

# KNOX COUNTY COMMISSION

## Public Hearing and Final Budget Meeting Vote

**Knox County Commission and Budget Committee**

**Thursday - December 15, 2022 – 6:00 P.M.**

A Joint Commission and Budget Committee Review Meeting was held on Thursday, December 15, 2022, at 6:00 at the Knox County Courthouse, 62 Union Street, Rockland, Maine.

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

**County staff present included:** County Administrator Andrew Hart, Sheriff Patrick Polky, and Finance Director Kathy Robinson.

**Budget Committee members present were:** Chair Roger Peabody, Barry Norris, Bob Duke, Randy Stearns, Charles Grover, Vera Roberts and Nick Lapham.

**Absent:** Richard L. Parent, Jr. Commissioner District #2, Administrative Assistant Wendy Galvin, IT Director Zach Greene, Gayle Gallant Budget Committee, Shawn Levasseur Budget Committee, Communications Director Robert Coombs, Deputy Register of Deeds Madelene Cole, EMA Director Candice Richards, District Attorney Natasha Irving, Chief Deputy Curt Andrick, Register of Probate Elaine Hallett, Prosecutorial Assistant/Investigator Shane Riley and Airport Manager Jeremy Shaw.

**Others in Attendance:** None

### Joint Commission and Budget Committee Review Meeting

#### Commission Hearing Room

Thursday – December 15, 2022 – 6:00 P.M.

- I. 6:00 Meeting Called To Order** (Chair Roger Peabody for the Knox County Budget Committee, Commission Chair Dorothy Meriwether for the Knox County Commission)
- II. 6:01 Approve Minutes** (Chair Roger Peabody for the Knox County Budget Committee, Commission Chair Dorothy Meriwether for the Knox County Commission)
  1. Minutes of Budget Review Meeting of November 22, 2022.
- III. 6:03 Opening Remarks – Roger Peabody, Chair**
- IV. 6:05 Public Hearing**
  1. Chair Peabody Opens Public Hearing on the 2023 Proposed Knox County Budget.
  2. Chair Peabody Closes Public Hearing.
- V. Budget Committee Vote on 2023 Budget**
  1. Vote to Approve 2023 Budget and Transmit to Commission.
- VI. Commission Vote on 2023 Budget**
  1. Vote to Approve 2023 Budget.
- VII. Adjourn**

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

The December 15, 2022 Joint Commission and Budget Committee Review Meeting was called to order by Budget Committee Chair Roger Peabody and Commissioner Chair Dorothy G. Meriwether at 6:01 P.M.

### **II. Approve Minutes**

1. Minutes of the Joint Commission and Budget Committee Review Meeting of November 22, 2022.
  - ***Bob Duke made motion to approve the Minutes of the Joint Commission and Budget Committee Meeting of November 22, 2022. Randy Stearns seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor. (Vera Roberts abstained)***
  - ***Commissioner Pohlman made motion to approve the Minutes of the Joint Commission and Budget Committee Meeting of November 22, 2022. Commissioner Meriwether seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor.***

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

Chair Roger Peabody gave a brief overview of how the budget gets started and how it ends:

- This year was a tough budget. Every year it always seems to be a little bit more. It is higher than what all of us would like to see. Unfortunately, some things are out of our control. I do want to thank all the Budget Committee members, as they did a pretty good job settling things and getting through this.

### **IV. Public Hearing**

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

- ***Bob Duke*** spoke: I have been on this Budget Committee for a very long time and I was in a Commissioners seat for four (4) years. I will tell you that this budget has bothered me more than any other budget that I have ever looked at. I've done Town budgets, School budgets and this has been really difficult. I listened carefully to when the Department heads presented their budget, I asked questions to help me understand the needs, and preliminary voted on how I felt was responsible to the Citizens of Knox County. Yes, the majority of the Citizens of Knox County are not here they're coming through the camera and if that camera could speak I would hope they would be screaming at us. At least some percentage of them and Steve can only report so much. I went on to Village Soup and looked at the Waldo County budget. The Waldo County budget, I understand Waldo County is a little different than we are. They are a much larger area, and have about the same population as we do. Their Corrections budget this coming year is approximately \$189,000, and Knox County's is \$5,758,000. Waldo's Communication budget is \$1,132,579 and Knox County's is approximately \$1.5 million dollars, Waldo's Sheriff's budget to cover double the area Knox County has is \$2,300,000 and Knox County is \$2,718,000. I am not saying this for tonight but I am saying this to my Committee; think about how other Counties are operating their County and how much it cost to operate that County. I feel that Knox County has taken into consideration needs of the Department head (which I understand) but I also feel that they are not listening to the Citizens in Knox County. The Citizens in Knox County that pay taxes are going to pay, if you have a \$2,600 tax bill it's going to be another \$260-\$300; it's going to be 10% more if this County budget flies through and the Town covers the increase in labor costs, only labor costs. I looked at this budget, because of inflation our cost of living increase was 8.7%, plus Step, plus the benefits we are looking at payroll that is going to go up about 10%. I was ok with that. The labor part of our budget is of course the largest part. I feel that was an expense that you could not do anything about, you had to accept it. I felt this was not the year to do anything new; this was to survive through this. I think I heard our Administrator say was what can you do? That is not the type of answer that I wanted to hear. I think we need to be able to manage the budget better. I am not voting for this budget on any level. I just feel that we should have done some other things to manage the cost down. I heard everybody rebut what I said, and I totally get that. I feel that we are managing our County, especially on the law enforcement side, at a higher cost than our

neighboring Counties. I would ask that we ask better questions in the future and try to manage this budget lower in the future. I am really disappointed in the Commissioners over the years. I would like to have had the Commissioners simply question costs. In the years that I have been on this Budget Committee, I do this as a service to the folks that live in Rockport, Hope; I really do this to serve them. This is an unpaid position and I have better things to do with my time. Being a Commissioner you've got to have some conservative blood in you, and I don't feel that any of the three (3) of you do.

