

**PUBLIC MEETING  
SAGADAHOC COUNTY**



**BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BAC)**

**Meeting 3: Department Head Presentations**

Friday, February 28, 2025 – 8:30 a.m.

Commissioners' Meeting Room – Sagadahoc County Courthouse  
752 High Street, Bath, Maine

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**MINUTES**

A public meeting of the Budget Advisory Committee was held at 9:30 a.m. on Friday, February 13, 2025, at the Commissioners' Meeting Room, 752 High Street, Bath, ME.

**I. Call Meeting to Order and Establish Quorum**

At 8:35 a.m. Commissioner Crosby established a quorum and called the meeting to order.

Crosby welcomed the Budget Advisory Committee and asked them to introduce themselves. Committee member Matt Nixon joined via Zoom. The Department Heads who had already arrived introduced themselves to the committee. HR Director Jessica Grey informed attendees that the most recent draft of the preliminary budget containing the placeholder COLA was available at the front of the room for anyone who might have an older version.

Crosby shared that the Commissioners had met 3 days prior and set a COLA rate of 3.7%, advising that it was not necessarily the final COLA number for the budget, but a placeholder number that was the higher percentage, suggested by CPI (Consumer Price Index) North, versus the Social Security COLA set at 2.5%, which on the other end would be the 'worst case scenario' adjustment in the budget. He continued that the Commissioners were also not recommending any wage increases but would hear suggestions from Department Heads regarding individual employees in their respective departments. In addition, the Commissioners also voted to approve a new policy to considering wage adjustments for non-union employees every 3 years during the off year when collective bargaining agreements are not being negotiated. He clarified that the shift in policy wouldn't mean that adjustments couldn't be made as needed, but that looking at wage adjustments across the board would only occur every 3<sup>rd</sup> year. He then asked if members of the BAC had everything they needed to get started. Matt Nixon stated that he was not able to see anyone via his Zoom connection, and it was fixed so that he could.

Before beginning presentations, Commissioner August asked Finance Director Jill Flaherty if the changes on the tracking sheet had been incorporated into the most recent preliminary draft, and she advised that they had. Commissioner Crosby informed the attendees that he was turning the meeting

over to Flaherty, who had temporarily taken on the role of acting Administrator, to give a quick budget overview before the presentations began.

## **II. Budget Overview**

Flaherty welcomed everyone, then informed the attendees that the budget they would be considering amounted to a 16.22% increase over last year and advised that while it was a sizable increase, the budget was also very lean. She continued that there were 4 factors driving the increase: capital projects (deferred funding has brought 3 projects into critical status—the flat roof, cooling tower, and generator), the stability of operations (we have identified vulnerabilities that could halt our emergency services), funding the reserves (the Commissioners' contingency needs to be replenished for overages in tower construction and lease costs) and unfunded liability (funding of employee retirements), and finally, decreased revenue (revenue has been trending down over the past few fiscal years and has gotten worse this year). The real estate surge of the Covid era has ended, interest rates are falling, and most notable for this cycle, the budget contains zero federal funding because we cannot count on receiving any. She added that if we do get any federal funding, great, it can offset the tax levy next year. As mentioned by Commissioner Crosby, the budget does not contain any wage adjustments outside of the Cost-of-Living increase in the collective bargaining agreements and what was set by the Commissioners on Tuesday. Before the first presentation, BAC member Carolyn Lockwood asked if the Department Heads could point out any line items in their budget that were dependent on federal funding. Commissioner Crosby suggested that they could also highlight those items and send something out to the committee.

## **III. Presentations**

### **Natasha Irving, District Attorney**

Irving introduced herself as the District Attorney for Sagadahoc County, as well as Lincoln, Knox, and Waldo Counties, with her home office located in Knox County. She advised that she would be discussing some of the highlights from her proposed budget, and would identify any areas tied to federal funding, too.

First, her office is asking for a new cruiser for their Domestic Violence Investigator, Marc Brunelle. Irving described having a DVI as an asset and shared that Brunelle does a lot of deep dives into their domestic violence cases, particularly with ones that are higher risk. He is also helpful in driving policy and informing both prosecutors and other law enforcement officials as to best practices and protocols for investigation, prosecution and safety in matters of domestic violence. They are asking for \$30,000 for a new cruiser because his vehicle is over 10 years old and has over 100,000 miles on it, leading to increasing repair costs. In January, the exhaust pipe fell off while Brunelle was driving on 196, and Irving believes that not only is it unacceptable to have him driving an unsafe vehicle, but that it could also be a liability for other drivers on the road or passengers he may have in the vehicle with him.

In line 220-53805, for \$2,000, the money that was previously budgeted for a rifle was instead used to purchase a vest for Domestic Violence Investigator Brunelle. There is a new bail check policy in her office that requires him to knock on doors to check bail compliance, so they are requesting the firearm in this cycle.

The other budget line that they request an increase in funding for is 220-54512, for \$10,000, to be used for Superior Court Witness Fees. Those fees have been increasing alongside the need to call experts as witnesses in trials. Irving continued that domestic violence aggravated assault Class B cases are where they typically most often look to use those experts. These are usually very serious domestic violence or strangulation cases. In strangulation cases, one of the elements that must be

proved is that there was obstruction to air flow or blood flow. Victims are rarely able to cooperate with prosecution for one reason or another, often due to safety issues, so being able to use an expert to talk about what a person experienced according to a medical examination, or to explain what it means when someone says that they're hearing flowing in their ears, or broken blood vessels, or scratches from defensive wounds, is extremely helpful. These are things that expert witnesses can testify to, and we've seen progress in other parts of the state in getting convictions in these extremely serious cases. Irving shared that to strangle a person, it takes as much pressure as it does to open a can of soda, and strangulation can cause serious affects—even up to a month afterward folks have died from it. So, we need to take these cases seriously and do a better job. There are many reasons why that line item is needed, not limited to airfare, hotel and car rental.

As far as federal funding, Irving stated that she believed that the only funding pertinent to her office is the VOCA grant. They have been receiving it for several years, and it requires a lot of personnel hours. Shane Riley in Knox County does most of the compliance, while victim/witness advocate Lynn Talbot does a huge amount of work trying to make sure they have the data they need to be in compliance with that grant. In total, it's split about evenly between the 4 Counties in Irving's district. She advised that for a while, the payment was sent to Lincoln County, and they were supposed to disperse it to Sagadahoc, but that didn't happen for several years. When they couldn't get cooperation from Lincoln regarding paying Sagadahoc back, she opted to allocate all the funds to Sagadahoc. She thinks that we are likely close to being fully paid back.

Irving continued that there are proposals for federal legislation that they don't know what will happen with. For instance, one of the proposals is that if the Presidential Administration had a belief that any agency receiving federal funding was "supporting" immigrants, that that federal funding could be revoked. She is concerned because a lot of work has gone into this, and she doesn't want any other executive telling her office how to conduct their business. As a prosecutor her concerns are not what someone's immigration status is, but it could be seen, for instance, as "supporting" immigrants if she were prosecuting a case in which an immigrant was a victim. She added that her office doesn't typically know a persons' immigration status to begin with—Maine is a tourist state, and a lot of people who come visit from away—she doesn't know if folks are visiting or undocumented because it's not relevant to prosecuting cases. In that regard her only concern is how her office would contact them in the future if they weren't from the area. After Lincoln County has finished paying the County back, Irving says Sagadahoc would see about \$13,000 each year but that with the amount of work that goes into it and the uncertainty about policies or potential overreach into her office, it may be more of a liability at this point.

Irving shared that the office is down a prosecutor position and joked that if anyone in the room or on Zoom was a bar-admitted attorney, to please reach out. Kathryn King is doing a great job as Sagadahoc's resident prosecutor and Shaundra is doing an excellent job at keeping the office rolling, and she is really proud of the work her office has done.

Commissioner Crosby asked, regarding the vehicle request, if Irving knew whether the Sheriff might have a car that could be used in the interim. Paralegal and Office Manager Shaundra Vanella replied that by the time the Sheriff's Department is done with one of their vehicles they are in worse condition than the DVI's vehicle is currently in. Crosby then asked about the other line item for the DVI, asking if it was a gun. Vanella advised that it is a rifle. Crosby then wondered if the Sheriff had an extra gun Brunelle could use. Vanella advised that the DA's Office and Sheriff's Office are separate departments, and the DA's Office doesn't utilize any assets that the Sheriff's Office has. Brunelle is sworn entirely under the District Attorney and is exclusively in their budget. She continued that it would be an item that was budgeted for by the Sheriff, and she does not believe he would have extra firearms. The rifle was budgeted for this year but then the allocated funds were

needed to replace Brunelle's expired bullet-proof vest.

BAC Chair David Hennessey then had a question about the Phone Reimbursement line item in the amount of \$360.00 for a total account request of \$2000. Vanella replied that that was for her. There was a bit of laughter in the room, and Hennessey commented that it seemed a little high for a phone. She explained that the \$360 was split into a \$30 per month reimbursement, which is their standard reimbursement rate for cell phone usage. She added that both of their prosecutors and advocates, as well as the Domestic Violence Investigator also utilize their cell phones for work. Hennessey clarified, "so it's not for 1 phone."

Committee member Roo Dunn thanked Irving and Vanella for their presentation, noting that he appreciated the wider understanding of the federal funding as it applied to their department. Pertaining to the requested vehicle, Dunn pointed out that under the Sheriff's budget, there was a request for two cruisers. Working for the city, he knows how difficult it can be to obtain vehicles and knows sometimes vehicles are traded in versus being shared, as well as the condition of the cruisers by the time the request is granted. That said, he wanted to make sure that when it came time for Sheriff Merry's presentation that timing had been discussed to see what could be done to spread out the vehicle purchases.

Dunn then asked if Irving or Vanella could talk about line item 55-400, \$14,500 for Database Replacement. Irving advised that the Maine Prosecutors' Association, all the elected prosecutors, and the Attorney General, had voted to move to a statewide database that is accessible to all pertinent parties. They need to be able to do electronic filing and have it streamlined so that they aren't all using different systems. Irving added that the recommendation to move to the new system was not really a choice, as the court is going to tell them that they need to be able to use the new technology. It's kind of a contract that they have entered into with the entire state. Dunn then said, to paraphrase, the 8 District Attorneys agreed on this as an application, hopefully cloud-delivered, that you all will use? Irving confirmed. Dunn then asked if the figure represented Sagadahoc's share of the cost for the software. She again confirmed, and Vanella added that the share is done per district and then divided among the Counties that make up the district. Dunn wanted to know if the cost would be recurring. Vanella told him that JustWare, the application they had been using, was no longer being updated or supported, but the same company is providing the new program, so they will be able to transfer their data. The requested amount would be for the annual fee for licensing (per user), the updates, and any additional users that are added as that would increase the annual cost. She added that while it was not a new budget line, the department hasn't utilized it in a few years because their licensing with JustWare had been out the window for 4 years. Commissioner Crosby stepped in to make sure that Budget Advisory Committee understood that there had not been an increase in the District Attorney's budget—it was the same number last year that has been sitting there for this purpose, and each time it didn't happen it rolled back into the budget.

