COMMISSIONER'S MINUTES

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

MEETING STARTS AT 3:00 PM

SOMERSET COUNTY COMMISSION CHAMBERS

Present: Commissioners: Robert Sezak, Cyp Johnson, Scott Seekins, John Alsop and Joel Stetkis were present

Staff: Tim Curtis, Leanne Dickey, Patrick Dolan, David Spencer, Christian Savage, Tammy Barker, Pawel Bialczak, Tanya Belanger, Sheriff Dale Lancaster, Michael Mitchell and Cameron Arcidi.

Public: Erin Benson, Mike Smith, Paul Tashjian (FEMA) and Jake Freudberg (Morning Sentinel)

A. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

B. CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 3PM

C. MINUTES:

Resolution 24 - 28: **To Accept the Minutes of January 17, 2024**
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to Accept the Minutes of January 17, 2024
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

D. PUBLIC HEARING: None

E. PUBLIC COMMENT: (To allow members of the public to comment or reserve time to speak on an upcoming agenda item). Paul Tashjian with FEMA introduced himself as the site supervisor for Somerset at the Recovery Center which is now operational out of the Communications Center. He left contact information and encouraged people to apply for relief from damages suffered from the December 2023 storm.

F. WORKSHOP:

1. Update from Erin Benson on the Central/Western Maine Workforce Development Board & the Chief Local Elected Officials (CLEO) Board: Ms. Benson provided the

Commissioners with a brief overview of the Workforce Development program and took questions regarding the make up and activity of the CLEO Board.

The program receives funding from the Federal Government to the Maine Department of Labor to a Workforce Initiative which is governed by a Board made up of one Commissioner from each five counties (Somerset, Kennebec, Androscoggin, Franklin and Oxford).

The Commissioners asked questions about how much funding is available. Ms. Benson said that currently there is a total of $5M in funds from grants with an impact to approximately 400 individuals across the five counties. The structure of the finances is set up the same for every State where the Counties have fiduciary responsibility for the funds. Finance Director Patrick Dolan said that he was willing to review the financial structure of the CWMWD and report back to the Commissioners. It was the consensus of the board to have the County Administrator and the Finance Director to review and report back.

2. Further Discussion of SEDC Loan for High Tide Capital: Christian Savage with Somerset Economic Development Corporation reviewed the terms of a loan approved by the SEDC Loan Committee to assist High Tide Capital with recovery from damage to the Spinning Mill Project in Skowhegan. SEDC was providing a $100,000 loan at 5% amortized over 10 years with the first nine payments interest only. The developer is requesting that the Commissioners consider matching the SEDC loan with funds from the Community Benefit Program. The Commissioners chose to take up the matter under New Business.

3. Discussion regarding non-union wage increases/health insurance buyout for the upcoming budget cycle: The County Administrator informed the Commissioners of the impact of paying for the State's new Paid Family Medical Leave program. Starting January 1, 2025 employers are required to pay 1% of wages to fund the program which will go into effect January 1, 2026. Large employers like Somerset County may opt to take .5% from employees and .5% from the budget. Mr. Curtis advised the Commissioners that if they choose to maintain a 3.5% wage increase for non-union employees, a small part of that increase could be absorbed in the contribution to Paid FMLA halfway through the budget.

Commissioner Stetkis asked what the cost-of-living increase was for Social Security recipients. It was determined that Social Security increased by 3.2% for 2024. It was the consensus of the Board to leave an increase for non-union employees at 3.5% for budgeting purposes.

In regards to the health insurance buyout, the County Administrator wanted to make the Commissioners aware of some language differences between contracts and the employee handbook. Contracts have a specific buyout amount based on either four or six-months of premiums for individual coverage. Per the employee handbook, the Commissioners

set the basis of the buyout for non-union employees each year. This year the cost associated with a four-month buyout is approximately $4,700 and a six-month buyout is approximately $7,000.

It was the consensus of the Board to keep the non-union buyout equal to four months of premiums for individual coverage.

G. NEW AGENDA ITEMS: (Commissioners Only) Motion by Commissioner Seekins to add Resolution 24 – 43 to the agenda (*To approve the hire of William Crawford as part time dispatcher at the Somerset Communications Center, and to approve the hire of Elizabeth Hume and Adam Poulin as full-time workers at the Comm Center.)* Seconded by Commissioner Stetkis. Motion carries 5-0.

