

MINUTES
Cheshire County Commissioners Meeting
Wednesday, March 10, 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, Sheriff Rivera, HR Director May, and Assistant County Administrator Bouchard.

Guest(s): James Weatherly, Southwest Regional Planning Commission

At 8:31 AM, Commissioner Wozmak 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 Wozmak 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.

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- 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 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 8:33 AM, the Chair opened the meeting and begin the first public hearing for the scheduled mid-grant review of the CDBG Microenterprise project. Wozmak then read the public hearing notice.

The Cheshire County Commissioners will hold three public hearings on Wednesday, March 10, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. Pursuant to Emergency Order #12, issued by the Governor of New Hampshire and Executive Order 2020-04, the public hearings will be conducted electronically via the web-based platform Zoom. Members of the public can join online at www.zoom.us/join and use the Meeting ID: 409 748 8803 and Pin: 6031233, or use the Zoom call-in number +1 (646) 558-8656 to participate. The purpose of the first Public Hearing is to discuss and receive public comment on the Microenterprise projects currently underway. These projects are funded through a federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) awarded to the County of Cheshire.

The second Public Hearing will discuss three applications to the NH Community Development Finance Authority under the CDBG program. CDBG funds are awarded on a competitive basis in New Hampshire and may be used for projects which have the primary benefit to low- and moderate-income people. A municipality can apply for up to \$500,000 in CDBG funds per year in each of the following categories: housing, public facilities, economic development,

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microenterprise technical assistance, and emergency funds. Municipalities can also apply for up to \$25,000 annually for feasibility studies.

The proposals to be considered by the Commissioners are microenterprise grants to be submitted by Cheshire County for up to \$500,000. The funds, less administrative costs, will be sub-granted to multiple entities, including the Hannah Grimes Center, Rockingham Economic Development Corporation, and the NH Small Business Development Center, to provide training and technical assistance for microenterprises. This public hearing has been scheduled to provide residents with specific information regarding the grant requirements. A third Public Hearing will be held to adopt the Relocation and Anti-Displacement Plan specific to these projects.

Those interested are invited to attend and comment. Please contact the Cheshire County Commissioner's Office, (603) 352-8215 or via Relay NH at 1-800-735-2964 in advance if you have a disability or need assistance to attend or participate in the hearing. Anyone wishing to submit written comments prior to the hearing should address them to the Cheshire County Commissioners, 12 Court Street, Keene, NH 03431, or email rbouchard@co.cheshire.nh.us.

James Weatherly, Planning Technician with Southwest Region Planning Commission, was then recognized and explained it is a requirement of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to hold a public hearing while a project is underway. The hearing allows the public the opportunity to comment and ask questions about the project. He noted that this first hearing would provide an update of the 2020 Microenterprise projects.

Weatherly introduced himself and explained that Cheshire County received \$454,865 in CDBG Microenterprise funds to support Microenterprise centers around the State in 2020. Cheshire County sub-granted the majority of the funds as follows, less administration costs:

- \$162,500 to the Hannah Grimes Center in Keene. The center will provide access for 65 microenterprises to its hands-on workshops, one-on-one coaching, retail training at the Hannah Grimes Marketplace, and in-depth programs, such as their incubator. Through the first two-quarters of the project, Hannah Grimes has served approximately 23 microenterprise business owners.
- \$137,500 for the Regional Economic Development Center in Raymond. Activities to be funded include one-on-one meetings with business advisors, training in reading financial statements, and assistance with brand development and marketing. REDC anticipates that 55 low-to-moderate-income small business owners will use their many resources. Through the first two-quarters of the project, they have served 39 microenterprises.

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• \$117,500 to the NH Small Business Development Center's Pathways to Work initiatives in Durham and Manchester. Some of the services they will provide to approximately 47 participants include starting a small business, e-courses on finance, and marketing and accounting workshops. Through the first two-quarters of the project, they have served 22 microenterprises.

The projects are scheduled to close-out by June 30, 2021.

At 8:42 AM, The Chair opened the floor for public comments, and no public comments were received.

The Commissioners and staff were then asked for comments or questions. Commissioner Englund asked about how the grant covers towns outside of the County. Weatherly spoke to how the state allocates the funds across the state. It was learned that the CDFR administers the funding this way to keep down costs and reduce administrative functions. Commissioner Clark asked if the Hanna Grimes Center was fully utilizing the funds. The Hanna Grimes staff said that the funds were fully used and spoke to the current program's successes.

