

COÖS COUNTY
DELEGATION MEETING
Saturday, February 19, 2011 - 10:00 a.m.
Coös County Nursing Hospital - W. Stewartstown, NH

Present: Representatives John Tholl-Chair; Herb Richardson-Vice Chair; Yvonne Thomas-Clerk; Gary Coulombe, Duffy Daugherty, William Hatch (*arrived at 10:40*), Larry Rappaport, Bill Remick, Robert Théberge 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, Rich Crocker, Grafton County Area Agency for Aging; Paul Robitaille, ServiceLink; Steve Turaj, UNH Cooperative Extension and the public.

Chairman Tholl called the meeting to order at 10:12 a.m. The roll was called by the Clerk, Representative Yvonne Thomas. There were 9 members present. Representative Merrick was excused. Chairman Tholl requested all to stand for the Pledge of the Allegiance.

Hearing of the Public:

- a. Rich Crocker, Grafton County Area Agency for Aging presented information to the Delegation on long term care. (A copy of his presentation is on file.) Mr. Crocker reported that he had previously met with the County Commissioners and they in turn suggested that Mr. Crocker also meet with the County Delegation.

He began by reviewing maps which showed percentages of population projections for those over the age of 65. Mr. Crocker pointed that changes to the current long term care system should include:

- conducting an independent economic analysis;
- dealing with regional de-centralization;
- an organized health care delivery system for Medicaid waiver services;
- contracting with BEAS Social Services;
- enabling legislation at the state level which would designate the counties as responsible, in partnership with the State, for the development of the community long term care system;
- re-energizing of volunteer services in support of community seniors;
- establishing more local control, in partnership with the State, in the evolution of the long term care system; and
- establishing county and state collaboration around long term care changes that could occur under the Affordable Care Act.

Representative Théberge asked if this information had been presented to the New Hampshire Association of Counties and to other Delegations. Mr. Crocker replied that he had met with the New Hampshire Association of Counties but had yet to meet with other County Delegations. Representative Daugherty inquired how this concept would affect the county nursing homes as most of the residents were indigent and had no funds. Mr. Crocker stated that he was not asking to remove money from the nursing homes; however, one should start down this new path slowly. This would be consumer-directed care; consumers taking care of families. Representative Tremblay asked if studies had been conducted that showed these savings.

- b. Paul Robitaille, ServiceLink: Mr. Robitaille reported on a program called Caregiver Connections which has been in existence for one year and is funded through a private grant from the Weinberg Foundation. This program is for caregivers at home. There are several people in this county who are economically devastated; there is a higher percentage of caregivers at home taking care of loved ones. This program is based on caregivers needs. There is a higher percentage of caregivers who burn out frequently and need support. Caregivers feel isolated; feel exhausted and overwhelmed; and do not know where to turn to for help. They need respite, vacation time and someone to talk to. This program is for people who do not fit in other systems. At the moment there are about 35 clients in Coös County. One of the reasons this area was selected for funding was that the foundation wanted to see how rural communities could work together. The funding is all private money with no cost to the taxpayers.

Representative Hatch arrived during this presentation.

Review & Approval of Minutes: Chairman Tholl asked if any changes or corrections needed to be made to the minutes of the December 6 & December 11, 2010 meetings. A motion was made by Representative Hatch, seconded by Representative Richardson to approve the minutes of the December 6 & December 11, 2010 meetings. The minutes were unanimously approved by a voice vote.

Review & Approval of the Fourth Quarter Financial Statements: While reviewing the Nursing Hospital figures, Representative Daugherty asked if the low bed count had any bearing on the percent expended of 96.72%. Sue replied that there were savings throughout the budget including wages, benefits, food and fuel. She noted that with fewer residents there will be savings in certain line items.

Representative Richardson asked what the total cost of legal fees was to date regarding the lawsuit versus the County Attorney. Sue replied \$16,046. Representative Richardson added that according to the newspaper the issue is back in court. Sue replied that a declaratory judgment was filed by the Commissioners asking the judge to rule on the adequacy of the Probate space in the three-way space swap proposed by the Commissioners. The Commissioners contend that this proposed swap is adequate space for the County Attorney. Representative Richardson asked if the funds had been paid from the County Administration budget and Sue replied yes.

