

September 11, 2025

Minutes of the Washington County
Public Hearing on the
Proposed Budget for FY 2026
held September 11, 2025
in the Washington County Superior Courtroom
Machias, Maine

Attending the meeting were:

Commissioner David C. Burns

Commissioner Hammond

Commissioner Howard

Renée Gray, County Manager

Carla Manchester, Administration

Abby Sargent, WRCC

Mike Sargent, Milbridge

Tammy Gay, Deeds

Amanda Smith, Beals

Baffrey Bentley, Harrington

Stephen Simmons, Machias

Ryan Maker, East Machias

Rachel Worcester, D.A.'s Office

Susan Sullivan, D.A.'s Office

Robert Tracy, Lubec

Michael Schoppee, Jonesboro

David Davis, Alexander

Catherine L. Carter, Northfield

Darlene Perry, Probate

Monique Smith, Whitneyville

Heather Lee, Deeds

Nicholas MacDonald, Jonesboro

Angela Seelye, Machias

Matthew Stanhope, Marshfield

Toff Toffolon, Columbia

Sherrie Sprangers, East Machias

Nate Pennell, Whitneyville

Zach McClimon, Washington County Soil & Water Conservation
Service

Harry Fish, Jonesport

Talia Kelker, East Machias

Citizen, Roque Bluffs

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Connie Ziegler, Charlotte

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Violet Willis, Dennysville
Carlen Jay, Jonesport
Chris Gardner, Edmunds
Linda Rendleman, Lubec
Joyce Kryszak, East Machias
Tiffany Strout, Harrington
Jim Lenke, Machias
Brian Schuth, Eastport
Cynthia Beaurus, Jonesport
Zoie Zanoni, East Machias
Joe Thompson, Machias
Jake White, Machiasport
Marianne Moore, Maine State Senate
David Bibber, Charlotte
Will Tuell, Maine House
Mike Roukas, East Machias
Meredith Mawhar, SCEC
Mica Mawhar, Cathance Township
Shasta Rolfe, Machias
Jessie Bouchard, Columbia Falls
Jason Bouchard, Columbia Falls
Jody Kearney, Machiasport
Ken Kearney, Machiasport
Chris Loughlin, Baileyville
Cody Sprague, Perry
Lori Nehrings, Whitneyville
Colin Brown, Pembroke
Marcia Hayward, Machiasport
Sarah Dedmon, Machias/Machiasport
Elizabeth Lawrence, Jonesboro
Paula Alley, Machias
Kendall Alley, Machias
Denise Alley, Jonesport
Tonia Merchant, Jonesport
Crystal Cushing, D.A.'s Office
Lynn Dwelley, Machias
Jim James, Cutler
Danyel Crabtree, Whiting
Paula Wilson, Addison
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Terry Beal, Beals
Patrick Whitney, Jonesboro
Jeffrey Alley, Machias
Cynthia Rowden, Cutler

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Cynthia Gay, Deblois
Daniel Daley, Lubec
Michael Hinerman, Machiasport
Joshua Rolfe, Machias/RCC
Dennis Perry, Machias/RCC
Daniel Perry, Selectman Cherryfield
Valerie Lawson, Robbinston
Michael Brown, Robbinston
Lewis Pinkham, Milbridge
Keven Mahar, Cooper
Laurie Mahar, Cooper
Nancy Harrison, Lubec
Edward Harrison, Lubec
K.V., Machias
Cathy Chipman, Milbridge
Kim Look, Columbia
Laurie Curtis, Whiting
Robert Curtis, Whiting
Ben Edwards, Machias
Karen Redman, Marshfield
Charlene Hammond, Columbia Falls
Denise Rule, Lubec
John Rule, Lubec
Melinda Craig, Jonesboro
Dennis Alexander, Jonesboro
Bill Weaver, Machias
Darin Hammond, Harrington
Genevieve Lemire, Pembroke
Paula Johnson-Rolfe, WCSO
Jennifer Weaver, Machias
Daniel O'Connor, Augusta
Michael Congelosi, Machias
Brian Getchell, Roque Bluffs
Stewart Atwood, Machias
Sonnie Shepherd, Sullivan
Roy Palmer, Steuben

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Cathy Fonda, Addison
Jeff Moore, Machias
Wayne Jones, Trescott
Alex Finley, Machiasport
Jake Patryn, Machias
Kelly Hinkle, Columbia Falls

