



CHESHIRE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OFFICE

Mission Statement & Long Term Plan

2002 through 2017

Mission Statement

Cheshire County is value and service driven. Cheshire County will be known as an innovative and progressive leader providing cost effective county services that are required by statute. Others will benchmark against Cheshire County as an example of the best in local government as we partner to meet the unique or unmet needs of county residents. The citizens and Board of Commissioners will be proud of the staff and have a firm belief in the reliability, truth and strength of the organization.

Statement of Goals

It is the goal of the Board of Commissioners that we address the following county government issues:

First, to address the long-term space needs of the county jail/house of correction. Second, to acquire downtown property to accommodate expansion and/or relocation of downtown county operations, such as the Registry of Deeds, Human Services, Finance, Alternative Sentencing, Human Resources and other downtown county offices.

Third, to maximize the efficiency of the existing courthouse space for the office of the County Attorney and Victim-Witness Office.

Fourth, to pursue an agreement with the State of New Hampshire to expand/renovate the county courthouse, to enter into a long-term tenancy arrangement with the State and to resolve the related parking issues.

Fifth, to support efforts to increase home care or community-based care systems.

Sixth, to develop a long-term plan for the county farm.

Finally, Seventh, to participate in steering committees and other regional initiatives intended to increase housing for low to moderate-income citizens.



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Long Term Plan

Long term planning for the county shall be balanced and equitable. Planning shall take into account the services that the county is required by statute to provide and those that also can be provided by other entities such as other government units, private, non-profit agencies or private, for-profit agencies.

Planning shall take into consideration the needs of the County Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facility, the County House of Correction, the Registry of Deeds, the County Sheriff, County Attorney, Human Services, administrative support departments and the county farm.

The Board of Commissioners has formulated the following priorities that the county should adopt in the planning of new facilities or the planning of new expenses of county government. If this plan is fulfilled, the Commissioners believe that no additional, large capital planning programs for the Keene campus or the county correctional facility will be necessary for the next 25 years.

Following is a set of visions highlighting the most essential county issues. Following each vision statement are action statements that describe implementation steps for achieving the vision. When combined, they can serve as the county's master plan:

1. Jail expansion/renovation/construction

Vision: We will demonstrate our resolve to address the long-term space needs of the County Jail and House of Correction. The space/service issues at the House of Correction have also been well documented in a study by Pulitzer-Bogard in December of 1999 and by the National Institute of Corrections assessment in 2001. The jail is holding approximately twice its build capacity and programmatic space is very limited. The Commissioners have, since at least 1999, been committed to examining options towards a goal of reaching a consensus from the Delegation on what actions should be taken. In general, the Westmoreland facility should be expanded to provide more program space and to create internal operations for dietary and laundry. While there is disagreement over the number of beds that should reasonably be added to accommodate future growth, there is no dispute that something needs to be done. The Commissioners are also committed to supporting alternative sanctions that might reduce the number of people housed in the facility. Options need to be developed that will moderate the impact on the Town of Westmoreland while meeting the needs of the facility. This is seen as a top priority in 2002, 2001 having been nearly lost, from a planning perspective, as a result of the Galway decision that



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affected the county's ability to borrow. The Commissioners continue to be optimistic about the ability to make recommendations to the Delegation during the 2002 budget cycle.

Timeframe: Immediate and on going with a plan to fund an expansion in the 2002 budget. Over the balance of 2001, examine options for the offender community, utilizing feedback from the Pulitzer-Bogard and NIC studies. Have a preliminary presentation prepared for the March 2002 Delegation meeting.

