

# KNOX COUNTY COMMISSION

## Special Joint Meeting Knox County Commission and Budget Committee

Thursday – October 22, 2009 – 5:00 p.m.

A special joint meeting of the Knox County Commission and the Knox County Budget Committee was held on Thursday, October 22, 2009, at 5:00 p.m., at the county courthouse, 62 Union Street, Rockland, Maine. The executive assistant was present to record the minutes of the meeting.

Commission members present were: Anne Beebe-Center, Commissioner District #1, Richard L. Parent, Jr., Commissioner District #2, and Roger A. Moody, Commissioner District #3 (joined the meeting by conference call).

County staff present included: County Administrator Andrew Hart, Executive Assistant Constance Johanson, Finance Director Kathy Robinson, Registrar of Deeds Lisa Simmons, Probate Judge Carol Emery, Register of Probate Elaine Hallett, Communications Director Linwood Lothrop, and IT Director Jeff Lake.

Budget Committee members present were: Ann Matlack, Bob Duke, Sid Lindsley, Dorothy Meriwether, Elizabeth Dickerson, and Bill Jones.

Also present were: Lawrence Nash from Union, Union Fire Chief Barry Norris, Rockland Fire Chief Charlie Jordan, Rockland Assistant Fire Chief Adam Mecilli, Washington Fire Chief Tom Johnston, and Rockport Fire Chief Bruce Woodward.

### Special Meeting – Agenda

Thursday – October 22, 2009 – 5:00 p.m.

- I. 5:00 Meeting Called To Order** (Chair Ann Matlack for the Knox County Budget Committee, Commission Chair Anne Beebe-Center for the Knox County Commission)
- II. 5:01 Vote to Approve New Members to the Knox County Budget Committee** (Budget Committee)
  1. Bob Duke, representing District #5
  2. Elizabeth Dickerson, representing one of the two seats for District #3 (*the other is vacant*)
- III. 5:05 Election of Officers** (Budget Committee)
  1. Chair
  2. Vice Chair
  3. Secretary
- IV. 5:10 Vote to Approve New Members to the Knox County Budget Committee** (Commission)
  1. Bob Duke, representing District #5
  2. Elizabeth Dickerson, representing one of the two seats for District #3 (*the other is vacant*)
- V. 5:15 Joint Meeting with the Knox County Budget Committee for the Presentation of the Proposed 2010 Budget** (County Administrator Andrew Hart)
- VI. 5:30 Communications Proposed 2010 Budget** (Communications Director Linwood Lothrop)
- VII. 6:00 2010 Proposed Budgets** (County Administrator Andrew Hart)
  - Registry of Deeds**
  - Probate Court**
  - Finance Office**
  - Debt Service**
  - County Administrative Offices**
- VIII. 6:30 Adjourn**

#### **I. Meeting Called to Order**

The October 22, 2009 meeting of the Budget Committee and the Knox County Commission was called to order by Budget Committee Chair Ann Matlack in order to conduct the committee's portion of the meeting.

#### **II. Vote to Approve New Members to the Knox County Budget Committee**

The Town of Rockport recommended Bob Duke to fill the District #5 seat on the Knox County Budget Committee. Budget Committee Chair Ann Matlack asked for a motion to approve the appointment of Bob Duke to the Knox County Budget Committee, representing District #5.

- A motion was made by Sid Lindsley to approve the appointment of Bob Duke to represent District #5 on the Knox County Budget Committee. The motion was seconded by Bill Jones. A vote was taken with all in favor.

The City of Rockland recommended Elizabeth Dickerson to fill one of District #3's vacant seats on the Knox County Budget Committee. Budget Committee Chair Ann Matlack asked for a motion to approve the appointment of Elizabeth Dickerson to the Knox County Budget Committee as one of the representatives for District #3.

- A motion was made by Sid Lindsley to approve the appointment of Elizabeth Dickerson to be one of District #3's representatives on the Knox County Budget Committee. The motion was seconded by Bill Jones. A vote was taken with all in favor.

