COMMISSIONER'S MINUTES

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

SOMERSET COUNTY COMMISSION CHAMBERS

Present: Commissioners: Robert Sezak, John Alsop, Cyp Johnson, Joel Stetkis and Scott Seekins were present.
Staff: Tim Curtis, Leanne Dickey, Dave Spencer, Sheriff Lancaster, Mike Smith, Sara Bickford, Chris Dostie, Pawel Bialczak, Michael Welch and Patrick Dolan.
Public: Jake Freudberg with the Morning Sentinel

A. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Pledge was observed

B. CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 3:00pm

C. MINUTES:

Resolution 25-45: To Accept the Minutes of March 5, 2025.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to Accept the Minutes of March 5, 2025.
Second: Commissioner Stetkis
Vote: Motion Carries 4-0-1 (Alsop abstained)

D. WORKSHOP:

1. FY26 Budget Review:

a. AXON Data Storage for District Attorney's Office: The County Administrator has received a final proposal to incorporate the DA's Office with AXON storage capacity. If paid out yearly the increase to the DA budget would be $10,000. After conferring with DA Maloney and Finance Director Dolan, they recommend paying the first five years of a ten-year contract in this current budget cycle. Commissioner Stetkis asked if this will reduce the DA budget, Administrator Curtis said the budget would remain as proposed without an increase for the data storage service. The consensus of the Commissioners was to move forward with this purchase within the current budget.

b. Transfer of Funds from Dark Fiber Project: There is approximately $520,000 remaining from funds raised for a Dark Fiber Project from more than five years ago. The project has been altered to use satellite technology at a significantly reduced cost. The budget proposes using $157,000 to reduce costs in the I/T budget. The remaining $361,748.45 is at the discretion of the Commissioners to allocate.

c. Consolidation of HR Budget to Commissioners Budget: During the budget presentation at the previous Commissioners meeting, it was suggested to combine the Human Resources budget in with the Commissioners budget thus aligning administrative duties and consolidating some costs. As a result, the net impact to the budget is decreased by $5,000. Chairman Sezak proposed adding $6,000 to the Commissioners Budget to allow for the County Administrator to participate in the July conference for the National Association of County Officials (NACO).

Overall, the net difference to the budget before applying overlay is a reduction of $44 from the current fiscal year. With the change to training in the Commissioners line, the overall proposed budget is $14,996,031.

2. Legislative Policy Update

a. LD 870 Appointments to Land Use Planning Commission: This bill allows the Governor more influence on appointees to LUPC and infringes on the rights and duties of elected County Commissioners. There has been much talk about opposing this bill, including the Maine County Commissioners Association (MCCA) and the Administrators Association. The Commissioners reviewed testimony from Commissioner Sezak and Administrator Curtis, who plans to attend the public hearing at the legislature tomorrow.

b. LD 894 Amending Laws Governing Paid Family Medical Leave: The Commissioners Association reviewed this bill and plans to oppose due to the restrictive and punitive nature of enforcement that is added to the current law.

On a side note, Finance Director Patrick Dolan has found a plan that has been approved by the Maine Department of Labor that the County could implement as a third-party plan that would provide employees with the same level of payment, at a reduced cost to the County. The consensus of the Commissioner was to follow through and bring a proposal back to workshop at the next meeting.

c. LD 852 Adequately Funding County Jail Operations: This bill is supported by the Sheriff's Association, MCCA and Maine Municipal Association in an effort to increase State funding for jails and to relieve the burden on the property tax payer. The public hearing has not yet been scheduled but there is significant interest in testifying in favor.

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: Administrator Curtis shared two proposed letters of recommendation for groups seeking funding to purchase land in Somerset County. Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is looking to conserve 400 acres in Attean and Jackman, and Somerset Woods Trustees are seeking to conserve properties in Madison and New Portland. Due to the fact that these properties will remain in tree growth, the tax impact is minimal. It was the consensus of the Commissioners to support.

Administrator Curtis said he has received four abatement appeals from the Town of Palmyra. All four are in the same neighborhood as the Cray property which was abated by the Commissioners last spring and is awaiting a ruling from Superior Court on the Town's appeal.

I. FINANCE (& OTHER) REPORTING: Patrick reported that there has been little change in the current budget progress.

Sheriff Lancaster reported that the SO is investigating murders in Norridgewock and Palmyra and conducted a drug bust in Madison within the past two weeks. Commissioner Alsop asked whether the County Jail is seeing detainees from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The Sheriff said that there have a few individuals picked up and boarded at the Jail for up to 72 hours before they are transferred to a federal facility.

