WALDO COUNTY 2024 BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
DECEMBER 2, 2023
In-person and Remote Teleconference (Zoom)
8:00 a.m.

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

CALL TO ORDER: W. Shorey asked to speak for a few minutes. He used the City of Belfast budget as an example. Their budget is $19,000,000.00 today. Waldo County's was just under $8.2 million in 2017 and now they are at $12 million. He felt that the review process was going in a more difficult way than it needed to and asked if Tim Parker would reconsider his vote to review line by line.

T. Parker said he didn't mind changing to a different or better idea, but he represents his district and this impacts them strongly. He asked if the Commissioners had an idea of how to do it differently. W. Shorey suggested each budget be reviewed for about half an hour rather than several hours on each budget. T. Parker felt that it was important that the entire committee feel comfortable with the review process, so if someone wanted to change that and present it rather than line by line, he was willing to withdraw his motion to do it that way. T. Higgins said that in a situation like this, sometimes it is necessary to go through line by line, however, to go line by line is not necessary, in her opinion, unless there is huge jump. There will be increases. Everything is going up, and in the towns, they should be seeing that as well. As long as they're within reason, it is acceptable. Her personal opinion is there should be an overall explanation of the budget and if a committee member has a question over a drastically increased line, it would move this along. T. Parker said it had actually not been his motion to review every single line, it had been Robyn's motion. If he had his way, they would be here a month. It was Robyn's motion that was accepted. L. Payson said that if something jumped out at someone, question it. She felt some of the budgets could be reviewed in a much shorter period of time that a half hour, but some might need a bit more. T. Parker said he agreed with that in that the District Attorney brought up Restorative Justice at the end and that added time. R. Tarantino said she believed that the reason for going line by line was due to the error in the Jail budget in a large amount, and felt it was also because the committee thought they needed to find lots of cuts. She felt the lines generally didn't need to be picked at and they weren't trying to micromanage. T. Parker said he felt that the Committee should not let people presenting the budgets fight with the Committee. R. Tarantino said she had a strong objection to how the vote went for the District Attorney's Office. T. Parker agreed.

There was more discussion about the error with the Jail budget, with A. Fowler explaining that she as Commissioner had been trying to do the Finance job for a while, and that K. Hunt quickly was picking things up. B. Kurek said he hadn't been prepared last time because he had just joined the committee but felt that if a budget needed more than 30 minutes to review, fine, and if it took less time, fine. L. Payson noted that the budget committee is the second set of eyes and the Commissioners have already made reductions. W. Shorey reiterated the law that says the County has a limit to how much in undesignated funds it can keep for reserve accounts, and the rest goes toward reducing taxation. He just felt the budget process could be moved along faster.

T. Parker noted there were a number of errors in the Facilities budget lines, and those were found by a thorough review. He felt that the best way to go through the budget effectively was to have less argument and more reasonableness from the departments. T. Wagner was against going line by line because it inhibits the department head from running their departments. He did say that $2,000,000,00 increase was way too much for a budget to increase, and it was an unacceptable budget. He reiterated that the Budget Committee cannot address wages and benefits, and stood by his wish to see the budget remain about the same as last year's. He said Waldo County has some of the best benefits and felt that people making more than $50,000.00 a year was not affordable. Waldo County is not Cumberland County. The Town of Waldo cannot afford this.

T. Parker said it is helpful that the County owns all its buildings. A. Fowler reminded all that the Superior Courthouse is being sold to the City of Belfast. There was about $100,000.00 work done on the Extension Office last year. T. Wagner said he was not opposed to the recent year increases, and that he was agonizing over making cuts, but he couldn't live with this. He went back to the wages and benefits and said it can't continue to be this high. W. Shorey said that with union negotiations, which he's done for 12 years, the County has to be competitive. The government has been talking about 4.5% wage increases. There is nothing in the County over a 4% increase, and the County is negotiating as much as it can to be reasonable. He is very mindful about what they have and what they don't have.

A. Fowler reminded all that the TAN interest was budgeted at $19,000.00 and it came out in January at $265,000.00. The TAN has been paid off, and she thanked all the towns for submitting their taxes. The total interest was $123,000.00 out of $275,000.00. Originally, for 2024, it was budgeted at $500,000.00. It was believed that with the reductions, it was more like 11% budget. K. Hunt submitted the updated percentage of increase page, and the updated District Attorney's budget from last week's cuts. It was explained that the Community Corrections Act funds from the State of Maine was not deducted from the Jail budget.