### III. Budget Committee Election of Officers

#### 1. Chair:

Ann Matlack called for nominations for chair of the Budget Committee. Sid Lindsley nominated Ann Matlack as chair. The nomination was seconded by Bob Duke. A vote was taken with all in favor.

#### 2. Vice-Chair:

Ann Matlack called for nominations for vice-chair of the Budget Committee. Sid Lindsley nominated Bob Duke as vice-chair. The nomination was seconded by Dorothy Meriwether. A vote was taken with all in favor.

#### 3. Secretary:

Ann Matlack called for nominations for secretary of the Budget Committee. Dorothy Meriwether nominated Bill Jones as secretary. The nomination was seconded by Bob Duke. A vote was taken with all in favor.

### IV. Meeting Called to Order

The October 22, 2009 meeting of the Budget Committee and the Knox County Commission was called to order by Commission Chair Anne Beebe-Center.

### V. Vote to Approve New Members to the Knox County Budget Committee

Commissioner Anne Beebe-Center asked for a motion to approve the appointment of Bob Duke to the Knox County Budget Committee, representing District #5.

- A motion was made by Commissioner Roger Moody to approve the appointment of Bob Duke to represent District #5 on the Knox County Budget Committee. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Anne Beebe-Center. A vote was taken with all in favor.

Commissioner Anne Beebe-Center asked for a motion to approve the appointment of Elizabeth Dickerson to fill one of District #3's vacant seats on the Knox County Budget Committee.

- A motion was made by Commissioner Roger Moody approve the appointment of Elizabeth Dickerson to be one of District #3's representatives on the Knox County Budget Committee. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Anne Beebe-Center. A vote was taken with all in favor.

### VI. Joint Meeting with the Knox County Budget Committee for the Presentation of the Proposed 2010 Budget – County Administrator Andrew Hart

County Administrator Andrew Hart explained that the salaries in the proposed budget for 2010 were calculated at a two (2) percent increase plus longevity. The FICA is set at 7.65 percent of the wages. The rate used for health insurance is the cost of the premium with a five (5) percent increase built in because the new rates for 2010 have not been received. Mr. Hart reported meeting with other insurance agents to explore other health insurance carriers and plans. The conclusion was that the other insurance companies can not compete with Maine Municipal Employee Health Trust (MMEHT), the current provider, because of the County's loss ratio report. Waldo, Washington, and Hancock Counties have health insurance provided by Meritain Health. Mr. Hart met with a representative for Meritain Health to compare costs and plan options.

Page 5 shows the Tax Cap Calculations. The Budget LD1 Tax Assessment limit for 2009 is \$6,705,712.00. The average real personal income growth factor is 1.78 percent and the property growth factor, which is based on information from the towns, is 1.97 percent. The new LD1 assessment limit for 2010 is \$6,957,176.00, which is an increase of \$251,464.00.

Page 7 explains the effect of increasing the tax cap for 2009 on the 2010 proposed budget. By applying the Property Growth Factor for 2010 (3.75% as shown on page 5) to the 2009 base tax assessment of

\$6,705,712.00, the County is allowed to raise the tax assessment to no more than \$6,957,176.00 or \$251,464.00 more than the base tax assessment in 2009. The 2010 Knox County Proposed Budget shows a decrease in the tax assessment of \$453,776.00, which means the total amount to be assessed the towns is \$6,503,400.00.

Page 8 is a summary, which shows the 2009 budget and the 2010 proposed figures for the departments, along with the increase/decrease in each departmental budget. It was noted that the communications department is funded by fees assessed to the towns so that the expenditures are offset by revenue.

Last year \$100,000.00 was taken from surplus to reduce the tax assessment in 2009 and have the actual tax assessment the same as in 2008. Mr. Hart recommended not using any surplus to reduce the tax assessment for 2010.

The 2008 audit showed revenues being up and expenditures down, which resulted in an increase in surplus. In 2009 some of the surplus was used for projects such as the terminal building at the airport. The commissioners approved the use of \$500,000.00 in surplus funds for the terminal building project. There was a limited amount of time in which to decide the County's commitment to the terminal building project because of the availability of stimulus money. Currently, there is just under \$900,000.00 in surplus. The proposed departmental budgets are conservative and it is not expected that there will be much in unexpended funds to be put into surplus. It was noted that even with the jail debt being retired and capital improvement projects proposed, the over-all budget is less than the 2009 budget. It did not appear that there would be any need to use surplus funds in 2010.

