

# KNOX COUNTY COMMISSION

## Special Joint Meeting Knox County Commission and Budget Committee

Thursday – November 13, 2014 – 5:00 p.m.

A special joint meeting of the Knox County Commission and the Knox County Budget Committee was held on Thursday, November 13, 2014, at 5:00 p.m., at the county courthouse, 62 Union Street, Rockland, Maine in the Commission Hearing Room. The Administrative Assistant was present to record the minutes of the meeting.

Commission members present were: Carol L. Maines, Commissioner District #1, Richard L. Parent, Jr., Commissioner District #2, and Roger A. Moody, Commissioner District #3.

County staff present included: County Administrator Andrew Hart, Administrative Assistant Candice Richards, Communications Director Linwood Lothrop, Finance Director Kathy Robinson, and Building Maintenance Supervisor Don Decker.

Budget Committee members present were: Ann Matlack, Bob Duke, Lawrence Nash, Randy Stearns, Dorothy Meriwether, Tom Mellor (*left at 5:55 p.m.*), Shawn Levasseur, Bill Jones and Stephen Carroll.

Other people present: President Paul Cook and Vice President Jesse McCue from Maine Real Estate Management.

### Knox County Commission and Budget Committee Joint Meeting Agenda Commission Hearing Room Thursday – November 13, 2014 – 5:00 p.m.

- I. 5:00 Meeting Called To Order (Chair Dorothy Meriwether for the Knox County Budget Committee, Commission Chair Carol Maines for the Knox County Commission)
- II. 5:01 Public Comment
- III. 5:05 Budget Review
  - 1. Building Maintenance – Courthouse (Pg. 10)
  - 2. Building Maintenance – Public Safety Building (Pg. 11)
  - 3. Communications (Pg. 26)
  - 4. Any department that needs further review
  - 5. Surplus & Reserves Discussion
- IV. Adjourn

#### I. Meeting Called to Order

The November 13, 2014 joint meeting of the Knox County Budget Committee and the Knox County Commission was called to order by Budget Committee Chair Dorothy Meriwether and Commission Chair Carol Maines at 5:00 p.m.

#### II. Public Comment

Budget Committee Chair Dorothy Meriwether asked if any members of the public wished to speak. There was none.

#### III. Budget Review

##### Building Maintenance - Courthouse

Administrator Hart gave a brief historical explanation about the County eliminating the Building Maintenance department at the end of 2010 to cut back on expenses, and then the County had contracted with Maine Real Estate Management to provide those services. MREM President Paul Cook, Vice President Jesse McCue, Building Maintenance Supervisor Don Decker and Administrator Hart each relayed various pieces of information on this budget:

The Contractual Services line was decreased by \$660. Electricity costs have gone up by \$2,600. The building has seen a significant savings because of the upgrades and the energy efficient processes that were put in place, but the last winter was a colder one than usual. The more the furnace runs, the more electricity

gets used. Heating Fuel was decreased by \$5,000 based on heating cost trends. Knox County is paying \$3.11/gallon for the 2014/2015 winter season. That's up 2 cents over the last winter. Landscape maintenance at the courthouse is handled by Farley & Son, who also has the contract for snow plowing/removal. Building Maintenance Supervisor Don Decker also helps keep the costs down by doing the mowing and some other tasks himself.

There was a discussion about why the County had awarded the cleaning contract to Maine Real Estate Management for both the Public Safety Building and the Airport when MREM was not the lowest bidder. It was explained that the County had put it out to bid along with the Airport terminal, and that although the vendor who had previously held the airport contract was the lowest bidder, the Commission voted to go with the next to lowest bid because of the unsatisfactory performance of the lowest bidder (who previously had the contract), as well as some negative feedback from the vendor's other references..

- A consensus vote was taken on the Building Maintenance – Courthouse budget with all in favor.

