

Meeting to shed light on budget questions

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\$1.2M shortfall reported in county capital reserve fund

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A meeting this Thursday of the Sullivan County Commissioners is expected to shed more light on the county's fiscal 2007 budget, following questions last week about a reported \$1.2 million capital reserve fund shortfall.

Rep. Peter Franklin, D-Newport, said last week during a meeting of the county delegation that it appears that the county may be relying on \$1.2 million in revenue that it may not actually have. That's because the budget lists \$1.2 million as being in a capital reserve fund that Franklin said last Thursday doesn't exist. The entry was discovered by Franklin the second time he scrutinized the budget, he said, after County Delegation Chairman John Cloutier, D-Claremont, had signed off on the budget in June. A quorum wasn't present last week so the meeting was not official.

Neither County Commissioners Don Clarke, Ben Nelson and Ethel Jarvis nor County Manager Ed Gil de Rubio discussed Franklin's claim during a commissioner's meeting Tuesday.

The 2007 fiscal budget is under review with the state Department of Revenue Administration. Barbara Robinson, director of the DRA's municipal services division, has been unavailable for comment.

To explain the budget and its preparation, the county's accountant, Jeffrey A. Graham, president of Vermont-based Graham & Graham, P.C., will be present Thursday to discuss the budget entries. It remains unclear if that money is in the county's coffers or not. A representative from the Nashua-based firm that audits the county budgets, Melanson, Heath & Co., PC, also is expected to attend.

The meeting begins at 4 p.m. in the Sullivan County Complex in downtown Newport.

"The first thing to find out is, is there a problem?" Clarke said Tuesday night. "And

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if so, what do we do to correct it?"

That's the same question raised by Franklin, Rep. Jay Phinizy, D-Acworth, and Rep. Tom Donovan, D-Claremont.

Of key interest will be the budget form itself, known as an MS 42. Clarke and Nelson say the MS 42 form doesn't allow for financial entries that accurately and correctly reflect the figures approved by the delegation and county manager. The form sent to the DRA had the \$1.2 million in a reserve fund that Franklin said does not exist.

The budget's total appropriations equal \$26.9 million, the submitted budget reflects. The amount certified to be raised by taxes is \$9.2 million.

Gil de Rubio said Friday

that the budget is not short \$1.2 million.

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