



# County of Cheshire

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12 Court Street, Keene, NH 03431

[www.co.cheshire.nh.us](http://www.co.cheshire.nh.us)

**TO: Members of the Cheshire County Delegation,  
Selectmen of the Towns in the County and Mayor of the City of Keene**

**FROM: Commissioners, Clark, Stewart, & DiBernardo**

**DATE: November 26, 2025**

**SUBJECT: Commissioners' Proposed 2026 Budget**

Enclosed is your copy of the Cheshire County Board of Commissioners' proposed budget for 2026. The Commissioners will present the budget and take questions during a public hearing on Monday, December 8, 2025, at 7:00 PM on the second floor of Cheshire County Hall, 12 Court Street, Keene, NH 03431.

This year's budget is brought to you by an almost entirely new Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Clark remained on the Board and became Chair, while two new members joined the Board: Claudia Stewart, who now serves as Vice Chair, and Skipper DiBernardo, who serves as Clerk.

As you are aware, the County budget is a three-tiered process. It starts with Department Heads bringing forward their requests. The Commissioners then review these requests and develop a budget to present to the County Delegation and the public on the second Monday of December each year. At this meeting, the County Delegation assigns the Commissioners' budget to the Executive Committee of the Delegation. The Executive Committee meets over a five-week period at the beginning of the year to review the budget as presented to them and to meet with Department Heads. They then vote on their version of the budget, making any changes they choose. This is brought back to the full Delegation on the third Monday in March for a final vote, meeting the statutory requirement to have an approved budget by April 1, 2026.

Over the last seven years, the County has been able to minimize the tax impact on residents, raising taxes by only \$1,965,206 (approximately 6.9% in total). Annually, this equates to an average of .97%, even as the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose an average of 2.61% during that time. Included in this letter is data that reflects County taxes to be raised across all ten Counties and the percentage of taxes to be raised during the past seven years. You will see that Cheshire County has the lowest average of taxes to be raised since 2019.

The County's ability to be creative and diligent in the funding of services or projects has been paramount to our success. Projects such as the upgrades to the Sheriff's Dispatch or renovations to County Hall were covered by grants and other means so the burden of the cost was not taken on by the taxpayers.

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The development of Cheshire County Power has brought significant savings not only for the County's facilities but for the residents and municipalities as well.

Connected Families continues to work with children at high risk of residential placement, ensuring they receive the support they need while remaining in their homes with their family. This program generates revenue and helps reduce special education costs for schools across the County and the State. Our hope is that, by providing this support early, children who might otherwise be at risk of entering Treatment Court or the Department of Corrections can instead become productive, thriving members of our community.

The County grants department continues to excel in its mission of pursuing grants to help offset costs and expand the opportunity for programming. In 2025 alone the grants department has had direct oversight of 37 grants and over 12.6 million dollars in grant funding for the County. These grants help support various entities, including many municipalities and non-profit organizations as well as public health, housing, and rural transportation entities. This past year, the grants department offered their fourth and fifth three-day grant-writing course with 24 individuals in attendance.

We are pleased to report that Cheshire County EMS, our county-run ambulance and paramedic service is now operating smoothly and working well in partnership with the municipalities of the County. This groundbreaking regional EMS program, now in its second year of operation, ensures that residents in towns across Cheshire County have access to timely and high-quality emergency medical services. By coordinating at the county level, Cheshire County EMS has strengthened emergency response while fostering collaboration with local fire and rescue departments.

These are all examples of how the County has aggressively pursued alternative methods to control costs and meet the needs of our community. We continually seek innovative ways to stabilize or alleviate tax increases while still providing the necessary services to our residents. Importantly, these efforts have not gone unnoticed. Cheshire County's commitment to innovation and efficiency was recognized nationally this year when the County received a NAESCO (National Association of Energy Service Companies) award for energy efficiency. At the state level, several Cheshire County employees and officials earned top honors at the New Hampshire Association of Counties (NHAC) annual conference, reflecting the excellence and dedication of our staff. We are incredibly proud of the national recognition and the statewide awards our team has achieved, as they underscore the success of our initiatives and the quality of our county workforce.

This year, the County Commissioners and senior leadership have worked exhaustively to lessen the impact on taxpayers, but the 2026 budget has been especially challenging. We are all familiar with the rising costs of goods, services, and labor over the past year, as well as the lasting effects of COVID and the great resignation. Inflationary pressures, tariffs, and increased costs for fuel, utilities, supplies, and construction have all significantly driven up the cost of operations. In

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addition, decisions at the state and federal levels have shifted responsibilities and expenses onto counties and municipalities adding to financial pressures. The Board has not sat idly by in the face of these challenges. This year, Commissioners and County officials traveled to Washington, D.C. and to Concord, to meet with our state officials, congressional delegation, and federal agencies, advocating for additional federal funding and support for critical county programs. We will continue to fight for our fair share of resources at the state and federal level. Even with these efforts, a more substantial increase in county taxes is being proposed this year to ensure we can meet our obligations. With roughly 62% of the County's budget consisting of wages and benefits, it has become increasingly difficult to avoid a tax increase while still maintaining the workforce and services required by our community and statutory mandates.

The total of the 2026 proposed budget is \$77,855,394. This figure represents an increase of \$2,828,837 from 2025. The major increase is due to payroll and benefits as well as other increases in areas such as property and liability insurance, food costs for the Nursing Home and Jail as well as an increase in the gross budgeting for grant expenses.

The proposed taxes of \$32,430,267, represents an increase of \$2,345,062 (7.79%) from 2025.

During our review of the department budgets, we made reductions to expense requests totaling \$889,805 and increased revenues by \$3,921,842.

These adjustments were made in an effort to mitigate the tax impact as much as possible. Although we were able to make many changes during our review, some increases were impossible to contain. Like other employers, Cheshire County has experienced a shortage of workers and a highly competitive market for personnel. As one of the largest employers in the area, with nearly 500 employees, we have had to make wage adjustments to attract and retain the staff needed to serve the public. In addition, the 2026 budget includes a cost of living adjustment of 2.5% for non union employees, as well as a longevity increase of 1.5% for long-serving staff. Furthermore, the County continues to grapple with rising health insurance premiums for our employees.

As always, we are grateful to our department managers and elected officials for their efforts to hold the line on spending. They recognize the importance of minimizing the impact on Cheshire County taxpayers. Their fiscal responsibility and careful management have lessened the burden on taxpayers while allowing the County to meet its obligation to provide essential services to our citizens.

As noted above, the Commissioners' proposed budget will now be reviewed by the Executive Committee of the County Delegation, which will then develop its own budget proposal to bring to the full Delegation of Cheshire County state representatives. We look forward to working closely with the Delegation's Executive Committee as they review each department and elected office's budget.

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During the public hearing on December 8, 2025, the Executive Committee will determine a tentative schedule for their budget review meetings in the new year.

The Board of Commissioners looks forward to answering any questions you may have at the public hearing on December 8, 2025, at 7:00 PM at County Hall, 12 Court Street, Keene. We appreciate your time and careful consideration of the proposed 2026 budget, and we remain committed to working together for the good of Cheshire County.

Very truly yours,

CHESHIRE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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