

STRAFFORD COUNTY DELEGATION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING OF FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2026

1. Call Meeting to Order: Chairman Howland called the Public Meeting of the Strafford County Delegation's Executive Committee to order at 9:03 a.m., in the Cafeteria Conference Room, Lower Level of the Justice and Administration Building, 259 County Farm Road, Dover, NH, with public access via Zoom: Meeting ID: 811 6166 1825, Passcode: 570252; <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81161661825?pwd=8VieJtBBLFPQsVFQpQbZUX4W6qCeeu.1> Dial by your location: +1 305 224 1968 US; and thanked everyone for coming.
2. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag: Chairman Howland lead the Executive Committee in the pledge of allegiance to the flag, which was followed by a moment of silence.
3. Roll Call: Clerk Levesque called the roll, which showed the following members present:

PRESENT: Bailey, Horrigan, Howland, Kaczynski, LaMontagne, Levesque, Potenza, Schmidt, Southworth, and Wall (11 of 15)

ZOOM: DeRoy (dropped off before votes taken) and Harrington; both home alone and too ill to attend in person (2 of 15)

EXCUSED: Burnham (1 of 15)

ABSENT: Malone (1 of 15)

Also present were Representatives Bay and Miller, Commissioners Maglaras and Leavitt, County Attorney Emily Garod, Administrator Raymond Bower, Assistant Administrator Deirdra Brown, Finance Director Diane Legere, Register Catherine Berube, Sheriff Kathryn Mone, Chief Deputy Ray Parady, HOC Superintendent Chris Brackett, EMD Director Justin Bellen, IT Specialist Kelly Parker, and Executive Assistant/Deputy Treasurer Janet Hilber. Commissioner Feliciano attended via Zoom. Chairman Howland noted that some of the agenda items may be taken out of order to accommodate Subcommittee Chairs.

4. Report of Criminal Justice Subcommittee: The Criminal Justice Subcommittee met on January 28, 2026, and a report was provided to the Executive Committee with a few corrections noted and duly rectified. There were no substantive changes requested and the Subcommittee voted unanimously to accept the recommendations of the 2026 Commissioners' Proposed Budget. The following amounts were recommended by the Criminal Justice Subcommittee to the Executive Committee as follows:

Account #	Account Name	Amount
4110	County Attorney	3,289,179
4103	Child Advocacy Center (CAC)	264,497
4140	Sheriff	3,822,227
4141	Dispatch	1,607,818
4150	Medical Examiner	35,000
6100	Department of Corrections	17,879,802
6102	Community Corrections	991,968
6103	Supervised Visitation Program	26,750
6104	HOC Laundry	42,500
6105	Drug Court	675,308
6106	Transitional Housing Program	414,633
6134-6139	Jail Industry Programs	500,001
6140	Jail Industries Program	469,636
Total Criminal Justice Programs:		30,019,319

5. Report of General Government Subcommittee: Rep. Miller provided a brief review of the General Government Subcommittee which met on Friday, January 30, 2026, had a quorum, and accepted the recommendations of the 2026 Commissioners' Proposed Budget after an approved increase to the Registry of Deeds of \$23,238 to cover staff retirement transition by a vote of 5 to 1. Committee members discussed county funding provided to nonprofit organizations, including Meals on Wheels and Easter Seals. Concerns were raised regarding increasing fund balances held by certain nonprofits while continuing to request county funding. Some members questioned executive compensation levels and whether public funds were being used efficiently. Other members emphasized the value of these services to county residents and noted that financial reserves can provide operational stability. The discussion concluded with agreement that future budget cycles should include more detailed financial disclosures from nonprofits to support informed decision-making. Administrator Bower proposed a meeting to update the resource agency applications in a way that will provide the additional information now being requested.

