WALDO COUNTY 2026 BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
FEBRUARY 24, 2026
6:00 P.M. TO 9:00 P.M.
Waldo County Commissioners Courtroom and Remote Teleconference (Zoom)

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

Public: Andrew Reed, Gene Randall, Eric Buch, Jay Davis, Roger Chadwick, Rick Basford, Officer Andrew Parker, Joe McLaughlin, Rodney LeSan, Virginia Thompson, Keith Thompson, Dorothy Odell, and others.

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Bob Kurek called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He stated that the public does not vote on this budget – only the Budget Committee as the representatives of the entire County and the weighty responsibility falls on them to do the best for the County and the residents of the County.

REVIEW MINUTES: December 12, 2025 and January 27, 2026 Budget Meetings
****MOTION: B. Kurek/D. Thomas to accept the December 12, 2025 Public Hearing/Budget Committee Meeting Minutes and January 27, 2026 Budget Committee Meeting Minutes. Unanimous.**

BUDGET COMMITTEE REVIEW REVISED 2026 COUNTY BUDGET
Two budgets have been received from the Commissioners; Version 4 at 13.64% and Version 5 at 17.14%. B. Kurek said he looked at both budgets and if they removed things from the 13.64% budget, the County would already be behind next year by 4.4% on the 2027 budget.

When asked why there were two budgets, T. Parker said that there was difference of opinion among the Commissioners so they felt it was best to give the budget committee two options with reasons for each. Personally, he struggled with the 13.64% because of the "cliffs" it was creating by cutting funding in the Sheriff's Dept and Health Insurance so he was learning toward the 17.14% budget. He felt it was more his and Kevin Kelley's budget, and respectfully, he felt there might be a conflict of interest with Breanna Bebb sitting on both sides.

B. Bebb said that having sat on both sides of this, she had heard concern expressed about the County's habit of going into the reserves, and the 13.64% version eats into the reserves more. She has also heard loud and clear that people didn't want $100,000.00 of OPIOID funds to assist with cost of Jail medical treatments. She felt it would be a good use of those funds, but out of respect for working with the OPIOID Committee fund process, the 17.14% would mean the Commissioners would not have to use the OPIOID funds. She commended the Sheriff and staff for finding savings but noted that using undesignated funds to pay for the first quarter of jail board will create a cliff in 2027. B. Kurek said that he realized funds being used to pay for some things would already make the County behind 14.4% for next year. B. Bebb said the 17.14% budget was more realistic. T. Parker said the Budget Committee would trim to the point that it would cause the Commissioners to go to the reserves to pay for shortfalls. B. Bebb mentioned another large difference between the two budget options was that in the employee benefits line, the HR Director felt this had been cut very close. The more reasonable amount was put in the 17.14% budget. K. Kelley pointed to the reserve accounts submitted in the Budget Committee's packets, stating that issues really started back in 2020 during COVID. Then there was a negative swing that moved to a $900,000.00 positive swing. The Commissioners want to accurately reflect what will run the County appropriately as a whole and not singling out one or two departments. The Budget Committee also have asked the Commissioners to look at reduction in force (RIF). Version 4 and 5 of the Budget show about $408,000.00 removed for various new and needed positions. The letter submitted from the auditor states year 2023 will be done by March 31st. The summary sheet accurately reflects what is going on. The County sold 100 acres in 2022, and the Old Superior Courthouse in 2023. There's nothing left to sell unless it is the garden and five brand new buildings. Health care costs are running higher than the benchmark and the cost has risen exponentially. The average employee benchmark is almost $62,000.00. The County must pay health claims as soon as insurance bills arrive. The deductible is $70,000.00. The money back should be funding the health reserve account. Stop Loss is still $72,000.00. One bad claim could wipe out the entire county health plan. There are more cliffs in version 4 (13.64%) than version 5 (17/14%). Union grievances are pending, there mounting bills – some of which are IT and this could affect the safety of people in the County. It is almost at emergency level.

B. Kurek opened discussion up to the Committee. M. Mortier: At the last meeting, M. Mortier recommended a dollar figure that would have put the budget increase 12%, after considerable work and review. She believed this was the most reasonable, sustainable figure and did not believe the budget could be reduced to a single digit percentage of increase. She recommended looking closer at the Sheriff and Jail budgets for additional reductions.

B. Kurek said he felt reductions in the existing work force needed to be considered because the budget was too high for the Towns to handle.

