



COMMISSIONERS MEETING

Wednesday, January 7, 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, Grants Manager Bansley, Director of Executive Services/Communications Bernstein, IT Director Hummel, and Superintendent Phillips

Guests:

Sarah Bollinger & Jack Ahern of the Southwest Regional Planning Commission, Julianna Dodson & Lillian Chase of the Hannah Grimes Center, and Jason Cannon of the NH SBDC

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.

II. Scheduled Items

Master Agenda Item #1320: Public Hearing – Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Housing/Public Facilities Application – SWRPC Staff

Action Expected: To hold a public hearing, receive public comment, and consider authorization to submit the CDBG application and related documents.

The Chair opened the first public hearing for discussion of the Community Development Block Grant Applications at 8:31am and read the public hearing notice.

Sarah Bollinger, Grant Administrator, explained that CDBG funds are available to municipalities for economic development, public facilities and housing rehabilitation projects that primarily benefit low- and moderate-income persons. Cheshire County is eligible to receive up to \$500,000 in the housing and public facilities category, up to \$500,000 in the economic development category, up to \$750,000 in the microenterprise category, and \$25,000 for feasibility studies. Bollinger provided a handout describing the NH Community Development Block Grant Program eligible activities that included the area HUD

income limits.

Bollinger provided a project handout. The proposed application to the NH Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA) is for \$500,000 to be subgranted, less administration costs, to Keene Day Care Center, Inc. The CDBG funds will be used to fund facility renovations at the Keene Day Care Center facility at 86 Wood Street, Keene, NH. The low- and moderate-income benefit of the project is up to 69% based on current enrollment and will directly benefit children from low and moderate income households.

The proposed activities meet the goal of “Support[ing] existing public and nonprofit agencies that provide services to lower income people... including daycare...” in Cheshire County’s Housing and Community Development Plan, last adopted in July of 2024.

The Keene Daycare team said they could have up to 90 kids. They provide meals and take care of their needs as young as six weeks old to five years old. The hope of the money is to renovate the facility's HVAC system, install sprinklers, and replace windows in the 1940s building. The daycare center, which currently serves 70 children and has an operating budget of \$1 million, currently struggles with recruitment due to inadequate facility conditions.

The Chair opened the floor to public comment on the projects.

Seeing none, Commissioner Stewart motioned to close the Public Hearing on the Projects portion of the CDBG Block Grant Application Hearing. Seconded by Commissioner DiBernardo. The motion passed unanimously 3-0.

Commissioner Stewart motioned to approve the submittal of the applications, vote to authorize County Administrator Christopher Coates or County Commissioner Chair Terry Clark as the Authorized Designees to sign and submit the CDBG applications, and vote to authorize Grants Manager Suzanne Bansley to serve as Authorized Designee to sign environmental review related documents, and upon approval of the CDBG applications, authorize the Authorized Designee to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate the CDBG contract. Seconded by Commissioner DiBernardo. The motion passed unanimously 3-0.

Master Agenda Item #1321: Public Hearing – Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Microenterprise Applications – SWRPC Staff

Action Expected: To hold a public hearing, receive public comment, and consider authorization to submit the CDBG applications and related documents.

The Chair opened the second public hearing for discussion of the Community Development Block Grant Applications at 8:40am and read the public hearing notice.

Jack Ahern, Grant Administrator, provided a project handout. The proposed microenterprise applications are for up to \$750,000 to support two entities in southern NH: the Hannah Grimes Center in Keene (HGC) and the Small Business Development Center in Durham (SBDC). The funding is used by each entity to provide training and technical assistance and, in some cases, micro loan servicing to low- and moderate-income micro-entrepreneurs. If the proposed applications are successful, the funds will be awarded to Cheshire County and sub-granted, less administrative costs, to the two sub-recipients.

Cheshire County has applied for and has been awarded Microenterprise funding for the HGC and SBDC each year since 2015. The HGC and SBDC are interested in continuing to be recipients of the Microenterprise funding in 2026. The proposed activities meet the goals of “Support[ing] the development of a diversified economy” and “Support[ing] educational and training facilities which upgrade the skills of local residents” in Cheshire County’s Housing and Community Development Plan,

last adopted in July of 2024. In total, for this program year the two entities anticipate serving an estimated 75 to 125 microenterprises.

