-2. This was a 2% increase.

Unincorporated Places: Chairman Tholl read the bottom line of the Unincorporated Places expenditures. Representative Daugherty stated that based on the discussion at the public hearing regarding the emergency trailers, he could not approve the unincorporated places budget as the procedure was not done properly. Other groups in the County have expressed that they too would have applied for funding. Representative Richardson noted that he had an amendment that would allow any organization that is associated with an unincorporated place the same opportunity. He had a list of the unincorporated places that had money available in fund balance. Rep. Daugherty stated that he had received a complaint from a Millsfield resident opposing these appropriations. Chairman Tholl stated that these organizations would need to make a request to the Commissioners. Sue stated that there was no appropriation included for Millsfield for emergency equipment as they ended the year with a \$295 deficit due to special education costs. She continued that a \$2,500 contingency has been allocated in case the North Country Endurance Challenge goes through Millsfield. Sue also added that the 2012 Payment in Lieu of Tax from Granite Reliable has already been received. The fund balances for the Unincorporated Places are included the County report.

Sue explained that at the February 8 meeting, Commissioner Judd stated that the Pittsburg Fire Department might request funds for an emergency equipment trailer. It was received the following Monday. Since the budget had not been printed Sue contacted the Board by email asking if they wanted to include the request in the proposed budget. The Commissioners had replied yes. Sue stated that the Commissioners held a meeting earlier in the day and formally approved the request.

Representative Daugherty stated that there had been questions regarding liability. Since the County is making donations to both clubs, the County does not incur any liability.

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Tremblay to amend the Unincorporated Places budgets listed below in order to allow organizations that provide emergency rescue and aide in the Unincorporated Places to request rescue equipment funding from the Board of Commissioners from time to time as each appropriation allows:

Crawford's Purchase	\$1,000
Dixville	1,000
Erving's Grant	1,000
Green's Grant	1,000
Low & Burbank's Grant	1,000
Martin's Location	1,000
Odell	1,000
Pinkham's Grant	1,000
Sargent's Purchase	1,000
Second College Grant	1,000
Thompson & Meserve's Purchase	1,000

Representative Daugherty suggested amending the motion to read “up to \$1,000”. Both Representatives Richardson and Tremblay agreed with the amendment. Chairman Tholl indicated that this would increase the Unincorporated Places budget by \$12,000. The new appropriations totaled \$1,059,292. The motion passed by roll call vote 10-0.

Revenues Budget: Chairman Tholl reviewed the budgeted revenues.

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Remick to create and establish a capital reserve fund for the purchase of in car video cameras for the Sheriff’s Department, and to allocate the sum of \$5,000 from last year’s budget surplus for that purpose.

Representative Richardson explained that these cameras are for safety purposes. They will be used to protect the citizens and the employees of the Sheriff’s Department. There is hope to apply for matching funds from the State Highway Safety Agency. Chairman Tholl explained some of the features of these cameras. Discussion followed on the number of cameras needed and the cost of each unit.

Edith Tucker inquired why this request would not be part of the Sheriff’s Department budget as the County does not have a capital reserve fund. There was a lengthy discussion on whether these funds should be set up as a capital reserve fund, be part of the Sheriff’s budget or an expendable trust. Representative Richardson asked for Sue’s opinion. Sue stated that it was best not to appropriate funds from the surplus. She recommended an appropriation for the gross amount of \$30,000. The revenue offset of \$15,000 grant expected from the State will be added to the revenue budget. Representatives Richardson and Remick withdrew their motion on creating and establishing a capital reserve fund.

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Merrick to reconsider the appropriations budget. The motion passed by roll call vote 10-0.

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Merrick to increase the Sheriff’s budget by \$30,000 for in car cameras with a revenue offset of \$15,000. The motion passed by roll call vote 10-0.

Other Business:

County Treasurer Fred King presented information to the Delegation regarding \$26.5 million in federal funds that will be coming to the state to support elderly and disabled individuals. He noted that these funds are part of a three year grant and questioned if the counties may need matching funds and we must not forget that the counties pay 100% of the nonfederal dollars for these type of programs or 50% of the total cost. Also, if these funds fund new or expanding programs who will pay for the costs when these new federal dollars go away after three years. The property taxpayers cannot afford to sponsor such programs.

