

MINUTES
Cheshire County Commissioners Meeting
Wednesday, July 27 2022

**This meeting was conducted
electronically via Zoom**

Conference Call Information
Phone Call-in Number: +1 646 558 8656
Meeting ID: 409 748 8803
Pin #: 6031233

Present: Commissioners Jack Wozmak, Robert Englund, and Terry Clark

Staff: County Administrator Coates, Finance Director Trombly, Superintendent Iosue, HR Director May, IT Director Hummel, Grants Manager Bansley, and Assistant County Administrator Bouchard.

Guest(s):

At 9:31 AM, Commissioner Wozmak opened the meeting, Administrator Coates took a roll call of the Commissioners, and Commissioners Wozmak and Clark responded as “present.”

I. Public Comments

Upon recognition from the Chair, a Public Comment on topics of interest may be made, not to exceed three (3) minutes in length.

II. Elected Officials & Department Head Updates

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

III. Scheduled Items

Master Agenda Item #1003: Homeland Search and Rescue Grant for Monadnock Special Response Team – S. Bansley

Action Expected: To discuss and vote to submit an application to NH Homeland Security’s Search and Rescue Grant program on behalf of Monadnock Special Response Team for \$12,439 (no match) to purchase headsets for communications during incidents.

Bansley spoke about the purpose of the grant and said that the grant allows the purchase of tactical radio headsets for use by the Special Response Team during emergency operations.

At 9:34 AM Commissioner Englund joined the meeting.

The Commissioners asked a few clarifying questions and then Commissioner Clark moved to accept the grant and was seconded by Commissioner Wozmak. Upon roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

Bansley then addressed Master Agenda Item# 1004: NH Highway Safety FFY22 Grant Agreement Execution

Action Expected: To discuss and vote to approve and execute a grant agreement with the New Hampshire Office of Highway Safety for \$2,500.00 + \$625 match for overtime

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for sheriff deputies to conduct DUI enforcement. The match will be from in-kind time from dispatchers to run checks.

She said that this was a reoccurring grant that has been in place since at least 2018 and said that the grant covers all costs and there are no expenses to the County.

Commissioner Clark asked if there was coordination between the City, Sheriff, and other police organizations. Bansley said yes, but there have been scheduling changes for the various police organizations

Commissioner Englund then moved to accept the grant and was seconded by Commissioner Clark. Upon roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

Bansley further said that a \$200K for EMS training had just been received, and she and Commissioner Wozmak will meet and craft a program based on receipt of the funding and that the start of the training is scheduled for around October 1st.

Superintendent Iosue was then recognized and spoke to Master Agenda Item #1005: Group I and Group II analysis for Department of Corrections staff.

Action Expected: To receive as informational a report from the Superintendent on the results of the analysis of the Group I and Group II Retirement options for DOC personnel.

Iosue addressed the following document with the Commissioners:

As you know, as part of the most recent CBU agreement, the County agreed to explore the feasibility of reentering the Group II Retirement System. The following report summarizes our research and analysis into this question.

Any examination of the feasibility of returning to Group II needs to start with checking and verifying the requirements for officer training and certification set out by NHAC. This is why we originally left Group II and within the training requirements, we find the most significant challenges and obstacles. Our research confirmed the following information and policies relevant to training/certification requirements:

- 1) The Superintendent Certification Board will only accept training that covers the required curriculum content of 200 hours duration, and that training *must be completed within a 5-week period*. (As verified through Jason Henry, Chair of the Certification Board).

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- 2) NHAC has confirmed that there is no option to “pick and choose” between Group I or Group II. If we switch to Group II, *we must switch for all* (as confirmed through Mark Cavanaugh at NHAC).
- 3) The requirements for the job must be met either from the date of hire or within a specified time interval *not to exceed two years* (as per NH RSA Chapter 100A:1, VII b)

So, the question is, how feasible is it to meet these parameters and requirements?

To answer the question, Cpt Byam and I analyzed two different training models that would meet the 5-week requirement. We examined, as a hypothetical target, the goal of training just 12 officers per year. We looked at two options: 1) running an In-House Academy, using our own staff as trainers; and 2) sending officers to the NHAC Academy in Boscawen.