- **Randy Stearns** spoke: I have been on this Committee too long. At the end of last year's budget process I told everybody in this room I was done. I couldn't do it any longer. Bob's been here longer than I have and tip my hat to him for having stuck it out as long as he has. I voted against these budgets before, I have been the only one to vote against the budget. Like it or don't like it there are things I'm not agreeing with throughout these budget processes, and forcing new programs on the Towns that have asked us point blank do not do this and we did it anyways. I voted against this salary adjustments that we did way back when I first got on board. Giving the County employees a 43% pay raise because we compared their job and the economy was not great at that point. I've struggled but last year I said I couldn't do it. I mentioned it here, I mentioned it in the Administrators office, I got sent to the Town of Camden. The Town of Camden said no they don't handle that here it gets done at the County level. I threw my hands up, smiled and said I've told everybody (inaudible) when this process started this year I was told I had to come back basically. I'm here. This budget in my opinion is the worst budget we've had to face. This group, as well as the Commissioners and Administrator have created a process that now you have to cover wages by CPIW, and the employees get a Step Increase just for showing up and doing their job. They don't have to do performance reviews, they don't have minimum criteria, and they get their raises every year. General Public doesn't get that. We did the supplemental CARES budget giving away \$7.7 million. This Committee and Commissioners gave County employees \$1.4 million dollars in bonuses that nobody else in the County got. That turned my stomach. Again, I came back because when I saw the proposed budget I had to sit through a little bit of this. I am done this year because I did not get reappointed thankfully. I'm not supporting this budget. This is not fair for the taxpayers who don't get these kinds of raises. You're putting more and more of a burden on these people and it's not fair. I can't support it.
- **Nick Lapham** spoke: I feel as an individual looking at this budget it's almost 13% increase. As Randy said we all approved \$1.4 million dollars in bonuses earlier this year. As Andy acknowledged last week, this is what we've approved and this is where we are now. I have been to, not this year, I have been at the Jail and talked with the Sheriff and tried to do that this year. We were not able to get our schedules together but that was my intention because I wanted to see the facilities and go through the budget. As I looked at this before coming over, I see that Communications is up 17%. Gayle raised that question last week. Bottom line as an individual I look at this and say I couldn't approve this. I feel torn between trying to figure out what are the responsibilities here of the County in terms of providing the safety and essential services to the residents for which the tax payer pay. I also feel responsible to those taxpayers. I'm trying to balance that out. I can't look at a 13% increase and say you can't have everything this year. I stand with Bob and Randy.
- The Public Hearing portion of the meeting was closed at 6:20 P.M.

#### **V. Budget Committee Vote on 2023 Budget**

- *Barry Norris motioned to approve the 2023 Knox County Budget in the total amount of \$17,576,157 and a net amount of \$11,317,348 and transmit to the Commission. Vera Roberts seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor. **The motion therefore failed.***

*In favor: 3 (Chair Roger Peabody, Barry Norris, Vera Roberts)*

*Against: 4 (Bob Duke, Randy Stearns, Nicholas Lapham and Charles Grover)*

*Abstained: 0*

## **VI. Commission Vote on 2023 Budget**

- *Commissioner Pohlman motioned to approve the 2023 Knox County Budget in the total amount of \$17,576,157 and a net amount of \$11,317,348. Commissioner Meriwether seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor. **The motion therefore passed.***

*In favor: 2 (Commissioner Pohlman and Commissioner Meriwether)*

*Against: 0*

*Abstained: 0*

***For the Budget Committee to override the Commissioner's vote and fail the 2023 budget; the Budget Committee needs six (6) members, or 2/3 of the total amount of Budget Committee members (which is nine (9)) to override the Commissioners approval. This was verified with Legal Counsel. A revote takes place.***

- *Barry Norris motioned to approve the 2023 Knox County Budget in the total amount of \$17,576,157 and a net amount of \$11,317,348 and transmit to the Commission. Vera Roberts seconded the motion. A vote was taken with all in favor. **The motion therefore failed.***

*In favor: 3 (Chair Roger Peabody, Barry Norris, Vera Roberts)*

*Against: 4 (Bob Duke, Randy Stearns, Nicholas Lapham and Charles Grover)*

*Abstained: 0*

**The 2023 Budget was therefore passed and the Commissioners approved figures of a total amount of \$17,576,157 and a net amount of \$11,317,348.**

## **VII. Adjourn**

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

The meeting adjourned at 6:25 P.M

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Galvin  
Administrative Assistant

**The Knox County Budget Committee and Knox County Commission approved these minutes at the Joint Commission & Budget Committee Meeting on April 6, 2023.**