Commissioner August then asked, "if the federal VOCA funds don't show up, what are the programmatic effects?" Irving explained that right now the money comes in and we get a \$55,000 grant each year. She is the one who decides where those funds go, and opted to follow the same distribution practice previous DAs have chosen--divided evenly between VWA (Victim Witness Advocate) roles within the County. If the office lost the funding, they would be losing a revenue stream, but nothing is attached to that money—there is no position, for instance, that would have to be cut—but it would be a revenue loss of about \$13,000 per County in the district. She shared that she has considered not requesting the funds due to how much work it is to receive the small sum per County, adding that when you have limited personnel and have someone spending hours per week doing that when they could be potentially doing other work that's essential to the office, you start trying to figure out what the cost benefit is. She continued that she does understand that we are

looking at budget increases and that is part of why they are still pursuing those funds. August asked, in terms of creating a budget scenario in anticipation of a potential \$13,000 reduction, if she anticipated looking for additional revenue to replace it. Irving responded, “potentially.” She continued that typically, their revenue streams come in the form of [often federal] grants and reiterated her concern regarding overreach into her office. She and her staff need to make decisions that are based on the law and a lot of other factors, and right now no one comes in from above except the Commissioners, and the Budget Advisory Committee—people from this district, and the people of Maine can tell her how to do her job. She added that the President can even tell her how to do her job and that’s fine, but to lose federal funding or have anything tied to one person telling her that she has to do something that is, really, outside the scope of her job, would be problematic—potentially in many ways.

Roo Dunn commented that he appreciated and agreed with DA Irving’s sentiment, and stated that however as a County, we may be asked, in reference to federal funding, to say if we got funding for something—like a plow—that then our law enforcement would do a, b, and c. He continued that we may be facing this on a wider scale, and we have to think about that. Irving assured Dunn that she had considered that, and that prosecutors take that sort of thing very seriously. She doesn’t want to feel pressure to treat people differently in order to bring in \$13,000. Essentially, she wants to be able to practice ethically without those sorts of strings attached.

Commissioner McPhee asked to return to the vehicle line, and wondered if the DVI vehicle was purchased, how much Irving thought the Maintenance and Repair line amount could be reduced. Irving replied that they’d need to get oil changes and tire rotations/changes—saying that she didn’t want to jinx anything—sometimes you buy a brand-new vehicle and...there will still be costs, but it should go down. Vanella stepped in to advise that they would likely not be looking for something brand new as vehicles are extraordinarily expensive, and the DVI doesn’t drive as much as a deputy does, so in the past they have looked for a suitable used vehicle. Matt Nixon added that [their repair budget] is like two tires. You get a rock to the windshield and that budget’s gone. Inflation is not going down, it’s going up—adding that he thinks \$2,000 is actually too small a number for vehicle repairs, even for a newer car, but given the circumstances he thinks their number is on target. McPhee said that he isn’t sure \$2,000 is enough based on previously shared information.

McPhee then asked if their liability insurance gets paid once per year, or more frequently. Irving answered that it was a once yearly cost per County, and that it would be going up in cost next year. She explained that insurance rates do increase typically when a prosecutor in Maine has been sued, although she couldn’t think of any recent examples. Vanella appended that the figure requested was a worst-case scenario, and that the Attorney General had notified them that rates would be going up but had not determined final numbers. She added that she suspects it will be at least twice what it is currently but was not sure. Irving clarified that the insurance was essentially legal malpractice insurance. McPhee then asked about vehicle insurance, and Vanella advised it is through the County Risk Pool.

### **Hannah Dickinson, Deputy Register of Probate**

Dickinson introduced herself and shared that after a year and a half hiatus as Deputy Director in EMA (Emergency Management Agency) she was recently re-instated to her previous position within the Probate Court. She explained that Judge Paris was unable to attend the meeting due to a court conflict in Franklin County, but wrote a letter for Dickinson to share with attendees, which she read verbatim: “Commissioners and BAC, please excuse my absence on February 28, 2025, due to a previously scheduled court appearance in Franklin County Superior Court beginning at 8:30 a.m. I have authorized our Deputy Register of Probate, Hannah Dickinson, to speak on my behalf presenting the 2025 FY budget [2026]. I have reviewed the budget and consulted with our Deputy

Register and am in agreement as to the expenditures and figures as presented, and more importantly, as to the necessity of funds required for operating efficiently and prudently. Of note, our largest future expenditure appears to be the unknown. The amount of funds necessary to support our indigent community members when either the law requires the appointment of counsel for parties, or a Guardian ad Litem on behalf of a minor. In some instances, the law requires appointment of a Visitor. Out of necessity we have increased our hourly rate for counsel to compete with that of the PDS (Public Defense Services) from \$120/hour to \$150/hour, and that amount will continue to vary as will the case numbers that we have in our court.

Recently in conjunction with the Commissioners, the Probate Court has determined that the needs of the office and community are best served with a part-time Register of Probate, deviating from a long-standing tradition of a full-time Register. The position is elected and is required by the Constitution of the State of Maine. The position has been vacant since December 2024; however, we hope to fill that position in the near future. That move will save the County funds and also speaks to the efficiency of our office at present. In early March, the qualified candidates [for the Register of Probate] will be forwarded to Governor for selection. The Governor will need to make her final selection at that time. We expect that the office will be fully staffed not later than May 2025. We will stress again the office continues to fully function without backlog in cases or in addressing time-sensitive filings. Again, my apologies for my unavailability today in not attending. I would be happy to answer any questions at a later date. It continues to be my honor to serve as Judge of Probate in Sagadahoc County. Thank you for your attention to this matter.”

After reading the letter from Judge Paris, Dickinson communicated that she prepared the budget and shared that Probate’s big ask for this cycle is to put the line item 54510 Professional Services back up to \$16,000. She continued that the committee would see that \$12,000 is what was budgeted for this year, and as of November 30 they had \$6,095 left, and after checking again the night prior to this meeting, there is a balance of \$3,128.23 to carry them through the end of the fiscal year. She believes that there are a couple of current cases that will likely deplete those funds further, explaining that if an indigent person comes in and is entitled to have counsel according to state statute, they need to file the same financial affidavit that is required by district court. If they qualify, we are required by law to offer that service. If a grandparent comes in and the biological parents want counsel, and their rights are potentially going to be temporarily given to the grandparent, both of those biological parents have a right to counsel [even] if they can’t afford it. So, that line item is kind of one of those things where we need to put it where we think it could be in the worst-case scenario. We haven’t been putting it that high. Dickinson shared that she and Judge Paris had sat down and agreed that they don’t want to make the County vulnerable to going over in this line.

David Hennessey asked Dickinson how the salaries of the elected officials in Probate broke down. Dickinson replied that the part-time Register would make around \$37,500 and the Judge receives the remainder, determined by a wage adjustment made a few years earlier. Prior to the staffing change, the Register at full-time was receiving around \$65,000. Hennessey then commented that part-time wages had gone up quite a bit. Dickinson advised that the part-time wage increase was due to an independent contractor who came in and a permanent part-time position was born from it last July. The part-time person went to a full-time position within the County and they have refilled that position at the same rate of pay.

Roo Dunn, referencing line item 54510 once more, remarked that the hourly rate for Professional Services is going up from \$120 to \$150 per hour. Dickinson advised that she could not recall the acronym, but that there is a conglomerate that sets the amount Public Defenders should get. Sagadahoc has traditionally underpaid for that. When she was last working in the Probate Office, they were paying \$100. Public Defenders are a hot topic in the state of Maine, they’re needed, and

they're trying to get together, so instead of going under, we're matching what the going rate is, as are our other 15 Counties. Dunn next questioned who conducts the study for the rate recommendation, and Dickinson answered that she believed it was the Maine Bar Association or a suborganization under them. She added that it's not a County study but is vetted through Maine State Bar Association.

Commissioner McPhee asked, regarding the part-time personnel, what else is included in that [wage]? Dickinson advised that the part-time employee gets federal holidays off, but there is no health insurance. He followed up by confirming that the position is 29.5 hours per week at \$27.00 [per hour]. Finance Director Flaherty shared that there would be a 3.7% COLA increase added to that as \$27.00 was the rate for last year. Dickinson expanded that the department didn't have anyone in the part-time position from the time that the initial person moved to full-time in a different department, so there were just two full-time people during that time, one salaried and one hourly.

Commissioner Crosby asked if there were any other questions. BAC member Carolyn Lockwood said no but commented that Probate's overall budget went down. Dickinson explained that the change to a part-time Register largely accounts for that. As public servants, she continued, "we're not really supposed to make money in our particular department, we're supposed to provide a safe place for people to land, with people that will talk to them one-on-one, and every day is different." She added that she is thrilled to be back in Probate and loves what she is doing and invited anyone who wishes to visit Probate and ask any questions.

Commissioner August mentioned that Passports were still listed as revenue for the office. Dickinson assured him that she had brought that to Finance Director Flaherty's attention (and Flaherty confirmed), and Dickinson addressed the room in saying that the line item of \$9,000 is gone. August advised the meeting attendees that this would change their overall total, and Dickinson said instead of \$170,000 it would be around \$161,000. Flaherty stated that the department would still have a budget decrease of -1.3%. Commissioner Crosby stepped in to reiterate to any public viewers that the County no longer does passports, and Dickinson advised that people could go to the Bath Post Office or the Topsham Town Office. She assured everyone that the office would still direct people and answer any questions to the extent possible without being official passport agents.

Commissioner August asked what a publication fee was, and Dickinson advised that when someone passes away or when there's a fight over an estate, you have to publish who is assigned as the Personal Representative so that any creditors have 120 days to submit claims against the estate for repayment. August asked if Probate paid for that, and Dickinson clarified that it is \$75.00 and calculated as part of the filing fee. The person applying to administer the estate pays the fee, and we in turn pay the newspaper. Crosby asked what the fee is to file? Dickinson informed him that there's a scale set by the state of Maine by Title 18-C statute and the cost is dependent on the perceived value of the estate.

Commissioner August asked if the \$13,200 on the revenue line balances against line 56-200 Advertising, is that the way it's...? Dickinson interjected yes and explained that their personnel advertising comes out of that as well, and any other advertising they may have to do, so it should be a wash. She explained that she calls the Times Record to make sure that what they are charging is going to even out to about what we should be paying. The fee is charged ahead of time, and the publications go in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> week of the month. Then Probate gets a bill from the Times Record that is paid within 2 weeks.

## **Joel Merry, Sheriff**

Sheriff Merry started his presentation by saying that he created an initial draft of his budget and knowing that his department has had a lot of increases over the past few cycles and being aware of some of the issues we are currently facing, he then went through it again to parse out even more things he thought they could possibly forego until next year.