Liz Gray of the state SBDC was then recognized, and Jason Cannon addressed some of the Pathway to Work program details. He discussed how the program is run and said that due to COVID-19, the overall program participation is down slightly. Still, they anticipate that the pending American Recovery Act may help increase the number of participants.

The Chair closed the first public hearing at 8:54 AM.

The Chair opened the second public hearing to discuss the Community Development Block Grant Applications at 8:55 AM.

James Weatherly explained that CDBG funds are available to municipalities for economic development, public facility, 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 \$500,000 in the microenterprise category, and \$25,000 covering feasibility studies. Weatherly provided a handout describing the NH Community Development Block Grant Program eligible activities that included the area HUD income limits.

Weatherly provided a project handout. The proposed microenterprise applications are for up to \$500,000 to support three entities in southern NH: the Hannah Grimes Center in Keene (HGC), the Regional Economic Development Center (REDC), and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Each entity uses the funding to provide training and technical assistance and, in

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some cases, microloan services to low- and moderate-income micro-entrepreneurs. If the proposed applications are successful, the funds will be awarded to Cheshire County, which will sub-grant the funds, less administration, to the three Sub-recipients.

Cheshire County has applied for and has been awarded Microenterprise funding for the HGC, REDC, and SBDC each year since 2015. The HGC, REDC, and SBDC are interested in becoming recipients of the Microenterprise funding in 2021. The proposed activities meet the goals of "Supporting the development of a diversified economy" and "Supporting educational and training facilities that upgrade local residents' skills" in Cheshire County's Housing and Community Development Plan, last adopted in January of 2019. In total, for this program year, the three entities anticipate serving an estimated 175 microenterprises.

Representatives from the Hannah Grimes Center in Keene, Regional Economic Development Center, and the Small Business Development Center provided the following details about the projects. Chris Duffy spoke and said that the state Small Business Development Center (SBDC) was very much needed and discussed the enormous impact that the global pandemic has had on the local economy. He said that they were planning on supporting sixty new companies in the coming year.

Liz Gray then addressed the potential budget cuts and their impact on the state SBDC. She said that a concerted effort from supporters at the statehouse is underway, and the hope is that funding will be restored. The amount of the funding is still unknown and will depend on state revenue recipients. She said that the Keene mayor coordinated a letter that drew the participation of all thirteen cities in the state that covers over half of the population in New Hampshire.

At 9:08 AM, The Chair opened the floor to public comment on the projects: No comments were received from the public.

The Chair then opened the floor for comments from the staff and Commissioners. Commissioner Wozmak asked a question around income qualifications for being able to join the program. Weatherly addressed the question and provided some details on the rating of applications against the income limits.

Coates then asked about the allocation of existing funds if other Counties were to be involved in administering the funds instead of just Grafton and Cheshire counties. Mary Ann Kristiansen spoke to adding another County as dispersing agent and said the existing funds would be split if additional counties become involved in fund administration.

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Jason Cannon then said that the SBDC program would change in 2021 and reflect some new realities brought about by the pandemic, but the continued funding of SBDC will need to be resolved.

Commissioner Wozmak moved to close the Public Hearing on the Projects portion of the CDBG Block Grant Application Hearing. Commissioner Englund seconded it. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Englund moved to approve the submittal of the applications and vote to authorize County Administrator Christopher Coates or County Commissioner Chair John Wozmak as the Authorized Designees to sign and submit the CDBG applications, and upon approval of the CDBG applications, authorize the Authorized Designee to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate the CDBG contract, and was seconded by Commissioner Clark. Upon roll-call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

At 9:17 AM, Commissioner Wozmak moved to open the third public hearing regarding the Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan. Commissioner Clark seconded it. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

James Weatherly of SWRPC explained that if any permanent displacement takes place as a result of this project, 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. James Weatherly noted that no permanent displacement is planned 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. No public comments were received.

Commissioner Wozmak moved to close the third public hearing for discussion of the proposed RARA Plan. Commissioner Englund seconded it. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Clark moved to adopt the Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan. Commissioner Englund seconded it. Upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

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At 9:20 AM, the Commissioners took-up Master Agenda Item #864: Administration of the Unassigned Fund Balance of the Cheshire County General Fund.

