

KNOX COUNTY COMMISSION

Special Meeting

Wednesday – December 12, 2012 - 6:30 p.m.

A special meeting of the Knox County Commission was held on Wednesday, December 12, 2012, at 6:30 p.m., at the county courthouse, 62 Union Street, Rockland, Maine.

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, and Administrative Assistant Candice Richards.

Municipal representation present: (*see below*).

Legislative representation present: (*see below*).

Others present: Henry Carey, resident of Thomaston and a County Budget Committee member; Geoff Herman, Maine Municipal Association; Andy O’Brian of the Free Press.

Meeting with Knox County Municipalities – Agenda

Wednesday – December 12, 2012 – 6:30 p.m.

I. Called to Order

II. Discuss Municipal Leadership Core Issues/Concerns:

1. State to fulfill/honor financial commitments it has already made or been mandated to do. (Towns to give examples and data to legislators at the meeting)
2. School funding formula EPS model
 - Special ed funding supposed to be \$100
 - Special ed funding process needs help – the funding doesn’t follow the student
 - 55% is the law (currently paying 45%)
3. State road “giveback”
4. Fund corrections law
5. Other

III. Action List

IV. Adjourn

I. Called to Order:

Commission Chair Roger Moody called the special meeting of the Knox County Commission to order at 6:30 p.m. The following are the meeting attendees:

Municipal representation:

- Martin Cates, Camden Selectman, Chair
- Don White, Camden Selectman, Vice Chair
- Pat Finnigan, Camden Town Manager
- Val Blastow, Thomaston Town Manager
- Donald Grinnell, Washington Selectman
- Duane Vigue, Washington Selectman
- Bill Chapman, Rockport Selectman
- Ken McKinney, Rockport Selectman

Legislative representation:

- Ed Mazurek, State Senator District 22
- Elizabeth Dickerson, State Representative District 47
- Chuck Kruger, State Representative District 48
- Joan Welsh, State Representative District 46
- Jeff Evangelos, State Representative District 49

County representation:

- Carol Maines, Commissioner District 1
- Richard Parent, Commissioner District 2
- Roger Moody, Commission Chair District 3
- Andrew Hart, County Administrator

Core County Issues/Concerns:

Commissioner Moody started out by briefly going over the MCCA legislative update from Timothy Leet:

1. “An Act to Change Document filling Fees for County Registries of Deeds”
The governor vetoed this when it was pushed through the first time because he thought it was a tax but it’s a user fee for those who wish to use it.
2. “An Act to Fund the Inverse Debt Requirement of the State Board of Corrections”
The legislature needs to fulfill its commitments to counties and municipalities. The State isn’t fulfilling obligations to fund capital improvements or to even run the jails effectively.
3. “An Act to Ensure Public Safety Through Adequate Funding For the E-9-1-1 System”
A lower priority than the other two; it mostly helps the two largest counties because they are struggling to pay for all of the cell phone calls just because of the sheer size of their county.

II. Discuss Municipal Leadership Core Issues/Concerns:

The following is a summary of opinions and points raised and questions asked by various meeting attendees throughout the meeting on a variety of topics:

School funding / Education

- The towns used to pay based on valuation and the legislature has moved down a path of formulas that stands outside the EPS formula. (The statute reads: “from property tax to State resources”)
- The referendum question set the school funding formula at 55%. The state doesn’t have any resources and it should really say sales tax not property tax since that’s where the funding comes from.
- The legislature set the 55% in 1983 and the referendum in 2005 was the voters’ way of saying the State needed to do what it said it was going to do.
- Educators’ retirement money is being included with the amount of money being sent to the district as part of the 55%. That started in 2011. It makes it look better than it really is because the state is still responsible for the retirement system separate from the education cost. It’s not state money.
- The average citizen doesn’t know or understand about what all this means beyond the state saying that they don’t have money. People need to be educated about education costs.
- A lot of the larger school systems have declining enrollment. Warren is the only town with increased enrollment and it all comes down to taxes.

- The legislature thinks that instead of fixing the way government is run and spends money, that they should just get more money by increasing income tax or sales tax.

State transportation / roads / rail

- The state needs to pay more towards the transportation budget. We need more work done on the Old County Road especially with a new super Wal-Mart being built in Thomaston.
- The transportation budget desperately needs fixing but it never gets fixed because everybody is afraid of fixing the tax structure.
- The governor has been tapping the gas tax so there is not as much money there as there should be.
- Why is the gas tax a set fee rather than a percentage like sales tax?
- The municipalities need to work with the legislature to educate the towns.
- We have a great rail system from Brunswick to Rockland and need to focus on bringing the Downeaster up to Rockland.
- Need to keep the roads in great condition to attract and keep workers in this area.
- The voters just passed bonds for transportation projects but is the governor blocking those and said he would only release those bonds if and when the hospitals are all paid off. This is not fair to the voters when they've passed the bonds and the legislature did their part too.
- Well-maintained roads are essential to attracting businesses and people to the state.
- The state road "give back" system – the roads need to be maintained properly to take the burden off the towns and then given back to the towns once they're up to the standard they're supposed to be, which means we need the funding to do that first.

Attracting / keeping young people in Maine

- Students getting out of college can't find a job. If you want to increase revenue then we need to take advantage of our resources and employ people to operate those resources and not just represent ourselves as a tourist town.
- Need to look beyond the I-95 mentality of the only places worth going are Portland to Augusta.
- How do we brand ourselves so we are getting the word out about the attributes of this area and how to we attract people and find jobs for them?
- Need to come up with incentives for people to live in town / in the city. We could use more of places like City Rock, which is a good draw for younger people. The Strand has been really good for Rockland too. There should also be an incentive for people to "get back to the land" and have opportunities to farm and live off the land if they want to learn how to do that.
- Retirees are finding Maine desirable. They pay for a lot of things in Maine but aren't necessarily using the services like the school system. The younger generation, however, is needed to support and take care of the older generation. Also, the retirees often spend the winters away from Maine and aren't spending money here. They are also doing things like registering their car in Florida.

Increasing revenue

- Some State revenue could be gained by taxing out of state people who own property here as a second home at a higher mil rate because if they can afford a second home here why can't they afford the higher tax rate? There would have to be a constitutional amendment to do that.

- Increase the sales tax during tourism season but give a rebate at the end of the year to the in-state people.
- Raise the sales tax or lodging tax or whatever during the higher tourism months like July and August.
- Raise the homestead exemption.
- Start enforcing tax on internet sales.
- Some issues with income growth in the State of Maine are caused by the federal government's free trade policies. It's not something we have any control over.
- The towns could look into doing some comprehensive planning but there's no state planning office anymore.
- It would be nice if we could look at having the fines for speeding or other traffic offenses stay local instead of having it go straight to Augusta. The taxpayers were willing to pay a little extra if it meant they could have more of a police presence on their roads and cut down on speeding, etc. but the money goes to Augusta.
- What about the idea of a "local option sales tax"? It could be seasonal during the tourist season and the money would go right to the County and not to Augusta. The community has to be behind it 100%, though, and have a focus on what the money will be spent on (ie: a civic center or property tax relief) or it will never be supported by the voters.
- Towns need some sort of template to follow for going through that process.
- The State Planning office may not exist anymore technically but the department that absorbed it will still look over your plans for you.
- <http://www.smartgrowth.org>

III. Adjourn

- A motion was made by Commissioner Carol Maines to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Richard Parent. A vote was taken with all in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candice Richards
Administrative Assistant

The Knox County Commission approved these minutes at their regular meeting held on January 8, 2013.