

Coös County Delegation
Delegation Meeting &
Public Hearing of the 2024 Proposed Budgets
December 11, 2023, at 10:00 a.m.
North Country Resource Center
629 Main Street Lancaster, NH

Present: Representatives Arnold Davis, Chair; Mike Ouellet, Vice Chair; Corinne Cascadden, Clerk; Seth King (arrived 10:18); Henry Noël; and James Tierney. Also, Present: Commissioners Thomas Brady, Raymond Gorman, and Robert Théberge; County Administrator Mark Brady, Director of Finance Carrie Klebe (telephone), Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills, Nursing Home Administrator Louise Belanger; Superintendent Ben Champagne, Sheriff Brian Valerino, Captain Keith Roberge, County Attorney John McCormick, Register of Deeds Leon Rideout; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris; and members of the public.

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

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

New Business:

- a. Continuing Resolution on 2024 Budget Spending 1/1/2024 - 3/31/2024. Clerk Cascadden read the following resolution:

Resolution
Authorization for Coös County to Pay 2024 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 \$10,500,000.

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 \$10,500,000 for 2024 expenses during the months of January, February, and March in anticipation of the subsequent approval of the 2024 budget. Further that the \$10,500,000 be allocated proportionately to the line items based on the 2023 approved net appropriations to fund like operating and personnel expenses in existence as of 12/31/2023.

A motion was made by Representative Tierney, seconded by Representative Noël to approve the resolution. The motion was approved by roll call 5-0.

- b. Approval of Robert Gargano as an alternate to the Zoning Board of Adjustment: A motion was made by Representative Ouellet, seconded by Representative Noël to approve Robert Gargano as an alternate to the Zoning Board of Adjustment. The motion was approved in the affirmative.
- c. Approval of the minutes of the October 30, 2023, quarterly meeting: A motion was made by Representative Noël, seconded by Representative Tierney to approve the minutes of the October 30, 2023, quarterly meeting. The motion was approved in the affirmative 4-0-1. (Representative Ouellet abstained)

There being no other business to discuss, a motion was made by Representative Tierney, seconded by Representative Ouellet to adjourn the meeting at 10:12 a.m.

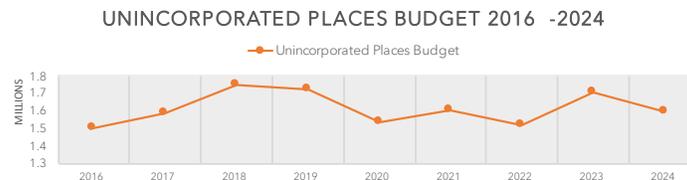
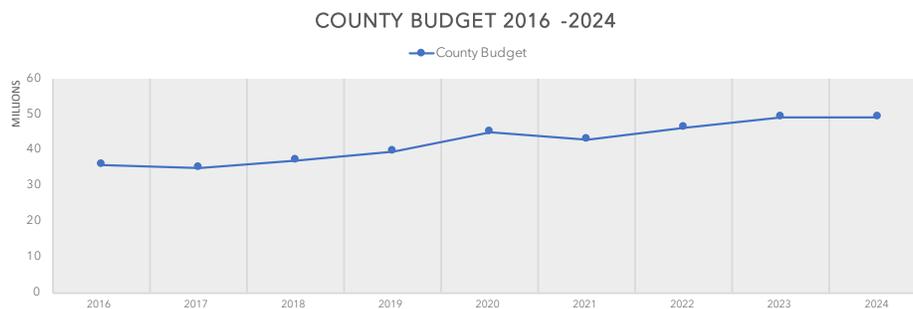
PUBLIC HEARING

Chairman Davis opened the public hearing at 10:14 a.m. and asked County Administrator Mark Brady to begin his budget overview.

