

MINUTES
Cheshire County Commissioners Meeting
Wednesday, January 27, 2021
County Hall Pursuant to Emergency Order #12 Pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04
This meeting will be conducted electronically.

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, Register of Deeds Tilton, Grants Manager Bansley, and Assistant County Administrator Bouchard.

Guest(s): J. B. Mack, Principal Planner, Southwest Regional Planning Commission

At 8:41 AM, Commissioner Englund opened the meeting, and County Administrator Coates conducted a roll-call of the Commissioners attending the meeting. Commissioners Englund and Clark responded as "present."

Commissioner Englund then moved to conduct this meeting as an emergency meeting under the relevant provisions of NH RSA 91-A and consistent with the recommendations contained in Executive Order 2020-04 Order 12 issued by Governor Sununu. Commissioner Englund seconded the motion, and upon roll-call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Emergency Order #12 Pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04 Temporary modification of public access to meetings under RSA 91-A Pursuant to Section 18 of Executive Order 2020-04, it is hereby ordered, effective immediately, that:

1. Pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, paragraph 8 provides: "State and local government bodies are permitted and encouraged to utilize the emergency meeting provisions of RSA 91-A to conduct meetings through electronic means while preserving, to the extent feasible, the public's right to notice of such meetings and ability to observe and listen contemporaneously."
2. Pursuant to Emergency Order #2 issued pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, gatherings of fifty people or more are prohibited.
3. To implement these orders and recommendations, the requirement in RSA 91-A:2, II 1 (b), that a quorum of a public body be physically present unless immediate action is imperative, is waived for the duration of the State of Emergency declared in Executive Order 2020-04.
4. To further implement these orders and recommendations, the requirement in RSA 91-A:2, II 1 (c), that each part of a meeting of a public body is audible or otherwise discernible to the public "at the location specified in the meeting notice as the location of the meeting," is waived for the duration of the State of Emergency declared in Executive Order 2020-04 so long as the public body:
 - Provides public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by
 - video or other electronic means.
 - Provides public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting.
 - Provides a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are

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- problems with access; and
- Adjourns the session if the public is unable to access the meeting.

Coates then outlined the rules of the meeting.

1. The public has an opportunity at the beginning of the Commissioners Meeting under "Public Comment" to speak. Community input will not be allowed after that point unless recognized and allowed by the Chair of the Commissioners.
2. All votes will be Roll Call, and when recognized, we are asking that you re-state your name and yes or no
3. If you have a question or motion that you would like to ask to put forward, please state the following, "Mr. Chair, Commissioner (your name) has a question or motion."
4. If you are having issues hearing the call, please text or call the County Administrator at 603-313-9002.
5. Please mute your phones so background noise won't interfere with the meeting.
6. This meeting has been posted on our website so that the Community, department heads, and media can listen to the meeting.
7. This meeting is utilizing a Zoom Platform so listeners can join us via audio or audio/visual.

At 8:43 AM, the Chair opened the meeting and recognized Register Tilton to discuss Master Agenda Item #845: Register of Deeds Semi-Annual report. She provided the following information on the operations of the department.

She said that the total transaction value put through the Registers office was about \$7.6M, with the transfer taxes sent to the State at approximately \$734K for 2020. She said that all archive registry books had been scanned, and all of the plans have been indexed.

She stated that the total amount of funds sent to the New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) fund came to \$220,152.00 for the year. Tilton reviewed the documents that are processed by the Registry and said that they handle seventy-six different types of documents and, in total, processed 12,323 documents of all types for 2020.

She said that many of the requested copies of documents are paid for online, and the Registry receives up to \$9K per month in transaction fees that help offset the costs related to running an online system.

A discussion of the need for more shelving units took place. It was discussed that the accumulated funds in the operational account might be a source for purchasing the additional needed shelving units.

The Commissioners thanked Tilton for her report and then took-up the next item on the agenda.

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J. B. Mack from Southwest Regional Planning was recognized to discuss Master Agenda Item #845: presentation reviewing and updating the new NH-VT bridge in Hinsdale.

Mack provided and spoke to many slides and discussed the new bridge project planned between Hinsdale and Brattleboro, VT.