1030 FACILITIES MANAGEMENT BUDGET

Facilities Manager Christopher Bryant was present. B. Kurek asked if line 4305 could be reduced to $3,000.00, line 4610 reduced to $500.00, if line 4617 could be lower, and if line 4636 could be reduced to $500.00.

R. Tarantino mentioned the solar panels. A. Fowler said there is not track record yet with these. Some members noted that the electricity lines are significantly higher. A. Fowler explained that the County had to use one of their checking lines to pay the electricity part of the budgets earlier this year. There was discussion of what solar usage known at this time. The County doesn't have information on what has been saved at the EMA building. The Public Safety Building is in the process of installing solar panels. C. Bryant said the electrical bill for EMA is about $200.00 per month currently. C. Bryant noted that he found an error in 4302 and can reduce it to $4,000.00. Other reductions were mentioned including reducing 4303 to $9,000.00, 4304 being reduced to $3,000.00, 4305 being reduced to $3000.00, and 4307 being reduced to $10,000.00. 4308 stayed the same at $16,000.00.

Water and Sewer:
4309 was reduced to $1,300.00, 4311 was reduced to $750.00, 4313 was increased to $2,500.00, and 4314 was reduced to $1,300.00.

****T. Parker moved, B. Kurek seconded to approve $306,442.00 for Facilities Management. Unanimous.**

1025 FINANCE BUDGET

Finance Director K. Hunt presented. Question was raised about Capital Outlay, and she explained that it is for half the Finance Software. The other half is paid for by the Jail budget. There were questions about bank fees and checks and the unforeseen circumstances. There were some high finance fees on one of the cards, even though efforts were made to rectify that. The plan moving forward is to pay the bill as soon as it comes, since there seems to be no grace period. It isn't an easy solution to change the vendor and would create more work, so that is not an option. Also, each department had credit cards and even though they were cancelled, it was found out later that each individual had to cancel their own card separately. The Equipment Repair Charges line is for Finance's portion of the color copier maintenance, toner, repairs, etc. B. Kurek asked for a reduction in meals and mileage. K. Hunt explained that she is training for a Treasurer's Certificate and must make trips to Bangor and Augusta. Printing and Engraving is for checks from the Finance Software and deposit slips. It was reduced to $600.00.

****B. Kurek moved, L. Payson seconded to accept the Finance Budget at $81,479.00. Unanimous.**

1090 AUDIT BUDGET

Finance Director K. Hunt explained that the total would be $14,000.00 and was divided between Finance. $9,000.00 would be from the County and the remainder from the Jail.

****T. Higgins moved, T. Parker seconded to accept the Audit at $9,000.00.** Discussion: T. Higgins said that was a very good price for an Audit. When asked, the County is still waiting on the 2021 Audit. Unanimous.

1095 DEBT SERVICE BUDGET

Finance Director K. Hunt presented this at zero dollars, as the County has no long term debt.

**** L. Payson moved, M. Mortier seconded to accept. Passed by 6. T. Parker opposed.**

2045 RESERVES BUDGET

The Commissioners stated that the Severance line must be increased but the rest of the lines should be at safe levels at this point. M. Mortier referred to the sheet that shows the Reserve accounts. The TAN, which is at the bottom of the page, is not a reserve but is a payment. She noted that there is a "Target" Reserve. The county is above target on more than one. There is one that shows Interest is $8,000.00. She asked were the interest revenue goes and was told that it goes to pay the TAN back, so it is applied to a debt. Otherwise, unless it is Jail account specific, it goes back to the general fund. The committee asked for the Reserve funds balances and was provided.

****B. Kurek, T. Wagner seconded to accept it at zero. Passed by 6, T. Parker opposed.**

1075 SHERIFF'S BUDGET

Sheriff Jason Trundy and Chief Deputy Matthew Curtis

T. Wagner remarked that most of the lines have no wiggle room, and the wages are not touchable by the Committee. He said in favor of not going line by line, he felt the total should be less and let the Sheriff work out how to handle that reduction.

