

KNOX COUNTY COMMISSION

Special Joint Meeting Knox County Commission and Budget Committee

Thursday – October 27, 2016 – 5:00 p.m.

A special joint meeting of the Knox County Commission and the Knox County Budget Committee was held on Thursday, October 27, 2016, at 5:00 p.m., at the county courthouse, 62 Union Street, Rockland, Maine. 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, Finance Director Kathy Robinson, EMA Director Ray Sisk (*left at 5:43 p.m.*), EMA Geospatial Database Manager Leticia vanVuuren (*left at 5:43 p.m.*), Register of Deeds Lisa Simmons (*left at 5:24 p.m.*), Register of Probate Elaine Hallett (*left at 5:24 p.m.*), and Building Maintenance Supervisor Don Decker.

Budget Committee members present were: Nicholas Lapham, Bob Duke, Lawrence Nash, Randy Stearns, Dorothy Meriwether, Bill Jones, Shawn Levasseur, and Terry Pinto. *Budget Committee members not present: Gerald Zwick.*

Others in attendance: Maine Real Estate Management President Paul Cook (*left at 5:56 p.m.*), MREM Vice President Jesse McCue (*left at 5:56 p.m.*); Sonja Sleeper, candidate for State Representative – District 92; and Sharon Pohlman, candidate for Knox County Commissioner Seat - District #3.

Knox County Commission and Budget Committee Joint Meeting Agenda Commission Hearing Room Thursday – October 27, 2016 – 5:00 p.m.

- I. 5:00 **Meeting Called To Order** (Chair Bob Duke for the Knox County Budget Committee, Commission Chair Roger Moody for the Knox County Commission)
- II. 5:01 **Public Comment**
- III. 5:01 **Approve Minutes** (Chair Bob Duke for the Knox County Budget Committee)
 - 1. Minutes of the Joint Budget Meeting of October 20, 2016
- V. **Budget Review**
 - 1. Probate (Pgs 24 - 25)
 - 2. Registry of Deeds (Pgs 13 - 14)
 - 3. Emergency Management Agency (Pgs 17 - 18)
 - 4. Building Maintenance (Pgs 10 - 12)
 - 5. Finance (Pgs 19 - 20)
- VI. **Adjourn**

I. Meeting Called to Order

The October 27, 2016 joint meeting of the Knox County Budget Committee and the Knox County Commission was called to order by Budget Committee Chair Bob Duke and Commission Chair Roger Moody at 5:02 p.m.

II. Approve Minutes

1. Minutes of Joint Budget Meeting of October 20, 2016.

Terry Pinto referred to an exchange that he had had with the County Systems Administrator, Mike Dean, at the prior joint budget meeting on October 20th. While the minutes from that meeting contained a summary of the general discussion, Mr. Pinto felt that the specific question he had asked, and the specific answer Systems Administrator Dean gave, should both be included in the minutes. Since Mr. Pinto is one of the two Rockland representatives, he thought it was important to have System Administrator Dean's response in the minutes because it was about Rockland's willingness to collaborate with the County. There had apparently been some confusion on whether or not Systems Administrator Dean had contacted the City of Rockland about running fiber on Park Street or not;

Chair Bob Duke clarified that the County had not contacted the City about the project. He said that he had asked Administrator Hart about that earlier, and gotten a transcript of the Systems Administrator Dean's response to Mr. Pinto's question of "have you talked to [the City]?", which Chair Duke then read verbatim:

"I wasn't even aware that they were...Rockland doesn't tend to be real forthcoming...with wanting to play nicely with anybody else. They like to go their own direction...they don't like to have to...share. And I don't mean to sound negative towards Rockland, I just...when you start getting multiple partners in...it changes the projects...and Rockland made their decisions before talking to anyone. So...as far as I know."

Chair Duke stated that everyone is now aware that the County and the City of Rockland have not talked about this topic. Administrator Hart explained that the County currently has a relationship with GWI and the County re-structured the contract for 2017, which includes the build-out on Park Street and running fiber to the Courthouse, that Systems Administrator Dean had talked about at the last meeting. Administrator Hart said that he tried to reach Assistant City Manager Audra Caler-Bell by phone today just to see what Rockland's plans are, but he was unable to reach her. He said that he would follow up with her later and have more information later on.

Chair Duke asked for a motion to approve the minutes with the quote from Systems Administrator Mike Dean included in the minutes so it will be in the permanent record.

- Dorothy Meriwether motioned to approve the minutes including adding the quote from Systems Administrator Mike Dean from the October 20th meeting. Randy Stearns seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor.
- Commissioner Carol Maines motioned to approve the minutes as amended by the Budget Committee. Commissioner Richard Parent seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor.

