

August 21, 2025

Minutes of the Washington County Commissioners'
Regular Meeting
held August 21, 2025
in the Washington County Superior Courtroom
Machias, Maine

Attending the meeting were:

Commissioner David C. Burns
Commissioner Hammond
Commissioner Billy Howard
Renée Gray, County Manager
Carla Manchester, Administrative Assistant
Paul Sylvain, MVNO / Machias
Crystal Cushing, D.A.'s Office
Rachel Worcester, D.A.'s Office
Susan Sullivan, D.A.'s Office
David Spear, Danforth
Harry Beal, Jr., Columbia
Sondra Small, Finance Office
Wayne Small, Jonesport
Paula Johnson-Rolfe, WCSO
Rich Rolfe, Jail Administrator/WCSO
Barry Curtis, Sheriff
Mike Crabtree, Chief Deputy
Shannon Larmie, MAFD/MPFO/MFFD
Jacob White, MPFD/MFD
Lisa M. Hanscom, EMA
Joshua Rolfe, RCC/WCSO
Michael Roukas, East Machias
Grace Falzarano, Columbia Falls
Megan Huffman, Finance Office
Steve McClellan, Machias
Ben Edwards, Machias
Meredith Mawhar, SCEC
Sonnie Shephard, Star 97.7 News
Tim Tabbutt, Columbia
Cindy Rossi, Marshfield
Tara Wood, Machiasport
Danyel Crabtree, Whiting
Sarah Craighead Dedman, Machiasport
Adam Imhof, Roque Bluffs
Laurie Curtis, Whiting

August 21, 2025

83

Robert Curtis, Whiting
Michael Anderson, Northfield
Erin Crowley, Harrington
Jared Crowley, Harrington
Carlen Jay, Jonesport
Amanda Smith, Beals
Darlene Perry, Probate
Daniel Bowker, Marshfield Fire Department
Emily Philbrook, Wesley Fire
Dwayne Lee Philbrook, Wesley Fire
Heather Green, Deeds
Tammy Gay, Deeds
Christine Day, EMA
Gabrielle Broden, UMaine 4H
Robert A. Simpson, Whiting
Nick Landrum, East Machias
David Brock, Lubec
Dennis Perry, WRCC/WCSO
Quoddy Tides, Eastport
Delwyn M. Huntley, Cutler

Executive Department business was called to order at 3:40 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM: Executive Session: Personnel Issue pursuant to Title 1
MRSA § 405 (6) (A)

MOTION Commissioner Hammond moved to go into Executive
Session. Commissioner Howard seconded the motion which
passed 3-0. It was 3:41 p.m. (Hammond / Howard, 3-0)

MOTION The Commissioners declared themselves to have closed
the Executive Session. It was 3:50 p.m.
(Hammond / Howard, 3-0)

No action.

The Executive Session was followed by Unorganized Territories business
beginning at 4:05 p.m.

The Executive Department business reconvened at 4:19 p.m.

August 21, 2025

Approval of the minutes for the Regular Commissioners' meeting held on July 10, 2025. (Howard / Hammond, 3-0)

84

Approval of the minutes for the Special Commissioners' meeting held on June 30, 2025. (Howard / Hammond, 3-0)

AGENDA ITEM: Old Business

- None.

AGENDA ITEM: Monthly and Quarterly Reports

The Commissioners were provided written reports from the Department Heads. (See attached)

Jail Administrator Rich Rolfe reported the jail facility is experiencing some intercom system issues. He noted that both the control board and intercom system are required by jail standard and have to be fixed. Rich stated he has contacted vendors. He has received one quote but is still waiting for others. He stated he will notify County Manager Renée Gray once he has received the other quotes.

Jail Administrator Rich Rolfe presented a request to the Board of Commissioners for permission to allow retiring Patrol Deputy Sgt. Jim Malloy to take his issued handgun with him when he retires on August 30, 2025. Rich noted this is a standard practice of most law enforcement agencies. Rich noted that with the understanding of the financial impact of such a donation, a replacement handgun has been purchased through deputy donations.

***MOTION* Commissioner Howard moved to approve the transfer of the Sheriff's Office issued handgun to Sgt. Jim Malloy as presented. (Howard / Hammond, 3-0)**

AGENDA ITEM: Payroll Change Notices

By consensus, the following resignations were accepted by the Commissioners:

- Lynn Dwelley as part-time VWA for District Attorney's Office Machias effective 07/10/25;

August 21, 2025

- Karen Lockenwitz as part-time Secretary for District Attorney's Office Calais effective 08/02/25;
- Michael Cromer as full-time Corrections Officer effective 08/21/25.

