

A Checklist To Ensure Meetings Are Compliant
With The Right-to-Know Law During The State Of Emergency
Coös County Delegation Meeting &
Public Hearing of the 2021 Proposed Budgets
December 12, 2020

As Chair of the Coös County Delegation, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, I am confirming that we are:

We are utilizing Zoom for this electronic meeting. All members of the Coös County Delegation have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone # 1-646-558-8656 or by clicking on the following website address: www.zoom.us/join. Meeting ID # 860 3163 0443, passcode 923482.

We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using Zoom or telephonically. Instructions have also been provided on the website of the Coös County Delegation at: www.cooscountynh.us.

If anybody has a problem, please call 603-331-5670 or email at: jennifer.fish@cooscountynh.us.

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, the meeting will be adjourned and rescheduled. Please note that **all votes** that are taken during this meeting shall be done by **roll call vote**.

Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance. When each member states their presence, please also state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to-Know law. The roll was called by the clerk, Representative Larry Laflamme. There were ten members in attendance.

Representative Craig	present	Representative Laflamme	present
Representative Davis	present	Representative Merner	present
Representative Dostie	present	Representative Th��berge	present
Representative Hatch	present	Representative Thompson	present
Representative Kelley	present	Representative Tucker	present

Also present remotely: County Commissioners Tom Brady, Paul Grenier and Rick Samson; County Administrator Jennifer Fish; Director of Finance Carrie Klebe; Superintendent Ben Champagne; Nursing Home Administrator Lynn Beede; Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; Sheriff Brian Valerino; Registrar Leon Rideout; County Attorney John McCormick; Treasurer Suzanne Collins; Commissioner-Elect Ray Gorman; Forest Ranger Luc Perrault; representatives of outside agencies; members of the press.

Chairman Th  berge requested a moment of silence for the late Speaker of the House Dick Hinch.

DELEGATION MEETING

Chairman Théberge called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led Superintendent Champagne.

Other Business:

- a. Chairman Théberge read Resolution #1 on behalf of the County Treasurer which pertained to borrowing funds in Anticipation of Taxes in 2021:

Resolution #1

Be it resolved by the Coös County Delegation duly convened on this twelfth day of December, 2020, that since the monies in the treasury of the County of Coös are insufficient to meet the demands upon the same and the sum of Eleven Million Dollars (\$11,000,000) being the projected amount necessary for the purpose of operating the county for the Fiscal Year 2021, the Coös County Treasurer is hereby authorized to borrow up to \$11,000,000 upon order of the County Commissioners pursuant to RSA 29:8. A motion was made by Representative Hatch, seconded by Representative Merner to approve Resolution #1. The resolution passed by roll call vote 10-0.

Representative Craig	Yes	Representative Laflamme	Yes
Representative Davis	Yes	Representative Merner	Yes
Representative Dostie	Yes	Representative Théberge	Yes
Representative Hatch	Yes	Representative Thompson	Yes
Representative Kelley	Yes	Representative Tucker	Yes

- b. Chairman Théberge read Resolution #2 as follows:

Resolution #2

Authorization for Coös County to Pay 2021 Expenses (RSA 24:15)

Due to timing differences, the County operates without an approved operating budget during the months of January, February and part of March. Historical figures demonstrate that the January through March expenses will total approximately \$9,500,000.

RSA 24:15 states that no County Commissioner or elected or appointed official shall pay, or agree to pay, or incur any liability for the payment of any sum of money for which the County Convention has made no appropriation.

I move that we, the County Convention authorize the County to spend up to \$9,500,000 for 2021 expenses during the months of January, February, and March in anticipation of the subsequent approval of the 2021 budget. Further that the \$9,500,000 be allocated proportionately to the line items based on the 2020 approved net appropriations to fund like operating and personnel expenses in existence as of 12/31/2020.

A motion was made by Representative Hatch, seconded by Representative Tucker to approve Resolution #2. The resolution passed by roll call vote 10-0.

Representative Craig	Yes	Representative Laflamme	Yes
Representative Davis	Yes	Representative Merner	Yes

Representative Dostie	Yes	Representative Th��berge	Yes
Representative Hatch	Yes	Representative Thompson	Yes
Representative Kelley	Yes	Representative Tucker	Yes

The Chair closed the Delegation meeting at 10:30 a.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

Chairman Th  berge opened the public hearing at 10:30 a.m. and asked Jennifer Fish, County Administrator, to begin her budget presentation.

Jennifer Fish, County Administrator welcomed everyone to the public hearing on the county budget as recommended by the three County Commissioners - Tom Brady, Paul Grenier and Rick Samson.

On behalf of the Commissioners, the County Administrator welcomed the newly elected State Representatives to the Co  s County Delegation, the Honorable Arnold Davis, the Honorable Donald Dostie, the Honorable Eamon Kelley, the Honorable Robert Th  berge; and the Honorable Dennis Thompson.

Ms. Fish noted to the members of the public that complete line item budget documents would be provided to all citizens in the Co  s County Annual Report and on the County website.

For those who are new to this process, there are services covered in this budget that are mandated by the State Constitution, there are costs that are required by NH state statute and then there are programs that the county has traditionally funded.

The State Constitution requires certain county elected officials to oversee certain government functions. These include the Registrar of Deeds, the County Attorney, Medical Referees, a County Sheriff, a County Treasurer and County Commissioners.

There are other financial responsibilities that fall to the counties as a result of state law. They include the Department of Corrections, the Unincorporated Places and the State Assistance Programs where basically the county functions as tax collector for the State of NH.