#### **Building Maintenance – Public Safety Building**

MREM President Paul Cook, Vice President Jesse McCue, Building Maintenance Supervisor Don Decker and Administrator Hart each relayed various pieces of information on this budget:

Contractual Services has increased \$19,707, in part because some of the warranties for equipment in the new building are ending so there will now be maintenance agreements to maintain things. Preventative maintenance is easier to budget for than waiting until something dies and replacing it then. Electricity has increased by \$4,690. Grounds Maintenance has increased by \$3,371 because of the addition of a shoveling contract with Farley & Son who also takes care of the Courthouse. This change was made because in the past, inmates were tasked with doing the shoveling and it either wasn't being done well, or wasn't being done at all. County employees tried to do some of it but people were still slipping and falling in the parking lot. The cleaning contract was increased \$4,308 now that the contract was awarded to the same vendor that also handles the Courthouse and the Airport. The price is that it is locked in until December 31, 2017. Heating Repairs and Maintenance has increased by \$5,648 because of the maintenance contract with AAA Energy for the HAV units. Heating Fuel was increased by \$809.

- A consensus vote was taken on the administrator's proposal for the Building Maintenance – Public Safety Building budget with all in favor.

#### **Communications**

Communications Director Linwood Lothrop explained that the ICMA retirement line is increased because more dispatch employees are participating in the retirement plan. He also currently has vacant positions and has to assume that the new-hires will participate so that the money is there in case they do. The lodging budget line is up because when dispatchers are hired and start their training, some of that requires travel, and therefore lodging. The department is adding a battery backup system for the 9-1-1 system so that if the power goes out and the generator quits or won't start to begin with, the dispatch center will still run. The backup system is not new but will be fully operational once the batteries in it have been replaced. Besides the replacement of the batteries, there is also a one-time start-up cost. Once that's done, the backup power will be able to run for 48 hours. The Maintenance line was increased because of contract licensing for software in the consoles, which are all IP based and software driven, which means you end up with maintenance agreements. Director Lothrop explained that he had to budget with the assumption that the generator wouldn't start because he couldn't afford to take the risk that it generator wouldn't start. There's any number of reasons why the generator might fail, which is why there has to be redundancies. Communications directors have to be prepared and plan for "what if" because of the liability falling on their shoulders. The maintenance agreements for the towers went up because service calls are now built into the agreements instead of the County paying an extra \$40,000 per year to do call outs when the system goes down.

The Capital line was decreased by \$81,054 since there are no capital expenditures planned in 2015 Budget. The last payment on the lease/purchase for the communications equipment was made this year. Undesignated reserves are getting pretty low. Director Lothrop said that he tries to carry 20% to help pay for some of the unexpected technological costs that crop up each year. Technology is expensive and when something breaks, it has to be fixed or replaced right then – it can't wait because the integrity of the system has to be maintained. Most communications centers try to keep 20%.

When asked about the 5-year capital improvement plans Director Lothrop usually puts together, he responded that he did have a capital plan and had given it to Administrator Hart with his budget draft a while back. Administrator Hart explained that he could provide a copy of the capital improvement plan to everyone but said that he hadn't given it to anyone before now because there are no capital projects in the 2015 budget.

Director Lothrop was asked if he was able to spend funds in his investment accounts and undesignated funds on anything that he wanted to. Director Lothrop responded by saying that if anything happens with Communications equipment and it needs to be replaced, he goes to the Commission and the Executive Board and get authorization withdraw the funds. He noted that the computer reserve account is set aside to replace computers and peripherals. The larger reserve account is for if there's a large catastrophic failure of equipment. He said that his 5 year plan includes replacing radios, but he will look to fund that out of reserves instead of putting it in the operating budget.

When asked what would be a "catastrophic failure" that would require dipping into the undesignated reserve funds, Director Lothrop gave the example of the recent storm when the generator on Ragged Mountain died. A new one had to be purchased and then the County had to pay for a helicopter lift to get the generator up there because of the difficulty of the terrain. Administrator Hart noted that if the County can't get the equipment load issue on the Ragged Mountain antenna resolved, a tower will have to be put up on Hatchet Mountain instead at the County's expense. The worst case scenario cost for that would be about \$175,000.

- A consensus vote was taken on the Administrator's recommendation for the Communications budget with 7 in favor (Bob Duke, Ann Matlack, Randy Stearns, Steve Carroll, Ann Matlack, Dorothy Meriwether, and Shawn Levasseur), 0 opposed, and 1 abstention (Bill Jones). *\*Note: Tom Mellor had already left before this vote was taken.*

*Director Lothrop left the meeting.*

#### **Any department that needs further review**

Administrator Hart noted that when he had asked the Committee at the previous meeting if they wanted any of the departments to come attend this week's meeting, nobody responded. A few Committee members commented that they had left the last meeting with the understanding that all department managers would be invited back for tonight's meeting.