Actions:

- A. Complete the Bond Anticipation Note (BAN) Line of Credit by September 28th
- B. Distribute the NIC report to NIC program participants by September 28th
- C. Engage a planning consultant by September 28th
 - 1) Develop the scope of services of the consultant for planning
 - a) Complete planning within 4-5 months: February 2002
 - 2) Draft the RFP for planning the new facility utilizing consultant
 - 3) Acquire a copy of the Strafford County RFP's by September 28th
 - 4) Consult with the NIC on RFP language by October 28th
 - 5) Establish potential bidders to receive the RFP by October 28th
 - 6) Establish/confirm the bond budget breakdown within 3 months of hiring consultant
 - 7) Establish/confirm the planning timeline within 3 months of hiring consultant
 - 8) Begin the site selection process
 - 9) Determine architect/engineer/contractor selection process
- D. Form the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee by October 19th
- E. Begin design process as per consultant's timeline
 - 1) Develop schedule of community meetings
 - 2) Develop schedule of delegation & executive committee meetings
 - 3) Develop schedule of public meetings
- F. Launch Alternative Sanctions pilot program by September 10th
- G. Present delegation with bond motion for new facility by Spring/Summer 2002
- H. Present public with plans for new facility
- I. Draft and publish RFP for construction
- J. Break ground in spring of 2003



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K. Plan for occupancy in fall of 2004

2. Acquisition of downtown property for expansion.

Vision: The Commissioners are committed to keeping the county campus located in downtown Keene. The City of Keene and the local bar association as well as users of the various county services have supported the downtown campus. Because of this, and in light of the space planning issues raised above, it becomes more important to be poised to examine and acquire property that may become available that is close to the downtown campus. Property acquisition for the long-term planning process is essential for the successful expansion of county operations in downtown Keene. The likelihood of available property coinciding with any planning process conclusions is low. Thus, efforts at acquisition necessarily proceed on a certain amount of faith as the planning process will need to fit into the property after acquisition, rather than before. Property reasonably contiguous to the downtown campus is limited. Contiguous property that becomes available is even more limited. Thus, any property that becomes available should be carefully and quickly evaluated for any possible county use and funds should be made available for this purpose.

Timeframe: Immediate and on going. Be available to make reasonably quick decisions about available property in order not to miss opportunities. Acquire property in 2002 to coincide with Deeds planning.

Actions:

A. Identify/assess potential sites

- 1) Bell property
- 2) SAU 29
- 3) Masonic Temple
- 4) MEDC building
- 5) Latchis/Lindy's property
 - a) Engineer's report
 - b) Repair & Acquisition costs in 2001
 - c) Construction design costs in 2002
- 6) Green/McMahon building

B. Identify space needs, generally

- 1) Sheriff
- 2) Deeds
- 3) County Attorney
- 4) Victim Witness
- 5) Women's Crisis



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- 6) Probate
- 7) Superior Court
- 8) Finance
- 9) Commissioners'/Delegation/Adm./Meeting/Conference
- 10) Human Services
- 11) Facilities
- 12) UNH Cooperative Extension

C. Secure vote from Delegation for building acquisition by March of 2002

3. Registry of Deeds

Vision: We will demonstrate our resolve to address the long-term space needs of the Registry of Deeds. It is acknowledged that the Registry is and has been grappling with space issues for some time now. The number of new volumes of property transfer books and related materials has been growing substantially in recent years. The Registry occupied the old courthouse until 1989. In the old courthouse, the registry used approximately 2800 square feet before moving to 33 West Street. 33 West Street increased the square footage to approximately 4500. The present building was designed with an approximate 10-year life expectancy from the point of view of document storage. As an appendix to this long term plan, the Register of Deeds has compiled exact records on the number of new document volumes over the past ten-plus years. An additional 5,000 to 6,000 square feet will be needed over the next 25 years. Books are presently being stored on the floor, some documents have been moved to the basement to make more room on the main floor, and creative uses of additional bookshelves is just about exhausted. A new facility and/or an expanded facility are in order and the planning of this facility should be scheduled to begin in 2002, with an appropriation for the cost of design and development in the 2002 budget.

Timeframe: In 2001, identify property that could allow for expansion/new construction for Registry of Deeds. Immediately following, plan for funding the construction in the 2003 budget. Secure a vote from the Delegation in 2002 authorizing a bond for construction.