R. Tarantino and others on the committee questions undesignated funds and reserves. Some felt that budgets were being way over-budgeted and funds were accumulating. They would like to see the budgets and actuals side by side, and the budget should reflect the actuals on the appropriations reports for the whole year, and what offsets it, but that isn't what is being done. R. Tarantino mentioned State funds that are specifically earmarked for certain things and asked if that is what it is used for. T. Parker said that it is. She and B. Kurek said revenue lines should be shown for all offsets in the budget. T. Parker said there is a breakdown. He also explained what had happened with having to move inmates to a different Jail. The current boarding contract is saving the County $500,000.00 to $600,000.00 dollars. K. Kelley addressed the formatting questions. K. Kelley made a note of that. There was lengthy discussion about how undesignated funds, reserve accounts, and projected revenue are accounted for and used, and statutes that govern the authorization and obligation of the Commissioners regarding County finances.

D. Thomas asked when the County might move out of being self-insured. K. Kelley said it would be a few years before they could get an outside insurance carrier to take them.

E. Lenharr said the Budget Committee were first looking at the TAN and how that could be mitigated, and with the 13.64% budget would increase the amount of TAN that needs to be borrowed and would be facing cliffs. She felt it was cutting it too close and a budget like that and coming up with what they would be facing in the following year, there would be a more significant increase because of kicking the can down the road. So having a much more realistic budget of 17.14% was a starting point. It won't be the end of increases and in the realistic work of budgets and business, 3% is very, very modest and barely keeping afloat. It's small. She felt 17.14% was a more realistic budget.

B. Kurek said he believed that this wasn't a sustainable budget and RIFs need to be considered. E. Lenharr said it is hard to see the future and she felt it was for the Commissioners, Department heads and union workers. She felt they would be setting up the County for failure and it would be a bigger problem if they go with the 13% budget. Everything gets more expensive as the years go by,

L. Greeley stated she needs to know that there is no waste in the budget and a correct budget but she feels it's unacceptable for the Commissioners to expect them to vote on a budget when they don't have current audits. The sticker shock with IT is because she doesn't know how those figures compare to what has been spent before. She can't know if they are bare budget or not. She couldn't tell if IT was funded from property sales or overbudgeting. She said it isn't fair for the budget committee to not know. She wants the numbers for what the budget would look like for the towns. She wondered about negotiations. they didn't know how much it was, and this wouldn't be done in a municipality. They also don't have the audits to refer to.

The Commissioners noted that they have talked about the possibility of having to pay recently incurred bills from reserves. Some of the bills coming in the future will be an emergency because they are used for law enforcement, Jail, Dispatch, etc. There was brief discussion looking into the true cost of a RIF – separation, unemployment, it depends on the employee who is laid off. They are trying to clean up a lot of things, trying to show real numbers. Suggestion was made to consider passing certain departments and drill down on the focus. The Budget Committee noted there is one person short on the budget committee some wondered about the legality of passing some but not all parts of the budget.

The Committee wanted the County to come up with something lower than the 17.14%.

DISCUSS EMPLOYEE BENEFITS (REPORTING, REDUCTIONS, ETC.)

Human Resources Director Tracy Benton said that she could not speak for previous years, but she and the Office Associate had spent over 60 hours researching every employee at their wages and the Employee benefits budget was accurate to the penny for 2026 for every employee, including for MainePERS, FICA, all of those and very significant cuts have been made based on this accurate information. It was thought that we were not paying enough for Workers Comp based on the request and she submitted to the Committee the most recent bill for 2026. She had originally requested $140,000.00 and the Bill is $139,700.00 and change. She was only off by about $300.00. These are accurate budgets. There was further discussion by L. Greeley and R. Tarantino but they have to look at different sheets to see what was budgeted, what the actuals were and they need to be side by side. R. Tarantino said that the most recent budget for MainePERs seemed more accurate. She explained that there is a $70,000.00 overall aggregate deductible. Stop Loss is per covered life. It starts at $100,000.00 per person in injuries. The County could take a very severe hit. When looking at numbers, these are only from when the request was made. The County had already paid the claim, and it takes time for it to be determined if it will be reimbursed. The insurance company requests for reimbursement and initial payment must be made by the County. There is a lot of negotiating about separate discreet pieces. The timeframe between the County paying, the hospital and insurance debating, and the individual bills coming in a little at a time in before the hospital and insurance debate. The deductibles are different each year.

SUMMARY OF I.T. DISCUSSION WITH MR. HAND

K. Kelley gave a brief overview of a few potential savings.

UPDATE ON COUNTY AUDITS

The 2023 Audit should be done by end of March 2026 and 2024 should be done after that. 2025 has not been hired out yet.