Merry shared that they had added a few positions to the department over the past couple of years. He proposes taking the Lieutenant's position (which is half funded through Transport and half funded through the Sheriff's office) and moving it entirely to the Sheriff's office. It's where he spends most of his time anyway and will continue to spend more time there as they move forward. This would also allow the Transport Department to add a full-time Transport Deputy, and that position has a lower pay rate. He described the Transport workload as consistent, although it can be hit or miss. Some days are very busy, and they might need to call in people to assist, while other days it's not as busy. The staffing shift is the only significant change, and while they are adding one full-time position, the half salary for the lieutenant will no longer be there.

He then advised that the total budget for the law enforcement side (Sheriff's Office) is up about \$70,000, or 2.7%. Wages are the biggest driver of the increase, with a 3% COLA in the collective bargaining agreement. He added that this is the final year of their contract. Other than the configuration of the Lieutenant's position, there will be no staffing changes, but the budget does fund one contract position with MDEA and that is reimbursed through the state. That reimbursement is then used to offset their personnel costs. The MDEA agent is the only one in Sagadahoc County, and there's one in Brunswick as well but he is often pulled away, so ours is really the only one in the area. Training wages were also increased modestly to remain competitive.

There are two canine teams in the Sheriff's Office. One is a law enforcement-trained canine team in all matters of patrol and drug detection, while the other team is trained in search and rescue. The search and rescue dog was trained through MESARD (Maine Search and Rescue Dogs) and is deployed all over the state.

Merry described vehicle maintenance as another driver of increases in his budget. Based on the rising costs, this line has gone up by 5.5%. One of his main concerns in this area is the Maine County Commissioners Association's Risk Pool, as their deductible per incident is more than doubling from \$1000 to \$2500. This cost comes out of their maintenance budget as well. He joked that it would help if the deer population in Sagadahoc County were a little more forgiving, informing the attendees that in the past year 3 deer have hit cruisers (not the other way around)!

Contract Services is the other big increase in the department. This year it went up by about \$6700 (or 64%), partially because last year it wasn't funded enough. He explained that they have several contracts for law enforcement tools of which the costs have been steadily increasing.

Pivoting to the Transport (and jail) side of his department, Merry shared, the budget is also increasing. He proposed a \$73,000 (2.3%) rise this year, adding that he thought it was important to note that for the first time in 13 years, they're going to propose increasing the cap by \$66,000. Their cap has been set at \$2.6 million, and by statute they could increase it by \$200,000 plus up to 4% annually. He continued that there is a lot of discussion going on at the state level regarding County Jail funding, and he advised that what Sagadahoc is expected to contribute to Two Bridges has been kept flat in hopes that their budget would balance based on boarding revenue. Both Sagadahoc and Lincoln Counties are responsible for funding the jail operation, and try to do that while maximizing boarding revenue, which is not always consistent. The regional collaborative between the four Counties was created to try to maximize what we can do there. They have contracted with SMRT

Architects and Engineers to look at the collaboration and long-term facility needs and then a governance structure. Merry believes this sharing of resources will save a considerable amount for the County. He added that unfunded mandates—requirements from the state regarding things that must be done, but with limited assistance in bringing those requirements to fruition—have become a real problem affecting budgets and ultimately falling to taxpayers.

The Alternative Sentencing Program, which includes a full-time mental health liaison contracted through Sweetser and shared between the Brunswick Police Department and Sagadahoc Sheriff's Department, does not have the capacity to meet the need. Due to this, they have approached Sweetser to investigate obtaining a full-time liaison solely for the County so that there is availability to the extent needed. The Sheriff's Department is seeing more and more cases that involve weapons restriction orders, and having a mental health nexus is one of the requirements. That budget line is increasing by \$10,000 and includes Maine pre-trial services and a part-time (20 hours per week) peer support counselor through Mid Coast Hospital.

Merry went on to say that not much has changed within the Civil Process portion of the budget, but like in other County departments, they are seeing a decrease in revenue. The number of Civil Process Services is down "a couple hundred" from last year, which was down from the previous year as well. Those services come from a variety of things: small claims, DHHS, court appearances, divorces, property cases, trusts in Probate, etc. The office is staffed by two per diem deputies that we don't pay or provide benefits to — their payment comes through the fees that they collect in service. We do have a part-time clerk 20 hours per week who handles questions and meets with the public, etc.

Commissioner McPhee commented about the Corrections account, 55405, that he thought the copier was already part of the IT budget. Finance Director Jill Flaherty stepped in to advise that the other copiers are all under the IT budget, but since Transport is funded differently it must be recorded on its own, just like their benefits and other things. Merry added that it's because those must be reported to the state. David King then asked about line 55340, Rental Equipment—what are you renting? Merry advised that it was the cost for electronic monitors—the bracelets. He added that they get some funding back on that in the revenue section and explained that the courts used to charge defendants for the cost of electronic monitoring (either GPS or alcohol), but no longer do, so now the County is expected to pick up the cost of it in most cases. During any given month, there are on average 8-12 individuals monitored in this way.

David Hennessey commented about Overtime Wages (51500) and observed that the addition of positions didn't decrease that line. Sheriff Merry communicated that he took a cautious approach to the overtime line and said that they are likely going to go over what was budgeted for this year. Hiring has been difficult. Technically, they still have one position open and are waiting to hear more on the conditional offer that has been made regarding it. The other individual that was hired had no previous experience in law enforcement, joining us after a stint in the Marine Corps, so he had to go through an FTO (Field Training Officer) program and is now at the Academy. Hennessey stated that the two positions for this year's budget have not really been in place then, which was confirmed by Merry. Merry added that they had started the hiring process last June and made the first hire on October 31. That was the individual with no experience, and he will be trained and ready to go for the upcoming summer. Then there have been other candidates that have started the process and for various reasons have not made it. There's a promising individual they are working with now and are in the final stages of the background check and polygraph. Merry hopes within a couple of weeks to make a recommendation for hire to the Commissioners, further explaining that the candidate has already had training, so the FTO process will be much shorter than with the other hire. Hennessey asked if he thought that would result in a decrease in overtime expenditure, and Merry advised that

it should if they don't lose anyone, as they have three deputies who have put their time in and are able to retire at any point.

BAC member Darci Wheeler commented that they're not coming in fast enough, and Merry replied that he thinks she knows that very well. He went on to say that Topsham is the same way—they have two openings, Brunswick has 4 openings. BAC member Roo Dunn asked if it was safe to say that if all things were to stay level, from the time the two hires were approved, there could be a period of 4 years between hiring and going to the Academy, etc., before any savings are realized. Sheriff Merry replied that that was correct and that there's kind of a lag factor. Dunn then asked about the position contracted through Sweetser, they couldn't fill that position for a while—were we billed for it? Merry answered that we were not billed during that gap, and looking at the projected expenditure through the end of the year on that line, it shows that it will come in quite a bit under.

Regarding vehicles, Dunn inquired first if there were any vehicles that had been taken out of service but still in inventory, and second, if only one vehicle was funded in this budget, what would be the effect? Merry advised that he would typically provide the committee with a vehicle inventory containing mileage and that once they received the March billing that he would put something together for them to see but shared that they currently have 4 vehicles in their fleet with over 100,000 miles and another 2 that are around 90,000 miles. They would like to move 2 of the older vehicles with the most mileage out of their inventory and replace them with newer vehicles. One vehicle they have purchased will be replacing a vehicle now, and they are waiting for parts to come in so that it can be fitted. Merry thinks that if they were to replace just the one vehicle, it would essentially just be delaying the second purchase to next year. If this year's request for vehicles is approved, Merry doesn't expect to obtain them until early 2026. Dunn asked what the average yearly mileage accrual is, and Merry answered that it depends on the deputy, but between 20,000 and 30,000 typically. So, if we were to approve one vehicle, Dunn continued, then one of your 90s [vehicles with 90,000 miles] is going to get somewhere north of 120,000 or 130,000 in a year.

Lastly, Dunn asked Merry to give the committee an idea of where federal funding comes to play in their budget. Merry replied that they have 1 grant for body worn cameras that they have drawn down about half of and must do the other half by the end of this year. The grant was a total of \$30,000 and they have drawn around \$18,000 so far. Commissioner Crosby commented that that is already in the budget, so we're not waiting for anything, and clarified that what they were looking for are items in the upcoming budget that could potentially get cut. Merry then clarified that the only other thing is that they have two message board trailers in the pipeline coming from a Department of Homeland Security grant, but they are confident that those are encumbered.

David King referred to the 3 deputies eligible for retirement, asking how bad it would be for the department if they all left at once. Merry replied that there would be an issue of minimum staffing and would require using more overtime to meet that minimum staffing. Commissioner Steve August suggested, noting that it would likely come up in EMA's presentation as well, asking Finance Director Flaherty if she could produce a single sheet highlighting the federal funding across all departments, just for an easier reference. Merry apprised that they have had federal grants in the past but only have the one currently. BAC member Carolyn Lockwood recalled that the MDEA agent position is funded by the state and asked how the state gets funding for that position. Merry replied that it was a good question because a lot of their funding does come through the Edward J. Byrne [Memorial Justice Assistance] Grant. He did not know how much is received or how it's divided for use but offered that he could call the Commissioner's office for that information. He continued that MDEA is also struggling currently with obtaining staff. While on the topic, Commissioner August remarked that the budget narrative advises that it offsets the cost of 1 patrol deputy, but the MDEA investigator is not a patrol deputy. Merry responded that it's a detective and

that by state law, that position must be paid at a certain level commensurate with the state police detective contract, so it's actually more funding than what the patrol deputy's wages are. August asked him to explain it further, and Merry stated because it's a contract deputy with MDEA, it must be paid, and we have to budget (about \$118,000) for that rate of pay with benefits. Then we backfill that with a deputy whose pay and benefits will be at a lower cost. August asked if there would be a net savings and Merry replied that it's an in and out because he's going to have to pay the detective, but we made a commitment to backfill the position and so it helps pay for that.

Commissioner Crosby referred to Finance Director Flaherty's overview, where she is looking at budgeting money to prepare for the deputies who are eligible for retirement because if they left now, we wouldn't have the money to pay them. Merry responded the liabilities—sick time, vacation leave, those things—yes.

Commissioner McPhee asked if the budget line for gas includes the exemption. Merry replied that you never know what it's going to be. He explained that in his experience, gas has been volatile over the years. He recalled a year where well into the budget year the price of fuel spiked and the cost of that was not covered by what was budgeted, even when discounted. McPhee asked if the exemption was \$.50 and Merry advised it is \$.60. McPhee asked if that is state and federal and Merry confirmed it is federal and state combined. McPhee then inquired if the \$310 included the exemption or not. Merry advised that he thought it would cover up to \$370. He advised they go through WEX and have cards they use. He put in a little extra in case the cost of gas rises.