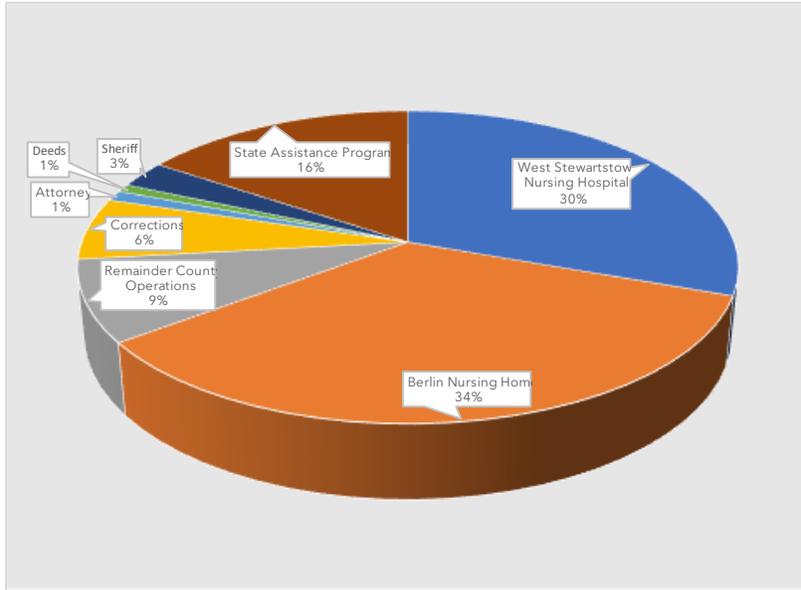
County Administrator Mark Brady welcomed everyone on behalf of the Coös County Commissioners.

He mentioned that this is the first budget he participated in as County Administrator. And after many years in public finance, he approaches budgets from the macro - understanding the history, dynamics and trends that effect the micro -- or the details.

He prepared a power point presentation which provided the basis from which he discussed the proposed budget.



The County Administrator said that the proposed 2024 budget was a standstill budget, \$176,000 less than the 2023 approved budget. He also reminded the Delegation that the Board recently approved a new PILOT agreement with Granite Reliable Power, which helps with the Unincorporated Places budgets for Millsfield and Dixville.

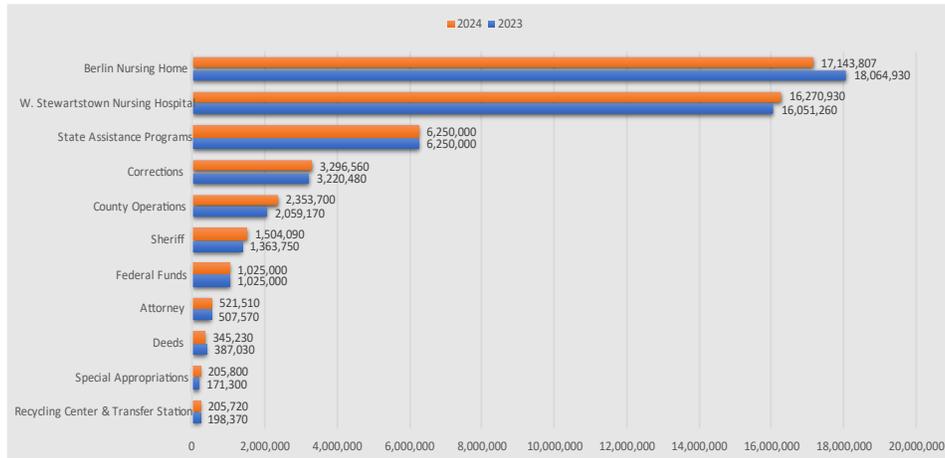


Budget
Composition
2016-2024

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The Administrator reiterated what he had said in his cover letter that was mailed along with the budget -- County government today in New Hampshire is financially responsible for some of the highest cost services provided by any level of government: long-term care and corrections. He noted that 80% of the county budget funded health care services. The County Administrator said that the counties are responsible for the non-federal share of Medicaid costs for long term services and supports, up to the County CAP. The State bills the county for nearly 40% of the costs of LTC Medicaid Services for residents of the county.

2023 & 2024 Budget by Department



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The County Administrator noted that the Berlin Nursing budget will be revisited by the new NHA Louise Belanger.

