

MINUTES
Cheshire County Commissioners Meeting
Wednesday, November 02, 2022, 2022
County Hall Building
12 Court Street, Keene, NH 03431

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

Present: Commissioners Robert Englund and Terry Clark, Commissioner Wozmak absent with notice.

Staff: County Administrator Coates, Finance Director Trombly, Department of Corrections Superintendent Iosue, and Assistant County Administrator Bouchard

Guest(s):

At 08:36 AM, Commissioner Wozmak and Commissioner Clark responded as 'present'. Commissioner Englund was at Maplewood for a quarterly meeting and will join the meeting in Keene later in the morning.

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 #1038: Semi-Annual Report – Department of Corrections – D. Iosue
Action Expected: To receive, as informational, a report from the Superintendent on the operation of the County Corrections department.

To: Commissioners Wozmak, Englund, and Clark
From: Doug Iosue, Superintendent
Re: Semi-Annual Report – November 2, 2022

There are several areas I would like to review as part of the November Semi-Annual report:

Federal Inmate Numbers

Federal Inmate population continues to run well ahead of budget.

- Budgeted at 35
- Avg. YTD at time of my June semi-annual report was 44.6 (through 22 weeks, 5/31/22)
- Avg YTD through October is 46.

Updates on Staffing Challenges:

- Correctional Officers:

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- 44 positions
- Current vacancies:
 - 12 resignations from January 1- April 15, 2022
 - 5 resignations from April 15-October 31, 2022
 - Current vacancies (on paper): 2
 - Floor coverage vacancies: 2 or 3
- MSO/Nursing:
 - Full staffing pattern takes 5.6 FTEs.
 - Still have the equivalent of 3 full-time vacancies (of 5 LPN/RN positions); however:
 - We have increased our Per Diem (both #s of nurses and hours worked)
 - The Department staffing is relatively stable for the first time
 - Hope to not use traveler nurses
- Food Services:
 - Successfully hired two Prep Cooks in the past year
 - No vacancies
- Overall, staffing levels have improved. Why? . . .
 - Nurses: \$5.00 increase in base pay (huge impact)
 - Food Services: changing vacant positions from .8 FTE to full-time
 - Correctional Officers:
 - Hiring bonus
 - Referral bonus
 - Enhanced OT
 - Existing staff (retention) stipend
- Current Correctional Officer base pay: NH and NH County avg pay rates:

Correctional Officer Starting Pay Rates- NH

<u>Jails:</u>	<u>County Mean Pay Rate- all industries</u>	
Belknap:	\$24.89	\$23.61
Strafford:	\$21.97	\$22.46
Merrimack:	\$20.65	\$24.85
Hillsborough:	\$19.64	\$23.78
Grafton:	\$19.39	\$29.78
Rockingham:	\$19.25	\$28.17
Sullivan:	\$18.54	\$25.29
Cheshire:	\$18.50	\$24.85
Coos:	\$17.82	\$23.78

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Carroll: \$17.44 \$22.46

Cheshire County has the 4th highest mean pay rate in NH; the 3rd lowest pay rate among Jails.

I am very appreciative of the financial measures you have supported recently, and these appear to have stabilized things, at least for now. I remain concerned about staying competitive in the job market, and, as you know, I have recommended modest increases relating to 4 areas of differential pay. This is my attempt to remain proactive, so we don't face the near-crisis levels we were facing in the spring.

Facility/Maintenance Dept

- Geothermal/Multistack: Capital Project Update
 - Initial work on the multi-stack was completed at the end of April. The chilling tower was completed in the summer
 - Tweaking of control systems for a couple of months since
 - We are now tracking energy usage and savings: (handout- chart)

Medication Assisted Treatment

- Completed grant application to Opioid Abatement Fund in September
- ACLU challenge of individual medical decision-making on a particular inmate, as well as our policy in general

Master Agenda Item #1039: Semi-Annual Department of Corrections Facility Inspection – D. Iosue
Action Expected: To conduct the second 2022 semi-annual inspection of the physical property and engage inmates and staff in reviewing the Department of Corrections operations as required pursuant to NH RSA 30-B:12.

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 the week had been filled with many meetings on the 2023 budget and the startup of the EMS department, and therefore, his report would be abbreviated this week.

He said that he had a meeting with Franklin Pierce College's soon-to-be graduates on careers in the County and the currently open positions that need to be filled.

He then said that he was scheduled for a meeting with the town of Richmond select board to discuss the new EMS department and to answer any questions they have on County operations.