Commissioner August asked if we ever bought gas—if there are state vehicle road departments, etc.? Merry shared that they started doing that with the state and utilizing the DOT pumps in Topsham. They found that that location was buying quantity in advance and at one time the price was competitive, but then the price dropped at the pump and not at the state and they ended up paying more for gas. Commissioner Crosby asked if there was a way to choose to go to the DOT garage if we wanted to versus—we can't do both? Merry offered that that's what they tried to do in the past and it became problematic—two different systems, the past pricing discrepancy, and extra work for their secretary. Roo Dunn asked if they ever got gas from City of Bath pumps and Merry advised they had not. Dunn continued that he wasn't sure what they paid for it but that it might be worth looking into. He added they have a pump on Oak Grove, and Merry agreed it might be worth looking into.

Carolyn Lockwood commented that she had taken one of the RAD classes over the summer with her office, which she offered was excellent, and asked how the program is funded? Are they volunteers? Merry informed her that they get a stipend for it through one of the lines in their budget.

### **Mike Carter, Director of Communications**

Carter stated that his department consists of 18 full-time employees and 1 per diem staff member and they are currently fully staffed. He noted that there is 1 dispatcher currently out on medical leave. The department shows a 4.36% increase in their budget over last year, with the top contributors to this being contractual raises for the 16 union employees, vehicle maintenance and gas, and contractual services. They also use the same power and training document systems that the Sheriff's office uses, the costs of which have risen, as well as a computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system.

The vehicle gas part, particularly this year and going into the next budget, refers to the new radio system upgrade. In expanding from 5 to 11 sites, there is travelling to and from the locations, meeting with radio vendors, and then maintenance and upgrades. The expansion includes the construction of 3 towers that will be owned by the County for a potential revenue stream. West Bath has been constructed, while Georgetown and Phippsburg are in the permit stage.

Commissioner Crosby asked if Carter could speak about the cost associated with the money being spent on 11 sites that eventually will be less sites once our towers are all online. Carter confirmed that once the full system is online, they will be able to get rid of 2 pricey tower leases with American Tower and US Cellular and then have 3 County-owned towers in those communities (West Bath and Phippsburg). In addition, there will be the opportunity to bring in revenue from cell carriers, averaging from \$2500-\$3500 a month per carrier. It will also help to address the communication issues currently experienced between emergency services and dispatch. On average, he reported they are at about a 60% rate of coverage in the County, meaning 40% of the County can't talk to anyone. Our tower projects will increase this coverage to 95-98%.

David King commented that the total overtime wages in the department are equivalent to about 20% of the total of regular dispatcher wages, and he asked if the department was short-handed. Carter indicated that they are fully staffed, but with both the 3.5% COLA increase for the contractual obligations and coverage for vacations, sick time, etc., it will be higher this year.

David Hennessey asked if there were any leads on tower renters, and Carter advised that AT&T had expressed interest as they may be getting off the other tower in West Bath. He continued that they are working with FirstNet because the department utilizes their public safety network and can also offer their point of contact access to the other towers in Georgetown and Phippsburg. Hennessey commented that it would be an ongoing effort.

Roo Dunn asked when Carter believed the other towers would be completed—3 years? Carter replied that it should be done within the upcoming budget year. Once the permitting is complete, they can start pouring concrete in April/May. He added that the longest part of the process is ordering the steel, which happens as soon as the permits are approved. Dunn inquired if they wouldn't know the delivery timeline until the order is made. Carter confirmed, and said it took about 3-4 months for the West Bath site to receive their steel order. Dunn asked if in theory, the construction and electronics could be done before next fall. Carter said yes, and Dunn then wondered how long from the completion of construction until commission of the towers? Carter said ideally by the end of this year, but probably spring. He continued that they would exhaust all the money by ARPA standards, but then the system will be tested and turned online. Dunn commented that if that happens as expected, there should be a reduction in some expenses in the next budget cycle, and Carter confirmed.

Dunn then had additional questions regarding the department's overtime, that 15 or 20%, are you sure you're not getting close to needing an additional part-time, rotating position or anything? To try and reduce the time and a half? Carter advised that they are taking applications for certified per diems all the time, as he does realize that paying them the straight wage would be cheaper than overtime. They have seen a bit of interest. Dunn inquired if they must be certified prior to applying. Carter advised that it's easier if they are because it takes 6-8 months to train a full-time dispatcher, so someone who works once or twice a month would take much longer to become fully trained.

### **Phil Davis, Director of EMA**

Davis introduced himself and his department, advising that they had been very involved in 2024. He advised that most Sagadahoc County residents experienced EMA firsthand during the January [2024] storms. This County department serves as the coordinating agency between local response resources, participating in damage assessments with local officials and FEMA personnel. EMA is the support agency in our communities in times of need. Davis stated that in the last year SCEMA (Sagadahoc County Emergency Management Agency) has been proud to be involved in our communities. Because of the relationships and partnerships that have been built, when the need arises, people look to this office to address complicated problems, and we are sometimes asked to

be creative with our solutions. Davis continued, saying that at other times his office serves as grant managers of over \$250,000 in grant applications, and they continue to pursue more every day.

In 2024, SCEMA was contacted to assist with approximately 20 different emergency incidents, ranging from a double murder in Bath to a monster truck incident to a plane crash in Topsham, as well as 3 separate propane incidents in Richmond and Bowdoin. This year so far has included many things seen or heard about in news stories, but EMA has also responded to several residential house fires to assist in coordination between the American Red Cross and the displaced families. Davis shared that on Christmas Day, he was awoken to word of a residential fire and ended the day with a commercial building fire at Dick's Sporting Goods.

He continued that many residents have seen him in their communities promoting the County's new mass notification system, RAVE. Just in February, which otherwise was not a busy month, they have been a support in 7 different incidents throughout the County, and the notification system had been used to send 13,300 text messages, 28,850 emails, and 23,900 voice calls just to support those 7 incidents. This past week, EMA was asked to lead a tabletop exercise between the MSAD 75 school district and local police. These are just examples of how the office is utilized on a regular basis.

Going into this year's budget, Davis commented that he knows it's a huge expense. A lot of it is tied to the federal funding that we receive. As previously stated, the EMA office manages over \$250,000 in grant applications, so this year they sent out a stakeholder survey. The survey assisted them in creating a 5-year strategic plan with most stakeholders responding that more staffing is needed in the department. In this year's budget, there is a request for an additional staff member for program coordination. This position will assist the Director and Deputy Director (to be hired) in bringing back some of that grant money that may not be received this year, including through private funding avenues and other grant opportunities they may not be aware of. Davis believes that this position would ultimately be self-funding. Davis shared that along with grant applications for EMA, they also help the Sheriff's Department with some of their grant applications, as well as some of the Fire Department's applications. Each of those grants helps with training and equipment.

Davis advised that another proposed increase is intended for public safety equipment. One expense is for a program called Orion from a company that focuses on operational coordination. During the January storms last year, each municipality completed damage assessments reported to SCEMA that then went to MEMA (Maine Emergency Management Agency) for state inspection. Once the inspections determined that enough damage had occurred to declare a disaster, the information was sent back for coordination of site visits with FEMA. The County was responsible for that coordination, and a few months later disaster status was declared so that properties could be repaired. Davis understands that the process can be frustrating for residents due to its length and says that the Orion software would enable a streamline of the process. Within the program, we can see information in real-time regarding how much damage has been experienced throughout the County. A lot of the information that FEMA requires us to provide can be reported within this software, including GPS location, the amount of damage, how many homes were damaged, what kinds of public infrastructure was damaged, and photographic evidence as well. Davis set up a screen with a made-up scenario in the meeting room to demonstrate the program for the meeting attendees. It will break down information so far as to identify damage ranging from non-existent to destroyed and is all done through a mobile app. Davis informed the group that each town in the County has been given an I-Pad this year by EMA, allowing them to collect all of this information and as they enter the information, we can see it in real-time. It walks them step-by-step through the process, and as they take pictures they get added to the report. It also includes the GPS locations

and before pictures. You can print a public assistance application right from it and hand it to a city or town and tell them it's a complete application.

The next product has already started being utilized by the County, and it is called Salamander. Davis shared that when Commissioner McPhee came into the Courthouse for the meeting, he had also 'checked into' the event. He explained that he could use McPhee's wage as a "volunteer" for now in-kind donations. What that means is that he can look at the meeting event and see that at that point, they are able to account for \$350. Each time you check into the event your time starts. With this, you can create a report that shows exactly how much was spent, and this is another thing that is needed for the public assistance application. The report shows the breakdown of check-ins, check-outs, their hourly rate, how much time they spent on scene, and then the total cost for each incident. When a large-scale disaster happens and spans multiple days, you don't have to keep track of how many people are going in and out or people's timecards. When volunteers check-in, they get a wristband that gets printed out with a QR code and that is how they check-in and out, and we can set how long they are good for, etc. It will also list any credentials that the person may have. For our first responders and public safety personnel have a card that they carry with them that has that QR code as well, and when we scan them in, each of their vehicles is then a cost that we can account for.

In January 2024, Georgetown was the only town that filled out a public assistance application because the process is so cumbersome. It took 3 personnel over 46 hours to complete a project for \$44,000. They only received \$35,000 of it back in federal grant funding, so with the two programs, Davis said that he could bring in the remaining \$9,000 which would cover the expenses that have been proposed.

The next line item with a large increase is for tower leases. As mentioned by Communications Director Mike Carter, the County has gone from 5 to 11 sites and this year there is a large cost increase. One of the tower sites went from \$1.00 a year to almost \$3500 a month. Treasurer Gail Eaton asked if that was one of the towers Sagadahoc will let go of once theirs are online, and Davis advised that he didn't know which tower that was, but he thinks it was a different tower.

Davis reported that the other large expenses in their budget are capital line items. Throughout the 5-year strategic plan-building, they have asked their partners for additional information on what they can do to better support the communities. They are asking for funding for a new EMA vehicle. Davis describes keeping a rotation basis that results in 5 or 6 years, having that money available to make that purchase. Their hazard mitigation plan is current until 2027, so at that time the plan will need to be updated. Because they are currently doing an overhaul and rewrite of their emergency operations plan, it is his recommendation that the County considers going with a paid contractor to get all the needed information. They will be applying for grants to try and keep the cost down. They are also asking for GIS capability. Currently we don't have the capability anywhere in the County and have been asked multiple times for sets of maps. During a response, we need to be able to hand someone a map, especially during search and rescue operations where some people may not be familiar with the area. The other request is regarding speed trailers and message board signs, as mentioned by Sheriff Merry. He advised that they will be delivered next week, but there is an additional cost to keep them going, whether that's pulling traffic data or being able to control the displayed messages.

