

COÖS COUNTY
QUARTERLY DELEGATION MEETING
Monday, May 12, 2014 - 10:00 a.m.
North Country Resource Center - Lancaster, NH

Present: Representatives Robert Théberge-Chair; Larry Rappaport-Vice Chair; Leon Rideout -Acting Clerk; Larry Enman, Wayne Moynihan and Herb Richardson. Also present: Commissioner Tom Brady; Commissioner Rick Samson; County Administrator Jennifer Fish; Director of Finance Carrie Klebe; Superintendent Craig Hamelin; Nursing Home Administrator Louise Belanger; Nursing Hospital Administrator Laura Mills; Administrative Assistant Linda Harris; County Treasurer Fred King; County Attorney John McCormick and members of the press and public.

Chairman Théberge called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and requested all to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. The roll was called by the acting clerk, Representative Leon Rideout. There were 6 members present at the time of roll call; Representatives Coulombe, Hammon, Hatch and Thomas were not in attendance.

Hearing of the Public:

Sonny Martin, Martin's Agway in Lancaster, asked that the Delegation submit a letter to the NH Fish & Game asking to reconsider the new hunting rules in regards to the use of attractants. Representative Rideout questioned the Fish & Game's definition of a "traditional hunter".

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Moynihan that the Chairman, on behalf of the Delegation, send a letter to the NH Fish & Game addressing attractants by Friday, May 16. Chairman Théberge stated that he would also email Representative Lovejoy. The motion passed by roll call vote 6-0.

Review & Approval of Minutes:

Chairman Théberge asked if any changes or corrections needed to be made to the minutes of the March 31, 2014 meeting. A motion was made by Representative Rappaport, seconded by Representative Richardson to approve the minutes of the March 31, 2014 meeting. The minutes were approved by roll call vote 6-0.

Review & Approval of the First Quarter Financial Statements:

The Coös County expenditures and revenues for the first quarter were reviewed.

There were no questions pertaining to the first quarter expenditures.

Representative Moynihan asked why the revenues for the Recycling Center were low. Superintendent Hamelin replied that the cooperating towns are typically billed in July.

Chairman Théberge continued with the review of the Unincorporated Places expenditures and revenues.

There were no questions pertaining to the first quarter expenditures.

Representative Moynihan inquired about the revenue received in Dixville and Millsfield. Carrie Klebe replied that the Granite Reliable Payment in Lieu of Tax was received in January.

Representative Rappaport asked how the County will pay the DRA assessment if HB1590 does not pass. Commissioner Brady replied that the amount would be passed on in the form of property taxes. He expressed the importance of HB1590. Representative Moynihan added that in 2013 the Dixville and Millsfield property taxes were paid using the fund balances, PILT and land use change taxes. Jennifer replied that was correct.

A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Rappaport to approve the first quarter financials. The motion was approved by roll call vote 6-0.

Old Business:

- a. Chairman Théberge provided an update on HB1590. The Senate subcommittee voted 4-1 to concur. HB1590 will go before the Senate this week. He continued that several people did not understand unincorporated places and how it works. It was made clear to the Governor, the Senate and the House the negative impact this could create on the future of The Balsams and the possibility of 1,000 jobs over time if HB1590 did not pass. Representative Rappaport asked if there was any indication that the Governor would sign the bill. Chairman Théberge replied that the Governor has indicated she has no reservations on signing the bill.

Commissioner Brady, on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, expressed gratitude on the work done by the entire Delegation on HB1590.

- b. HDR Report: County Treasurer Fred King reported that the Economic Impact Survey had been completed. He found an error on page 4-17. The word "million" should be added after 4.6. Overall it is a good plan with a lot of research. In his opinion, if the federal government continues to purchase land in Coös County, the county is in trouble. The report indicates that tourism is down in Coös County. Mr. King received correspondence from an individual in Virginia requesting a copy of the study. He requested permission to send a copy. Mr. King added that the federal government not fulfilling their obligations is nationwide. One significant factor in the report indicates that tourism in the country is increasing; however it is going down in Coös County.

Edith Tucker, *The Coös County Democrat*, asked how much of the County tax dollars went into the report and if funds were received from outside agencies to offset the cost, as previously discussed. Jennifer Fish replied that the total cost of the study was \$44,650 from the Unincorporated Places budget and no funds have been received.

