

COMMISSIONERS MEETING

April 17, 2024

YORK,ss

At a regular meeting 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, April 17, 2024, A. D. at 4:30 P. M.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Richard R. Dutremble
Richard Clark
Robert Andrews
Justin Chenette
Donna Ring

Deputy Manager Linda Corliss was present at the meeting.

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

04-17-2024

ITEM

1 PUBLIC COMMENT(S) ON ANY ITEM(S)

None

2 TO CONTINUE AND FINALIZE 'FY 25 BUDGET REVIEW

a. To review and discuss requested documentation regarding salary increase requests for Probate Department

Register of Probate Lovejoy and Deputy Register of Probate Casey Hartford and Probate Judge Houde approached the Board.

Register of Probate Lovejoy explained that each county does probate court differently. The only thing we are uniform in is the forms, she stated.

Judge Houde read a supplemental letter and stated that he loves doing his job and appreciates the willingness to address his request. He explained that the users of court are the State's most vulnerable population. We also handle adoptions, stepparents, grandparents, estates of seniors, adults seeking name changes as well as adult guardianships. Things must be done in a timely manner and it is a very complex job. Judge Houde added that York County and Cumberland County are different as we here in York County border other states. The numbers are deceptive when comparing filings.

Commissioner Chenette stated that Judge Houde is the second highest Probate Judge in the State with \$70,000. Cumberland County's Probate Judge's salary is \$75,000.

There is a similar amount of time and Commissioner Chenette commented that he understands it doesn't mean the workload is comparable.

You would be making considerable more if you are granted the wage you are requesting, stated Commissioner Chenette to Judge Houde.

Judge Houde replied that York and Cumberland are different. The actual time for work is a better metric than looking at caseloads, stated Judge Houde. The reality is he can't go into court without reading files and that he has to prepare Orders at the end of the day. Judge Houde continued that district and superior court judges are a good point of reference. Judge Houde stated that he will respect whatever decision you (Commissioners) make.

Commissioner Chenette asked if the part time structure of your role is sufficient? It seems like you're suggesting it should be a full-time responsibility.

Judge Houde responded that he does not think it is a full-time job now but pretty close. He added that he holds court 15-17 days per month right now.

Judge Houde explained that the hours he puts in the Probate court makes it pretty much impossible for him to have a practice as the work has to get done. He added that the hourly rate for court appointment (attorney) has doubled.

Commissioner Chenette asked Register of Probate Lovejoy what she is requesting? Register of Probate Lovejoy responded \$10,000 for herself and \$10,000 for Casey Hartford (her deputy register of Probate). She added that the way the budget sheets are set up, they don't show the actual salary for the actual fiscal rate. It is 6% according to what the County Manager has put in, explained Register of Probate Lovejoy. She added that she is more concerned about her deputy's salary.

Commissioner Chenette asked wouldn't there be a conversation with administration at budget time so you know what you are getting? Was there a communication breakdown between administration, finance and you. You are coming in and saying you have no idea. We have staff. How do we fix this going forward so that there is an open line of communication.

Register of Probate Lovejoy explained, when we get the budget from the County Manager, it says 4% across the Board. We only get the budget a week before you.

Register Lovejoy continued that it is not clear on the budget sheets what one is receiving. It is a communication issue, stated Register of Probate Lovejoy.

Commissioner Ring asked do you meet with the County Manager to discuss?

Register Lovejoy replied that we can if we want to. We did meet with the County Manager and Lori a couple of weeks ago.

Commissioner Ring asked if the Register of Probate met with H.R. to discuss a pay increase for the deputy?

Register of Probate responded, no, as it is in the budget.

Commissioner Ring stated that over time there have been equity increases. Is there a possibility that there could be an equity increase in your budget?

Register of Probate Lovejoy stated that there is no communication between departments. We don't see that until we get the budget.

Deputy County Manager Corliss explained that the County Manager would consult with me and have me go out and get pay rates for certain groups.

Commissioner Chenette asked as a path forward and for future reference, ahead of the budget and in these meetings did you bring up these issues with pay?

Register of Probate Lovejoy replied, no as we were told no increases would not be supported by the County Manager.

Commissioner Chenette questioned why the Register of Probate did not articulate that as we are now having a big public conversation as the correct avenue was not taken.

He continued that if he had an issue with his salary, he wouldn't let it fester. It puts us in an uncomfortable situation, continued Commissioner Chenette. It should have been addressed with the County Manager, Finance and H.R.

Register of Probate Lovejoy stated that they are not given the opportunity to do that.

Deputy Register of Probate Hartford explained that last budget year Register Lovejoy did try to do that.

Register of Probate Lovejoy added that the County Manager e-mailed her and said no salary increases will be supported.

