

July 15, 2021

**Minutes of the Washington County Commissioners'  
Regular Meeting  
held July 15, 2021  
in the Probate Courtroom  
Machias, Maine**

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**Attending the meeting were:**  
Commissioner Christopher M. Gardner  
Commissioner Vinton Cassidy  
Commissioner John Crowley, Sr.  
Betsy Fitzgerald, County Manager  
Carla Manchester, Administrative Assistant  
Jill Holmes, Treasurer  
Dean A. Preston, Unorganized Territories Supervisor  
Paula Johnson-Rolfe, WCSO  
Rich Rolfe, WCSO  
Josh Rolfe, WCSO  
Barry Curtis, Sheriff  
J.R. Gibson, Alexander  
Dan Sullivan, Cooper  
Lisa M. Hanscom, EMA  
Matthew Foster, District Attorney  
Robert Simpson, Whiting  
Tammy Gay, Registry of Deeds  
Marlene Sprague, Registry of Deeds

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Executive Department business was called to order at 4:26 p.m.

**Approval of the minutes for the Regular Commissioners' meeting held on June 10, 2021. (Cassidy / Gardner, 2-0-0)**

**AGENDA ITEM: Monthly and Quarterly Reports**

The Commissioners were provided written reports from Emergency Management Agency and the Treasurer's Office. The reports were accepted under the gavel. (See attached)

**AGENDA ITEM: Signatures on Six-Month Certificate**

A six-month certificate for James Sosa was signed as presented.

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**AGENDA ITEM: Payroll Change Notices**

By consensus and without prejudice, the Commissioners accepted the resignation of Darlene Perry as full-time Secretary/Clerk for the District Attorney's Office in Machias effective 07/08/21.

**\*MOTION\* Commissioner Cassidy moved to ratify the hire of Amy Premier as full-time Buildings and Grounds Maintenance effective 07/12/21. (Cassidy / Crowley, 3-0)**

**\*MOTION\* Commissioner Crowley moved to approve the hire of Ber-Moses Terry, Jr. as full-time Corrections Officer effective 07/18/21. (Crowley / Cassidy, 3-0)**

Captain Rolfe stated that after the hire of Ber-Moses Terry, Jr., his department is still down two positions. Captain Rolfe noted it is becoming increasingly difficult to cover all shifts. Captain Rolfe reported he has a total of 23 full-time employees that are requesting vacation causing mandatory overtime for coverage. Dean Preston asked Captain Rolfe if there was a reason for the retention problem in the jail and if exit interviews were conducted. Captain Rolfe replied exit interviews are not conducted but the reason normally given is the employee is usually leaving for a position of less stress and more money. Captain Rolfe stated compensation for employees is a big factor. Commissioner Gardner commiserated with Captain Rolfe that this is a big problem across the board nation-wide. Commissioner Gardner stated this will need to be a talking point during budget time.

**\*MOTION\* Commissioner Gardner moved to approve the hire of Robert Wayde Carter as part-time Patrol Deputy effective 06/11/21. (Gardner / Cassidy, 3-0)**

**\*MOTION\* Commissioner Cassidy moved to approve the hire of Marlene Sprague as Deputy Register of Deeds effective 07/12/21. (Cassidy / Crowley, 3-0)**

**AGENDA ITEM: Approval of Sheriff's Bonds**

Matthew J. Foster, District Attorney for Prosecutorial District No. VII stated that, as required by the provision of 30-A M.R.S.A. § 372 (2), he has examined and considered the sufficiency of the Sheriff's bond. D.A. Foster reported the Sheriff's bond, Chief Deputy's bond

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and the deputies' bonds were all found to be sufficient.

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**\*MOTION\*** Commissioner Crowley moved to approve the Sheriff's, the Chief Deputy and Patrol Deputies' bonds as so presented by D.A. Foster. (Crowley / Cassidy, 3-0)

**AGENDA ITEM: Approval of Caucus Schedule**

The Commissioners were provided a schedule for the annual caucuses to elect members to the fiscal year 2022 Washington County Budget Advisory Committee. Commissioner Gardner reviewed the schedule for each district. The schedule is attached. By consensus, the Commissioners accepted the caucus schedule as presented. Commissioner Gardner stressed the importance of participation in this process. Only municipal officers are eligible to participate. Commissioner Gardner noted that everyone is concerned about taxes; engagement in the process is needed.