III. Public Comment

No members of the public were in attendance.

IV. Budget Review

1. Probate

Register of Probate Elaine Hallett briefly reviewed her budget:

- Budget down is 2% from the 2016 budget
- Started doing passports almost 2 years ago and process an average of 2 per day. Probate charges \$25 for each passport processed, but that will be going up to \$35.
- Starting in 2017, the Register of Probate position will be included in the County's wage plan so Register Hallett will be receiving an increase in 2017 after not receiving an increase for a couple of years.
- Advertizing represents the costs for being required to put a notice in the paper to creditors every time an estate is processed, and it's the same anytime there is a name change. The department then charges fees to the individuals or estates which helps wash out the expense.
- Commodities are down 28% because two computers were purchased in 2016 and no computers will be purchased in 2017.

A consensus vote was taken by the Budget Committee on whether to approve the county administrator's recommendation of a net budget of \$129,284:

In favor: 8 (Bob Duke, Dorothy Meriwether, Shawn Levasseur, Randy Stearns, Nick Lapham, Terry Pinto, Lawrence Nash, Bill Jones)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

A consensus vote was taken by the County Commission on whether to approve the county administrator's recommendation of a net budget of \$129,284:

In favor: 3 (Commissioners Maines, Moody, Parent)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

2. Registry of Deeds

Register of Deeds Lisa Simmons briefly reviewed her budget:

- Budget revenues up 4% based on current trend. The revenues are being monitored and the estimates may increase or decrease before the final budget is approved in December.
- Commodities are down 10% because a lot more is done on the internet and electronically, which results in less resources such as paper, toner, etc. being used.

A consensus vote was taken by the Budget Committee on whether to approve the county administrator's recommendation of a net budget of (\$194,081):

In favor: 8 (Bob Duke, Dorothy Meriwether, Shawn Levasseur, Randy Stearns, Nick Lapham, Terry Pinto, Lawrence Nash, Bill Jones)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

A consensus vote was taken by the County Commission on whether to approve the county administrator's recommendation of a net budget of (\$194,081):

In favor: 3 (Commissioners Maines, Moody, Parent)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

3. Emergency Management Agency

EMA Director Ray Sisk briefly reviewed his budget:

- Budget is up about 10% overall.
- If EMA is successful getting EMPG funding (the 50% match) for the planned replacement of the EMA program vehicle, the increase of \$1,351 in the Automobile Repairs line will not be necessary because the department will be able to get the replacement vehicle. The estimate for a new vehicle is around \$45,000, with about \$25,000 of that being the trade-in value. That leaves \$20,000 needed, but \$10,000 of that would be reimbursed through EMPG funds if the County receives the grant funding. It had been anticipated that the County would know by now if receiving grant funds, but no one has received word yet. If EMA is not successful in getting the funding, the \$20,000 in the 2017 budget would go in a reserve account to use at a future date. The sooner the vehicle is replaced, the better, because the resale value will continue to shrink on the current vehicle, while the cost of a new vehicle will increase.

Director Sisk was asked to explain what “soft match” is. He described soft matches as things like volunteer hours or when EMA meeting participants sign the sign-in sheet with their round trip hours. That time spent in travel, along with the amount of time at the meeting or training, etc. has a value placed on it by the government, which means that EMA can submit for receiving a monetary value for that time spent. There used to be a lot more funds available for that type of reimbursement, but it is less now because more agencies are participating in programs and are getting some of that money, which makes it less available to Knox County.

A consensus vote was taken by the Budget Committee on whether to approve the county administrator’s recommendation of a net budget of \$82,580:

In favor: 8 (Bob Duke, Dorothy Meriwether, Shawn Levasseur, Randy Stearns, Nick Lapham, Terry Pinto, Lawrence Nash, Bill Jones)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

A consensus vote was taken by the County Commission on whether to approve the county administrator’s recommendation of a net budget of \$82,580:

In favor: 3 (Commissioners Maines, Moody, Parent)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

4. Building Maintenance

Jesse McCue of Maine Real Estate Management gave a brief overview of the Courthouse and Public Safety Building Maintenance budgets:

Courthouse

- Down 14% overall.
- There are no big projects or staggering increases in 2017.
- Heating fuel is still low plus the courthouse did a bunch of building envelope work that has greatly improved the efficiency of the building.
- Most of the maintenance contracts are multiple year contracts so prices are locked in.
- The snow bank removal is a variable expense because there’s no way to know in advance how much snow there will end up being each winter.

