

**WALDO COUNTY 2024 BUDGET COMMITTEE  
ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING  
OCTOBER 27, 2023  
In-person and Remote Teleconference (Zoom)  
6:00 p.m.**

**PRESENT:** Budget Committee Members Robyn Tarantino (Lincolnvilleville), Thomas Wagner (Waldo), Mary Mortier (Belfast), Linda Payson (Searsport), and Timothy Parker (Unity). (Winterport Councilor Tammy Higgins was absent.) Also present were County Commissioners William D. Shorey, Amy R. Fowler, and Betty I. Johnson; Finance Director Kari Hunt, IT Director J-sun Bailey, Human Resources Director Annette McLaggan, and County Clerk Barbara Arseneau to take minutes.

**CALL TO ORDER:** Commissioner Shorey called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m. with the flag salute, and read the policy for remote participation, roll call for votes, etc.

**INTRODUCTIONS:** Commissioner Shorey asked all to introduce themselves.

**BUDGET PROCESS OVERVIEW:**

The Commissioners thanked the Committee members for serving, as it has been difficult to find people interested and willing. They listed the challenges in the current budget including the Communications Center employees taking on some dispatching for Knox County and requiring more pay, tremendous increases in electricity and telephone costs, and other challenging circumstances. Oil was pre-bought and that has been helpful. Minimal updates and maintenance have been done on County buildings. The County and City of Belfast are working together on potential sale of one of the buildings. ARPA funds have been used to build the new EMA building and storage building. Solar panels have been installed at that site and will be installed on the Public Safety building. Extra power from the solar systems goes to reduce the County's invoices. The Interest budget was set at \$19,000.00 and it came in much, much higher, making things difficult early in the year. The Health Insurance program was flat funded for a while and is now increased to where it was 12 years ago. The Commissioners are proud of their health insurance plan and Wellness Committee. A self-funded insurance plan with 96 people is not easy but has gone very well. The County tried for several years not to increase budgets and must for 2024. Appropriations reports were submitted to all the Budget Committee Members.

**ELECT BUDGET COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN:**

**\*\*T. Parker moved, M. Mortier seconded to nominate Tom Wagner as Budget Committee Chairman for 2024. T. Wagner nominated Linda Payson to serve as chairman.**

Nominations ceased.

**\*\*Thomas Wagner was voted as 2024 Budget Committee Chair; Passed by 4 with T. Wagner abstaining.**

**PROJECTED REVENUE**

K. Hunt said she averaged out the past 5 years to come up with a projection of the revenues. There was a question about the Sheriff's line and Miscellaneous line in the Projected Revenues, and whether those were misprints.

R. Tarantino inquired about Superior Courthouse costs and was told they will go down in 2024, once the sale goes through with the City, likely the beginning of April.

T. Parker asked if there is a CAP for the Jail budget, why the budget request increased 15%, and inquired about revenue brought in by reentry residents. The Commissioners explained that Waldo's boarded inmates had to be moved to another facility, and it cost more because when Waldo's inmates were boarded at Knox County, the cost was reduced because Waldo County sent some Corrections employees to work at Knox's jail because due to being short staffed. There is no revenue being generated because the four jails in the districts are trying to work together. Some jails take women, some take mentally ill inmates. State inmates are no longer housed in County jails, so that revenue has been lost. Waldo's reentry is not at capacity currently, as well. 5 non-resident, non-reentry inmates are held for a short period of time before they are moved to another facility. T. Parker said that when he worked at Waldo's Reentry until about 2022, during COVID, there was a lot of expense to provide personal protective equipment, and as a selectman and a business owner, he appreciated how stressful it must be for the Commissioners.

The Commissioners explained the need to add a part-time IT technician this year, which was not in the 2023 budget. Another increase in the IT budget is that it now covers all the County telephone/internet costs.

The Committee discussed whether to make motions on the budget at this time and the Commissioners suggested the members discuss things during this meeting and hold off on voting. T. Wagner said that taxes have gone up for Town of Waldo citizens and they cannot handle the 18% increase in the County budget. They voted down the Town of Waldo's snowplow budget because the town can't afford it. T. Parker agreed that citizens are struggling and cannot pay more.

There was brief discussion about the County funding outside agencies such as the Soil and Water Conservation District, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, how funding is requested by Waldo Community Action Partners from the Towns and the County. L. Payson said that Searsport non-profits come first and then the budget advisory group looks at others.

## **1020 COMMISSIONERS BUDGET**

The Commissioners explained that much of the reduction was due to creating a new separate budget for Human Resources, which also includes the part time Office Assistant and funds that were originally part of the Commissioners budget. The Binding/Rebinding line was not funded this year due to other high expenses. Salaries and benefits for all departments are set by the Commissioners.

Human Resources Director A. McLaggan explained that most advertising is done through Indeed, but also on every free site she can find. This includes background checks and occasional psychological exams for employees who have not gone through academy training. There was a lot expended this year, as it was a very hard year; hopefully less funding will be needed in 2024. The Professional Services line was briefly discussed and explained.