Davis said that he is proud to be a County employee, and of the work that it does. He went on to say that being called to 20 incidents is unheard of within a lot of EMAs. SCEMA has become one of the agencies that people are looking to in how they can model our program. The Salamander program is a statewide platform, so we'll be able to integrate statewide, as well as see all the resources that get put into the system. He went on to say that disasters don't typically follow a 9-5 weekday schedule,

and that wherever he is or whatever he is doing, he will answer the phone. While his department plans for the worst, he adds that they get to work with the best.

Referring to Commissioner McPhee being used in the demonstration of Salamander, Treasurer Eaton jokingly asked how qualified it showed him as being. Davis laughed and advised that the Commissioners hold a lot of decision-making power when there's a large-scale disaster that happens. They delegate authority to Davis on some things and give directives on others. David Hennessey asked if there was a house fire, what process would EMA follow? Davis replied that it depended on the situation. With the house fire on Christmas day, he assisted with logistical support-bringing in all the resources, bringing in neighboring towns outside of the County, anything like that. He continued that in Bowdoinham he worked side-by-side with the incident commander and brought in the American Red Cross. There was a fire here on Middle Street recently, and he came in to work with the people while the fire department dealt with the fire. Currently EMS gets called to all first alarm fires for 6 communities. Not Brunswick though? Matt Nixon asked. Davis responded no, it's all Sagadahoc.

Roo Dunn reiterated that Davis gets called in instances of first alarm fires and asked how he gets dispatched to those incidents. Is it the County that notifies you or do you monitor and respond? Davis replied that it is both. He carries around a radio all the time, and there's a radio at his house so he hears things that are going on and usually has a step ahead. The fire departments that he is on the first alarm fires for use an application called IamResponding. When they get an alarm fire, as soon as Davis hears that it's been confirmed, it can be a self-dispatch.

Concerning the program coordinator position, Dunn then asked Davis what it would mean if that couldn't be funded? What would be the effect? Davis replied that there would be potential for the department to lose \$250,000 out of their budget. He continued that the program coordinator would handle most of the grant applications and be able to find private sector money. There are 5 mission areas within Emergency Management: preparedness, prevention, response, recovery, and protection. He would be able to divvy those areas within his department based on expertise. The person charged with programs would also be able to concentrate on the recovery component, for example. Dunn also had a question about the Orion software, asking where it is used and if it has been widely adopted. Davis answered that it is currently used in Androscoggin County, and has state contracts in Iowa, Kansas, Oregon, and, he believes, Washington. While understanding that Orion is preferred, Dunn inquired if there are comparable programs in use that might offer savings if we buy into someone else's program? Davis advised that the state uses a program called Survey 123 which is similar. Dunn asked if that also pulled in GIS data, and Davis confirmed. Davis then advised that the biggest issue that we have with it is we do not get that information here locally. Additionally, where Orion will print out a public assistance application you can't do that in Survey 123, or get the pictures off it. Dunn summarized that Survey 123 doesn't have as wide a scope as Orion.

Dunn then inquired, the Communications Department doesn't get GIS? Davis explained that they do have their own mapping software but it's used to locate a phone or something along those lines. And again, are there economies of scale [?] by considering what other people use? Davis replied yes. Dunn then asked regarding tower leases, it's going up because something went up, but once the new towers are built? Davis answered that because we don't know when the towers will be going online, we must budget for the whole year, but it will be reduced next year. Davis continued that as Communications Director Mike Carter mentioned, they have reached out to cell phone vendors, and working with FirstNet on a couple of them. They also have reached out to T-Mobile and US Cellular to get on a couple of the other ones. He added that he has heard that cell phone coverage in Phippsburg is an issue. They are exploring various options. Commissioner Crosby stated that the County knew going into the tower project that there was 1 tower that was \$1.00 a year and then

other towers that were \$3,000 or \$4,000 a month, and also knew that once we started exploring towers and talking to the owners that at some point someone might ask themselves why they are only charging \$1.00 a year, which has now happened. In the end, he went on, he thinks we'll be better off because Sagadahoc will control 3 towers whereas before we had none. He thinks it was a good way to use the ARPA funds, but there will be a little 'blip' in the budget over the next year.

Commissioner August directed attention to public assistance applications, asking if he knew of other communities that did not submit an application because of the administrative requirements? Davis answered yes, he knew of 3 who did not apply. Crosby commented that you need a full-time employee just to do it. Davis said that their office gets called a lot because the local EMA Directors are often fire chiefs or police chiefs or somebody wearing another hat, so it will fall back on a County EMA department to go and assist them. August commented that the costs of the Orion and Salamander software costs weren't broken down individually in the budget, and Davis advised that they are broken down by cost in the details section. August then commented that he imagines there's a pretty quick return the sooner we have a disaster. Davis pointed out that looking at the January storms, we could have recouped that entire cost right there. He continued that another benefit on the backside of it, there was quite a range in the location of those places, as we see them pop off, that's where we can self-dispatch. In a scenario when we notice damage shown in certain locations but not others, we can go and see those physical locations and get them taken care of quickly. As he mentioned earlier, it took Georgetown 3 people over 46 hours to do that. Davis had used the product before and did 70 assessments in a day.

August then asked about the Program Coordinator position and if it included benefits. HR Director Jessica Grey advised that the position would include benefits but those come from her budget, not Davis's. August clarified that the position would be full-time, which was confirmed, and continued to say that the Commissioners would love to see this kind of position that is self-supporting because of the identification of additional grant opportunities, but also that the environment at the moment is not full of grant opportunities. Davis interjected that on the federal side it isn't, but this person would also have skills on locating funds available privately. There are several private grants out there, and off the top of his head he named a few he utilizes regularly: Walmart, Firehouse Subs, Steven and Tabitha King. August then asked if the Program Coordinator would have other responsibilities as well, and Davis responded yes, that they would still help with anything in the office itself and clarified that the proposed number reflects what a current full-time grant writer could expect to be paid. August said that he might suggest seeing what a contract grant writer might do, just to test the waters. Davis advised him that he had already done that and was quoted \$64,000 to have 1 grant written.

Roo Dunn noted that on line 51300, page 70, it says [the position is] part-time. Davis advised that the position was not on that line item. Dunn asked for clarification. Davis explained that the Programs person is actually line 51035. HR Director Grey explained that it was an accident. Commissioner Crosby advised that his biggest concern was that EMA relies on at least 50% of its funding from the federal government programs and if those programs were to get slashed, the County would be in big trouble. Due to that, he felt the need to be very careful and mindful of the fact that if, for instance, the Administration [in Washington] decides EMA is not necessary anymore and we don't get 50% or what we've been getting, we need to come up with that money someplace. He continued that he thinks this is the year to make sure if there is surplus someplace—and that he wasn't suggesting that they not budget EMA getting half the money back from the federal government—but if the federal government program goes away, we better have money available. He went on to comment that the EMA budget was the only one he was really worried about, and asked Davis how he was feeling about it. Davis responded that it was a constant battle, worrying

everyday about what the current Administration might be doing. He went to say that FEMA could “absolutely” be reformed, and they duplicate efforts that we’ve already done locally, but it then falls on the locals to do more. Crosby returned that as far as he was concerned, the locals aren’t even the state anymore, the locals are the County budget. How do we make sure that our County residents have the assistance they need if a disaster happens while not relying upon the federal government for funding? This is the year that we have to think about the worst-case scenario, whether it’s in the contingency of the Commissioners or if we decide we’re not going to budget 50%--it’s hard, it could be everything gone. Davis agreed, and advised he did not put any of the FEMA funding in his budget as part of their revenue stream this year because it is such an unprecedented area. Where last year, they cut 10%, are they going to cut 100% this year? Crosby repeated that they had better have something in case the County doesn’t get any help in the future.

David Hennessey asked if the position were approved, would it be an experienced grant writer that they would be looking for? Davis answered yes. Hennessey then asked how the rest of the County, in-house, could benefit. Would this person be available to other departments? Davis said yes, and added that, for instance, EMA assists with a lot of the Sheriff’s Department grants. Currently he also has 4 applications out for drones for a couple different agencies. Davis confirmed that the grant writer would be available to help anyone in the office.

Dunn asked about the \$250,000 in federal funds, and where that revenue was in the budget. Davis reiterated that he didn’t put federal funds into the budget due to the uncertainty. Dunn continued that he didn’t see it reflected for last year either. Davis explained that EMA has 3 different budgets that it does, however only 1 grant is specific to EMA, and it is called the Emergency Management Performance Grant. With that one, he said they get about \$60,000-\$70,000 a year. So that’s what last year’s revenue was. Dunn asked where the rest of the money was, and Davis clarified that it’s in another “department” because it is an in and out. Dunn asked where it appeared in the budget. Financial Director Flaherty and HR Director Jessica Grey explained that it funded other programs within the County. Dunn inquired if that would be reflected when an overall federal funding report was completed for the Budget Advisory Committee because they needed to see where all of that is. It was confirmed that that would be included.

Carolyn Lockwood then asked if when doing the federal funding breakdown, if it could include what difference it makes to the overall County budget, so that people can see it without federal funding? Flaherty and Commissioner Crosby both agreed that could be done.

### **Jill Flaherty, Director of Finance/Acting Administrator Presenting on Behalf of IT Director Devin Field**

Flaherty advised everyone that Field was unable to attend the meeting due to a family emergency. She started by informing the Board and Committee that for this budget cycle, IT Director wages were only expected to be increased by the agreed upon COLA rate. Field also added a line for Office Supplies as he is moving to a new office and has no supplies. His Minor Equipment line is going up by \$700 which is listed out on the detail sheet. \$700 is going toward moving to hub monitors to reduce redundant computers, and then some funds would go to mice, keyboards, cabling, etc. \$1725 is for uninterrupted power supplies to keep workstations functional during power outages, \$250 will go toward back-up power supplies in case any fail—we do not currently have any extra, \$300 would be used to purchase Power over Ethernet (PoE) switches in our network so we have some on hand for quick turnaround during an active device failure.

His next line, Travel, is going up by \$500 as he intends to visit outside agencies to review other IT systems and set-ups to see how ours compares and identify areas for improvement. There is no

change in his request for contingency, for unanticipated equipment failures with server, firewall, workstations, etc. Training and Professional Development is going up by \$500 as Field is a relatively new IT Director and very ambitious. Professional Services line is increasing by \$1030. We have renewed the agreement with our IT contractor who has been with the County for a very long time. Money is also requested for Revize web hosting, with the increase reflecting the price to add American Disability Act compliance through Revize. This new service will have Revize actively monitoring the County website to make sure it is following current ADA orders, as well as a twice per year audit to remediate any issues found. It would also fund ArchiveSocial (now CivicPlus Social Media Archiving) which maintains compliance with public record laws for County social media accounts. Field is currently negotiating with the vendor to try to decrease the quoted price, and he thinks that he will be able to, but is planning for the worst just in case. It would cover Town Hall Streams, which records our public meetings, as well as the KnowBe4 Phishing Awareness service, which allows the IT Department to create awareness around phishing schemes and engineering tactics that hackers use to compromise our systems.