Barbara Tetreault, *The Berlin Daily Sun*, asked if any members of the Delegation had read the report. Some representatives had and others had not. Representative Moynihan has read it quickly but not studied it. He asked if the Delegation and Commissioners would meet as a group to discuss the report. Chairman Théberge agreed that a meeting should be held on a Wednesday in July. Commissioner Brady suggested an early evening meeting. Representative Moynihan also asked if a representative from HDR would be available to attend the meeting in order to answer questions. Commissioner Brady suggested that the Delegates submit their questions on the report to Jennifer which she could forward to HDR prior to the meeting. Jennifer will contact HDR to inquire on the availability of attending the meeting and inquire on a cost. Commissioner Brady noted that a copy of the report will be sent to each town in Coös County.

It was also suggested that the Congressional Delegation be invited to the joint meeting.

- c. Update on Chapel Hill Road, Wentworth Location: Representative Richardson asked for a status update on the repair of the riverbank in Wentworth Location. Commissioner Samson reported that 350 feet has been completed. Currently the project is at a standstill due to high water. The contractor is hoping to get back to work by the end of the week. Commissioner Brady thanked Commissioner Samson for taking the lead on the project.

New Business:

- a. Appointment of Delegation Member to Coös County Planning Board: Chairman Théberge stated that Representative Rappaport has been extremely busy and unable to attend the meetings. Chairman Théberge appointed Representative Rideout to replace Representative Rappaport on the Coös County Planning Board.
- b. National Forest Reserve Funds: Ms. Fish explained that state law (RSA 227-H:23) requires that the Delegation vote on the distribution of National Forest Reserve Funds to independent school districts. The total will be \$114,210.75 which is a decrease of \$9,454.73 from last year. The Commissioners recommended past practice where the funds are distributed to the independent school districts for the education of the children in the Unincorporated Places. Currently, students from Millsfield attend the Errol and Colebrook Districts at a cost of \$78,221.72. The balance of \$35,989.03 will be equally shared by the school districts in Coös County that maintain schools for books and education materials. A motion was made by Representative Rideout, seconded by Representative Rappaport to approve the distribution of the National Forest Reserve Funds. The motion was approved by a roll call vote 6-0.
- c. Valuation Defense Fund Disbursement: Chairman Théberge reported that the Commissioners had approved the disbursement of funds to the following:
- City of Berlin \$15,000
 - Town of Gorham \$10,000
 - Town of Lancaster \$15,000

Commissioner Brady noted that a letter will be sent to each town in Coös County to make them aware of the Utility Defense Fund. He questioned if the remaining \$40,000 would suffice. Chairman Théberge added that if more money is needed the Delegation may need to hold a supplemental budget meeting. He asked County Attorney McCormick if he would provide assistance with the utility lawsuits. County Attorney McCormick agreed to help in any way possible. Representative Rideout stated that currently there is one lawyer representing 30 towns throughout the state.

- d. Salaries of Elected Officials 2014-2016: Chairman Théberge explained that the salaries of elected officials are set every two years. In preparing the proposals, he used the salaries from Carroll and Grafton Counties for comparison. He expressed that Coös County salaries need to be competitive.

Chairman Théberge proposed increasing the County Treasurer salary from \$3,000 to a range of \$5,000 to \$5,500. A motion was made by Representative Moynihan, seconded by Representative Enman to increase the County Treasurer's salary from \$3,000 to \$5,000. Representative Rideout reminded everyone that salary increases were given to all of the employees while several citizens have not had increases. People are still struggling economically. Representative Richardson offered \$3,500 and Representative Rappaport stated he would support \$4,000. Representative Moynihan and Representative Enman both amended their motion to \$4,000. A motion was made by

Representative Moynihan, seconded by Representative Enman to increase the County Treasurer's salary from \$3,000 to \$4,000. The motion passed by roll call vote 4-2.

Chairman Théberge proposed increasing the Register of Deeds salary from \$40,000 to \$45,000. A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Rappaport to increase the Register of Deeds salary to \$45,000. The motion passed by roll call vote 6-0.

