

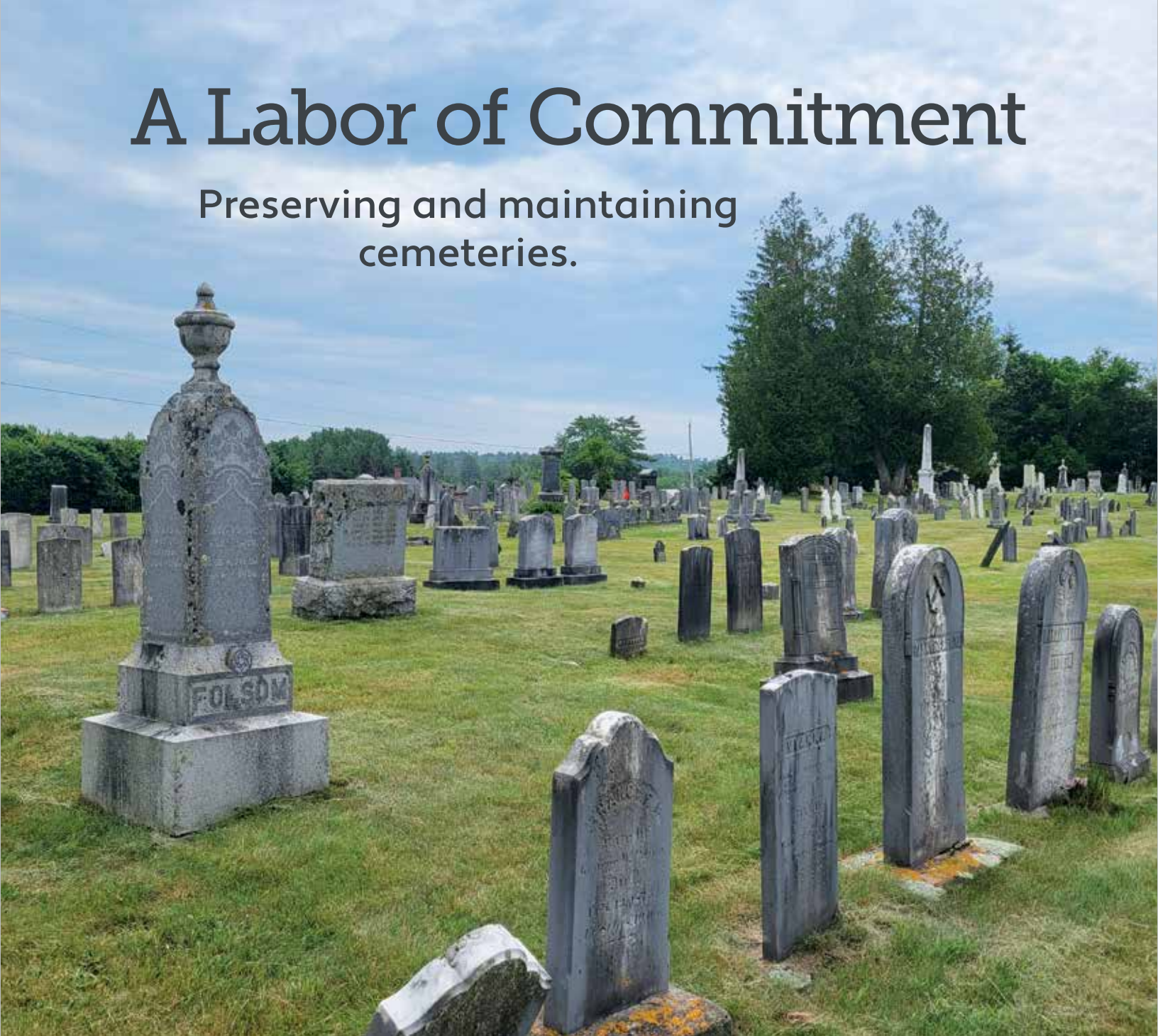
Maine Town & City

The magazine of the Maine Municipal Association

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A Labor of Commitment

Preserving and maintaining
cemeteries.



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

RMS RISK MANAGER | Q&A WITH SUZIE PARADIS | CLERKS DISH ON NOVEMBER ELECTION



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Shelly Crosby



Amanda Shelmerdine



Darci Wheeler

In this issue

MELISSA DOANE, BRADLEY TOWN MANAGER, discusses the priorities of focus during her term as MMA president. Improving MMA communications with members, finding ways to increase community engagement, and ensuring that all municipal voices are heard, top the list. **Page 5**

PRESERVING & MAINTAINING CEMETERIES. These open-air museums, hundreds of which dot Maine’s landscape, are no different than the historic documents that line climate-controlled libraries. However, the preservation and maintenance of cemeteries falls, primarily, on the shoulders of volunteers, who are committed to preserving this piece of history. **Page 7**

NOVEMBER 2024 ELECTION. The Maine Town & City spoke with the municipal clerks from Augusta, Bath, Millinocket, Monson, Orono, and Rumford, who agreed that a combination of advance preparation and public education were key to conducting a smooth election. **Page 11**

Q&A WITH SUZIE PARADIS. The 2023 MTCMA Rising Star award recipient, Suzie Paradis, discusses her municipal career, which began in Madawaska. The now Fort Kent town manager shares that the keys to success are simply an open-door policy, willingness to listen, and the ability to accept constructive feedback. **Page 19**

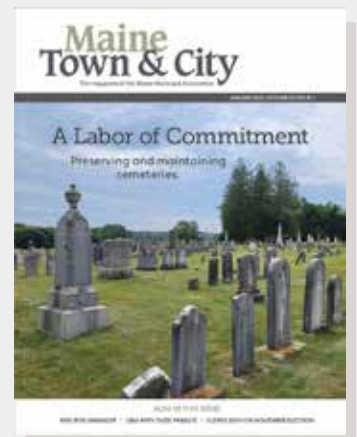
PROFILES OF SERVICES. This month the Town & City turns its attention to Amanda Shelmerdine, the Town of Warren’s cemetery sexton. Shelmerdine, described as “a wicked good person and very, very civic minded,” simply wants to be the voice of those who can no longer speak. **Page 21**

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ABOUT THE COVER

A beautiful view from the Town of Alna cemetery. *(Photo by Laurie Hiestand)*



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Well, hello 2025!

