

**WALDO COUNTY 2026-2027 BUDGET COMMITTEE
ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING
SEPTEMBER 26, 2025
In-person and Remote Teleconference (Zoom)
6:00 p.m.**

PRESENT Budget Committee Members Bob Kurek (Chairperson), Douglas Thomas, Laura Greeley, Mary Mortier, Breanna Bebb, Elizabeth Lenharr, and Brandy Bridges via Zoom. (Robyn Tarantino and Tammy Higgins were absent.) Also present were County Commissioners Betty I. Johnson, Kevin J. Kelley, and Timothy A. Parker. Staff present were Finance Director Kari Hunt, IT Director J-sun Bailey, Human Resources Director Tracy Benton, Sheriff Jason Trundy, and County Clerk Barbara Arseneau to take minutes.

CALL TO ORDER Commissioner Johnson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

INTRODUCTIONS Commissioner Johnson asked all to introduce themselves.

BUDGET PROCESS OVERVIEW

B. Johnson briefly explained the process.

ELECT BUDGET COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

****M. Mortier moved, D. Thomas seconded to nominate Bob Kurek as Budget Committee Chairman for 2026.**

Nominations ceased. **Passed unanimously.**

B. Johnson asked K. Hunt to speak. K. Hunt said she had consulted with an attorney and the County is permitted by law to have an entire 18-month budget, and the Budget Committee can vote on that entire budget. Also by law, the County can assess taxes to the towns twice in that 18-month period and is working on how to do that with as little impact to the towns as possible. The goal is to greatly reduce the Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) ideally to only 2 or 3 months. The TAN has been about \$5 million to \$6 million and the goal is to decrease it to a \$2 million TAN to reduce interest charges. B. Kurek said that several towns are on a calendar year and wondered how they would be impacted. The members discussed explaining this fiscal year change to their towns. M. Mortier stated that the City of Belfast was on a calendar year, always had to take out a TAN and borrowed for three-fourths of the year with interest. Changing the City to a fiscal year saved money on borrowing and should do the same for the County. Some members stated that at times the smaller towns already have to bill their residents twice, sometimes due to a valuation increase. B. Bridges said that it might be very hard for the smaller towns to pay a second tax during the 18-month budget and was concerned that some towns might need to take out TANs to pay for the County to avoid a TAN.

Commissioner Johnson stated that the Commissioners had handled their portion of the meeting and would now adjourn for the Budget Committee to take over the meeting.

***MOTION: B. Johnson moved, K. Kelley seconded to adjourn the Commissioners' portion of the meeting at 6:24 p.m. Unanimous.**

The question was raised regarding if the Commissioners had held previous discussions about changing to a fiscal year before they decided to do so. The Commissioners mentioned the most recent meeting they held with the Budget Committee to ask if they would consider and support the County going to a calendar year via an 18-month budget.

K. Hunt explained that, as it is for the towns, costs are increasing for the County and to say the County will “definitely” save money. M. Mortier noted that the County’s interest rate had increased from \$19,000.00 to \$270,000.00 in one year, and that there will be far less interest expended with fewer months of a Tax Anticipation Note. She believed it would cost a Town less to take out a short TAN for a couple of months than to pay its portion of the County’s TAN and interest for a couple of months.

The Budget Committee inquired about County health care benefits. K. Kelley said it is currently \$4.2 million dollars for premiums and claims. The Commissioners are looking at other companies and they declined to bid based the previous 24 months’ history. He met with Cross Insurance and learned that the County’s per-patient, per-person (PPM) rate is currently \$67.00. Cross Insurance was authorized by the County to obtain the County’s healthcare information from Meritain Health. The (PPM) cost can be reduced to \$40.00 and eventually to \$26.00 - \$28.00. There are some high-cost health care claims in the County, and health insurance will at the very least cost over \$4 million. The County needs to be able to make some changes in the plan. Some union contracts have language that won’t allow changes in the health plan, and that cannot continue. There needs to be stronger case medicine management that still works for the County employees. The two brokers currently being used will be notified. The County has switched to Cross Insurance as the broker.

The Commissioners stated that the medical director for the Jail is retiring so the County must utilize a different provider. The insurance malpractice rate will cost more but compared with what other counties’ pay, it will be a dramatic improvement. Boarding for Waldo inmates has increased substantially. While looking at other options regarding housing Waldo’s own inmates, the Commissioners learned it would cost Waldo County at least \$10 million to construct a jail plus the additional operating cost to house its own inmates, so boarding out is considerably less costly.

K. Hunt submitted an updated Finance budget, and a Budget Comparison sheet showing the percentage of increase from the previous year. When asked how much of the budget is paid by the TAN, K. Hunt reported that borrowing typically starts in February and can go through late October. Some on the Committee wondered if they could support the County’s change in fiscal year, and K. Hunt reminded them that by statute, the Commissioners have the legal right to move to an 18-month budget and have voted to do so. K. Hunt shared that she worked in municipal offices for 18 years and used to think the school and County got what they wanted and the towns did without. She now knows, sitting in the County Finance Office, that the County has been struggling for years, department heads are grilled on their budgets, and when an unexpected situation comes up, it is always costly and it’s very difficult to find the funds to cover it. B. Bridges said she doubted her town could handle a second tax payment for the 18-month County Budget. M. Mortier said she’s served on the Belfast Budget Committee for many years and has tried to view the cost of that budget very personally. She firmly believed in the importance of reducing the TAN and interest, noting it will be hard at first but pay for itself later.

It was noted that the Information Technology Department has an actual budget for the first time and had been operating by reserve funds for decades.

M. Mortier noted one positive thing, which was that this year there is a full 9-member budget committee, and two new commissioners who have come in with fresh, new ideas, and different backgrounds.

The Committee had already tentatively scheduled meeting dates and start times. M. Mortier proposed that there also be “finish” times. The members agreed upon the following schedule:

October 4, start at 9:00 and end at 3:00 p.m.

1075 Sheriff, 1050 Jail, 1035 Information Technology, 1010 Emergency Management Agency, 1025 Finance, 1090 Audit, 1095 Debt Service, 2000 Interest, 2045 Reserves.

October 9, start at 6:00 p.m. and end at 9:00 p.m.

1065 Deeds, 1070 Probate, 1076 Communications, 2040 Records Preservation

October 25, start at 9:00 and end at 3:00 p.m.

1021 Human Resources, 2025 Employee Benefits, 1015 District Attorney, 1020 County Commissioners

November 1, start at 9:00 and end at 2:00 p.m.

1030 Facilities, 1080 Special Appropriations (non-county agencies), 2005 University of Maine Cooperative Extension, 2035 Waldo County Soil & Water Conservation

When asked, B. Arseneau stated that the Public Hearing date must be determined about 3 weeks in advance so the proposed 2026-27 budget is made available to the towns and a public notice can be out a minimum of 10 days prior to the Public Hearing.

The members felt that times needed to be set for budget presentations. They requested that all but the Sheriff, Jail, Facilities, and Technology budget reviews be limited to 30 minutes, and that the person(s) who prepared the budget be the ones who present it and answer questions.

B. Kurek submitted a sheet showing the increases and decreases from the Commissioners budgets.

K. Hunt reminded the members to please keep in mind that the 2026 budget has 27 pay periods.

****MOTION: M. Mortier moved, D. Thomas seconded to adjourn at 7:31 p.m. Unanimous.**

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