



COMMISSIONER'S MINUTES

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

MEETING STARTS AT 3:00 PM

SOMERSET COUNTY COMMISSION CHAMBERS

Present: Commissioners: Robert Sezak, Cyp Johnson, Scott Seekins, John Alsop and Joel Stetkis were present

Staff: Tim Curtis, Patrick Dolan, David Spencer, Tammy Barker, Pawel Bialczak, Tanya Belanger, Sheriff Dale Lancaster, Michael Pike, Christian Savage and Mike Smith.

Public: Jake Freudberg (Morning Sentinel)

A. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Pledge was taken to open the meeting.

B. CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 3:00pm

C. MINUTES:

Resolution 24 - 43: To Accept the Minutes of February 7, 2024

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to Accept the Minutes of February 7, 2024

Second: Commissioner Stetkis

Vote: 5-0

D. PUBLIC HEARING: To take public comment on the proposed Somerset County Economic Development Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District in portions of Johnson Mountain Township and Moxie Gore Township in the County's Unorganized Territory: Chairman Sezak opened the Public Hearing at 3:03pm. County Administrator Curtis made a brief presentation on the proposed TIF District to capture value created by the development of the New England Clean Energy Connect project through the Unorganized Territories of Somerset County. The presentation included definition of terms related to TIF projects, the specific areas proposed to be included in the district, and the estimated captured value.

The project does not include a Credit Enhancement Agreement (CEA) with the taxpayer, and the proposal utilizes 4.1% of the overall Unorganized Territory valuation, under the 5% cap required by the State. The County Administrator also reviewed the list of 13 development projects.

Commissioner John Alsop said in his opinion there is no downside to this proposal. Commissioner Sezak wanted to make sure that funds could be used to purchase Public Safety equipment to be used in the Unorganized Territory.

Seeing no further public comment, Chairman Sezak closed the public hearing at 3:16pm.

E. PUBLIC COMMENT: (To allow members of the public to comment or reserve time to speak on an upcoming agenda item). None

F. WORKSHOP:

1. Discuss Support Letter for Register of Deeds Office regarding the Maine Revenue Services Tax Portal: At the behest of the Association of Registers of Deeds in Maine, a letter of support from the Commissioners has been prepared to review and send to Maine Revenue Services. The letter expresses concerns over a lack of communication from Maine Revenue to the Deeds Offices in the State regarding plans to begin accepting payments of Real Estate Transfer Taxes through the MRS Tax Portal in October of 2024.

2. Budget Update: The County Administrator presented a draft budget to give the Commissioners an idea of key expenses resulting in an overall increase to the taxpayer of approximately 4%. Key factors include restructuring of Emergency Management staffing, adding another Patrol Deputy position to the Sheriff's Office and raising the cap on taxpayer funding of the County Jail. The Commissioners were provided with budget worksheets to review prior to the full-day budget meeting on Wednesday March 6, 2024.

G. NEW AGENDA ITEMS: (Commissioners Only)

H. FINANCE REPORTING: Finance Director Patrick Dolan reported that there are currently 18 open positions County-wide. Those unfilled positions continue to provide favorable budget savings which can be applied to future budgets to offset taxes.

I. ADMINISTRATOR REPORT: County Administrator Curtis has spent much of the past few weeks meeting with Department Heads to discuss changes in the budget and hear plans for future projects and staffing needs. He has drafted changes to the Personnel Policy regarding terminations and resignations. He informed the Commissioners that a tentative date of March 20, 2024 has been set to hear abatement appeals from residents in Palmyra.

J. DEPARTMENT HEADS: Deeds Office Manager Tanya Belanger was present for the workshop, but had no further updates for the board.

SEDC Director Christian Savage shared information on efforts to attract manufacturing jobs to the County, and updates on broadband expansion.

Unorganized Territory Coordinator David Spencer reported on the process of licensing two gravel pits to comply with State and Federal regulations.

Jail Administrator Michael Pike said there are currently eight open positions among Corrections Officers, and three new hires are at the Academy which is a five-week training process.

Sheriff Lancaster reported 359 calls for service last week, and deputies enforced search warrants on illegal marijuana grows in Norridgewock. He shared an update from the Criminal Justice Academy including an increase in the amount to be paid for law enforcement training when a recently trained deputy leaves employment to take a job at another law enforcement agency. The reimbursement for a first-year blue pin is now \$47,000.

A recent news article on the County's Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) program has been picked up by a national news agency. The article prompted discussion among the Commissioners, the Sheriff and Jail Administrator about how inmates continue to receive treatment once released back into society.

