

# KNOX COUNTY COMMISSION

## Public Hearing and Final Budget Meeting Vote

**Knox County Commission and Budget Committee**

**Thursday - December 16, 2021 – 6:00 P.M.**

A Joint Commission and Budget Committee Review Meeting was held on Thursday, December 16, 2021, at 6:00 at the Knox County Courthouse, 62 Union Street, Rockland, Maine. The Administrative Assistant was present to record the minutes of the meeting.

**Commission members present were:** Dorothy G. Meriwether, Commissioner District #1, Commissioner District #2, Richard L. Parent, Jr. and Sharon L. Pohlman, Commissioner District #3.

**County staff present included:** County Administrator Andrew Hart, Administrative Assistant Wendy Galvin, Sheriff Tim Carroll and Finance Director Kathy Robinson.

**Budget Committee members present were:** Chair Shawn Levasseur, Gayle Gallant, Bob Duke, Roger Peabody, Randy Stearns, Barry Norris, Charles Grover and Nick Lapham.

**Absent:** Communications Director Robert Coombs, Deputy Register of Deeds Madelene Cole, EMA Director Ray Sisk, District Attorney Natasha Irving, IT Systems Director Michael Dean, Chief Patrick Polky, Register of Probate Elaine Hallett, Prosecutorial Assistant/Investigator Shane Riley and Airport Manager Jeremy Shaw.

**Others in Attendance: No one**

### Joint Commission and Budget Committee Review Meeting

#### Commission Hearing Room

**Thursday – December 16, 2021 – 6:00 P.M.**

- I. 6:00 Meeting Called To Order** (Chair Shawn Levasseur for the Knox County Budget Committee, Commission Chair Richard Parent Jr. for the Knox County Commission)
- II. 6:01 Approve Minutes** (Chair Shawn Levasseur for the Knox County Budget Committee, Commission Chair Richard Parent Jr. for the Knox County Commission)
  1. Minutes of Budget Review Meeting of November 18, 2021.
- III. 6:03 Opening Remarks – Shawn Levasseur, Chair**
- IV. 6:05 Public Hearing**
  1. Chair Levasseur Opens Public Hearing on the 2022 Proposed Knox County Budget.
  2. Chair Levasseur Closes Public Hearing.
- V. Budget Committee Vote on 2022 Budget**
  1. Vote to Approve 2022 Budget and Transmit to Commission.
- VI. Commission Vote on 2022 Budget**
  1. Vote to Approve 2022 Budget.
- VII. Adjourn**

### **I. Meeting Called to Order**

The December 16, 2021 Joint Commission and Budget Committee Review Meeting was called to order by Budget Committee Chair Shawn Levasseur and Commissioner Chair Richard L. Parent, Jr. at 6:01 P.M.

### **II. Approve Minutes**

1. Minutes of the Joint Commission and Budget Committee Review Meeting of November 18, 2021.
  - *Bob Duke made motion to approve the Minutes of the Joint Commission and Budget Committee Meeting of November 18, 2021. Barry Norris seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor.*
  - *Commissioner Meriwether made motion to approve the Minutes of the Joint Commission and Budget Committee Meeting of November 10, 2020. Commissioner Parent seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor.*

### **III. Opening Remarks:**

Chair Shawn Levasseur gave a brief overview of how the budget gets started and how it ends:

- This is the final hearing and vote on the 2022 Budget for Knox County. The process started earlier in the summer. The Department Managers each submitted their Budgets to the Administrator, this was reviewed and discussed, and then in November the Proposed Budgets were reviewed by this Committee and Commissioner. Now, we are here to vote on it tonight.

### **IV. Public Hearing**

The Public Hearing portion of the meeting Commenced at 6:02 P.M.:

- Shawn Wallace, President of Corrections Union spoke on behalf of wages. He stated that we are in negotiations currently. He wanted to amend some friction between Administration & the Union. Feels there is lack of negotiations again this year. The Union's response was 2% on top of COLA would have been an 8% increase, for a total of a 10% increase. The response was, in order for wages to go through, all the Capital improvements and renegotiating of the medical contract had to be done. That burden is being put back on staff, as to why they can't keep up to wages. Right now we are in a wage war. So far, we have lost a couple employees to Waldo County & Two Bridges as our employees are able to get better wages there. We are looking for a total of 10% increase in wages. We (Corrections Officers) are grateful for the stipend, but that will end on December 31, 2021. As the President, he came with a modest increase that he thought was fair across the board, and the County didn't even try to negotiate with them. They just stuck to their gums with the initial proposal. He is fearful that at the beginning of the year there may be a mass exodus of Corrections Officers. At that point it will force the County to do something and end up costing tax payers a lot more money with boarding out our whole facility to another County. There is about 20-25 employees left and they are all being burnt out. Some Correction Officers are working 72-80 hours a week. He was asked to provide proof of the wages other Counties were offering but right now it is all here say. Waldo County is looking at 16% increase and Two Bridges are looking at a 10% increase. Walmart is starting at \$17 and hour, which is \$0.17 cents less than what Knox County is offering for a starting pay, and that is without zero liability. The benefit package the County offers is great, but the life insurance policy will not cover heart attack or strokes, which are the two leading causes of death for Law Enforcement, Firefighters and EMS. We need something to retain the employees that we have left. The extra 2% on top of the 6% for COLA is not asking a lot, and it would keep us in line with other Counties.
- Administrator Hart spoke: The real change with this year's Budget is that we added the Budget Committee proposal column, and Commissions proposed budget column that was voted on in the last meeting on November 18<sup>th</sup>.
- Administrator Hart talked to Village Soup Reporter Steve Betts, as he reported the increase in the 2022 Budget up 5%. That is correct if you look at the gross budget from year to year for expenditures. He explained that if you take net budget which is minus the revenues that gives the increase of 2.76%. He did end up fixing the article.
- Budget Committee member commented on Shawn Wallace's statement regarding the wages for the Corrections Officer. He said that it seems like we are in a "wage war" with neighboring

Correctional Facilities He wanted to flush out what he was saying to what administrations perspective is.