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He then said that he had been contacted by another town that is about to purchase a new ambulance for \$250K but, before proceeding, wanted to know more about the new County EMS department and what that might mean for them. Coates said that he would follow up with them to help understand the options that would be offered to all communities in the County.

- V. **Old Business** None
- VI. **New Business** None
- VII. **Consent Agenda Items:**
Vote to accept the Weekly Manifests for October 26 and the Minutes of October 19, 2022.
Commissioner Englund moved to accept the Weekly Manifests and minutes of October 19, 2022, and Commissioner Clark seconded the motion. 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
- X. **Nonpublic Sessions:** **At 9:27 AM Commissioner Clark moved to enter a non-public session to discuss and review information pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II(c) Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of this board, unless such person requests an open meeting. This exemption shall extend to include any application for assistance or tax abatement or waiver of a fee, fine, or other levy if based on the inability to pay or poverty of the applicant. Commissioner Englund seconded the motion, and upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.**

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

At 9:55 AM, the Commissioners voted unanimously to return to the public session.

A discussion of the cost of the County health insurance began, and the present cost structures and potential options were reviewed in detail. **Following a lengthy review by the Finance Director, Commissioner Clark moved to authorize a two percent increase in employee medical costs**

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for 2023, and Commissioner Englund seconded the motion. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

At 10:00 AM, the Commissioners, via unanimous roll call vote, recessed the public portion of the meeting to take up Master Agenda Item #1039: Semi-Annual Department of Corrections Facility Inspection. **To conduct the second 2022 semi-annual physical property inspection and engage inmates and staff in reviewing the Department of Corrections operations as required pursuant to NH RSA 30-B:12.**

AT 10:03 AM, the second semi-annual tour for 2022 of the County of Cheshire Department of Corrections (DOC) began, escorted by the DOC Director of Programs, Major Michael Thompson.

The Commissioners and staff entered the R-block, and the Correctional Officers (COs) on duty discussed the ongoing COVID precautions and care taken for the intake process at the facility. The use of the segregation blocks part of the R-block was discussed, and the exercise was examined. It was discussed that the long-awaited replacement of the damaged floor tiles in the holding blocks is about to begin shortly.

At 10:09 AM, the Commissioners exited the R-block.

At 10:10 AM, The Commissioners were introduced to the new facility Case Manager, who started in the position in June of this year. She explained her job to help transition inmates from jail to the community. She said that before returning to New Hampshire, she worked in Florida in a methadone clinic. She said she had heard of the job opening in Florida because she had been an intern at the facility while completing her Master's degree in the field. She saw an opportunity to return home to a job that she liked and was trained to do.

At 10:13 AM, the Commissioners left the Case Manager's office and entered the F-block at 10:14 AM.

The Commissioners learned that there are currently fifteen inmates in the female block, including eight from the federal court system. The Commissioners learned that, unlike the much larger male population, inmate intake, diagnostics, and segregation, all activities for female inmates happen within the confines of the F-block facilities.

The Exercise area was then examined, and the Commissioners had several questions concerning how much the space was used and what activities were provided for the inmates.

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The Commissioners entered an unassigned cell and examined the cleanliness of the space. The condition of the bunks, mattresses, and toilet facilities, noting that overall, the area is tidy and well kept, but the mattresses need to be replaced. They were told that new mattresses were on order and would be distributed upon arrival at the facility.

At 10:21 AM, the Commissioners exited the F-block.

At 10:22 AM, the Commissioners reviewed the two video arrangement rooms. Thompson discussed how helpful it is to make video arrangements instead of physically moving inmates to the downtown courtrooms and back to the facility.

He then reviewed the inmate clothing and storage room area and explained its use and the reasons for having everything in a separate, clean, secure space.

At 10:26 AM, the Commissioners left the storage room.

At 10:27 AM, the Commissioners then entered the Booking area and noted that the floors in that area of the building appeared to be in very good shape. They asked a few questions about procedures for intakes and then left the space as an inmate was being searched and prepared to be released into the general population.

At 10: 28 AM, the Commissioners entered the medical area and were shown the reception areas and offices for the counselors that provide drug and alcohol counseling for the inmates. The department was very busy with inmates being examined and treated, and the group left the medical area at 10:31 AM.

At 10:32 AM, a short meeting was held in the main hallway outside the maintenance department to review and discuss the recent Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) and lighting upgrade work that was just recently completed.

At 10:34 AM, the Commissioners and staff entered D-Block and spoke with the on-duty CO and Thompson about the security of the living space and the types of inmates held in the unit. It was learned that there are currently 43 individuals assigned to the block, with 17 of them from the federal holds system.