By Melissa Doane / Manager, Town of Bradley



Let me start by saying that I am tremendously honored to serve as the President of the Maine Municipal Association. I have been on the Executive Committee (EC) since 2017, and while at first, I found the experience daunting—honestly, it still can be—it is very rewarding to be in the company of many dedicated individuals who not only understand municipal government but are passionate about it.

The membership survey sent out in the spring of 2024 showed member satisfaction with MMA’s programs and services and generated many new ideas and suggestions that the EC and staff are excited to implement. Thank you to all who participated in the survey and have communicated their needs and wants to us. One thing that the survey did not need to tell us is that local government in the 207 rocks!

While serving on the EC, I learned quickly that the board’s challenges are very similar to those we experience in our respective municipalities, large or small—it is about balancing the need to maintain and enhance services with stabilizing dues/taxes. There is no magic tax or dues rate. Like you, the EC works diligently on the budget and searches for efficiencies to provide members with better programs and services. While, as municipal leaders, we rightfully focus on the needs of our communities, at MMA, a slightly different approach is at play as staff and the EC focus on ALL municipal issues and needs. We know in the municipal world that what may be an issue for one town or city is not an issue for another. All those issues are ours at MMA, and we take them head-on.

The members’ survey revealed that MMA needs to formulate plans to engage with our smaller communities and actively communicate with elected officials. We must inform elected officials about the fantastic peer-to-peer opportunities that municipal government offers. In 2025, we will navigate how to make professional development opportunities more accessible to municipal employees and find a way to better communicate with all of you. These communication tools include creating member profiles in our database to highlight interactions with MMA, providing more free informational sessions, hosting additional “MMA for the Day” events in a neighborhood near you, and continuing to make the website more user-friendly and accessible.

One of my goals for the coming year is to work with the EC to explore ways to involve more people with different municipal titles in the decision-making processes of MMA. In 2023, changes were made to the bylaws that promote more diversity on the EC board by amending the members appointed to the nominating committee, which is tasked with

advancing the slate of candidates to serve on the EC. The change allows for the appointment of a representative from a community-based organization serving the interests of a marginalized group. If we truly desire more diversity, let’s expand the list of municipal officials eligible to serve on the EC. While town and city managers and elected officers are essential to municipal government, so are our clerks, public works directors, treasurers, assistants...heck, we all are. The EC will tackle this challenge with the goal of ensuring the association’s governing board maintains its effectiveness by remaining small while allowing for additional input from other municipal employees.

Since joining the EC, I’ve jumped on the soapbox of promoting civic engagement and finding ways to get people more involved in their local government. Getting the public to participate effectively, or at all, can be difficult. Local government is where the good stuff happens, and local officials can make significant changes to benefit the local citizenry. MMA is looking to create programs that promote civility and showcase how cool local government is, or if it is not, how it can be.

The year 2025 brings the legislative “long” session. The Legislative Policy Committee (LPC) and MMA’s advocates will work hard to protect municipal interests. MMA is committed to working with legislative leaders in 2025 and 2026 so that we can all effectively do what we are charged to do: serve the people of Maine. Your voice will be needed when the session starts, as testimony from municipal officials is a highly effective tool in the legislative process. I have already contacted my district’s senator and representatives and encourage you to do the same.

To quote the advice offered by The Beatles, or depending on music preferences, Joe Cocker, we “get by with a little help from...friends,” whether they are working for Maine people at the state or municipal level. We are all in this together.

I am really looking forward to 2025 and to communicating with so many of you. See you soon! 🏔️



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Preserving Access and Maintaining Cemeteries

Truly a labor of love, volunteer groups and associations, are largely responsible for the proper maintenance of Maine's "open-air" museums.

By Betty Adams

Alna cemetery at dusk. (Photo by Laurie Hiestand)

A **FLEDGLING GROUP** created by a 2021 law has begun efforts to sort out who has the responsibility and the privilege of caring for those interred in Maine's oldest cemeteries. The volunteers appointed to the Maine State Cemetery Preservation Commission (commission) represent organizations that need to know the information: Maine Town & City Clerks Association (MTCCA), Maine Municipal Association (MMA), Maine Old Cemetery Association (MOCA), Maine Cemetery Association, Maine Funeral Directors Association, Maine Historical Society, Maine Bureau of Veterans Services and Maine Association of Realtors.

According to the commission's mission statement, its members "commit ourselves to ensuring all Maine cemetery laws are adhered to by those associated or involved in activities and actions occurring in Maine cemeteries" and "pledge to encourage and ensure that all those overseeing Maine cemeteries and burying grounds do the same to provide and preserve a peaceful, reverent, and respectful atmosphere in all Maine's cemeteries and burying grounds so that the living may commune with the dead at those hallowed places."

Part of their role is to educate municipalities, property owners and owners of the burying grounds and cemeteries, about applicable laws, including one that applies to veterans' graves.

North Yarmouth Town Clerk Debbie Allen Grover is the clerk who manages three municipal cemeteries in that town and represents MTCCA on the commission, a post she has held since 2022.

"I think the cemetery preservation commission's goal is to help not just municipalities but all cemeteries – whoever is in charge – with proper record keeping, proper care and preservation of their cemeteries," she said. "There's still municipalities out there that aren't aware that they are technically required to maintain a veteran's grave if it's in their cemetery."

Grover, who is also a member of the Maine Cemetery As-

sociation and the New England Cemetery Association, began her work with cemeteries about 15 years ago when she held the role of deputy clerk in North Yarmouth and was named clerk of the town cemeteries. The three cemetery commissioners were usually unavailable during the workday, so she helped coordinate things from the town office.

A U.S. Postal Service carrier who served on a private cemetery board in Cumberland County suggested that Grover join the Maine Cemetery Association to help with the learning process. "It was absolutely tremendous because I literally had to create some of my burial records because they just didn't exist with the information I was given," Grover said.

She encourages networking with other people and other communities to see how the cemeteries are managed elsewhere. Grover said she gets good ideas from that networking, including how to find an affordable software package to keep track of graves. "It's so diverse across the state of Maine as to how each municipality handles their situation."

Grover said record-keeping is key, including date of interment, date of death and age of the deceased. "If I can locate an obituary, I attach that to my burial information," she said. "I can attach a copy of the map and where they're buried within the cemetery."