U/T Director David Spencer received notice from MEMA that funding has been released to the County to reimburse expenses related to the May 2023 storm. He is expecting a check for $25,000 to arrive next week.

District Attorney Office Manager Chris Dostie said that there are multiple trials going on in the month of March and a new Assistant DA is working in Somerset from Kennebec (Jon Provisor).

EMA Director Mike Smith reported that the department is working on a public notification project with MEMA, and reviewing emergency shelters in Skowhegan, Smithfield and Fairfield. They are working with KVCOG on resiliency projects in Madison, Solon and Norridgewock.

I/T Director Pawel Bialczak updated the Commissioners on battery backup projects, intercom projects at the Jail and updates to Windows 11.

J. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

K. NEW BUSINESS:

Resolution 25-46: To accept the FY26 Somerset County Budget as presented and forward to the County Budget Committee for review.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to accept the FY26 Somerset County Budget as presented at $14,996,031 and forward to the County Budget Committee for review.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: Motion Carries 5-0

Resolution 25-47: To approve the updates to the Somerset County Emergency Action Plan.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the updates to the Somerset County Emergency Action Plan.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: Motion Carries 5-0

Resolution 25-48: To approve the hiring of Nicholas Miska, Ashton Clough, Alexis Wilson and Jehiel Campbell as Corrections Officers for the Somerset County Jail.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the hiring of Nicholas Miska, Ashton Clough, Alexis Wilson and Jehiel Campbell as Corrections Officers for the Somerset County Jail.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: Motion Carries 5-0

Resolution 25-49: To approve the hiring of Brandon Stevens for the Somerset I/T Department.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the hiring of Brandon Stevens for the Somerset I/T Department.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: Motion Carries 5-0

Resolution 25-50: To approve the hiring of Viktoria Ek as Clerk for the Somerset Registry of Deeds.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the hiring of Viktoria Ek as Clerk for the Somerset Registry of Deeds.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: Motion Carries 5-0

Resolution 25-51: To approve the hiring of Ronnie Blodgett as Detective Sergeant for the Somerset Sheriff's Office.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the hiring of Ronnie Blodgett as Detective Sergeant for the Somerset Sheriff's Office.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: Motion Carries 5-0

Resolution 25-52: To pay the following awards from Community Benefit Funds for completion of Matching Grant Projects.

Kennebec Behavioral Health ADA Accessibility: $12,500.00
Town of Mercer Heating System Upgrades: $6,594.50

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to pay the following awards from Community Benefit Funds to Kennebec Behavioral Health in the amount of $12,500.00, and the Town of Mercer in the amount of $6,594.50
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: Motion Carries 5-0

L. CAPITAL RESERVE EXPENDITURES:

Resolution 25-53: To authorize the transfer of funds from Account G 12-4039-04 (Dark Fiber Project) to offset Proposed I/T Budget Costs.
Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to authorize the transfer of funds from Account G 12-4039-04 (Dark Fiber Project) to offset Proposed I/T Budget Costs.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: Motion Carries 5-0

M. UNORGANIZED TERRITORY:

N. WARRANTS:

Resolution 25-54: To approve the Treasurer's Warrant for General Fund, SCJ, Unorganized Territories and TIF Comm. Benefit:

General Fund	**$133,937.99**
SCJ	**$211,988.50**
Unorganized Terr.	**$ 21,666.71**
TIF Tax Revenue	**$ 0.00**
TIF Community Benefit	**$ 12,500.00**
Total	**$380,093.20**

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the Treasurer's Warrant for the General Fund, SCJ, Unorganized Territories and TIF Comm. Benefit in the amounts shown in the resolution.
Second: Commissioner Alsop
Vote: Motion carries 5-0

O. MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION ITEMS: (Commissioners Only):

P. EXECUTIVE SESSION: To discuss a personnel issue pursuant to M.R.S. Section 405(6)(A) (SCJ).

Motion: Commissioner Johnson motioned to enter executive session.
Second: Commissioner Seekins
Vote: Motion carries 5-0

The Commissioners entered executive session at 4:00pm.
The Commissioners came out of executive session at 4:48pm.

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the hiring of Evan Touchette as Programs Manager for the Somerset County Jail.
Second: Commissioner Johnson
Vote: Motion Carries 5-0

Q. RECESS TO EXECUTE DOCUMENTS: The Commissioners signed the warrant and other required paperwork.

R. ADJOURN: Meeting adjourned at 4:50pm