

COMMISSIONERS' WORKSHOP ON AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN FUNDING

SEPTEMBER 1, 2021

YORK,ss

At a workshop of the County Commissioners of the County of York, begun and holden at the York County Government Building in Alfred, within and for the County of York, being held on Wednesday, September 1, 2021 A. D. at 3:00 P. M.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Richard R. Dutremble
Richard Clark
Robert Andrews
Allen Sicard
Donna Ring (via ZOOM)

County Manager Gregory Zinser and Deputy County Manager Linda Corliss were present at the workshop.

YOU ARE INVITED TO RISE AND SALUTE THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES

County Manager Zinser explained that the Commissioners would be reviewing and discussing outside requests at this workshop; all of which appear on the County's website. He continued that the themes that came forward from requests were: training for all hazards, mental and behavioral health including detox, housing, communication, transportation and the purchase of a dredge from some of the coastal cities and towns.

County Manager Zinser continued that regional partners would be a consideration in proceeding with many of these projects. Another consideration is where, geographically, could these projects be placed and the jail land seems to be a viable answer. He reminded the Commissioners that there have been discussions only at this point with nothing approved as of yet.

The County Manager distributed a map to the Commissioners and explained that he is proposing to develop 75 acres of the jail land. One of the proposals is for 35-40 units of housing for those leaving incarceration, substance misuse treatment and others who are facing housing insecurity. This project would be done in conjunction with Sanford Housing Authority.

Another proposal, explained County Manager Zinser, is for \$5 million to build a larger treatment center and open this facility up to the community at large. Currently, Layman Way Recovery

Center is a diversion program with the District Attorney's Office. He went on to say that he is proposing to convert the current Recovery Center into a detox center. This would be a step-based approach where law enforcement could drop the individual off to detox and then they could possibly get into long term recovery and then housing. Commissioner Sicard stated that there is a cost of \$7 million attached to this project and he wonders if Sanford Housing Authority was aware of whether or not there are any State or Federal funds available.

Diane Gerry, Director of Sanford Housing Authority addressed the Board and stated there is a grant available for the housing program. She explained that this would be a "county ask of in-kind of the land". We would have to take a look at different types of grants for the sewer and water. Commissioner Sicard asked who would own the buildings. Ms. Gerry replied that Sanford Housing Authority would and the land stays with the County.

Commissioner Clark asked how many housing units would be built? Diane Gerry replied that 35-40 would be enough to handle people and that this housing could also be transitional. We could also supply them with a voucher when they are ready to move on. She continued that typically the person needs supportive housing while they are getting on-going treatment for about two years. Hopefully, during this time, they would also be getting back to work.

Commissioner Dutremble asked then what would the \$7 million be used for? The County Manager explained that would be more for the utilities (sewer and water, etc.). Commissioner Clark asked who would be responsible for the upkeep that would need to be done to the buildings in 25 or 30 years. Diane Gerry replied that Sanford Housing Authority would do this. Commissioner Sicard commented that you are talking about 35 to 40 units with no mass transit currently available. Diane Gerry replied that they would work with York County Community Action to see how we would make transportation possible. There will also be a grant possible for this item, too. Commissioner Clark asked if the number of children that might be included in these houses has been considered as they will have an effect on local schools. Diane Gerry replied that typically when one comes out of treatment, they usually do not have their children with them. But, there will be a plan for them to reunite and we will have childcare options for them. This idea is all very preliminary.

County Manager Zinser added that the current recovery center is an old building but is really set up ideally for a detox center. We would like to build a 35-40 bed recovery center and our preliminary code check does allow us to build these items.

Commissioner Dutremble stated that if each of these projects is approved, could you group them together to try to get a better bid? County Manager Zinser stated that is a good point. He reminded the Commissioners that we do not have firm estimates. Ultimately, the first step would be for the Commissioners to approve engineering and planning.

Commissioner Clark asked if the recovery center is expanded to 35 to 40 beds, would we be subjected to an entirely different regime with the State and Federal Governments? Diane Gerry replied that as long as we do not accept Maine Care, we would be fine. Commissioner Clark stated that while he supports the recovery center, his concern is that at present, the County is carrying all the cost of this project. The State has not supported this but it would be nice to reach a point where we are eligible for funding from other sources as opposed to entirely the tax payers of York County.

County Manager Zinser replied that we will certainly have that conversation. He added the other issue is we will have to get licensing from the Town of Alfred.

Commissioner Sicard commented that he echoes Commissioner Clark's comments about funding and that he would certainly like to see the State involved since they have the money.

County Manager Zinser stated that he can reach out to the Governor's office to see if they would give us money similar to the MAT program at the jail.

Commissioner Clark asked if we were to build a new center, could we do it without detox? Could the detox take place off-site? County Manager Zinser replied that it could but there is a shortage of detox facilities in Maine, particularly in York County.