All three municipal cemeteries in the town remain in use although the smallest has only one burial plot remaining.

The earliest recorded burial in North Yarmouth is from 1793, and in recent years, the town has had anywhere between 15 and four interments annually. "They come in waves," Grover said, noting that the pandemic brought an increase in both sales of plots and interments.

One duty in particular Grover attends to personally: placing American flags on each veteran's grave for Memorial Day. Some years she's assisted by members of the fire and rescue department.

In 2014, she was able to obtain monuments for five veterans who had never had them, including one for a Revolutionary War soldier, two for Civil War soldiers, one for a veteran of the War of 1812 and one for a World War I veteran.

About the Author: Betty Adams is a freelance writer from Augusta and regular contributor to Maine Town & City. adamsbetty00@gmail.com



Laurie Hiestand



Debbie Allen Grover



Julie Cromwell and Helen Shaw

Maine law governs “Decoration of veterans’ graves on Memorial Day” and says, “Each municipality, as directed by its municipal officers, annually shall decorate on the day Memorial Day is observed the graves of veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States of America with an American flag and appropriate flag holders.” In the unorganized townships, the responsibility falls to the county.

While North Yarmouth contracts out its interment work, other municipalities do it themselves. The City of Bath’s website, for instance, notes that the Parks & Recreation Department administers burials in the city cemeteries. It also says, “The mission of the Cemeteries and Parks Department is to maintain and improve the properties entrusted to us and to provide the most respectful burials possible.”

“Who owns a cemetery is a huge issue,” said Helen A. Shaw, of Rockport, chair of the commission. She is a past president of the Maine Genealogical Society and legislative liaison for MOCA, which works to preserve old private cemeteries – ancient burying grounds created before 1880.

The latter group was founded in 1968 and counts “more than 1,000 members from forty-odd states and several Canadian provinces,” according to its website which also says, “MOCA volunteers have gathered burial information, directions, and other data on over 7,100 cemeteries. The result of MOCA’s work to preserve and care for Maine’s neglected cemeteries provides invaluable information to families in search of their roots. To the ardent genealogist, the transcriptions taken from the gravestones and entered into (the) database are gems.”

The Maine Cemetery Association membership generally deals with newer and public cemeteries. That organization’s website says, “Our membership includes directors and superintendents of municipal, private and religious cemeteries throughout the state as well as vendors who help us do our jobs. We are responsible for the operation and maintenance of many cemeteries both large and small.”

In 2021, Shaw submitted testimony in support of a bill establishing that state commission: “The concept of a State Cemetery Commission grew out of the frustration of stake-

holders to accomplish much in the way of changing Maine laws to better protect and preserve burying grounds and cemeteries and to allow family members and descendants access to the graves of their loved ones . . . Maine has a robust network of associations that have worked to preserve and protect burying grounds and cemeteries for decades, LD 379 would use that base to bring into existence a commission that would facilitate the identification and preservation of burying grounds and cemeteries located throughout Maine.”

The bill was successful, and an amendment adopted in the next legislative session provided a funding mechanism: “The Cemetery Preservation Commission Fund, referred to in this section as ‘the fund,’ is established as a nonlapsing account into which is deposited, on a quarterly basis, \$5 of the fee established by the Department of Health and Human Services for a permit to transport and dispose of a dead human body. The commission may use the money in the fund to carry out its duties.”

That money is expected to begin arriving later in 2025 and may be used to support an executive director and staff among other things. The commission too was preparing to launch a website that will begin to offer educational information on such things as searching deeds to find out ownership of older cemeteries, particularly those established by families, and ways to solve problems gaining access to private family cemeteries.

Shaw also said the group hopes to come up with a definition of proper maintenance of graves as well because repair or replacement of damaged gravestones can be expensive. Grover, Shaw and Julie Cromwell, who represents the Maine Association of Realtors and serves as commission secretary, made a presentation about the new commission at MMA’s 88th Annual Convention in October.

When the Alna town office hears from people seeking information about the Alna Cemetery – either to arrange for an interment or to find the location of someone buried there – Town Clerk Sarah Perkins directs them to Laurie Hiestand, president of the Alna Cemetery Corporation.

Occasionally researchers also need the aid of Doreen Conboy, the town archivist. The cemetery was set up as a municipal cemetery but was transferred to a corporation in 1909 with a \$200 endowment, Hiestand said. She refers to it today as a quasi-municipal operation, noting that occasionally the corporation requests funding at the annual Town Meeting for special projects at the cemetery. (There are several privately owned cemeteries as well in Alna, a town with a population of about 1,500 people.)

She joined the Alna Cemetery Corporation in 2019. "I'm fascinated with history and I have a loved one there," she said. Initially she was vice president, but the other board members resigned in May 2020. "Their concern was that they didn't know what they were doing, record-keeping was very poor, and they had a giant map duct-taped together."

So, she became president of a new board whose members have remained to work on updating by-laws, creating procedures and forms for those who want to buy a plot, and ensuring cemetery maintenance. The corporation also has acquired insurance.

"There are some cemetery rules we have to go by," she said. "We found out that the Alna Cemetery had never been registered with the state. It was not on record. We got their approval, but how would you know this stuff?"

Every deed for a plot is now recorded and Hiestand is working to fill in a 17-year gap for which there are no records.

The oldest grave of a soldier in the Alna Cemetery is that of Revolutionary War Capt. James Hodge, 1730-1790, and the oldest grave with a stone is that of Ednah Hunt, 1729-1790.

In the town's 2023-2024 Annual Report of Municipal Officers, the cemetery corporation noted that it planned to do a survey of the entire cemetery to "properly plot the rest of our maps so we have accurate gravesite information."

That information would also help with siting a fence at the rear so the entire cemetery could be fenced in, Hiestand said, something one of the previous deeds mentions.

Two members of the corporation, Vice President Jon Luoma and Treasurer Tom Aldrich took drone photographs "to create a complete listing of every single grave with the name," Hiestand said. "We have some of those records, but it's not complete."

So far, they've learned the cemetery is 5.6 acres and about two-thirds of it is sold. "Because of the more recent acquisitions, we have more burial space," she said. Those interred in the Alna Cemetery on Route 218 generally have ties to the town.

Hiestand is a member of the Maine Old Cemetery Association as well.