Mack spoke to the bridge(s) route changes and discussed the positive impact on both Hinsdale and Brattleboro. He discussed the work that needs to be done to Hinsdale island to clean the area of invasive plant species and reviewed some proposals to create paths, outlooks, fishing piers, and play areas on the island in the coming years.

He said that some of the most significant changes brought about by the project will occur in Brattleboro. It will reposition the bridge crossing area from a major intersection in the City to a location several hundred feet away from the bridges' existing entrance and exit and significantly reduce the traffic flow in the downtown intersection. It will also provide riverfront recreation areas in both Brattleboro and Hinsdale that do not exist currently.

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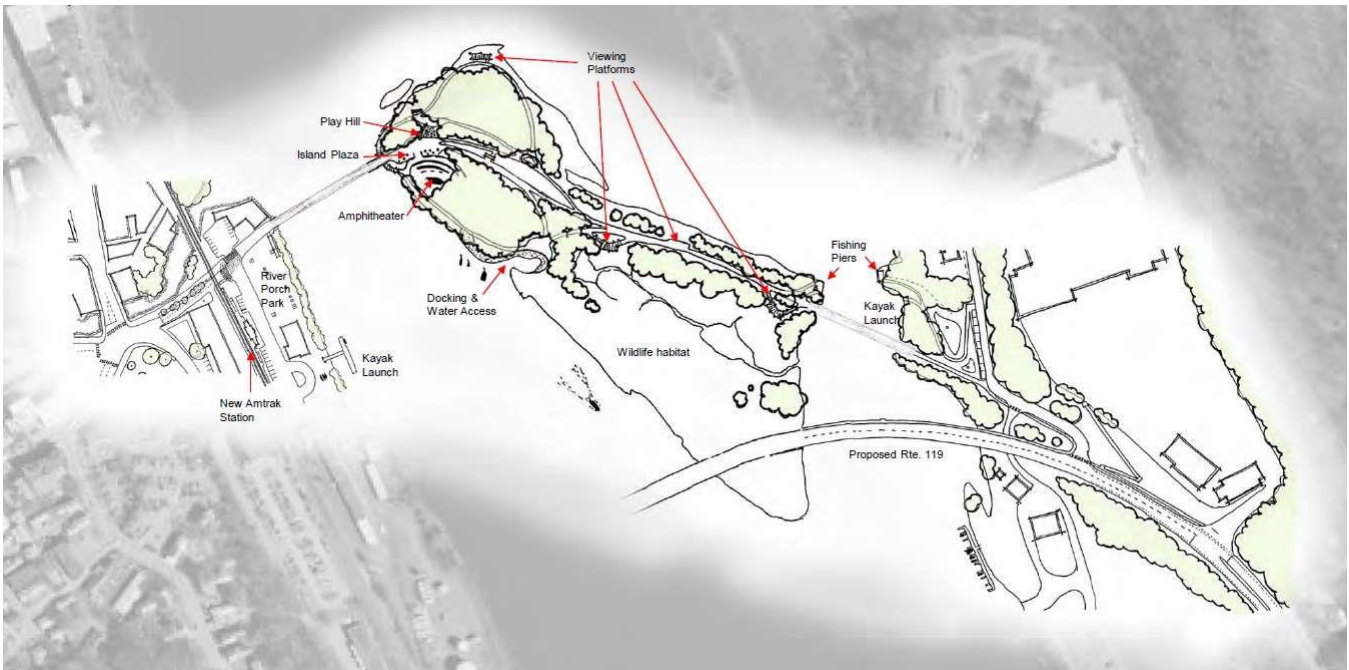
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Ad date: 2/23/21
Completion date: 10/18/24
Total Estimated Cost: \$56M

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Mack then provided the following schedule for the project:

- Begin Project #12210C (2021-2024)
- Finish Project with Subcommittee and Univ. of Massachusetts –
- Amherst (May 2021)
- Develop recommendations to Project Advisory Committee (2021)
- Project Advisory Committee makes recommendations to Towns of
- Hinsdale & Brattleboro (2021-2023)
- Information shared regarding existing bridge maintenance costs
- and negotiations with NHDOT (2021-2023)
- Begin Project #12210D (2025-2026?)
- Conceptual Plan Implementation (2025-?)

*The full overview of the project can be found here on the SWRPC
website:* https://www.swrpc.org/hinsdale-brattleboro_planning

The Commissioners and staff asked many questions concerning the overall project and the plans for the reclamation of portions of Hinsdale island to make it into an attractive local destination and thanked Mack for his detailed and comprehensive presentation.