Commissioner Dutremble replied that it doesn't matter what the County Manager tells you, you should fight for your budget.

He said to Register of Probate Lovejoy that in her 'FY22-23 budget her estimated salary was \$99,000 and last year \$110,000. We did increase your salary.

Commissioner Dutremble said to Register of Probate Lovejoy that he had asked her last year and she said, yes, she was satisfied with her budget.

Commissioner Ring stated that Register of Probate is fighting for her budget right now. If the County Manager told her there is no increase she has no other place to go but here. She did present her budget and it was different and now we are criticizing her for doing so.

Commissioner Chenette responded that he is not trying to be critical but he is trying to figure out where there is a break in communications.

We all need to come together and see how we refine the process. We need to identify issues and make sure that Department Heads feel comfortable to bring anything forward. When do meetings take place and do we need to work with the County Manager as there appears to be a breakdown somewhere.

Register of Probate Lovejoy stated that there needs to be more transparency in the budget figures that are provided to us.

Commissioner Ring stated that in the past the Department heads submitted their budgets and it wasn't the same as the managers.

Deputy County Manager/H.R. Director Corliss explained that a lot of work gets done prior to the budget preparation. For example, we met with the Sheriff and the jail administration and have a lot of conversations beforehand.

Commissioner Ring stated that they are elected officials and are in charge of their budgets. She added that when she looks at the budget and the elected officials is the same as the managers, it makes her wonder if they are all of the same mind.

3 TO HEAR ANY REPORTS FROM THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Dutremble asked if there are any other departments that you have questions on?

4 NEW BUSINESS

- a. To vote and transmit proposed 'FY25 budget to Budget Committee if applicable

Commissioner Ring stated that she would like to meet Probate's budget half way as she doesn't understand why it was taken out.

Finance Director Lemieux explained that those funds were not in the 'FY 24 budget.

Commissioner Ring commented that she is not happy with the budget increase and feels it is too high. She continued that she would like to go through the budget with a fine-tooth comb and we need to tighten our belts. Commissioner Ring continued that she received at least four calls regarding the tax rate and increase in our budget. She continued that she wants to start looking at policies and make reductions in our future budgets as she sees a lot of areas and a lot of spending. We need to be much more aware of taxpayers dollars, stated Commissioner Ring.

Commissioner Chenette asked Commissioner Ring if there are certain things that you have identified that you want to cut? It is easy to paint a brush but a lot of items in the budget are things we don't have control over like the phone bill increases, etc.

If we do not have a solution on the table, then what are we talking about, asked Commissioner Chenette?

Commissioner Ring replied that pto time in our H.R. manual. She added that she is not talking about taking anything away from existing positions, but we can reduce our cost of benefits. A good portion of the non-union get 41 days per year and can sell back 10 days. Very few have 10 years in.

They can also accrue up to 25 days. This is a very costly benefit, stated Commissioner Ring.

She continued that the insurance benefits are another item as non-union are only paying 2.5% others have to pay 13 to 28%. We never look for any increases but contractual employees do.

Commissioner Clark motioned to accept the budget as presented.

Commissioner Andrews seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION- Commissioner Chenette stated that going forward he would be supportive of having discussions around the role of the Probate Judge being a part-time v full-time position.

He added that communication around department heads and administration needs to continue.

Commissioner Dutremble informed all that Probate could be taken over by the State. It could determine the future, he stated.

Commissioner Dutremble also commented that the first sixteen years he was here, the average increase has been under 1%. Other communities' budgets are up there, too. We cannot control inflation.

Vote 5-0.

Commissioner Ring asked is it true that doesn't stop a department head who wants to have a conversation, to decide to do an equity raise.

Deputy County Manager/H.R. Director commented, yes.

Commissioner Ring stated that she would recommend that they (Probate) have that conversation.

5 TO CONDUCT AN EXECUTIVE SESSION ON PERSONNEL ISSUES PURSUANT TO 1 M.R.S.A. § 405 (6) (A), ACQUISITION OF REAL PROPERTY OR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PURSUANT TO 1 M.R.S.A. § 405 (6) (C), LABOR NEGOTIATIONS PURSUANT TO 1 M.R.S.A. § 405 (6) (D) AND CONSULTATION WITH LEGAL COUNSEL PURSUANT TO 1 M.R.S.A. § 405 (6) (E), REVIEW OF CONFIDENTIAL RECORDS PURSUANT TO 1 M.R.S.A. § 405 (6) (F)

6 PUBLIC COMMENT(S) ON ANY ITEM(S)

A member of the public requested a copy of the draft budget.

7 ADJOURN

Commissioner Dutremble motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Ring seconded the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 5:24 p.m.