**AGENDA ITEM: Cell Phone Service Letter**

After growing concern from individuals and municipalities in Washington County regarding the dependability of cell phone service, the Board of Commissioners made the decision in a previous meeting that action was necessary. The Board agreed a letter should be sent to all cell phone companies expressing the concern the county and its inhabitants have regarding the cell phone coverage. The drafted letter stated "as county government, the Commissioners are responsible to advocate for services that improve the quality of life." More importantly, the letter points out the concerns related to emergency situations where cell service is poor or non-existent. The letter strongly encouraged companies review their coverage areas and ensure that what is being "promised and sold" is actually being delivered. Commissioner Gardner noted that millions of dollars are spent on advertising. The letter states that unless the extreme degradation in service is addressed that what is being advertised is a false promise. By consensus, the Commissioners were in favor of the content and signed the letters as presented. Commissioner Gardner also directed Betsy to contact the media to let them know letters are being sent to the cell phone companies.

**AGENDA ITEM: Electric Power Proposal**

County Manager Betsy Fitzgerald reported several different companies have contacted her with proposals to buy into solar projects. Betsy

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stated she has worked with the Treasurer Jill Holmes to narrow down a

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proposal from Maine Solar Choices. The Commissioners were given a written summary on the details of the program being offered. The Community Solar program was created by the Maine legislature to promote the expanded use of renewable energy and offer discounted electricity to electric consumers in the communities where the solar farms are built. Community Solar is a large off site shared solar power plant. Betsy noted the county would not have to have solar panels installed; the agreement is buying into the consortium. There are several benefits of participating in the program. The County would save 15% off current utilities expenses. The other benefit would be that the county is supporting a renewable energy facility over a traditional fossil fuel power plant; therefore, reducing the impact on the environment. Betsy asked the Commissioners if there was any interest in entering into such an agreement. Commissioner Gardner asked if there was an agreement to review. Betsy replied there is a nine-page net metering agreement but did not have the document available. Josh Rolfe stated the Machias Board of Selectmen just entered into a similar agreement. Josh warned the Commissioners to be careful of the wording in regards to a certain amount of usage in correlation to a decreased credit. Commissioner Gardner stated in the attempt to save money, it was worth looking at the agreement. By Consensus, the Commissioners authorized Betsy to have an agreement drawn up and forward to the Commissioners to be considered prior to meeting a representative from Maine Solar Choices.

**AGENDA ITEM: Update on APEX Wind**

County Manager Betsy Fitzgerald stated she has had a conversation regarding the concerns surrounding the question of depreciation and ultimate value of the proposed wind turbines for APEX Wind. Those that were part of the conversation were N. Joel Moser and Phil Saucier of Bernstein Shur, and Robert Gee of APEX wind. Betsy submitted a written summary of the conversation that took place on June 10, 2021. The purpose of the conversation was to retrieve the information that would best help the Commissioners make their decision on their support for the project. Commissioner Gardner stated the board initially made their decision to support the APEX Wind project based on the financial modeling that was presented. Commissioner Gardner stated the financial modeling was not accurate. The Board of Commissioners withdrew their support for the project until more stable figures were received. Betsy noted in the summary that older projects have been

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impacted by policy changes that have affected the underlying values. It was also noted that it is important to get the starting point right

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and there is no way to predict what will be in 15 years. Any kind of guarantee would be difficult. The Community Benefit Agreement is outside the TIF agreement and taxes. Betsy reminded the Commissioners that the CBA for APEX Wind has already been signed. Commissioner Gardner requested Betsy to check on the legalities of the CBA. Commissioner Gardner reiterated that with new information coming to light, the board agrees to pause on any action until they are provided real numbers.

