

FINANCE/TAX REDUCTION/MANDATE RELIEF - COMMITTEE

Wednesday, March 23, 2022 - 10:30 AM

Thomas Scozzafava, Chairman
Noel Merrihew, Vice-Chairperson

Vice-Chairman Merrihew called this Finance Meeting to order at 10:30 am with the following Supervisors in attendance: Clayton Barber, Robin DeLoria, Stephanie DeZalia, Shaun Gilliland, Ken Hughes, Steve McNally, Noel Merrihew, James Monty, Matt Stanley, Ike Tyler, Joe Pete Wilson, Margaret Wood and Mark Wright. Charlie Harrington, Roy Holzer, Tom Scozzafava and Davina Winemiller was excused. Derek Doty was absent.

Department Heads present: Laura Carson, Michael Diskin, Jim Dougan, Judy Garrison and Dan Palmer.

Also present: Chelsea Merrihew and Joe Keegan - NCCC.

News Media: Sun News – Tim Rowland.

MERRIHEW: Good morning. I will call the Finance Committee to order please. Thank you, good morning everyone first on the agenda we have the County Clerk's office.

C.MERRIHEW: Mr. Provoncha had a doctor's appointment he was unable to reschedule so he asked me to stand in for him, lucky me.

February was a standard month, we brought in about \$780,000, transferred \$468,000 of that to the Treasurer and the remained went to New York State.

Of note in our office, the big five recertification for pistol permits has begun while that's handled by New York State Police it has significantly increased the calls and appointments in our office as everyone needs to update their information with us before they can recertify with the New York State Police so our pistol permit clerk has been out straight for about the last two weeks and we're not sure how long that's going to continue but we just encourage everyone to make appointments before they come in to do their pistol permit transactions.

On a positive note, the civil service test for Motor Vehicle Clerk and Recording Clerk were held on March 5, so hopefully by the end of the year we can start filling in some of our vacancies especially since we had one of our long time Motor Vehicle Clerks resign effective the end of last Friday so we have an additional vacancy in that office. I think it will probably effect the scheduling for our satellite offices in North Elba and Ticonderoga but I don't believe Charlotte and Joe have settled on a final schedule for that yet.

That's all I have for today. Any questions?

MERRIHEW: Thank you very much. Question for Chelsea?

MONTY: Yeah, Chelsea, Joe mentioned last month that he was planning on staggering the lunch times over there because I know a lot of people try to go to DMV on their lunch time and with it closed from 12 -1:00 or 11:45 – 1:00 it kind of makes it difficult for a lot of people, is that still the plan?

C.MERRIHEW: I believe it was. I don't think they started it.

MONTY: No, he said the end of this month. I was just wondering if it was still the plan to go forward with that?

C. MERRIHEW: I hope they do but I'm not sure how this recent resignation is going to affect the scheduling, with her gone on the days of the satellite offices are opening it only leaves two people in the office so I'm not sure what they are going to decide.

MONTY: My own thought is though, if we stagger the lunch it might help because there won't be that backlog of people waiting to get in.

C. MERRIHEW: I agree and I know, I don't think it's well advertised because we get a lot of people that come into our office upset that they've taken their time to come but I can't answer for sure, I'm not sure what they are going to work out with that.

MONTY: Thank you.

MERRIHEW: Further questions?

DELORIA: With these pistol permit renewals I understand that you are being inundated with people over there, is there anything our communities can do to get the word out and have them call and make an appointment? Do you have anything on your website regarding that issue?

C.MERRIHEW: It is on the website and since about the beginning of Covid we have been really encouraging appointments so I think a lot of our regular customers know that. We still take walk ins because were' not going to let someone drive all the way from Newcomb and say, no, you don't have an appointment you have to go it just helps the flow of the office better.

DELORIA: We'll try and push that out on our end through social media and our newsletter next month so we'll get the word out, anyway we can help you. We don't have that many people down there but I'm sure with this pistol permit renewal –

PALMER: But they all have a street light. *(laughter)*

MERRIHEW: Anything further for the County Clerk's office?

