

MINUTES
Cheshire County Commissioners Meeting
Wednesday, June 12, 2019
Department of Corrections
825 Marlboro Road
Keene, NH 03431

Present: Commissioners: Charles Weed, and Robert Englund, John Wozmak

Staff: County Administrator Coates, Finance Director Trombly, Superintendent Van Wickler, HR Director May, and Assistant County Administrator Bouchard

Guest(s):

At 8:30AM The Chairman opened the meeting and recognized Superintendent R. Van Wickler for the purpose of addressing Master Agenda Item #685: Department of Corrections (DOC) Staff Recognition. Van Wickler recognized the following DOC staff for their response and actions in two major recent lifesaving events at the facility last month.

Nurse Patricia Andrews
Master Sergeant Michael Bailey
Sergeant First Class Jason Bennett
Master Sergeant Christina Bertolami
Command Sergeant Major Alfred Beyer
Lieutenant Sara Blood
Sergeant Major Briand
Lieutenant Amy Byam
Michelle Castor
Officer Andrea Coburn
Master Sergeant Peter Costin
Sergeant First Class Michael Darrell

First Sergeant Matthew Deturris
Major James Erwin
Officer Kenneth Everett
First Sergeant Scott Hale
Master Sergeant Syjetlana Harrell
Sergeant First Class Gregory Johnson
Officer Jose Mansilla
Officer Elizabeth Pierce
Captain Robert Swain
Captain Michael Thompson
Officer William Vaughn
Captain Matthew Willis

Superintendent Van Wickler was then cited by his senior staff for his leadership and management skills with a proclamation read by the Chairman.

Following the awards ceremony, the Commissioners then recessed for a celebratory breakfast with the DOC staff.

At 9:23AM the Commissioners resumed the public meeting and adjourned to the Executive Conference room to continue the meeting.

At 9:26AM Pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) Commissioner Englund moved to enter non-public session to discuss 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 Wozmak seconded the motion and upon vote the motion passed unanimously.

As a result of deliberations in non-public session the Commissioners moved to terminate the employment of N. S. pursuant to New Hampshire RSA 28:10a.

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At 10:03AM upon roll call vote the Commissioners voted unanimously to reenter public session.

Administrator Coates was then recognized for the Weekly Operations report.

Coates said the Restorative Justice (RJ) meeting held this week with the RJ staff and that the meeting went well. He said that the RJ team will create a timeline organizational development document and will contact an outside consultant on organizational development of restorative justice programs to assist. A meeting of the County Attorney staff, restorative justice staff, and the Courts will take place later in the month.

A discussion ensued concerning the importance and need for the implementation of a restorative justice program within the County and how the program could be created, organized and managed was covered.

Coates said that Congresswoman Kuster will be here on Monday June 17th visiting Maplewood at 11:00AM and then will travel to the Department of Corrections at 1:15PM for lunch followed by a tour and then a discussion of the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) program. Commissioner Englund provided an overview of the agenda and spoke of the members of the County staff that will be presenting to the congresswoman and her staff.

A discussion of the goals of the meeting and the takeaways that the Commissioners wish to leave with the Congresswoman were covered.

Coates said that the New Hampshire Association of Counties September meeting that is scheduled to be held in at the County Hall building is being planned in conjunction with the City to secure the required number of parking spaces if held downtown. The preferred venue is still the Department of Corrections because of the availability of adequate parking for the anticipated 25-30 attendees.

Coates reminded the Commissioner that events for the Walldogs program being held in Keene will start on June 19th with an event to be held at County Hall on June 22nd.

Coates related that the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for the Tanglewood manufactured homes site have been approved and will move forward.

Coates then said that a meeting that will discuss County funding for the Integrated Delivery Network (IDN) will be held tomorrow and that he and Commissioner Weed will attend.

Coates then said that a meeting of the Delegation Farm committee will be scheduled before the August Mid-Year Delegation review to bring the Farm committee up to date on a number of projects that will need review and discussion before being presented to the full delegation for deliberation, review and vote.