J. Trundy said he was glad to block off the day and is proud to discuss the work that is done at the Sheriff's office with very little resources. This Sheriff's Office is leading the state in being progressive in thinking about how they provide public safety services and taking care of its citizens, and how much it costs to do so. They are always mindful of what they ask the taxpayers to pay, and he is also the taxpayers. The 11% of the population that is in the poverty bracket are the ones they come in contact with every day. It's important to provide public safety and taking care of those people's needs. He spent a considerable amount of time reviewing his budget line by line and feels that there are a few lines that he could reduce. M. Mortier thanked J. Trundy and said that as a fellow Rotary member she has seen that in his life. She asked J. Trundy to home in on the lines that could be adjusted.

J. Trundy said they track the spending line by line themselves, so his numbers are sometimes higher than Finances. There were a few expenses paid from one line that are usually paid from another. The former Finance Director used to be able to quickly make those changes, but with 4 Finance Directors this year, he didn't feel this was a priority at this time. His list:

4420 Dues: He reviewed the list of things dues covers. He recommends it be reduced to $4,625.00.

4840 Postage: He examined expenditures from 2016 to current. It depended on having to print various forms. Some years this fluctuates, so sometimes it looks like it's being underspent.

5377 Online Training Subscription: Contract with a group that builds online training programs.

5378 Training Academy: Those who attend and are fully certified are "Blue Pinners" and a number are Reserve part-time "Green Pinners". 10 people have left this year. The S.O. has recruited 6 who have to attend the Academy to earn the "Blue Pinners." They hope to pay some of the tuition for next year in advance from the 5375 Training/School/Supplies line as there are some unexpended funds, to reduce the cost for 2024.

T. Wagner asked if the overtime line could be trimmed. J. Trundy said that most it is spent this year because of the high turnover. This line also pays for callouts and shift extensions. This is part of regular business. The only flexibility is assigning people on shifts. He didn't feel it could be cut and have the appropriate level of coverage on the road. T. Parker thought it would be better to put the money into hiring younger people. There were many highly qualified deputies and now they have left. He felt that the academy line for 2024 should be increased. He spoke from experience working in law enforcement for the County, that he had to pay for a lot of the equipment and training. He expressed concern over older, reserve workers being used and recommended younger people. J. Trundy stated that the 6 new hires are all younger men and women who are excited to be in this field. A. Fowler said Waldo County Sheriff's Office is competitive, and the pay was altered again this year. The majority of the Sheriff' Office are young. Secondly, Waldo County did $15,000.00 sign-on bonuses and that helped draw applicants. T. Parker said the average house is $300,000.00 in Waldo County and the average pay is $50,000.00 to $60,000.00 and that is what is not competitive. It's hard to live in this County. J. Trundy said he's aware there has been some discussion about wages and benefits and while it isn't the Budget Committee's purview, the past few years have created circumstances in which it has been extremely hard to recruit and hire law enforcement employees. He's never seen anything like that. He is competing for smart, common sense people. The Commissioners have been responsive to this issue of competitive hiring. He mentioned that it's not about competing with Cumberland County. State Police wages for Patrol is $70,000.00, Waterville is $73,000.00, Camden is $71,000, Rockland $82,000, Penobscot is $72,000.00, Auburn $82,000. Not competing with Cumberland. T. Wagner said he greatly appreciated all the law enforcement personnel in Maine but for his townspeople, he needs to keep costs down. T. Parker explained that his point was not to offend – it is just that young people are interested but cannot afford to provide for their families. L. Payson said that there are people in her town who cannot pay for their heat. They have to go back their towns and say they are doing as much as they can. She didn't think the 2024 budget should be added to. J. Trundy said he felt that they won't have to train as many in 2024 so he believes what he's budgeted is O.K.

3100 P/T: This has hardly been spent, as there are only a few on the roster. It's hard to get the people on the roster to work. The Budget Committee asked why $20,000.00 has been spent from that line and M. Curtis said it was a coding error. K. Hunt said they would need to have a conversation about that.

M. Mortier thanked the Sheriff for making those adjustments. She had looked back to a few years before COVID and said it appears that as of 11/17/2023, the 2024 request is high. J. Trundy said they had a vendor who would order tires for them in the fall and store them, and that vendor has sold his business and the new vendor they are using doesn't have storage space so the S.O. has to do this as the vehicles come in and/or need tires. M. Curtis said that historically they had the Government rate.

