

STRAFFORD COUNTY DELEGATION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING OF MAY 8, 2026

1. Call Meeting to Order: Chair Howland called the Public Meeting of the Strafford County Delegation's Executive Committee to order at 9:01 a.m. on Friday, May 8, 2026 in the Café Conference Room, Lower Level, of the William A. Grimes Justice and Administration Building, 259 County Farm Road, Dover, New Hampshire with public access available via Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89027331395?pwd=JB3q2etbqapK06qk1KsWJprOCDwb0x.1>; Meeting ID: 890 2733 1395, Passcode: 747288.
2. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag: Chair Howland lead the Executive Committee in the pledge of allegiance to the flag.
3. Roll Call: Delegation Clerk Levesque called the roll, which showed the following members present:

PRESENT: Bailey, Burnham, DeRoy, Harrington, Horrigan, Howland, Kaczynski, LaMontagne, Levesque, Potenza (arrived late), Schmidt, Southworth, and Wall (arrived late) (13 of 15)

ABSENT: Howard and Malone (2 of 15)

Also, present were: Commissioners Maglaras, Feliciano, and Leavitt, County Administrator Ray Bower, County Attorney Emily Garod, Register of Deeds Cathy Berube, Sheriff Kathryn Mone, Treasurer Pamela Arnold, Chief Deputy Ray Pardy, HOC Superintendent Chris Brackett, Finance Director Diane Legere, EMD Director Justin Bellen, IT Specialist Kelly Parker, Susan Rice, and Executive Assistant/Deputy Treasurer Janet Hilber.

4. Approve Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting of February 20, 2026: Rep. Schmidt motioned to approve the minutes of the February 20, 2026 Executive Committee Meeting, as written. The motion was seconded by Rep. Wall and it was approved unanimously 11-0 by a voice vote.
5. Approve 2nd Round of Tax Anticipation Note Borrowing of Up to \$16,000,000 for 2026 to Pay County Expenditures: Chair Howland recognized Treasurer Arnold who explained that this is an approval to borrow up to \$16,000,000 in anticipation of taxes, as per the approved budget. The funds in the County's Treasury would be insufficient to meet the County's obligations for the remainder of the year 2026 and she recommended that the Executive Committee authorize the Commissioners to borrow an additional \$16,000,000 in Tax Anticipation Notes (TANs) to meet County expenditures and obligations for the rest of 2026, with repayment by the end of December after receipt of tax payments from the cities and towns. The Commissioners had approved this request at their meeting May 8, 2026. Arbitrage laws state that the County may borrow only enough money at one time to meet its obligations for a six-month period. Therefore, the County borrows twice a year for tax anticipation notes. Taxes from the cities and towns are collected on or before December 17th of each year, as per New Hampshire State Statute. County Treasurer Arnold explained that the borrowing was a standard annual financial procedure necessary for cash flow management and was not directly related to the County's developing revenue concerns. Although one representative questioned whether the borrowing reflected revenue shortfalls, County officials clarified that this type of borrowing routinely occurs regardless of budget performance. Representative Southworth motioned to authorize the Commissioners to obtain Tax Anticipation Notes of up to \$16,000,000 to pay the County's obligations for the remainder of 2026. The motion was seconded by Representative Schmidt and was accepted by a majority of 10-1 on a roll call vote, as follows:

YEAS: Burnham, DeRoy, Harrington, Horrigan, Howland, Kaczynski, LaMontagne, Levesque, Schmidt, and Southworth, (10 of 11)

NAYS: Bailey (1 of 11)
6. Review and Approve First Quarter 2026 Budget Report: Chair Howland asked if there were any questions regarding the first quarter budget report which was sent via e-mail, as well as USPS, and posted on the County Website. County administration reported that although overall County expenditures remained generally on track for the first quarter, revenue projections were falling behind expectations. Officials explained that the most significant issue involved declining federal detention revenue, especially related to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainees. According to the Commissioners, inmate placements from federal agencies sharply declined beginning in March following public controversy and protests connected to the County's detention contracts. County leadership stated that ICE began transferring detainees to facilities outside New Hampshire, substantially reducing expected revenue streams. In addition to lower detainee counts, the County also experienced delayed Federal reimbursements, with approximately \$2 million in payments reportedly still outstanding. A lengthy and detailed discussion followed regarding overtime expenditures at the House of Corrections. Representatives expressed concern that the overtime budget had already consumed a substantial percentage of its annual allocation during the first quarter alone, raising fears that the County would face significant overruns later in the year.