Chairman Théberge proposed increasing the County Attorney's salary from \$70,000 to \$76,000. Representative Moynihan stated that he had encouraged the County Attorney to attend the meeting to discuss his salary; however the County Attorney did not solicit an increase. County Attorney McCormick noted that Sullivan County is closer in comparison to Coös County. Sullivan's County Attorney salary is \$76,700. He continued that \$76,000 was a fair salary. Representative Rideout stated that the County Attorney is doing an excellent job but reminded the Delegation that an education benefit line item in the amount of \$4,000 was added to the budget to help cover the cost of the County Attorney's student loans. Representative Moynihan was in favor of the increase. He explained that once Attorney McCormick was elected he was no longer eligible for a federal program that compensated lawyers who work in rural areas for their law school debt. Coös County has a state prison and cases stemming from the state prison add to the work load. He argued that the County should offer a competitive salary to attract and maintain a qualified attorney for the position. The education benefit line item may be revisited at any budget cycle. The motion passed by roll call vote 5-1.

Chairman Théberge proposed an increase to the Sheriff's Salary from \$50,000 to \$56,000. Chairman Théberge reported that Sheriff Marcou requested no increase. A motion was made by Representative Richardson, seconded by Representative Moynihan to increase the Sheriff's salary from \$50,000 to \$56,000. Representative Richardson stated that setting the salary, the Delegation should consider the size of the county and huge responsibility of the Sheriff. Representative Rappaport voiced that the Sheriff's department should take on a greater role in law enforcement. Chairman Théberge stated that the department is overseen by the Commissioners. Commissioner Samson stated that the department has been doing more law enforcement. Representative Rappaport asked if the Sheriff's Department would assist in Stewartstown. Commissioner Samson replied that discussions have occurred concerning the matter. The motion passed by roll call vote 5-1.

Chairman Théberge proposed increasing the Commissioners' salaries from \$7,000 to \$9,000 with the chairman continuing to receive an additional \$500 per year. Chairman Théberge also disclosed that he is considering running for the position in the future.

Commissioner Brady stated that this would be the first salary increase in his 12 years as a Commissioner. Commissioner Samson stated that he had not requested an increase but appreciated the consideration by the delegation.

A motion was made by Representative Rideout, seconded by Representative Rappaport to increase the Commissioners' salaries to \$8,000 with an additional \$500 for the Chair. The motion passed by roll call vote 4-2.

Subcommittee Reports:

Representative Rideout reported that the farm/house subcommittee report was not quite ready. He did state that the committee's direction was to lease the house and barn as a whole to be operated as a

farm. The subcommittee is looking to set up a County Farm Commission that will oversee the county farm. It is hoped that the advisory board will alleviate some of the Commissioners decisions. The committee would be comprised of: a business person, a farm person and a resident from each of the three districts. Chairman Théberge noted that some type of solution will need to be presented to the Commissioners during the summer prior to the beginning of the budget season. Representative Rideout replied the report is almost ready.

Commissioner Samson reported that there is no longer a lease on the barn and land. The Commissioners are suggesting a one year lease. This will give the Commissioners one year to work with the Delegation's recommendation. The individual will be selected through an application process.

Chairman Théberge reported that the Cooperative Extension's Centennial Celebration was well attended.

Chairman Théberge also reported that he has been speaking with Jay Phinizy regarding a USDA grant to help feed kids during the summer. Funds could be used to upgrade kitchens at the nursing homes and kids would get the chance to work with the elderly.

Representative Richardson reported that two cruisers in the Sheriff's department do not have cameras.

Any Other Business:

Bob Ellwell, Lancaster, thanked the Delegation for the work that is done by them. He especially appreciated the Delegation members who used restraint to vote no on the proposed salary increases.

Commissioner Samson expressed concern on the lack of attendance by the Delegation and thanked the members that always attend.

Jennifer asked for clarification on the former county administrator's house and asked if the house was part of the farm proposal. Chairman Théberge replied yes. Representative Moynihan noted that previously there had been discussions of using the structure for County Administration offices. The subcommittee never received the presentation. Representative Richardson added that he would like to see the proposal as he firmly believes that Jennifer and staff do not belong in the Nursing Hospital.

A motion was made by Representative Rideout, seconded by Representative Rappaport to adjourn the meeting at 12:50 p.m.

The motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Leon Rideout
Acting Clerk