



COMMISSIONERS MEETING
Wednesday, January 14, 2026
Minutes

This meeting will be conducted in person and via Zoom at
County Hall
12 Court Street
Keene NH, 03431

Zoom Call-in Number: +1 646 558 8656
Meeting ID: 409 748 8803
Pin #: 603123
Start Time 8:30 AM

Present: Commissioners Terry Clark, Claudia Stewart, and Skipper DiBernardo

Absent:

Staff: County Administrator Coates, Finance Director Trombly, HR Director May, Director of Executive Services/Communications Bernstein, and Superintendent Phillips

Guests:

Public Comments

Upon recognition from the Chair, a Public Comment on topics of interest may be made.

I. Elected Officials & Department Head Updates

To receive, as informational, departmental updates requiring Commissioner review, participation, approval, and impactful departmental and operational issues.

1. HR Director May informed the Commissioners that the first TN nurse will arrive to work at Maplewood any day now depending on when a social security number is approved. A secondary nurse will be applying for a social security number soon. A couple others are in varying stages of the process. The EB-3 nurses will take more time.

II. Scheduled Items

County Administrator

Weekly Operations Report - The County Administrator will update the Commissioners on activities that have taken place since the previous meeting.

1. County Administrator Coates said a letter was sent to Governor Ayotte to request a collaborative effort to streamline the nursing licensure for foreign nurses in the state.

The letter is as follows:

Governor Ayotte,

As you may be aware, Cheshire County is actively pursuing alternative strategies to address the nursing workforce shortage in the southwest region of the state. I am writing today to highlight one such approach that could support both the County nursing home and the Department of Corrections.

This program could serve as a pilot to help bring qualified healthcare professionals into our communities and, if successful, could be replicated by other counties, private employers, or even at the state level. Given the ongoing workforce shortage impacting New Hampshire, the strategic use of H-1B, EB-3, and TN visas are increasingly vital to sustaining our healthcare system across the board.

Nurse licensure in New Hampshire is governed by the New Hampshire Code of Administrative Rules (NUR), which comprises the administrative rules issued by the New Hampshire Board of Nursing. NUR is a state administrative rule.

We recently received a response from the New Hampshire Office of Professional Licensure and Certification (OPLC) stating that modifying the Social Security number requirement in the nursing license application process is not possible, as it would require a change in federal law, followed by a corresponding change in state law and OPLC rules.

Nurse licensure is governed by state statutes and state administrative rules typically enacted by the state legislature and implemented by the state board of nursing. There is no federal nurse licensing laws. Federal laws may affect *specific aspects* of licensure indirectly, such as requirements related to Social Security numbers for child support enforcement or immigration/employment verification, but states retain authority over whether and how those requirements apply in their licensing processes.

Is there an expedited process you can proclaim or enact that would permit OPLC to implement a similar rule change to the over 15 other states (Texas, Alaska, Montana, etc.) that currently do not require Social Security for foreign educated nurses who are overseas?

I along with the team working on this in Cheshire County would be honored to meet with you in person or via Zoom to discuss this matter further.

2. Coates said the County is advocating for long term state planning that ends downshifting against towns, cities, counties, and schools.

Coates shared the following draft article:

Cheshire County Highlights Growing State Cost Shifting and Local Impacts

Cheshire County Government continues to raise concerns about the long-standing and worsening practice of state cost shifting and the increasing burden it places on local governments and property taxpayers across New Hampshire, particularly in counties such as Cheshire

New Hampshire is at a crossroads, particularly in rural counties like Cheshire County. Maintaining essential public services, protecting quality of life, and ensuring a fair tax burden requires a funding system that reflects shared responsibility between the state and its communities.

Nearly five years ago, county officials publicly warned that state budget decisions were increasingly pushing costs down to towns, cities, school districts, and counties. Since that time, those pressures have not eased. They have intensified, forcing local governments to make increasingly difficult choices simply to maintain core services.

New Hampshire continues to balance its state budget by reducing aid, altering funding formulas, or stepping away from long-standing financial commitments to local governments. While these actions may stabilize the state's finances on paper, they shift real and unavoidable costs onto communities. For counties, municipalities, and schools, there is no alternative revenue source. The result is increased reliance on the property tax.