The County is still waiting for a few big figures for the budget draft so it's hard to say just yet what the bottom line will be. Some of the items include the costs for Workers comp, Health insurance, Risk Pool coverage, and revenues updates for the Registry of Deeds. Administrator Hart said that he would try to get everything out to the Commission and Budget Committee before the meeting next meeting (11/20) via email to show the changes to the budget with the extra patrol supervisor position is built in.

It was suggested that the Committee talk about the things that are still bothering people and that it was better to bring things up now if there's a concern, rather than having surprises when the final votes are taken. Administrator Hart commented that it would be better to wait until the following week when the department managers could be present and answer questions. Several Committee members suggested making a list of questions/concerns that Administrator Hart could get to the department managers so they would come prepared to the meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Steve Carroll wanted to discuss the sheriff's budget

without the Sheriff and Chief Deputy present but Dorothy Meriwether noted that this was a public meeting, everything is recorded in the minutes, and she felt that it would be best if everyone would say their remarks to the Committee and Commission in front of the department heads.

#### Administrator Budget

No questions, just a comment that some of the Committee members couldn't support spending money on a memorial bench.

#### Building Maintenance – Courthouse

No questions.

#### Building Maintenance – Public Safety Building

No questions.

#### Registry of Deeds

Commissioner Moody mentioned that he wanted to know about if it was possible to use Deeds surcharge money for offsetting the budget. Administrator Hart responded that he could get the job description out to everyone, but said that Deeds surplus money, like forfeiture funds, can't be raided for just anything. Those funds can only be used for specific purposes within that department only. Commissioner Moody said he was interested in finding out if the Deeds reserve could be used for the Deeds Microfilming and Recording line. He also asked if Probate had any reserves that could be used to help offset that department's expenses. Administrator Hart responded that the department managers would be at the next meeting and could answer that.

Steve Carroll asked again if Register of Deeds Lisa Simmons could change anything internally to make up for the lost fees from the website without going to the legislature to ask them to change the law. Administrator Hart said that there wasn't anything Register Simmons could change without going against the law except increasing some fees, but that might just discourage people from using the online service at all, in which case the County would get even less revenue. He noted that you can approach the legislature with anything but it could backfire, and mess things up for all the counties, not just Knox. The governor is against giving any more money to counties. Lawrence Nash stated that Administrator Hart is right and that he had introduced a bill to the legislature and realized that the legislature isn't going to give up a penny. Dorothy Meriwether commented that she felt the discussion was starting to edge into policy making, which needs to be left with the Commission.

#### District Attorney

It was noted that it was okay if DA Rushlau couldn't make it to the meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> because of his schedule and no one seemed to have any questions for him anyway.

#### EMA

- Geospatial Database Manager – how much is the addition of this position actually supported by the municipalities?

Administrator Hart noted that while not that many municipal representatives had attended the meeting the County held on the subject, he did get letters of support from the town manager and fire chief in St. George, South Thomaston selectmen, Rockport selectmen and town manager, and the Camden town manager sent an email of support. He added that the Warren town manager also supports it. He said that he couldn't say that all 18 municipalities were telling him that they support the position, but he also hasn't had anyone telling him that they are against it. A few examples were given of municipal staff that use GIS and might use this new position for help. It was also noted that some towns don't have any staff trained on GIS at all so they could really use help from the geospatial position in EMA.

#### Finance

No questions.

Probate

- Are there any Probate reserves that could be used to offset expenses?

Patrol

Commissioner Moody said that he wanted to see the job description for the patrol supervisor position and discuss the liability the County would face with the position added, or without it added.

- New supervisor position – what would the addition of the new position do to the bottom line of the overall budget? How much of a percentage increase would it be?
- Overtime – should the amount be lowered?
- Forfeiture for vehicle purchases – shouldn't some be used to pay for at least one vehicle in 2015?
- Vehicle mileage – should patrol vehicles be kept for longer/higher mileage before replacing?