M. Mortier asked about 4656 Mobile/Portable/Radio Repairs. The certification of the radars is a fixed rate, but parts and batteries replacements and repairs are variable. Need to have some work done on some of the radars and need to replace two portable radios. The radios cost about $800.00, and the car ones are about $1,000.00. With the new towers update, this has permitted purchasing radios for a lot less.

5405 Uniforms hasn't been much expended. M. Curtis said they hold off and wait until the end of the year. J. Trundy said new hires have to outfit an officer and some of the things are not able to be transferred from one officer to another. It's not just clothing allowance.

5515 Investigative Supplies: They thought it should be reduced because of the 7-year history. Traditionally it was $1,000.00. Includes all the evidence prep room, storage, bags, tapes, boxes, fingerprinting kits and evidence collection, USB drives, video/audio equipment, game cameras, preservation letters requesting cell phone records and those cases vary in number. Fluctuates from year to year. Recommended $2,500.00.

B. Kurek asked about 5335. These are supplies for washing machine, etc.

R. Tarantino asked about 3002 Educational Stipends. Union negotiated for college degrees and other specialty trainings be given stipends. These are paid at different times, and some are due at the end of the year, so more will be expended before the end of December. Also, it allows time to show the person actually engaged in that activity during the year.

T. Higgins inquired about 5376 Firearms/Training and wondered why it wasn't increased. Last year the Finance Director was leaving and the budget process was rushed and some of the expenses that normally would have been paid for the last December warrant were not done and ended up on this year's budget.

B. Kurek asked about Vehicle replacement cycle, noting that five (5) vehicles are requested for this year. It was explained that they try to trade vehicles in at around 100,000 miles. There was brief discussion on hybrids and fuel savings vs liability. The experience has been hit and miss, and some were lemons. It's been pretty problematic for the use they've been put through. Since COVID, just finding a vehicle has been challenging. Ford has now created a police package for the F150. Now it's competitive, so have been switching from the Dodge RAM to the Ford F150. It will be very hard to find vehicles right now. J. Trundy read the list of the fleet. When asked if they would reduce the request from 5 vehicles to 3, the response was that this would cause concern. There was discussion of the ARPA funds and whether vehicles could be purchased. The Commissioners didn't know if law enforcement vehicles could be purchased. R. Tarantino looked at the internet and found it could be used. M. Curtis noted that he's been told the trucks may be 10% higher by the time they get to purchase them. If the Committee cuts it to 3, and there is an additional cost per vehicle, the shortfall might mean only 2 vehicles are purchased. L. Payson suggested 4 vehicles.

M. Mortier recommended waiting for the next meeting, when the TAN interest will be known, and then review again. She had learned through working on the Belfast vehicle purchases, that it actually costs more not to keep the rotation up with vehicles, and five would actually be better.

****L. Payson moved, T. Parker seconded to fund four (4) vehicles in 1075.** Discussion of how much a vehicle costs with upfitting - $56,247.00. The rest of the 1075 will be discussed later. **Passed with one opposed (T. Wagner).**

Vests and baton launchers were discussed.

****L. Payson moved, R. Tarantino seconded to reduce the Sheriff's Office budget by $73,472.00, with a new total of $2,498,999.00. Unanimous.**

(Lunch break)

1050 JAIL BUDGET

Sheriff Jason Trundy, Jail Administrator Raymond Porter, and Chief Deputy Matthew Curtis were present. Sheriff Trundy said he is especially proud of what he does with Corrections. He felt there were significant "wins". He felt the Reentry has done a great job reducing recidivism. The state took over county jails and it failed miserably but it did spark conversations between the counties for collaborating. He and Ray Porter challenged people in Prosecutorial District 6, which is Waldo, Knox, Lincoln/Sagadahoc (Two Bridges) Jails. Historically overcrowding and staffing have been huge issues, for example. Over the last two years, it's gone from a concept to creating District 6 Corrections Collaborative. Instead of housing inmates where they were arrested, it looks at housing them according to their needs to provide them with tools to find out why they offended in the first place, and how to help them not do that again. Moved the entire population in the District. It didn't have a financial impact. Mental health inmates did better in the lineal arrangement at Knox, those who did better with pods were moved there. There is a contract and there is a working committee and the mission moving forward is finance, operations, etc. He was asked to be the chair and is very excited about the conversations, efficiencies and effectiveness. There is a Corrections Consultant that came to one of their meetings. He said he had never seen this District approach to build a better, more efficient system. The Commissioners have been incredibly supportive. They have attended a number of meetings, etc. R. Porter said that the design of the project is broken down and feel that the women who are incarcerated are underserved. A few years ago he oversaw both Waldo and Knox Counties. Preparation for some work release. As part of the plan, all the women would be housed in one particular facility and bring in gender-specific programming for them. Pods takes less supervision.

