

Coös County Delegation
Delegation Meeting
Public Hearing of the 2023 Proposed Budgets
December 16, 2022 at 10:00 a.m.
North Country Resource Center
629 Main Street Lancaster, NH

Present: Representatives Troy Merner, Chair; Arnold Davis, Vice Chair; Corinne Cascadden, Clerk; Seth King; Henry Noël; Mike Ouellet; and James Tierney. Also, Present: Commissioners Thomas Brady, Paul Grenier and Raymond Gorman; County Administrator Jennifer Fish; Director of Finance Carrie Klebe; Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; Superintendent Ben Champagne, Captain Keith Roberge, County Attorney John McCormick, County Treasurer Sue Collins, Register of Deeds Leon Rideout; Commissioner-elect Robert Théberge; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris; and members of the public.

Chairman Merner opened the Delegation Meeting at 10:07 a.m. Representative Davis led the Pledge of Allegiance.

The roll was called by the Clerk, Representative Cascadden. There were seven members present. Representative Hatch was excused. Representative Kelley was absent.

New Business:

- a. Treasurer's Resolution for Borrowing Funds in Anticipation of 2023 Taxes. Chairman Merner read the following resolution:

Resolution #1

Be it resolved by the Coös County Delegation duly convened on this sixteenth day of December, 2022, 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 2023, 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 Tierney, seconded by Representative Noël to approve Resolution #1. The motion was approved by roll call 7-0.

- b. Chairman Théberge read the Continuing Resolution on the 2023 Budget Spending: 1/1/2023 - 3/31/2023:

Resolution #2

Authorization for Coös County to Pay 2023 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 2023 expenses during the months of January, February, and March in anticipation of the subsequent approval of the 2023 budget. Further that the \$9,500,000 be allocated proportionately to the line items based on the 2022 approved net appropriations to fund like operating and personnel expenses in existence as of 12/31/2022.

A motion was made by Representative Tierney, seconded by Representative Davos to approve Resolution #2. The motion was approved by roll call 7-0.

c. Approval of Commissioners' recommendations of ARPA Funds Distribution to the following towns:

City of Berlin	200,000
Town of Jefferson	117,383
Town of Gorham	10,000
Town of Colebrook	75,000
Town of Pittsburg	45,000
Town of Errol	24,644

The County Administrator explained that some of the requests received caused some of the districts to be over the amount available. The Commissioners reallocated funds to balance the requests. These requests will close out the ARPA funds allocated for this purpose. A motion was made by Representative King, seconded by Representative Davis. The motion was approved by roll call vote 7-0.

A motion was made by Representative Davis, seconded by Representative Tierney to adjourn the meeting at 10:43 a.m. The motion was approved in the affirmative by voice vote.

PUBLIC HEARING

Chairman Merner opened the public hearing at 10:43 a.m. and asked Jennifer Fish, County Administrator, to begin her budget presentation.

Jennifer Fish, County Administrator welcomed everyone particularly the newly elected State Representatives to the Coös County Delegation, the Honorable John Tierney, the Honorable Seth King, the Honorable Corinne Cascadden, the Honorable Michael Ouellet; and the Honorable Henry Noël to the public hearing on the county budget as recommended by the three County Commissioners - Tom Brady, Paul Grenier and Raymond Gorman.

Ms. Fish noted to the members of the public that line-item budget documents would be provided to all citizens in the Coös 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.

Programs that are not required by the Constitution or State law are traditional programs:

- The County Nursing Homes
- Victim/Witness Program;
- UNH Cooperative Extension;
- Coös County Conservation District;
- Other Special Appropriations for Senior Meals, RSVP, Food Pantry, Response Program, North Country Transit and Medical Transportation, Coös 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 2022. This amount will be determined when the financial statements are closed in mid to late January after all accounts receivable, accounts payable, encumbrances and accruals for 2022 have been recorded.