Trombly reviewed and discussed modifications to the Policies governing the County Unassigned Fund Balance for the General Fund, last reviewed on February 12, 2020.

Following an extended discussion, Commissioner Wozmak discussed an increase in the fund balance retainage percentage from 12% to 17% to 13% to 18% on the Director of Finance's recommendation. Trombly will draft a new policy document reflecting the change. Commissioners Clark and Englund were also in agreement with the increase.

An extended discussion about State Medicare Pro Share funding began, and a lengthy review of the history of the program and the costs of running a nursing home was had.

At 9:51 AM, Master Agenda Item #865: Sheriff's Department Semi-Annual Report to the Commissioners was taken-up for discussion.

Rivera said that his most concerning issue is staffing in Dispatch, the front office, and Deputies. He said that they are bringing staff on board in all three areas and approaching acceptable personnel levels after an extended time of shortages that caused a significant increase in overtime costs.

He said that he kept an eye on legislation from the State, including conducting background checks for firearms in cases instead of having the State Police conduct the review.

He said that Bailiff's costs are also under review and how the state determines Court security funding. An extended discussion of the state requirements for security services in the courts was reviewed and how the number of bailiffs for each court is determined. Pending house bill HB2 was discussed as it can change the cost reimbursements to the county Sheriff's offices for the Bailiffs.

Rivera addressed other issues with the Commissioners concerning the state's pending cost-shifting, and he assured the Commissioner that he would not authorize increased cost for the Bailiff court security services.

Administrator Coates was then recognized for the Weekly Operations Report:

Coates reminded the Commissioners that on Monday the 15th at 10:00 AM, the Executive Committee will meet to review and discuss the Energy Project.

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He then said that on Monday the 22nd, the full Delegation will meet at 7:00 PM to consider adopting the 2021 Budget.

Coates said that he has been in constant communication with Senator Shaheen's office discussing the pending American Recovery Act (ACA) funding. He said that the County funding is anticipated to be approximately \$14M. Coates said that he has started working with the Dupont Group that administers the operations for the NH Association of Counties (NHAC) to try to determine how the funds will be distributed and administrated. He pointed out the possible need for additional resources and staffing was being discussed as the funds would be distributed across many organizations throughout the County, and close tracking and accounting of the funds will be important requirements. A discussion and review of the possible financial impact and organizational structure needed were then covered.

Coates discussed that the fire alarm monitoring in place at the nursing home isn't working correctly and that a new contract with Countryside Alarm was being implemented. The new service will allow both phone and internet connections instead of just an analog phone dialer that is now being used. He also stated that the company provides additional insurance coverage through their policy and has agreed to a 30-day termination clause if the County is not satisfied with the service. He said that the service is being installed and tested this week.

Coates reviewed the Carbon Cash Back letters sent last week to the county delegation and state and federal officials, including the congressional and senate staff and the President, in support of the program.

He then addressed the city of Keene's request concerning a planned food festival that will hopefully take place in June, depending on the pandemic's status. He said that the city has asked to use the Center St. parking lot for the event that the Keene Young Professionals group is sponsoring. He went on to say that he has agreed to provide the space as other public events in the recent past that have used the space have gone well.

Coates then said that a meeting with the state Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to discuss a grant submitted for a biomass boiler that is part of the county energy project would take place next Tuesday. He said the grant amount is \$200K.

Coates said that the nursing home is investigating having a local cleaning service provide some cleaning services due to the difficulty of hiring staff in the department. He went on to say that the use of other outside services, including laundry services, is also being considered due to the staffing shortage.

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Old Business: None
New Business: None

Consent Agenda: Minutes of 03/03/2021 and Manifests for the week. Commissioner Wozmak moved the consent agenda and was seconded by Commissioner Englund. The motion passed with unanimous consent upon roll call vote.

General Discussion: None

At 11:03 AM, Commissioner Englund moved to enter a non-public session to discuss a matter under RSA 91-A:3, II(d) Consideration of the acquisition, sale or lease of real or personal property which, if discussed in public, would likely benefit a party or parties whose interests are adverse to those of the general Community. Commissioner Clark 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 11:45 The Commissioner Clark moved to return to public session and was seconded by Commissioner Englund; upon roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

At 11:46 AM, there being no further public business to conduct, Commissioner Wozmak 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