C. MERRIHEW: Thank you.

MERRIHEW: Next, we have Ms. Laura Carson, Auditor

CARSON: Good morning. Page one, is my department head expense report. The coroner's have responded to 17 calls and there have been 3 funeral home removals. Page two, is the supervisor expense report. Page three, is our invoice data collection summary. We've processed 1,886 invoices and noted 155 errors in February. The year to date overpayments we have prevented are \$2,224.00 and the year to date duplicate payments we prevented are \$147,710.00. Page four, is our auditor budget. Page five is the assigned counsel summary and in February we received 81 assigned counsel vouchers to process. We sent 178 to Chambers and we paid 227 totaling \$131,938.00. With the last 20-21 check run in February I can provide you with the final numbers for the budget year. We processed 853 vouchers and we paid \$485,000 in fees. There was 732 family court vouchers that totaled \$378,863.00, 4.99% of that was travel expenses at a

cost of almost \$19,000.00. Our travel expenses in Family Court are extremely low. They are still holding hearings for family court virtual if possible. For comparison, in 2019, we spent \$135,000 in travel expenses. There were 110 criminal court vouchers, these are the cases that originate in our town or village courts sometimes they are transferred to county court. These vouchers totaled \$85,346.00, 24.4% was related to travel expenses at a cost of \$17,444.00, in comparison to 2019, we expended \$27,331, in travel expenses.

The assigned counsel year to date budget report is page six, it's for 2021, it's our final budget including administration fees. Our budget is almost \$700,000 and we've expended almost \$500,000, I think as of Thursday it's safe to say the virtual hearings have saved us a lot of money. Page seven is the assigned counsel year to date for 2022, and as of the date of this report, we've only expended \$5,000 in actual assigned counsel fees and the rest is administration. Does anybody have any questions?

MERRIHEW: Questions for Laura this morning on her report or for any other reason? Being none, thank you very much Laura. It's a nice report.

CARSON: Thank you.

MERRIHEW: Next we have Real Property, Mr. Wainwright is with us this morning.

WAINWRIGHT: Good morning everyone. You have our budget there and if there are no questions I've just got a couple of other things.

This is one of the busiest times of year for our office as we prepare for the tentative assessment roll. As your all probably aware it comes out May 1st it has to be filed on or before May 1st.

Grievance day this year as you know it's the fourth Tuesday and it would be May 24th for the majority of your towns unless your assessor works in more than one town, they can't be in two places at once so they adjusted that.

We have Board of Assessment review training scheduled for April 20th from 6-9 pm. It's going to be right here. We've invited all the new members, all the members of BAR's that have been reappointed this year as well as, any other members in towns that are doing a full reval as per their cyclical plan, their actual project. If anybody else wants to come we won't turn them away, we've always got room. So far we've got about 15 scheduled for this year. Just a reminder, that I know a lot of towns are having trouble finding Board of Assessment Review members. If your town normally has three you need a quorum so two, if your town normally has five you would need at least three people on grievance day. There is the option of going to a county board of assessment review but nobody seems to be too thrilled with that so that's something we like to try and avoid. Mike Diskin is happy about it, he wants to try it. Other than that, I'm all set.

MERRIHEW: Can you remind me of my BAR members, what is the criteria? Say they took it three years ago, when do they have to have it?

WAINWRIGHT: Five years.

MERRIHEW: Okay.

WAINWRIGHT: Right and they are all staggered terms so it depends on what year they started.

MERRIHEW: Thank you. I appreciate it. Questions for Dave? Thank you very much.

WAINWRIGHT: Thank you.

MERRIHEW: Mr. Diskin.

DISKIN: If they go to a county board assessment of review I think you are going to find a lot of candidate people who aren't going to want to be Chairman of the Board or Treasurer or Clerk of the Board, Judy is going to have to sit in on that. We've done a couple of them and they are not fun.

GILLILLAND: That Chairman would be, surviving Chairman of the Board.