The following programs are not required by the Constitution or State law and are referred to as traditional programs:

- The County Nursing Homes;
- Victim/Witness Program;
- UNH Cooperative Extension;
- Co  s County Conservation District;
- Other Special Appropriations for Senior Meals, RSVP, Food Pantry, Response Program, North Country Transit and Medical Transportation, Co  s Economic Development;
- Land Management
- The Recycling Center; and
- The Transfer Station.

The proposed budget will be revised again before its submission in March to the County Delegation for final action after the following events have taken place:

- The Commissioners and members of the Delegation have had the opportunity to give consideration to comments received from members of the public today and any comments and suggestions received after that;
- Delegation subcommittees have had the opportunity to meet with department heads on any or all budgets for the various county operations; and
- The unencumbered fund balance (surplus) has not been determined for 2020. This amount will be determined when the 2020 financial statements are closed in mid to late January after all accounts receivable, accounts payable, encumbrances and accruals for 2020 have been recorded.

APPROPRIATIONS BUDGET SUMMARY:

The proposed 2021 budget includes a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for non-union (1.5%), AFSCME (1.5%) and SEA (2.0%) County employees. The 2021 budget does include step increases for those employees who have not reached the top step on the County's salary schedule. Increases in longevity and the additional payroll cost of employees reaching eligibility criteria for sick time payments on hours accrued over 480 or 720 are also included in the budget. There are several anticipated retirement payouts included in the budget.

- The health insurance rates have been budgeted for a 10% increase in premium for the 2nd half of the year.
- The budget includes \$750,000 increased expenses due to COLA, health insurance and NH Retirement for all county departments.
- The NH Retirement Employer contribution rates will increase in July 2021 for Group I and Group II employees. The Group I rate will increase 2.13% to 14.06% and Group II will increase 5.45% to 33.88%.

REVENUE BUDGET SUMMARY:

The projected 2020 surplus to reduce taxes is estimated at \$3,000,000.

The projected total County Tax for 2021 was \$17,712,308.

Ms. Fish provided information on the allocation of the projected county taxes for 2021 based on services to its citizens. In order to allocate the \$17,712,308 county tax, the offsetting revenue was deducted from the 2021 proposed appropriations for each program. The share of the \$3,000,000 projected surplus generated by each program was also deducted. The result was:

- Approximately \$13,366,517 or 75% of the 2021 county tax is for elderly programs – what the county sends to the State and the Medicaid/Medicare deficits in nursing homes;
- Approximately \$2,258,799 or 13% is raised for corrections.
- \$1,540,593 is needed for all the constitutional functions which is 9% of the county tax; and
- The balance of \$546,399 or 3% goes to fund so-called traditional programs like Victim-Witness, Cooperative Extension, Coös County Conservation District, Outside Social Service Agencies and Coös County Economic Development.

Ms. Fish explained that the Unincorporated Places Budget document contains a summary for the County's 23 Unincorporated Places. These are geographic entities with no formal town government. The County is the local government to these places. Each unincorporated place pays its own expenses and collects its own revenue. The total Unincorporated Places budget for 2021 was \$1,560,508.

County Treasurer Sue Collins inquired about the health insurance estimated at a 10% increase. Ms. Fish replied that there would be no increase for employees with Harvard Pilgrim Health Insurance and a 9% increase for employees with Healthtrust.

The County Administrator reviewed the nursing hospital and nursing home budgets.

Rep. Hatch stated that he was concerned with the pandemic and the impact it is having on the nursing homes. He asked if there was any place in the budget addressing the unknown. Commissioner Grenier replied that the County has an undesignated fund balance of \$550,000 for unforeseen and emergency purposes. Worst case scenario funds could be drawn from fund balance.

While reviewing County Government budgets, Rep. Thomas inquired about the State Assistance Programs. Ms. Fish explained that this budget is the non-federal share of Medicaid. For any resident in nursing homes from Coös County, the county pays 50% of that bill.

The County Treasurer inquired about the \$435,000 in that budget. Ms. Fish replied that the IDN is no longer part of the budget.

Rep. Tucker asked the County Attorney how the Randolph accidents are affecting the County Attorney's budget. County Attorney McCormick replied that he has been working with other agencies and costs have been split. It is difficult to speak about the effect on the budget as is waiting on invoices.

Commissioner Grenier mentioned that Delegation members have the opportunity to purchase tablets for County business only. He noted that if anyone used their personal device and a 91A request were submitted that all information on the device would be included in request.

The total 2021 appropriations \$43,187,323.

Rep. Hatch commended the Commissioners on the budget decrease.

Ms. Fish reviewed the revenues and there were no questions. The total 2021 revenues \$43,187,323.

Ms. Fish reviewed the Unincorporated Places budgets which totaled \$1,560,508.

Ms. Fish ended her presentation by urging the members of the Delegation to contact her with any questions.

Rep. Tucker was concerned that there were no requests for CDBG requests. She questioned on whether correspondence should be submitted to the towns informing them of this opportunity. She requested a list of the last 10 projects. Commissioner Grenier stated that there is criteria to CDBG grants with strings attached. Ms. Fish stated that projects must first go through the town. If a town has an existing project, the project would then come to the county. Commissioner Grenier also noted that North Country Council was the conduit to this endeavor.

A motion was made by Rep. Hatch, seconded by Rep. Merner to adjourn the meeting at 11:33 a.m. The motion was approved by roll call 10-0.

Representative Craig	Yes	Representative Laflamme	Yes
Representative Davis	Yes	Representative Merner	Yes
Representative Dostie	Yes	Representative Théberge	Yes
Representative Hatch	Yes	Representative Thompson	Yes
Representative Kelley	Yes	Representative Tucker	Yes

Respectfully submitted,

Rep. Larry Laflamme, Clerk