

COÖS COUNTY DELEGATION
QUARTERLY MEETING
Monday, October 25, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.
The Tillotson Center – Colebrook, NH

Present: Representatives Robert Théberge, Chair; Troy Merner, Vice Chair; Larry Laflamme, Clerk; Arnold Davis; William Hatch (*arrived 10:52*); Dennis Thompson; and Edith Tucker. Also, Present: Commissioners Paul Grenier and Raymond Gorman; County Administrator Jennifer Fish; Superintendent Ben Champagne; Director of Finance Carrie Klebe; Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; Nursing Home Administrator Lynn Beede; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris; members of the press; and members of the public.

Chairman Théberge called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. The roll was called by the Clerk, Representative Laflamme. There were six members present. Representatives Craig, Dostie, Hatch and Kelley were absent.
2. *Review & Approval of the Minutes of the July 26, 2021, quarterly meeting, and the September 8, 2021 joint meeting, as distributed:* A motion was made by Representative Merner, seconded by Representative Thompson to approve the minutes of the July 26, 2021, quarterly meeting, and the September 8, 2021 joint meeting, as distributed. The motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.
3. Hearing of the Public:
 - a. Former County Commissioner Rick Samson inquired about the following:
 - He asked if the county was still receiving payments for land rent of the cell tower area. The Director of Finance replied in the affirmative. Mr. Samson stated that it had been sold to another entity. He has done research and other companies pay up to \$1,000 per month. The county is losing money.
 - He inquired about the status of the Pilot and Decommissioning Fund; and if a utility appraiser had been obtained. The County Administrator replied that a new Pilot agreement is currently being negotiated. The Board of Commissioners awarded the contract to Brian Fogg from Whitefield, NH. He urged the Delegation to review the new contract, pilot and decommissioning contracts. Commissioner Grenier assured the Delegation that the appraiser was highly qualified. Representative Merner noted that he is well qualified. Representative Thompson noted that a public hearing will be required prior to the approval of the contract. The County Administrator agreed.
4. *Review & Approval of the Financial Statements of Coös County and of the Unincorporated Places for the Period Ended September 30, 2021.* Chairman Théberge reviewed the Coös County financials. The total expenditures for the period ending September 30, 2021 were \$26,648,782 or 61.95% expended. There were no questions. The total revenues for the period ending September 30, 2021 were \$24,816,327 or 57.69%. There were no questions.

The Chair continued with the review of the Unincorporated Places financials. The total expenditures for the period ending September 30, 2021 totaled \$306,661 or 19.14% expended. There were no questions. The total revenues for the period ending September 30, 2021 totaled \$1,041,093 or 65% received.

Representative Merner questioned the revenue received for the Sheriff's Department as it was only 49.78%. There was no one from the Sheriff's Department at the meeting. Representative Tucker asked that information be provided at the public hearing in December.

A motion was made by Representative Thompson, seconded by Representative Merner to approve the Financial Statements of Coös County and of the Unincorporated Places for the period ended September 30, 2021. The motion was approved by roll call 6-0.

5. Old Business: There was no old business to discuss.

6. New Business:

- a. Resignation of Representative Donald Dostie: Chairman Théberge reported that as of the yesterday Representative Dostie had not submitted his resignation. Representative Tucker urged that he be provided empathy and sympathy during this difficult time. She hopes that he does not resign and that he should not be rushed to make a decision and be given the time that he needs.

Representative Laflamme asked if Representative Dostie were to resign, would it mean a special election. Chairman Théberge replied that any of the 10 towns he represents could request a special election and an election would be held.

Representative Hatch joined the meeting at 10:52 a.m.

- b. Discussion/action of ARPA Funds stipends per Board of Commissioners' recommendation:
 - Stipends for 12 county employees previously excluded: Chairman Théberge stated that it was only fair to include all staff. A motion was made by Representative Merner, seconded by Representative Davis that the 12 previously excluded employees be paid retroactive as part of the ARPA funds phase 1. The motion was approved by roll call 5-1. (*Representative Thompson*)
 - Continuation of stipends from 11/1/2021 – 3/31/2022 for Nursing Home and Nursing Hospital employees, only: Chairman Théberge stated that he refers to the request as Phase 2 of the ARPA funds stipends. This request is only for nursing home and nursing hospital employees.