Budget Resolutions:

Chairman Tholl read the following resolutions:

RESOLUTION #1

Be it resolved by the Coös County Delegation duly convened on this tenth day of March, 2012, that the sums hereinafter detailed in this resolution are hereby appropriated and the total amount for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2012, shall be \$31,604,235 for the County budget not including the Unincorporated Places.

A motion was made by Representative Théberge, seconded by Representative Richardson. The motion passed by roll call vote 8-2.

RESOLUTION #2

Be it resolved by the Coös County Delegation that the sum of \$17,480,300 is hereby adopted as the estimated income from sources indicated for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2012.

A motion was made by Representative Théberge, seconded by Representative Richardson. The motion passed by roll call vote 10-0.

RESOLUTION #3

Be it further resolved that the total appropriation being in excess of the total estimated income in the amount of \$14,123,935 the Treasurer shall issue his warrant to the Towns and City in the County for this amount.

A motion was made by Representative Théberge, seconded by Representative Merrick. The motion passed by roll call vote 8-2.

RESOLUTION #4

Be it resolved that \$2,340,000 of the operating surplus for the year 2011 be appropriated in the 2012 Budget for the purpose of reducing taxes for 2012.

A motion was made by Representative Tremblay, seconded by Representative Rappaport. The motion passed by roll call vote 10-0.

RESOLUTION #5

Be it resolved by the Coös County Delegation duly convened on this tenth day of March 2012 that in order to comply with Department of Revenue Administration instruction, the Delegation separately approves an appropriation of \$1,059,292 and revenues of \$1,059,292 for Coös County's Unincorporated Places for calendar year 2012. The Unincorporated Places Budget for 2012 is adopted separately from the Coös County Budget.

The motion was approved on a roll call vote 10-0.

Chairman Tholl asked if there was any other business.

A motion was made by Representative Rappaport, seconded by Representative Daugherty, to ask the Commissioners to sell the house, subdivide the property adding the appropriate easements for the septic system and the well.

Representative Théberge stated that the Delegation has discussed selling the house. With modern communications such as cell phones there is no longer a need to have the administrator live on site and this requirement does not need to be part of any contractual agreement in the future. Representative Richardson inquired if Sue was still residing in the house and she replied that she was but will be moving by the end of the summer. Representative Richardson asked to amend motion to read at end of Sue's current contract and before the end of 2012. Representative Daugherty and Representative Rappaport agreed with the amendment.

Chairman Tholl was concerned with the water and septic system. This could be a potential negative impact on the sale because the water and septic are on county property. He believed that the residence

could be offered to the new county administrator; however, this individual would be responsible for expenses.

Superintendent Hamelin expressed concerns about selling the house as the recycling center, which is a work site for inmates, is within 200 yards of the house.

Representative Daugherty explained the outline of the subdivision that will be required for the house excluding a cemetery.

Sue added that there have been three houses in Colebrook/Stewartstown of about the same value which have been on the market for over three years. She stated that the Town of Stewartstown has appraised the house on a 2-acre lot at \$230,000 and houses in that price range are not selling.

Representative Richardson stated that he could not vote on the issue as he did not know where the house was located. He asked for the opportunity to view the property first. Representative Remick agreed.

Representative Merrick stated that the house will be vacant at the end of the summer. Eventually it will be a liability and something will need to be done. She said the county should either sell it or rent it.

Representative Th  berge suggested that the next quarterly meeting be held in W. Stewartstown and view the property.

Chairman Tholl re-read the amended motion. The motion passed by roll call vote of 7-3.

Commissioner Brady stated that while state statute gives the delegation the authority to buy and sell property, it does not give the body the authority to subdivide property. He believed that authority is within the commissioners' jurisdiction. He suggested that Sue obtain a legal opinion on the matter.

With no other business to discuss, a motion was made by Representative Tremblay, seconded by Representative Th  berge, to adjourn the meeting at 3:20 p.m. All approved by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Yvonne Thomas, Clerk