

COÖS COUNTY
DELEGATION MEETING &
PUBLIC HEARING on the
2015 PROPOSED BUDGET
Friday, December 12, 2014 - 10:00 a.m.
Coös County Nursing Hospital - W. Stewartstown, NH

Present: Representatives Robert Th  berge-Co-Chair; John Tholl-Co-Chair; Yvonne Thomas-Clerk; John Fothergill, William Hatch, Alethea Lincoln Froburg, Wayne Moynihan, Larry, Rappaport, Herb Richardson and Leon Rideout. Also present: County Commissioners Tom Brady, Paul Grenier and Rick Samson; County Administrator Jennifer Fish; Superintendent Craig Hamelin; Nursing Home Administrator Louise Belanger; Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; Sheriff Gerald Marcou; Chief Deputy Keith Roberge; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris; Deputy Registrar Sally Pelletier; County Attorney John McCormick; County Treasurer Fred King; representatives of outside agencies; members of the press and the public.

DELEGATION MEETING

Representative Th  berge requested all to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. The roll was called by the clerk, Representative Yvonne Thomas. There were 10 members present.

Review & Approval of Minutes: Representative Th  berge asked if any changes or corrections needed to be made to the minutes of the October 24 and December 8, 2014 meetings. A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Tholl to approve the minutes of the October 24 and December 8, 2014 meetings. Representative Moynihan requested that the roll call votes be written in the minutes when the vote is not unanimous. The minutes, as amended, were unanimously approved by a voice vote.

Other Business:

- Representative Th  berge announced that the Fourth Quarter Delegation Meeting will be held on January 30, 2015 in Lancaster, NH at the North Country Resource Center.
- Representative Th  berge also announced that Representative Tholl was named as Chair of the Criminal Justice Safety Committee and Representative Richardson was named Vice Chair of the Science and Technology Committee.
- A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Tholl, to authorize the expenditure up to \$5,000 for the purchase of video surveillance equipment for both nursing homes.

Representative Moynihan asked if an incident had occurred or was the purchase of the equipment for preventative purposes. Representative Th  berge replied that the purchase was for preventative measures. Representative Richardson noted that the purchase was a good investment. The motion was approved by roll call vote 9-1 (Representative Rappaport).

Emile Croteau, Millsfield camp owner, spoke on behalf of several camp owners. He noted that initially the camp owners supported the wind turbines as it was in the best interest of the North Country. They were also told by Granite Reliable representatives that there would be no property taxes in the future. In his opinion all property owners in Millsfield, not just the ones who raised

concerns, should have been part of the deal with Granite Reliable Power in receiving \$2,500 to offset property taxes. Mr. Croteau added that the Bayroot leases which are currently \$2,300 may go up because of the property taxes.

Representative Th  berge stated that the Delegation members worked very hard to protect the taxpayers in Millsfield with the passage of HB 1590. The bill has helped the Balsams project move forward. He also added that the discussion of the deal with Granite Reliable should be discussed amongst the Millsfield landowners.

Commissioner Grenier stated that the agreement between a small group of landowners in Millsfield and Granite Reliable Power was a private issue.

County Treasurer King stated that people require services which are typically covered by timber taxes. Some of the expenses incurred were due to legal fees. He suggested rescheduling the discussion to another date. Commissioner Samson stated that he has been researching the issue and asked the members of the public to attend the Commissioners' meeting on December 17.

Representative Th  berge continued with the meeting and read Resolution #1 which called for approval from the Delegation to authorize the County Treasurer to borrow in anticipation of the 2015 taxes and Resolution #2, which called for authorization for Co  s County to pay 2015 expenses for the first quarter.

Representative Th  berge read Resolution #1 as follows:

Resolution #1

Be it resolved by the Co  s County Delegation duly convened on this twelfth day of December, 2014, that since the monies in the treasury of the County of Co  s are insufficient to meet the demands upon the same and the sum of Ten Million Dollars (\$10,000,000) being the projected amount necessary for the purpose of operating the county for the Fiscal Year 2015, the Co  s County Treasurer is hereby authorized to borrow up to \$10,000,000 upon order of the County Commissioners pursuant to RSA 29:8.

A motion was made by Representative Tholl, seconded by Representative Rideout to approve Resolution #1. The resolution passed by roll call vote 10-0.

Representative Th  berge read Resolution #2 as follows:

Resolution #2

Authorization for Co  s County to Pay 2015 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 \$7,452,600.

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 \$7,452,600 for 2015 expenses during the months of January, February, and March in anticipation of the subsequent approval of the 2015 budget. Further that the \$7,452,600 be allocated proportionately to the line items based on the 2014 approved net appropriations to fund like operating and personnel expenses in existence as of 12/31/14.

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

Representative Th  berge closed the Delegation meeting at 10:47 a.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

Representative Tholl opened the public hearing at 10:47 a.m. and asked Jennifer Fish, County Administrator, to begin her presentation.