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The following amounts were recommended by the General Government Subcommittee to the Executive Committee as follows:

<u>Account #</u>	<u>Account Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>
4100.000	Administration	638,964
4120.000	Registry of Deeds * with amendment	664,207
4160.000	J&A Maintenance	440,834
4190.000	Medicaid	11,119,564
5131.000	Court Jester Café	164,060
9100.401	Interest on Temporary Loan	3,789,286
9200.000	General and Health Insurance – J&A	5,266,008
9350.504	Meals on Wheels - Nutrition Program	42,000
9350.513	Easter Seals Homemakers Health Services	80,000
9350.515	Strafford County Conservation District	66,180
9350.516	Cooperative Extension	175,683
9350.517	COAST Transportation	100,778
9370.000	County Convention	12,000
9400.000	Employee Appreciation	9,000
9400.000	Tuition Assistance	0
9900.000	Contingency	5,000
9402.000	Sheriff's Contract Negotiations	20,000
9902.000	Capital Expenses – J&A & Deeds	28,600
9403, 9404, 9405	Union and Non-Union Wage Settlements	1,547,030
9500.000	General and Health Insurance – RRH	7,049,457
Total General Government:		31,218,651

6. Report of the Revenues, Capital Expenses Subcommittee: Rep. Southworth reviewed the report and recommendations of the Revenues & Capital Expenditures Subcommittee for the Executive Committee noting \$24,000 in additional revenue for the Registry of Deeds was approved. Rep. Southworth reported that the Subcommittee voted (7 to 1) in favor of recommending the amounts in the Commissioners' 2026 Proposed Budget, as stated below:

<u>Account #</u>	<u>Account Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>
01.9100.402	Interest on Bonded Debt-RRH:	542,399
01.9100.403	Principal on Bonded Debt-RRH:	1,032,158
01.9100.404	Interest on Bonded Debt-Courthouse:	242,676
01.9100.405	Principal on Bonded Debt -Courthouse:	637,842
01.9100.405	Bond Issue Fees:	0
Total Bonded Debt		<u>2,455,075</u>
01.9902.809	Capital Expenses: Registry of Deeds: \$28,600	Funded in Operating Budget
01.9902.000	Capital Expenses: J&A Building: \$0.00	Funded in Operating Budget
02.9902.000	Capital Expenses: Riverside Rest Home: \$10,050	Funded in Operating Budget
Total Anticipated REVENUES with Deeds Adjustment		<u>47,501,963</u>

The committee held detailed discussions regarding jail operations, particularly the fiscal and operational implications of housing Federal and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainees. Jail administration explained that staffing and operational costs do not decrease proportionally with reduced inmate populations due to classification, safety, and supervision requirements. Members discussed the facility's original design, staffing levels, and revenue generated through detainee housing agreements. It was noted that eliminating ICE detainees would significantly reduce revenue without producing equivalent cost savings, resulting in a net financial loss to the county.

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The committee reviewed overall revenue performance for the fiscal year, noting an approximate 2% increase in total revenue. While the bottom-line result appeared relatively even, members emphasized significant variability across individual revenue line items. Riverside-related general revenues showed notable fluctuation, including a substantial increase in jail revenue offset by a decrease in transportation revenue following the decision to contract transportation services to a private agency. Additional variances included a \$400,000 loss in Medicaid income, partially offset by a \$500,000 increase elsewhere, along with a \$300,000 increase in Medicaid Care Unit revenue followed by a subsequent \$200,000 decrease. Changes in federal tax-related revenues were also noted. Members expressed concern about the unusually high degree of volatility across accounts, attributing it to shifting grant availability and evolving funding formulas at higher levels of government. It was noted that such fluctuations are increasingly common and underscore the need to maintain balanced fiscal planning amid changing external factors.

Discussion also included questions regarding the ICE contract. A historical comparison from 2018 through 2025 was referenced, showing the average daily ICE detainee count and an increase in amount received for each detainee from approximately \$83 to \$150. Members noted that detainee counts alone may be misleading due to changes in average length of stay over time. A request was made to add an additional data column reflecting total annual ICE revenue received for each year from 2018 through 2025 to provide clearer financial context.

7. Report of the Riverside Rest Home Subcommittee: A significant portion of the discussion focused on the county nursing facility and long-term care costs. Rep. Potenza requested specific information be added to the RRH report from the information she read reportedly noting multi-year operating losses and expressed concern over the cumulative financial impact on county taxpayers. Operating losses over \$7 million in 2024, with decade-long cumulative losses. Concerns about taxpayer burden (\$426/resident/year). Some members emphasized the magnitude of losses over the past decade and questioned the long-term sustainability of the current operating model. Others stressed that the facility serves a critical population with high medical and care needs and operates as a no-frills institution providing necessary services and the losses are partially due to state and federal funding shifts. There was consensus that a dedicated future meeting would be required to fully evaluate financial structure, cost drivers, and potential alternatives. Delegation Chairman Howland suggested a full Delegation meeting in April.

