

**WALDO COUNTY 2018 BUDGET COMMITTEE
ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING
OCTOBER 25, 2019
Commissioners Courtroom
39B Spring Street, Belfast, Maine
6:00 p.m.**

PRESENT: Budget Committee Members Richard Desmarais, Herbert Harnden, Penny Sampson, Gabriel Pendleton, Joshua Gerritsen, Peter Rioux, Bob Kurek, Brian Jones. Also present were County Commissioners William D. Shorey, Amy R. Fowler and Betty I. Johnson, and both County Clerk Barbara Arseneau and Assistant Clerk Nicole Hubbard to take minutes.

Call to order: Commissioner Shorey called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., Commissioner Fowler led all in the flag salute and all present made introductions.

Vote for 2020 Chairman:

****Peter Rioux moved, Herb Harnden seconded to nominate Richard Desmarais to serve as 2020 Budget Committee Chairman. Nominations ceased. Motion passed unanimously.**

A. Fowler gave a brief explanation on what the budget looks like and how to follow along with requests from each department, etc.

D. Desmarais asked if anyone had any questions on what they saw. P. Sampson wanted to address the EMA budget. She wanted to know what GIS salary was, what the position is. She understands that a part of that is reimbursed by the state.

1010 Emergency Management Budget:

The Budget Committee asked about projected revenue, as a portion of the budget gets reimbursed. A. Fowler stated that the Finance Director would have more accurate information on this.

Various inquiries came from the budget committee in regards to the General Fund and how that works; how the county borrows money, etc. B. Jones asked if it was possible to fluctuate when they pay their taxes to ease the TAN (Tax Anticipation Note) on the county. B. Johnson stated that most taxes are paid twice a year anyway.

B. Jones stated that a TAN shouldn't be happening regardless and J. Gerritsen inquired what the interest rate was and B. Shorey stated it was really low.

P. Sampson inquired where the County gets the 2% COLA. She stated the federal COLA is 1.6%, not 2%. B. Johnson explained that the county doesn't go by the federal as the [union] contracts are different.

1015 District Attorney's Budget:

A. Fowler explained that the employee who usually puts the budget together was out on leave and the new DA wasn't familiar with how the budget was put together. Fortunately, the

employee came back in time to catch some omissions and some additional cost requests had to be added.

There was discussion of the rental costs of office space for the District Attorney, who is a state employee. There was also discussion of the County being required to pay for its own internet, door locks, etc. for that rental space.

G. Pendleton asked if the county can just go to the state and say they need access of the Wi-Fi. There was no definite answer on this, however the Commissioners noted that Waldo did get office space in the new judicial building where other counties have not received an office. J. Gerritsen and G. Pendleton inquired if the county can get someone from the state to meet with the budget committee to explain why the county cannot hook into their Wi-Fi. A. Fowler asked B. Arseneau to see if she could get someone from the state to come in.

W. Shorey explained that the County tried to use an IT company and it didn't work well. They will be going back to someone in-house to handle IT.

The Budget Committee asked about the request that the DA had made during the last public hearing for funds for a grant writer, to be shared by the County. It had not passed last year. B. Jones thought that the DA should have a discussion with the legislature and make a plan before presenting the request. The Commissioners acknowledged that this request came in at the public hearing and they had been unaware of it until that time.

1020 Commissioners Budget:

P. Rioux inquired what the fee was for, in regards to hosting something. B. Arseneau stated that it was for the annual convention, which Waldo County hosted this year. The county also budgets funds each year because each county helps out other counties that are hosting.

A. Fowler and W. Shorey spoke about Waldo County being the only Maine County that does not have any debt.

B. Jones asked about the reserve accounts and what they are earning. The Commissioners said they put some of the funds into CD's. B. Jones wondered if bonding was less expensive and to put funds into the hands of the taxpayers.

W. Shorey explained that the county built a building out at the Garden for the Sheriff's Office equipment, the Garden equipment, and equipment used by the Facilities Manager. This building was paid out of CCA (Community Corrections Act) funds from the State and doesn't cost the County taxpayers anything. That Garden produces over 100,000 lbs. of produce that is given away to taxpayers and used at the Reentry Center to feed the residents.

1025 Finance Office Budget:

P. Sampson noticed that the Treasurer's salary was not changing at all and wondered why he was not getting a 2% COLA.

The Commissioners stated that K. Trussell does a majority of the work and it was agreed upon that the Treasurer would be paid a flat rate of \$2500.00, with no annual increases.