We played around with different variables, such as varying the number of 5 weeks Academies run per year, sending different numbers of officer trainees, using different numbers of instructors, etc. Training officers will always impact staffing. This is true of our current training model, however, this model spreads out training over an 8-12 month timeline. We found that compressing the training to meet the 5-week requirement, resulted in significantly more floor vacancies; anywhere from 75 to 150 more vacancies per year, as compared to our current model. The additional cost (covering these vacancies, mostly through overtime pay) ranged from \$35,000 to \$70,000. And, again, this hypothetical model was based on a target of training just 12 officers per year.

However, it is not this fiscal impact that turns out to be the biggest concern. The greatest obstacles would be the negative impact on staff work schedules and overtime requirements, as well as the impossibility of switching all officers to Group II and completing training and certification within any reasonable time frame. These concerns are detailed here:

Negative Impact on Work Schedules, Job Stress, and Morale

Given the current economic climate and job market, it appears that maintaining a full or nearly full complement of correctional officers will be as challenging as ever. We have been working hard to reduce overtime, particularly mandatory overtime, knowing how stressful and taxing this can be on staff in terms of work-life balance. To create upwards of 150

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additional vacancies in the schedule to accomplish required Group II training risks adding in a very negative way to officers' stress levels and job satisfaction.

Impossibility of completing training within the required (or reasonable) time-frame

We currently have approximately 40 officers in Group I. Based on the past two years' averages (2020 and 2021 data) we can expect to hire a minimum of 12 new officers each year. This would require training and certifying approximately 50 officers within a 2-year period, well beyond the hypothetical 12 officers per year that were part of our initial impact analysis on staffing, floor coverage, overtime expense, and staff stress/morale.

Two additional concerns worth noting include the cost/benefit of the training itself and coverage issues for officers currently in administrative positions. These concerns are detailed here:

Cost/Benefit of the Training itself

Going through the 5 weeks of training is a prerequisite to accessing the Group II system. However, existing officers have already been through training covering virtually the same curriculum that is used at the NHAC Academy. While there is no harm in "re-learning" the material it has very little benefit in terms of new correctional knowledge and skills. That is, the 200 hours per existing officer trainee invested into the training itself holds very minimal value when weighed out against other costs and negative impacts.

Coverage issues for Group I officers that are primarily in administrative positions

There are 3 staff/positions (Coordinator of Safety-Security & Investigations, Booking Commander, and the Federal Liaison/Community Corrections Assistant) that are current Group I certified and that are in Administrative positions. Unlike covering floor slots for officers who are in training or instructing, covering job duties for these three Group I administrative officers has significant workload and workflow repercussions. The three could perhaps be covered marginally for 5 weeks by officer backups, but this would add additional cost as each of these officer backups would create even more open slots and overtime on the schedule. Although I have not estimated an actual cost in terms of open overtime shifts it would add significantly to the financial cost estimated above. And, again

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and more importantly, it would add further to the negative impact on officer work Schedules, job stress and morale noted above.

In summary, I cannot recommend switching back to a Group II benefit structure. Meeting the compressed (5-week) training requirements would place significant stress on our floor coverage and correctional operations. It would have a detrimental impact on staff in terms of mandated overtime, stress levels, and job satisfaction. Finally, to put officers through these compressed 5-week cycles of training at a number and pace that would lessen these negative impacts would take many years and would not conform with RSA 100A:1; nor would it be at all practical or feasible.

An extended discussion began and Commissioner Wozmak asked how long the average staff member stayed at the County and spoke of the financial risk incurred to staff members if they leave before being vested at ten years under the Group II rules.

A discussion of the reasons to stay in Group I was had and Wozmak said that the County needs to lay out the full set of reasons as to why the average staff member is financially much better off in the Group I state retirement plan than in Group II.

Trombly then discussed with the Commissioners a spreadsheet analysis comparing the payout for individuals receiving payments from both Group I and Group II and the Group I payouts were significantly better over a period of time compared to the Group II payouts.