Representative Thompson stated that at the last meeting he had asked for figures reflecting what was left in the payroll accounts. If substantial, why not pay bonuses out of those line items. The Director of Finance replied that she had prepared spreadsheets reflecting the proposed wage increases. Representative Thompson asked how many vacant positions there were at the nursing homes. Lynn Beede, Berlin Nursing Home Administrator, replied 45-50. She also explained that the funds in the payroll line items are used for agency staff and extra bonuses that are offered. Representative Thompson continued that ARPA funds are for people directly affected by COVID. The county should be looking at raising wages. Representative Tucker noted that people are working in red zone areas and not working remotely.

Representative Laflamme inquired from the administrators if the bonuses are making a difference. Laura Mills, Nursing Hospital Administrator, replied that some employees are

sticking it out. The stipend is like an additional \$5/hour for some employees. Representative Laflamme noted that any increase approved would need to be part of the 2022 budget. It will increase the budget by \$4 million.

Commissioner Grenier stated that a supplemental budget will be needed to approve the expenditures. The NH Retirement System is not part of the deductions. The County Administrator requested that the ending date of the stipend be changed from March 31, 2022 to April 2, 2022 for payroll purposes.

Commissioner Grenier also asked that the Delegation not divide the second round of ARPA funds. Representative Tucker replied that it will be a Delegation discussion. She did not agree with the request. Representative Thompson also agreed with Representative Tucker. Some towns have projects and will need funding.

A motion was made by Representative Th  berge, seconded by Representative Thompson to extend the ARPA funds stipends from November 1, 2021 to April 2, 2022 for nursing home and nursing hospital employees only. The motion was approved 7-0.

7. Subcommittee Reports:

- Economic Development / CEDC: Representative Thompson reported that the "spec" building in Colebrook was now occupied by the Co  s Brewery.
- Planning Board: Representative Merner reported that Mr. Presby, The Cog Railway, is seeing if there is a market to provide Snowcat tours. The Snowcat will also be used for assisting with rescues and in case the train breaks down. He said it would be going up to about Skyline at about 5,100'.

A site plan application of the Androscoggin Valley Regional Refuse Disposal District (AVRRDD) for installation of two additional landfill gas utility flares, additional equipment and a new electrical/control building at the Mount Carberry Secure Landfill on Bean Brook Road in Success was approved.

Representative Merner also mentioned that there have been staffing issues at the Registry of Deeds. Registrar Leon Rideout reported that he has lost three employees but recently made an offer to a potential employee. He is hopeful to be fully staffed by December.

8. Any Other Business:

- a. Representative Thompson reported that the Town of Stratford had submitted a request for ARPA funds to the Commissioners for the fire department. These funds were to be used for air packs and updates to the fire station. The Board denied the request as it did not qualify per the criteria. Representative Thompson asked that the Delegation override the Commissioners' decision and award the funds. Several members of the Delegation opposed the request. A motion was made by Representative Tucker, seconded by Representative Hatch that the Stratford request be resubmitted to the Commissioners for a recommendation. Commissioner Gorman stated that the Stratford Selectmen have not approached him about the request. Commissioner Grenier noted that the request will be reviewed again. The County Administrator also noted that projects can be funded under the loss revenue provision. The County's loss revenue amount in 2020 was less than \$400,000.

- b. Chairman Th  berge discussed a possible date for the supplemental budget. It was decided that it would be held prior to the public hearing on December 13 at 10:00 a.m. The public hearing will immediately follow the supplemental budget meeting.

A motion was made by Representative Thompson, seconded by Representative Merner to adjourn the meeting at 11:34 a.m. The motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Larry Laflamme, Clerk