Ann Matlack asked if there were contributing factors in the past that impacted the build up of surplus funds. Mr. Hart explained that surplus in the past came from the jail in unexpended funds, which is no longer available to the County, other departmental unexpended funds, and over estimated revenues received. The Jail budget was part of the 2008 budget, but has since been taken over by the state. Any surplus generated by the jail has to be kept within the separate jail budget. It was suggested that although the jail may not contribute to surplus, it also does not impact the use of surplus to cover spikes in the cost of boarding out inmates as was the case in past years.

Bob Duke commented that he hoped that with the debt service being retired that the capital improvements could be made so that there would not be spikes, highs and lows, in the budgets over next few the years. It appeared that the capital improvements would be one-time expenditures to resolve problems and should not keep coming back for additional funding.

County Administrator Andrew Hart explained that some of the proposed projects were being completed in 2009 and others would be completed in 2010. The front granite steps project was more extensive than anticipated because the support structure had almost completely collapsed. Mr. Hart reported that the project was expected to be completed within the next week and a half with an additional cost of \$1,500.00. The 2009 budget had \$40,000.00 allocated for the project and the bid came in at \$18,000.00.

The landscape project is expected to be completed this week. Funds were not budgeted for this project, but the cost is being covered by savings realized from the heating fuel budget line in the building maintenance 2009 budget. There were various plans for the courthouse grounds maintenance and none of them were very successful. Mr. Hart submitted an amended landscape plan to Rockland's Planning Board that was approved with the stipulation that there would be an annual maintenance contract in place for the grounds upkeep. The cost of the landscape project is \$22,000.00. There have been positive comments on the improved look of the courthouse grounds.

Roof repairs, window replacements, superior court room renovations, brick re-pointing, and computer upgrades are planned for 2010 for a total of \$225,000.00. If the jail debt was not being retired, this would be the amount of additional funds needed in 2010 for general courthouse maintenance and renovation projects.

The major work planned for 2010 is the window replacements and interior painting of the courthouse. The window replacement project could cost .5 million dollars. The energy efficiency grant application has been filed and the County expects to receive \$179,000.00 to go towards the window replacement project. Mr. Hart reported working with Energy Efficiency Maine to extend the funding to cover energy efficient lighting.

Bob Duke asked if the budget committee was informed that \$500,000.00 was being taken from surplus for the terminal building project. After receiving the answer no, Mr. Duke asked that the budget committee, as financial partners of the County, be informed of large transfers of funds.

The space needs for communications is still being reviewed and the status has not changed. The only budgetary change of note was the capital item requested by the communications department. Communications Director Lothrop asked that the consoles be replaced in 2009. The console replacement project was taken out of the 2009 budget and was expected to be completed in 2010.

There have been increasing communication problems and issues with the old consoles that were less than adequate and difficult to repair. It became a safety issue as the quality of dispatching services declined due to poor and outdated equipment. After conferring with the communications director, a consultant, the communications advisory and executive boards and end-users, it was decided that the project could not be delayed. The recently purchased consoles were funded from communications reserves and did not impact the tax assessments to the towns.

Ann Matlack asked if there were any plans in the near future to go out for a bond to build a communications center. Mr. Hart responded by saying there currently were no plans for a bond or building. It could possibly be discussed and a plan put together in 2011. There is still concern regarding the space needs for dispatch. The County could build onto the jail facility at some point to add a communications center, but the soil preparation and support structure for any building on that site would cost a million dollars. Other sites have been reviewed for suitability to house communications. Nothing definite has been decided at this time.

Bill Jones commented that the console project was postponed for a year because it seemed prudent to find new accommodations for the dispatch center before purchasing new equipment that would have to be moved. The quality of service may have been improved now, but the space needs issue remains unresolved.

