

October 16, 2008

THE LINCOLN COUNTY NEWS, DAMARISCOTTA, MAINE

Advisory board Okays \$2.19 million for LSCO

By Greg Foster

The Lincoln County budget advisory committee approved law enforcement, emergency management/communications, and other budgets Tuesday during the second round of requests for a total \$10.3 million 2009 county budget.

Estimated revenues for the 2009 budget total \$1.3 million, thus the county anticipates a 9 million dollar bill for its taxpaying communities, with a few changes during the budget process, especially with more updated cost figures .as the yearend deadline approaches. The board also had a chance to quiz Corrections Administrator Mark Westrum about Lincoln County's \$2.71 million assessment for operation of Two Bridges "Regional Jail. Next year's total will run under the new state law cap at' the 2008 budget level of \$2.78 million. The statewide cap totals \$62.45 million.

Sheriff Todd Brackett presented his budget for the Sheriff's Office trimming it from an initial \$2.23 million down to \$2.19 million because of more recent changes, including a \$20,000 inmate transportation van he said cannot be paid for by taxpayers and a \$5000 typographical error. Brackett said a \$48,273 increase in the personnel services amount occurred because of an extra week this year of pay for the calendar year budgeting. "It happens once in a blue moon," he said. During the discussion, board members asked about the lines for fuel and gasoline, which have been so unpredictable this year; there was talk about lowering Brackett's worst case scenario gas cost of \$110,000 to \$95,000, but board member John Blarney, who is a Waldoboro selectman, urged otherwise to avoid a possible overdraft should there be another upturn in prices.

Brackett told the committee his department has been instructed to take minimum measures to reduce gas usage, by keeping tire air pressure up, avoiding unnecessary idling, avoiding going over the speed limit, and reducing the number of light bars on the police vehicles to reduce friction. He said "the department has also been using Motor Silk; a product developed by the U.S. Dept. of Energy that he said has increased gas mileage by at least two miles to the gallon and as much as four miles to the gallon for at least one vehicle, I feel this number (gas cost) can be reduced," he said.

As with all the final figures, the commissioners have the last say on the budget requests, since the advisory board is as the name implies, strictly advisory. However, questions raised about the requests or suggested cuts could make an impact on the final outcome as shown in past years. During the lengthy budget review, the board thanked Westrum for the explanation of the cost figures he presented Tuesday even though the state Dept. of Corrections followed by the Maine Legislature make the final approval of Two Bridges Regional Jail budget.

Revenue from federal and other county inmates have helped reduce operating costs this year, but Westrum wonders what will happen if the state sends more of its inmates to the jail and provides only \$21 per day per prisoner unlike its original agreement to provide \$85 per day. Westrum fears that number could even go to a zero amount given state finances, Meanwhile the jail takes in federal inmates at a high rate expected to go up to \$104 per day soon. He said the jail passed a recent U.S. Marshall's Office inspection with flying colors. This year has been unusual for the overall inmate count for Lincoln County compared to Sagadahoc County originally agreed to be a 57 to 43 split in cost-sharing, but tables have turned in recent months with Sagadahoc County housing more inmates at the jail, Westrum reported, "Lincoln County should be given a substantial rebate at the end of the year," he said. The money, however, cannot go to a general fund; it has to go to correctional purposes, according to Westrum.

Among other requests, Tim Pellerin presented the emergency management and telecommunications budgets, both of which have increased slightly. Pellerin received board approval for his requested \$143,303, which he reduced from the original \$143,381 request. Last year's budget totaled \$137,559. Pellerin said federal Emergency Management Planning Grant funding would reimburse the county for 50 percent of the budget this year, which actually means the operational cost to taxpayers will increase by 1.67 percent, Apart from the reimbursement, the overall budget represents a 4.23 per cent increase.

For telecommunications, which comprises the operational costs of the communications center and its 9-1-1 emergency function, the advisory board Okayed a total \$703,031 budget, including \$607,021 for personnel and \$58,960 for contractual services.

Pellerin spoke about the problem the communications center, faces in the future with more arid more requirements for certification for communications officers making it difficult for part-timers, who have to spend their vacations for their regular job on update training, "Today it's all computer generated," he said.