If there's to be an interment in the Alna Cemetery, Hiestand usually meets the family there and puts in metal markers. A contractor from Nobleboro digs the grave with a backhoe. She also notifies a neighbor of the burial time so there's no tractor noise.

Hiestand noted that the cemetery now has a conservation easement around it.

"There's always geese flying overhead and turkeys in the field. We've been planting trees and flowering shrubs, we want to make it a place people want to go to, we want to make it a community space."

She pointed to the Town of Weld, as an example, where the Mountain View Cemetery holds a party annually for people who have plots there so they can meet each other.

Perkins, the Alna town clerk, said, "The Alna Cemetery Corporation does a wonderful job, and the cemetery always looks beautiful. They look toward the future needs of the cemetery whether it's more land or fencing or signage. Their latest project was to enhance the roads that go throughout the cemetery."

Perkins previously was tax collector in Pittston and currently is a member of the Budget Committee there. Pittston, she noted, has multiple cemeteries: private, association and municipal. "In Pittston, the cemetery information, record-keeping, and mapping, is all at the Town Office," she said. "There's a lot of sharing information." 🏞️



The oldest grave of a soldier in the Alna Cemetery, Revolutionary War Capt. James Hodge, 1730-1790
(Photo by Laurie Hiestand)

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Reflections on the 2024 November Election

While participation rates were high, from the perspective of six municipal clerks it simply was an election.

By Stephanie Bouchard

WITH THE 2024 ELECTION FORECAST to be a historic one, MMA wanted to hear from clerks before and after Election Day to find out how things were going and how they went. Six clerks – Beth Bellegarde from Rumford, Shelly Crosby from Orono, Martha Gagnon from Monson, Kelly Gooldrup from Augusta, Diana Lakeman from Millinocket, and Darci Wheeler from Bath, volunteered to participate. Their answers, edited for space and clarity, are below.

Before the election:

MMA: What are you looking forward to (and not just for the election to be over!)?

Beth: We always look forward to making sure that what we do is done to the best of our ability; not making poor choices by being well-trained; and sometimes informing people to try to help them understand the process without pushing it on them.

Shelly: I am looking forward to seeing everyone, and to the energy of the day because elections are exciting.

Martha: It being over.

Kelly: I am looking forward to the week after.

Diana: I am looking forward to breathing easy while seeing the election safety procedures come to fruition on Election Day and providing a worry-free safe zone polling place experience for all election workers, poll watchers, and participating election day voters.

Darci: I really look forward to seeing the community – that whole coming together piece of an election, that’s what I love, and I look forward to.

MMA: What are your challenges?

Beth: I had to recruit a new voter registrar who was mostly trained, and we have had some office

personnel changes, so I’ve had to step in and help train them. Those kinds of things take away from the energy and the efforts you can put in toward election.

Shelly: We used to vote at the New Balance Field House (at the University of Maine) but because of construction projects and infrastructure changes near the Field House complex, we are voting at the Collins Center for the Arts. At the Field House, there’s one big floor, but at the Collins Center, the floor is set up like a horseshoe, which means that I have to split attendees, with those needing to register going to the left and everyone else going to the right.

Another big issue is several state agencies are instituting brand new processes, brand new databases, which require a lot of training time in the middle of us just trying to survive the election – and not just any election, but a contentious presidential election with a lot of absentee voting. It creates a lot of frustration.

Martha: There’s an awful lot of absentee ballots and early voting. That creates a challenge because we get a little bit overrun with that stuff and it’s sometimes hard to get anything else done.

Kelly: We’ve been short-staffed and very busy with absentee voting. Also, getting enough workers for Election Day has been challenging, and getting the balance between parties has been difficult.

Diana: As many clerks do, we wear many hats, and the November election comes at the busiest time pertaining to office duties. This year was exceptionally busy with many changes and updates required for state agency procedures. Many required last minute trainings, all while we were handling one of the highest volumes of requests for absentee voting.

Darci: I would say the challenge is making sure everybody feels confident in the election and making

sure that they know that I care about it and want to make sure that it's secure and I'm going to do my job to the best of my ability.

Another challenge is getting equal numbers of workers from the parties. This is a highly Democratic city, so I don't have as many Republicans.

MMA: How are you preparing? Are you doing anything different than you have from previous elections, and if so, what is different and why are you doing it differently?

Beth: We were able to call in some of our ballot clerks early to help us with stuffing ballots and stuff like that. I had never done that before.

Shelly: I am bringing in election clerks every single day. I've actually had to increase my part-time wages, and I am literally leaning on my election clerks to come in and on the ground, learn a new skill and help us because there's no way that just myself and two other staff members can manage this type of flow and register cars and answer the phone and everything else that happens in a clerk's office.

Martha: Preparation is pretty much the same. But, I will have extra counting teams come in. Usually I'll have an extra team; I'm having two extra teams this time.

Kelly: Not really. It's just on a bigger level.

Diana: Preparing as I usually do, working efficiently and effectively, month to month, week to week, and mostly day by day, as the election process starts well before the election commercials and ends well into the new year. I start preparing mentally for the election calendar of requirements/mandates that must be followed when we received our first mailings in July 2024 from the secretary of state.

Darci: I'm doing more focused training, especially taking the time to work with people with specific duties where errors tend to happen, like checking names off the incoming voter list when they've voted.

MMA: What, if any, concerns/worries do you have about this election? Are these different from previous elections, and if so, how are they different/why are they different?

Beth: We've never had anything happen in the town of Rumford that makes me worry that something might happen this time. But we do have three police officers at the polling place because we've

had to move to a school, which we've never done before.

Shelly: The logistics of the new location.

Martha: I really don't.

Kelly: I don't know if I'd say security as much as there's going to be a lot of passionate people out there and I'm just afraid that somebody may be making a scene, and it could escalate things. I think everybody is on a heightened security level right now, even voters coming out for absentee voting seem nervous.

Diana: I don't have any safety concerns. I do have faith in our community that they will conduct themselves in a respectful manner toward my election clerks and other voters during their voting experience.

Darci: I'm not concerned because I know my residents. I recognize them and as we get to talking, there's a sort of connection. I think that's huge.

MMA: What are you hearing from residents about the election?

Beth: I haven't heard a lot of complaining. Ranked choice voting is always a little difficult for people, but there aren't a lot of people who have mentioned it. A lot of people are saying they feel like they don't really have a good choice.

