

July 15, 2021

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

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

Prior to the 4:00 p.m. meeting of the Unorganized Territories, two tax abatements were scheduled to be held. The tax abatement hearing for Costa vs. Town of Perry took place at 2:00 p.m. The tax abatement hearing for Chambers Point Owners Association vs. Town of Roque Bluffs scheduled for 3:00 p.m. did not take place. The tax abatement for Chambers vs Town of Roque Bluffs has been rescheduled for Thursday, August 12, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.

Commissioner Gardner opened the public meeting at 4:00 p.m.

County Manager Betsy Fitzgerald introduced Lisa Whynot and Justin

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McMann of the Maine Revenue Service. Ms. Whynot and Mr. McMann were present to discuss the Commissioners' concerns regarding the tax abatement the State of Maine gave to Stetson Wind. The tax abatement resulted in the request for reimbursement to the State of over-payment of TIF Funds received by the County. Commissioner Gardner stated the Board of Commissioners would like to have a purposeful discussion and understand the situation. Commissioner Gardner noted the revenue anticipated to come from TIF funds has now been reduced. Commissioner Gardner inquired as to how often the wind farms can request a tax abatement. Commissioner Gardner also asked if the turbines can continue to devalue to the point of zero value. Mr. McMann answered Commissioner Gardner and addressed the Board with a brief history of how the current situation came to be. Mr. McMann stated yearly industrial appraisals are done. The evaluation for sites prior to 2015 remained the same for years. There was a steady depreciation for years. In 2019 the methodology for valuations was changed which caused an increase in the 2020 taxes for the wind farms. The wind farms contacted the State questioning the valuation and abatements were requested. Mr. McMann noted the State did not take the requests lightly. The information supplied with the requests was good information. The wind companies provided information about the history of the technology to present. It was pointed out the older technology was not as productive. There had not been a reduction in valuation using the past methodology. The State determined the increase was not just, therefore, a tax abatement was given. Mr. McMann stated it was a learning experience for all involved. Mr. McMann also stated this is not to be a consistent occurrence that will happen. Mr. McMann stated the new technology for the turbines increases capacity to generate power. Commissioner Gardner questioned what the anticipated value retention will be for the new turbines. Commissioner Gardner pointed out that in 2010 the possible devaluation of the turbines was not foreseen. Mr. McMann stated turbines have gotten better; the turbine valuation will floor out at a certain value but will only have zero value if it is no longer working. Mr. McMann noted it is hard to predict the future.

**Approval of the U.T. meeting minutes of May 13, 2021.
(Cassidy / Gardner, 2-0)**

AGENDA ITEM: Monthly Report

Unorganized Territories Supervisor Dean Preston's monthly report was submitted and is attached.

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Dean reported the ACO, Stephen Seavey, intends to resign his position. Dean stated he will begin the process of looking for Stephen's replacement.

Dean stated shellfish license sales started May 25th.

Dean reported the U.T. office is applying for DMR permits for identified flat closures for 2021 - 2023.

Dean stated the U.T. has partnered with Down East Institute for a project to enhance conservation efforts. As part of the project, recruitment boxes have been built and deployed to Marion's Cove, Trescott Twp., William's Island and is scheduled to be deployed to Burnt Cove and Edmunds Twp. Each location has sixteen 2' X 3' X 19" boxes and will be recovered in November of 2021.

Dean noted the new Shellfish Warden, Jim Sosa, is scheduled for Department of Maine Resources training in Belfast June 23rd and 24th.

Dean reported the Mitten Mountain Road bridging project is complete and had a final inspection on May 24th. The final project was accepted and the final payment was made. Dean noted the total cost of the whole package was \$335,000.00. Dean stated the bridge looked great and provided pictures of the completed project.

Dean stated other summer highway maintenance projects still in process are paving operations in Trescott Twp., Edmunds Twp., Marion Twp., Centerville Twp and Big Lake Twp.

Dean reported Barry Gillis has notified the U.T. that he will not be able to fulfill his final year of the snow removal contract (Contract #5) for T8 R3 & 4. An advertisement for this contract will be published in July.

Dean has contacted Town of Danforth to negotiate using the same contractor that Danforth awards the snowplowing bid and the same contract price that Danforth uses for the five miles on Rt. 169 in Twp. 8.

Dean reported the annual Septage Spreading Site report was delayed this year but has been completed and submitted.

Dean presented the final Shellfish Conservation Ordinance for the Commissioners signatures. The service provider is Washington County

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Territories. The purpose of the ordinance is to establish a shellfish conservation program for the Washington County Territories which will ensure the protection, management and optimum utilization of shellfish resources within its limits. The ordinance will serve the unorganized territories of Washington County. The ordinance has been approved by the Commissioner of Marine Resources and will become effective after its adoption by the townships, provided a certified copy of the ordinance is filed with the Commissioner within twenty (20) days of its adoption.

***MOTION* Commissioner Cassidy moved to sign the Shellfish Conservation Ordinance to service the Unorganized Territories as presented. (Cassidy / Gardner, 2-0.)**

AGENDA ITEM: TIF Committee Update

Ms. Hatton's monthly report was submitted and is attached.

Ms. Hatton presented a TIF Grant request of \$31,000 for Downeast Lakes Land Trust. DLLT is a non-profit organization with a mission to contribute to the long-term economic and environmental well-being of the Downeast Lakes region through conservation and exemplary management of its forests and waters. DLLT is replacing a problematic culvert with a bridge on a tributary of Lower Oxbrook Lake. Flooding in recent years has cut off access to several recreational camps and public boat landings in northern Washington County. This stream is also a very important smelting location for Registered Maine Guides. The installation of this bridge will likely have important future implications for several working Maine Guides in the region. Ms. Hatton noted that the demographic using the bridge would also range from visiting ATV users to local timber contractors. DLLT plans to maintain the new stream crossing. The Grant Committee recommended approval of the grant request in the amount of \$21,391.00 rather than the \$31,000.00. The amount of \$21,391.00 represents a 1:1 match with other grant funds. Commissioner Gardner asked Colin Brown, Development and Outreach Manager for DLLT, if the project could still happen if DLLT did not receive the full grant amount requested. Mr. Brown verified the bridge could still be funded.

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MOTION Commissioner Cassidy moved to approve the Grant request, Grant #2101-05-CM, in the amount of \$21,391.00 for Downeast Lakes Land Trust. (Cassidy / Gardner, 2-0.)

AGENDA ITEM: Public Comment

None.

ADJOURNMENT

4:13 p.m.

ATTEST:

Carla J.R. Manchester, Admin. Asst.