Iosue then addressed Master Agenda Item # 1006: DOC Staffing Update and Recommendations – D. Iosue

Action Expected: To receive, as informational, a report from the Superintendent on staffing at the Department of Corrections.

Iosue provided the following written report to the Commissioners on staffing and spoke at length about the details.

DOC Staffing Update and Recommendations
July 27, 2022

It has been nearly 3 months since the April 27th Commissioner's meeting at which I presented the DOC staffing analysis and recommendations to stabilize our staffing in 3 key departments/areas (Correctional Officers, Nurses, and Food Services). As you know, we implemented a number of strategies and measures for an indefinite period of time. I agreed to assess and report back on progress after 90 days. This is that report.

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Correctional Officers:

On April 27th we had 10 current or projected vacancies (counting SFC Croteau on leave)

- Since April 27th we have hired 8 COs
- Since April 27th we have had only 3 terminations; and of these:
 - 1 was involuntary (did not complete probationary period)
 - 1 was expected and had been planned and anticipated for several months prior
 - 1 was an officer that could not return from medical leave
- As of July 20th we have:
 - 5 CO vacancies (counting SFC Croteau on leave)
 - 8 CO "floor vacancies" (3 officers are still in training, so don't yet count as part of required minimum coverage)
 - 2 officers hired, but not yet started
 - We have 2 officer interviews scheduled within the next week

We could, *assuming no resignations*, as of August 15th, fall at or below the "4 CO floor vacancies" that I established as the arbitrary target to discontinue the enhanced (plus \$3.00) overtime pay.

Nursing:

- We hired a Traveler nurse. Her contract is due to end on Sept 17th
- We interviewed a potential full-time LPN this week. She is contemplating a position, but we will be revisiting salary after the August delegation meeting and vote on the Commissioner's recommended \$5.00 increase. If this happens on schedule and if it leads to the hiring of this LPN candidate we will not look to renew the current traveler nurse contact; otherwise, we will need to do so.

Food Services:

- We hired for the long-vacant Prep Cook position. He started on 7/3/22. This success was almost certainly a direct result of changing the position from 80% full-time.
- We are likely losing a Prep Cook (on light duty currently, not FMLA eligible, and unlikely to resume needed work hours)
- We have an interview for the Prep Cook position scheduled

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Analysis:

We are making slow, but steady progress towards stabilizing staffing in the 3 DOC departments that have been struggling to recruit and retain staff. How much of this is due to strategies and measures put in place earlier this year?

- Referral Bonus: A number of the CO hires were referred by current staff, including 5 full-time Correctional Officers and our most recent Prep Cook hire. All three of the per diem COs were also referred by current staff (although, per diem hires are not eligible for the hiring bonus). I believe the Referral Bonus has been a very helpful incentive for word-of-mouth recruitment
- Hiring Bonus: Staff being hired have appreciated this. It is not clear that they applied specifically because of the hiring bonus.
- \$3.00 Overtime Enhancement: Has helped increase sign-ups for voluntary overtime shifts, especially among officers in primary Admin positions. It has also helped to lessen the negative impact on mandated overtime/red ball shifts. Has it helped prevent officers from leaving that otherwise might have resigned? Possibly, but there is no way to no for sure.
- Staff Stipend: It's hard to know whether this has lowered the resignation rate. I believe all 3 of the above noted CO resignations were somewhat inevitable. I do believe the staff appreciates the (anticipated) \$1,000 stipend.
- Use of Per Diem Officers: We have hired three. This has been helpful in reducing shift vacancies and overtime
- Expedited hiring process: being more proactive in communications with candidates and expediting the screening, interviewing and hiring process has been helpful, as evidenced by fewer "no shows" and fewer instances of unreturned initial phone calls.

Recommendations at this point:

- Continue paying this additional \$3.00 until, at least August 15th. If at that point, we are at 4 or fewer "floor vacancies" with no pending resignations, I believe it can be discontinued.
- Continue all of the other above measures
- Continue use of per diems, but will begin to re-assess this need as of August 15th

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A lengthy discussion concerning the various elements of the report was had and there was general agreement that some of the programs that have been put into place are effective and that further options will be considered to stabilize and improve hiring and retention.