Shelly: That they're tired. That they don't trust the media and don't know who to vote for because they don't trust anything. They just think that the system – not the election system but government in general – is broken.

Martha: People aren't super vocal here. Basically, just that they feel like it's just going to be crazy and that the world is crazy and that no matter who wins the election, everything's probably going to get crazier.

Kelly: Each party is nervous about the other party – trying something not to hurt people, but to delay or make difficult the results or for us to be able to go through our whole process on Election Day, and they're very concerned about accuracy.

Diana: Most residents thank us for all that we do, appreciating our dedication while noting their faith in our conduct in the election procedures. We have a great community, very respectful and supportive of the election staff and its process.

Darci: They all want to vote. That's what I'm hearing right now: "Can we vote? Is it time to vote?"

After the election:

MMA: How did it go? Did everything go as you expected, or were there any unexpected situations?

Beth: In a nutshell, it went okay. Unrelated to the election, there was a nearby emergency and a shelter-in-place order for a couple of hours. That was not fun. But election-wise, we had a line of new voters almost as long as the voting people in line to get a ballot at times during the day. I could have used more help, not for the ballots and that kind of thing, just for assisting people, like if they needed a place to sit or if they had issues on how to put the ballots in the machine.

Shelly: It went very smoothly because we made some logistical changes, which I think aided us in our ability to move our residents through quickly at the Collins Center. Before the election, the decision was made to completely shut down the roadway that surrounds the Collins Center and redirect traffic. And we had a lot of volunteers who were outside the doors and in the entryway to help guide voters into which area of the building they needed to go. So we didn't have any of the bottlenecks or any of the concerns that I had initially.

Martha: Very smooth and uneventful. It's kind of always like that here.

Kelly: Everything went great. We had no negative events, staffing was adequate, safety/security was not an issue after all.

Diana: I wasn't expecting to have no time at all to process absentees during the day. The booths were constantly in rotation. We did have to hold a few times throughout the day. At the busiest part of the day, it was possibly a 25 to 30 minute wait from beginning to end.

Darci: It went better than expected. I was expecting a lot more questions about how things were being done, but there wasn't as much as I thought there would be. I was pleased about that because I felt like I had done enough education that people weren't questioning me. I was also surprised by my voter registration turnout. I had over just over 500 voter registrations or changes.

MMA: How many voters turned out?

Beth: About 2,800. We actually had less voters this year than we did four years ago, by about a hundred, or so. We opened our absentee ballots to process them on Friday. We started at 9 a.m. and got done

at 6 p.m. We processed a little more than a thousand. The day of the election, we got out around 1:30 a.m. because there were six write-ins. That took us a long time.

Shelly: We had roughly 5,460, maybe a thousand less than what I expected. We were there until about 12:30 a.m. On Oct. 30th, we hosted an in-person absentee voting day and voter registration at the university (of Maine in Orono) and we had 370 kids register to vote and over 600 absentee ballots cast. So in the week before the election, we were 60-plus hours just trying to handle the volume, and I was bringing in at least eight to 10 workers daily to try to keep up with the influx.

Martha: We had 525 this time, which is more than we've ever had, and it was very steady all day, getting quieter toward the evening. We ended up having 128 absentees, which I think also was the most probably we've ever had. The end of the day stuff took a lot longer because there were so many to open. The ballot clerks finished their counting and had everything handed into the warden probably by around midnight, and then the warden and myself were there until probably about 1:30 a.m.

Kelly: We had approximately 78% voter turnout, which included over 50% of that being early voting/absentee. It was about what was expected. Due to the declared write-ins for two races, it took a couple of extra hours than hoped.

Diana: 2,684 for Millinocket, that's not including the townships. That is the highest that I've seen as a town clerk. It was a 21-hour-day for me. It was so busy that we didn't open our absentees ahead of time. We really started about 7 p.m. when it started to slow down. We were scanning absentees until about 1 a.m.

Darci: I was discouraged because it felt like it was an over 80% day, but it was only at 64%. I had set aside Friday and Saturday to process absentees but only needed Friday and a couple of hours on Saturday. On election day, everything was in by 2:30 a.m.

MMA: What was the vibe from residents?

Beth: There were a few problematic attitudes, but nothing that was a real issue. Basically, people were pretty good.

Shelly: People were really excited and they were shocked. They were showing up expecting that they could be there for a long time, and the fact that they were able to show up and walk right in and vote was kind of a bit surreal.

Martha: Everybody seemed to be in a very good mood. Everybody was really happy to see such a good turnout and just thought it was great that everybody was coming out.

Kelly: Residents seemed pleasant and only one polling location seemed to have a steady line due to the space being small and limited.

Diana: I would say the majority of them were appreciative of us being there. There weren't any controversial things that I was aware of going on. I know a lot of people got antsy having to wait in line.

Darci: The vibe was pretty good. Nobody likes to wait in line, but I think that is one good thing that the pandemic has taught us: You've got to wait. I didn't see people walking away.

MMA: Does anything stand out to you about the day?

Beth: We had a lot of kids from the high school come and register to vote because we were right there, so that was really nice. It was good for them to see the process.

Shelly: We've always had a police presence at our elections, but what we did differently this time was that we actually had police working the polls. We brought in campus police and Orono PD. We had police officers inside the building and outside the building, some of them were dressed in uniform, some of them were plainclothes officers, and they learned about and worked the election. By doing that, we were able to anticipate and/or take care of any issues as they happened, so we didn't have any incidences or anyone upset throughout the entire day.

Martha: Nothing really in particular stands out.

Kelly: Election staff worked well together at each polling location and voters were very patient and pleasant.

Diana: This may be weird, but it was strange to me how the lines of people waiting in the A to L and M through Z alternated. At 8 a.m., both lines were busy, but by 10 a.m., line M through Z was busy but hardly anyone was in line A to L, then later, it was the reverse, and it alternated like that all day long.

Darci: It was amazing to see so many workers from Bath Iron Works. It was actually exciting to know that they were voting and probably for many of them their first time. A lot of them didn't have the proper stuff that they needed, so we had to do oaths and do the challenges and things like that. They waited probably 45 minutes in a line, but they were all very good.

MMA: Do you have any thoughts/takeaways from this election that you can apply to future elections?

