

**WALDO COUNTY 2026 PUBLIC HEARING &
FINAL BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
DECEMBER 12, 2025
6:00 P.M. TO 9:00 P.M.**

**Waldo County Commissioners Courtroom and Remote Teleconference (Zoom)
(For additional details, please see video recording on www.waldocountyme.gov)**

1. Call to Order/Greetings/Introductions/Opening Remarks – Chairperson Bob Kurek called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and stated that he would moderate as Chair. Anyone who wished to speak was asked to put their name on the sign up on the sheet. He instructed all to please be quiet when someone is speaking, and any comments should please be directed to him as Chair and he would redirect to the correct person.

B. Kurek reviewed the budget process so far including the dates the meetings were held, starting with an 18-months budget because the Commissioners' goal was to move to a fiscal year to reduce the Tax Anticipation Note funds borrowed and the interest paid. The Budget Committee felt the increase was too high so the Budget Committee voted to recommend that the Commissioners go back to a 12-month fiscal year, and the Commissioners voted to do that. He briefly reviewed some of the increases and decreases in the proposed budget, stated that the meeting would be opened up to public comment, and after public comment, the Committee would discuss and vote on each department individually.

2. Public Hearing: Proposed 2026 County Budget

Andrew Reed (Waldo County Soil & Water Conservation District) stated he was available for questions only.

Roger Chadwick (Burnham) questioned whether the Jail budget complied with Title 30-A §706 assessment limits and raised concerns about setting a budget without recent audits. Commissioners acknowledged the issue and explained that audits for 2022–2024 were underway due to statewide auditor shortages. B. Kurek noted reliance on prior budget figures and R. Tarantino said that one reason for increases is that the Commissioners may be exercising caution against underbudgeting.

Ann Frenning (Northport) spoke on behalf of an Islesboro Selectboard member, expressing frustration with meeting timing and the inability for Islesboro residents to participate by Zoom.

Alex Huff (Burnham) stated he misunderstood the sign-up and declined to speak.

Antonio Avily (Unity) questioned the \$400,000 medical line item and Finance Department staffing increases. Chair Kurek and Sheriff Trundy explained the statutory requirement to provide medication-assisted treatment for incarcerated individuals housed at Somerset County Jail, and the method of administering this treatment, which costs \$1,600.00 per shot, every 28 days while incarcerated. Commissioner Kelley explained staffing requests in the Finance Department were necessary due to workload and were recommended by the auditor, as well. The current Office

Associate position has moved from part-time to full time and also assists the Finance Director, Human Resources Director and County Clerk.

Gene Randall (Waldo County Soil & Water District) declined to comment.

Roxanne Whitcomb (Brooks) questioned audit cost increases and employee benefit costs. Commissioner Kelley explained insurance changes, reinsurance increases, utilization issues, and efforts to reduce premiums. He noted the County remains self-insured due to lack of available bidders.

Randy Place (Morrill Selectman) stated the proposed increase was excessive, urged review of all line items exceeding 25%, and questioned Sheriff vehicle assignments for each patrol officer.

Kim Weaver (Waldo Selectboard) asked about reserve balances, employee workloads, wage comparisons, IT funding, and audit availability. Commissioners and committee members responded regarding IT costs previously being paid by undesignated funds in reserves, TAN usage, staffing challenges, and budget structure. Weaver expressed concern about approving increases amid uncertainty.

Brian Simmons (Morrill Selectman) emphasized taxpayer strain and urged significant budget reductions or holding the budget flat.

Scott Wood (Belfast) asked about financial records, audit delays, and recommended deferring tax increases and cutting positions if necessary.

Steve Hand (Lincolntown Selectboard, IT professional) raised concerns about IT costs appearing to be high, reserve account usage, employee benefits governance, and urged tabling the budget until more information was available.

Gary Hazard (Thorndike) supported deferring decisions until audits were complete and warned increases were disproportionate to residents' income growth.

Mr. Ward (Searsmont) suggested county budgets should be voter-approved like school budgets.

Paul McCarrier (Monroe) criticized the lack of accessible information and urged another public hearing at a better time and location.

Draa Mackee (Lincolntown) urged the Committee to reconsider the budget using basic fiscal accountability questions.

Michelle Rattay (Belfast) expressed concern over the term "Final Budget," asked about timelines, public involvement, and Zoom access.

Chair Kurek explained statutory deadlines, Budget Committee composition, the budget process, and responded that there is no formal training requirements for Budget Committee members.

Kevin Winslow (Morrill) questioned the size of the increase, audit timelines, and union wage agreements absent a finalized budget.

Cindy Bogue (Swanville Chair) cited LD 1 and Title 30-A §706, warned statutory limits were likely being exceeded, and urged legal review.

Rene Ouellet (Freedom Selectboard) questioned the budget process and unspent jail funds. Commissioners and committee members discussed prior year underspending and audit limitations.

Jason Johnson (Belfast) criticized meeting timing and expressed declining confidence in the budget.

Walter Sarnacki (former Searsport Selectman) urged tabling the budget, citing his experience with property tax increases, and his view that there was a lack of notice for the meeting.

Matthew Cameron (Morrill) urged freezing the budget until audits are complete.

Earle Jellison declined to speak.