Cheshire County provides a clear example of this challenge. The County has historically maintained one of the lowest county tax rates in New Hampshire. Preserving that position has required disciplined budgeting, conservative spending, and difficult decisions year after year. Even so, Cheshire County has not been immune to rising costs driven by state policy decisions.

State downshifting has increased county obligations for Medicaid-funded long-term care and human services, while also financially affecting other mandated programs. These services are not optional. Counties are legally required to provide them. When the state reduces its share or fails to meet prior commitments, the cost does not disappear. It is absorbed locally.

Over the past decade, the State of New Hampshire has shifted an estimated three billion dollars in costs to local governments statewide. Counties account for roughly three hundred million dollars of that total, largely through Medicaid nursing home reimbursement shortfalls and expanded human services responsibilities. Without this downshifting, the statewide property tax burden today would be significantly lower than it was ten years ago.

In Cheshire County, holding tax increases to modest levels has required close scrutiny of departmental requests, looking for funding methods and strategies to pay for capital projects across multiple budget cycles, and carefully balancing workforce needs against the goal of minimizing taxes to be raised from property taxpayers. These decisions are made with full awareness that the taxpayer is already carrying a significant burden created elsewhere within the system.

Many of these pressures stem from fiscal commitments made by the State of New Hampshire decades ago that were never fully realized. Revenue sharing tied to meals and rooms taxes and the business profits tax has fallen short of original estimations.

Highway block grants and bridge aid have not kept pace with inflation, leaving local infrastructure needs unmet. State contributions to the New Hampshire Retirement System have been eliminated, significantly increasing costs for counties, municipalities, and schools. Additionally, Medicaid long-term care costs, once fully state funded, are now borne in significant part by county property taxpayers.

These financial challenges are not partisan; they are structural, multiple administrations and legislative bodies have contributed to the current funding framework. While individual efforts have been made to ease the burden, incremental changes have not been sufficient to reverse the overall trend and burden.

We have recently witnessed ill-advised decisions made at the state level resulting in the elimination of hundreds of millions in revenue, (business profit tax, business enterprise tax, and interest and dividends tax) at the same time, tourism revenue has declined, federal funding is uncertain, tariffs, health insurance and employee wages have skyrocketed.

The state needs to see that the Perfect Storm is upon us and that we are taking on water faster than we can pump.

Cheshire County continues to advocate for responsible and consistent state funding practices that meet statutory obligations without shifting costs onto local property taxpayers. Keeping county taxes low should not require sacrificing essential programs such as public safety or human services.

Without meaningful change at the state level, the pressure on local governments and taxpayers will only continue to grow.

2. Coates said the County received a \$25,000 grant from the State Department of Environmental Services to assess water needs at Maplewood nursing home and to explore the possibility of another well on site.
3. Coates said he will be meeting with the interim Director of Southwest NH District Fire Mutual Aid this coming week.
4. Coates said the house on the site of the CCEMS HQ has been used for traveling nurses. The nurses noted they did not like the distance from Swanzey for Westmoreland especially for night shifts. The County has found alternative locations in Westmoreland for the travelling nurses.

Coates said the administrative wing of CCEMS will be moved into the house on site. Some work will need to be performed to ensure that the building can serve as sufficient offices.

III. Old Business

IV. New Business

V. Consent Agenda Items:

Vote to accept the Weekly Manifests and Minutes of January 7, 2026

Commissioner Stewart made a motion to accept the manifest and minutes of January 7, Commissioner Clark seconded. Upon a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

VI. Calendar

Action Expected: To accept the calendar as informational and to make necessary changes/additions.

VII. General Discussion for Commissioners

VIII. Nonpublic Sessions:

At 9:20AM Commissioner Clark made a motion to enter into a non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a). Commissioner Stewart seconded. Upon a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

As a result of the non-public the Commissioner's made no decisions and no votes were taken.

At 9:38AM the Commissioners unanimously voted to re-enter the public session.

IX. Adjournment

At 9:38AM Commissioner Clark made a motion to adjourn, and Commissioner DiBernardo seconded. Upon a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

Minutes Recorded by:
Davis Bernstein
Director of Executive Services & Communications

Minutes Reviewed by:
Commissioner DiBernardo
Clerk, Cheshire County Commissioners