

COÖS COUNTY
DELEGATION MEETING
Monday, May 16, 2011 - 10:00 a.m.
North Country Resource Center – Lancaster, NH

Present: Representatives John Tholl-Chair; Yvonne Thomas-Clerk; Gary Coulombe, Duffy Daugherty, Evalyn Merrick, Larry Rappaport, Bill Remick and Marc Tremblay. Also present: County Commissioner “Bing” Judd; County Administrator Suzanne Collins; Director of Finance Jennifer Fish; Superintendent Craig Hamelin; Nursing Home Administrator Louise Belanger; Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris; County Treasurer Fred King, David Santamaria of Santa’s Tree Farm, Allen Coats, Stewartstown Selectman and members of the press.

Chairman Tholl called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. The roll was called by the Clerk, Representative Yvonne Thomas. There were 8 members present. Representatives Richardson, Hatch and Théberge were absent. Chairman Tholl requested all to stand for the Pledge of the Allegiance.

Chairman Tholl stated that a presentation would be made regarding the farm. Sue distributed a report to each delegation member which provided an update on the status of the County Farm. Representative Daugherty requested to present a motion which read as follows:

That the Coös County Delegation support the County Commissioners in any decision of their choosing to negotiate a lease or otherwise find an economical use for the County Farm, so long as that lease or use:

- 1. Covers the entire costs of all taxes, insurance, utilities used, and any building and equipment maintenance and upkeep incurred; and*
- 2. That such payments by a lessee or user is sufficient to remove all funding requirements for the County Farm from the annual Coös County Budget; and*
- 3. That the lessee or user be bonded or otherwise indemnify the County for any lost fees or costs for the length of the lease or rent contract.*

Representative Daugherty noted that the motion locked up the Delegation’s thoughts on leasing the farm and gave the Commissioners total flexibility.

This motion was made by Representative Daugherty, seconded by Representative Rappaport to approve the motion as read. Chairman Tholl asked for discussion on the motion.

County Treasurer Fred King inquired that if the lease did not go through was the Delegation ready to fund the upkeep of the lands and if the Commissioners were to decide to tear down the buildings the Delegation would need to appropriate funds for the cost of doing so. Chairman Tholl stated that if a bond is required it should cover costs.

Sue stated that the RFP for leasing tillable land did not specify that the lessee would cover the property taxes. All the utilities to the barn will be disconnected. Sue added that the farm has an investment in AgriMark totaling \$70,000 which will be paid back over five years. The Commissioners are planning to request that the funds be set aside to pay the annual property taxes which are currently \$4,820. Sue reported that the Commissioners received three bids. The lease recommended is to David Santamaria of Santa’s Tree Farm in Colebrook. His bid was for a five year term with a payment of \$2,500 per year. His plan is to use the farm for agriculture, agri-education and agri-tourism. He has already

provided his certificate of insurance and the coverage is acceptable to the County's insurance provider. There will be no cost of utilities or insurance to the County. The County will maintain liability insurance on the buildings but because the Property Liability insurance is based on payroll, the farm will incur no expense because there will be no payroll. Commissioner Judd also noted that the County lands are in current use therefore the taxes are low. The property taxes are mainly on the buildings. The equipment will be auctioned off in June.

Representative Merrick asked if a clause could be added to the motion pertaining to the use of the \$70,000 from Agrimark. Representative Merrick left the meeting at 10:16 a.m.

Mr. Santamaria thanked the Delegation for the opportunity to speak to them. His bid as presented was for the lease of the land only. He has expressed to the Commissioners his interest in also leasing the buildings and offered to cover the cost of the property taxes, utilities and insurance on the buildings. He also offered to alter his bid to read \$4,800 if need be. He projected that a lot of people will benefit from his proposal.

Chairman Tholl stated that the Delegation is not there to micro-manage the Commissioners' decision. The motion is to make sure no costs are incurred to the County.

Mr. Santamaria presented a brief video on corn mazes.

Sue stated that the corn maze company that Mr. Santamaria is contracting with has looked at different fields in the area and the County Farm fields were the preferred fields. She also added that Mr. Santamaria has an Advisory Board which includes teachers from each school in the area, a State Trooper and a Stewartstown Selectman. Mr. Santamaria added that he has met with the Stewartstown Board of Selectmen and they were receptive to the corn maze idea. Allen Coats, Selectman from the Town of Stewartstown, stated that the Board of Selectmen has voted in favor of this project. They felt that Upper Coös County could benefit economically from this proposal.