Beth: I need to figure out how to train people more so that they're ready for all the different situations that can arise.

Shelly: I didn't run out of ballots, but I was getting dangerously close, and I didn't have enough machines or enough blue boxes to handle the volume. So, I definitely am going to look at adding more machines and more resources to handle the volume. And logistically, there were a lot of spoiled ballots that day. I think the issue was we had multiple voting styles. We had ranked choice voting, and then we had popular vote, and the state had put the ranked choice voting on the reverse side of the popular vote. That seemed to really confuse the voters. I think if the state had taken the two ballots that were popular vote and they had put them on the same ballot and then let the ranked choice ballot stand alone as its own ballot, I think that would've helped reduce the number of mistakes that were made.

Martha: I'd say it was pretty much par for the course, and just hearing other things around the country that went on, it just made me extra glad to be here.

Kelly: No.

Diana: In terms of absentee voting for the next presidential, I will definitely utilize the time better and do an early processing because that was a long day.

Darci: I want to make sure that everybody is comfortable and believes in the process, so going forward, I know that what really needs to happen in my community is make sure that the education piece is there. 🏔️

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A PUBLICATION OF THE MAINE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION

JANUARY 2025

A Message from the Director of MMA Risk Management Services

As we start a new year, Risk Management Services (RMS) wanted to provide an update on the successes achieved and challenges faced in 2024, as we implemented the Maine Municipal Association's (MMA) Property & Casualty, Workers' Compensation, and Unemployment Compensation programs and services.

MMA's Property & Casualty Pool (P&C Pool)

In May, MMA's P&C Pool governing board approved the purchase of an Active Shooter and Malicious Attack and Acts of Terrorism and Sabotage policy. This coverage is exclusively for and shared by all members of the P&C Pool at no additional expense, which increases access to needed protections without shifting additional burdens onto the property taxpayers.

The board also approved distributing \$600,000 in dividends in 2026 for the 2024-2025 coverage term.

The increasing value of member-owned property continues to impact each member's contributions to the pool. However, in 2024 Risk Management Services was able to negotiate favorable reinsurance rates for its 483 members with over \$7 billion in assets covered by the P&C Pool. This has allowed the association to stabilize rates for its members. Additionally, the pool partnered with NLC Mutual Insurance Company, which funded a portion of the reinsurance expenses. NLC Mutual is a member-owned and governed organization that provides each participating member with an equal voice in directing the execution of this mission. Since I was designated as a member of its board of directors, MMA has a voice in the discussions and decisions made that could impact the pool's membership. Additionally, I was also recently appointed to the NLC-RISC Board of Directors.

As many of our members have experienced in their own communities, climate change has led to more frequent and severe weather events, which in turn has increased the strain on the P&C Pool and put additional pressure on internal resources. Several members reported damages to vital facilities and infrastructure during the December 2023 storm, and then reported additional damages after the back-to-back storms in January

of 2024. As a result, the combined number of claims reported was 250 with costs of over \$2.5 million incurred. The claims team managed to maintain member service at the same level despite the record-breaking number of claims that resulted from these multiple weather events.



Michelle Pelletier

MMA Workers' Compensation Fund (WC Fund)

After the WC Fund board met in November 2024, we were pleased to report a rate decrease for 2025, which will impact members with favorable experiences. The board also approved distributing \$725,000 in dividends in 2027 for the 2025-2026 coverage term.

The board continues to support the safety of its membership and approved expanded funding for the Ed MacDonald Safety Enhancement and Scholarship Grant program. RMS staff encourage members to review the update and to take full advantage of this grant.

Staff would also like to highlight the Workers' Compensation Safety Incentive Program (WCSIP), which was initially implemented in 2020. Currently, the 140 members that have enrolled in this voluntary program earn contribution credits by demonstrating their commitment to a safe workplace through compliance with established criteria. In the first three years of the program, participating members saved nearly \$1.9 million annually and decreased average annual net incurred losses by \$3.6 million. All members are highly encouraged to enroll in this voluntary program, so they too can receive a financial reward for committing to creating and maintaining a safe workplace.

MMA Unemployment Compensation Fund (UC Fund)

The UC Fund board met in December 2024 and staff were pleased to report that the claims experience for this program remained stable. Under this program, RMS manages the

cont'd on page 16



A Message from RMS Property & Casualty Pool and Workers' Compensation Fund Claims Teams

The frequency and cost of claims against municipalities and governmental entities have increased significantly in recent years for just about every type of claim, from workers' compensation to property damage to cyber breaches to professional liability and catastrophic events. But, through our partnership and your participation in the Property & Casualty Pool and the Workers' Compensation Fund, we have taken great strides to disrupt the trend of increased costs and instead focus on safety, health and loss reduction. The RMS Claims Team would like to offer the following recommendations to help us all be safe and productive.

- 1. UNDERSTAND YOUR COVERAGE:** Review your coverage and know what's covered and what isn't; clarify what information is required to process a claim and when notification is due.
- 2. IDENTIFY POINTS OF CONTACT AND SECURE IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS:** A claim often requires the attention of multiple individuals within the affected organization. Identify key players from operations, human resources, accounting and finance, management, and risk management, who could be critical to the claims process and could hold key documents.
- 3. PROVIDE PROPER NOTICE OF A CLAIM:** Provide proper notice immediately! Too often entities make the mistake of waiting until the end of the policy year to submit a list of potential claims issues. This can jeopardize coverage or hinder and delay the claims administration process. Proper communication with your adjuster throughout the claims process is critical to a successful outcome.

If a property or casualty claim has occurred, and you have provided notice, it is important to implement the following measures within the next 24 to 48 hours to expedite the administration of your claim:

- **PREVENT FURTHER DAMAGE:** Your policy will require that you protect and preserve your entity and its property from further damage. Make any temporary repairs necessary. Restore fire protection if it's damaged. These may seem like short-term fixes, but they're of critical and lasting value.
- **DON'T DISCARD ANYTHING:** Don't remove anything from the scene of the claim. Make sure to retain any documents, including video recordings, related to the claim. Let the adjuster inspect everything and come to a clear understanding as to how they plan to deal with damaged assets that can't be replaced.
- **TRACK ALL YOUR CLAIMS-RELATED COSTS:** Create a general ledger account and record all costs associated with your losses, including work orders and job

accounts. If possible, compare it with your existing inventory of the property to determine original purchase prices and costs to replace items. Where there are lead times, make notes of those as well.

