



Cumberland County

Board of Commissioners

Meeting Minutes - Final

142 Federal St
Portland, ME 04101

The Board meets on the second Monday of each month at 5:30pm in the Peter Feeney Room unless otherwise noted.

Monday, February 12, 2024

5:30 PM

**Feeney Conference Room, County
Courthouse, 205 Newbury St,
Portland ME 04101**

CALL TO ORDER

The Board of Commissioners met for their regularly scheduled meeting at the Cumberland County Courthouse in the Peter Feeney Conference Room, the meeting was called to Order by Chair James Cloutier at 5:32 pm.

ATTENDANCE

Present: 5 - Commissioner Neil Jamieson, Commissioner Susan Witonis, Vice Chair Stephen Gorden, Commissioner Patricia Smith, and Chair James Cloutier

County Staff:

Alex Kimball, Deputy Manager of Finance and Administration
Amy Jennings, Human Resources Director
Travis Kennedy, Director of Public Affairs
Theresa Grover, Finance Department Director
Katharine Cahoon, Admin and Special Projects

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Cloutier thanked Commissioner Jamieson for serving as previous Chair for Board of Commissioners and for his service for the past 12 years. Commissioner Jamieson thanked Chair Cloutier for the recognition and thanked the rest of the Board for their service as well.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

[CD 24-002](#) Approval of the minutes, January 8, 2024, meeting of the Board of Commissioners

A motion was made by Commissioner Witonis, seconded by Commissioner Gorden, that the Minutes Report be APPROVED. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Commissioner Jamieson, Commissioner Witonis, Vice Chair Gorden, Commissioner Smith, and Chair Cloutier

No: 0

INFORMATIONAL REPORT/PRESENTATIONS**[CD 24-003](#) 2023 Recruitment and Hiring Update, Informational Update on Correctional Officers Hiring**

Human Resources Director Amy Jennings gave an overview of the hiring and staffing statistics from July 2022 to present. She presented a handout which is attached to these minutes. She stated that Cumberland County received around 800 applications for Correctional Officers (COs) and of those applicants, total hired were 42 resulting in a current staffing level of negative two COs. Staffing has been impacted by terminations, internal transfers, medical leaves, and resignations. Human Resources has taken the following actions to expedite the hiring process, added a second Occupational Health Officers, increased benefits, increased base hiring rate for new hires, increased the hiring bonus, and added a bonus for lateral Brown Pin transfers. Other efforts included hiring a marketing firm for radio advertisements, advertising on Facebook, Google and YouTube. Hiring efforts are ongoing and continue to be adjusted. On average hiring process takes close to 100 days and depends on the background checks and polygraphs. A training academy was held in January and there were only five applicants. HR Director Jennings recently met with the Sheriff's office to determine how hiring can be expedited. She located an external organization that can complete background checks as an alternative to in house hiring. This alternative is being reviewed by Captain Ackerman. HR Director Jennings has some concerns about upcoming retirements and whether or not CO staffing levels will support Jail operations.

Commissioner Gorden asked how many COs are needed for adequate staffing levels. HR Director stated that she spoke with Major Tim Kortez and 20 COs are needed given that there are 10 upcoming retirements. 1 in 8 applicants pass the background check and 1 out of 2 applicants pass the polygraph or fail to complete the paperwork. Despite the large amount of applications received many applicants do not meet the minimum qualifications for a CO which is why the applicant pool drops. Applicants who progress to the interview stage sometimes fail to show or information is learned during the interview that would disqualifies them. Dispatch uses a different polygraph that could be used.

HR Director Jennings spoke about reasons for current employees resigning included a need for better work life balance. Commissioner Gorden asked what would happen if the Jail eliminated Over Time (OT), HR Director Jennings explained that with low staffing levels, without OT the Jail would not be able to remain open because there would not be enough coverage. Finance Director Theresa Grover stated OT is limited to 72 hours a week. She explained that the opportunity earn OT is a big draw for current COs.

Chair Cloutier commented on using Jail Staff to complete the background checks. HR Director Jennings explained that Captain Ackerman and Captain Foss complete background checks. Captain Ackerman is reviewing her current proposal to use an external organization. Chair Cloutier observed that the staffing issue seems to be a retention problem. He asked what level of education is required to be a CO, graduation from High School is required.

Commissioner Witonis asked if the background checks are too strict compared

to national agencies? Who sets the standards? HR Director Jennings stated that the standards are set by the State. Commissioner Witonis asked if Lieutenant Foss only does background checks or has additional responsibilities? Commissioner Witonis asked the Board of Commissioners if they could learn more about why the background checks are done in house. Chair Cloutier invited Jail Major Kortes to speak about the hiring process. Jail Major Kortes stated that his experience with preemployment checks is it requires quick turn around. The current hiring process takes a lot of time. He noted that Captain Smith and Sargent Demmers have discussed a plan of training additional staff to do background checks. Dedicating staff to streamline the hiring process would help keep background checks in house and completed quickly.

Commissioner Witonis and Chair Cloutier discussed the possibility of learning more about the Sheriff's Department hiring process in the in a workshop. Chair Cloutier wondered if the current process was the simplest process in place. Commissioner Jamieson expressed concern about retaining the current staff through the summer. Chair Cloutier asked Deputy Manager Kimball about working through a possible solution. Commissioner Smith asked if a workshop could be scheduled to look at the process. She asked why certain items are being allocated in the budget when there is an unsustainable hiring process. As a newer Commissioner, she would like to know more about the operations. Commissioner Gorden agreed and that Management should be included. Deputy Manager Kimball proposed Monday, February 26 as a date for a workshop. Possible dates for March workshop were discussed.