## **VII. Proposed 2010 Communications Budget** – Communications Director Linwood Lothrop

The fire chiefs and assistant fire chief present introduced themselves and explained that they also were members of either the Communications Executive or Advisory Board and supported the director's proposed 2010 budget.

Communications Director Linwood Lothrop explained that the consoles with wiring dating back to 1995 had become obsolete without the capability to work with new required radio equipment. It was no longer possible to get replacement parts to repair the consoles. It was thought that a new dispatch center would have become a possibility in the last 10 years and then all new equipment would have been purchased for the new and improved communications center. As it turned out, the infrastructure for adequate dispatching services needed to be upgraded, starting with the new consoles.

There are new dispatching issues regarding the radio infrastructure that need to be discussed in relation to the communications proposed budget for 2010.

Bob Duke referred to page 36 and asked why the radio infrastructure upgrade was proposed as a county project, rather than being placed in the communications budget and funded through the assessment of fees to the towns.

County Administrator Andrew Hart explained that there was a discussion about dispatching services with the end-users. There were dead spots and problems with the radio equipment. A consultant was hired to look at the communications problems and issues. It was decided that the County needed to take care of the problems. The total cost of the project was estimated at \$263,000.00. There were several options discussed on how the project could be funded. One bank suggested looking at borrowing the money for five, seven, or ten years. The most advantageous option was the shortest one for five years. The County would pay \$40,500.00 as its obligation and the \$16,800.00 was put in the communications proposed budget, as shown on page 44. This payment arrangement was recommended by the Communications Executive and Advisory Boards.

Both Ann Matlack and Bob Duke asked for an explanation as to why a communications upgrade would be separated out in this manner. Dispatching and its associated costs for operations was considered to be user based and paid through a fee for service assessment to the towns.

Ann Matlack asked about the new dispatch position that was in the proposed budget for 2010. It appeared that Director Lothrop had requested an additional dispatcher and the county administrator had eliminated it from his proposal.

Communications Director Lothrop explained that he asked for another dispatcher because in 2003 there were 12,000 calls and the number had doubled in 2009 with the same number of dispatchers available to handle the increased volume of calls. There are new mandates for screening calls that take more time. The processing of some calls take longer because specific instructions have to be given to the EMT's. It was expected that the new position would be filled in February because of the length of time for the hiring process. There are three 10-hour shifts at the communications center that are covered on a staggered basis for continuity throughout a shift. The new position was supported by both the executive and advisory boards.

Bob Duke asked what the stipends were for, as listed on page 41. The stipends are for advanced training. The part-time dispatch line is at \$26,000.00, which is the same as in 2009, but it is almost \$10,000.00 over the amount budgeted in 2008. Communications Director Lothrop explained the

increase was to help provide coverage during peak hours. It was noted that there is only one part-time dispatcher currently on the roster.

Bill Jones noted that there were a number of lines that were increased and he asked for an explanation. Mr. Lothrop explained that not all of the training bills had been submitted, but he anticipated the estimated costs would be substantiated. Three full time positions needed to be funded. Currently there were two vacancies. Mandatory training, which has increased in recent years, would have to be provided. Another tower site was expected to be added to the grid and has to be inspected twice a year as well as the other towers on line. It costs \$1,500.00 for each inspection, plus repairs. Some equipment associated with the towers needs to be replaced because it was 10 years old. The tower rental is for renting a space on the tower for communications equipment. The flexible benefits line increased slightly because the new employees may wish to opt for these benefits. It was noted that the explanations provided in the last column were beneficial.

Sid Lindsley commented that it appeared the dispatch fees assessed the towns were up by 10 percent, as shown on page 6. Communications Director Lothrop explained that the costs had increased because of the proposed budget and the \$16,800.00 for the radio upgrade. Currently the infrastructure needs to be upgraded. Federal funds of \$800,000.00 and \$99,000.00 of County funds were used for the radio network system now in place. The system was designed in 2004 and the final installation was completed in 2008. Serious problems were discovered early in 2009. Some of the problems were due to the vendor that designed the system going out of business. A consultant was hired to evaluate the system and identify ways to resolve the issues, one of which was non-local interference. Changing frequencies did not resolve the interference issue. The links had to be changed out. The site on Ragged Mountain does not hit all the outlying areas. The antennas have to be replaced to resolve some of the other interference issues. The cost to fix the system is \$263,000.00 with the possibility of another \$20,000.00 to be held in contingency. The first year's cost would be \$57,300.00 (\$16,800.00 in the communications budget and \$40,500.00 in the County's project budget).

