

Franklin

Franklin County Commissioners want sheriff to reimburse county



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FARMINGTON — Franklin County commissioners voted Tuesday to have the sheriff reimburse the county for \$442.87 for four pairs of shoes and a mass mailing to unorganized territory residents.

Sheriff Scott Nichols Sr. was not at Tuesday's meeting but said Wednesday he is appealing the decision at the next meeting Jan. 3.

Commissioners took issue with Nichols buying four pairs of nonslip shoes, one pair each for the full-time jail cook supervisor and cook and two part-time cooks, all nonunion employees.

The amount, \$272.50, was charged to the county's sole credit card. The cost was charged to the jail uniform account. Nichols does have the authority to use the card.

The sheriff oversees the jail and the Sheriff's Office.

Commissioners said the purchase of the shoes and use of the credit card were inappropriate. They also agreed that if buying the shoes was an appropriate purchase, it should not have been ordered by the sheriff but by the jail administrator.

County Clerk Julie Magoon said the cooks do come under the sheriff's jurisdiction because he has control of the jail.

Nichols said at his office after the meeting that he bought the shoes for the cooks, which includes his wife, Lorna Nichols, cook supervisor, because they are on their feet eight to 12 hours a day on a cement floor. He said the nonslip shoes would help prevent them from getting injured and filing workers' compensation complaints.

He provides the cooks with shirts, hairnets, aprons and mitts for their jobs.

Commissioners also took issue with the \$170.37 cost of Nichols' mass mailing to unorganized territory residents, informing them of a proposal for a new deputy and cruiser to be dedicated to patrolling the unorganized territory.

A deputy also delivered the letter to residences who could not be reached by the mass mailing.

Nichols' letter was sent out in late November prior to a pending hearing commissioners were holding Dec. 12 on a proposed unorganized territory budget. The proposal included Nichols' request for \$100,000 as start-up money for a deputy and a cruiser.

Nichols explained his reasoning in the letter for the request including that it would reduce response time to calls in remote locations and provide proactive patrol in areas where people live seasonally. He also noted that it would reduce property crime.

The county does have a resource coordination agreement with Maine State Police to help patrol areas of Franklin County, but it is not enough, he wrote.

The letter went on to ask the unorganized territory residents to attend the public hearing at the Eustis Community Building. If they could not attend, he asked them to contact him by mail or by phone so he could hear whether they were for or against his proposal.

Commissioners eliminated the \$100,000 for the deputy and cruiser in a mixed vote when they approved a \$1 million unorganized territory budget following the hearing. The measure was expected to raise taxes.

Commissioner Charles Webster of Farmington said Tuesday that the mailing was campaigning for the position. The expense of mailing, \$170.37, should have come before commissioners and was an inappropriate use of taxpayers' money.

Commissioner Gary McGrane of Jay said he wanted Nichols to reimburse the \$170.37 because it was campaigning and an inappropriate expense.

Nichols said he considered the mailing sheriff's business.

The Sun Journal reached out to other sheriffs to see if they provide footwear to cooks at the jails.

Androscoggin County Sheriff Eric Samson said, "We provide uniforms and aprons and we have them cleaned by a uniform company (General Linen)," he said. "General Linen is also the provider, but we do not provide footwear. We have two full-time and one part-time cook."

One of the full-time cooks is the kitchen supervisor, Samson said. About 12 incarcerated individuals are assigned to kitchen services, he said.

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