

I want to begin by recognizing today's announcement that the Chair of the Waldo County Commissioners, Betty Johnson, has passed away. Betty served as a Commissioner representing District 1 for the last 16 years and most recently held the position of Commission Chair for at least four (and possible more) years. Throughout her lifetime, Betty was active in politics and demonstrated a deep commitment to meeting the needs of the people of Maine, and more specifically, those residing in Waldo County. May she rest in peace.

Special Commission Meeting held Monday, January 5: On short notice, Commissioners Kevin Kelley and Tim Parker held a meeting on Monday afternoon to discuss the status of internal deliberations regarding revisions to the proposed 2026 County Budget. I could not attend, but Jay Davis (retired reporter from The Republican Journal and Waldo Independent) did, and the Commissioners permitted him to listen to their discussions. According to Jay, Kevin reported that he had met with a number of County department heads to identify areas where budgets potentially could be reduced. He indicated that he hoped the Commissioners would be able to achieve a bottom line of "under \$15 million" (which by my rough calculation would represent a 17% increase over the approved 2025 budget). Towards the end of the meeting Kevin and Tim held an Executive Session to deal with a personnel issue.

Shift of January 2, 2026, Payroll back into December 2025: At a special meeting held shortly before Christmas, the Commissioners made the decision to move the payroll payment scheduled for January 2, 2026, back to December 30 or 31, 2025. While this action might, on paper, lower personnel costs for 2026, it's unclear what effect it might have upon the bottom line (net revenue vs expenditures) in 2025.

WC Commissioners Regular Court Session set for Thursday, January 8 at 10:00 am: The first regular Commission meeting of January will take place at 10:00 am this Thursday in the County offices at 39b Spring Street, Belfast. The agenda for the meeting has just been posted tonight. There will be the normal opportunity for short public comments near the start of the meeting (don't be late or you may miss it!), Beyond the regular business items, I had expected that there would be an extensive budget discussion between the Commissioners and possibly staff, but oddly enough, there is no agenda item concerning the proposed 2026 Budget. There will be an online connection to the meeting (for the link, see the County website at [waldocountyme.gov](http://waldocountyme.gov)). In an email today, Kevin Kelley informed me that he and Tim Parker voted yesterday to restore the policy of attaching the videos of Commission meetings alongside the agendas and minutes for each meeting, allowing community members and County staff the option of viewing meetings after they have taken place. Good news.

Waldo County Budget Committee meeting on Friday, January 9 from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm (if necessary): As it turns out, this meeting is being held in the same spot as the public hearing in December — the Probate Court at 103 Church Street, Belfast (just around the corner from the County Commission offices). I wrote today to Bob Kurek, Palermo Select Board member and current Chair of the Waldo County Budget Committee, to address three items:

1. Meeting location: Given the number of people (125+) who showed up for the public hearing in mid-December, there were not enough seats to accommodate everyone (some had to sit on the floor, others stood at the back) and some people had difficulty hearing the remarks of Commissioners and Budget Committee members. There were assurances that the County would find a better location for future meetings. Since that did not happen, I asked that many more chairs be provided and a sound system be used to amplify speaker voices.
2. Advance materials: I asked that an agenda for the meeting and any related documents be made

available to the public via the County website at least a day before the meeting.

3. Public comments: When I met briefly last week with Barbara Arseneau, County Clerk, she pointed out that since this was a regular Budget Committee meeting there might not be the opportunity for public questions and comments. I wrote to Bob as I commented to Barbara, given the number of people that showed up to the public hearing in December and the level of angst that still surrounds the proposed 2026 County Budget, I certainly would hope that the Committee will find a way to enable those in attendance to ask questions and/or share their comments.

**I hope that as many Town select board members and City Councilors as possible, along with residents, appear at this Friday evening's Waldo County Budget Committee meeting to demonstrate their serious concerns about the proposed double-digit growth in the 2026 Waldo County budget and its very substantial impact upon taxpayers, especially low- and moderate-income individuals and families.**

David Augusts' Substack Column on Waldo County Government: Some of you may be familiar with David August, who is a "citizen journalist" who writes regularly about local government issues — often related to the City of Belfast, but also the RSU71 School Board and the Waldo County Commission. Later tonight or early tomorrow morning, David will post on his Substack page a column about Waldo County government that, in part, is based upon my observations in monitoring the meetings and actions of the Waldo County Commissioners over the past two and a half years. I encourage you to read it because it raises with a number of issues that many of you may be unaware of if you didn't have reason to pay very close attention. Go online to Substack, find David August, and subscribe to his site (there's no cost involved, and you can cancel at any time). I believe that you find that David is an excellent thinker and writer who consistently draws attention to important local issues that are worth considering.

I hope to see many of you at the Commission's Regular Court Session on Thursday, January 8 at 10:00 am and, even more importantly, at the Waldo County Budget Committee on Friday, January 9 at 6:00 pm. Remember, in the case of Waldo County, the Commissioners propose the 2026 Budget but it is the Waldo County Budget Committee that approves what they arrive at as the final 2026 County Budget.