Representative Remick asked why County Finance was low and Sue replied that the Director of Finance position was budgeted to begin in July but was not instituted until November.

Representative Daugherty asked for an explanation of the Federal Funds line item. Sue replied that the energy grant for 150 windows for the nursing hospital was the only grant fully expended. The Deanbrook Mobile Home Park which was a CDBG grant will be re-appropriated in the 2011 budget and Operation Stone Garden was not funded.

A motion was made by Representative Hatch, seconded by Representative Th  berge to approve the fourth quarter expenditures. The fourth quarter expenditures were approved on a roll call vote 9-1.

The Chair continued with the revenues. Representative Hatch asked what the current census was at both nursing homes: Berlin was 100 and W. Stewartstown was 66. Representative Daugherty asked why the percentage was so low in investments and Sue replied that the County is currently getting practically nothing on its investments. Representative Tremblay inquired about miscellaneous

income. Sue replied that the additional income is the return of funds from the federal government from the Retiree Drug Subsidy since the County provides some retirees with a prescription plan and they do not use the government's Medicare Part D plan. Representative Th  berge asked about the increase in the farm revenue and Sue replied that the price of milk has gone up significantly in the past few months.

A motion was made by Representative Th  berge, seconded by Representative Hatch to approve the fourth quarter revenues. The fourth quarter revenues were approved on a roll call vote 10-0.

The Chair read the bottom line for the unincorporated places expenditures and revenues.

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Daugherty to approve the unincorporated places fourth quarter expenditures. The unincorporated places fourth quarter expenditures were approved on a roll call vote 10-0.

A motion was made by Representative Rappaport, seconded by Representative Hatch to approve the unincorporated places fourth quarter revenues. The unincorporated places fourth quarter revenues were approved on a roll call vote 10-0.

Old Business:

Representative Richardson wanted it noted that he did not believe in the County Attorney and County Commissioners suing each other. It is a waste of the County taxpayers' money. Representative Hatch stated that one of his constituents asked if there was ever an attempt for mediation. Sue replied that the County had been working on the space issue since last April and the County Attorney sued the Commissioners without warning. There was no chance for mediation as the County Attorney's lawsuit was filed before attempting mediation or exploring other avenues. Sue suggested that Representative Hatch contact the County Attorney with his question. Representative Rappaport agreed that the lawsuit is a waste of money and expressed his disapproval of the lawsuit. County Treasurer Fred King noted that ultimately it will be the Delegation's decision whether funds are appropriated for a move to other space or renovations in the Courthouse. The County Treasurer cannot pay bills unless authorized to do so by the Commissioners. Chairman Tholl noted that the County Commissioners cannot pay without the Delegation's appropriation of funds. He is disappointed with the County Attorney and not happy with the judge's decision as it was not a clear decision; it was an ambiguous decision and waste of money. Representative Daugherty added that he had read in the newspaper that the Commissioners were exploring the third floor of the bank. Sue replied that the judge's order was that the Commissioners needed to find adequate space for the County Attorney within a reasonable time. The Commissioners want the County Attorney to remain in the courthouse but the County Attorney does not like the current proposal. In the meantime adequate space is needed. The agreement with Passumpsic Bank would be a month to month rental. At the 2010 budget meeting the County Attorney made it clear that there would be no cost for moving and no money has been appropriated for the move. Representative Richardson asked what the proposed rental cost was. Sue replied \$1,500 per month and 1/3 of the property taxes if no other tenant is found for the third floor of the bank. Chairman Tholl asked if the money was coming from the existing appropriation and Sue replied yes. The County will need to give the State a 60-day notice before the County Attorney moves out. Representative Rappaport stated that he wanted an answer from the County Attorney as to why mediation was not appropriate. Chairman Tholl noted that the court has the ability to throw in a "monkey wrench" in what the Delegation decides to do with this budget. Representative Th  berge questioned if the Delegation had the authority to request information about mediation from the County Attorney.

