COMMISSIONER'S MINUTES

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

SOMERSET COUNTY COMMISSION CHAMBERS

Present: Commissioners: Cyp Johnson, Joel Stetkis and Vice Chair Scott Seekins were present. Chair Robert Sezak arrived at 9:30am, Commissioner John Alsop was absent.
Staff: Leanne Dickey, Patrick Dolan, Tim Curtis, Tammy Barker, Mike Smith, Sara Bickford, Sheriff Lancaster, Victoria Hatch, Chief Mitchell, Kristen Washburn, Pawel Bialczek, Michael Welsh, Christopher Dostie, Meaghan Maloney and Tanya Belanger.
Public: Kerri Chasteen, Julie Lajoie and Ellen Richmond with the University of Maine Extension Office.

A. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Pledge was observed.

B. CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 9:00am

C. MINUTES:

Resolution 25-39: To Accept the Minutes of February 19, 2025.
Motion: Commissioner Stetkis motioned to Accept the Minutes of February 19, 2025.
Second: Commissioner Johnson
Vote: Motion Carries 3-0

D. WORKSHOP:

1. Review of the proposed FY26 Budget with Commissioners: County Administrator Curtis shared a brief overview of the approach to this year's budget. Money raised in previous budgets is being used to offset any major increases, and the remaining ARPA funds are being applied to keep the cost to the taxpayer flat.

Finance Director Patrick Dolan shared with the Commissioners a three-year outlook using current fund balance to keep future increases under 3% through FY2029.

Program Services

SEDC / TOURISM COUNCIL / SOIL&WATER / EXTENSION OFFICE: Somerset Economic Development Director Christian Savage reported that the County's contribution to the SEDC budget will remain static at $50,000 from the general fund and $20,000 from TIF. Christian also represented the Tourism Council. Their request remains at $3,000 from the General Fund and $3,000 from TIF.

The Soil and Water Conservation contribution will remain at $28,500 from the General Fund.

The Extension Office is asking for a small increase from $64,968 to $66,365. Kerri Chasteen, the Executive Director of Extension Operations spoke to the Commissioners about plans to restaff the Somerset office.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: Director Mike Smith shared some concerns about ongoing federal funding with the Commissioners. Overall, the EMA budget is up 3%. The Commissioners also received the most recent copy of the County Emergency Management Plan for review.

COMMUNICATIONS: Director Tammy Barker presented a flat budget and took questions from the Commissioners regarding the status of operations now that Somerset no longer services Towns in Kennebec County. The Communication Center phased out servicing Kennebec Towns in 2023 and it has resulted in a net savings to the Somerset taxpayer.

REGISTRY OF PROBATE**:** Probate Register Victoria Hatch shared a budget with a slight increase in revenues and wage adjustments to reflect looking for a part time clerk rather than full time. Net budget increase is 6.4%.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: D.A. Meaghan Maloney and Office Manager Christopher Dostie reported on slight increases to staffing and training and discussed options for uploading data from body cameras. The County's contract with Shared Files expires in September, and it has been reported that the system is not equipped to handle the data recordings. D.A. Maloney has been speaking with a representative from AXON to contract for data storage. A quote received just before the meeting was approximately $14,000 per year. Administrator Curtis recommended that he and the Finance Director and the Sheriff review the AXON quote to see if it meets the needs of the Sheriff's Department and the DA's Office and if some of the cost can be absorbed in the current budget. The first draft of the DA's budget is an increase of less than 2%, but additional costs for AXON will need to be factored in before a final number is presented to the Commissioners.

SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT: Sheriff Lancaster is recommending a Quartermaster position in the SO Admin budget to help with efficiencies in purchasing and inventory control. The other major increase comes from implementing the AXON body cameras with $103,000 budgeted. Patrick explained that cost is offset by $65,000 in savings from no longer using Watchguard products.

Patrol Deputies are funded through several sources. Most are included in the patrol portion, but the County is now using portions of the COPS-FAST grant to fund an additional patrol position and there are School Resource Officers in both Skowhegan and Madison schools being funded in part by those towns.

The overall SO budget comes in slightly lower than the current budget due to some cost savings in capital purchases.

CORRECTIONS: Increases in revenue sources to offset Jail costs have reduced the amount from fund balance by over $1,000,000. The Sheriff has negotiated new contracts to board federal prisoners and inmates from other Counties. There is also a slight increase in State funding. This allows the County to keep the tax cap at $6.9M and not pass along any increase to the taxpayer for the Jail.

The overall jail budget came in flat with less than a one half of one percent increase.

TECHNICAL SERVICES: I/T Director Pawel Bialczek shared a budget with limited increases. Last year's budget included hiring a new technician with the anticipation of a long-time employee's retirement. After a round of interviews, a new candidate has been offered the position and is in process of being onboarded.

Increases to subscription costs are due mainly to the transition to Microsoft 360 and startup costs with Central Square. It is recommended that funds from the former Dark Fiber account be used to offset some of these costs and that the remainder of approximately $360,000 be deposited into the General Fund. Commissioner Sezak recommended keeping those funds in a capital accounted dedicated to I/T purchases since the money was initially raised for I/T.