- Administrator Hart said we have been looking at wages, and some of it is not finalized yet. He noted that after some research, last year, Hancock County gave a 21% increase and this year Waldo County gave a 17% increase. It's almost like Counties are trying to jump each other, or get to the top. At this point we have to play catch up. Three years ago we were in the top three, and then Hancock did that increase. In another year or so we will have to look at wages for Corrections. The other thing is we have to have the information, statistics and numbers to justify making a change. In the initial proposal we received they didn't have the numbers to back anything up. This year we did a Step and COLA increase and had negotiated a 0.05% increase for one year for Corrections. We had agreed to that. We hire people and they don't always leave because of the wages it sometimes is because once they start they realize it's not a good fit for them and then they choose to leave. We look at wages every year.
- Budget Committee member asked does the negotiated amount bring our Corrections Officers up to Two Bridges and Waldo's wage rates as it stands today.
- Administrator Hart stated that we look at wages for each of the Unions we look at neighboring facilities like Waldo, Two Bridges, Kennebec and Hancock, and look at what we have for information now. If one of the neighboring facilities decides to give an increase in three months, they may be on a different Budget cycle so we cannot do that. Most of the time this is just a proposal so we can't just go by a proposal, it needs to be adopted by that County.
- A Budget Committee member stated that if what we're dealing with is apples to apples today not conjecture tomorrow, then I think we have done our due diligence today and look at this next year. I heard him say he did not have any hard statistics, it was what ifs. This should not be a stumbling point for this Budget, but I think this is something we will have to look at in the future. For the other 5 or 6 Counties that surround us, we don't know what they will do tomorrow we only know what they have done today. If we are where we're supposed to be today, and not where we "might think" where we're going to be then I am ok in voting for the Budget tonight. I understand their frustrations.
- Budget Committee member said, "I'm hoping Knox County was not negotiating with his Union because there were Capital needs relative to the facility.
- Administrator Hart stated no. We had Capital and also had the Inmate Medical contract, but we stripped out the Capital just because of the CAP number. We still have the Inmate Medical and that is still being negotiated. Even with stripping out Capital we still couldn't give an additional wage increase because that would put us over the CAP unless we cut other Budget lines. Personally, I don't have a problem with brining a 20% increase in wages to the Budget Committee and Commissioners if I had the information to back it up to justify it. It's a big pill to swallow to come in with that much but if I have the information to back it up, and I can prove we are behind and we need to go to that amount, or even 10% and we phase it in over a couple years. I don't have a problem doing that. If we can prove we're behind in wages then we will feel comfortable coming to Budget Committee next year.

The Public Hearing portion of the meeting was closed at 6:08 P.M.

## **V. Budget Committee Vote on 2022 Budget**

- ***Bob Duke motioned to approve the 2022 Knox County Budget in the total amount of \$13,231,350 and a net amount of \$10,084,709 and transmit to the Commission. Barry Norris seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor. The motion therefore passed.***

*In favor: 8 (Chair Shawn Levasseur, Gayle Gallant, Bob Duke, Nicholas Lapham, Charles Grover, Randy Stearns, Barry Norris and Roger Peabody)*

Against: 0  
Abstained: 0

**VI. Commission Vote on 2022 Budget**

- *Commissioner Meriwether motioned to approve the 2022 Knox County Budget in the total amount of \$13,231,350 and a net amount of \$10,084,709. Commissioner Pohlman seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor. **The motion therefore passed.***

In favor: 3 (Commissioner Parent, Commissioner Meriwether and Commissioner Pohlman)  
Against: 0  
Abstained: 0

**The 2022 Budget was therefore passed and the Budget Committee approved figures of a total amount of \$13,231,350 and a net amount of \$10,084,709.**

- Administrator Hart announced that any Budget notebooks need to be turned in. Everyone may keep the 2021 Budget contents, but the tabs need to be left in the Budget Binders.
- Administrator Hart reminded Budget Committee Members that four (4) members are due to expire unless they renew their Budget Committee Member status. The four (4) members are: Barry Norris, Gayle Gallant, Charles Grover & Randy Stearns. Those go in the General Elections they are not run in the Primary. All the information is not on the site yet. There is still one vacancy in the City of Rockland for a Budget Committee member.
- Administrator Hart stated that he is looking at the second or third week in January for a meeting to get started on ARPA. . Budget Committee members will have access to all the applications for ARPA.

**VII. Adjourn**

- *Bob Duke made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Barry Norris seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor.*
- *Commissioner Meriwether made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Pohlman seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor.*

The meeting adjourned at 6:22 P.M

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Galvin  
Administrative Assistant

**The Knox County Budget Committee and Knox County Commission approved these minutes at the next Quarterly Joint Budget Committee Meeting to be held on February 3, 2022.**