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Lisa Hanscom, EMA
Karl Pingree, East Machias
R.H. Seeley, Pembroke
Robert R., Whiting
Barbie Holmes, Machiasport
Lis Patryn, Northfield
Aidan Hammond, Machias
Bonnie Davis, Addison
Pat Davis, Addison
Brendon Sohre, Machias
Conner Magliozzi, WABI
Brenda Duggan, Milbridge
Philip Duggan, Milbridge
JoAnne R. Champrey, Columbia
Crystal Gallina, Calais
Donna Michell, Harrington
Harry M. Beal, Jr., Columbia
Julie A. Morgan, Northfield
Jean Kaye, Beddington
Susan Beal, Columbia
Greg Morgan, Northfield
Debra Hanscom, Northfield
Grace Falzarano, Columbia Falls
Gina Huffman, East Machias
Anna Villone, East Machias
Megan Huffman, Treasurer's Office
Shannon Carmie, Machias
Corrine Carmie, Machias
Laura Garnett, Steuben
Leonard Garnett, Steuben
Steve McClellan, Machias
Billy Milliken, Jonesport
Julie Farris, Jonesport
Kristin Daye, Machias

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Jolette Rossi West, Milbridge
Jason West, Milbridge
Cindy Rossi, Marshfield

Commissioner Burns called the Public Hearing to order at 4:00 p.m. on the proposed County Budget for FY 2026.

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AGENDA ITEM: Appoint Budget Advisory Committee Member to Represent U.T.

Commissioner Burns stated the first order of business is to appoint a Budget Advisory Committee Member to represent the U.T. As discussed in the August Commissioners' meeting, this is a requirement due to the recent law that passed to add two new voting members to the committee; a resident of the U.T. and a member of the Legislative Delegation. Commissioner Burns asked for nominations. Wayne Jones of Trescott was nominated.

***MOTION* Commissioner Howard moved to appoint Wayne Jones to the Budget Advisory Committee as the U.T. member. (Howard / Hammond, 3-0)**

It was noted that State Representative Tiffany Strout was elected by ballot of the Legislative Delegation as a voting member per LD. 1542.

Commissioner Burns asked the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) members to introduce themselves.

- Ben Edwards, District 2
- Brian Schuth, District 2
- Lewis Pinkham, District 3
- David Davis, District 1
- Dan Daley, District 2
- Tiffany Strout, Legislative Delegate
- Crystal Gallina, District 1
- Chris Loughlin, District 1
- Sonny Beal, Jr., District 3
- Harry Fish, District 3
- Wayne Jones, U.T.

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Commissioner Burns requested the BAC to nominate their Chair and Vice Chair. Ben Edwards nominated Brian Schuth. Dan Daley nominated Lewis Pinkham. Brian Schuth will be Chair by vote of 7 to 4. Chair Brian Schuth asked for nominations for the Vice Chair. Representative Tiffany Strout nominated Ben Edwards for Vice Chair. Ben won by unanimous vote. Chair Brian Schuth called for nominations for Secretary. There were no nominations. It was decided to address the nomination of a secretary at the next BAC meeting. The Committee then discussed possible dates for BAC meetings. The first BAC meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, September 17th at 9 a.m. Renée Gray

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noted the law adding two new voting members does not take effect until September 24th. Representative Tiffany Strout stated she will plan to attend the September 17th meeting without participating. Chair Brian Schuth suggested the meeting run from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Commissioner Burns stated for clarification the votes for the BAC Chair and Vice Chair still stands without the U.T. and Legislative Delegate members.

Commissioner Burns stated County Manager Renée Gray prepared a statement to explain the current financial state of Washington County. Renée read the memo in whole. (See Attached) Commissioner Burns stated the Commissioners have met their obligation in creating a budget to present to the BAC. The budget for FY 2026 being presented to the BAC is a total of \$13,814,376.00 with an increase of 39.87%. Commissioner Burns stated the \$11 million dollar bond annual interest payment is included in this budget. Commissioner Burns explained the need for the bond is a culmination of \$7.6 million to repay the 2025 TAN, the unaudited back deficit of \$2.6 and a projected 2025 cash shortfall of \$700,000.00. Commissioner Burns noted the bond question will be on the November 3rd ballot. Commissioner Burns read the Washington County Bond question from a sample ballot. It reads "*Shall the County Commissioners be authorized to issue general obligation securities of the County in an aggregate principal amount not to exceed \$11,000,000 to provide a source of funds to be drawn as needed to cover budgetary shortfalls and emergency expenses as they may occur from time to time in any fiscal year, as determined by the County Commissioners in their discretion, including the authority and*

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discretion to fix the dates, maturities, interest rates, denominations, calls for redemption (with or without premium), form, and other details of said securities, and including authority to execute and deliver the securities on behalf of the County?" Commissioner Burns noted that, by statute, before the Referendum on November 3rd each Commissioner must hold a Public Hearing to discuss the bond question within their district. Public Hearings will be scheduled and publicized as soon as possible.