A discussion of the use of the various areas of the block began and how attorneys for the inmates could meet with their clients in private.

At 10:41 AM, the Commissioners exited D-block and crossed the hall to the high-security K-block. Two COs are assigned to the K-block instead of one, as is the norm in the other blocks.

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At 10:44 AM, the Commissioners ended the physical tour and went to a staff meeting room to conduct confidential interviews with inmates and staff.

At 10:46 AM, CO #1 entered the room and was informed that they could speak freely and openly and that nothing said to them would leave the room nor be attributed to any individual.

The CO said they are now on the third shift but have worked both first and second shifts in the past. They said that they volunteered to remain over from the third shift to the first shift that day to fill an opening from another CO. They discussed sleep issues due to shift work and said that the job is very different from what they expected but that it suits them very well and they enjoy what they do.

They said that they enjoy the strong comradery and varied job responsibilities. In response to a question, they said they interface with inmates a lot and relate to them as peers and not inmates under the control of the "law." They noted that the approach works well with most inmates they deal with.

In response to a question asking what could be better, they said that the training in dealing with bad situations, especially for new employees who may not have ever been exposed to those situations, could be improved.

The CO exited the interview at 11:01 AM.

At 11:02 AM, the second CO entered the interview room and, in response to questions from the Commissioners, said that they had been working at the facility for about 3.5 years and were in the military police before joining the County. They said they were assigned to the first shift and liked it after being on both the second and third shifts.

They stated that many of the current inmates had cycled over and over through the years, usually for crimes related to drug addiction.

When asked about the effectiveness of the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) program, the CO said that they did believe that it was very effective as the graduates of the program are the ones that appear to have the highest rate of recidivism.

The CO said that even though they started out to be a police officer, they like what they are doing and are looking for growth within the organization.

They then said that they had just resigned from the transport team as it didn't feel safe transporting inmates by themselves. This, coupled with family pressure to keep safe, prompted

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the decision to resign from the transport team. They said that doing transports alone also opens up the COs to possible false allegations. They also stated that due to the risks involved, the extra \$3.00 per hour for the transport isn't sufficient for the potential problems. It was discussed that wearing a body cam would be a good idea to help alleviate this problem.

At 11:19 AM, the CO exited the interview room.

At 11:22 AM, A CO entered the interview room and said that the CO pay scales were too low based on the required duties. They also said that they believe that the hiring standards are too low and that they fear that some of the people hired are already problems or potential problems waiting to happen.

They said a group of volunteer COs should be allowed to meet with the Commissioners to discuss pay issues.

A short discussion began, and it was stated by the Administrator that a number of pay enhancements and job improvement programs for the COs had just been initiated. He went on to explain some of the details of the increases and how pay adjustments are made within the department in consultation with the bargaining unit that represents the bulk of the COs.

At 11:34 AM, the CO departed the interview room.

At 11:36 AM, the first inmate to be interviewed entered the room and, after introductions, was asked if they had any issues or questions they would like to discuss.

They said that they thought more staff was needed so that the inmates wouldn't need to be locked down in their cells early in the evenings.

Responding to a question about programs for inmates, they said it appears that the programs are starting to come back slowly and cited the recent restart of the Recovery Group, Narcotics Anonymous, and the recent addition of a wildlife specialist program.

They said that the food was okay but heavy in carbohydrates.

At 11:41 AM, the first inmate left the interview room.

At 11:43 AM, the second inmate entered the interview room and was introduced to the Commissioners and staff.

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The inmate said that there wasn't a barber to cut hair and said that was a real problem. They stated the same thing three or four times, expanding on why it was a problem for them personally.

They then said that there were murderers in their cell block and that they had gotten into an altercation with one of them and had been hit with a food tray in the face causing cuts and scrapes. They repeated four or five times that they didn't belong in the cell block with murderers and didn't want a repeat of being assaulted again.

They also said that the showers were dirty two or three times but didn't elaborate. They said that there are lots of arguing in the cell blocks between the inmates and that some of them do not take showers regularly.

They stated, without prompting, that they were in the current lawsuit involving the New Hampshire Youth Development Center (YDC) and that they were arrested for assault and trespassing due to a drinking problem but were scheduled to be released in February to a halfway house for further treatment.

The inmate then left the interview room at 11:52 AM.

XI. Adjournment

At 11:57 AM, with no other public business to discuss, Commissioner Clark moved to adjourn the meeting, and Commissioner Englund seconded the motion. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Recorded and edited by:
R. Bouchard
Assistant County Administrator

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