Tom Johnston, Washington Fire Chief and Chairman of the Communications Executive Board, explained that the executive board was appointed by the Knox County Communications Advisory Board and the advisory board was made up of one member from each of the emergency services (law, fire and in EMS) in the County. The executive board reviews the budget along with the recommendations of the advisory board.

The \$16,800.00 is basically to solve the dead zone problem and be able to respond to an emergency. It would allow for communication in the dead zones through the use of pagers, but there may still be some problems with being able to communicate back to the KCRCC using the mobile radios. The \$40,500.00 is a pay out to fix the communication system. The reasoning behind putting this amount in the County budget as a project was that originally the towns were told dispatching was a county function and this is how it was being set up. The fees assessed the towns to pay for dispatching services are based on population. The advisory and executive boards recommended paying for the communications upgrade of the infrastructure through valuation and taxation to bring the system up to the level it should have been at years ago. There is a grant application submitted to fund the upgrade. It is unknown, at this time, whether or not the grant will be approved. The grant may require some matching funds from the County. It was anticipated that the grant approval or disapproval would be received in early December. If the grant was not approved, funds to cover the upgrade would be spread over the next five years.

Bob Duke suggested that eventually there would be a new dispatch center. The County had gone into debt in the past to pay for a structure (the jail), but this was a matter of purchasing equipment to provide adequate dispatching services. The towns, traditionally, wanted to know what it cost for dispatching operations and paid for the service through assessed fees. Therefore, the equipment upgrade costs should be in the communications budget and not funded in the County's budget as a project.

Sid Lindsley commented that he supported giving the communications department the tools to do their job.

For clarification purposes, Mr. Hart explained that this was a lease purchase that one bank had recommended. Other counties had used the lease/purchase method to fund equipment upgrades. The grant application might have a better chance of approval if there were some funding or matching funds supplied by the County. If there is no funding for the equipment upgrades and infrastructure, there is a distinct possibility that some of the towns may contract with other providers for dispatching services. There is also the possibility that other towns, outside of Knox County, that may wish to contract with Knox County for dispatching services if the upgrade project is completed.

It appeared that it was not a question of being opposed to doing the project, but more a question of how the project should be funded. The grant application is to cover the whole cost of the project (\$263,000.00) and is from Homeland Security through a competitive bid process. At one time it appeared that the state might be taking over some of the PSAP's. The trend has recently gone the other way with counties and towns taking on the responsibility of dispatching for additional towns in their areas rather than having the state police dispatching in those areas.

The argument to have some of the funding in the County budget as a project was to mitigate the increase in the dispatch fees assessed to the towns and help with the grant process. In effect, it was a question of moving some of the cost of the equipment upgrade from a population based fee to the towns to an increase in valuation base funding (increase in taxes).

Mr. Hart reported that he had heard from six fire chiefs that they were ready to look elsewhere for dispatching services because of the communications issues. Originally the total cost of the project (\$263,000.00) was put in the dispatch budget which impacted the dispatch fees assessed budget column. Then the lease/purchase option was proposed which lessened that impact with only \$57,300.00 (\$40,500.00 + \$16,800.00) being put into the dispatch budget. The advisory and executive boards recommended splitting it between the County and the dispatch budget. The fire chiefs expressed their concern with the dead spots in the County and the effect on being able to respond to an emergency.

Ann Matlack suggested showing the impact of the lease/purchase amount in the dispatch budget, rather than split the amount between communications and the county project budget.

Bob Duke suggested that the administrator research old documents to see if and when there was a reference to how the cost of dispatch services was originally set up.