DISKIN: That's right. Okay let's start with sales tax, sales tax as you can see is still surging pretty good. We are considerably ahead of last year at this time. We're almost a million, three ahead of last year at this point we're up about a little over 21% so we're doing very well with sales tax. Part of it obviously is gas I'm assuming because if we look at the next report which is occupancy we are actually down a little bit last month, not a tremendous amount \$17,000, but it's not a huge, there's not a big growth in occupancy last month. We're getting a lot of money this month. March is the second busiest month for us with occupancy the reason being that in March everybody reports, the annual people, the quarterly people and the monthly people. The annual reports all come in March so we get a lot of reports in March and that's one of our biggest months other than September which is a lot of August reports its one of the busiest months for occupancy is in August and we get that money in September but so far, this month what we've seen coming in in March is going to be at least as much, if not more than last years. We're doing well in tourism as well and that obviously is the driver of sales tax because Essex County is the only county in the State of New York where hospitality is the number one sales tax.

MERRIHEW: The only one?

DISKIN: It's the only county in the state, it's the number one sales tax driven. If you look that up the money that we get from hospitality, we consider it hospitality it's not only hotel stays but food and beverages.

HUGHES: Does that include New York City, Kings County?

DISKIN: Everybody in New York State, we're the only one in the state that our #1, not that we get the most money but we are the #1 percentage of sales tax that comes from hospitality. Well, most of them it's obviously a little less but we're the only one in the State that gets their sales tax most from hospitality so it's a very important sales tax and you can see that even with the gas prices the way they are our sales tax, as long as we continue to have good occupancy, we're going to – we saw that when we had the dip during Covid how our sales tax went down and that's primarily from people not coming to the county. So I covered those two and I have my expenses and revenue for you there unless somebody has some questions I have a couple other things I want to go over.

MERRIHEW: Questions for Michael?

GILLILLAND: I guess the bill is in legislature right now to suspend the gas tax will that have any effect on us?

DISKIN: We're not a huge provider of sales tax, we don't get a tremendous amount of sales tax from gas. As most of you know to travel you head to Plattsburgh or you go to Glens Falls and

you fill up because it's cheaper in Glens Falls most of the time although you'd be surprised you go to Glens Falls these days I can buy gas five cents cheaper in Ticonderoga than I can in Glens Falls right now. I'm not sure why that is but normally gas is cheaper in other towns and if you're traveling to go shopping which a lot of us do either to Warren County or Clinton County you're buying gas there as well but it will affect us in some other way if they cap that amount that we can do with sales tax or they reduce the amount. I think what they are talking about is taking away the state portion of it, not the county portion if I understand that correctly, counties to decide whether they can opt into that but my understanding is they are looking into the 4% of the state so it wouldn't necessarily effect our sales tax.

So if there are no questions I do have one resolution and I gave you the information on the Motor fuel, let me give you quickly Essex County and I sent this out to everyone last week, I got this from NYSAC, Essex County was motor fuel sales tax last year was up 41% in our sales. It's about average. The average for the State is around 37% and we were up a little over 41% in motor fuel and that's in a year when the motor fuel prices were starting to go up but not like they are today so you can see that part of that is when people are driving here. As we talked about in the past with tourism, people are starting to drive here rather than go other places that we see some of that.

Okay I do have one resolution and this one we've been doing for a couple years now and that's to approve us changing our hours beginning May 1st and ending on September 2nd rather than the end of August, make it end of the week rather than stopping in the middle of the week those hours change from 8 to 4 p.m. and we've found it's been pretty successful the last couple of years because people like to get in and get their things done early. The State law or County law does allow us to change our hours on our own in July and August but we need approval from the board to do from May to June so that's why I'm asking for a resolution.

MERRIHEW: Thank you very much.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING TO CHANGE THE HOURS IN THE OFFICE OF THE ESSEX COUNTY TREASURER TO BE OPEN FROM 8:00 A.M. TO 4:00 P.M. BEGINNING MAY 1, 2022 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2, 2022. DeZalia, Hughes

MERRIHEW: Comments, questions on the resolution? Being none, all those in favor, opposed – motion carries. Questions, comments while Michael is available?

HUGHES: Does the motor fuel include diesel?

DISKIN: Yes. All motor fuels. It doesn't include home heating fuels but it includes all kinds of motor fuels.