**\*MOTION\* Commissioner Cassidy moved to officially withdraw the support of the Board of Commissioners on the APEX project until updated figures are provided on the financial benefit. (Cassidy / Crowley, 3-0)**

**AGENDA ITEM: ARP Funding Discussion**

Commissioner Gardner stated the ARP funding discussion will be a standing agenda item. Commissioner Gardner noted the use of ARP funds has also been a point of discussion at the MCCA meetings that he has attended. He reported there has been some ambiguity around this matter during the MCCA meeting discussions. Commissioner Gardner stated collectively state-wide Commissioners are not sure how to navigate the proper use of funds. He reported counties are being inundated with requests for the use of funds. Initial discussions for possible uses of the funds concentrated around something that would be beneficial for everyone and would benefit generations of Washington County Tax payers. Commissioner Gardner noted the first ideas to share the resource would be an investment in the infrastructure of broadband, or the upgrading of the currently deteriorating county buildings. Commissioner Gardner stressed the concern that the buildings must be addressed, but the criteria for the use of the funds may not allow the county to use the funds for a new structure or improvements on the existing facilities. Commissioner Gardner asked about the progress of a Building Committee being formed and meeting. Betsy replied that a Building Committee has not been formed. By consensus, the Commissioners directed a Building Committee be formed and anyone that will be affected should be on the committee.

J.R. Gibson of Alexander requested to speak on behalf of Downeast Broadband Utilities. Mr. Gibson explained Downeast Broadband

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Utilities is a fiber-based network provider owned by Calais,

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Baileyville and Alexander. DBU has built the internet infrastructure allowing multiple internet service providers to offer internet, television, and telephone services to the residents of Calais, Baileyville and Alexander. Mr. Gibson stated the importance of a fiber-based network that allows for greater economic development for businesses and those that work from home. Mr. Gibson also stated having fiber-based network across the county would help retain the younger generation as it would allow them to work anywhere. Dan Sullivan, President of Downeast Broadband Utilities, stated there is a "middle mile" of missing fiber connection. DBU has tried to collaborate with Consolidated Communications and Spectrum to build on the fiber network that is already existing. Mr. Sullivan stated both Consolidated Communication and Spectrum refused to work with DBU. Dan stated an investment from the County for this infrastructure can leverage hundreds of millions of dollars. Commissioner Gardner acknowledged supporting the DBU network would result in a great benefit to the County, but his concern is using all the funds for this one project. Commissioner Gardner asked for the project cost of DBU's proposal. Mr. Gibson replied that the cost to build the fiber network for Alexander was approximately \$489,000.00. Commissioner Gardner noted the recovery funds were also divided amongst the towns. Commissioner Gardner asked if the towns had considered using their funds collectively to build onto the existing infrastructure of the DBU fiber network. Lisa Hanscom stated the Town of Roque Bluffs has been working on building out a fiber connection and the project has a cost of \$1.2 million dollars. Mr. Sullivan stated their proposal is looking at the project as a county-wide project. Mr. Sullivan noted the funds would stay local and the county would own the network. Commissioner Gardner questioned the funding for the network thus far. Commissioner Gardner noted Calais, Baileyville and Alexander have already invested funds. Mr. Gibson pointed out that the Town of Alexander took out a line of credit. Commissioner Gardner recognized DBU to be a successful model without using recovery funds. Commissioner Gardner stated the concern is making sure there is an even spread of the funds, and to not make a quick decision on where to use the ARP funds. Commissioner Gardner asked specifically what is being proposed. Mr. Sullivan stated the request is to first allow a discussion to take place, and to determine the cost of adding the "middle mile" to the network. Mr. Sullivan noted adding on to DBU's

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fiber network would increase opportunities to have a better smart grid and reduce costs with a fiber back bone in place. Commissioner

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Gardner agreed there should be a discussion. Commissioner Gardner concluded the discussion by stating investments must be county-wide. All ideas should be brought to the Commissioners then the Commissioners will need to make tough decisions.

**ADJOURNMENT**

5:40 p.m.

**ATTEST:**

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Carla J.R. Manchester, Admin. Asst.

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