- **LOG YOUR EFFORTS:** Keep a journal of the claim- and damage-related work that takes place each day, noting its objective and who was involved. This information can be very valuable in demonstrating to the insurance company the size and scope of the investment required to restore normal operations.

In the event of a workers' compensation claim, notice and open communication can yield benefits that are helpful to your injured employee as well as your organization. For an injured worker, a prompt post-injury discussion can lead to quicker medical treatment, faster employee return through light duty placement, peace of mind and control of costs. However, the possibility of these benefits relies on the collective actions of the employer, the injured employee, and your designated RMS Claims Team throughout the process. Proper communication:

- 1. BUILDS TRUST:** Trust is the eternal motivator for any claim progression, but how can an employer build trust without seeming overly eager to benefit their organization? The first step is always empathy. Involve a nurse case manager early, who specifically meets the needs of the claim. For example, in catastrophic cases, a more experienced nurse will be needed to appropriately discuss the recovery process with the family. Regardless of severity, empathy should always be prioritized, demonstrating urgency in care coordination and recovery.

A Message from the Director cont'd from page 15

day-to-day unemployment correspondence from the State of Maine, collects quarterly wage information from each member, and reports that information to the state. Due to our members' claims experience, the board approved the distribution of \$100,000 in excess balances and a \$300,000 dividend distribution as part of the 2025 funding model.

In closing, it is important to remember that the partnership with our members is built on trust, respect, and community. Staff listen to our members and look for ways to improve the resources available to support your goals and missions. Our team is committed to working together and appreciates your commitment and membership in the service and programs provided by the Maine Municipal Association Risk Management Service Department.



MMA Risk Management Team

2. EMPOWERS THE INJURED WORKER: Employers have a strong tool to assist their employees avoid a pathway to permanent disability, and that is a robust return-to-work program. Employees should be provided with guidance on the policy, a description of processes to be followed, and key contact information. Full transparency of benefits and challenges in their recovery allows them to make informed decisions and take ownership of their journey.

3. PROMOTES A CULTURE OF COOPERATION: An injured worker is typically unfamiliar with the workers' compensation system, but with effective communi-

cation, an injured worker should feel supported and valued. Poor communication can cause an employee to seek advice elsewhere, and if they feel the claim is not being treated as a priority, they may feel more inclined to retain an attorney and engage in litigation.

Sound communication with an injured employee has numerous benefits for all and has been shown to reduce the overall severity of a claim while providing support and peace of mind for your employees. As always, if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance, please contact MMA Risk Management Services.

Underwriting and Member Services

The underwriting and member services team is dedicated to supporting your operational efforts to minimize losses by implementing effective risk management practices and ensuring the proper placement of coverage.

Our team manages all member transactions, such as handling new business and renewal reviews, processing coverage change requests, issuing certificates of insurance, conducting workers' compensation payroll audits, answering coverage questions, and more.

We process changes throughout the year and are proud to offer various ways to assist you, including on-site visits, mail, phone and online. We encourage you to explore the member tools and forms available on our website, which can help simplify change requests, audit requests, and more. Our website is

located at <https://www.memun.org>. Just hover your cursor over Risk Management at the top of the page.

From our website, you can request a certificate, add/change/delete property, request bonding, as well as access our vast selection of tools and resources. As always, if you would rather communicate directly with us, please feel free to email us at rmsunderwriting@memun.org.

We also want you to know that we are available to come to you to help. Member Services and Underwriting staff assist hundreds of members each year to discuss coverage, property schedules, liability exposures, help with applications and other risk management needs. Please let us know how we can help you, and we will make it happen. Together, we have got you covered.

RMS Loss Control Department Updates for 2025

The Loss Control Department will implement updates to several programs beginning in 2025. The most noticeable changes will affect the Grants and Scholarships offered by Risk Management Services.

Ed MacDonald Safety Enhancement Grant

The MMA Workers' Compensation Board voted to increase the total annual award for the Ed MacDonald Safety Enhancement Grant from \$325,000 to \$400,000. Each year we receive more grant applications than we can fund. This increase will allow us to approve more requests. The grant remains unchanged otherwise—it is still due by April 15 and provides 100% funding up to a \$3,000 maximum award.

Ed MacDonald Safety Scholarship

The Ed MacDonald Safety Scholarship will also see an increase in funding with the total annual award amount rising from \$75,000 to \$90,000. We are also increasing the maximum award for:

- Individual scholarships: From \$500 to \$1,000, and
- Group scholarships: From \$2,000 to \$3,000.

We hope these increases will expand opportunities for members to access quality training. Scholarships are awarded on a rolling basis and applications must be submitted at least 25 days in advance of the training event.

Law Enforcement Grant

The Law Enforcement Grant supports law enforcement agencies that belong to our Property and Casualty Pool and are working toward Maine Law Enforcement Accreditation Program (MLEAP) certification. The grant awards a total of \$5,000, distributed in two payments:

- \$2,500 upon award and proof of contract with an outside agency, and
- \$2,500 at the end of the award period upon meeting requirements.

Starting in 2025, we are removing the August 1st deadline and replacing it with a rolling application process. Agencies must submit their requests at least 30 days in advance of when they wish to begin. This flexibility allows agencies to start the process anytime, rather than waiting for a fixed deadline.

For more information on available grants and scholarships, please visit: <https://www.memun.org/Risk-Management/Grants-Scholarships>.

Online University

Our Online University helps members educate employees on critical safety, health, and liability topics. These awareness-level courses, combined with a documented review of depart-

ment-specific policies, meet the training requirements of the Maine Department of Labor.

The Custom Course Management Tool allows members to upload custom policies and courses, document training, and track certifications. The Online University is available to members of both the Property and Casualty Pool and the Workers' Compensation Fund. Each enrolled member will have their own Learners Campus managed by a designated HR Admin.

We encourage members to review who their HR Admin is and assign a backup for redundancy. Starting in 2025 we will provide access to classes on a routine basis:

- Basic HR Admin Training: First Tuesday of every month at 1:30 p.m., and
- Advanced HR Admin Training: Fourth Thursday of every month at 2:00 p.m.

The basic course helps new users understand their role as global administrators. The advanced training covers course-building tools, analytics, and reporting features.