The Superintendent of Corrections explained that the overtime spike was driven by multiple simultaneous factors, including staff medical absences, mandatory staffing requirements, correctional academy training schedules, and increased County inmate populations. Several correctional officers had been out due to surgeries, illnesses, injuries, and other health-related matters, while six officers attended mandatory certification academies during the first quarter, creating staffing shortages that required overtime coverage.

The Superintendent described the difficult operational environment inside the jail, explaining that the facility already operates at minimum staffing levels. He detailed the ongoing struggle to maintain safe coverage while complying with statutory requirements that mandate minimum officer presence within the facility. To reduce overtime costs, he explained that management had already implemented several mitigation strategies, including reducing overnight staffing where operationally feasible, adjusting supervisory schedules, and personally working altered hours to help cover staffing gaps without additional overtime expense. Despite those efforts, he acknowledged that the situation remained stressful and difficult to fully resolve.

Several representatives raised broader concerns about employee fatigue, burnout, and the long-term sustainability of relying heavily on overtime. Members noted that the County has struggled with overtime issues for many years and questioned whether the budgeting process itself fails to adequately account for predictable staffing shortages and mandatory training obligations. Some representatives argued that continued excessive overtime could ultimately expose the County to liability risks if exhausted staff members were involved in incidents or accidents. Others emphasized that while overtime may sometimes appear less expensive than hiring additional employees in the short term, it creates operational and retention problems over time.

The Superintendent and Commissioners also connected the County's growing inmate population to recent state bail reform legislation. Officials stated that inmate populations had increased by approximately 25% following changes to bail laws, which in turn increased food, medical, and operational costs. The Superintendent emphasized that many inmates enter the facility with severe untreated medical conditions, requiring the County to provide substantial healthcare services to avoid legal liability and ensure constitutional standards of care are met. He noted that untreated diabetes, chronic illnesses, and mental health conditions significantly increased operational pressures and healthcare expenditures.

The committee also discussed the County's Supervised Visitation Program, which had exceeded its budget due to the loss of expected Federal grant funding. County administration explained that the program was originally expected to receive a federal grant award, but repeated delays and uncertainty from federal agencies forced the County to continue temporarily funding the program internally. Officials ultimately decided to discontinue the service due to financial concerns. Representatives expressed concern for families who relied on supervised visitation to safely facilitate court-ordered parental access in contentious custody situations. County leadership acknowledged the value of the program but argued that responsibility for such services properly belongs to the courts and the Department of Children, Youth and Families rather than County taxpayers.

Additional financial discussions focused on miscellaneous revenue sources and future settlement funds. County officials informed the committee that the state had recently reached a major settlement related to opioid litigation, and Strafford County anticipated eventually receiving a portion of those funds. However, officials explained that the timing and amount of payments remained uncertain due to complicated formulas involving municipalities and County participation in the litigation. County administration also reviewed the County's receipt of escheated funds, which are assets from estates where no heirs are identified after a statutory period.

Chair Howland asked if there were any further questions or comments; there being none, Rep. Wall motioned to approve the First Quarter 2026 Budget. The motion was seconded by Rep. Horrigan, and was approved by a majority of 10-3 on a voice vote, as follows:

YEAS: Burnham, Horrigan, Howland, Kaczynski, LaMontagne, Levesque, Potenza, Schmidt, Southworth, and Wall
(10 of 13)

NAYS: Bailey, DeRoy, and Harrington (3 of 13)

7. Approve Distribution of Previously Approved Salary Schedules for the Union Contracts and Non-Union Agreements to the Appropriate Budgetary Line Item: Administrator Bower explained this request to transfer monies to fund employee wage increases as per union and non-union agreements with monies that have been included in the approved 2026 budget and distribute these funds to the appropriate line items. There is no change to the 2026 Budget bottom lines or the amount to be raised by taxation as the total amounts have been included in the budget already designated as line items in the Justice and Administration section and the Riverside Rest Home's section entitled "Union and Non-Union Wage Settlement Adjustments."