Special needs need to be in smaller areas. There was a six-month trial. If you change the environment, the behavior changes. It was great to see the behavior improve. All the General population went to Two Bridges. Medically assisted treatment was discussed. One pod has been dedicated to SUD. Staffing can also be shared. There was brief discussion of how state court system impacts County taxpayers. The state won't fund more assistant district attorneys.

Overtime: Staff is being shared with Knox County, and this reduced the boarding rate for a while. Knox was having issues with staffing and had to pay staff overtime, but it was still cheaper at that time. Hospital stays incur overtime with officers staying with the inmate. Waldo contracted with Two Bridges for $1.2 million. Then they negotiated and switched to Sagadahoc for $830,000.00. They tried working a deal with Knox, then paid overtime. Two Bridges is now at $825,000.00 per contract. Inmates have to be sentenced before they can come to the Reentry Center.

Question about 4303 Fuel Oil/Heating Oil, which will be a question for the Facilities Manager Chris next week to revisit that and 4302 electricity.

4307 Live Scan SVC Miscellaneous is also electronic monitoring. There was a question about zero expenditure for the last 3 years. This is for indigent people and so far, people have paid. It's cheaper to pay this and let them use the monitor than to board them for $65.00 a day. It was reduced to $1,000.00.

Rubbish removal is a question for the Facilities Manager.

The Corporal and the reentry residents always meet state compliance.

5101 Food – reduced to $58,000.00.
5230 Office Supplies – reduced to $6,000.00
5230 Training – reduced to $12,500.00

M. Mortier said it is more helpful to have the background information for the lines.

****B. Kurek moved, T. Parker seconded to approve the reduction of 1050 of $6,500.00.** Discussion of whether should vote now. **B. Kurek withdrew his motion, T. Parker withdrew his second.**

*Revisit several lines with Chris:4303 Electricity, 4303 Fuel Oil/Heating Oil, 4308 Sewage, 4312 Water, 4601, 4602,4605,4606.4608,4609,4610,46174619,4621,4622.

****T. Parker moved, L. Payson seconded to table the Jail budget review until the Facilities Manager could be present. Unanimous.**

Discussion of Jail Tax CAP.

1065 REGISTRY OF DEEDS BUDGET
Register of Deeds Stacy Grant reviewed her budget line by line. The union is still in the process of negotiating, so she had been told to put 4% in as a "placeholder."

Line 4630: The map copier is aging, and she recommended cutting it by $500.00. The contract renews in April. She hoped it would be the same. M. Mortier recommended funding at $800.00.

There are three copiers, one of which is out of commission. The other two are at end of life. There are two more invoices for this year. There is also a fax machine and an ancient typewriter which is still used. New equipment might be needed. Her equipment would come out of the Future Technology Reserve. S. Grant said she has typically purchased the copiers and sometimes purchased used ones. M. Mortier said a lease arrangement is the most cost effective.

Microfilming is based a lot on the real estate market. In 2023, the interest rates have impacted the sale of homes. She listed the ups and downs of the real estate market in 2017 through today. She felt she could reduce to $56,000.00, same as 2021.

Box Rent 4830: With the upcoming move, she wants to keep it, and people send unrecorded documents there to be recorded later.

S. Grant said the registries are putting in a bill that allows them to increase the fees.

****B. Kurek moved, M. Motier seconded to approve the Registry of Deeds budget at $249,902.00.** No discussion. **Unanimous.**

FUTURE BUDGET MEETINGS:
The Committee set the next budget meeting for Saturday, December 9, 2023 starting at 9:00 a.m.

The Committee set the 2023 Public Hearing & Final Budget Meeting for Friday,

****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