This Presentation was RECEIVED AND FILED.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Board Chair will limit comments to three (3) minutes per speaker.

There were no comments from the public.

CONSENT AGENDA

[24-009](#) Authorization for the County Manager to remit \$61,232.00 from Cumberland County to Portland Hockey LLC.

A motion was made by Commissioner Jamieson, seconded by Commissioner Witonis, that the Order be APPROVED. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Commissioner Jamieson, Commissioner Witonis, Vice Chair Gorden, Commissioner Smith, and Chair Cloutier

No: 0

ARPA BUSINESS

[24-010](#)

Authorization for the County Manager to award the bid of Office Furniture RFP and enter into a contract between Cumberland County and Creative Office Resources for the design, delivery and installation of new office furniture for the 27 Northport Building.

Commissioner Jamieson asked how many office stations would be constructed. Deputy Manager Kimball stated that there would be close to 60 stations, cabinetry, and conference room tables. He estimated the cost for construction is estimated to be close to \$1M. Commissioner Jamieson stated that COR was a good firm and has been impressed with their work.

A motion was made by Commissioner Witonis, seconded by Commissioner Jamieson, that the Order be APPROVED. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Commissioner Jamieson, Commissioner Witonis, Vice Chair Gorden, Commissioner Smith, and Chair Cloutier

No: 0

NEW BUSINESS

[24-011](#)

Authorization for the Jail Major to negotiate the services of the Cumberland County Jail with the Oxford County Jail to house ten (10) of their residents for a daily border rate of \$85 per day for one year beginning March 2024 to March 2025.

Deputy Manger Kimball introduced the agenda item stating that the News recently published a misleading article and the authorization is for the Jail Major to start negotiations. Jail Major Kortez spoke on the agenda item and stated that the contract would be for 10 inmates. The Oxford County jail is currently undergoing renovations. The inmates would be transported to the Cumberland County Jail and a dedicated staff person would be assigned Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for video arraignments. Given the current staffing levels and assigned Oxford County support staff, ten inmates would be a reasonable number of inmates to consider. Commissioner Gorden asked Major Kortez if the Oxford County Jail would consider assigning staff to the Cumberland County Jail, Major Kortez stated that it was brought up but it is expected staff will be unavailable given the number of prisoner transports. Commissioner Smith asked about coverage for hospital detail, Major Kortez stated that that is a component that would be negotiated.

A motion was made by Commissioner Witonis, seconded by Commissioner Gorden, that the Order be APPROVED. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 4 - Commissioner Jamieson, Commissioner Witonis, Vice Chair Gorden, and Chair Cloutier

No: 1 - Commissioner Smith

COMMENTS FROM THE COUNTY MANAGER

Deputy County Manager Kimball gave an update on County news. The new FMLA fund is anticipated to start being funded by employee wages, collected at 1% of employee wages starting on January 1, 2025. This would have an impact on the budget. The rules governing the fund are not in place but would have an effect on the Cumberland County Budget. The Regional Communications Dispatch Center Renovations are close to being completed. It is the first major ARPA project to be completed.

COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE STAFF

HR Director Jennings stated that the Employee Appreciation Awards Ceremony is being held at Broadway Bowl in South Portland.

Finance Director Grover stated that the Finance Department is wrapping up some IRS reporting deadlines. They are also completing a workers comp audit.

Director of Public Affairs Kennedy shared that he is working with Department Heads on legislative initiatives. He is also working with Sandra Warren on DEI initiatives. They have interviewed at least six different DEI firms. A small group is meeting a monthly on different initiatives.

Special Projects and Admin Katharine Cahoon stated that after the budget is finalized, she will work with finance to send out the tax warrant to the towns.

COMMENTS FROM THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Jamieson stated that he hoped that all of the high school students have success in all of their various sports.

Commissioner Gorden gave a brief update on Legislative issues and the Biennium budget. All of the Counties received flat funding for Jails despite increasing costs. The Governor's office and legislature has been lobbied for more funding. He also spoke about rural patrol, though it does not effect Cumberland County, other more rural Counties are impacted.

Chair Cloutier agreed and that it's a pretty common story. The pressure to fund programs due to the lack of State funding results in funding coming from property tax.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Deputy Manager Kimball stated that the Board of Commissioners would not return to the meeting and would adjourn immediately after concluding the Executive Session.

24-012

To enter into Executive Session under 1 M.R.S.A. §405(6)(A) for the further discussion and/or consideration of the compensation request of the Probate Judge.

A motion was made by Commissioner Witonis, seconded by Commissioner Jamieson, that the Executive Session be APPROVED. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Commissioner Jamieson, Commissioner Witonis, Vice Chair Gorden, Commissioner Smith, and Chair Cloutier

No: 0

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Gorden, that the Executive Session be CONCLUDED. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Commissioner Jamieson, Commissioner Witonis, Vice Chair Gorden, Commissioner Smith, and Chair Cloutier

No: 0

Next Meeting: March 11, 2024

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:10 pm.