Commissioner Burns opened the floor to public. There were many questions, comments, suggestions and concerns. The Board of Commissioners answered them to the best of their ability as

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there are still many unknowns.

QUESTIONS:

- What is the worst-case scenario?
 - There may be a disruption in essential services based on the cuts needed to continue to paying operational expenses and repayment of the Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) .
- Has anyone reached out to the State Delegation?
 - The State Auditor and Governor's Office has been contacted.
- What measures has the County taken thus far?
 - A Provisional Treasurer has been appointed.
- When will there be more information for the potential that the referendum does not pass? What is Plan B?
 - We are still trying to obtain solid answers.
- Will there be a forensic audit done before November 3rd?
 - It is not a guarantee a forensic audit could be done by November 3rd. There has already been communication with the District Attorney. The D.A. has said that if there is indication of wrong doing, he will initiate a forensic audit.
- Has there been a discussion regarding the closure of the Calais District Attorney's Office.
 - Commissioner Burns responded it has been discussed but there has not been a determination yet.

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- Is the 2022 Audit completed?
 - It is partly done. The Finance Office is working on answering questions the auditor has asked. Commissioner Burns stated he wants the public to understand that the lack of audits was not because the County didn't want to get them done; it was because of the difficulty of securing an auditor.
- What will the effect be on the budget be should the bond pass?
 - The additional amount added to the budget will be approximately \$1.4 million per year for the next 10 years.

COMMENTS:

- Cannot see how the County can shut down.

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- o It would be a violation of law to shut down services and the Commissioners do not intend on violating the law. However, some services can be cut.
- A forensic audit should be done.
 - o A forensic audit would be initiated by the District Attorney's Office.
- In order to vote positive on the referendum, it is important to analyze and understand what went wrong.
- Some demanded accountability and that a forensic audit should be done.
- It was noted the 40% increase does not increase one's complete tax bill but only the county portion.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Provide an example of what each taxpayer's increase in property tax would be should the bond pass.
- If the bond passes, the County should continue to look for options to pay it off early.
 - o Commissioner Burns stated the Board of Commissioners agree and will work towards paying the bond off early. He stated the policies and procedures will be changed to enforce more accountability.
- Assign a Project Manager to work on the financial crisis and information regarding the bond question.

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- o The Board of Commissioners acknowledged the need to present a plan. It was also noted there are many details to work through with the need for legal guidance.
- Town Official suggested municipalities pay their portion of the shortfall, and in turn, not pay interest on the bond.
- The County could look at county-owned property that may be able to be sold.
- Utilize a grant writer to obtain funding.

CONCERNS:

- Several people voiced their concern about the loss of emergency services. Several Emergency Communication Specialist (dispatchers) spoke regarding this concern.
- Concerns of elderly, low-income and those with fixed incomes being able to pay the increase in taxes.

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Commissioner Hammond stated the Board of Commissioners have completed a tremendous exercise of going through the complete budget. He stated they have also looked at facility issues that may arise. Commissioner Hammond noted the 2025 budget did not have funds to cover facility issues. He stated 2025 budget can not be used as a baseline.

Commissioner Howard noted there cannot be a complete shut down as there are essential services that must be provided. He stated that possibly the State could take over operations of the County and the County would not have any say.

County Manager Renée Gray stated the County has plans to move the fiscal year from January 1st through December 31st to July 1st through June 30th. She noted this would help with cash flow. Renée did note the county will not be changing the fiscal year this year as there are already too many things happening.

Representing the governmental third-party Washington County Soil & Water Conservation Service, Zach McClimon noted that they have received funding from the County in the past. Their organization has assisted in conservation projects, assisted

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land owners and work to protect and improve the County's natural resources. All third-party requests have not been considered for the FY 2026 budget.

Jeffrey Davidson made allegations of wrong doing. He pointed out that bond coverage through the County Risk Pool could be collected because of criminal or negligent acts. Commissioner Hammond stated the County has contacted the Risk Pool. Commissioner Burns noted he has talked to the District Attorney, and also stated that bond coverage with the Risk Pool should cover mistakes made.

State Representative Tiffany Strout stated the Washington County Legislative Delegation is in the minority but is advocating loudly for the County. She has reached out to others and has begun to look more closely at the proposed budget. She thanked the Board of Commissioners for all their work.

Machias Selectman Jake Patryn stated it is important to know the pros and cons of approving the \$11 million bond. He offered his

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help in organizing this information. Commissioner Burns thanked Jake for offering his expertise.

Commissioner Burns assured the public the Board of Commissioners are providing as much information as possible with an emphasis on transparency.

With no further questions from the public, Commissioner Burns asked for a motion to adjourn the hearing.

ADJOURNMENT

6:21 p.m.

ATTEST:

Carla J.R. Manchester, Admin. Asst.