

COÖS COUNTY  
DELEGATION MEETING &  
PUBLIC HEARING on the 2018 PROPOSED BUDGET  
Monday, December 11, 2017 - 10:00 a.m.  
Coös County Nursing Hospital - W. Stewartstown, NH

Present: Representatives Robert Théberge - Chair; Wayne Moynihan - Vice Chair; Larry Laflamme - Clerk; William Hatch, Bing Judd, Troy Merner, Herb Richardson, Yvonne Thomas and Edith Tucker . Also present: County Commissioners Tom Brady, Paul Grenier and Rick Samson; County Administrator Jennifer Fish; Director of Finance Carrie Klebe; Superintendent Ben Champagne; Nursing Home Administrator Louise Belanger; Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; Sheriff Brian Valerino; Captain Keith Roberge; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris; Registrar Tanya Batchelder; County Attorney John McCormick; Treasurer Suzanne Collins; Captain John Acardi; Larry Barker UNH/Cooperative Extension; representatives of outside agencies; members of the press and the public. Representative John Fothergill was excused.

**DELEGATION MEETING**

Chairman Théberge requested all to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. The meeting was called to order at 10:06 a.m.

Chairman Théberge voiced his discontent in regards to comments made by the Commissioners on the scheduling of the public hearing during the week. He explained that dates are selected based on Delegation availability as he needs a quorum. The annual budget meeting will be held on a Saturday.

The roll was called by the clerk, Representative Larry Laflamme. There were nine (9) members present.

Review & Approval of the Minutes of the October 30, 2017 meeting: A motion was made by Representative Tucker, seconded by Representative Judd to approve the minutes of October 30, 2017 meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved by a voice vote.

Other Business:

Chairman Théberge read Resolution #1 which pertained to Borrowing Funds in Anticipation of Taxes in 2018:

*Resolution #1*

*Be it resolved by the Coös County Delegation duly convened on this eleventh day of December, 2017, 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 Ten Million Dollars (\$10,000,000) being the projected amount necessary for the purpose of operating the county for the Fiscal Year 2018, the Coös 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 Judd, seconded by Representative Tucker to approve Resolution #1. The resolution passed by roll call vote 9-0.

Chairman Théberge read Resolution #2 as follows:

*Resolution #2  
Authorization for Coös County to Pay 2018 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 \$8,500,000.*

*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 \$8,500,000 for 2018 expenses during the months of January, February, and March in anticipation of the subsequent approval of the 2018 budget. Further that the \$8,500,000 be allocated proportionately to the line items based on the 2017 approved net appropriations to fund like operating and personnel expenses in existence as of 12/31/17.*

A motion was made by Representative Hatch, seconded by Representative Judd to approve Resolution #2. The resolution passed by roll call vote 9-0.

Chairman Théberge announced that the fourth quarter meeting will be held on Monday, January 29, 2018 in Berlin with a snow date of Monday, February 5, 2018. The annual budget meeting will be held on Saturday, March 10, 2018 in Berlin with a snow date of March 17, 2018.

Chairman Théberge closed the Delegation meeting at 10:20 a.m.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

Chairman Théberge opened the public hearing at 10:20 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.

Ms. Fish explained that the public hearing was being held in accordance with state law, RSA 24:23 that states "not earlier than 5 nor later than 20 days after the mailing of the commissioners' budget statement, there shall be held within the county at such time and place as the chairperson of the county convention may specify a public hearing on the budget estimates as submitted by the commissioners."

Ms. Fish noted budget development process began in September. Budget requests from all departments and programs were submitted to the Director of Finance in October for review and compilation. After the County Administrator's review, where adjustments and recommendations were made, the working budget then moved on to the Commissioners. The Commissioners conducted individual reviews and held three budget work sessions. The Commissioners made a few more adjustments on November 8 and approved the budgets for publication. Finally, in accordance with state law the Commissioners recommended budget must be in the hands of the city, towns and Delegation members by December 1.

Ms. Fish explained that there are services covered in the 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. These include the Registrar of Deeds, the County Attorney, Medical Referees, a County Sheriff, and a County Treasurer.

There are other financial responsibilities that fall to the counties as a result of state law. These include the Commissioners, 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. Current state law requires counties to fund 100% of the non-federal share of the cost of all services to any citizens who qualify for nursing home level of care and Medicaid regardless of where they live – be it in a county nursing home, a private nursing home anywhere in New Hampshire, a skilled nursing facility, a residential care or assisted living facility or even in their own homes. The two key elements to being approved by the State for Medicaid services are qualifying for nursing home level of care and meeting the state's Medicaid financial guidelines. The two programs included in the State-County relationship and therefore in the county budget are Home & Community Based Care and Intermediate Nursing Care.

Traditional and Community Programs are financial responsibilities that fall to the county as a matter of choice. These programs include:

- The County Nursing Homes;
- Victim/Witness Program that operates out of the County Attorney's Office;
- UNH Cooperative Extension;
- Coös County Conservation District;
- Other Special Appropriations; and
- The Recycling Center and Transfer Station are included in the budget but do not have any financial impact on the county tax. Both are operated directly by County staff for several area municipalities that separately and individually cover all the associated costs.

The proposed budget will be revised again prior to its submission 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;
- Delegation subcommittees have had the opportunity to meet with department heads on any or all budgets for the various county operations; and
- The surplus is determined.