A consensus vote was taken by the Budget Committee on whether to approve the county administrator’s recommendation of a net budget of \$220,080:

In favor: 8 (Bob Duke, Dorothy Meriwether, Shawn Levasseur, Randy Stearns, Nick Lapham, Terry Pinto, Lawrence Nash, Bill Jones)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

A consensus vote was taken by the County Commission on whether to approve the county administrator’s recommendation of a net budget of \$220,080:

In favor: 3 (Commissioners Maines, Moody, Parent)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

Public Safety Building

- Down 9% overall.
- Heating fuel costs still down for this facility as well, plus the County has a better idea of what the building actually needs. Unfortunately, one of the issues is that the hot water runs off of the boiler, so the boiler cannot be completely shut down or the building will have no hot water at all. In the courthouse that’s not the case, so the boiler can be shut down all summer.
- Will now have a contract for pest control because of ants, spiders, etc., especially in summer.

A consensus vote was taken by the Budget Committee on whether to approve the county administrator’s recommendation of a net budget of \$65,867:

In favor: 8 (Bob Duke, Dorothy Meriwether, Shawn Levasseur, Randy Stearns, Nick Lapham, Terry Pinto, Lawrence Nash, Bill Jones)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

A consensus vote was taken by the County Commission on whether to approve the county administrator's recommendation of a net budget of \$65,867:

In favor: 3 (Commissioners Maines, Moody, Parent)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

5. Finance

Finance Director Kathy Robinson briefly reviewed her budget:

- Budget is up 10%.
- Finance clerk retired in 2015 and we decided to try having the new person brought in at 28 hours in 2016, but discovered it just won't work. So the big change in the budget is to increase the position's hours to 35, which makes her eligible for benefits including health benefits and ICMA. That is the main difference between the 2016 budget and 2017 budget. Have to budget the full family package because we don't know what the employee will decide on, but open enrollment ends in November so we'll know before the end of the budget process.
- Kathy didn't do some of the training, etc. offsite because they were all so busy she couldn't leave the office, so she didn't expend that much of the training line or the mileage. Hopefully with the finance clerk position working more hours in 2017, Kathy can go to more stuff.

Several Budget Committee members expressed some concern over the jump in cost to increase the finance clerk hours because that made the position eligible for benefits again, which caused a spike in the finance budget. Several Committee members suggested having two part-time employees instead of increasing the hours of the current part-time employee. Director Robinson said that while she had not considered that option, she did not believe that would work because that would mean having two people that would have to know the same exact job so that regardless of who was here, the staff could jump in and take care of tasks with deadlines or helping the public that come into the office. She didn't believe that it would be productive or time effective to handle things that way. She also noted that lowering the position to 28 hours had only been an experiment to see if the office could get by with that position being cut back to part time. In her opinion the experiment was not a success because they have needed that employee to work more hours than that anyway, and staff has been so busy that Director Robinson has not been able to attend training or conferences or other events that would take her away from the office. She noted that the change would be re-evaluated for 2018, and the current employee knows that. Director Robinson hoped that by increasing the hours from 28 to 35, the office can catch up on some backlogged projects and then cut back the finance clerk's hours as appropriate. She added that if she hadn't lowered the hours in the first place, this conversation wouldn't even be happening because then her budget would have remained even at the higher personnel services amounts.

Administrator Hart commented that it had been hard enough to find one employee that was qualified for the position and was willing to work part-time with no benefits so he didn't think it would work out well if the County had two part time positions instead. Director Robinson agreed, and argued that having two part-time employees might work for some positions, but that it simply wouldn't work for the finance clerk position.

A few other Budget Committee members commented that it wasn't up to the Budget Committee to make personnel decisions and that the Commission supports Administrator Hart and Director Robinson and trusts that appropriate staffing level decisions are made. It was also noted that the results of the Organizational Study that the County had done a few years prior moved some HR tasks up to the finance office, which has increased the finance office staff work load.

A consensus vote was taken by the Budget Committee on whether to approve the county administrator’s recommendation of a net budget of \$283,586:

In favor: 5 (Randy Stearns, Lawrence Nash, Bob Duke, Dorothy Meriwether, Terry Pinto)
 Against: 1 (Shawn Levasseur)
 Abstained: 2 (Nick Lapham, Bill Jones)

Nick Lapham and Bill Jones were asked why they had abstained from voting. Nick responded that he was still wrestling with are there other options besides increasing the current finance clerk’s hours, but he also knows that it’s up to the Commission, Administrator Hart, and Finance Director Robinson to decide that. He said that he was not against it, but was not in favor of it either.