HUGHES: Thank you.

MERRIHEW: Questions, being none. Thank you very much.

DISKIN: Thank you.

MERRIHEW: Mr. Palmer.

PALMER: I did put on your desk for some resolutions. Sheriff Reynolds had mentioned to you that the Elizabethtown Community Hospital was going to end their nursing contract because they can't get enough people either. It was scheduled to end on March 31st, he went to them and

asked them if they would extend it until at least June 30th to give him an opportunity to try and hire somebody or find another contractor, one or the other so I'm asking for a resolution to extend the nursing agreement contract with Elizabethtown Community Hospital for jail nursing services at the same terms and conditions as the expiring contract and it be extended until June 30, 2022.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY CHAIRMAN OR COUNTY MANAGER TO EXECUTE A CONTRACT EXTENSION WITH ELIZABETHTOWN COMMUNITY HOSPITAL FOR JAIL NURSING SERVICES AT THE SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT THROUGH JUNE 30, 2022. Tyler, Hughes

MERRIHEW: Questions on the motion? Being none, all those in favor, opposed – motion carries. Thank you.

PALMER: I also provided you a list of vehicles that we bid out and of course, unfortunately all of them we ended up having to pay more than what we budgeted. 2020 we didn't buy any vehicles, 2021 we ordered a number of vehicles through the fleet management program and we're not able to get any of them, they cancelled all of the fleet orders both out of Dodge and Chevy for that matter, all of them have stopped doing fleet. Fleet pricing is so much lower that the car manufactures are just saying we don't have enough chips we're not going to put them in fleet vehicles because it doesn't pay enough so those are not available. The ones you see on the list; the ones I'm asking for is permission to award these bids. We had two bids from Adirondack Auto and Huttig Nissan were the two that bid on these what is essentially nine vehicles. The \$12,000 on the two DPW that we ran over, Jim talked to you this morning about at the DPW meeting, he's going to cover that cost out of his, he has an equipment reserve account so he has the ability to go back and cover those expenses. The rest of them I will need to take out of either existing funds or contingent account or unreserved, unallocated fund balance but we are at the point where we are running pretty low on vehicles and maintenance to keep some of them going, are getting more expensive so I'm asking permission to award these and to cover the costs, the additional costs which if you removed Jim's is \$37,000, and I would, like I said take that out of either contingent account or unreserved depending on which department needs it. Some of the departments may have some additional funds within their budget that we can leverage but if not, I would need permission to do that.

MERRIHEW: So, for this specific motion, \$37,000.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PURCHASING AGENT TO AWARD BIDS FOR VARIOUS VEHICLES IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF DPW, EMERGENCY SERVICES, HEALTH & SAFETY, DSS, PUBLIC HEALTH AND OFFICE FOR THE AGING AND FURTHER AUTHORIZING ANY ADDITIONAL COST ASSOCIATED WITH SUCH BIDS TO BE PAID FROM EXISTING FUNDS, CONTINGENCY ACCOUNT, OR UNALLOCATED, UNRESERVED FUND BALANCE. McNALLY, DeZalia

MERRIHEW: Questions, comments?

HUGHES: Are we replacing vehicles in the fleet or adding to?

PALMER: These are all replacement vehicles.

HUGHES: Is there any money to be received in selling the vehicles we are replacing?

PALMER: Typically what happens is we rotate the vehicles, what happens is we get about 170,000 or 180,000 miles, there's really no trade in value so then we just rotate them, you see them running around the buildings and grounds that's typically what we do with those vehicles.

MONTY: Do other departments where we are purchasing vehicles for them, do they have a capital reserve for purchasing?

PALMER: We don't on most of them. DSS, other than DPW, DSS is probably the largest purchaser of cars and the majority of those are covered by the State so you know, depending on the category and whichever particular service it's being used you get anywhere from 60% to 75% reimbursement so we have never set up a reserve in that because we've always, the State actually will tell you that, will tell them that once you purchase a vehicle and it reaches a certain amount of miles that you can do whatever you want with it, the State doesn't say we have to have it back because of our money or anything so, no we don't do it in those accounts. You know, it maybe something in Emergency Services now that we've got some additional vehicles in there that they didn't have before you may want to look at a reserve in those accounts but for most of them we don't purchase a lot of them. Aging we try to keep up with the nutrition vans because they put a lot of miles on them but the rest of them, a typical vehicle for us will get used six or seven years.