Other Special Appropriations			
Expense: (Page 35)	2023	2024	Change
Senior Meals	\$17,000	\$17,000	\$0
Retired Senior Volunteer Program	\$17,000	\$17,000	\$0
Child Advocacy Center of Coös County	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$0
Response Program	\$6,000	\$8,000	\$2,000
Tri County Transit	\$36,000	\$36,000	\$0
Coös Economic Development Corp	\$45,000	\$75,000	\$30,000
Food Pantry Program	\$5,000	\$10,000	\$5,000
Funerals: County Assisted Person	\$4,500	\$2,000	-\$2,500
Homeless Outreach Intervention & Prevention	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$0
Coös ServiceLink Resource Center	\$5,800	\$5,800	\$0
Energy Assistant Services Program	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$0
CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates)	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Special Appropriations	\$171,300	\$205,800	\$34,500

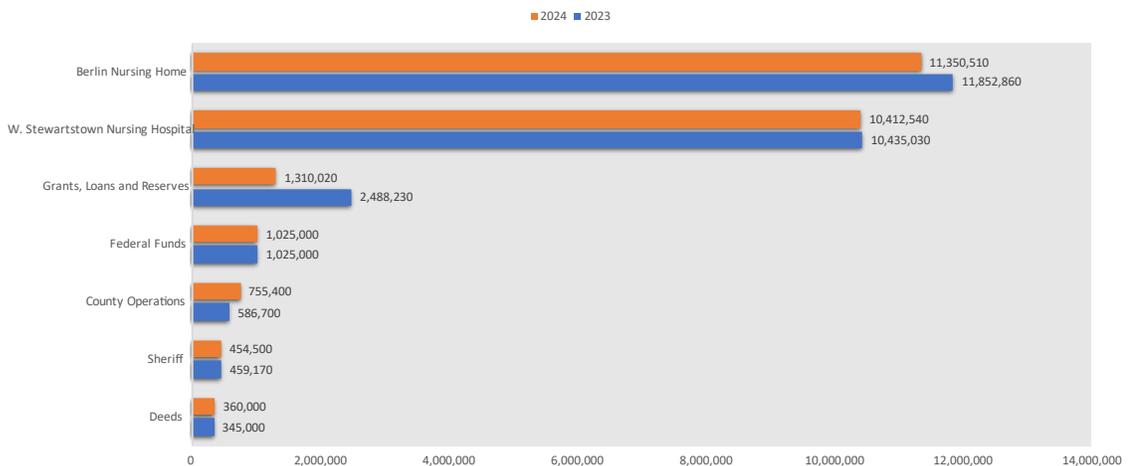
State Assistance Programs

Expense: (Page 31)	2023	2024	Change
Home/Community Care (HCBC)	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$0
Intermediate Nursing Care (INC)	\$4,750,000	\$4,750,000	\$0
Totals	\$6,250,000	\$6,250,000	\$0

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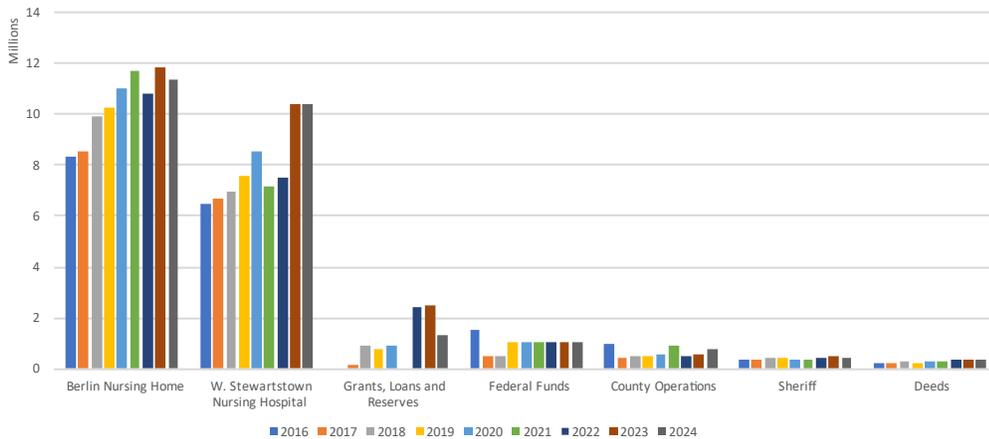
ADP