Actions:

Identify the space needs of Deeds

- A. Estimate the number of new book volumes per year
- B. Estimate the square footage requirements for book volumes
- C. Detail the history of growth in deeds/property transfers
- D. Quantify parking needs



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- E. Identify other space needs such as closing rooms, etc.
- F. Incorporate alternative document access strategies in planning
 - 1) Microfiche
 - 2) CD
 - 3) Internet
 - 4) Off-site storage
 - 5) Other client services

4. County Attorney' Office.

The staff of the County Attorney's office has grown in recent years as a result of increasing workload. The Victim-Witness Program has doubled, an additional Assistant County Attorney has been added, bringing the number of Assistant County Attorneys to 3, and, in 2001, it is anticipated that the number of prosecutions will increase significantly over the previous four years. The staff is currently located in the County Courthouse on two levels; the main floor and the basement level.

The Commissioners' long-term plan is to move the offices out of the basement level of this building. These offices have a more difficult emergency exit set-up and access to programs such as the Women's Crisis Service can be inconvenient. Planning to make the County Attorney's office all on one floor and moving the other basement offices to a different county-owned location is important and should be included in the planning for the Registry of Deeds. The County Attorney should be involved in any planning activities.

Timeframe: In 2001 & 2002, seek a long-term commitment from the State to remain in the county building in downtown Keene. From there, advance on expansion planning for 2003-2005 range of time. Absent a commitment from the State, this priority drops significantly other than moving basement tenants to another location and working to consolidate the County Attorney's office on one floor without large capital expense.

Actions:

- A. Estimate future need for office space
- B. Determine criteria for office location (in courthouse v. elsewhere)
- C. Document case load for study purposes (see annual reports)
- D. Estimate future staffing needs
- E. Identify any new or additional services requiring space or staff



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F. Determine criteria for access by public

G. Determine security issues

5. Courthouse renovations.

The space issues at the courthouse have been well documented in the study performed by Clough, Harbour & Associates in February 1998. This study identified many space and planning issues pertaining to the court operation, the county activities in this building and the security issues pertaining to prisoner transport. This report also presented detailed information about the parking needs for the county and the local area. Although the needs have been seemingly well established, the tenant relationship with the State of New Hampshire and the lack of a consensus on the parking issue have stalled any planning efforts at the courthouse. However, efforts should continue to be made with the State to determine the willingness of the State to participate in funding courthouse renovation, which would dovetail with the county's efforts at parking, security and courthouse expansion. Although there does not appear to be any interest at this time, the possibility that the courthouse could be expanded to accommodate the Keene District Court should not be excluded. In addition, the possibility of building a jail connected to the courthouse has been suggested. Although this would create some redundancy, it could reduce prisoner transport costs, it could increase security and it could have the effect of reducing the overall population at the Westmoreland facility, which could make it easier to build a new facility while planning for fewer inmates held awaiting arraignment and/or trial. However, a jail attached to the courthouse could present a long-term liability if the State moved Superior and/or District Court from downtown to another location. This makes more important the interest in securing a long-term lease agreement with the State, perhaps as long as 10 years.

Timeframe: In 2001 & 2002, seek a long-term commitment from the State to remain in the county building in downtown Keene. From there, advance on expansion planning for 2003-2005 range of time. Absent a commitment from the State, this priority drops significantly. Likewise, an invigorated interest from the state would elevate this priority.