85

MOTION **Commissioner Hammond moved to accept the retirement/resignation of Sgt. Jim Malloy and reclassify him from full-time Patrol Deputy to part-time deputy effective 08/30/25.**
(Hammond / Howard, 3-0)

MOTION **Commissioner Howard moved to hire Jesse Bunker as full-time Corrections Officer effective 09/13/25.**
(Hammond / Howard, 3-0)

County Manager Renée Gray made a recommendation for the Commissioners to accept financial consulting services of Grace Falzarano. Grace is volunteering to assist Washington County with budget review and other financial matters through the remainder of the 2025 fiscal year.

MOTION **Commissioner Hammond moved to accept the volunteer services of Grace Falzarano as presented effective immediately. (Hammond / Howard, 3-0)**

AGENDA ITEM: Signatures on Six-month Certificates

Six-month certificates were signed as presented for Gloria Rodriguez and Abigail Sargent.

AGENDA ITEM: Schedule Tax Abatement Hearing

By consensus, the Commissioners have scheduled a tax abatement hearing for Town of Lubec V. Christopher and Diane Sarau. The hearing is scheduled for Thursday, October 9, 2025 at 3:30 p.m. at the County Courthouse.

AGENDA ITEM: RCC Relocation Discussion

Commissioner Burns stated it had been the Commissioners interest to have a discussion regarding relocating the Regional Communications Center to the new Sheriff's Building. He explained that as there are no funds available to make this transfer possible at this time. The discussion will be postponed.

August 21, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: Award IT RFP

County Manager Renée Gray stated a proposal for IT needs was previously presented by the current IT provider Dennis Dorsey. Dennis's recommendation for an in-house IT Service Department would

86

cost \$252,267.97. An RFP for IT services was advertised due to Dennis Dorsey not continuing his contract. One bid was received from The Computer Guy for an amount of \$221,792.00. (See attached summary) It is the recommendation of County Manager Renée Gray to accept the bid from the Computer Guy. She noted The Computer Guy already works with the County, with Hancock County and owns his business in the Machias area.

***MOTION* Commissioner Howard moved to award the IT Services bid to The Computer Guy of Machias with a bid of \$221,792.00. (Howard / Hammond, 3-0)**

AGENDA ITEM: Award Heating Bids

Request for Proposals were sent out to oil and propane distributors for the winter 2025/26 season. The RFP requested both a one and two-year option. Two bids were received; one from Dead River and one from R.H. Foster for both oil and propane. Bids were opened on August 21st and a summary of the bid opening is attached. For the propane bid, Dead River submitted bids for a one-year, two-year or three-year option at a price of \$1.35 per gallon for all options. R.H. Foster submitted a bid of \$1.799 per gallon for one year. With the recommendation of County Manager Renée Gray,

***MOTION* Commissioner Howard moved to award the bid for propane for the three-year option to Dead River for a fixed price of \$1.35 per gallon. (Howard / Hammond, 3-0)**

Both Dead River and R.H. Foster submitted a one-year bid option for oil; \$2.59 per gallon from Dead River and \$2.669 per gallon from R.H. Foster. County Manager Renée Gray recommended the oil bid be awarded to Dead River.

***MOTION* Commissioner Howard moved to award the bid for oil for a one-year contract to Dead River for a fixed price of \$2.59 per gallon. (Howard / Hammond, 3-0)**

August 21, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: Award Bulk Salt Bid

County Manager Renée Gray stated the county is the facilitator for a collective bid process for bulk highway salt. Requests for bids were sent out to seven vendors. Five bids were received and opened on August 20th. The bids are as follows:

87

- New England Salt Co., of Winterport, ME
 - \$77.00 per ton for all locations
- Cargill, Inc. of North Olmsted, OH
 - NO BID
- Morton Salt, Inc., of Chicago, IL
 - \$88.20 per ton for all locations
- Kingsco Transport
 - Price differed based on delivery location
 - \$72.95 LOW
 - \$92.80 HIGH
 - \$85.33 AVERAGE
- Eastern Salt Company, Inc. of Lowell, MA
 - \$83.92 per ton for all locations

It is the recommendation of County Manager Renée Gray to award the bid to New England Salt as apparent low bidder.

***MOTION* Commissioner Howard moved to award the bulk salt bid to New England Salt Co. of Winterport, Maine as presented.
(Howard / Hammond, 3-0)**

AGENDA ITEM: Authorize County Manager to Execute the Participation Agreement in the On-Going Nationwide Opioid Litigation

County Manager Renée Gray stated the County is already participating in a nationwide opioid litigation. This participation agreement is for an additional settlement in the on-going litigation. Renée noted the opioid funds fit the criteria and are being used for jail inmate crisis services.