P. Sampson asked about the Deputy Treasurer's increase. She wondered if it might have been the change in title from Deputy Treasurer to Finance Director.

W. Shorey explained that K. Trussell did every bit of the budget. He explained that the Treasurer before used to get raises. P. Rioux said he felt that dropping the current Treasurer's funding last year was a dirty trick. A. Fowler said she recognized that the timing was terrible, but that K. Trussell, when asked any question, finds the answers right down to the nickel. A. Fowler mentioned that the former treasurer had a stroke, and also that he was retiring, but the timing was bad and there was never anything done with malicious intent. There is only so much anyone should do to when someone has a medical issue. The current Treasurer only comes in for most meetings. G. Pendleton said he remembered that it came up in the budget and Treasurer Sheff was there and didn't say anything. It was discussed that K. Trussell was already doing all the work.

B. Kurek asked if the County had to have a Treasurer, and they responded that the law requires it unless the County had a charter that changed the state statute.

B. Jones asked what this line item looked like going forward. The Commissioners said the COLA would be the same as the unions would get.

P. Sampson said that the math for the Finance Director's position seemed incorrect, if it was a 2% increase. It shouldn't be \$61,908.00, it should be \$61,175.00. A. Fowler said she would check on that.

B. Jones noted that K. Trussell is responsible for a \$9,500,000.00 budget. He asked how it compared to the salary of other Finance Directors. The Commissioners said they didn't know.

J. Gerritsen asked how the Treasurer felt about his salary. B. Johnson replied, "Well, you saw what he put in the papers." W. Shorey said he never showed up to any Commissioners Court Sessions before taking office.

1030 Facilities Budget:

When asked what was happening with the former District Courthouse building, A. Fowler explained that the Probate Office has moved upstairs, the two small conference rooms were renovated to create a Finance Office, the H.R. Director had moved into the former Commissioners conference/court room and the Commissioners now used the former Probate Courtroom and chambers.

B. Jones asked if snow removal, garbage removal, etc. were bid contracts and if they were bid out every year. The Commissioners said it varied based on the contract arrangement.

1035 Information Technology Budget:

W. Shorey said that the Commissioners fund technology out of the Technology Reserve. He illustrated that there is a server that needs to be replaced in February of 2020 and that will be paid from this reserve account.

P. Sampson asked about the work IT budget and if it was a new thing. The Commissioners said that it was new. The IT Contractor who had been with the County for years was no longer able to do the work and told the County they would need to find someone else. The Commissioners went out to bid and ended up hiring a company, and have not been satisfied with the cost. W. Shorey said that they ended up putting a freeze on capital expenditures so that this company would not keep spending. The Commissioners explained that they now need to have a person in-house.

B. Jones asked if the budget before them was appropriated through taxation. He asked what the appropriation process was for the Reserve Accounts. He asked if that part came before the Budget Committee and the Commissioners explained that it did not. B. Kurek asked if they took all the expenses of the County and then figured out what was coming out of reserves and the fund balance, if the Budget Committee would see this. He wondered if the revenue just went into a fluctuating undesignated fund balance. What he was asking was for the 2020 budget was what the expected expenditures are, what was expended out of the reserves, and what was paid out of the budget raised by taxation.

W. Shorey said that the County is allowed to keep up to \$1,000,000.00 in undesignated funds. They usually keep about \$600,000.00. They have, a few years, given back funds to the taxpayers.

P. Sampson said she'd like to have, for the next meeting, what was spent on technology this year. The Commissioners stated that they get a report monthly on that and would provide that.

J. Gerritsen explained that many IT consulting companies prey on governmental agencies. A. Fowler said that this is what basically happened to the County this year.

1065 Registry of Deeds Budget:

There was discussion of how much the State takes from the Registry of Deeds and how much is able to be retained by the County.

1070 Registry of Probate Budget:

A. Fowler noted that this budget was a little reduced from the previous year.

There was discussion of how the County's overall budget increase makes it very hard on the taxpayers, how the towns take the heat from increased budgets, and they can't cut anymore. A. Fowler passed out copies of the current towns Mil Rates.

G. Pendleton asked if the County would consider going to merit raises. B. Jones said that people work in government jobs for the stability, and that this is one way you lose the best people back to the private sector.

B. Kurek said that when he took a tour of all the facilities, what he came away with was that there are a lot of enthusiastic, tenured people here.

1075 Sheriff's Office Budget:

W. Shorey noted that the State is asking the Counties to do more of the work in law enforcement.

A. Fowler explained that the counties have received notice that, effective January 1, 2020, the state will no longer be participating in call share agreements. It has actually already dropped to about 75%/25%. The State Police will be more of a specialty unit – highways, truck weight, homicides, etc. The Waldo County Sheriff has done a good job gradually adding personnel to the department.