Ms. Fish highlighted appropriations affecting the 2018 budget:

- The proposed 2018 budget includes a 2% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for County employees. The 2018 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.

- The health insurance rates were budgeted for a 25% increase in premium for the second half of the year. However, the County was informed late last week that the Not-to-Exceed rate will be 8.1%. This means a reduction \$188,200 to the budget.
- The Coös County Nursing Home (Berlin) has budgeted for a full year of rehabilitative services to Medicare beneficiaries.

Ms. Fish also highlighted revenues affecting the 2018 budget:

- The unencumbered fund balance (surplus) has not been determined for 2017. This amount will be determined when the 2017 financial statements are closed in mid to late January after all accounts receivable, accounts payable, encumbrances and accruals for 2017 have been recorded.
- The projected 2017 surplus to reduce taxes is \$2,972,000.

The total proposed 2018 appropriation budget (without the unincorporated places) is \$37,476,895 compared to the 2017 approved budget of \$35,037,404. That is an increase of \$2,439,491 or 6.96%.

The total County Tax for 2018 was projected at \$15,656,005 compared to \$15,084,791 in 2017. This is an increase of 3.79%.

The Unincorporated Places Budget document contains a summary for the County's 23 Unincorporated Places (three places are entirely within the boundaries of the White Mountain National Forest and have no taxable property). The total Unincorporated Places budget for 2018 was projected at \$1,680,340 compared to the 2017 approved budget of \$1,588,411 which included a request from the Colebrook Dispatch Center for communication equipment totaling \$60,000 which was split between three places that the Center covers and the Contracted Services increased in several places due to the final phase of revaluation by the County's assessors.

Ms. Fish began the review of the 2018 proposed budget. She explained that she would be following the budget book by department and welcomed questions through the process.

*Coös County Nursing Hospital:*

Representative Tucker inquired about the low census and if measures were being taken to reduce costs for example closing down floors, reducing staff, etc. Laura Mills, Nursing Home Administrator, noted that the census was low at the moment. She explained the waived beds will not be used and capacity will reduced to 84 instead of 97. In regards to staffing, no replacements are being called in for call outs. There are no plans to close down floors. Ms. Mills also noted that the budget is based on 74-75 full beds. Representative Tucker asked if this was the year's average and Ms. Mills replied in the affirmative.

*Coös County Nursing Home:*

Representative Tucker thanked the Berlin Nursing Home Administrator Louise Belanger for the information provided in regards to the skilled nursing facility. Mrs. Belanger noted that all 100 beds are Medicare qualified. It is a new business and the facility is doing well.

*County Attorney:*

County Attorney John McCormick provided an update on the status of Drug Court and Felonies First. Drug Court is in the works and will hopefully start in February. There will be no incurred costs for the County. Felonies First is ongoing. Representative Tucker asked if Felonies First was cutting down on trials. Attorney McCormick replied that it seemed more like an upswing but quicker.

*Coös County Sheriff:*

Sheriff Valerino noted that the request from the City of Berlin for the Drug Task Force under contracted services would be reduced to \$20,000. Representative Moynihan raised skepticism in regards to the request. He indicated that he would support the request if there were facts to support the request. Is there data that shows that participation in the task force will make a difference? He asked for hard data by the March meeting. Chief Morency, City of Berlin, stated that he would be willing to submit a monthly report to the Delegation. He wants the task force to make a difference. Representative Tucker asked for data as well. Representative Richardson stated that he supported the data but suggested that the program be evaluated every two years.

Representative Moynihan noted that the Sheriff's budget showed an increase of 33% over a two-year period and asked about the increase. Captain Roberge replied that there were new vehicle purchases as well as new cages, group II retirement rates increased, health insurance increases.

Representative Hatch left the meeting at 11:45 a.m.

*Department of Corrections:*

Representative Moynihan asked Superintendent Champagne for a report indicating the census of the house of correction by March. Superintendent Champagne replied he would provide a five year lookback.

*Cooperative Extension:*

Larry Barker presented a proposal that would change the support staff from Coös County to UNH Cooperative Extension employment. There would be a \$10,768 savings in the 2017; however, there would be a \$5,300 increase in the 2018 budget and would be recurring. Chairman Thérberge noted that the Advisory Committee had met to discuss the proposal presented by Mr. Barker. Both, he and Commissioner Samson, recused themselves from the discussion. Representative Tucker asked if the position was necessary. Mr. Barker replied that the office serves as the reception area for all of the departments in the building. Representative Moynihan agreed with the change but asked if the proposal was presented to the Board. Commissioner Grenier replied that the Board has not discussed the proposal and he did not support the proposal. Mr. Barker noted that the Advisory Committee meeting was held after the Board's November meeting and he was attending the December meeting to discuss the proposal with the Board. Commissioner Brady stated that the Board would make a recommendation to the Delegation by March. Commissioner Samson stated that he supported the proposal. There are several outside agencies that cost more than the proposed increase on the budget. John Acardi, DRED, stated that his agency relies on cooperative extension support staff and supported the proposal.

Ms. Fish then reviewed the County's projected revenues.

Ms. Fish concluded by reviewing the Unincorporated Places budgets.

A motion was made by Representative Judd, seconded by Representative Richardson to adjourn the public hearing at 1:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Larry Laflamme, Clerk