APPROPRIATIONS BUDGET SUMMARY:

The proposed 2023 budget includes a Cost-of-Living increase of 2% for SEA Corrections employees in accordance with the current bargaining agreement. There is no adjustment for AFSCME member employees or non-union employees. The budget does include 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 for AFSCME and County Employees. The health insurance rates for the Corrections and Sheriff's departments reflect a 17.9% increase in the 2nd half of the year.

- ✓ In November, each nursing home applied for a NH GOFERR long term care grant for capital improvements to their respective buildings. The appropriation and expense are included in the budget.
- ✓ The Commissioners have budgeted a new position, Assistant County Administrator.

REVENUE BUDGET SUMMARY:

The projected 2022 surplus to reduce taxes is \$5,000,000.

The projected total County Tax for 2023 is \$17,991,982.

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 2023 is \$1,607,125.

The County Administrator began the review of the nursing hospital budget.

The total West Stewartstown Nursing Hospital proposed budget totaled \$13,581,950 and specials in the amount of \$2,053,100 for a total budget request of \$15,635,050. Representative Ouellet inquired about the capital project. The Nursing Hospital Administrator replied it was an HVAC system for the nursing hospital.

The County Administrator noted that all salaries were adjusted in 2022 and are reflected in the budget.

Representative Noël inquired about the HIM Manager position zeroed out. The Nursing Hospital Administrator replied that the position was eliminated, and two clerks were hired to work under the business office manager.

Representative Noël also asked how many nursing staff were in the budget and how many were currently open. The Nursing Hospital Administrator replied that she did not have an accurate figure with her but could provide it to the Delegation. She also noted that she is currently not accepting applications due to staffing.

The County Administrator continued with the Berlin Nursing Home budget. The proposed budget was \$16,448,912 and specials in the amount of \$418,350 for a total budget request of \$16,867,262.

Representative Noël inquired about the GOFERR Grant capital project. Ms. Fish replied the grant was for replacement windows.

The Berlin Nursing Home has 90 long-term care beds (Medicaid) and 10 skilled beds (Medicare). West Stewartstown has a 97-bed license, but the Nursing Hospital Administrator bases her nursing home budget at 84 beds. The nursing hospital does not meet standards for skilled services.

The County Administrator continued with the County Government budget.

Representative King inquired about the long-term notes listed under Debt Service. Ms. Fish replied that the notes were for the IT Infrastructure and the water system at the Nursing Hospital to connect to the Town of Stewartstown.

The total county government budget with specials was \$13,367,930.

The County Administrator reviewed the anticipated revenues which totaled \$47,098,422. There were no questions.

Chairman Merner thanked Commissioner Grenier for his years of dedicated service.

Upon review of the nursing homes loss report, Commissioner Grenier stated that if the Delegation were to close a nursing home the county could not afford to pay for all the residents to be relocated as well as staff earned time.

Representative King noted that if the nursing homes are half-staff and half full why not combine them. Commissioner Grenier replied that there were not enough beds to combine the two. Representative Ouellet stated that the jobs and care are critical to the area towns.

County Treasurer Sue Collins explained that the county taxpayers are responsible to pay for the difference between the state reimbursement and the daily rate of care.

Representative King inquired that the county is still responsible to pay for long-term care residents if the nursing homes were closed. The response was in the affirmative.

Commissioner Gorman stated that the nursing homes in these areas are unique geographically. The two boards must work together.

Representative Davis asked if it would make more sense to build a new 150-bed facility in a more central location. County Treasurer Collins did not think Coös County has the bonding capability for this type of project.

Representative Ouellet left the meeting at 12:40 p.m.

Commissioner Brady added that the nursing homes have unbelievable staff who provide quality care.

Ms. Fish reviewed the Unincorporated Places budgets which totaled \$1,607,125.

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

A motion was made by Representative Cascadden, seconded by Representative Tierney to adjourn the meeting at 1:10 p.m. The motion was approved in the affirmative by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Corinne Cascadden, Clerk