MONTY: Thank you.

McNALLY: Are all those vehicles ready to be picked up?

PALMER: I think Jim's has got to be ordered right?

DOUGAN: They said it was going to be 60 days.

PALMER: Yes, but the majority of these ones are off the lot, they are available off the lot again, that's why we are paying the additional price because we can't get fleet pricing.

MERRIHEW: Further questions on the motion? Being none, all those in favor, opposed – motion carries.

PALMER: The third one I had on for you was a resolution authorizing a MOU with the CSEA regarding, the CSEA has what's called a peer training program and they propose to provide at no cost to the county, a train the trainer where we send a couple people, Seth would be one and then the CSEA requires that it be at least one other CSEA employee, they go to the training, the CSEA covers the cost of the training, the motel stay, the food, those things and then once those people receive the training they can come back and train our people. Instead of hiring, we used to hire that contracted firm to come in and do some of the training, supposedly if we get certified through this program we would be able to do it without having to hire somebody to do it. Again, it's not something that costs us it's something that CSEA wants done just to protect the membership as part of their, and it's not the Local Unit it is the whole CSEA unit that's paying for this so we're asking for permission to sign an MOU with the CSEA regarding the peer to peer training program.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY CHAIRMAN OR COUNTY MANAGER TO EXECUTE AN MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) WITH THE CSEA PEER TRAINING PROGRAM WITH NO COST TO THE COUNTY. Hughes, Tyler

MERRIHEW: On the motion?

MONTY: Is there going to be a vetting process on who gets to do this? If it's out of a department, does the department head get to say whether it's – you know maybe a position that they can't afford to have somebody away? I know with Corrections if you wanted to be a trainer, they reviewed their time and attendance, they did a lot of different other things to make sure that the person was –

PALMER: Obviously I want Seth to go I mean, that's his responsibility I want him there for that.

MONTY: Absolutely.

PALMER: The other person is supposed to be picked by the union and then we provide the time off for the trainee.

MONTY: Right and that's understandable but I'm just hoping that –

PALMER: I guess I don't know the name the CSEA has in mind.

MONTY: I'm just playing devil's advocate because I know sometimes people try to take advantage of situations.

MERRIHEW: Further questions on the motion? Being none, all those in favor, opposed – carries also.

PALMER: And the last one I have and I didn't have in your packet but we need a resolution again, this is a standard one we do every year with North Country Workforce Investment Board, it just provides that the Chairman of the Board can enter into that agreement with the Workforce Investment Board.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY CHAIRMAN OR COUNTY MANAGER TO EXECUTE AN AGREEMENT WITH THE NORTH COUNTRY WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD AND TO PROVIDE REQUIRED ONE-STOP OPERATOR FIREWALL AGREEMENT FOR THE PERIOD JULY 1, 2021 – JUNE 30, 2025. DeZalia, Tyler

MERRIHEW: Questions, comments? All those in favor, opposed – motion carries. Thank you.

PALMER: That's all I had.

MERRIHEW: Further questions while he is available on any topic you can think of? So we'll move next on the agenda, Mr. Keegan is with us today from North Country Community College.

KEEGAN: Good morning everyone, nice to see you. Happy Spring. As always, I want to thank you for your ongoing support for our students and our college and our mission, we are really grateful for it. I want to give you a few updates. We are on spring break so students are just past their mid-terms and I think a break is probably well deserved. When we will come back, we will have two months until the end of the semester and we will be doing a face to face commencement and I know that some of you received invites to that so if you can join us that would be wonderful. I know that there are some new supervisors that we've been in contact with via email and I'm looking forward to the opportunity to get some time with you and see how the college can better

serve your constituents particularly now our ability to meet face to face is reopening up.