Eric Buch (Belfast) sharply criticized transparency, executive session use, lack of narrative behind budget numbers, called for accountability, cited a recent article that discussed problems with county government and stated that leadership must change if county government could work at all.

Judson Colby (Belmont) described cumulative tax burdens across multiple towns and supported public voting on the County budget.

Heather Donahue (Freedom) asked about IT funding sources, TAN usage, and the magnitude of the increase. Committee members explained budget restructuring, reserve account usage, and clarified the increase percentage.

T. Wagner (Town of Waldo Selectman) questioned sustainability of increases, TAN reliance, and audit risks and the potential impact on the cost to obtain a TAN. Commissioners discussed audit challenges and expectations of potential findings in the 2023 audits

Michael Nickelson (Belfast) suggested independent operational audits and long-term forecasting to stabilize increases.

Patty Dumphy (Belfast) asked about audit deficiencies, expressed concern over financial risk, and urged another public hearing.

Rick Blood (Belfast) asked whether raises could be frozen for a year.

Dan Miller (Belfast) urged rejecting the budget and reverting to the prior year's spending, also calling for the Commissioners to do better as leaders.

William Rahn (Belfast) questioned audit sourcing, Commissioners' budget increases as elected officials, and workload compensation.

James Kossuth (Northport Administrator) warned of compounding multi-year increases and urged the Committee to reject the budget.

Mayor Eric Sanders (Belfast) emphasized transparency, trust, working together to resolve current budget issues, and questioned decision-making with absent committee members.

Dave Marceau (Searsmont) stated Commissioners should know and understand departmental budgets and whether requests for increases were warranted.

Howard Whitcomb (Brooks) challenged the Sheriff's budget as being inflated and asserted that it was not required to provide inmates with medical-assisted treatment for addiction withdrawal. Sheriff Trundy explained statutory medical requirements and how this medication is administered, as was already discussed earlier.

David August (Belfast) said he watched his property taxes go up 53%, and the City's budget had gone up 32% in three years. He asked how many years the Finance Director has been there. K. Kelley explained that since January of 2022 until August of 2023, there were five finance directors for a number of reasons including qualifications issues and archaic software. Since August of 2023, Kari Hunt has been here and has done a tremendous job pulling this together, and they are grateful she is still here. The former H.R. Director left on March 17th of this year and the County Clerk, Finance Director, and p/t Office Associate have been trying fill the gap in that position until the new H.R. Director was hired.

K. Kelley said he wanted to go back to the Commissioners salaries. He makes \$13,750.00 per year and declined the cost of living increase for 2026.

T. Parker said that Waldo County is the only one with no County Administrator. This is why the Commissioners have been meeting for workshops and doing a lot of the work so the County doesn't have to present the cost of an administrator for the County. He felt it was better to have an intimate understanding of how the County runs, and so they have been working on job descriptions, etc.

Unnamed speaker questioned legality of adopting the budget without statutory compliance; Commissioner Johnson agreed concerns were valid.

B. Johnon said it was great to see so many people here. For many years the Commissioners have a public hearing on the budget and usually very few people come. She said it was good for people to be discussing things.

Unnamed speaker asked if the treasurer was here, and O. Smith was pointed out as present. The speaker said he found it was odd that the two most important people, the Treasurer and Finance Director, were not part of the meeting. He also questioned why ARPA Funds were used to build a new EMA building when space for EMA had been built already in 2012.

Unnamed speaker said that the Commissioners should be answering many of the questions instead of looking to the Budget Committee volunteers to answer them.

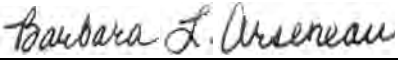
Public hearing closed at 8:37 p.m.

3. Final Budget Committee Discussion & Action

Committee members expressed that public input clearly indicated the budget should not be approved at this time. Discussion among the Budget Committee: L. Greeley said she hears the people and doesn't think they could vote yes. D. Thomas said these people present were a lot nicer than the people in Montville. He noted that the County has no long-term debt. E. Lenharr said that they need to discuss more. M. Mortier said she appreciated the people come, appreciated the respectful discourse, and she had already come feeling that she could not vote. T. Higgins said she was surprised at how many people had come. The fact that everyone is so upset but still remained respectful was helpful. The Budget Committee can't know how people feel if they don't show up and let us know. R. Tarantino said she has been putting together things with spreadsheets and she wanted to push hard to reduce \$2.3 million from the budget. It was the final meeting but this was not the final budget. She reiterated that the Jail is the biggest problem because they were basically kicked out of the jail that was housing inmates. They can only go to Somerset and they do the medicated treatment, and the room and board is actually half a million less, thanks to Sheriff Trundy. B. Kurek thanked everyone for coming and the Committee understands. We are all responsible for our towns. The higher 18-month budget would make the county's budget the second largest cost in his town. He has been on the phone with Robyn a lot going over numbers. In the end, what they need to do is to not approve the budget at this time, to table this and wait until the audits are done and then decide on the budget.

****Motion: B. Kurek/D. Thomas not to approve the budget tonight but reconvene in the future, after the audits are finished from 2022 through 2024, which may be an incentive to the auditor and see the medical expenses properly, etc. D. Thomas seconded. Passed unanimously.**

Adjourned: 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by  Waldo County Clerk
Barbara L. Arseneau