Telephone and Internet are going up by \$3500. This is because we currently only have 1 service provider and if that provider goes down, then we're down. There needs to be a back-up in place. Field is working with GoNetspeed, the Internet provider for Bath PD, and they have offered a lower monthly price with more than double the Internet speed. The copiers and associated leases have been moved out of the various departments and into the IT line, so he can manage them all. Computer equipment has increased by \$1000 to purchase additional hard drives for the Spillman server. We are reaching limitations for storage space, and it will need to be managed or there will be serious issues.

Software will be increasing by \$8,225. \$6,000 would be used for Acronis system, which is the automation for server back-ups. \$25,000 is for Office 365 licensing for all County employees. Field is gathering prices from other certified Microsoft resellers to try to bring this cost down. \$3,175 goes to firewall licensing. \$6,550 is for an effort to modernize our IT systems. Field would like to add a remote management and monitoring tool, RMM. As of right now, the endpoints are out in the field without any management capabilities for remote support, so he must have the physical computer in his hands to help anybody. By adding this tool, he would be able to automate patches from his own workstation to make sure all the computers are up to date, remotely manage devices—if someone is having issues in the field he could troubleshoot--he could even shut a computer down if it is stolen. It would also centralize management, provide a single platform to manage and troubleshoot all computers, saving a lot of time. He also requests, in the same line, SentinelOne Endpoint Cybersecurity which blocks malware, ransomware and other cyber attacks in real time. It also identifies suspicious activity and automatically stops attacks, using AI to respond to threats without user intervention. \$5,000 would go to Trend Micro, our current endpoint security provider, but with the addition of the RMM tool this cost could be eliminated.

The rest of his budget is capital funding. There is a computer reserve for general computer turnover as well as a few extras in inventory in case of critical failure, funding a future telephone system upgrade--we've just done one but will need to do it again down the road, and the server reserve for the Spillman server--we are looking at a need to replace that FY27 or FY28.

Regarding the Spillman Server (57400), Roo Dunn asked if there was any cloud-based option. Flaherty noted that she would ask Field about it. Dunn added that there were a few things he had questions about but understood that Flaherty might not be able to answer. Next, he shared that he was supportive of the move to the [Microsoft 365] E5 license and replacing Trend Micro with Defender because it's included. He continued that what was described of the RMM tool, he couldn't imagine operating without that, and he did not realize there was no back-up ISP. Dunn then said that

while looking at the contingency, he was a bit concerned. Under 53600 Minor Equipment, he was curious to know what was put into 59300 to arrive at the \$5,000.00. Flaherty advised that there is nothing specific, but it's there to cover any unforeseen things that could come up. HR Director Grey added that she spoke with Field and she does not think any of the Sheriff's laptops were included in the laptop replacement numbers because they were purchased with a grant several years ago, so she believed that some of the tech he is concerned about being able to replace quickly if needed.

David Hennessey commented that he would recommend not funding the smaller capital accounts and putting them off for another year, then catch up. Commissioner Crosby asked Jill if she could give the attendees an idea of what was put off last year, so what we must pay in '26/'27, and then if we are going to suggest pushing off funding until next year, we know what that number is. He continued, "that year, we're going to remind everybody that we already didn't pay this in '24/'25 and '25/'26." Flaherty agreed that she could put that together for the group. Crosby advised the attendees that they wouldn't be doing that at that meeting, but this way the Budget Committee will know we already technically agreed to last year, remember the Commissioners took \$300,000 out of our reserve, which made our Finance Director very nervous? This year we might do it more!

Commissioner McPhee commented that again on the copier part, it seemed like that was the total number for all the copiers including Joel's. He continued, "now I found out that the Sheriff's shouldn't be on this list, so I don't know if that's correct." Flaherty interjected that it was only the Transport copier. McPhee added that it seemed like the \$17,500 total was inclusive of that one. Flaherty agreed to confirm. McPhee offered that when he added up all the computers, including the Sheriff's, that is the total he arrived at.

Commissioner August spoke about the contingency in the IT budget, commenting that there were other contingencies in other budgets, and wondered if a single contingency reserve might be created to cover several departments. Flaherty shared that there used to be just 1 contingency reserve in Administration that was usually funded around \$50,000 but has been cut in the last several years. Commissioner Crosby shared that it had been cut so that there would be more transparency within each department, so it is technically contingency because the Commissioners could take it out of IT if they didn't need it and do something else with it. "You can also do that throughout the year if you get into trouble." He thinks that the auditors would prefer that each department request their own contingency as opposed to 1 general fund. August agreed that a single contingency would be less transparent but added that it was only in the sense that you would use the funds for a specified purpose. Carolyn Lockwood asked who approves the contingency expenditures? Is it the Department Head? The Commissioners? The Admin? Flaherty and Crosby confirmed that the Commissioners would approve those requests. August commented, for example, that if they did a \$2,000 contingency for computers—Crosby interjected that they would still bring it to the Commissioners, it isn't just spent. Roo Dunn commented that there must be an amount they can spend without asking? Crosby clarified that they could spend anything that's been approved in their budgets, but unbudgeted funds must be approved by the Commission. "That's just been the way that we've done it, there's nothing saying that if something is \$500.00 you can just do it." He added that it could change, they could say if it's under \$1,000.00 then you don't have to come to the Commissioners for approval, but he would rather be involved. Lockwood commented that it looked like the 2025 contingency was already expended, and Flaherty told her she thought that it was used for replacement laptops. EMA Director Davis offered that it was for Salamander. The hardware was paid for by a grant and then because Salamander was not budgeted for, we reached out to IT because it was a software program and decided it was good to come out of the contingency line item. August commented that there was not much added transparency there if we can tap other

budgets and draw it in. It's a win, but. Lockwood added that it's still presented to the Commissioners.

### **Lynn Moore, Registrar of Deeds**

Moore began by informing the Budget Advisory Committee and Board of Commissioners that there were no increases in the Deeds Department's budget. She explained that their software contract will be renewed but the cost is only going up by \$4,000.00. She also moved \$4,000.00 over for storage at Iron Mountain, and advised that MRODA (Maine Registry of Deeds Association) has decided that a bunch of their storage fees could be moved over to a preservation account. It's a 6-year contract that also covers the computers that they have now, which are 5 years old, but if any of them fail they are covered in that contract.

Revenue is down, and looking back over the past year, Moore advises that her office was only up \$11,005.74 which isn't very much and could fluctuate at any point. Sales are also down but there's nothing that can be done about that. What's kept them above water has been commercial sales. She described a few particularly large sales that contributed to that. She shared that they are no longer printing their index books which allows for savings on supplies.

Finance Director Flaherty commented that a few months back, Moore had mentioned that there was something going on at the state level regarding fee increases. Moore confirmed that it is currently happening and hopes that it will pass. They aren't getting a lot of pushback on it and have had 2 hearings over the past couple of weeks. She explained that their fees are very complicated, and a lot of out-of-state people review it—banks and title people from all over the country—and everybody's fees are different, with ours being the worst. "We've got so many dollars for the 1<sup>st</sup> page, so many dollars for the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> pages, so many extra dollars if you have more than 4 names, \$13 if you have more than 2 sidings. Trying to calculate the fees is causing us to have a lot of rejections which means we're not collecting money because we must send them back and have them redone." It's helpful with the E-recording they have because they take what they need and don't have to worry about not getting the fees. So, a lot of states now have flat rates for each document recorded and that is their hope. They will also be increasing the surcharge, the municipalities and state's surcharge, as well as the cost of copies. All their fees are going to go up. She said that she didn't have the figures with her, but noted that it will be a significant increase, adding that there haven't been any since the 1990s. If everything goes as expected, the changes will go into effect in January of 2026. She also mentioned that there is property fraud legislation happening as well meant to curb real estate fraud before it gets to their office.

Commissioner August asked Moore if she had any idea as to how it would affect her revenue if the legislation around the fees went through. Moore responded that she hadn't done any fee calculations yet because they are still waiting to see what's going to happen with it. She added that they've just had the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with the legislature, but because they haven't gotten much pushback, it looks like they will likely be able to get it through. August remarked that it would be good if she could get an estimate, and she told him she would put some numbers together.

### **Aaron Hanscom, Facilities Director**

Hanscom prefaced his budget presentation by saying that he wanted to touch on a change that would make more sense once he got into the budget portion. Last year, the possibility of contracting a plow person was discussed for cost effectiveness. He has discussed it with both Administrator Amber Jones and Finance Director Flaherty and the consensus is that it makes sense. He has put calls out for quotes and has received 1 but is waiting for others to come back. Predicting that the quote we currently have will be one of the higher ones, he thinks that the amount budgeted will be

ample to cover the cost. He continued that looking at the cost of the [plow] vehicle, its life expectancy, the cost of the plow, the cost of the salt, and overtime, it really is going to make sense. In this budget, vehicle gas, upkeep and maintenance were taken out, and a vehicle stipend was added for use of Hanscom's personal vehicle. That would cover things like incidental usage for trips to the hardware store or to the transfer station, etc.

For wages, per direction of the Commissioners, Hanscom only added the 3.7% placeholder COLA while significantly reducing overtime. Flaherty said that she could speak to that a bit, advising the Commissioners that Hanscom's was one of the wages that was being presented for adjustment consideration. The expected overtime was reduced under the expectation that it would only be applicable to the custodian while Hanscom's position as Director would become salaried and no longer on call for plowing. That would need to be reflected in his salary as he would still need to come in for various things outside of business hours as part of his position. Commissioner Crosby returned that we were talking about a possible increase because there won't be overtime, and it will be a salary position? Flaherty confirmed his understanding as correct. Hanscom continued that the \$500 would be used, for instance, if the boiler alarm went off overnight and he had the custodian come in, or occasional holidays they must come in and lower or raise the flags. The stipend is listed in the next line, and he felt comfortable leaving the General Supplies line as-is for the upcoming year.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> section, Supplies and Operating Expenses, stood out with almost a 45% increase. He advised that we had almost \$2500 there in the past to cover the purchase of salt, with a buffer built in. If Hanscom was sick, for example, we could call a contractor, so that line rose to \$15,000 to cover Jorgenson's (where the quote was from). That would cover the cost if the County were to hire them, but as he mentioned they have other quotes out and could move to take bids if it was decided to go ahead with the contracted plowing plan.

Regarding heating fuel, M.W. Sewall did the same for us this year as they did last year. Where it's too early to lock in a price, the person we work with there made a 'gentlemen's agreement' at a price of \$2.399 as the highest rate we would pay, with hopes of locking in a lower rate. Last year it was \$1.999 and she thinks she can probably do that again, but if it looks like it will go higher than \$2.399, she will lock us in there.