Jason, the Associate State Director from the New Hampshire Small Business Development Center, discussed their services, including confidential business advising, educational trainings, and webinars, all offered at no cost. Julianna Dodson, Executive Director of the Hannah Grimes Center shared a personal experience about a farmer's improved operations due to equipment funded by a microgrant. She highlighted the importance of small businesses in the local economy and expressed concerns about rising costs and business struggles.

The team discussed the importance of guiding entrepreneurs to understand the sustainability of their business models, emphasizing the need to balance passion with practical business management. They highlighted successful stories of businesses that adapted their models, such as a childcare center and a consignment shop, and explained how their program provides tools and education to help entrepreneurs make informed decisions. The discussion also touched on the long-term support offered to businesses through various programs and the importance of building relationships with entrepreneurs over time.

The Chair opened the floor to public comment on the projects:

Seeing none, Commissioner Stewart motioned to close the Public Hearing on the Projects portion of the CDBG Block Grant Application Hearing. Seconded by Commissioner DiBernardo. The motion passed unanimously 3-0.

Commissioner Stewart motioned to approve the submittal of the applications, vote to authorize County Administrator Christopher Coates or County Commissioner Chair Terry Clark as the Authorized Designees to sign and submit the CDBG applications, and vote to authorize Grants Manager Suzanne Bansley to serve as Authorized Designee to sign environmental review related documents, and upon approval of the CDBG applications, authorize the Authorized Designee to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate the CDBG contract. Seconded by Commissioner DiBernardo. The motion passed unanimously 3-0.

Master Agenda Item #1322: Public Hearing – Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance (RARA) Plan – SWRPC Staff

Action Expected: To hold a public hearing, receive public comment, and consider adoption of the RARA Plan.

The Chair motioned to open the third public hearing regarding the Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan. Seconded by Commissioner Stewart. The motion passed unanimously 3-0.

Jack Ahern of SWRPC explained that if any permanent displacement takes place as a result of these projects, the Uniform Relocation Act must be followed, which requires that any permanently displaced household or business in a project using federal funds must be found comparable housing in a comparable neighborhood at a comparable price. Ahern noted that no permanent displacement is planned or anticipated at this time. Under the certification section of the application, the County will certify that the Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance (RARA) Plan is in place, and in the event that it is discovered that this specific project does permanently displace persons or households, a displacement implementation plan must be submitted to CDFA prior to obligating or expending funds.

Chair calls for public comment.

Seeing none, Commissioner Stewart motioned to close the third and final public hearing for discussion of the proposed RARA Plan. Seconded by Commissioner DiBernardo. The motion passed

unanimously 3-0.

Commissioner Stewart motioned to adopt the Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan. Seconded by Commissioner DiBernardo. The motion passed unanimously 3-0.

Master Agenda Item #1323: Semi-Annual Report, IT Department – R. Hummel

Action Expected: To receive an informational report on the last six months of operations from the Director of IT

1. IT Director Hummel said there have been no breaches or area of concern for the IT Department. Direct digital attacks on the County have increased.

He said that typical attacks such as asking an employee to buy gift cards for fraudsters have been reduced, but a new frequent one is sending calendar invites with viruses attached.

Hummel said that AI data centers are taking up stock of RAM and GPUs.

He said that the DOC camera project will take up manpower from the department.

Hummel said he has to reprogram systems every day to fight against hackers who consistently try to break past our security systems.

He said they are a bit understaffed as not many folks are responding to the employment ads.

Master Agenda Item #1324: DOC Prisoner Transport Bus Trade In – S. Trombly

Action Expected: To discuss trading in the DOC bus.

1. Superintendent Phillips said the new transport bus has arrived and the old one is no use to the DOC any longer. There is a trade in option which will net the County \$3,300. This will result in a bid waiver since any other bid would result in extra costs towards transporting the bus to a different seller.

Commissioner Clark made a motion to waive the bidding process and approve the trade in of the old DOC bus. Commissioner Stewart seconded. Upon a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

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 there will be a leadership training opportunity on Friday January 16 at 10:00am in County Hall.

2. Coates said Community Power NH is raising their rates for the foreseeable future.

3. Coates said HB 314 is being voted on today, January 7, which could be detrimental to the support of towns the NH Municipal Association provides to municipalities, or the

NH Association of Counties provides to counties.

III. Old Business

IV. New Business

V. Consent Agenda Items:

Vote to accept the Weekly Manifests and Minutes of December 17, 2025

Commissioner DiBernardo made a motion to approve the manifests and minutes of December 17, 2025. 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:

IX. Adjournment

At 11:00AM 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