REVIEW RESERVE ACCOUNTS (29 ACCOUNTS TOTALING $1.8 MILLION AS OF 12/31/2025)

The Committee noted that some reserve accounts have no description for use. K. Hunt said that when she asked B. Arseneau and most senior former Finance Director, they did not know either.

The Committee discussed the possibility of reduction in force (RIF). B. Bebb asked philosophically regarding if the Budget Committee believes that the County has more staffing than it needs. There was brief discussion about whether all on the budget committee were even in agreement with RIFs. Some had asked for estimates of savings by laying off employees and were cautioned by Commissioner Pinkham Bebb and the HR Director that this would be putting in jeopardy employee's identities to discuss such detailed estimates. It was mentioned that most of the employees are in Communications and Corrections. B. Kurek thought the exercise needed to be done and the County cannot afford to continue paying the salaries. R. Tarantino stated she was not in favor of reduction in force and suggested looking at the number of vehicles to see if there could be a reduction. There was discussion of the current fleet numbers and some of the fleet aging and having maintenance issues, and the benefits of the fleet management contract the County is currently with. T. Parker explained some of the background.

Discussion about Community Corrections Act funds. J. Trundy said that they looked at reducing budget costs they looked at the CCA funds. This is about 25% to 30% and the remaining amount is used to offset the budget. He has made recommendations of how these funds can be used but previous boards of Commissioners made those determinations with very little discussion with the Sheriff.

Unemployment Reserve was discussed. L. Greeley inquired about why this was not in the budget. K. Hunt was explained that the County does not have unemployment insurance and it isn't a common occurrence to have to pay employment insurance – in the last three years the County has only paid six months of unemployment in the last three years. B. Arseneau explained that even before she was hired, this has been the practice as it has proven to be the least expensive option. T. Benton explained that layoffs are always eligible for unemployment and must be paid to some level whether there is unemployment insurance or not. K. Hunt said she would need to research this further.

BUDGET COMMITTEE DETERMINE IF BUDGET REDUCTIONS ARE SUFFICIENT

Man from public asked if it was prudent and/or legal to pass a partial budget when there is more to talk about. K. Kelley said he had just put it out as an idea. He felt this was a dire straits situation and that after the payouts and severance, the cost would be reduced in the future. Either 13% or 17% is too much and there will be more requests in the future because the people in Waldo County cannot do it. He felt it should be researched to determine numbers for how layoffs for a low end employee and high end employee would be.

B. Kurek said there needs to be a sustainable budget. B. Kurek asked the Commissioners to get down to 9.% budget. A member of the public submitted copies of the statutes for MRS 30-A §706 and stated that the attorney who calculated on County property taxes at about 18% was incorrect. There was brief discussion about this. B. Kurek asked the Commissioners to send a copy of the attorney's letter with that calculation.

B. Bebb asked what the values are for what is being asked because the committee's directions are very mixed. The committee has said use reserves, don't use reserves, have capital planning, don't over budget so undesignated funds are used in reserves, etc. T. Parker said he recalled the Committee pushed the budget back to the Commissioners to reduce the budget and the Commissioners gave two options because there were differences of opinions on that, and he felt the Budget Committee needed to make a clearer motion for the amount.

****MOTION: D. Thomas/B. Kurek to keep the budget increase under 10%.** Discussion: Using actual expenses rather than the previous budget, including revenue, the IT budget, opinions on how the County plans it's budget, the desire to see reductions in work force, boarding issues, whether union contracts are paid, expenses mounting due to an undecided budget were mentioned. **D. Thomas amended his motion from under 10% to a total of $14 million; five in favor, E. Lenharr opposed.**

There was additional brief discussion about budgeting concepts and perceptions. K. Hunt mentioned that there is a lot of mixed messages from the budget committee about using reserves, not using reserves, and how much data and what type is wanted on the budgets. It was mentioned that the delay in deciding on the budget is costing money. Some continued to state there should be a limit on union contracts. It was acknowledged that holding more budget meetings than usual and requests for changes requested on the budgets has been considerable additional work on the County staff preparing budgets and regular work that isn't not being done. There was some criticism of the seemingly casual conversation among the Commissioners during a recent meeting and coming back with a higher budget request. One member of the public asked if there would be a public meeting in the future and was told that the Budget Committee decided the will hold a public hearing.

Next meeting is March 6, 2026 starting at 6:30 p.m.

ADJOURNED at 8:56 p.m.

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