***MOTION* Commissioner Howard moved to authorize the County Manager to execute participation in said agreement for on-going nationwide opioid litigation. (Howard / Hammond, 3-0)**

August 21, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: Discussion of County Debt Referendum

Commissioner Burns stated the discussion regarding the referendum will be postponed for the Public Hearing.

AGENDA ITEM: County Manager's Report

County Manager Renée Gray submitted a written report. (See attached)

88

Renée reviewed the highlights of her written report.

- Sheriff's Building project is being wrapping up. The final payment for Sheridan of \$123,000.00 is within the budget.
- Preparations are being made on FY 2026 budget.
- Auditor is working on FY 2022.
- Met with TIF Grant Committee on August 6th.
- Met with Machias Savings Bank Representatives regarding the financial status of the County.
- July Meetings:
 - Washington County Development Authority
 - Washington County Council of Governments
 - Washington County Town and City Managers Luncheon
 - Tax payments discussed
 - Brownsfield Committee meeting
 - Cutler Planning Board on behalf of WCDA
 - MCCA meeting and Risk Pool meeting on behalf of Commissioner Burns
- Conversations with auditor, bank and attorney
- Met with Lauren Gaudet of Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust

AGENDA ITEM: Commissioner Issues and Comments

- MCCA Risk Pool Update
 - None

AGENDA ITEM: Public Hearing Regarding County Financial Status

Commissioner Burns introduced the Board of Commissioners. He stated he represents District 2; Commissioner Howard represents District 1 and Commissioner Hammond represents District 3.

Commissioner Burns stated the County is facing a financial crisis. He stated the purpose of this meeting is to explain to the public how the situation happened and what is the solution moving forward.

August 21, 2025

Commissioner Burns explained there is a county finance deficit of approximately \$3 million. He stated audits are behind. The deficit is based on the completed 2021 audit. A more complete picture of the financial situation will be known as the process continues and depending on the findings of audits. Commissioner Burns emphasized the seriousness of the situation. A handout of the synopsis of the County financial situation was available for the public. Commissioner Burns read the synopsis in whole. Commissioner Burns stated, in summary, the policy of "Treatment of Carry-Over Amounts" on unaudited

89

figures started the depletion of the fund balance. He noted the ARPA funds designated for the new Sheriff's Building helped with cashflow shortage, but caused the issue to be undetected. Commissioner Burns stated it has been recommended the County pass an \$11 million bond to cover the \$7 million TAN which is due by the end of this year, in addition to covering operating expenses and interest due. Commissioner Howard noted this will help the County to regroup and stay afloat. Commissioner Hammond stated he was appointed as a Commissioner in May. Commissioner Hammond noted the Board of Commissioners are all new this year and they are trying to find the best option to move forward and clean up this mess. Commissioner Burns stated the Board has consulted with auditors and attorneys to find a way to keep county government operating with the least cost to taxpayers. He noted the Commissioners have met with each Department Head in hopes of possible cuts. It was determined there are not many areas to cut. Commissioner Burns stated that after the budget is set for FY 2026, the Board of Commissioners plan to take a very close and serious look at policies and procedures. He concluded that the county must be able to continue to pay the employees and the bills to operate. On that note, Commissioner Burns opened the floor to questions and comments. The public had comments, suggestions, questions and criticism.

- Concerns of emergency response to the vast and rural population of Washington County. It was noted most Washington County Firefighters are volunteers. Commissioner Burns noted the County does not fund those services.
- Concerns of programs being cut.
- Suggestion of other ways to raise funds such as community benefits from windmills. County Manager Renée Gray noted Community Benefit Agreement funds are airmarked for specific uses. Some TIF grants are only available to citizens in Unorganized Territories. She stated U.T. is the largest tax

August 21, 2025

payer in Washington County. Renée also noted the County does not issue tax bills; it is up to the towns to access and collect taxes from taxpayers. Commissioner Howard pointed out TIF agreements are usually negotiated before they come to the Commissioners.