## **1021 HUMAN RESOURCES BUDGET**

A. McLaggan explained that the Capital Outlay request is for needs of the Office Assistant, and for fire-resistant file cabinets to replace the current donated and old difficult to use cabinets. These are for employee-related files. Currently, they are trying to repurpose things from other offices, using repurposed computer monitors, and a repurposed computer.

## **1025 FINANCE BUDGET**

The Governor selected former Communications Director Owen Smith to finish the vacant Treasurer's term. There has been turnover in the Finance Department, and the new Finance Director is Kari Hunt. The budget request is decreased from 2023. There was discussion about whether there should be a separate budget line for the finance software. When asked about differences in line numbers for the departmental budgets, K. Hunt noted that there isn't always consistency in the budgets with the sub account lines.

## **1035 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BUDGET**

IT Director J. Bailey stated that he has been IT Director for four years this coming February. He submitted a list of computers that need to be replaced this year. Half the computers have been replaced and some need to be. A Congressional Delegation Grant fund may meet criteria to be applied to the technology at the Communications Center. A new unfunded law was passed by the State and will require law enforcement officers to log demographic data related to "perceived" race, gender, etc. without asking the person, while making traffic stops. There was discussion and concern expressed about this law, potential lawsuits, and whether law enforcement officers would be protected. There was brief discussion about County computer assisted dispatching software being used by the law enforcement agencies of Belfast, Stockton Springs, and Searsport, and whether these agencies should be charged for their use. T. Parker stated that these agencies used to be on different CAD systems and communication and data sharing were impossible, and the newer system has vastly improved data sharing.

## **1090 AUDIT BUDGET**

K. Hunt reported that the audit has increased, and she has no control over that.

**1095 Debt Service:** The County has no debt.

## **2000 INTEREST BUDGET**

The County utilizes a Tax Anticipation Note each year and this past January they were notified that it would be \$295,000.00. Only \$19,000.00 had been budgeted. K. Hunt said that when estimating the 2024 budget request, she called the bank and was told it would be about 6.22% interest and that is how she arrived at this figure. She and the Commissioners thought it was prudent to request more because rates are continuing to increase. T. Wagner asked if the County could get a fixed rate and refinance later with no penalty if they needed to. K. Hunt said she would ask the County's bank.

## **2025 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS BUDGET**

15 years ago, the budget committee told the Commissioners to find less expensive health insurance for employees or the Committee would cut it. The Commissioners formed a committee, put two of the Budget Committee members on it, interviewed a lot of health insurance companies, and the County started self-funding. It was a lot of work the first few years, but the County has held that budget down for a long time. It has only started to go up in recent years. The only other county that is self-funded pays double the amount, and their employees also pay double. When asked if towns could join this along with the County, it was explained that the key is to have over 50 to under 100 people on the plan. It was suggested that some of the towns pull together and see if they can self-fund.

M. Mortier had to leave at 8:00 as the meeting was running overtime.

## **2040 RECORDS PRESERVATION BUDGET**

The Commissioners stated that they felt they could not request funds for this for 2024.

## **2045 RESERVES BUDGET**

K. Hunt submitted the reserve balances as of October 4, 2023. The Severance/Assistance line was briefly discussed, as well as the Health Insurance line. R. Tarantino asked if some funds from the reserve account “Future Technology” could be used in the upcoming year budget. IT Director J. Bailey said some of the funds reimbursed from Knox County for Waldo taking their 9-1-1 calls are being put in the Future Technology reserve. Some of the funds will be used to install a new phone system that allows an automation to take business-type calls. W. Shorey said that \$2,000,000.00 was used from ARPA funds to upgrade the Communications Center equipment. K. Hunt explained Reserve funds are generally restricted to the purpose and description of what the funds are for, and the purpose of Future Technology funds is planning for things in the future.

Vacant county positions were briefly discussed. Waldo County dispatchers are being paid an additional stipend and the County has been trying to keep the positions filled. J. Bailey explained that Waldo is taking Knox’s 9-1-1 calls, putting them in the system, and then Knox copies and pastes that into their system, and they are still dispatching. That way they are dispatching their own way. A. McLaggan added that Knox is being billed for the additional stipends. The Commissioners noted that, so far, some have said they hope this work continues through the winter. A. McLaggan said the Commissioners have been very concerned about employee welfare and so has H.R. so they are trying to make sure that the dispatchers are not becoming burned out.

## **FUTURE BUDGET MEETINGS:**

The Committee set the next budget meeting for Saturday, November 18, 2023 starting at 10:00 a.m.

The Committee set the 2024 Public Hearing & Final Budget Meeting for Saturday, December 2, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

**\*\*L. Payson moved, R. Tarantino seconded to adjourn at 8:29 p.m. Unanimous.**

Respectfully submitted by *Barbara L. Arseneau* Waldo County Clerk  
Barbara L. Arseneau