



CUMBERLAND COUNTY FINANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

5:00 PM

The Finance Committee will held their meeting in person in the Sebago Room in the County Administration Building located at 27 Northport Drive, Portland, ME 04103.

Attending: Councilor Bob Vail, Cumberland
Councilor Karin Orenstein, Yarmouth
Councilor Sarah Michniewicz, Portland
Councilor Tim Thompson, Cape Elizabeth

Absent: Councilor Ben Grant, Portland
Councilor Jon Anderson, Scarborough
Select Board Connie Justice, New Gloucester

County: County Commissioner Patti Smith
Finance Director/Treasurer Theresa Grover
Finance & Budget Manager Alyssa Johnson
Assistant County Manager Breana Gersen
County Manager James Gailey

Welcome

Being that it was the first meeting, the Committee and staff went around the room and introduce themselves.

Nominations for Chair & Vice Chair

Nominations were held for Chair and Vice Chair of the Finance Committee.

Karin nominated Bob Vail as chair. No other nominations were made. Nominations were closed. Karin motioned for appointment, seconded by Sarah. Vote 4-0

Bob nominated Karin as Vice Chair. No other nominations were made. Nominations closed. Sarah motioned for appointment, seconded by Tim. Vote 4-0

Bob made some early statements about the financial struggles of other Maine counties and the national immigration enforcement process that has been playing out in Maine and across the nation and how this could impact county operations. Bob finished up by stating that there are more communities can do in working together to regionalize services, reducing costs, while providing the same services to the communities.

Presentation of 2026/27 General Fund, Jail & Cross Insurance Arena Budgets

County Manager Gailey went through a PowerPoint presentation of the proposed 2026/2027 General Fund, Jail and Cross Insurance Arena budgets and how they all collectively tied out to a need from taxes tax rate. The presentation was developed showing the effects of developing a budget with the use of federal inmate revenue and not using the revenue. The presentation was designed to be a high-level overview of the budget with the anticipation that more granular review of the budget will be forthcoming.

Committee Discussion

Bob: When I first got on here, during the pandemic, we had no federal prisoners. Are we planning for a time when we lose this money, and will a reduction of staff follow that?

Jim: There are a couple of things in play. In November, the commissioners voted 3 to 2 to keep the contract as is. I should explain the difference between the contract and state law because there is confusion. The federal contract pays for heightened services at \$150 per day per inmate. The inmates have their own pod, a grievance officer, and transportation to federal court. State statute requires all jails to house federal, state, county, and local arrests. If we didn't

have the contract, the arrests would still come to the jail; the burden would be on local taxpayers versus the contract.

There is a bill sitting on Governor Mills's desk that could threaten the contract. There is also another bill sponsored by Rachel Talbert Ross looking at other restrictions relating to immigration and federal enforcement.

Karin: When we were talking earlier, you said that because this facility is for medium and higher security inmates, typical immigration pickups don't come to our facility.

Jim: Correct. We are holding medium to high inmates from all over New England. We are not seeing the low-security movement often discussed in the news (individuals without paperwork). Those individuals have been brought outside the state.

Karin: We are getting ICE or DHS arrests here in addition to other federal agencies? ICE arrests in this region are what we are required to take under state law?

Jim: Yes. We have US Marshal arrests as well as ICE and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The contract allows the Bureau of Prisons, but I've only heard of one person from that group.

Karin: What about other federal agencies, like the FBI or DEA?

Jim: Typically, the ones we're holding are the more serious, and the less serious go to Strafford. So, if we lose the contract, we still have to keep these people in our jail houses with our sheriffs; we just don't get the money.

Sarah: Since the vote was 3 to 2, is it up for reconsideration?

Patti: It's currently not on the docket. It was voted on and exhausted, and I have not heard any commissioner want to bring it back to the table.

Tim: So, a piece of legislation that Governor Mills could sign would put us in a position where we could no longer do that?

Jim: Not straightforwardly. It is more about how it plays out. It doesn't attack the contract itself but focuses on immigration law enforcement in Maine.

Tim: It has a big impact on all our towns if we lose this revenue.

Bob: As we go through the budget review, we have invited entities like the director of the arena, the district attorney, and the sheriff in the past. I would like to hear from the sheriff because if we lose this money, we will be scrambling to avoid layoffs. My other question for Jim concerns insurance costs, which seem out of control.

Jim: Workers' Comp has seen a significant uptick in injuries at the jail over the last two years, whether hands-on with inmates or through training. We needed to right-size this budget line

because we were not fully funding it. So, we had a double whammy: an increased mod rate because of injuries, and we needed to budget enough to cover our responsibilities.

Bob: Are we in the pool, or does MEMIC carry this?

Jim: We're through the Maine Municipal Pool.

Sarah: I have the text of the bill (LD 1259), "An Act to enhance public safety in Maine by defining the relationship between local and federal law enforcement." It's short and prohibits agreements with federal immigration enforcement authorities. A law enforcement agency may not enter into any arrangement that grants federal immigration enforcement authorities' powers.

Breana: There's also a companion bill, LD 1971, that goes more into detail on restrictions for detaining people at the jail.

Jim: One thing about losing the federal contract: we will look at doing things leaner at the jail. But two and a half years ago, when we lost the federal inmates, we had a huge hole in the budget and lost a good portion of state aid, forcing us to unfund 42 jail positions. Those positions have not been added back. We are already short-handed. This current year's budget brought back nine out of 42. Even if we lost the federal pod, which requires nine to eleven staff per pod, those staff might just blend in and cover other areas because we are already playing with a limp.

Tim: And we are keeping up to 420 people, up from 190-200 a couple of years ago, with far fewer staff. It's a predicament.