Communications Director Tammy Barker spoke about maintenance to the Coburn Tower to improve transmissions. A newly hired reserve dispatcher has been on the job for two weeks while new hires are in training.

I/T Director Pawel Bialchek reported that the camera installation project at the Jail is near completion and the updates to the Courthouse firewall will begin next week.

Mike Smith updated the Board on FEMA's work to help private citizens get assistance for damage and losses from the December 2023 flooding. Since the recovery center was opened in Skowhegan, there have been 95 residents helped in person and over 130 online applications. Mike also provided update on preparation for the solar eclipse in the Jackman area, and that progress is being made on updates to the County Hazard Mitigation Plan.

K. UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

L. NEW BUSINESS:

Resolution 24 - 44: To approve the Resolution regarding the Somerset County Economic Development Tax Increment Financing District and Development program as presented.

Motion: Commissioner Johnson motioned to approve the Resolution regarding the Somerset County Economic Development Tax Increment Financing District and Development program as presented.

Second: Commissioner Alsop

Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 - 45: To authorize a letter of support for the Somerset Register of Deeds Office regarding the Maine Revenue Tax Portal.

Motion: Commissioner Alsop motioned to authorize a letter of support for the Somerset Register of Deeds Office regarding the Maine Revenue Tax Portal.

Second: Commissioner Stetkis

Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 – 46: To acknowledge the resignations of County employee(s) from the Communications Center and the Somerset County Jail.

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to acknowledge the resignations of County employee(s) from the Communications Center and the Somerset County Jail.

Second: Commissioner Stetkis

Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 – 47: To approve the Somerset County Loan Agreement with the Somerset Economic Development Corporation.

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the Somerset County Loan Agreement with the Somerset Economic Development Corporation.

Second: Commissioner Alsop

Discussion: The County Administrator and Christian shared a document outlining the various loans that involve County funds but are administered by SEDC. The auditors have been asking for a letter to this effect. The document included a policy going forward to allow SEDC to keep 1% of interest earned on County funds to administer the loans. There was concern from the Commissioners regarding language that refers to loan forgiveness. The intent was to show that SEDC would be held harmless in case of default. It was the consensus of the Board to remove some of the language and bring this back at the next meeting.

Vote: Motion fails 0-5

Resolution 24 – 48: To approve the promotion of Arianna Bjork to Compliance and Training Assistant for the Somerset County Jail.

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the promotion of Arianna Bjork to Compliance and Training Assistant for the Somerset County Jail.

Second: Commissioner Stetkis

Vote: 5-0

M. CAPITAL RESERVE EXPENDITURES:

Resolution 24 – 49: To approve the transfer of \$50,000 from the U/T TIF Fund to Capital Account #4034-03 (Radio Equipment).

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the transfer of \$50,000 from the U/T TIF Fund to Capital Account #4034-03 (Radio Equipment).

Second: Commissioner Stetkis

Discussion: Administrator Curtis explained that this proposal came out of budget discussions to expedite repairs to radio towers that impact the U/T rather than raising more capital through the budget process.

Vote: 5-0

Resolution 24 – 50: To approve the reallocation of \$350,000 from Capital Account #4039-04 (Dark Fiber) to Capital Account #4043-02 (HP Server Equipment).

County Administrator Curtis explained that this was an effort to allow updates to the servers to begin sooner than later. The consensus of the Commissioners was to wait until additional information was available regarding proposals to create a redundant network system.

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to table this resolution to the next meeting.

Second: Commissioner Alsop

Vote: 5-0 Resolution Tabled.

N. UNORGANIZED TERRITORY:

O. WARRANTS:

Resolution 24 - 51: To approve the Treasurer’s Warrant for General Fund, SCJ, and Unorganized Territory:

General Fund:	\$154,258.66
Jail:	\$190,317.73
U/T:	\$ 33,717.83
Total:	\$378,294.22

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to approve the Treasurer’s Warrants for the General Fund, SCJ, and UT in the amounts shown in the resolution.

Second: Commissioner Stetkis

Vote: 5-0

P. MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION ITEMS (Commissioners Only):

Q. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Title 1, Section 405 (6) (A) Personnel/SCJ (FMLA)

Motion: Commissioner Seekins motioned to go into executive session under Title 1, Section 405 (6) (A) Personnel/ SCJ (FMLA)

Second: Commissioner Stetkis

Vote: 5-0

The Commissioners entered into executive session at 4:20pm

The Commissioners came out of executive session at 4:30pm with no action taken.

R. ADJOURN:

Commissioner Johnson motioned to adjourn at 4:31pm