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Coates then spoke to possible seminar topics on the New Hampshire retirement system that may be presented at the NHAC conference in October. A discussion of part-time employment for retiree's was covered.

Old Business: None

New Business: None

The Weekly Census was then reviewed and the report was accepted as informational.

The minutes of June 5, 2019 were then reviewed and Commissioner Wozmak moved to accept the minutes as amended and was seconded by Commissioner Englund. Upon vote the motion passed unanimously.

The Weekly Manifest was then reviewed, and Commissioner Wozmak moved to accept the Manifest as presented and was seconded by Commissioner Englund, upon vote the motion passed unanimously.

The calendar was then reviewed and no changes were noted.

At 11:21AM Master Agenda Item #686: Semi-Annual Inspection of the Department of Corrections as required by RSA 30-B 12 was taken-up and the Commissioners began the inspection tour of the Department of Corrections physical facility and its operations.

At 11:23AM The Commissioners and staff, escorted by Correctional Office Scott McLaughlin, entered the Visitation area in the buildings lobby. It was discussed that the video visitation system is used heavily for inmate visits and that the cost is set at \$5.00 for each 20-minute visit. McLaughlin said that even local families and friends of inmates have been using the system as it saves on travel time and costs and offers the same type of interaction as they would have if they visited on-site.

At 11:26AM The Commissioners entered the Booking Area and McLaughlin said that as the facilities Federal Liaison Officer he has seen many other jail and prison facilities and most of them are sub-standard when compared to the County facility as they are not as well managed and are in general less clean and with some in disrepair. The role of inmates on the facility cleaning crews was discussed as well as how the holding cells are used and how incoming arrests are processed. In response to a question from one of the Commissioners McLaughlin discussed how the restraint chair is used when needed to restrain out-of-control individuals being processed but said it has been quite a while since it was needed.

At 11:33AM The Commissioners entered the Sally Port (garage) area and inspected one of the inmate transport vehicles and discussed the weapons training for the Correctional Officers.

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At 11:37AM The Commissioners entered the rear hallway to the medical area and proceeded to inspect the Property room and noted how neat and clean the room is and the lack of any odors. Mclaughlin said that was due to all clothing worn by inmates when they are arrested are thoroughly laundered after they are processed so that upon release, they have clean fresh clothes to change into upon leaving the facility.

At 11:41AM The Commissioners then stopped at the Video Arraignment room and Mclaughlin described the use and purpose of the room and said that it is used frequently, when and where it is appropriate, as way to reduce transport of inmates thus saving on time and costs and increasing safety.

At 11:44AM The Commissioners entered F Block where female inmates are housed. Mclaughlin said that the census for F Block was higher than normal due to 5 or 6 inmates that were transferred from the Belknap County jail as a contingency in anticipation of potentially needing extra space due to the Bike Week events being held in the Laconia area. The Commissioners spoke to some of the inmates and examined a cell.

At 11:51AM The Commissioner entered the Medical department and spoke with the on-duty staff and viewed the layout of the department and viewed exam rooms and office areas.

At 11:56AM The Commissioners entered R Block (segregation and incoming holding areas) and spoke with the CO staff on duty. Mclaughlin explained that all incoming inmates are held for seven days before being placed in population to ensure that the detox from drugs and alcohol is successfully completed. It was noted by Commissioner Wozmak that some of the flooring in the unit is experiencing premature wear failure. The staff will investigate options for remediation or replacement as necessary.

At 12:04PM The Commissioners entered S Block that houses inmates who have been sentenced and the Commissioners inspected a cell and discussed the use of sentenced inmates for facility work crews and the use of electronic monitoring programs for those inmates who qualify for outside employment while serving their sentences.

At 12:11PM The Commissioners entered the facility Maintenance space and discussed the operation of the buildings heating and cooling systems with particular focus on the geothermal installation. The present study of the thermal efficiency of the system was discussed and the study being completed by staff at the University of New Hampshire was covered.