REGISTRY OF DEEDS: Register Tanya Belanger discussed revenues with the Board, proposing to raise from $450,000 to $460,000. Commissioner Sezak was not sure about raising it due to a potential downturn in the Real Estate market caused by uncertainty at the Federal level of government. Commissioner Stetkis asked for a historical review of Deeds revenue. Patrick showed the past 10 years of at least $460,000 or higher. Register Belanger also updated the Commissioners on legislation before the State to raise Deeds fees. If passed, this would have an impact in 2026 for FY2027.

Deeds has extended its contract with Avenu software for one year while gathering quotes to move to a different vendor. That results in an increase in the services line of the budget. Overall, the proposed Deeds budget is 8.25%.

MAINTENANCE: Administrator Curtis said the Maintenance budget covers one full time employee and two part-time custodian/janitorial. The overall budget is reduced by 9% due to a reduction in capital raised for projects at the Courthouse. The Administrator believes there are sufficient funds available to continue small projects.

FINANCE**:** Patrick Dolan reviewed the finance budget with increases due to wages and benefits. Due to lower rates of interest offered by Bangor Savings Bank, the revenue forecast is down by $240,000 from $1M to $759,000.

COMMISSIONERS: Administrator Curtis presented a flat budget for the Commissioners that includes administrative salaries and costs. Increased revenue from the U/T budget helps to reduce the impact to the tax payer.

HUMAN RESOURCES: The HR budget was stable at a 2.23% increase. HR Director Leanne Dickey said she, Patrick and Administrator Curtis recommend folding the HR budget back into the Commissioners budget to trim some savings on supplies and services, while consolidating all the Counties administrative positions. The Commissioners agreed with the recommendation.

At the meeting scheduled for March 19, 2025, the Commissioners will revisit the DA's Budget, the I/T Budget and HR before making a final recommendation to the Budget Committee.

E. PUBLIC HEARING: None

F. PUBLIC COMMENT: (To allow members of the public to comment or reserve time to speak on an upcoming agenda item.): None

G. NEW AGENDA ITEMS: (Commissioners Only): None

H. ADMINISTRATOR REPORT: In addition to his submitted report. The County Administrator reported that some residents of Palmyra are filing abatements for the 2024 taxes, even though Superior Court has not issued a ruling on the appeal reviewed by the Commissioners for 2023 taxes. After consulting with a tax attorney, Administrator Curtis informed residents who have inquired about an appeal to submit an application within the proper time frame regardless of the Superior Court's decision. The County can then enter into agreements with the property owners to say, "The Taxpayers agree to extend the 60-day period for the County to act until 60 days from the date of the Superior Court ruling in the matter of Cray v. The Town of Palmyra."

I. FINANCE REPORTING: None

J. UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

K. NEW BUSINESS:

Resolution 25-40: To approve updates to the Somerset County Fund Balance Policy.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve updates to the Somerset County Fund Balance Policy.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: Motion Carries 4-0

Resolution 25-41: To accept a legal secretary resignation in the Somerset District Attorney's Office.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to **accept** a legal secretary resignation in the Somerset District Attorney's Office.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis

Vote: Motion Carries 4-0

Resolution 25-42: To authorize the posting of a legal secretary position in the Somerset District Attorney's Office.
Motion: Commissioner Stetkis motioned to authorize the posting of a legal secretary position in the Somerset District Attorney's Office.
Second: Commissioner Seekins
Vote: Motion Carries 4-0

L. CAPITAL RESERVE EXPENDITURES:

Resolution 25-43: To authorize the transfer of funds from Account G 12-4039-04 (Dark Fiber Project) to offset Proposed I/T Budget Costs with the balance to Undesignated Fund Balance.
Motion: Commissioner Stetkis motioned to table this resolution until the next meeting.
Second: Commissioner Johnson
Vote: Motion Carries 4-0

M. UNORGANIZED TERRITORY:

N. WARRANTS:

Resolution 25-44: To approve the Treasurer's Warrant for General Fund, SCJ, Unorganized Territories, TIF Tax Revenue, and TIF Comm. Benefit:

General Fund	**$316,741.36**
SCJ	**$154,667.17**
Unorganized Terr.	**$152,884.11**
TIF Tax Revenue	**$0**
TIF Community Benefit	**$0**
Total	**$624,292.64**

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motion to approve the Treasurer's Warrant as presented.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: Motion Carries 4-0

O. MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION ITEMS: (Commissioners Only):

P. EXECUTIVE SESSION: To discuss an Economic Development Project pursuant to M.R.S. Section 405(6)(C).
Motion: Commissioner Stetkis motioned to enter executive session.
Second: Commissioner Johnson
Vote: Motion Carries 4-0

The Commissioners entered executive session at 1:50pm.

The Commissioners exited executive session at 2:12pm with no action taken.

Q. RECESS TO EXECUTE DOCUMENTS: The warrant and other documents were signed.

R. ADJOURN: Meeting adjourned at 2:15pm.