

**York County Budget Committee
Meeting Minutes
May 22, 2024
6:00 p.m.**

**York County Government Building, 149 Jordan Springs Road
Alfred ME (Commissioners' Meeting Room)**

ZOOM LINK:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82099299813?pwd=Q2lDSDVlN25RMElOZHg3NzIeVjJldz09>

In attendance: James Smith, Jonathan Martell, Lisa Pratt, Susan Wiswell, Jo-Ann Putnam, Marc Lessard, Danica Briggs, Rebecca Bowley

1. Introductions and Welcome: Jo-Ann Putnam, Chair
Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam opened the meeting.
2. Approve following minutes-
 - a. Minutes of June 12, 2023, public hearing meeting-Marc Lessard motioned to approve the minutes. Rebecca Bowley seconded the motion. Vote- 4 (only members present at last year's public meeting). Motion passed.
 - b. Minutes of May 20, 2024, meeting- Marc Lessard motioned to approve the minutes with changes. Lisa Pratt seconded the motion. Vote-unanimous
3. Any further review and Q&A of FY'25 proposed budget
Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard asked the County Manager what the county's target fund balance is that we look to achieve? County Manager Zinser replied that state law requires us to have 20%.
Marc Lessard asked once we remove the \$500,000 to subsidize this year's budget, what is our percentage?
County Manager Zinser replied, 17%.
Marc Lessard asked does that impact in any way falling below the 20% by the State?
County Manager Zinser replied, no.
Marc Lessard asked do we go out for bonds?
County Manager Zinser replied, no.
Marc Lessard stated because going below (required 20%) could affect financing. He added that he was speaking to his peers regarding where we have overtime dollars and funding positions at the same time. We should have some type of carryover.
County Manager Zinser replied that as it pertains to the jail, Mr. Lessard is generally correct but there is about a \$200,000 delta between the two. We have a month and a half of the payroll left in this budget. He explained that it is a balancing act of funding vacancies and looking at increasing the overtime line.
Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard asked the County Manager who would provide the policy for funding required for fund balance?
County Manager Zinser responded that it would be the Commissioners.

Marc Lessard asked if the Budget Committee can make a recommendation to the Commissioners as his fear is that the 17% could go lower. He added that it has been his experience that it could develop into a trend to deplete that fund balance to maintain tax balances. Mr. Lessard stated that he doesn't want that to happen here on the County level and would like the Budget Committee to send the Commissioners a letter that where we stand is that the 17% doesn't go any lower and that the fund balance needs to be replenished back to 20%.

County Manager Zinser stated that we would be required to replenish that (fund balance) before we were to return anything to the budget.

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard added that all (cities, towns) finish the year with funds as well as the County. He asked that it gets shared with the Commissioners that he doesn't want it to get out of control.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam responded that we could send comments to the County Manager to relay to the Commissioners.

Budget Committee Member James Smith stated that the vehicle amount budgeted in the Sheriff's Office budget was still too low when divided by the number of vehicles. He added that the comment made was we take money out to make up the difference.

County Manager Zinser stated that he was reminded that we budget \$40,000 per vehicle. He added that any overages would come out (of the reserve account).

James Smith expressed his concern that the Budget Committee was provided no information on those types of capital reserve accounts. He continued that since we don't know the balances, we cannot make correct decisions for a full disclosure sense.

County Manager Zinser explained that this becomes the separation of powers, Budget Committee vs. Commissioners. The statutory role (of the budget committee) is to approve a budget provided to you by the Commissioners. It becomes a policy discussion. We can give you that information, but you cannot utilize those funds and it is available in our audits and is public record, stated the County Manager.

Budget Committee Member James Smith replied that he is not concerned about who makes policy but if we don't have access to that information, that is a failure.

Budget Committee Member James Smith replied that, for instance, if there is a huge balance in that vehicle reserve, we could not fund that item line.

County Manager Zinser explained that if it was authorized by Commissioners, we could use the funds if that is policy. He informed all that there was \$130,000 in the vehicle reserve about one month ago.