- Criticism of action to be taken towards those responsible for this situation. Commissioner Burns explained there is not one specific reason or person for this situation. He stated the lack of auditors available after 2019 was a factor as well as the many people involved in building the budget. Attorney Jeffrey Davidson's main concern was to hold someone accountable and find

90

out if the issue has been reported to the State Auditor and/or Attorney General. To illustrate the issue of the lack of auditor services, Renée reported there was only one proposal received for the last publicized RFP for auditing services. At Mr. Davidson's insistence to find fault and hold someone responsible, Commissioner Burns stated there is no evidence of any mishandling of funds or malicious intent. Mr. Davidson also had criticism as to the time it took the County to report the issue when it was discovered in August of 2024. Renée responded that the issue was reported when the audit for 2021 had been completed in August of 2024. At this time, the discovery of the deficit and the reason for it was reported. The FY 2025 Budget was approved with a rate increase for that reason. When Mr. Davidson accused the Board of Commissioners of spinning the scenario and not holding the Treasurer accountable, Commissioner Burns responded that the Board's objective is to be transparent.

- Criticism also came from the Clerical Union Teamster's Representative Michael Vaughan. Mr. Vaughan stated the District Attorney's Office has been told they can not hire new staff at this time. He questioned the continued employment of the Treasurer. Commissioner Howard responded the Treasurer is an elected position, and hiring or firing of an elected official is beyond the Commissioners purview. Commissioner Burns noted the Treasurer's experience, background and institutional history is very valuable to help find solutions to this situation.
- A question posed from RCC Director Josh Rolfe was in regards to changing the county fiscal year. Renée responded that changing the fiscal year would help eliminate the need for a TAN. She stated this is part of the plan of action.
- Newly elected BAC member, Harry Beal, Jr., suggested towns pay taxes on a monthly basis to help with cash flow. He noted Town

August 21, 2025

of Columbia pays monthly. Renée stated there is new legislation allowing Commissioners to set due dates for taxes due. This may be looked at as one of the answers to the solution of cash flow. Grace Falzarano of Columbia Falls noted their town makes monthly payments on county taxes.

- Concerns from RCC Dispatcher Carlen Jay asked if the bond passes would the County be able to fill open positions necessary for operation. Commissioner Burns stated the passing of the bond would assure the County to be able to continue to pay employees and bills. He emphasized the need to provide essential services. Commissioner Hammond noted that there have been no positions cut. Commissioner Burns stated the primary responsibility of the County is to provide rural patrol. Commissioner Hammond noted

91

the State Police are no longer covering rural patrol in Washington County and taxpayers are having to pay. Commissioner Howard pointed out municipalities have not cut positions either but they cannot fill the positions; there are openings but there are no personnel to fill those positions.

- Concerns were voiced regarding taxpayers being able to stand an increase to pay an additional \$1.4 million per year for the next ten years to pay off the \$11 million bond. Commissioner Howard acknowledged many people in Washington County are on fixed incomes. He also stated there will still need to be a major regrouping even if the bond passes. Renée noted a start to correcting the problem is to be sure municipal officers show up at BAC Caucuses; involvement is crucial. Commissioner Hammond noted he plans to try to meet with all the towns in his district to educate taxpayers on the budget process.
- The question was asked if there is a plan if the bond should not pass. Commissioner Burns responded information is being gathered for possible options. There are no solutions yet as there has not been any other county in this predicament.
- It was asked if there is any contingency plan if the auditor finds any more mistakes after 2020. Commissioner Hammond responded the auditor has been looking ahead for projections.
- Lora Whelan of the Quoddy Tides asked for the timeline of the next steps. Renée responded that the auditor is working diligently to complete two audits for the county and U.T. per year. Renée stated the referendum question must be submitted to the State tomorrow in order for it to be on the November 4th ballot.
- A suggestion was made to sell some of the county-owned properties that are not necessary. Commissioner Burns stated that has been

August 21, 2025

discussed and several properties are being considered.

- Deeds Clerk Heather Green asked if the referendum will be advertised and if there is a plan to inform the taxpayers. Commissioner Burns stated the information will be shared as best as possible. Commissioner Hammond stated he has already begun meeting with towns to inform the public. Commissioner Howard noted they are still unsure of what happens if the bond does not pass.
- Robert Simpson of Whiting stated he has worked in audit and financing. He noted the purpose of annual audits is to confirm management of finances. He stated an organization should not rely on an auditor alone to find shortfalls; it is up to the

92

management of an organization to find errors. Commissioner Howard noted the auditor is working with the County to help us with more accountability for the future.

- Concerns about employees being paid was calmed with the assurance from Commissioner Burns that the Board of Commissioners' first responsibility is to be sure County employees are paid.

Commissioner Burns thanked the elected officials and public that attended the meeting. Commissioner Howard stated the Board of Commissioners are not happy with the hardship being put on the taxpayers.

ADJOURNMENT

6:04 p.m.

ATTEST:

Carla J.R. Manchester, Admin. Asst.

August 21, 2025

93