Hanscom advised that their Minor Equipment line is not changing this year. With Landscaping, it is a smaller scale but same concept as the plowing plan. We have a push mower, and it typically is about a 3-hour job to do the mowing and trimming. If we were to contract that out—the mower we have was bought in 2017 and nearing the end of its life expectancy—they have zero-turn mowers, they have additional help, and they're in and out in an hour. It will be a better finished product, and we wouldn't have to deal with the upkeep or maintenance, or the time it would take Hanscom or the custodian to do it. They got a quote for \$3600 which covers spring clean-up, including leaves. Like with the plowing, he again thinks it makes sense to bring someone in for that.

Vehicle Repair and Maintenance was taken out assuming that the plowing plan will proceed as discussed, so that won't be an issue any longer. For electricity, the rate is staying the same, but he did add a little bit to that budget line just for consumption. With technology and everything going the way it is, he wanted to add extra coverage there. With water and sewer, we are almost over budget already for this year due to a catastrophic failure with the cooling tower over the summer. It was down for about a month and as a temporary fix, there was a garden sprinkler running constantly which allowed us to keep our doors open to have AC, but our water bill saw a significant increase. Keeping it at \$5,000 will cover us next year, barring any more issues like that.

Cellular Phone budget did not change, and neither did the Building Repair and Maintenance line. There was a slight increase in the rental cost for the DA's space in West Bath. There was also a slight increase in Equipment Repairs and Maintenance. Special Projects for \$4,000 is intended for the carpeting that was discussed last year. It was mentioned doing either the whole building or going floor by floor, but this would at least get things started in maybe some of the worst offices.

He mentioned a significant increase in Waste Collection costs as well. He referred to IT, saying that there has been an increase in equipment turnaround and replacement, and the disposal fees have gone up a lot. Disposing monitors and computers, but also light bulbs—the fluorescent tubes, are expensive to get rid of now. He explained that the extra \$2,000 he included there is to help get rid of some of the backlog we have of the old stuff and keep up with the new stuff we have coming all the time.

For capital items, he describes his budget as perhaps having the biggest increase. The Roof Reserve: G&E Roofing strongly recommended that we do the flat roof last year. It's lasted as long as expected. There have been a couple of leaks they have repaired and have already put off replacement. Additionally, with ARPA last year, the decision was made to use some of the money we had in those capital accounts because we were going to use ARPA, and now we don't have ARPA. There were some unforeseen issues with the tower projects and that money is gone. Unfortunately, we now have some areas that are in a pretty dire state and the flat roof is one of them.

The Generator Reserve is one we had a notable amount invested in, somewhere around \$50,000, and we have put in a grant for that. That is to be determined, we don't know if we're going to get approval for that or not. Flaherty added that EMA Director Davis had stated that it would be around 9 months before they find out. Roo Dunn asked what the source of the grant was, and Davis advised it was a FEMA grant. Hanscom continued that the wall sealant is going to be done this year. The crew is tearing down staging now and finishing up the brick repointing and they are going to start the wall sealant next. To not end up short years down the road, Hanscom communicated that he had concluded what we need to maintain a proper capital account for the wall sealant, as well as the brick repointing.

The Cooling Tower, that was the one that died last summer. That also should have probably been done last year. If that fails, we have no air conditioning. There are no windows in the Courthouse that open. If that were to fail, we would be in a pickle.

The smaller capital projects—the HVAC Reserve we do every year. It's gone up a bit this year because the cost has gone up for replacement of the individual heat pumps that we have around the building. The Elevator Upgrade is being completed now, but to be prepared down the road, Hanscom wants to start putting funds in now so that we'll be ready when the next issue comes up. Another task attempted yearly is to make parking lot improvements, budgeted in the amount of \$6,000. Every other year we try to do sealant and repaint the lines. There are some cracks out there and where the parking lot lights were installed in 2018, they had to dig a trench there and where they patched that pavement is getting quite uneven. Out in front of the door there is also a spot that is sinking quite a bit. Hanscom thinks that they should really be putting more into the parking lot this year because it's going to need to be resurfaced at some point, but if we start with \$6,000, we've got at least something to put towards the sealant. He remarked that he was aware that it was a difficult section of the budget and that a lot of it would be a stretch this year, but that some tough decisions needed to be made.

The Vehicle Reserve came out of the budget, but Hanscom noted that taking the approximate cost of a new vehicle, \$60,000.00 probably for a ¾ ton truck, if a capital plan were funded for 5 years, that's almost going to offset the cost of the plowing contract alone, never mind the gas and the hours and whatnot. Finance Director Flaherty stepped in to add that they would also be able to sell the Facilities truck for more than it was purchased for. It was purchased in 2020 for \$26,305 and could possibly get \$30,000.00 now. Hanscom shared that he ran it through Kelley Blue Book, and it came up at \$29,000. It's a ¾ ton 4WD 6.4-liter Hemi with 11,500 miles on it. David Hennessey asked if the sander was any good and Hanscom said that it's almost no good. It might make it another year. He sprays it down with WD40 and Fluid Film and washes it well before it gets put away for the season, but it lives its life soaked in salt and we got it in 2017. Hennessey asked how the plow itself was, and Hanscom says the plow itself is immaculate. Hennessey commented that it would probably be \$10,000 just for the plow. Hanscom shared that he got a quote from Bodwell's for \$8770 and the sander was \$4710. He added that for a comparable truck today it would be about \$60,000 retail. We got ours through the Fleet Program, but that is no longer available.

Commissioner August asked Hanscom to go through his capital projects once more, commenting that they were all labeled as reserves. He continued that some of them have been recommended to expense this year, and some of them are true reserves to start putting money aside for future expenditures. "So, for your Building Reserve, are you going to spend \$15,000 this year?" Hanscom replied that they have had that line [for some time], and it's used for unexpected things that pop up that aren't budgeted for. August asked if he would be spending that money this year, and Hanscom advised it would possibly not be used. August continued that with the roof, clearly Hanscom would like to spend that this year, which he confirmed. Regarding HVAC Reserve Hanscom shared that they try to do 1 unit every year. August observed that it's not because of a failure, but to keep up with the cycle. Hanscom confirmed. August stated that the generator reserve was another one that Hanscom would likely want to see actioned this year, which Hanscom also confirmed. The wall sealant reserve sounds like a reserve you would like to bank, to which Hanscom said yes. August commented that the elevator upgrade is already occurring, and Hanscom confirmed that funds would be banked for future use. Regarding parking lot improvements, August assumed they could potentially bank that money. Hanscom said that they could. August then remarked that the reserve for the cooling tower is requested to be used this year, and Hanscom agreed. August went on to say that we have just completed the brick repointing, so he gathered that Hanscom wanted to bank the money for future repointing, and that the vehicle reserve is now gone.

David Hennessey asked what the status of the generator is currently. Hanscom said that the generator is running fine. It was installed in 1991. Back in 2019 the electricians that were working in the building (and installed the original) strongly recommended replacing it. Cummins Northeast services and maintains it, and they did an assessment of it. When we lose power here, the generator kicks in automatically, but only powers about 60% of the building and does not power most of the general office space, just Dispatch, the Sheriff's Office, heat—the necessities. There is a transfer panel of switches downstairs that he can manually change it over so it will power the building, but Cummins advised not to do that anymore. Because of its age, running it at capacity would age it even faster and would likely kill it sooner. The Administrator at the time said that it really needed to be replaced, and Hanscom doesn't disagree, especially if we want to run business as usual every day, even in a power outage, but the number of days that we have power outages in the business day when we're not already closed anyway, are actually far and few between. Do we need a new generator? Yes. He said that he'd hate to imply that we don't and then have a catastrophic failure, but he thinks it will probably be ok for a while if it isn't overworked, and if needed, we've already proven that we can work remotely. Roo Dunn asked if it was a diesel generator and Hanscom advised it's propane, with two 1-thousand-gallon tanks underground. David King asked how many

hours there were on it and Hanscom did not know, but imagined the number was high. He shared that it runs for an hour each week in addition to the number of times that we've used it.

Roo Dunn then turned attention to the flat roof, and asked its age, and Hanscom advised the roof was from 1987. Dunn asked how many times it had to be repaired, and Hanscom expressed that the roof is serviced yearly, including an assessment. They repaired a couple of leaks this past year. Dunn shared that he was asking because the library in Bath just went through a similar situation, and wondered if the roof would also be replaced with a membrane roof or with something else? Hanscom said that that's what they are recommending. Matt Nixon asked what the square footage of the roof was, adding that he just got a quote for his 3200 sq ft building for \$80,000, so he thought our quote sounded a little high. Hanscom did not have the square footage but offered to get it and provide it for the attendees. Dunn pointed out that the items on Hanscom's list were big items and that he couldn't imagine that most of the items would be able to be funded in this year's budget. He then asked what the top 2 items would be if he had to choose, and, for any project over \$50,000, did Hanscom get multiple bids? Hanscom advised that the County has a contract with G&E and an ongoing working relationship with them, so that is the only price quote we have gotten [for the roof]. He continued that it was the same for HVAC—we have had an ongoing relationship and contract with them for years, and the cooling tower would fall under them. Those 2 [the roof and cooling tower] he feels strongly need to be done as soon as possible as they have reached a critical status.

Dunn referred to the vehicle needs of the Domestic Violence Investigator and if the truck and its accessories were sold it would more than cover the amount requested. Commissioner McPhee joked that maybe he could use a truck.

Carolyn Lockwood shared that she had used the bathroom down on the ground floor and could smell propane or that smell they put in tanks, so she knocked on the Transport Deputy's door and they said that it happens every day at that time. She asked if that was something going on with the building? Hanscom informed her that there have been 2 floods where water came up through the floor drains. He wasn't sure if there was a connection between the two things, but there are a couple of floor drains in the building and the traps dry up if left unattended. He occasionally adds a little water with some Simple Green to try and mask the scent a bit. Lockwood asked if there was gas detection in the building, and Hanscom said that there are both carbon monoxide and propane detectors. Commissioner August commented that Hanscom had been in touch with the Bath Water District as well.

David Hennessey asked how much LED lighting was used in the building, and Hanscom said there wasn't a lot, but that as he replaces bulbs, he tries to use it where he can. He added that it didn't make it into this year's budget requests, but he did get a quote last year to upgrade the entire building. In the long run it would pay for itself, but it would be a reimbursement, probably through Efficiency Maine. It's a great program, but very costly up front. He didn't have the exact figure, but it would be over \$100,000 to do the whole building because they would go through and replace each fixture. Another project involves the asbestos under the carpeting that runs down through Deeds. When it eventually gets done, the carpet will need to be covered with something, or a full abatement will need to be done.

Before breaking for lunch, Registrar of Deeds Lynn Moore wanted to share some figures regarding the proposed fee structure currently in legislation. In one year, they bring in \$386,466.74, and with the new fee, it would add \$305,738.00 to their revenue.

## **Jill Flaherty, Finance Director/Acting Administrator**

Commissioner Crosby introduced the last presentation of the day as Administration, with discussion to include unfunded liability, miscellaneous reserve funds, HR benefits and insurance, the debt service, and revenue.