Jim: Yes. If we lost the federal pod, that would be about 80 individuals not in the jail any longer. Around the holidays, the population always decreases.

Karin: So, if I understand correctly, the US Marshals handle prisoners for federal courts. The problem with immigration detainees is they go to immigration court. The issue is having immigration detainees with us. I'm hoping that if there is a state law, it gives us leverage in reaching a different contract.

Jim: We had a conversation with the US Marshal Service. General public at the commissioners' meetings have requested amending the contract to uncheck the box for ICE. The Marshall Service representative said that if the county submits an amendment request, they will pull the whole contract, including the Marshals' prisoners.

Karin: It could be a different conversation if things change in Augusta.

Jim: Yes, but I wanted to share that conversation. That's why we're heading down the road of showing all or nothing in terms of federal revenue.

Bob: We work in silos and tend not to communicate outside of that. I'm hoping our commissioners communicate with our legislative body in Augusta. One struggle I've had for decades is getting conversations to happen with other communities about consolidation efforts.

Jim: One thing I want to circle back to is departments. I heard the Sheriff's office, which is always a good one to bring in.

Bob: I'd like to see an update on anything receiving federal funding that may be curtailed, like FEMA.

Jim: The bulk of our federal funds in the general fund budget are through the Emergency Management Agency and the Sheriff's office (jail). We have a number of grants supporting public health, but they are not in the general fund budget.

Bob: We had the District Attorney's office last year and the restorative justice program. I think we should have her back.

Karin: From the District Attorney's office or the DA herself?

Jim: It was the DA.

Karin: Let's have her come back.

Bob: I thought everybody we heard from last year was valuable. The dispatch director was excellent. She gave a clear understanding that regionalization pays off. When you call 911 from a cell phone, she can often tell you the room of the building you are in. When we dispatch units closest to respond without regard to town lines, it makes sense.

Tim: Did the fellow from the arena come in last year? Will he come in again?

Jim: Mike would love to come in. The busy season is January to May. Last year's profit was \$68,000. Our goal is to break even, and we've turned a profit for four years. Profits are razor-thin, but we're not using taxpayer dollars.

Karin: What happens to the arena's profit?

Jim: It stays with the arena to cover salaries during slow months like July.

Sarah: The partnership with Tedford is important. Is the data being tracked to understand if it reduces the Portland shelter population? I looked at the United Way data this morning. About a third of the people in the Portland shelter system are from Portland, a third from the rest of the state, and a third from elsewhere.

Jim: We have been partnering with Tedford for five or six years now. They track where their population comes from. I worked with the Sagadahoc and Androscoggin County managers to recognize the value they provide and contribute something nominal.

Sarah: That plays into the Portland conundrum: we're doing the heavy lifting for the rest of the county with the homeless services center.

Bob: Change of subject. We hired a firefighter specialist last year. Can we get an update?

Jim: Bill has been on board since September 1st (two and a half months). He runs three committees of town managers and fire chiefs: a data committee to create comparisons, a municipal committee for governance models and sharing equipment, and a training committee to provide more routine, available classes (like Firefighter 1 and basic training). Things are starting to gel. The commissioners appointed seven members to an advisory committee of fire chiefs. However, I think it would be worth giving a pass this year as he is just getting his feet off the ground.

Karin: I'd like to talk to the Register of Deeds and the IT department about their budgets.

Bob: Are there ways to share IT services across the county to align software and hardware?

Jim: Every town runs different platforms. One instance where we touch 20 communities is through communications dispatch with Spillman, where the county holds the license and distributes it. With software licenses for the county, we typically buy a license for every employee (380-400 employees).

Karin: This might be a conversation with the Fire/EMS coordinator. There is an issue with what software is used by different towns.

Jim: In the county-wide fire EMS plan two and a half years ago, that was a big hole. Not everyone used the same platform or reported data the same way, so consultants could not make heads or tails of it.

Jim: So, I have the Sheriff's office, EMA, district attorney, Cross Insurance Arena, Registry of Deeds, and the IT department on the list.

Bob: All exciting stuff! I think the expectation is that over ten years, you expect your taxes to go up 30%. Your income and wages go up too; it's a natural progression. Your 5% increase has 3% in COLA; the rest is outside our control.

Jim: The bulk of our budget is wage increases. The 3% COLA only applies to about 110 non-union employees out of 380. The union side ranges from 5% to 9%. Health insurance is another big one. The increases were on wage and benefits, not operational costs.

Bob: I had a conversation with my town manager today about combining our staffing or wage tiers instead of a Cumberland police officer being paid X, it's a county police officer working in Cumberland. It is a hard question to bring about; it takes systemic change.

Jim: We owe you an enterprise budget and a grant budget.

Bob: I like that the solar panels are here, and I'm hoping we can continue that effort for the rest of the facilities. We just doubled the size of our solar field in Cumberland.

Karin: Are there any departments we didn't ask for that you think we should have?

Jim: Communications (dispatch) typically falls on this list.

Bob: We might want to hear more from some departments than others, like the Sheriff's department. Maybe break it down over two nights.

Jim: Yes. Try to get everybody in and give time to work on the backside. We can do that with the Sheriff's office.

Karin: I'm interested in the breakdown of medical programs and how they are administered (jail medical).

Bob: Does the hospital employ any security force of their own?

Jim: They do, but they will not sit outside a room. We need a correction officer or law enforcement officer outside the room.

Bob: Can that duty be shared with surrounding police departments?

Jim: We rely on police departments for that today, and we're spending significant dollars on it.

Bob: That was the \$200,000 overtime detail?

Sarah: Yes. It takes a limited pool of officers off the street for long, multi-day details with 24-hour coverage.

Adjournment

Motion by Tim, second by Sarah to adjourn the meeting. Vote 4-0 at 6:46 pm