At 12:20PM The Commissioners entered K Block and spoke with some inmates and with Superintendent Van Wickler who was present in block when the Commissioners entered.

At 12:26PM The Commissioners entered D Block and spoke with the Correctional Officer (CO) on duty and inmates. In response to questions from the Commissioners, the CO reviewed the procedures in place for responses to fires and explained the evacuation process.

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At 12:37PM The Commissioners entered the facility Control Room and spoke with the CO on duty who explained the operations of the control panel and how the cameras, automatic doors locks, and other security devices work during normal operations and under emergency situations.

At 12:44PM The Commissioners entered the Laundry room and Mclaughlin explained how the laundry operated and the schedule that is in place for inmate clothing and bedding changes.

At 12:50PM The Commissioners entered the facility Kitchen area and met with the kitchen manager who reviewed the general operation of the kitchen and spoke to the recent replacement of the old steam kettle with an electric kettle and said that the new unit was much more useful and far cheaper to operate than the old unit. The number of meals prepared each day (approximately 460) was discussed and the staffing of the kitchen was reviewed.

At 12:56PM The Commissioners entered one of the facilities events rooms to conduct inmate and staff interviews.

The first staff member Correctional Officer (CO) #1, entered the room and the Commissioners introduced themselves. *The CO was informed that the Commissioners are required by RSA to conduct semi-annual inspections of the County Department of Corrections and one of the areas they are most interested in is staff and inmate perceptions of the not only the physical plant but of the managerial and operational issues, both positive and negative. The Administrator said that everything that was said in the interviews would be confidential and would remain so if the interviewee's wish it to be kept confidential. This was subsequently explained to the other three persons that were also interviewed by the Commissioners.*

CO #1 said that they are a fairly new employee and is under the Group I retirement plan and doesn't have any issues being in Group I instead of Group II as some of the older employees are. They said that the job is be very personally rewarding and that they take great pride in their work and always tries to go the extra mile. The CO said that they had received a promotion that would remove them from the union and that they were fine with that issue. The CO said that their father was a CO for about thirteen years and is now a police officer and that they have a number of friends who work in the Massachusetts correctional system, mostly in the Maximum Security units, however they much prefers to make less money working in Cheshire County as a CO than having to deal with working in facilities that are in poor physical condition and that have hostile work environments between the inmates and Correctional Officers. They said that the relationship between the CO's and inmates here is one of mutual respect.

The CO said they are adjusting to a switch in shifts as they recently moved from second shift to first shift. When asked by the Commissioners how they thought the facility could be improved the CO said that an incentive for the employees to be able to participate in an on-going exercise program would be a well-received added benefit.

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The Commissioners thanked CO #1 for their comments and input and at 1:06PM the CO exited the interview room.

At 1:09PM Inmate “Matt” entered the room and following introductions and being told of the confidential nature of the meeting began to discuss his views and perceptions of the facility.

He said that he is looking forward to leaving the facility with a few more career skills than he had so that he can find a job when he is released. He said that he is thirty years old but has been using drugs since he was fifteen. He told the Commissioners that he hopes to be released on July 17th and will then enter a rehab program at the Serenity Center. In response to a question about his background he said that he is from the Hartford Connecticut area and that the County facility is far better than being in the Hartford jails in every way. He said the only thing he misses is being able to go outside but that he did like the exercise areas in the housing blocks as the windows can be opened and the fresh air is nice. In response to a question he said that he ended up in the Cheshire County jail when he was arrested for 5.5 grams of methamphetamines and that he had tried to run from the police. He discussed the medical treatment that he is receiving and his medication plan and his progress to date.