It was suggested that the advisory board recommended that the County pay for part of the upgrade because the equipment should have been in place back in 2000 and it was believed that surplus funds could be used for the project so there would be no impact on the end-users. Since the last quarterly meeting of the advisory committee, it has been determined that there are no surplus funds available (*used for consoles*) and the total cost of the project (\$263,000.00) would have to be funded in some manner such as the lease/purchase option.

Tom Johnston, on behalf of the executive and advisory boards who supported the request for an additional dispatcher, recommended putting the additional dispatch position back in the proposed budget for 2010. The fire chiefs of Knox County met last night and supported the additional dispatch position.

- A motion was made by Bob Duke and seconded by Dorothy Meriwether (*as a straw vote*) to reduce the part-time line to \$20,000.00. No vote was taken.

Mr. Hart was asked to put the new position and \$40,500.00 back in the budget and reduce the part-time dispatch line to \$20,000.00.

#### **VIII. 2010 Proposed Budgets – County Administrator Andrew Hart**

County Administrator Andrew Hart remarked that because the budget process had been shortened, not all department heads were required to be present, but were welcome to attend. The majority of questions were for the larger departments, such as Communications.

##### Registry of Deeds:

The Registry of Deeds proposed budget for 2010 is on page 15. Bob Duke stated he did not have any questions. Ann Matlack remarked that generally the only budgetary item that is discussed is the projected revenues for the Registry of Deeds. The estimated revenue figure for 2009 is \$87,000.00 and it is expected that it will be approximately 30 percent less in 2010.

The revenues are market driven and with real estates sales down, it is expected that the revenue will continue the downward trend. It was noted that the projected revenue figures is less than half of what it was two years ago.

Recording fees increased slightly because the number of documents recorded as increased. The on-line service fees are down slightly due to the real estate slump.

County Administrator Andrew Hart reported that Hancock County was being sued by MacImage of Maine because of their request for information from the internet service for free. A substantial amount of money was won due to the legal action and now the other counties are being sued. Knox County contacted legal counsel. A letter was drafted and sent to MacImage of Maine in response to their letter requesting information.

The budget revenues were not changed because there is no way of knowing at this time what the outcome of this issue will be.

Commissioner Anne Beebe-Center explained that MacImage of Maine was originally a provider of information electronically and had the electronic versions of information available through Hancock County' Registry of Deeds.

It was noted that the printing line, on page 15, should be zero. The net amount would then be reduced by \$200.00.

The consensus of the committee was that there were no problems or issues with the proposed 2010 Registry of Deeds budget.

Probate Court:

Register of Probate Elaine Hallett was asked if it was still necessary to have a budget line (\$500.00) for microfilming with the newer technologies now available. Ms. Hallett responded that all original documents had to be kept on file in one of the vaults and even though many documents have been scanned, the system is not foolproof. Microfilming of documents was still required. There are two copies of each film made; one for the archives in Augusta and one kept on site in the Probate office. There were no other questions.

County Administrator Andrew Hart explained that there were two changes of the salary budget lines. Judge Carol Emery offered to forfeit her longevity, which decreased the amount budgeted for her salary. It was noted that there was a typo in the transcript budget line that was corrected to \$750.00. The proposed net budget for Probate is \$128,655.00.

The consensus of the committee was that there were no problems or issues with the proposed 2010 Probate budget.

Finance Office:

The proposed 2010 Finance Office budget is on page 24. Bob Duke asked if the resignation/termination benefits line was increased because someone was leaving. Finance Director Kathy Robinson explained that anyone with over 720 hours of sick time could opt to be paid half of the year's accumulated sick time.

The training and seminar budget line was increased because the Maine Municipal Tax Collectors and Treasurers Association is offering new education opportunities; one of which leads to certification of a treasurer. Each department pays dues to their own specific association.

The MUNIS accounting software has been used since 2007 and funded out of a reserve account. The cost for the contract \$29,388.00 was put in the budget to show the actual cost of the system.

Bob Duke asked who used the MUNIS system. Ms. Robinson said only the three finance staff members are users. It was noted that there was not much interest by other department heads to view the information available. The finance department provided updates on expenditures to the department heads.