2023 & 2024 Revenues by Department



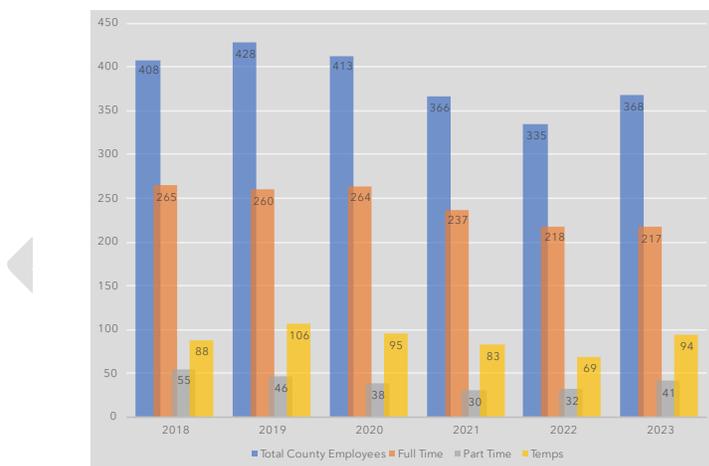
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2016-2024 Budgeted Revenues by Department



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The County Administrator said that this slide represents modern day federalism at work in the United States. The relationship between the federal government and states is about the flow of funds, and specifically healthcare. He reiterated again that the county budget is all about healthcare.

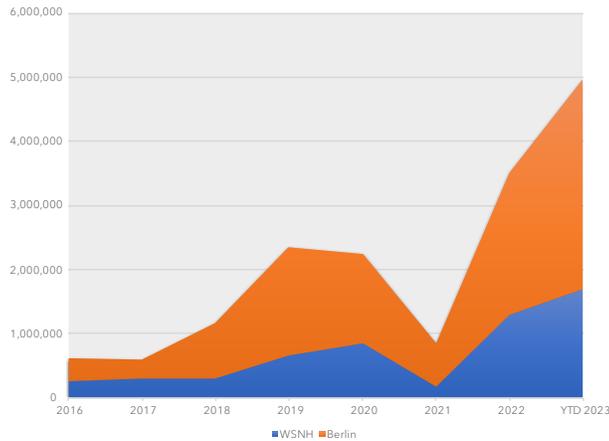


County Employees 5 Year Trend

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The County Administration budget includes requests for one additional person in the Human Resources Department, a grants person in the Finance Department, additional monies for follow on analysis based on Berry Dunn's operational assessment and an increase in the legal line item.

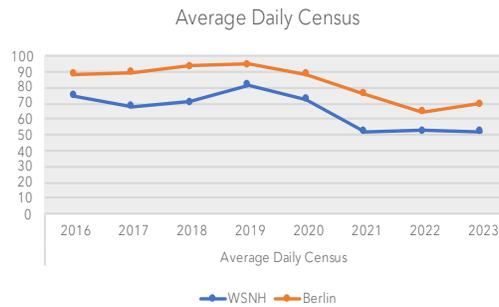
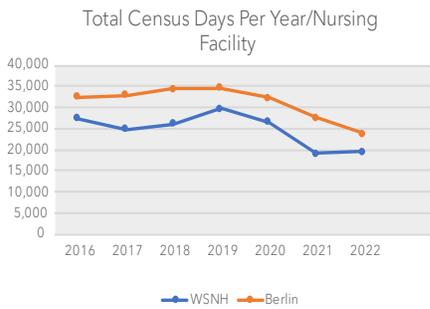
The County Administrator said that reporting requirements by the federal government are increasingly difficult and there needs to be a position dedicated to overseeing this to (1) mitigate the County's exposure and (2) identify additional grant opportunities which should help fund the position in time. He noted that the human resource department was understaffed with 2.5 professionals for 368 full-time employees and 217 part time.



Contract
Nursing Staff
2016-2023

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The County Administrator noted that Berry Dunn is currently doing an analysis of the two nursing homes. The use of contract nursing by the nursing homes, particularly in Berlin, has exploded and is driving increased costs while the census numbers are flat.



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Representative Ouellet inquired if the County Administrator will have a firm plan in place for the Delegation relating to increasing staff and census in the nursing homes by the March meeting. The County Administrator replied that he could not commit to an answer. The additional funding requested for Berry Dunn cannot be spent until the budget is approved in March. Representative Ouellet noted that if the staffing and census cannot be increased other options will need to be looked at.

Representative Ouellet inquired about the significant increase request from Coös Economic Development Corporation. Commissioner Gorman replied that the funds currently allocated have been used for funding. Ericka Canales, Director, replied that the additional funds will help with the formation of the Americorps Program and an affordable housing program.

Berlin Mayor and former County Commissioner Paul Grenier noted that he had been the main architect of the last 12 budget cycles while he was County Commissioner. He congratulated the County Administrator on a great job. He reminded the Delegation that they needed to be cognizant of the county CAP as it is a financial issue for the county, i.e., the lower the cap the better for the County.