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

Jennifer welcomed newly elected State Representatives to the Co  s County Delegation: the Honorable John Fothergill; the Honorable Alethea Lincoln Froburg; and the Honorable John Tholl. She also thanked Representatives Enman, Hammon and Coulombe for many years of service.

Jennifer explained that the 2014 budget development process began in September. The Commissioners' reviewed the budget on two separate occasions. The proposed budget was mailed to the Delegation the week of November 17.

Representative Moynihan stated that when the budget was provided to the Delegation in last budget season there was a question as to the submission date and the date of the budget meeting was changed. Commissioner Grenier replied that December 12, 2014 is the date of submission of the 2015 Co  s County budget. He continued that the proposed budget is still a work in progress and the Commissioners will make further recommendations and changes to the budget.

Representative Hatch asked for the statistics of Vermont residents residing in the Co  s County Nursing Homes. In his opinion, the subsidizing of Vermont residents needs to be addressed. County Treasurer King noted that it is better to have Vermont residents than to have no one at all.

Jennifer reported that the State of New Hampshire recently announced new Medicaid rates as of January 1: Co  s County Nursing Hospital \$152.18 per day/a 4% rate reduction and Co  s County Nursing Home \$152.81 per day/a 1% reduction.

Representative Moynihan asked why the rates were different and Jennifer replied that rates are determined by acuity reporting. Representative Moynihan asked if the Medicaid rate was the amount paid for out of district placements. Jennifer replied no that it depended on the nursing home's daily rate. Commissioner Grenier noted that the State does not reimburse the actual rate. Representative Hatch noted that it is not just a county issue but a state-wide issue. The State does not pay its fair share because it does not have the money to do so.

Jennifer highlighted appropriations affecting the 2015 budget:

- The proposed 2015 budget included a 1.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for County employees. The proposed budget also includes 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 720 are also included in the budget.
- NH Retirement System has presented rate increases for both Group I and Group II members.
- The guaranteed maximum rate increase on health insurance premiums for July 2015 was unknown when the budget was mailed out. Therefore a projected increase of 10% was included in the budget for July thru December. Jennifer reported that the County was informed that the not to exceed rate will be 9.6%.

The **total proposed 2015 appropriation budget** (without the unincorporated places) was \$34,163,660 compared to the 2014 approved budget of \$34,140,007; an increase of \$22,653 or .07%.

The Unincorporated Places Budget contains separate line items for each of the County's 23 Unincorporated Places. The total Unincorporated Places budget for 2015 was \$1,499,150 compared to the 2014 approved budget of \$2,171,908 which was a decrease of \$672,758.

Jennifer began the review of the 2015 proposed budget. She explained that she would be following the budget book by department and welcomed questions through the process.

While reviewing the Berlin Nursing Home's budget, Representative Moynihan questioned the retiree benefits line item. He also asked if the benefit is paid through current taxes or if a fund was established. Jennifer explained that health insurance and some life insurance policies are paid by the County for certain retirees. These benefits are paid with current taxes. Representative Richardson noted that these benefits were promised when these individuals were hired. The County is honoring the benefits.

County Attorney John McCormick announced that a new assistant county attorney was hired. A request for an increase in the salary line item may be forthcoming in 2015. There are sufficient funds in the 2014 budget.

While reviewing the Department of Corrections budget, Representative Moynihan inquired if the physician services are paid for by the Affordable Care Act or County taxes. Superintendent Hamelin replied county taxes pay for the services. If an inmate has health insurance it is used. Representative Richardson noted that if an individual has no income, they do not qualify for Affordable Care Act.

Representative Richardson noted the increase in Prisoners: Other institutions line item. Superintendent Hamelin stated that female inmates have spiked with long-term sentencing. The cost is \$50 per day at Grafton County.

Under Other Special Appropriations, Jennifer announced that the 45th Parallel had withdrawn its request of \$35,000 for a van.

Kristy Letendre, TriCAP Div. of Alcohol & other Drug Services, spoke of the program. She explained that it is not a new program. It has been in existence for 11 years and has had resources to provide services. Requests for funding have been sent to Grafton County, Carroll County and Coös County. The funds will

be used to offset costs for low income residents. County Attorney McCormick encouraged the support of the program.

The public hearing recessed for lunch from 12:33 p.m. to 1:20 p.m.

Jennifer then reviewed the County's projected revenues.

While reviewing the Unincorporated Places budgets, Representative Fothergill asked if the County pays for all of the expenses generated in the Unincorporated Places. Jennifer replied yes. Historically, timber taxes are used to help offset expenses. Commissioner Grenier explained that the Commissioners are the Board of Selectmen and the Delegation is the town meeting.

On a motion by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Théberge, the public hearing adjourned at 1:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Yvonne Thomas, Clerk