The IT department was asked to review the new MUNIS contract and its costs. Some language was added to protect the County's interest and information. MUNIS provides an information back-up service. If the County changed to a different system, there could be additional costs associated with the change for technological support. Some modules that were underutilized were removed this year as a cost saving measure.

Mr. Hart reported that he surveyed other towns and counties to see what accounting software programs were used. Many of the towns use TRIO. It is possible to do a budget using MUNIS, but the budget forms the County is using is done in Excel. Before MUNIS was installed, the County used a DOS based system.

It was noted that the income number was down. Telephone costs were up in some offices, but the finance office telephone figure was down.

Bill Jones commented that it was difficult to determine if the numbers, which were up a little over \$100,000.00 in four years were reasonable for the operations of a county finance office. It was noted that many of the county finances offices were that of a treasurer who was an elected official. Knox County changed the status of the treasurer's position, by means of adopting the Charter, from elected to appointed.

There was some concern over the budgetary upward trends. One of contributing factor to the increase was the finance director's salary and the other was inclusion of the almost \$30,000.00 for the MUNIS contract being put in the finance office budget.

The cost for the audit each year has declined, mostly due to the improved methods of accountability.

There being no other questions, the consensus was that the Finance Office proposed budget for 2010 was acceptable.

Debt Service:

The jail bond has been retired and therefore there is no debt service. Although a number of capital improvements have been included in the proposed budget for 2010, not all of the funds allocated in the past to pay off the jail bond were being proposed to be used to keep the budget flat. The over-all budget proposal for 2010 is down. The greatest proposed expenditure is for the communications equipment upgrade. Although the jail structure needs to be renovated, it was not anticipated that funds would be used for repairs because it was still unknown as to whether or not the mission of the jail itself will change.

County Administrative Offices:

County Administrator Andrew Hart explained that the IT assistant's position was reclassified from a salaried to an hourly position. The overtime was to pay for call-outs for emergency computer related repairs and to cover for when IT Director Jeff Lake is on vacation.

Bob Duke asked how many computers were being supported by the IT department. Mr. Lake responded 85 computers plus servers. There are approximately 75 end users.

It was noted that the largest increase in this budget was for the public safety records management server and the courthouse server network infrastructure costs (\$47,500.00) and upkeep. Mr. Lake explained that he wanted to put in a comprehensive wireless system in the old section of the courthouse and a central server for security and management of data. This is considered a long-term investment with a maintenance cost associated with the wireless system. The office computers are replaced every three to five years. The server itself would probably have to be replaced in five years.

Asked if the IT purchases as requested were necessary, Jeff Lake responded that the project could be put off, but it was needed to mitigate risk. It was difficult to figure the worth of mitigating the risk associated with security and management of data.

County Administrator Andrew Hart would like to see the legal cost decrease, but the Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) could be a contributor to the increase in legal costs.

Bob Duke commented that legal fees were relative to business and counsel contacted when there was a need. Mr. Hart reported that he recently attended an association meeting of the clerks, managers and administrators and they were looking to have Maine County Commissioners Association (MCCA) being able to provide a similar legal service that Maine Municipal Association (MMA) has for answering general legal questions.

Many calls to the County's legal counsel are contract related, as well as for personnel issues. It was noted that the Risk Pool's legal counsel was for protecting the Risk Pool and the County had to have its own legal representation in many cases. Arbitration, mediation and labor relations were also responsible for some of the legal costs. Some departments account for more of the costs than others. One pending case, concerning the sheriff's office and the authority of the administrator, could cost as much as another \$20,000.00. The union contract was signed, but there are two outstanding issues; wages for 2010, and discipline. It is anticipated that there will be additional legal costs associated with completing work on the union contract. It is expected the routine legal work and costs will decline when the reworked contracts are renewed.

Regarding commissioners' salaries, Commissioner Richard Parent asked if Commissioner Anne Beebe-Center was comfortable with the recommended salary. Commissioner Anne Beebe-Center commented that she was because there was less of a time commitment this year with the three current commissioners sharing the workload. The Charter changed role of the commissioners to one of policy makers with the administrator responsible for the day to day operations of the County offices. Much of the background work on issues was done by the administrator with the final decisions being made by the commissioners.