Representative Daugherty stated that the conditions of the RFP were met by Mr. Santamaria. However other issues like the buildings and the stock pile of manure need to be considered. Sue stated that the "living beings" were addressed first: the cows and the fields. The buildings have not been discussed by the Commissioners yet. Steve Turaj from UNH Cooperative Extension has been asked to provide an estimated value of the manure pit as it is full. Mr. Santamaria has expressed an interest in spreading the manure and clearing the pit with his own machinery. The Board of Commissioners will make a decision on this matter at their next meeting.

Representative Rappaport stated that there was a possibility of compromise. The most value is in the buildings not the land and the lease will not cover the costs. It is possible to remove the buildings and there would be no property taxes? One thing that was not accounted for was the money coming from Agrimark. The \$70,000 could be used to keep the expense to the taxpayers at zero. This will give a little flexibility to the Commissioners to do with the buildings what is best for the farm.

Representative Rappaport stated that he would withdraw his second to the motion if Representative Daugherty amended his motion to use the \$70,000 for expenses. Chairman Tholl stated that this was the proposal made by Sue and asked Representative Daugherty if he would amend the motion. Representative Daugherty amended the motion to read as follows: *"Use of the \$70,000 Agrimark returned funds to offset the cost of maintenance of the farm buildings and property taxes until the lease operation is viable."*

Representative Daugherty asked Mr. Santamaria how long before there would be a profit. Mr. Santamaria replied that most businesses do not make a profit the first year of operation. He is hoping

the second year. The maze would be open six weekends beginning in September. The maze will be cut in early fall. He has many people who have expressed interest in sponsorship and being vendors. There will be different themes each weekend. They will be open Friday, Saturday, Sunday and closed during the week. Weekdays will be saved for school field trips.

Mr. King stated that it is his understanding that this motion relinquishes all decision making regarding the farm to the Commissioners and Representative Daugherty replied yes.

A motion was made by Representative Daugherty, seconded by Representative Rappaport to approve the amended motion. The motion was approved by roll call vote 7-0.

Review & Approval of Minutes: Chairman Tholl asked if any changes or corrections needed to be made to the minutes of the March 12, 2011 meeting. A motion was made by Representative Tremblay, seconded by Representative Rappaport to approve the minutes of the March 12, 2011 meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved by a voice vote.

Review & Approval of the First Quarter Financial Statements: After the review of the expenditures, Mr. King asked if there would be any changes from the state budget process in Concord pertaining to the State Assistance Program and if the amount currently budgeted would suffice. Chairman Tholl replied that there may be changes but did not know what the outcome would be. Mr. King stated that if the \$6 million budgeted in the Coös County budget is not enough a supplemental budget may be needed. Chairman Tholl agreed.

The first quarter expenditures were approved by roll call vote 7-0.

The first quarter revenues were approved by roll call vote 7-0.

The Unincorporated Places first quarter expenditures were approved by roll call vote 7-0.

The Unincorporated Places first quarter revenues were approved by roll call vote 7-0.

Old Business:

Representative Rappaport asked for an update on the wind project. Sue reported that the land for the turbines has been cleared and the turbines are set to arrive August 15. AJ Coleman of North Conway has been hired to set the concrete pads and the Fish Brook String will be set up first. Commissioner Judd stated that due to mud season and the fact that there is still snow on the ground in the high elevations, the roads have not been built yet. Representative Tremblay inquired if the interconnection process with PSNH had begun. Sue replied that the interconnection project component is in Dummer and that part of the project is not reported to the Commissioners. Commissioner Judd stated that the offices for the Granite Reliable windpark are located in Milan.

New Business:

2011 Legislation: Chairman Tholl reported that the biggest issue will be the NH Retirement issue and it will hit all towns and counties. Everyone one is fighting over everything. The biggest issue that will affect the County is the return to work. The current proposal from the House is that pensioners cannot work more than 1,300 hours. Any person who has retired into the retirement system and returns or returned to work part time will only be able to work 1,300 hours a year. If the individual chooses to work more than 25 hours per week he/she will need to give up their retirement benefits. This will affect the County Sheriff, deputies, Sue and others. The bill does not exclude elected people. Representative Tremblay believed that the latest version exempted officials who were elected as of 2008.

Representative Rappaport reported that on the energy front two bills would be heard during the coming week. SB46 relative to extending the Coös Loop Commission will be heard on Tuesday and HB648 relative to eminent domain petitions by public utilities will be heard on Thursday.

Representative Remick asked for a Northern Pass update. Mr. King stated that according to a local newspaper PSNH met with property owners in Millsfield and is looking for alternate routes. Representative Daugherty stated that PSNH believes that they can take the land by eminent domain. Representative Rappaport stated that when FERC granted approval it was for a merchant project. A private company cannot take land by eminent domain.

There being no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Representative Tremblay, seconded by Representative Rappaport to adjourn the meeting at 11:23 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Yvonne Thomas, Clerk