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard commented that having done this for a number of years, he agrees with the track that Jim was going down and he understands "*the pool of water that each of us play in*". He added that he is more concerned with the trend of where the fund balances are year after year so he can understand what the Commissioners are doing for next year. He stated that he would like to be able to see the past two years with next year's numbers to see a trend line.

Budget Committee Member Becky Bowley stated that we can see the grant monies in the audit. County Manager Zinser explained they are special revenues. She commented that she likes to look at grant revenue and if it's in the audit, she is okay. The County Manager replied that they will get it online.

Budget Committee Member James Smith asked if they are part of the 20% capital reserves fund balance?

County Manager Zinser replied, no, \$8 million.

Budget Committee Member James Smith asked how much is in the reserve funds. County Manager Zinser replied \$4 million, and the majority (\$2.5 million) is allocated for new buildings.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell asked at what point does the budget committee make suggestions for changes. He added that he was looking at vacant positions, especially at the jail and is seeing \$1.6 million in overtime and 25 vacant positions. He asked if those positions were expected to be filled in the next year? He would like to defund an additional six positions so we have 15 (open) positions and still some overtime money in there to offset.

Budget Committee Member Martell continued that there are two District Attorney vacant positions listed around \$100,000.00. Could we cut those, he asked.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell asked since it was stated that Deeds isn't as busy, he is wondering why there is a request for an additional person?

He continued that if three out of the four patrol vacancies were cut from the budget, it would save us about \$210,000. Mr. Martell added that COLA is budgeted at 4% and he would like to reset it at 3%.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam suggested letting each department leader speak about these proposed cuts.

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard stated that in his opinion, it would be nice for a motion on the floor one at a time.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell motioned to defund an additional six positions for corrections officers in jail budget. Susan Wiswell seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: Marc Lessard asked if we know what positions are what?

County Manager Zinser replied that these are corrections officers. Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard stated that we would only fund 68 then. County Manager Zinser clarified that it would be 66.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell stated that at roughly \$50,000 for each person we would save around \$200,000.00.

County Manager Zinser explained that this is a balancing act as we are over budget in the overtime line of about \$800,000. Our regular wage line has about \$1 million left so there is a \$200,00 delta, explained the County Manager. Therefore, if you reduce that line, you will need to increase the overtime line, he explained. We don't budget for a fully burdened overtime rate as we do know we will have vacancies. They have historically washed (the two budgets).

Jonathan Martell asked why isn't that data presented? We should have the data, so we know how many you hire and how many people quit. He stated that he would like to see a budget that reflects reality with a reasonable number of openings, stated Mr. Martell.

Budget Committee Member Jim Smith stated that he has a different point of view as to the overall staffing requirements concerning permanent positions and overtime. Certain staffing levels must be maintained. He added that if you bring one down you will have to bring the other up.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam commented how hard it is to attract people to these types of positions right now. That is the biggest reason she is not in favor of cutting positions. There was a reason for 72 (positions) said Jo-Ann.

Budget Committee Member Lisa Pratt stated that she agrees with Chief Putnam.

There is a reason for the number and safety is key at the jail. Once you take them away, it will be difficult to get them back. We will have more turnover if they have to work more overtime, said Ms. Pratt.

Budget Committee Member Susan Wiswell asked Sheriff King, realistically how many (vacant c.o. positions) do you think you will be able to fill?

Sheriff King replied that they do have vacancies. He continued to explain that they do have a lot of turnovers. We did cut back some positions a few years ago, explained the Sheriff. We are enterprising some programs and initiatives. We are looking at hiring some people from Puerto Rico that are already U.S. citizens. Sheriff King stated that most of those that leave state in their exit interviews there is too much overtime.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam informed all that the jail was at crisis levels in the past and down a lot more (personnel) than now.

County Manager Zinser stated that they were down to 35 corrections officers at one time.

Budget Committee Member Becky Bowley asked if we were to cut these positions, how would you make up the deficit that you will have at the end of the year?

County Manager Zinser responded, if you cut, we won't hire.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam stated that the County Manager explained that if the positions don't get funded or filled, the money goes back into the jail fund.