Bill Jones commented that he was pleased to hear this response because, having been on the Charter Committee, he thought that there should be a reduction in the salaries for commissioners with the addition of the administrator's position. Bob Duke agreed, noting that the commission meetings were much longer in the past and the commissioners roles have changed with the addition of an administrator.

Bob Duke commented that he considered many of the capital improvement requests valid, but he was interested in seeing that the tax assessments to the towns not increase over the 2009 assessment. Some of the requests are the reasons that people are considering TABOR, more local control over expenditures.

County Administrator Andrew Hart remarked that if the jail debt had not been retired, there would have been more cut out of the proposed budget for 2010. There is some concern that if the tax assessments remain the same over the next several years, budget items will be put off and then there will be a large

spike to finally address the needs and pay the costs associated with them. Mr. Hart recommended having small increases in the tax assessment each year.

Rockport's tax assessment was down, but some towns' tax assessment went up due to the increase in valuation. The suggested change in the communication budget would change the dispatch fee assessment and the tax assessment to each town.

Bill Jones commented that he preferred to have the 2010 budget reflect what is best for the County in terms of capital projects and what needs to be done, rather than being considered as a means to stabilize the taxes assessed each year.

It was noted that both the Sheriff's office and the airport are asking for additional personnel. Mr. Hart reported eliminating all three requests for additional personnel. The rationale for this action was that the department heads should come and explain why the positions are needed.

County Administrator Andrew Hart was asked if he supported the request for an additional dispatcher. Mr. Hart explained that he removed the requested position from the communications proposed budget for 2010 because the equipment upgrades and the radio infrastructure were a priority and an expensive fix. If this project was not funded and the emergency services community could not communicate with each other, there was little need for an additional dispatcher, even with the increased call volume. The calls might even decrease with towns seeking dispatching services elsewhere. If not, then the calls during peak times could be covered with part-time dispatchers. It was not a matter of not supporting the additional position as much as looking at the increase in funding for the upgrades in the proposed project.

Sid Lindsley commented that he agreed with Mr. Hart's assessment of the communications department's situation.

It was suggested that it was not just a matter of the call volume relating to the need for another dispatcher. There were other factors such as the time required to screen calls, the amount of training a dispatcher was required to have, mandated procedures, and instructions being given during a call that made the call handling time longer and necessitated having another dispatcher during peak hours of operation.

The requests for additional personnel would be reviewed during the departmental review process. It was suggested that with newer technology available, that staffing in some offices may come under more scrutiny next year.

Bob Duke stated that he was concerned about being told now that the department is defunct and \$263,000.00 is needed to fix it. It appeared that there was a lack of communication between the end-users and the County regarding the problems with the radio equipment and infrastructure. Some of the problems have been discussed previously, but the impact and the amount of funding needed now was new.

County Administrator Andrew Hart reported that the Programs Grants were scheduled to be reviewed next week. It had been suggested that representatives from most of the Programs Grants did not need to be present at the meeting. Mr. Hart recommended not increasing the 2010 budgets for Knox-Lincoln Cooperative Extension Service and the Knox-Lincoln Soil & Water Conservation District. The proposed budget amount remained at the 2009 budget level (*\$54,570.00 and \$19,421.00, respectively*).

It was expected that KWRED would be present to explain their request for funding.

There was some discussion as to whether or not the representatives should be present. It was suggested that they come at the start of the meeting and be allowed to answer questions during a time set aside for "public comment". This would give them the opportunity to learn that their budget requests were not granted.

## **IX. Adjourn**

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn. A vote was taken with all in favor.

A motion was made by Commissioner Richard Parent to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Anne Beebe-Center. A vote was taken with all in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Constance W. Johanson  
Executive Assistant

**The Knox County Commission approved these minutes at the joint meeting with the Knox County Budget Committee held on October 29, 2009.**

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Anne H. Beebe-Center, Chair – Commissioner District #1

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Richard L. Parent, Jr. – Commissioner District #2

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Roger A. Moody – Commissioner District #3