At 9:36 AM, Commissioner Wozmak joined the meeting

Grants Manager Bansley was then recognized to review Master Agenda Item #845: Public Health Network SFY20&21 Grant Agreement Amendment #5. She asked the Commissioners to vote to accept and sign the grant agreement amendment #5 for the Public Health Network SFY20&21 federal pass-through grant from the N.H. Department of Health and Human Services for \$100,000 for public immunizations.

Following a short question and answer period, Commissioner Englund moved to accept the grant and was seconded by Commissioner Clark. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Coates then spoke to Master Agenda item #846: Opposition to HB213, AN ACT, relative to eliminating useful thermal energy from renewable energy classes. He said that this law was ill-conceived, and the ramifications have not been thought through. He also remarked that several towns and counties have relied on the existing law in the recent past to cost-justify energy efficiency projects that now appear to be in jeopardy.

He discussed and reviewed a letter in opposition to HB213 from the County Commissioners and asked the Commissioners to sign the document to be sent to the House Committee on Science, Technology and Energy.

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The content of the letter is as follows:

January 27, 2021

The Honorable Michael Vose
Chair, House Committee on Science, Technology and Energy
Legislative Office Building
Concord NH 03301

Re: Opposition to HB213, AN ACT relative to the elimination of useful thermal energy from renewable energy classes.

Dear Representative Vose and Honorable Members of the ST&E Committee:

The Cheshire County Board of Commissioners submits this letter in strong opposition to House Bill 213, referred to your committee.

In 2019, as part of the extensive renovation and expansion of the Maplewood Nursing Home, Cheshire County decided to install a woodchip fueled biomass boiler to provide the large quantities of heat and hot water required for this critical facility. The decision to invest in the biomass boiler system was based on many factors, including the future economy and wood chip cost stability. A key element to the economics of this decision was the qualification of the biomass system we selected to generate Class 1 Thermal Renewable Energy Certificates (T-RECs)

For a boiler system to qualify for the generation of T-RECs using biomass, it must meet stringent particulate emissions standards as defined by N.H. Renewable Portfolio Standard and enforced by the N.H. Department of Environmental Services (NHDES). Because this is a county nursing home with elderly residents, many of whom suffer from respiratory issues, this was a significant factor and consideration in our decision to install the biomass system.

A grant was applied for and received from the Public Utilities Commission Renewable Energy Fund for \$395,000.00 against a total for the project of \$1,180,600.00 with the remainder funded by a taxpayer authorized bond. A key decision element in making this investment was the receipt of funds from the sale of T-REC's that will be generated to help pay the installation cost.

Maplewood Nursing Home has been generating T-RECs since March of 2020—not yet a year. The revenues generated from the sale of T-RECs reduce our biomass heating fuel costs by over 50%. These revenues are estimated at between \$44,000 and \$65,000 per year, assuming market pricing of T-RECs remains constant going forward. These savings offset operating expenses, thereby reducing the

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taxpayer burden for all residents of Cheshire County. We wish to make it clear that this is repeating annual revenue promised to continue for many years into the future. If HB213 passes, Cheshire County will lose this critical future revenue, thrusting these costs back onto its taxpayers.

HB213 is a shortsighted policy. We understand that there are currently fifty-eight (58) biomass and geothermal projects around the state eligible to sell T-RECs. As with Cheshire County, many of these projects were planned and financed with the assumption of renewable heat generation revenues. Many would not have happened without the T-REC incentive.

Cheshire County has been considering an expansion of the boiler system at the New Courthouse facilities in Keene which included the generation of T-RECs as a significant part of the financial analysis. With the passage of HB 213, those plans would have to be re-considered possibly placing a greater burden on the tax-payer or cancelled altogether.

It is wrong for legislators to adopt policy encouraging private and public investment in renewable energy and then repeal the very incentive that fosters this investment. We ask you to consider the implications of the passage of HB213 to Cheshire County and urge your opposition to this bad bill.

Respectfully,

Jack Wozmak, J.D., Chair

Robert J. Englund, M.D., Vice-Chair

Terry M. Clark, Clerk

Commissioners Clark and Wozmak signed the letter, and Commissioner Englund will add his signature tomorrow when he is in Keene.