New Business:

County Treasurer Fred King stated that he had an opportunity to listen to the Governor's address. The Governor made a statement on health care where his budget will redirect \$8.5 million of supplemental payments to the nursing homes to support home and community based care. This money historically has gone to nursing homes. The source of money that the Governor plans on going after is generated by the bed tax. Coös County cannot afford to lose these funds; let Concord raise the funds. The Governor should not be allowed to do this. Mr. King asked the Delegation to watch carefully and should call Sue if they have any questions. Chairman Tholl stated that the leadership is very adamant that there will be no downshifting of costs to taxpayers. Mr. King quoted a NH Sunday News guest editorial by Majority Leader Representative Bettencourt that leadership was committed to no downshifting of costs.

- a. *Legislation 2011:* A motion was made by Representative Rappaport, seconded by Representative Daugherty that the County Delegation send a letter to the Site Evaluation Committee (SEC), the Governor and the Northern Pass opposing the power line through Coös County. Representative Rappaport offered to write the letter and submit it to the Chair.

Representative Théberge noted that this project is years away and at this point in time he could not support this motion. Representative Remick added that Northern Pass needs to be nipped in the bud early. Representative Rappaport met with the Governor and was concerned as to what the Representatives had to say. Representative Rappaport has introduced a bill which prevents taking of land for Northern Pass by eminent domain. Everyone has signed up to be a co-sponsor except for Senator Gallus who so far has not signed on to support the bill. The SEC Committee is appointed by the Governor. Representative Hatch agreed with Representative Rappaport. Many of his constituents do not support the Northern Pass. The eminent domain bill would bring relief to some. Chairman Tholl stated that this letter is a good idea as it would help support the taxpayers. He has attended some of the meetings and PNSH / HydroQuebec are not answering questions. Initially he thought it was a good idea and now he is willing to sign the letter. He suggested that the letter be signed by each Delegation member who wishes to sign; if one does not want to sign he/she does not need to do so. Representative Théberge still thought that it was premature. Chairman Tholl suggested that "at the present time" be added to the letter. Representative Théberge stated he could agree to that. A letter will be sent to the SEC opposing the Northern Pass power line as it is proposed at the present time through Coös County. The motion was approved by voice vote 10-0.

Mr. King stated that this was a good motion. There may be sweeteners down the road and the Delegation members may change their minds. Mr. King reiterated that PSNH should follow the existing power line route in Vermont.

- Representative Daugherty reported that he is working on the Ways & Means Committee;
- Representative Hatch is working on a homestead property tax relief bill for both homeowners' primary residences and commercial properties;
- Representative Richardson is working on the re-districting committee as the 2010 census data is due to be released soon; and
- Chairman Tholl reported that there is a ton of information on the NH Retirement System which will impact people in the system and retirees.

- b. *Allocation of National Forest Reserve Funds:* Sue explained that state law requires that the Delegation vote to expend National Forest Reserve Funds. The total will be \$137,854 which is a decrease of \$22,163 from last year. The Commissioners recommended past practice where the funds are distributed to the independent school districts in Berlin, Colebrook and Errol for the tuition for the students from the Unincorporated Places attending school in these districts. The balance of the funds will be equally shared by the school districts that maintain schools for books and education materials. A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Théberge to approve the distribution of the National Forest Reserve Funds. The motion was approved by a roll call vote 10-0.
- c. Commissioner Judd asked that the Nursing Home in Berlin and the Nursing Hospital in W. Stewartstown be recognized as they had received 5-star ratings from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid. Representative Richardson suggested and Chairman Tholl agreed that a letter from the Delegation should be sent to both facilities congratulating them.

Report of the Cooperative Extension Service - Steve Turaj: Mr. Turaj explained that he considers himself as a biologist with background in agriculture finance. He tries to link biology with common sense economics. Mr. Turaj works with agricultural people. He also answers questions on agricultural and biological areas – landscaping, bugs and weeds. He also works with integrated pest management and maintains his pesticide license. During the winter he works on educational meetings and in the summer he does field work. Mr. Turaj provided information on various educational sessions being offered.

Mr. Bill Joyce asked if the Delegation would be open to revisiting the close of the dairy farm operation. This item was to be discussed at a Public Hearing of the Farm Subcommittee at 1:30 p.m.

Representative Richardson reported that he had received a copy of the letter written by the Chairman regarding the overcrowding situation at the State Prison in Berlin.

There being no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Representative Tremblay, seconded by Representative Richardson to adjourn the meeting at 12:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Yvonne Thomas, Clerk