County Manager Zinser replied, yes, we just signed a \$1.3 million contract to put in a new septic grinder. We didn't ask for this money and we have been saving the money for years. That is where a portion of that capital has gone.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell explained that he wants the jail to have the people they need but that he sees a large number of openings. Instead of having 25 openings, perhaps raise that pay to \$55,000 to attract more people and have less vacancies.

County Manager Zinser explained that the County was successful 3 years ago as we gave them a 15% raise. Two years ago, there was an additional \$3 per hour and a nighttime differential. The starting rate is \$22.00 per hour currently and we recognize we need to bring those numbers up.

Sheriff King also informed all that the overtime budget represents sick time, as well as hospital details and transports.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell asked how many of these 25 positions would get filled during this budget period.

Sheriff King replied that he believes they will fill them, but people do leave.

County Manager Zinser explained that several budget years ago (4 or 5) 84 were budgeted and we have been reducing that number and now we are going to 72. We are trying to do it in a methodical manner.

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard stated that while he understands the reasoning and the goal, his preferred way of doing this is having a guestimate of when

the positions are potentially filled. You might only need to fund positions a portion of the year. County Manager Zinser replied that is typically what we do. Should we be successful we would ask for that money and more.

James Smith motioned to move the matter. Susan Wiswell seconded the motion.

Vote- unanimous to move the matter as motioned to cut six (6) positions from the jail budget.

Vote 1 in favor (Jonathan Martell) and 7 opposed. Motion failed.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell commented that revenue is down \$100,000 in the Deeds department and it was mentioned that people are doing this work online and then there is a request for another archivist position. If there is less work going on, he stated that he is not sure we need to fund another head count. County Manager Zinser explained Deeds used to have nine positions and now has six. The archivist is not a new position and was in last year's budget and we are just filling it now.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell moved to defund the archivist position in deeds. Susan Wiswell seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: County Manager Zinser explained that the County has been working with a professional archivist for review of our records with the Maine State archivist for the past year and a half and it will be coming to an end so we will bring on a records management to help us continue this process. This person will start with deeds and then the position will be available in all departments. Probate has records that go back very far, and we have lots of records. We also deal with FOAA requests, explained the County Manager.

The County Manager Increased efficiency with online but a human still needs to review it.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell asked if there was a reason this position wasn't filled last year?

County Manager Zinser explained that they opted not to eliminate it as we knew we were going to need an archivist. That is when we brought in a contract archivist and then as we progressed forward, we said now let's hire someone. The Contract archivist is coming out of the deeds budget.

Vote- unanimously opposed. Motion failed.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell motioned to defund three vacant patrol positions. Susan Wiswell seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: Budget Committee Member Becky Bowley stated that crime in York County has risen, and my municipality is now represented by the State Police. Sheriff King added that York County has 14 towns that do not have police departments. We are required to provide coverage. He continued that it is important to know that seven deputies are grant funded. Every year we have towns pay for contract deputies. We are the only county in the State in which the State Police provide primary police coverage. They don't work at night so they call the trooper, and the trooper will call the Sheriff's Office.

Budget Committee Member Becky Bowley stated that we need people on the street. Even though Hollis has State Police coverage anyone who needs a warrant served, the Sheriff's Office still must serve that warrant. The two departments work very well together. She added that she feels safe in her town knowing someone is going to respond to her call.

Jonathan Martell asked if these are new or vacant positions? Sheriff King replied, vacant positions.

Budget Committee Member Susan Wiswell asked Sheriff King if he expects to be able to fill these positions?

Sheriff King responded that yes, three persons are in the (hiring) process.

Budget Committee Member Becky Bowley asked if when you are hiring, do you have to coordinate when they have an academy class.

Sheriff King explained that with a brand-new person, it is a year before you get a return on your investment, but we have been very lucky with people coming from other departments coming to the Sheriff's Office.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam informed everyone that they run two academies a year that last eight weeks. Then the officer must complete twelve weeks of field training.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell withdrew his motion. Budget Committee Member Susan Wiswell withdrew her second.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell motioned to de-fund two (vacant) positions in the District Attorney's office. Susan Wiswell seconded the motion. County Manager Zinser explained that these are two existing positions. Of the three (vacant positions), one transferred to a different D.A.'s position.