H. FINANCE REPORTING: Finance Director Patrick Dolan updated the Board on the FY24 Budget status. There are still significant shortfalls in hiring, particularly at the jail which result in cost savings which will be carried forward into future budgets.

I. ADMINISTRATOR REPORT: County Administrator Curtis shared his report as information to the Board and provided additional items including potential tax abatement appeals from the Town of Palmyra which conducted a full-fledged revaluation in 2023, and updates to the review of a possible U/T TIF of property owned by New England Clean Energy Connect.

The research on the TIF District indicated smaller revenues that originally thought due to the fact that the corridor project already makes up over 10% of the Somerset U/T total valuation. State law caps TIF Districts at capturing no more than 5% of total valuation. The focus then shifted to determining where the greatest potential for increased valuation lay. By capturing the value in Johnson Mountain Township and Moxie Gore the value would be less than 5% and offer a modest return of approximately $250,000 annually that could be used to offset infrastructure costs within the U/T.

The County Administrator stressed that CMP would not benefit from this TIF. The purpose is to allow the County access to funds specific to economic development and infrastructure in the U/T.

If the Commissioners want to have this TIF in place this year a public hearing would need to be scheduled to take comment. It was the consensus of the Board to hold a public hearing at the next scheduled meeting on February 21, 2024.

J. DEPARTMENT HEADS: Former EMA Director Mike Smith shared with the Board the opening of the FEMA Recovery center at the Comm Center and the visit from Governor Mills on Tuesday. As of today, $335,000 worth of individual assistance has been approved by FEMA for damage from the December 2023 storm. Commissioner Stetkis had questions regarding consistent trouble with towers in the Unorganized Territory. Mike explained that there are plans and budget preparations to address those issues.

Communications Director Tammy Barker reported that their main focus is staffing with three open positions. She is appreciative of the Commissioners willingness to add hiring approvals to the agenda.

Sheriff Lancaster reported 18,000 calls for service last year (2023), that compares with 15,000 calls for service in 2022. He updated the Board on the request from MSAD54 to work with the County to provide a School Resource Officer (SRO) to elementary schools in Canaan and Norridgewock. The SO has received grant funding for a drone to help with investigations and reconstruction projects. The SO has also received funding for a new K-9 patrol and tracking dog. Commissioner Stetkis asked if there is any potential reimbursement from the State or Federal Government for costs associated with raids on illegal marijuana grows. The Sheriff said no, those costs are encumbered by the County taxpayer.

Chief Deputy Mike Mitchell reported that there are several new deputies in various stages of training with hopes that there will be as many as five deputies at the academy by this summer.

Deputy Jail Administrator Cameron Arcidi reported two new corrections officers in training and introduced Travis Andrews a long time Corrections employee who is up for promotion to Special Projects Lieutenant at the County Jail.

Deeds Office Manager Tanya Belanger relayed that her training continues. Former Register of Deeds Laura Price has been training Tanya over the past two weeks while the Deputy Register has been on vacation.

U/T Coordinator Dave Spencer updated the Commissioners on the work to get two gravel pits State certified to allow for FEMA reimbursements to come to the U/T for work done in response to May and December 2023 storm damage.

I/T Director Pawel Bialczak updated the Board on the installation of cameras at the jail and the work Jonathan Robinson has done to finalize the new County website. Firewall projects have been completed at the Jail and firewall work is scheduled for Courthouse and then the Comm Center. Commissioner Seekins asked about the payment to the vendor for website renewal since the work was not completed and had to be taken up by County staff. County Administrator Curtis said he plans to contact the vendor and revisit the issue.

K. UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

L. NEW BUSINESS:

Resolution 24 - 29: To authorize $2,000 in Community Benefit funds to be distributed to The Old Canada Road Scenic Byway.
Motion: Commissioner Alsop motioned to authorize $2,000 in Community Benefit funds to be distributed to The Old Canada Road Scenic Byway.
Second: Commissioner Seekins
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 - 30: To authorize $15,000 in Community Benefit funds to be distributed to the Solon Community Food Cupboard.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to authorize $15,000 in Community Benefit funds to be distributed to the Solon Community Food Cupboard.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 – 31: To authorize $15,000 in Community Benefit funds to be distributed to Main Street Skowhegan.
Motion: Commissioner Alsop motioned to authorize $15,000 in Community Benefit funds to be distributed to Main Street Skowhegan.
Second: Commissioner Seekins
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 – 32: **To authorize the next round of Community Benefit Matching Grant Applications for Spring 2024.**
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to authorize the next round of Community Benefit Matching Grant Applications for Spring 2024.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Discussion: County Administrator Curtis shared with the board that he proposes that the next round of applications be opened from April 1 through May 3, 2024.
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 - 33: To approve the underwriting of an SEDC loan to High Tide Capital.
Motion: Commissioner Johnson motioned to approve the underwriting of an SEDC loan to High Tide Capital to match the terms of SEDC's loan with an additional $100,000 from Community Benefit Funds.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 – 34: To approve the promotion of Tammy Barker to Communications Director, and the Promotion of Travis Andrews to Special Projects Lieutenant at the Somerset County Jail.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the promotion of Tammy Barker to Communications Director and the Promotion of Travis Andrews to Special Projects Lieutenant at the Somerset County Jail.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 - 35: To authorize the posting of a job opening for an Emergency Management Deputy Director.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to authorize the posting of a job opening for an Emergency Management Deputy Director.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 - 36: **To acknowledge two Corrections Officer resignations from the Somerset County Jail.**
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to acknowledge two Corrections Officer resignations from the Somerset County Jail.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 - 37: To acknowledge the termination of a probationary Corrections Officer from the Somerset County Jail.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to acknowledge the termination of a probationary Corrections Officer from the Somerset County Jail.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Discussion: County Administrator Curtis said that in light of reviewing Title 30 Section 501 there are no references to the Commissioners having to approve or accept resignations and the Employee Handbook states that resignations are deemed excepted immediately and cannot be repealed without the Commissioners approval. Furthermore Title 30 Section 501 clearly states that probationary Corrections Employees do not need Commissioner approval for termination. It was the recommendation of the County Administrator to develop a clear policy on the process of handling terminations.
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 - 38: **To approve the hire of the following Corrections Officers at the Somerset County Jail: Nicholas Rotondi, Brandon Chase & Camryn Atwood.**
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the hire of the following Corrections Officers at the Somerset County Jail: Nicholas Rotondi, Brandon Chase & Camryn Atwood.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 – 39: To approve Commissioners Mileage Reimbursement from November 2023 through January 2024.
Motion: Commissioner Johnson motioned to approve Commissioners Mileage Reimbursement from November 2023 through January 2024.
Second: Commissioner Seekins
Vote: 5-0

M. CAPITAL RESERVE EXPENDITURES:

Resolution 24 - 40: **To authorize the purchase of a Ford Explorer to be used as a Detective's vehicle for the Sheriff's Office. ($56,000)**
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to authorize the purchase of a Ford Explorer to be used as a Detective's vehicle for the Sheriff's Office. ($56,000)
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 - 41: To authorize addition funds to outfit the recently purchased transport van for the Somerset County Jail. ($18,206.90)
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to authorize addition funds to outfit the recently purchased transport van for the Somerset County Jail. ($18,206.90)
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

N. UNORGANIZED TERRITORY:

O. WARRANTS:

Resolution 24 - 42: To approve the Treasurer's Warrant for General Fund, SCJ, Unorganized Territory, TIF Tax Revenue, and TIF Community Benefit:

General Fund:	**$165,786.78**
Jail:	**$243,397.44**
U/T:	**$170,595.58**
TIF Tax Revenue:	**$ 25,883.94**
TIF Comm. Benefit:	**$ 32,000.00**
Total:	**$637,663.74**

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the Treasurer's Warrants for the General Fund, SCJ, UT, TIF Tax Revenue and TIF Community Benefit in the amounts shown in the resolution.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 – 43: To approve the hire of William Crawford as part time dispatcher, and Elizabeth Hume and Adam Poulin as full-time dispatchers at the Somerset Communications Center.

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the hire of William Crawford as part time dispatcher, and Elizabeth Hume and Adam Poulin as full-time dispatchers at the Somerset Communications Center.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: 5-0

P. MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION ITEMS (Commissioners Only):

Q. ADJOURN:

Commissioner Johnson motioned to adjourn at 4:45pm