Flaherty shared that the Administration budget was looking at a 7.8% increase over last year, with the steepest increase associated with the Software line. This includes the addition of the ClearGov platform which is a budgeting tool that the County is just starting to work with, and it automates everything—formatting, calculations, graphs. Multiple versions of a scenario can be added to compare how small changes affect the bottom line. Next year there will be the ability to use the personnel suite that calculates wages and benefits with the click of a button, allowing testing of different COLAs to see how they affect payroll taxes, and to project future budget information. There is also a capital projects module that shows how funding decisions impact future budgets. If funding is cut this year, it would show how that would affect other years. There is also an operations module which communicates with the other modules to build the entire budget. Department Heads would be able to log in and enter things themselves, and then Admin would be able to approve. Commissioners and the BAC would have logins to see the progress and what is going on. Flaherty shared that there is also much more room to include narrative since it's not a paper form. Administration plans to have a digital budget book completed for the provisional budget that will go out for the public hearing.

Moving on, legal fees decreased by 50%. In FY25, \$100,000 was requested in this line due to the tower project and lots of other uncertainties, but these projects are wrapping up and the need is not there for this budget. The other large change is that there are 2 capital project requests—the first is a public safety feasibility study. The \$25,000 requested is not an exact quote but we have discussed a general amount with a few firms. If this is approved in the budget, we would put out Request for Proposals. The second project is the digitization of County records, which is a critical project because both the Courthouse and Administrative building are at full capacity, and so many of the records need to be retained permanently and are at risk of deteriorating in their current locations. Digitizing these records will preserve them and make them easily accessible, both to employees and to the public. This would be a long-term project, and this budget request would just be a drop in the bucket to get it started. There is a slight decrease in interest revenue, and that is because interest rates are declining. We will likely do a little better than is expected, but it can't be guaranteed.

Moving on to the various Reserve accounts and the Unfunded Liability, we are not requesting any funding to the Unemployment Reserve currently. We are self-funded, but there is plenty there to cover any potential claims. For the Unfunded Liability (aka the Accrued Employee Leave Reserve), we truly need \$150,000 there. There is currently \$86,000 in the account, but the potential liability far exceeds that amount and as Sheriff Merry mentioned earlier, there are 3 Deputies eligible for retirement now, with more coming in the next few years in addition to just regular employee turnover. HR Director Jessica Grey added that about \$250,000 will be needed over the next 5 years. Commissioner Crosby remarked that next year we'll have enough money to put toward something like that. Commissioner August asked, beyond the 3 Deputies, there are other individuals that will become eligible? Flaherty responded that there are probably 8 or so within the next few years, primarily in the Sheriff's Department.

Next, the Commissioners' contingency needs to be replenished since funds were expended related to the tower construction and leases. Dunn asked if that was the emergency contingency and Flaherty advised it was. Additionally, our insurance deductible is increasing, so she mentioned adding a little to the reserve to account for that. There was no request for the Fuel Reserve—there is \$10,000 there

that has not been touched, and no request for the ADA reserve either. Roo Dunn asked what the total amount of unfunded liability was. Flaherty said that it was around \$250,000. He then asked if they were trying to get to \$150,000 or add \$150,000, and she advised the latter. “If you had 3 people leave tomorrow, how much would that cost?” Flaherty answered that it depends on who it was, their pay rate, etc. Dunn added, assuming they are the most senior people. Flaherty advised that for a senior ranking employee with everything maxed out it could be around \$100,000. Carolyn Lockwood asked if we had not addressed some of the accrued leave last year so that the next year, we wouldn’t run up against...so you have to either use it or lose it? Commissioner Crosby mentioned that there is a cap on it now. HR Director Grey remarked that they have to budget for them to have the max that they’re allowed and under the assumption that they are going to retire on the day that it’s the fullest. “We got rid of the uncapped rollovers, so now it’s pretty easy to budget the worst-case scenario.”

Roo Dunn asked how much of a balance the Commissioners contingency fund currently has, and Lockwood commented that it’s at zero. Flaherty explained that that is assuming that the funds will continue to be expended this year. We have spent about \$60,000 so far between all the tower stuff. She added that we also tend to need to dip into it to help cover overtime in the Sheriff’s Department.

Regarding the insurance, it runs on a calendar year, and the updated premium information has not been received yet—it tends to come out mid-late March. For the budget, Flaherty described assuming a 10% increase to be on the safe side, and then another 10% increase on top of that for the portion that will fall in the calendar year ’26. With the bond insurance, there is no change. In Debt Service, this is the year our jail is paid off. December 31, 2025, we will be done.

Finally, with revenue, Flaherty reported that it is trending down in most areas. Interest rates are falling, there have been fewer District Attorney supervision fees, the real estate market has cooled, the County is no longer accepting passport applications, and most notably we are not relying on any federal funding for the FY26 budget. If any federal funding is received, it can be used to offset the FY27 tax levies. Flaherty also advised that she did not use any of the undesignated fund balance in this preliminary budget, noting that it’s usually plugged in at the end once there is a better idea of what we’re looking at. On the balance sheet, Dunn observed, there’s \$2.5 million in there now, and June 30 there’ll be \$2.2 million, and that’s because we used \$300,000 in which year? In the coming year? Flaherty answered in the current year. So, he continued, the minimum recommended is the minimum amount we should keep in the fund? Flaherty confirmed. Dunn stated that we would then have about \$1 million we could use if we chose? Commissioner Crosby replied that we took \$300,000 last year—it is probably not prudent to do too much more than we’ve already done, but it is a place where we could borrow if we felt like we wanted to take that chance.

Dunn wanted to know where the funds were kept and asked if they were invested. Flaherty shared that we have a couple of bank accounts with money markets and a couple CDs. Dunn asked if we had looked at any higher yielding accounts for that? Flaherty said that it had been talked about in the past but also like the liquidity that we currently have. She added that we are getting pretty good interest rates on those. Dunn then asked what the origin of the money was. Flaherty stated that it was an accumulation of unspent funds over the years. Commissioner Crosby shared that auditors have a certain amount that they want you to keep (Flaherty advised the goal is 15%), and that Sagadahoc County is about \$12 million under what could be asked for under LD1, so we’ve never really done much in the way of increases. Dunn commented that at the same time, we would never get that close to the amount we’d be allowed, they’d be looking for sticks on the bridge to stick our heads on and they’d be right. He continued that he wasn’t as concerned about being below the LD1 cap as how we use it and where it comes from. Crosby added that we could always raise another \$300,000 or \$400,000 and put it back in this place where the auditors feel more comfortable with it,

and it wouldn't necessarily have to be used unless needed.

David King noticed that it said "June 30<sup>th</sup>, unaudited" –he assumed the County gets audited every year? Flaherty confirmed that is the case. He then asked if the BAC could get a copy of the audit and Flaherty said yes. Crosby expanded that the 2022 audit has been done, and 2023 is currently being reviewed. Flaherty verified that all the field work had been done and now they are waiting for the report to be issued. Crosby advised that audits were behind at all is because of the backlog coming out of Covid. There are only a few companies that do it, and they have gotten years behind. Other Counties and groups have experienced it as well.

Flaherty shared that overall, the benefits budget saw a 17.4% increase, which is steep, and there were several factors that have contributed, most notable being our health insurance. We are self-funded, so it is claims-based, and there have been quite a few larger claims this year. The rates are expected to go up, as well as the negotiated rates in the collective bargaining agreements that we are now paying more for. HR Director Grey added that the overall cost of the plan to us hasn't gone up much. Flaherty shared that the County covers dental and vision for some union employees as negotiated and that is a little bit higher this year, too. With payroll taxes, among the various pay increases and the new 1% Paid Family Medical Leave Act, those have gone up as well. Treasurer Eaton asked if the County is paying just the employer share while employees cover their shares, and Flaherty stated that currently the County is covering the entire cost. Commissioner Crosby asked if the employees would be paying a portion at any point and Flaherty advised that it was up to the Commissioners and explained that we budgeted to cover it in its entirety for the FY25 budget because we didn't know how the program was going to roll out when we did the budget.

Commissioner August brought up that on the Health line, it shows an increase of 25% but only 12% of that is related to the rate, and asked if the assumption on enrollment is that everyone is going to participate? Flaherty advised that that was due to the collective bargaining agreements. Grey added that it's also the overall cost—because we pay the real claims as well and we've noticed an increase in the overall cost. It's not just the premiums we pay; we have to actually budget for paying the claims. August asked if there were more enrollees, and both Grey and Flaherty said there were. Almost everyone participates. Flaherty added that any position that is open—like the Probate Register or Deputy EMA—she budgets for at the family rate just in case. Dunn said that while talking over the break, Grey had shared that our insurance is a 90-10, so the employee pays 10%? Grey answered that they pay 10% of the cost to cover themselves and 20% of the difference between that cost and the cost to cover whatever they elect.

David Hennessey asked about HR programming, and Grey shared that they received \$5,000 for that and she was happy to explain what it had been used for. This year, she requested an additional \$1,000 because she pays for Police App out of that budget line—that's just one of the things that is covered by it—because in August we brought our hiring programs into the 21<sup>st</sup> century for dispatchers and the Sheriff's Office. It had been an incredibly slow and long turnaround time for hires in those areas—about 10 months—so it's a platform used by law enforcement agencies all over and acts passively to catch people who may be interested in applying. Grey and a few other people work to monitor the app and potential applicants and it's proven to be a worthwhile recruitment tool. Treasurer Eaton asked if there were any requirements regarding job listings as far as posting them. Grey replied not in newspapers but shared that they still have it on Maine Municipal when there's an actual opening, but it's also on our website constantly. Grey continued that they also use money in that budget line for various training like peer support programs, mental health—basically when there's an initiative within a department that she thinks falls under HR and maybe not budgeted for, she will try to piece it together. Flaherty added that it could also be for a turkey for the County Christmas or flowers for Suzie when she has a baby, etc.

Commissioner August acknowledged it was still early in the process but mentioned Flaherty estimating a close out number. He continued that there's still a quarter left in the fiscal year—we haven't filled the Probate Register position, for example. There are some big items, and it might help us get a better sense of that. Flaherty agreed.

Carolyn Lockwood commented that it looked like dental and vision were added because of the collective bargaining? Grey offered that previously we did not have to pay for them and added that in our last Communications Department CBA they didn't take a dollar amount increase, but a 3% COLA for 3 years and 100% covered health insurance. That's just Communications, Lockwood asked? Grey confirmed. Lockwood asked if it wasn't put in their budget, and Grey responded that all the benefits are housed under the HR budget. Flaherty added except for Transport, and Grey noted that they are accounted for differently. She expanded that we also offer benefits to all elected officials as well, even if they are part-time.

Commissioner Crosby asked if anyone else had any further questions about the budget document, noting everything on the agenda had been discussed.

#### **IV. Adjournment**

**Vote – At 1:30 p.m. Commissioner Crosby motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Commissioner McPhee seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**