County Manager Zinser stated that the next proposal is for a regional training facility on 17 acres of the (jail) land. He continued that the Commissioners have heard from several town managers, police and fire chiefs that there is a need for a regional training center. The County Manager added that there is a staffing difficulty in these fields that the pandemic exasperated. We are proposing creating a jobs program in conjunction with York County Community College and Sanford Vo-Tech. This facility could also have police, paramedic and firefighter simulator labs. This is lacking in the State of Maine as well.

A regional career development and training center would have positive impacts for recruitment and retention for new firefighters and police, stated the County Manager. This center is highly desired by all of our Police and Fire Chiefs and EMS personnel for local training. The County has already been working on this and are hiring fire instructors.

Chief Schools, President of York County Fire Chiefs' Association spoke to voice support and remind the Commissioners of the support they have received from York County Fire Chiefs. This center would alleviate us having to send our firefighters an hour or more away for training and provide a place for firefighters and police officers to learn to drive the emergency vehicles as well as learn how to be an EMT. Chief Schools continued that they support this initiative for the betterment of the workforce as well as the betterment of working together as a county.

Chief Hooper stated that this center would allow us to leverage other assets around the State. He added that every York County community already has a relationship with the community college system.

Kate Grant, Director of Workforce Development at York County Community College in Wells addressed the Board and stated that the EMS program at York County Community College was recently developed. There is a high need for EMS training and continued professional development for retention. A space dedicated for "hands on" training is needed.

Professor Willis who has taught at SMCC for 39 years spoke in support of the training center. He stated that he has seen declining numbers in these fields and that this proposal is a collaboration and a ray of hope for the future of emergency services.

Wells Police Chief and York County Chief's Association President, Jo-Ann Putnam addressed the Board and thanked the Commissioners for their consideration of the training facility. She added

that this has been talked about for years. It would save towns money as they must send their employees away for training currently. She continued that this center would allow all to train together on the same platform. The York County District One Chiefs support this project.

Chief Hooper reminded all how EMA brought all of York County together during the pandemic and that this training center will keep that initiative moving. It has been a discussion for generations to plan and prepare in a unified manner in York County.

Commissioner Sicard asked that since there is an amount of \$6.5 million earmarked for this project, has anyone explored any educational grants that might be available? Also, how would the operational costs be covered? Would agencies pay an annual fee? Chief Hooper replied those are questions for another meeting. We would need to figure out how to fund this center perhaps by charging a user fee and/or tuition.

Commissioner Sicard replied that he would want this firmed up before he would okay \$6.5 million to build it. Otherwise, it comes back to us as a line item deficit. He added that he is trying to avoid approving anything that is going to fall down operationally.

Chief Hooper again stated that he feels we would be better positioned to receive grant money if we have this facility.

Chief LaMontagne of the Old Orchard Beach Fire Department addressed the Board and stated that we cannot afford to not have this facility. We are falling behind, he stated. Current budgets have enough funds to send people to training. The issue is that we have difficulties finding classes and facilities.

Commissioner Clark asked if there are any similar training facilities nearby? Chief Hooper replied there is one in Hollis that is 40 years old and has to be modified before we can do any type of training. Also, it is firefighter training only. He continued that there is a new facility in Yarmouth and there is a facility in Farmington.

Commissioner Sicard asked how they fund the center in Yarmouth? Chief Hooper replied that he was not sure but believed there is a Mid-Coast Area of Firefighters that funds it.

Chief LaMontagne added that mental health and substance abuse is also a huge issue and response to those calls is critical. He added that public safety jobs have changed.

Chief O'Brien, Fire Chief in Kittery, addressed the Board and stated that he has 46 years of experience in fire service. He stated that York County is growing and it is important to have one facility to be able to train people to become highly skilled to man their departments.

County Manager Zinser stated that he has been in discussions with Sanford Sewer District regarding bringing a sewer line to the jail. The jail tanks and pumps are aging and will need to be replaced. He added that he does not have an exact cost of this project but has an estimate of \$6.5 million. Also, there is a chance of receiving a \$1 million from the Federal Government. The County Manager reminded the Commissioners that Alfred is the geographical center of York County.

County Manager Zinser stated that our communications tower in Acton is failing and there are no funds to replace it. This tower carries County fire. There is not only the cost of the tower, stated County Manager Zinser, but also the cost of the repeater and back up dispatch here at the County. He added that these are allowable uses of the ARPA money.

Chief Hooper informed the Commissioners that York County has twelve different dispatch agencies. If one goes down, they could move their operations to our backup site. The Acton tower site is very vital for fire services.

Commissioner Clark asked if there is an opportunity to put another tower at the same location as the cost is not cheap to build a new one.

EMA Director Art Cleaves replied that this is not possible for these frequencies.

Commissioner Sicard asked if there was a cost estimate for the replacement of the Acton tower.

County Manager Zinser replied, \$1.4 to \$1.5 million.

Commissioner Andrews asked if anyone had looked into a lease from cellular towers?

County Manager Zinser replied that none have expressed interest and that the property owner does not want cellular.

Commissioner Clark asked if we owned the land. County Manager Zinser replied that we do not and that at one time we had a lease but that has expired. The land owner has expressed interest in selling the land.

Commissioner Dutremble closed the Workshop.