A couple of highlights I wanted to mention to you, some weeks it feels like we get a lot of good news they are few and far between but last week was one of those. We received a reaffirmation of our accreditation from the Middle States Council and Higher Education, that's our accrediting body. We got an eight-year accreditation which is just an incredible testimony to the working faculty and staff over these last several years and it puts us in good standing moving forward and it will also us to continue to receive Title III funds, Pell funding which is it's great, both a sigh of relief and an exclamation of joy so that was really wonderful news.

We also received the same day, that we had been the recipient of a million dollar grant to upgrade our nursing labs. Mr. Gilliland, thank you for your letter of support. Shaun and his counterpart Don Dabiew wrote a letter to Representative Stefanik's office in support of that, it's to upgrade the nursing labs in all three campuses' to really provide our nurses with state of the art technically to be able to serve the patients and families in the region. We know we've got huge deficits there and we're just mentioning that. So that was wonderful news and we'll be working on what that looks like in practice going forward.

And Mr. Gilliland also supported a letter to EMS to make sure that we were able to a course sponsorship application, we were having problems getting that I think I reported that last time. We received that and are in the process of filling that out which will allow us to deliver EMS classes assuming that we are approved and right now we are in negotiations with some others about getting on board for the fall regardless of whether or not we have core sponsorship and then Mr. DeLoria I got your email I was copied on it, around the waste water operator that has been moved, it's approval stage at the DEC so we are expecting we will have the basic water operator training, we're shooting for the start in the fall so those folks may not need to travel to central New York we will keep you in the loop as we know more about that.

DELORIA: Thank you.

KEEGAN: And just a couple of other items, you may have seen our Women's Basketball Team earned a third straight trip to the national championships for the National Junior Conference of Athletics, they placed fifth overall in the nation which is a real feat for a small community college placing above its weight so that was really wonderful and that's it, that's my report. I'm happy to take any questions.

MERRIHEW: Thank you very much Joe.

TYLER: I would like to offer a resolution of congratulations for his accreditation to the school getting that accreditation.

RESOLUTION OF CONGRATULATIONS TO NORTH COUNTRY COMMUNITY COLLEGE ON RECEIVING AN EIGHT (8) YEAR ACCREDITATION FROM MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION. Tyler, unanimous

MERRIHEW: Thank you very much on that and a shout out also I would send out my congratulations to both Shaun and your University those are three big deals right there that sort of blends out to our EMS program and it's just very tremendous.

KEEGAN: Thank you.

MERRIHEW: Comments or questions?

HUGHES: Can you talk a little bit about how you are going to spend the million dollars that you receive for the nursing program, is that being structured? I know buildings are nice but I know interior there's opportunities.

KEEGAN: Yes, that's a good question. So the original application that we put in was for \$1.8 million, we had to dial it back to \$975,000 actually and Representative Stefanik advanced it put a million into it and Senator Gillibrand and Schumer approved it so we were really grateful but when we dialed it back we had to limit to what we were doing in the structural upgrades and putting more emphasis on the technology so each campus has, Ticonderoga campus is a newer campus there's less infrastructure we actually did a scoping study in advance so we know from where the numbers are the expenses to bring those buildings up would eat up that entire million and there's about \$700,000 in equipment, SIM – simulation labs to bring that up to speed so if we were to bring everything on board we would need that \$1.8 million. Earmarks just opened up so we will be applying for those as well and Shaun, we may be asking for another letter of support. Does that answer your question?

HUGHES: Yeah it does, thank you very much.

MONTY: Joe I want to thank you since you've come on board there seems to be a lot better connection between the Essex County Board of Supervisors and North Country Community College and you've been great in offering help and information and it is a refreshing thing to see the advances that are being made and the contributions, your college is adding to the students here in Essex County and I just want to thank you for that.

KEEGAN: Thank you Jim.

MERRIHEW: Any further questions for Mr. Keegan? Being none, thank you very much. Further business to come before the committee? Being none, we stand adjourned. Thank you very much.

As there was no further discussion to come before this Finance Committee it was adjourned at 11:08 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Garrison, Clerk
Board of Supervisors