Coates then addressed Master Agenda Item #847: Update on MCVP renovation. Request to reallocate \$6,500 from the generator fuel pump project that was terminated.

Coates reviewed the work being done in the Sheriff's department and for the MCVP rehab project in the basement of the 1858 building. He asked for the reallocation of \$6,500 from the generator fuel pump project that was terminated to the MCVP project to complete the job. **Following questions and discussion, Commissioner Clark moved to reallocate \$6,500 and was seconded by Commissioner Englund. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.**

Administrator Coates was then recognized for the Weekly Operations Report.

Coates said that an untimely death occurred on the farm yesterday, presumably from a medical event, and he will provide further details once the autopsy report has been completed.

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Coates then discussed the pending upgrade to the County site approved for funding in the 2020 budget. He said it is recommended that Paragon Digital of Court Street, Keene, NH, be awarded a single source contract for \$6,500.00 based on their pricing, capabilities, resources, a portfolio of similar clients, and local preference.

He said that this decision was made after surveying several options. If authorized by the Commissioners to proceed, it will enable the work to be completed at a significant discount and in a timely manner compared to the company that did the initial redesign a few years ago.

Following discussion, Commissioner Englund moved to authorize the single source bid for the website modifications and award the website redesign contract to Paragon Digital of Keene, NH, for \$6,500.00. Commissioner Clark seconded the motion, and upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Coates said that the federal department of Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) had released another round of the development grant that the County submitted for last year and did not win due to many applicants. He stated that the grant application submitted in the previous grant round was very well received and scored very highly, and will be tweaked and re-submitted shortly.

Coates then addressed the SWRPC Monadnock Broadband meeting, and he and Bouchard provide an outline of the discussion. It was learned that a senior representative from the FCC made a presentation and conducted a question and answer session aimed at detailing some of the initiatives underway to improve the quality of the data that the agency collects and distributes. He also discussed the programs' changes to make them more accessible and easier to use.

A second presentation by staff from Consolidated Communications was then discussed. It was learned that besides the six towns currently in a contract with CCI for town-wide fiber networks to be built, more than fifteen other towns are now also in negotiations for the implementation of fiber projects for their communities. It was stated that the bulk of the communities in discussions are located in the southwestern portion of the state. If these projects are completed, it will result in the Cheshire County and Monadnock region going from one of the least broadband-connected areas to one of the state's most high-speed broadband regions.

Coates then reminded the Commissioners that the Executive Committee 2021 Budget hearings would continue next Monday, and the Maplewood Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facility budgets will be reviewed. He then said that the Executive Committee would also meet on February 8th to receive and discuss the Countywide energy audit proposal with the vendor attending to answer any questions.

Director Trombly then discussed an agreement with the City on the previous purchase of the 33 Winter Street building jointly owned by the Monadnock Development Corporation, the City of Keene, and the

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County. She said that she received notification that the underlying finance bond has been refinanced, and the previous agreement with the City on the bond payments will change. She discussed that monies had been set aside in 2020 for the payments, but refinancing a rollover of the funds from 2020 to 2021 will be done to pay the slightly increased costs due to the refinancing. The amount to be remitted in 2021 will be an additional \$12,354.10.

Following discussion, Commissioner Wozmak moved to authorize the Director of Finance to complete the transaction for an additional \$12,354.10 and the motion was seconded by Commissioner Englund. Upon roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

Coates then reviewed conversations with the congressional and senate office concerning the additional expenses accrued for the nursing home's reconstruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He said that he and Bouchard would work with the contractor and Steve Horton, the County's owner representative, to identify any COVID related expenses. Coates said that he is hopeful that the new administration will include additional funding for projects underway in the new CARES act impacted by the pandemic.

Old Business: None

New Business: None

Consent Agenda: Minutes of 01/20/2021 and Manifests for the week. Commissioner Englund moved the consent agenda and was seconded by Commissioner Clark. The motion passed with unanimous consent upon roll call vote.

General Discussion: Discussion to improve utilities at the Department of Corrections.

At 11:20 AM, there being no further public business to conduct, Commissioner Clark moved to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Commissioner Englund. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Minutes recorded by:
Assistant County Administrator Bouchard

Reviewed and submitted by:
T. Clark, Clerk