Finance Director Trombly was then recognized to discuss Master Agenda Item #1007: Capital Lease for Sheriff Dispatch.

Action Expected: To receive a recommendation from the Director of Finance for funding the Sheriff's Dispatch Radio upgrade project.

Trombly then spoke to the planning for the Dispatch project presentation that will be made to the Executive Committee and full Delegation. She spoke of the need to plan for the receipt of grant funds and to also plan for not receiving the funding as hoped. She discussed the options for financing and said that a Public Hearing needs to be scheduled to present the various options.

IV. County Administrator

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

Coates said that on August 8th at 9:30 AM the Executive Committee will meet and on Wednesday, August 10th the full Delegation will meet at 7:00 PM for mid-year budget amendments and a mid-year review.

In response to a question from the Administrator, Commissioner Wozmak said that the EMS buildout project is slightly ahead of schedule and the building itself is on target and the house still needs a fair amount of work but is progressing nicely.

Coates then said that the Westmoreland rental house for the traveling nurses is almost ready and that he expects three nurses to be moving in on or around August 1st. This will greatly help retain the traveling nurses for longer periods at the nursing home that is only about a mile away.

Coates asked if the Commissioners wished to consider the Radically Rural Funding proposal that was discussed last week and it was decided that more information was needed before making a decision. A discussion of the use of the ARPA funds for this purpose was had and Coates said that this request would seem to fall under the economic growth support that we have for other organizations.

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Following discussions, Commissioner Englund moved to approve \$20K as requested and was seconded by Commissioner Clark. Upon roll call vote the motion passed unanimously. Trombly said that she would prepare the issue to be presented to the Delegation.

Bouchard was asked to inform the Commissioners of the status of the County electrical contract that was discussed at last week's meeting. He said that the contract was signed last Friday at 0.159 for a 16-month term as that was the best bid received after submitting three separate multi-bidder requests. Bouchard also said that it is hoped that the recently completed energy upgrades including LED lighting and other electrical efficiency improvements would at least partially offset the large increase in electrical costs.

Bouchard said that Froling Energy who install the new biomass heating system for 12 Court Street and 33 Winter Street buildings as well as the Biomass boiler and heating systems for the Maplewood Nursing home, has provided forward projections and calculations for or 2022-2023 heating season that show over \$409K being saved as compared to the cost of oil and propane heating that was in place for last year's operations.

V. Old Business

1. Commissioner Clark was asked to update the Commissioners on the Community Power Aggregation plan that is in progress. Clark gave the background of the project and said that the next step is to review the final written draft that was supplied by the Community Power Coalition of NH and to schedule two (2) public meetings and then have the plan ratified by the delegation as required by RSA.

VI. New Business: None

VII. Consent Agenda Items:

Vote to accept the Weekly Manifests and Minutes of July 06, 2022. **Commissioner Englund moved to take the manifests and minutes and was seconded by Commissioner Clark. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.**

VIII. Calendar

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

IX. General Discussion for Commissioners

Master Agenda Item #673: Commissioners - State Cost Shifting Letter and Restorative Justice Program

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X. Nonpublic Sessions

At 10:051AM, Commissioner Wozmak moved to enter a non-public session RSA 91-A:3, II (a) The dismissal, promotion, or compensation of any public employee or the disciplining of such employee, or the investigation of any charges against him or her, unless the employee affected (1) has a right to a public meeting, and (2) requests that the meeting be open, in which case the request shall be granted. Commissioner Englund seconded the motion, and upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

As a result of discussions in the non-public session, no decision was made, and no vote was taken.

At 11:10 AM, The Commissioners voted unanimously to return to the public session.

XI. Adjournment

At 10:11 AM, the Commissioners voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

Recorded and edited by:
R. Bouchard
Assistant County Administrator

Reviewed and submitted by:
Terry Clark Clerk, Board of
Commissioners