These amounts are equivalent to the amounts to be transferred to individual salary and associated line items (e.g., Accrued Benefits, Social Security, Retirement, Workers Compensation and Unemployment). Rep. Southworth motioned to approve the distribution of the previously approved salary schedules for the Union Contracts and Non-Union Agreements to the appropriate budgetary line items as per the document entitled “Strafford County 2026 Line Item Transfers.” The motion was seconded by Rep. Schmidt and approved by a majority of 9-4 on a voice vote, as follows:

YEAS: DeRoy, Harrington, Horrigan, Howland, LaMontagne, Levesque, Schmidt, Southworth, and Wall (9 of 13)

NAYS: Bailey, Burnham, Kaczynski, and Potenza (4 of 13)

8. Any Other Business Which May Legally Come Before the Committee: An update on the closure of Hyder Hospice House included the County’s ongoing negotiations with Wentworth-Douglass Hospital regarding the future use of the facility. County officials explained that Hyder House had become financially unsustainable, operating at a loss of approximately \$3.2 million annually. Commissioners stated that changes in healthcare utilization patterns following COVID-19 dramatically reduced hospice occupancy rates and altered the economics of inpatient hospice care. Although Hyder House had historically been financially viable, County leadership said the post-pandemic healthcare environment made continued County operation impossible. Representatives questioned County officials about transparency surrounding the closure and negotiations with Wentworth-Douglass. Some members expressed frustration that delegation members had not been informed earlier about the discussions. Commissioners responded that Wentworth-Douglass specifically requested confidentiality during negotiations to avoid public controversy if the deal ultimately failed. Officials indicated that Wentworth-Douglass intended to continue hospice-related operations at the site, preserving many aspects of the facility’s original purpose. County leaders also noted that maintaining hospice use helped honor donor expectations, as many community members originally contributed substantial funds specifically to support hospice services at Hyder House. Some members questioned why Hyder had not be separated from Riverside in the operating budget which was explained that prior delegation members from years ago voted to merge the two budgets.

Commissioners provided an update on the progress of the County warming center project, reporting that permits had been secured through the City of Dover and that demolition of the old “piggery” building was expected to begin within the week. Construction contracts with Hutter Construction had been finalized, and County officials stated the project remains on or under budget. Commissioner Maglaras also noted ongoing coordination meetings with Dover city officials regarding future payment arrangements and project administration. While the warming center traditionally opens on November 15, officials explained that supply chain delays may push the projected opening date to approximately December 15. Commissioners emphasized they are actively working with contractors to accelerate the timeline and are exploring additional assistance and resources to address material shortages and keep construction moving forward.

Delegation members raised several questions regarding transparency, grant funding, and project oversight. Commissioners clarified that the project is not being conducted in secret, noting that city councils have publicly voted on the initiative and that discussions and agreements are subject to New Hampshire Right-to-Know laws. Officials further explained that two federal grant applications have been submitted, including requests connected to Senator Shaheen’s office, and that if grant funding is awarded, municipal financial contributions may no longer be necessary or could potentially be returned. Additional discussion focused on construction oversight and project engineering. One representative strongly encouraged the County to seek independent outside review of project plans and specifications to avoid unnecessary costs and over-engineering. Commissioners responded that the project had undergone a competitive bid process and stated that several design and construction adjustments had already been made to reduce expenses and improve the building’s interior layout.

9. Adjournment: Chair Howland recognized Rep. Harrington who motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:34 a.m. The motion was seconded by Rep. Schmidt and was accepted by a majority voice vote with one nay vote by Representative Kaczynski.

Respectfully submitted,

Cassandra Levesque

Cassandra Levesque, Clerk
Strafford County Delegation