He discussed his multiple felony arrests and said that all of his prior arrests are related to his drug use. He then discussed that it was very hard to change because finding a job with his record was very difficult. He said that as he has matured, he realizes that he needs to change and has set a goal of training to become a drug counselor and then hopefully at some point, becoming a Licensed Drug and Alcohol Counselor (LADAC). He said that he has a semester of college and hopes to be able to return to school and that the County Drug Court program is something that he is interested in qualifying for.

The Commissioners commended “Matt” for his honest answers and encouraged him to pursue his goals and aspirations as drug rehab counselor.

At 1:22PM “Matt” exited the interview room.

At 1:25PM Correctional Officer #2 entered the interview room. Following introduction and a short orientation for the reason for the session, CO #2 explained that they are a new transfer to first shift and are much happier than when they were on second shift. CO #2 said that because they have three children, and that they are very glad that to have the option to occasionally swap shifts with other staff to be able to care for their kids. The CO said that they have been at the facility for about ten months and has been getting a lot of training. They explained that one of the recent training sessions was on CPR and the Heimlich maneuver which they had to use on an inmate that same day during the noon meal. It was learned that the CO’s immediate response likely saved the life of the inmate and that they have been recognized for their actions. The CO said that they spent eight years in the Army as a truck mechanic and that they learned of the Correctional Facility as an intern student. The CO said that they attended the in-house certification academy and that the program worked very well for them.

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The CO then discussed two life other recent lifesaving events that occurred on two successive days in May and said that the response of the staff was outstanding and that the shared experience brought the staff closer together.

The Commissioners thanked CO #2 for their time and comments and at 1:31PM the CO exited the interview room.

At 1:35PM Inmate M. S. entered the interview room. Following introductions and orientation to the session with the Commissioners M. S. said that she is from another county jail and was transferred here because the other facility needed the bed space in the event incidents during Bike Week that is being held this week.

She said that she doesn't want to go back to her previous jail because it is just a hole-in-the-wall and that it a really horrible place. She said that all of the inmates are jammed into one side of the jail and the newer better side of the jail used for sentenced inmates is empty while the unsentenced side is overflowing.

Responding to a question from one of the Commissioners she said that she is in jail because of alcoholism and having PTSD and that there isn't any counselling available. She said that she began drinking when she was five years old and became an alcoholic when she was a young teenager. She also said that her mother died of alcoholism. She then stated that she also uses marijuana and that her PTSD stems from being raped by six different family members over a number of years when she was a child and young teenager.

She said that she is in jail this time for being drunk, resisting arrest, and having a deadly weapon (a knife) in her hand when the police came in response to a call that she was out-of-control. She said that she was told that the local courts believe that she is a "lost cause".

Commissioner Wozmak said that this a major issue with the way the judicial system functions as instead of offering counselling and treatment programs to people with drug and alcohol problems, with some individuals having multiple co-occurring issues, they are simply arrested and thrown in jail for being sick.

Commissioner Wozmak stated that major reforms must be made to prevent people who need treatment from being locked away in jail or prison because there are no treatment programs available. He said that people who are sick and commit crimes because of their illness deserve compassion, help and treatment and not punishment.

M. S. then said that when she is out of jail, she does some landscaping work and volunteers at a homeless café. She said that she is on disability and stated that she has been in the Cheshire County jail for only one week but has received more counselling here in that week than in all the times she has been

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in the other facility. She stated that she has become so desperate that last year she tried to commit suicide by hanging herself.

She discussed that the food at the other facility was very poor and that she was given seventy-two pieces of bread in one week for meals. She said that the food here (Cheshire Facility) is good and she doesn't want to return to the other jail.

She also stated that homelessness has been an on-going issue for her and that the longest she has been sober is for twenty-four months because she was in jail for that time period. She said that the longest she was able to be sober on her own has been about six months.

At 1:51PM The Commissioners thanked M. S. for her candor and for sharing her story. She was then escorted from the interview room back to F Block.

At 1:55PM there being no further business to discuss, Commissioner Englund moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion to adjourn was seconded by Commissioner Weed and upon vote the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,
R. Englund, Clerk