Airport

There was a discussion about AIP grants and whether it made sense for the County to come up with 5% of the project cost just so the other 95% could be obtained from the State and Federal governments, with opinions voiced both for and against. It was suggested by one Committee member that the Commission should relook at how the airport should be operated and prevent the ever increasing burden on the taxpayers, and that only the wealthy use the airport anyway. It was suggested by another Committee member that the only alternative to doing the projects was to shut down the airport which would mean the County would have to pay millions of dollars of grant funds back to the federal government pays most of the money for these projects.

Commissioner Maines noted that some of the big expenditures and AIP projects are for work that *needs* to be done. The fence project was done after collisions with wildlife, which had the potential to cost people their lives if something wasn't done. She added that the airport isn't just used by the wealthy or people taking flights to and from Boston. There's also a lot of freight coming in and that's saving time and money for people who aren't wealthy.

- Is the \$65,000 necessary for the budget or is it the County's share for an AIP project?

Communications

The question was asked of why there was a \$11,165 maintenance agreement in the Communications budget and whether the Budget Committee had approved some kind of expense that initiated the acquisition of the maintenance agreement. Administrative Assistant Richards stated that it is for the I Am Responding software, which the Commission approved in the 2014 capital budget. There was some discussion about the Communications investment accounts and why some accounts were designated and some not. The Committee wanted to know what the funds were going to be used for.

- Why is it being done that way? Wouldn't it be more transparent to properly label the funds for specific projects and build up the accounts?
- How many redundancies are *actually* needed?

Commissioner Maines reminded the Committee that one of the things Director Lothrop had brought up several times is "catastrophic failure" and the risk he takes if not properly prepared. The Communications budget is going to be different from others because of communications equipment being technology based and very expensive. When that kind of equipment dies, it has to be replaced immediately so the money has to be on hand already. The equipment also becomes obsolete fairly quickly and can die at any time. Director Lothrop is also required by other government entities to have the equipment that he does, so not all expenses are a choice he actively makes.

Administrator Hart said it was worth noting that there had originally been 8 capital improvement projects in the budget but the KRCC Executive Board decided they didn't want to fund any of those this year and keep the budget from going up.

Commissioner Moody stated that it's not Director Lothrop driving the Communications budget. It's all of the public safety folks in all of the municipalities. He pointed out that the municipal public safety people will be the first to pounce on Director Lothrop if anything fails or goes wrong.

MCEDD, MCRPC, KLSW, and Time & Tide RC&D

No questions.

KLCES

Dorothy Meriwether asked Administrator Hart if she remembered correctly that one of the Extension Service representatives was going to send information to the Committee. Administrator Hart said that he had emailed everyone's email addresses to Extension staff educator Ellen Libby. He asked if anyone had received something from her. No one had.

Restorative Justice

Concerns but no additional questions to ask the organization.

Surplus & Reserves Discussion

Some Committee members wanted more information on which reserve accounts are tied up with specific purposes. Administrator Hart noted that the department managers could give more information on that at the next meeting.

When the issue of using surplus to lower the budget came up, Administrator Hart asked the Committee to keep in mind that the County had used a large amount of surplus in the 2014 budget so there may not be that much surplus to use in the 2015 budget. He added that the County still has to figure out how to pay for the repairs to the courthouse envelope and the last estimate was around \$500,000. He stated that there was no way voters would approve another bond so it might have to be funded it out of surplus. When asked about the use of contingency funds, Administrator Hart stated that the County legally has to carry \$100,000 or a certain percentage.

Public Hearing

At the next meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup>, all departments will be there to answer questions. We will take votes on all the departments so the administrator will know what to put in the budget for the budget committee recommendations for when the budget goes out to the towns. Next week we will decide which date will be the public hearing.

**IV. Adjourn**

- A motion was made by Randy Stearns to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Ann Matlack. A vote was taken with all in favor.
- A motion was made by Commissioner Richard Parent to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Roger Moody. A vote was taken with all in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candice S. Richards  
Administrative Assistant

**The Knox County Budget Committee and Knox County Commission approved these minutes at their meeting on November 11, 2014.**