Deputy Manager/H.R. Corliss clarified that two employees transferred out and two positions were actively filled.

County Manager Zinser informed all that the D.A.'s budget is currently \$8,000 over budget in overtime and they have spent \$30,000 to date.

Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell asked why the third position has such a long-standing opening?

Deputy County Manager/H.R. Director Corliss explained that some have transferred out of the position to another D.A. position. We are trying to actively fill all of them, she explained.

District Attorney Kathy Slattery stated that if she had kept notes on hiring, it would be a lesson on everything that has gone on in the economy. We haven't been able to keep and maintain them, she commented. Our workload isn't going down. It just means our workload is more. It would be a real detriment to the county if we lose these positions. Mistakes happen if people are getting overworked, she said.

We can't say no to business.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam asked if most are leaving to move up the ladder?

Deputy Manager/H.R. Director Linda Corliss explained that there are different responsibilities (positions) within the D.A.'s office.

Overtime has skyrocketed over the last year as positions haven't been able to be filled, explained Manager/H.R. Director Corliss but we are seeing a trend showing more people are applying.

D.A. Slattery added that due to the difficulty in filling positions, office managers are doing legal secretary work. This is not efficient or a good use of manager positions. Budget Committee Member Lisa Pratt commented that as part of her criminal justice degree she worked with the clerk's office and D.A.'s office. She stated that the front line paperwork clerks are heroes needed to move the court system forward. They are very busy.

Budget Committee member Jonathan Martell amended his motion to move defunding one position instead of two. Susan Wiswell seconded the motion.

Vote – 1 vote for the motion (Jonathan Martell) Seven opposed. Motion failed.

Marc Lessard stated that the prior motion was to amend from two to one. We did not vote on the original motion.

Vote (on original motion)- All opposed. Motion failed.

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard stated that he is starting to see a trend.

Unless there is any other passion to have some other changes in the budget I would be happy to make a motion to approve the budget.

4. To vote on 'FY25 budget-

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard motioned to accept the fiscal budget as presented. James Smith seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: Budget Committee Member Jonathan Martell stated that he had one other item to discuss. He stated that he wanted to adjust COLA to 3%.

County Manager Zinser stated that this would affect 30 positions.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam stated that she did not see that he wanted to address the Board but that he did mention it early on.

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard withdrew his motion.
James Smith withdrew his second.

Jonathan Martell motioned to move the COLA for the non-union from 4% to 3% as a cost savings measure. Susan Wiswell seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam asked what number would be looking at? Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard replied, \$24,000 in rough math.

Budget Committee Member Lisa Pratt commented that in all of the budget committee members' town budgets most towns are looking at a 5% COLA so to stay competitive and keep retention, we should not reduce the COLA.

Budget Committee Member Susan Wiswell stated that she does not see it being fair to have unions at 4% and non-unions get 3%.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam cautioned if your start down that road, you could have line staff making more than the department heads.

Vote- 1- (Jonathan Martell) 7-opposed. Motion failed.

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard motioned to accept the 'FY 25 budget in the amount of \$25,163,972. Budget Committee Member James Smith seconded the motion.

Vote 7-1 with Jonathan Martell opposed.

5. Set Public Hearing Date and Time

Monday, June 10th

After a brief discussion it was decided to hold the Public Hearing on June 10, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

6. Public Comment(s)

Commissioner Clark stated having served eight years as a Commissioner and seven on the Budget Committee, he appreciates the members' time serving.

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard commented, *"We have been through some real drag out meetings in the past. We have taken out a lot from the very first budget that I've seen. Seeing this book now, I feel comfortable that there isn't a lot there as a fiscal conservative."*

He also stated that he appreciates the work done by the Commissioners and County Manager.

7. Adjourn

Budget Committee Member Becky Bowley adjourned the meeting. Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard seconded the motion. Vote 8-0.