Rep. Wall stated that the RRH Subcommittee supported all the department budget requests and voted unanimously (6 to 0) in favor of recommending the amounts in the Commissioners' 2026 Proposed Budget, as follows:

<u>Account #</u>	<u>Account Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>
5100	Administration	2,244,883
5102	MIS Department	1,042,531
5120	Purchasing	99,596
5130	Dietary	3,497,607
5140	Nursing	13,994,613
5141	Social Behavioral Unit	2,349,978
5145	Resident Services	439,993
5150	Maintenance	1,958,003
5160	Laundry & Sewing	687,991
5170	Housekeeping	1,618,572
5180	Physician & Pharmacy	803,160
5190	Infection Control/Clinical Recruitment	396,022
5191	Rehabilitation Services	753,665
5192	Activities	819,754
5193	Occupational Therapy	280,317
5195	Social Services	611,527
9500	Insurances – RRH	* 7,049,457
9902	Capital Expenses – RRH	10,050
9103	RRH Union Settlement	684,860
	Subtotal	39,342,579
	* Less Insurances (approved by General Government)	<u>7,049,457</u>
	Total Riverside Rest Home:	<u><u>32,293,122</u></u>

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8. Report of Policies & Procedures Subcommittee – Elected Officials’ Salaries: The subcommittee met on February 13, 2026 and it was noted inflation on that day was 3.1% and they voted 4 to 1 to a zero salary increase in year one and a 2% salary increase in year two. Elected Officials salaries have to be set for the upcoming two-year term prior to the filing period in early June so that those persons seeking to run for office are aware of the amount of the current salary of each elected position. The salaries are not based on the person in the position, but on the responsibilities of the position. Strafford County has traditionally adjusted the salaries of the Elected Officials’ positions for the next biennium by a percentage equal to the approximate amount of the increase for employees for the previous two years. The elected officials noted they were satisfied with the raises they received for the current term. Some members of the committee opposed any salary increases, advocating for zero raises for both years given the current financial strain on taxpayers.
9. Discuss and Nominate Candidate for the Strafford County Pease Development Authority (PDA) Representative Position: Steve Fournier, current PDA Rep. and present Town Business Manager of Newmarket, was recognized for his leadership and innovative approach to economic development. Members noted his strong track record in economic development initiatives and Mr. Fournier’s extensive connections throughout Seacoast communities, as well as his role as an effective regional advocate. Highlighted was Mr. Fournier’s involvement not only in developments in Newington, but also in significant projects related to the Portsmouth Harbor. Members expressed interest in gaining a better understanding of harbor-related economic activity and facilities. A field trip to the harbor was proposed for the Delegation when weather permits, which Mr. Fournier offered to help facilitate. Members responded positively to the idea, noting it would provide valuable firsthand insight into regional economic development efforts. Overall, the discussion reflected strong support for Mr. Fournier’s work and his continued engagement with the Seacoast region.

Rep. Schmidt motioned to nominate Steve Fournier for the Strafford County Pease Development Authority Representative Position and that this recommendation be presented to the Senators and Delegation at their meeting on March 4, 2026. The motion was seconded by Rep. Wall and passed by a majority through a roll call vote of 11 to 1 as follows:

YEAS: Harrington, Horrigan, Howard, Howland, Kaczynski, LaMontagne, Levesque, Potenza, Schmidt, Southworth, and Wall (11 of 12)

NAYS: Bailey (1 of 12)

10. Motion and Vote to Approve Recommendations for Full Delegation Meeting Wednesday, March 19, 2026, 7:00 p.m.: Committee members engaged in an extensive discussion regarding the county’s overall fiscal condition and budget outlook. Members acknowledged ongoing cost pressures and the structural challenges facing county finances, including rising operational costs and limited flexibility within the existing budget framework. Several members emphasized the importance of fiscal restraint while maintaining legally mandated and essential services. There was broad agreement that continued vigilance and frequent financial reporting will be necessary to manage risk and ensure long-term sustainability. A significant portion of the discussion focused on the county nursing facility and long-term care costs. Members reviewed multi-year operating losses and expressed concern over the cumulative financial impact on county taxpayers. Some members emphasized the magnitude of losses over the past decade and questioned the long-term sustainability of the current operating model. Others stressed that the facility serves a critical population with high medical and care needs and operates as a no-frills institution providing necessary services. There was consensus that a dedicated future meeting would be required to fully evaluate financial structure, cost drivers, and potential alternatives. Chairman Howland asked if there were any further questions or discussion regarding Subcommittee reports. There being no further discussion, Chairman Howland asked for a motion to accept and recommend the budget. Rep. Southworth motioned to approve the Commissioners’ Proposed 2026 Budget as amended with the total amount to be raised by taxation of \$46,029,128 and that this recommendation be presented to the full Delegation at their meeting on March 4, 2026. The motion was seconded by Rep. LaMontagne and passed by a majority through a roll call vote as follows:

YEAS: Horrigan, Howard, Howland, LaMontagne, Levesque, Schmidt, Southworth, and Wall (8 of 12)

NAYS: Bailey, Harrington, Kaczynski, and Potenza (4 of 12)

11. Motion to Accept the Minutes of December 5, 2025: Rep. Southworth motioned to accept the December 5, 2025, Executive Committee Meeting Minutes with the removal of Rep. Bailey as also attending since he was in the original roll call. The motion was seconded by Rep. Wall and accepted by unanimous by a roll call vote as follows:

YEAS: Bailey, Harrington, Horrigan, Howard, Howland, Kaczynski, LaMontagne, Levesque, Potenza, Schmidt, Southworth, and Wall (12 of 12)

NAYS: None

12. Other Business: Chairman Howland asked if there was any other business to discuss. The Committee discussed the proposed construction of a warming center on county-owned land, which had previously been approved by the Delegation. City managers conducted an RFP process with seven bidders and awarded the construction contract. The request before the committee was to authorize County Commissioners to execute the contracts on behalf of the municipalities for administrative efficiency. To allow this, a budget amendment of up to \$3.5 million in both revenue and expenses would be required, with no impact on property taxes. Members noted that similar revenue-neutral budget adjustments have been approved in the past. Several members expressed concern about the lack of written documentation detailing the contract terms, RFP results, and municipal agreements. It was agreed that additional information should be provided before any action is taken. An additional, properly noticed Executive Committee meeting was proposed to review the materials and consider the request prior to the next scheduled delegation meeting. Since there was not sufficient time to properly notice an Executive Committee meeting before the Delegation meeting, the request was withdrawn and the Commissioners will notify the City Mayors and Managers.

Chairman Howland thanked everyone for attending and noted that the meeting of the Full Delegation to approve the 2026 County Budget is scheduled for Wednesday, March 4, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room, with a snow date of March 11, 2026.

A motion was presented for the Executive Committee to enter a nonpublic session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II(c), due to the potential for discussions to negatively impact individuals. The stated purpose of the nonpublic session was to allow a limited discussion regarding county detainees. The Chair noted that the County Attorney had advised that the topic met the legal threshold for a nonpublic session due to its legal nature and the potential use of identifying information. Attendance during the nonpublic session would be limited to the Executive Committee Members, County Attorney, Superintendent of the Jail, the County Administrator, and the Chair of the County Commission. Minutes would be taken in accordance with RSA requirements and would reflect the discussion in general terms without specific details.

Rep. Southworth motioned to go into non-public session at 10:50 a.m. pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II(c), due to the potential for discussions to negatively impact individuals. The motion was seconded by Rep. Horrigan and accepted by unanimous by a roll call vote as follows:

YEAS: Bailey, Harrington, Horrigan, Howard, Howland, Kaczynski, LaMontagne, Levesque, Potenza, Schmidt, Southworth, and Wall (12 of 12)

NAYS: None

Rep. Harrington requested an update after the meeting since he would not be able to attend via Zoom.

Non-public session minutes: Two Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainees who were previously held at the Strafford County House of Corrections cases were discussed. No votes were taken and Rep. Southworth motioned to return to public session at 11:20 a.m. The motion was seconded by Rep. Howard and approved unanimously (11 to 0) by a voice vote.

13. Adjournment: Chairman Howland noted that with no further business, a motion to adjourn was in order. Rep. Schmidt motioned to adjourn the meeting at 11:22 a.m. The motion was seconded by Rep. Southworth and was accepted unanimous consent.

Respectfully submitted,

Cassandra Levesque

Cassandra Levesque, Clerk
Strafford County Delegation