Actions:

A. Establish working relationship with new court clerk

B. Pursue long term relationship with state

C. Continue dialog with cost sharing renovations



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- D. Identify court parking needs in light of this Plan
- E. Identify court security needs
 - 1) Determine cost allocation for any changes to security

6. **Parking issues or parking agreement with court.**

Parking issues are certainly related to the above planning issues in downtown and have been documented in the report of Clough Harbour. The county parking lot on Winter Street, next to the Courthouse, has been the subject of the study to determine the highest and best use for this piece of county land that is the largest piece of county land available for development. An expansion of the court with an associated parking/security/prisoner transfer area would consume the lot, at the expense of some of the parking spaces. However, the lost parking spaces could be recovered under an agreement with the City in their planned new emergency services/parking garage envisioned one block away. The utilization of this parking lot for parking is also somewhat determined by the State's interest in having the superior Court in downtown Keene. The State's position on this is not at all clear and the State has not shown any willingness to commit to a long-term arrangement. Absent this, it may be premature to engage in the planning process on the parking issues. Also, because the City of Keene is planning a parking facility, this should reduce the parking issue for the county.

Timeframe: None at this time. Wait until the conclusion of the City-built parking garage.

Actions:

- A. Establish parking priorities
 - 1) Nearby or walkable from offices

7. **Nursing home/assisted living expansion.**

There continues to be a growing need for housing for the increasing numbers of the elderly. The need for nursing home beds will at least remain constant. The need for assisted living arrangements appears to be increasing. Clearly, the number of elderly residents in the county is increasing and it is a need that must be met. In addition to the county meeting these needs, other nursing homes, private for-profit, and private non-profit entities can also meet them. Thus, unlike other county services, county initiated projects are not the sole resources that are available to meet these needs. The county should be a participant in supporting a move to home care or community based care systems that keep the elderly in their homes longer and defer nursing home living.



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Timeframe: Current and on going.

Actions:

- A. Identify and support appropriate CDBG projects to meet these needs.
- B. Participate on regional study groups that assess the needs of the elderly.

8. Farm.

The Cheshire County Farm has a long history as part of county government. Once used to make residents of the county facility nearly self-sufficient, it now serves largely as an education and natural resource management facility. The Commissioners feel that a long-term utilization should be developed that will maximize its use as an educational resource.

Actions:

- A. Develop a long term plan for the farm using the resources of the Cooperative Extension Service for presentation to Delegation in 2003.
- B. Assess the value of both crops and cows vs. cows and purchased crops

9. Housing

The Commissioners accept that there are significant housing issues in the county. In the recent past and presently, the county has supported through community development block grants, rehabilitation projects for low and moderate-income homes. The County should be involved funding the building of housing units to the extent practicable through grants, etc. but should not be involved in the managing of housing units as this task is better suited to agencies in the housing business. From the economic development viewpoint, the shortage of rental housing units delays economic development and the county should participate on committees formed to deal with the housing shortage. Consideration should be given to a county-sponsored “needs assessment” to determine depth of the housing need. Finally, to the extent appropriate, the county should be involved in crafting legislation to limit “snob” zoning.

Conclusion:

The two most pressing needs that will require substantial bonding expense for the county are the House of Correction facility and the Registry of Deeds/Downtown facility. A prerequisite to the Registry of Deeds facility is the acquisition of property in downtown Keene. As to these issues, the planning for Corrections, taking into consideration alternative sites and alternative programs is paramount in order to



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refine the Commissioners' recommendations to the Delegation and the public. The direction of both these projects should become clear by the summer of 2002.

The issues of the Courthouse and the parking situation need more time to pass in order to see the direction taken by both the City of Keene and the State of New Hampshire with respect to parking and courthouse lease terms, respectively.

The housing issues pertaining to the elderly have had a significant amount of attention and resources in the past 6 years, and longer. Although they are important issues, the Commissioners are less inclined to be pursuing these issues when they are balanced against the financial impact of addressing the Corrections and Deeds projects, which loom on the landscape. The Commissioners feel that the correct county posture at this point is to be supportive to efforts at dealing with housing, but not to be directly, financially involved, in any way other than through block grant programs or other grant-supportive ways.

Respectfully Submitted,

THE CHESHIRE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Gregory T. Martin, Chair

Peter B. Davis, Vice Chair

Margaret E. Lynott, Clerk