A consensus vote was taken by the County Commission on whether to approve the county administrator’s recommendation of a net budget of \$283,586:

In favor: 3 (Commissioners Maines, Moody, Parent)
 Against: 0
 Abstained: 0

Other Topics Discussed

Fiber Build-Out

Administrator Hart was asked for the complete cost of the fiber build-out that the County had arranged with GWI. Administrator Hart explained that the entire cost of the contract with GWI is \$18,660, which includes 1/4th of the build-out cost, but he didn’t have the figure in front of him to know what the breakdown was and didn’t want to guess. He said that he would check with the Systems Administrator and get the information to everyone. A couple Committee members voiced concern over the fact that since the project was being paid over the course of 4 years, if the Budget Committee approved the expense in 2017, it was automatically agreeing to support it in the subsequent 3 years.

Health Insurance

Administrator Hart was asked what percent of the cost of health insurance is being paid by the employees. For single coverage, the County pays 100% of the cost. For family coverage, the County pays 75% and the employee pays 25%. A few years prior, the Commission voted to have the employees that had been grandfathered at 100% for family coverage start paying a percentage of their insurance in larger increments each year until they are up to the 25%.

Commission Input

Commissioner Maines raised the issue of the Budget Committee having asked for more feedback from the Commission during the budget process, and yet she had been cut off earlier in the meeting by Budget Committee Chair Bob Duke when she had asked a question of the Maine Real Estate Management representatives. Chair Duke responded that he had ended the conversation because the questions were about brainstorming ideas of what could make the heating system more efficient, and did not actually relate to the current budget being reviewed. Chair Duke said that he felt it was his job as Chair to keep the group on task and to prevent the Committee from getting into policy discussions or off topic. A few other Committee members voiced support for his efforts. Chair Duke said that if Commissioner Maines had wanted to ask questions unrelated to the budget, she could do so after the meeting or at another, more appropriate time. Commissioner Maines disagreed with his assessment of the pertinence of her questions, but the discussion was ended.

MCEDD

A few Budget Committee members expressed some heartburn over the fact that since the County taxes are paid by all municipalities of Knox County, if the County buys into MCEDD to give the smaller towns access to MCEDD that aren’t already members, the 4 municipalities that bought into MCEDD on their own will essentially be paying twice – once on their own, and a second time (though considerably less) in their

county taxes. Commissioner Moody felt that the ultimate goal would be to have the County funding membership with MCEDD for all County municipalities, rather than just the smaller towns, with Thomaston, Rockport, Camden and Rockland no longer paying for their own memberships. That way, everyone would only be paying once - in their County taxes. For the County to cover all Knox municipalities, however, that would essentially double the current MCEDD funding requirement because those 4 largest municipalities contain about half of the population of Knox County and membership is based on \$1.25 per capita, but that might be an option for a future budget year.

There was a short discussion about whether Commissioner Moody should recuse himself from voting since he serves on the MCEDD board even though he disclosed that fact earlier on, or whether Budget Committee members representing towns already members of MCEDD should do the same.

It was noted that every year MCEDD gets discussed repeatedly but it is unlikely that anything being said for or against will change the minds of those present. It was suggested that if Budget Committee members believed in giving the smaller towns access to MCEDD and the services it provides, then vote to approve the budget request. If not, vote against approving the request. The MCEDD request is a tiny fraction of the overall budget for the whole County, and some felt that way too much time is spent discussing MCEDD.

Upcoming Meetings

There will be no meeting on November 3rd because Administrator Hart will be out of the country.

November 10th is the next scheduled meeting. The budgets being reviewed are the Patrol and Jail divisions of the Sheriff's Department.

Administrator Hart asked if the plan was to finish the budget review on the last scheduled night of November 17th or whether the final review of all budgets would be done on the "as needed" date of November 22nd. He said that he needed to know because he needed to let the department managers know what night is mandatory for them to attend in case the Commission or Budget Committee has any further questions. There was no consensus on whether the budget review process would be wrapped up enough on November 17th to not need the 22nd, so Administrator Hart said that he would tell department managers to hold both dates just in case.

Finance Director Robinson was asked to provide the Budget Committee with a list of reserve accounts to be discussed at a later meeting.

V. Adjourn

- A motion was made by Dorothy Meriwether to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Randy Stearns. A vote was taken with all in favor.
- A motion was made by Commissioner Carol Maines to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Richard Parent. A vote was taken with all in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candice S. Richards
Administrative Assistant

The Knox County Budget Committee and Knox County Commission approved these minutes at their next joint meeting on November 10, 2016.