A. Fowler noted that the state has mandated training, for example, and it only comes through Maine Criminal Justice – a state entity. This is unfunded so the cost has to come directly from the county. Interestingly, Maine's crime rate has gone down.

B. Jones commented that everyone feels the unfunded mandates. He wondered why counties do not pitch in together and fund a lobbyist to advocate for the counties. A. Fowler explained that the Counties already do that. She added that she has been advocating at the legislature for the past 15 years.

J. Gerritsen asked about the motor vehicles and wondered how the Sheriff handled the request. The Commissioners stated that the Sheriff embraced the request, did the research for the most economical model and put in an order. They have also figured out how to monitor the costs and savings. J. Gerritsen asked that if there were savings calculated, it's reliable, and makes sense, would they move forward with more purchases. The Commissioners said they would need to wait and see what the figures and results were.

J. Gerritsen asked if each deputy wears body cameras and was told yes. The EMA Director also recently wrote a grant and included the Sheriff's Office so they will be applying that to update cameras and vests.

J. Gerritsen asked about the night vision goggles and what they would be used for. The Commissioners recommended asking the Sheriff.

The Budget Committee asked if the funds reimbursed for the Resource Officer and the Computer Crimes Officer directly offset this. The answer was unknown at that time as the Finance Director was not there, but the Commissioners would get clarification and pass it onto the committee.

1076 Communications Center Budget:

W. Shorey said that the Commissioners have found that other centers run 12-hour shifts. They have spoken to the Director and he has been reluctant to do it. They believe that this will help with overtime. They have discussed among the 3 commissioners that they want to try the 12-hour shifts in order to save on overtime. They believe the overtime is too high, and have reduced the request. The Commissioners noted that this is one of the few departments that requires filling the position if someone calls out.

There was discussion of how the dispatchers feel about this. In a recent conversation with Director O. Smith, he said he believed it was about 50/50.

Some on the Budget Committee thought that the employees might really like it.

B. Jones asked if the centers that work 12-hour days receive more pay and A. Fowler explained that Waldo's dispatchers are among the highest paid. B. Jones stated anything over 40 hours is considered overtime, not anything over 8.

J. Gerritsen inquired what Knox County was doing, A. Fowler stated she wasn't quite sure but Waldo is working with Knox in other areas including sharing a Jail Administrator. A. Fowler stated that they would like to cut the OT budget line by 25,000.00.

1080 Advertising and Promotion:

Not much discussion. The Budget Committee would like them to come in and present their value.

1090 Auditing Budget:

Not much comment.

1095 Debt Service Budget:

No reason to comment because Waldo County has no debt.

2000 Interest Budget:

No discussion.

2005 Waldo County Extension Office Budget:

The Commissioners explained that since this budget has been the same for years, the Commissioners went along with the increased request.

2025 Employee Benefits Budget:

B. Jones inquired what the percentage of "overhead" per employee is. A. Fowler stated she didn't know right off the top of her head, W. Shorey stated he believed it was 15-16%, somewhere in that area.

The Commissioners spoke about the self-funded health insurance plan, how it has saved a great deal of money, and the Commissioners have held back from asking for increases in budget requests for the past several years. They have had a long period of time with minimal costs from employee illnesses. The past few years, the County has had some hard times.

2035 Waldo County Soil & Water Budget:

P. Sampson brought up that Soil & Water has been working on cleaning up Unity Lake.

2040 Records Preservation Budget:

W. Shorey asked B. Arseneau to explain. B. Arseneau explained that the Old Jail has been renovated to be an archive, with the help of a Brownfields Grant to remove hazardous materials. Unfortunately, the old Sheriff's Office building was housing a fair amount of records and there was a pipe that burst over one weekend and number of the records were exposed to water. They became moldy, and have contaminated some other records, which are isolated. It is not known if some of these records will have to be preserved but even disposal will involve some costs.

NEXT BUDGET MEETINGS:

R. Desmarais asked if the Budget Committee wanted to see all the departments and agencies. After brief discussion, all agreed to see all of them.

The next budget meeting will be November 15, 2019 starting at 6:00 p.m. in the Courtroom. It will be live-streamed and recorded by Josh Gerritsen.

****P. Rioux moved, G. Pendleton seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:21 p.m. Unanimous.**

Respectfully submitted by

Nicole V. Hubbard

Waldo County Assistant Clerk