The County Administrator began the review of the nursing hospital budget. The total West Stewartstown Nursing Hospital proposed budget totaled \$13,855,930 and specials in the amount of \$2,415,000 for a total budget request of \$16,270,930.

Chairman Davis continued with the Berlin Nursing Home budget. The proposed budget was \$17,027,057 and specials in the amount of \$116,750 for a total budget request of \$17,143,807.

Mayor Grenier asked the nursing home administrators what census numbers were used for the calculation of revenue and expenditures. Laura Mills, WSNH, replied that a census of 60 had been used for the revenue and a census of 75 for the expenditures. Contract nurses/LNAs cost two to three times more than staff. It would take 1½ residents to pay for a contract person. A census of 72 was used for the Berlin Nursing Home. The County Administrator added that the budget will be fully revisited by the March meeting.

Review of the County Government budget continued.

During the review, Mayor Grenier reported that he had been requesting copies of the Commissioners mileage since August. Two of the three [Commissioners] are very respectful of their mileage reimbursement. Mayor Grenier said that reimbursement should be requested only on meetings that they are required to attend. He distributed copies of Commissioner Théberge's mileage reimbursement since the beginning of the year. The mayor said that there are questionable charges that appear as downright fraud and should be investigated. He pointed out that there were two instances where mileage was claimed for trips to Concord, NH. Mayor Grenier noted that he had attended in the first instance to testify, and Commissioner Théberge was not present. Mayor Grenier also said that Commissioner Théberge claimed mileage for a Berlin Airport Authority meeting which was held in Berlin prior to the Council meeting. That is fraud in his opinion. Mayor Grenier said there is mileage for Coös County Planning Board and CEDC meetings but he [Commissioner Théberge] is not the Board of Commissioners' representative on either. Mayor Grenier said that mileage should only be claimed when the county commissioner is acting as the Board's representative. Mayor Grenier noted that Commissioner Théberge has \$3,200 worth of mileage in nine months. He asked for a full investigation by the County Delegation. He will go to the Attorney General if he needs to. These actions are fraud and criminal. It is immoral.

Representative Ouellet asked the County Administrator to investigate mileage policies and report back to the Delegation. The Delegation discussed holding a special non-public meeting in January to address the issue. Commissioner Brady raised concerns about the County Administrator investigating a Commissioner since the Administrator works directly for the Board of Commissioners. It was suggested that County Attorney McCormick investigate the allegations and he responded that he was conflicted too since the Board of Commissioners has oversight over his office by approving his budget. McCormick suggested that someone outside of the county conduct the investigation. Representative Tierney advised that the Attorney General's office be notified.

The total county government budget with specials was \$14,476,890.

The total appropriations were \$49,122,347.

Representative Cascadden inquired about debt service. Director of Finance Klebe replied that the debt service line item included the water system at the nursing hospital; IT infrastructure; and roof repairs at the Berlin Nursing Home. The short-term was the tax anticipation note.

Rick Dube, Pittsburg resident, questioned the lieutenant position budgeted in the Department of Corrections (DOC) budget. Superintendent Champagne replied that the department is

working on opioid initiatives and the individual in this position will be involved. He noted that this did not require adding a new position but using an existing vacant position and updating the job description. The County Administrator noted that the county lacks succession planning, and this position was needed to fill that requirement. He also said that the DOC has over 350 offenders' cycle through the facility each year and Coös County has some of the highest opioid use, per capita, in the state. The redesignated position will enable DOC to do much more opioid mitigation and education. Representative Ouellet asked for a point of order. He welcomed Mr. Dube's comments, but he suggested that Mr. Dube discuss the issue further with the County Administrator if he so desires.

The anticipated revenues totaled \$49,122,347. There were no questions.

The Unincorporated Places budgets which totaled \$1,591,551.

Representative Tierney noted that a complaint was brought forward, and the Delegation must follow through with it. A special meeting will be dependent on the Attorney General's recommendation. Commissioner Brady noted that the Commissioners will obtain an opinion on how Commissioners' mileage is paid and whether the Delegation sets the terms of the mileage.

A motion was made by Representative Ouellet, seconded by Representative Noël to adjourn the meeting at 11:54 a.m. The motion was approved in the affirmative by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Corinne Cascadden, Clerk