If you're interested in attending a session, please email: RMSlosscontrol@memun.org.

Workers' Compensation Safety Incentive Program (WCSIP)

All members of the Workers' Compensation Fund are eligible to join the Workers' Compensation Safety Incentive Program (WCSIP). This voluntary program promotes a self-sustaining safety culture, improves workplace safety, and fosters communication with employees.

The program has three progressive tiers, each with its own best-practice criteria:

- Tier 1: 5% discount on workers' compensation contribution,
- Tier 2: 7.5% discount, and
- Tier 3: 10% discount.

If you haven't joined yet, now is the time! Over 140 members are already benefiting from financial savings on their annual workers' compensation contributions.



The Municipal Risk Manager

The Municipal Risk Manager is published seasonally to inform members of developments in municipal risk management which may be of interest to you in your daily business activities. The information in these articles is general in nature and should not be considered advice for any specific risk management or legal question. You should consult with legal counsel or other qualified professional of your own choice for specific questions.

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Paradis: Communication breeds success

By Liz Mockler



Suzie Paradis

GOOD COMMUNICATION is essential to running a town and for building trust with the public, Suzie Paradis said recently of her time as town manager of Fort Kent.

Paradis was named a Rising Star by the Maine Town, City and County Management Association (MTCMA) in 2023, an honor awarded to someone who has been in their position for five years or less and who strives to encourage others to stay in municipal government.

Paradis is the former director of economic and community development in her hometown of Madawaska, a job that required close work with department heads and business leaders. She began her municipal career in 1997 as an administrative assistant for the economic development department, a job she held for eight years before being promoted to director. She worked in that role for 14 years when the position of town manager in Fort Kent opened.

She was reluctant to apply for the job because she didn't feel qualified, but after being urged by Ryan Pelletier, now Aroostook County administrator, Paradis interviewed and was hired.

She thinks communication is the key to success, with town councilors, employees and members of the public.

She said even if she cannot fully satisfy a resident's request, she explains why. "Generally, most people go away pleased that we actually explained it to them," she said.

Paradis, who lives in Fort Kent, is active in municipal circles in Maine. She is in her third year as president of the Aroostook County Management Association and serves in an ex-officio capacity for the Greater Fort Kent Chamber of Commerce. She is treasurer of the Northern Maine Development Commission board of directors. She also is the sponsorship chairwoman for the MTCMA, raising money to finance several major conferences each year.

"I can't credit (winning the Rising Star award) to just myself," she said. "It's not just me who serves the town. It's working well with my department heads and employees. It's not just an award I feel is solely just for me."

Paradis said she enjoys the support and help of managers throughout Maine, who stay connected and try to help each

other through difficult issues. "I'm able to reach out and ask pertinent questions. It's always good to know what other communities are doing in similar circumstances."

She recently talked about her management style and philosophy and how running small towns can vary from larger municipalities.

Q. Were you surprised that your peers elected you the Rising Star in municipal management?

A. I was truly surprised and honored when I learned that my peers had elected me the Rising Star through MTCMA. This recognition means a great deal to me, as it comes from colleagues whom I respect and admire. I am grateful for their confidence in me and will strive to continue contributing positively to my community and the field of municipal government.

Q. What is your management style?

A. My management style focuses on fostering growth and providing opportunities for employees to develop in their respective roles. By offering resources, guidance and opportunities for continuous learning, I aim to help everyone reach their full potential. I also prioritize open communication and collaboration, ensuring that everyone feels valued and has the chance to contribute to success.

Q. What do you enjoy most about being town manager?

A. The opportunity to witness and contribute to the growth and development of our community. I find satisfaction in seeing how redevelopment projects can transform our town and bring new life and opportunities to Fort Kent. Tourism is another area that excites me; I love showcasing the unique aspects of our community to visitors and seeing the positive economic impact it brings. I feel that collaboration and shared goals among neighboring communities creates a stronger, more vibrant region. Being able to assist with these types of growth and cooperation is incredibly rewarding and is what I enjoy most about my role as a town manager.

Q. Does the size of your town make a difference in how local government works?

A. In my opinion, the size of the town does make a difference in how local government operates, but the core responsibilities remain the same regardless of size. In a smaller town, the responsibilities are often concentrated among fewer people, which means that individuals may need to wear multiple hats and take on various roles. For instance, in our town, I handle not only the typical duties of a town manager, but also serve as the road commissioner, tax collector and treasurer, and more.

Q. What is your budgeting philosophy?

A. My budgeting philosophy is ensuring transparency, and that our resources are aligned with the community's priorities. I believe in creating a balanced budget that carefully considers both current needs and future sustainability. I believe in identifying areas where we can be more efficient, and prioritizing projects that offer the greatest benefit to our residents. I'm committed to investing in initiatives that promote long-term growth and stability, such as infrastructure improvements, economic development, and essential services.

Q. Can you tell us about a tough problem you encountered and resolved?

A. When we were faced with the tough problem of a police department shortage in Fort Kent, the challenge was initially overwhelming due to the critical need for public safety in our rural area. To address this, I collaborated closely with the head of the police department to develop an attractive package deal aimed at recruiting new officers. This package included competitive salaries, retention bonuses and reduced health care premiums. We also partnered with the University of Maine at Fort Kent to create and attract

students from the Criminal Justice Degree program who were interested in law enforcement careers. Through this joint effort, we not only managed to attract new officers, but also strengthened our ties with the university.

Q. How do you handle complaints from the public?

A. I listen and try to answer to the best of my knowledge and explain what we are allowed to and can't do to remedy the situation. If I don't have an answer, I try to look at options and reach out to colleagues on how they have handled a similar situation. But I do try to listen to the complaints and make sure they know I care that they are heard.

Q. What do you like to do in your spare time, if you have any?

A. I enjoy spending it with family and friends—it is always a treat to spend my extra time with my two grandchildren Tilley and Wells. I especially love to travel and read, and I have a passion for decorating and party planning.

Q. Do you have any advice for people just starting out in municipal management?

A. For those just starting out in municipal government, my advice is to embrace an open-door policy and always be willing to listen to the concerns of your community and colleagues. Being approachable and receptive to feedback and taking positive criticism constructively is crucial for building trust and creating a collaborative environment. Learning from feedback and being open to different perspectives can help growth, both personally and professionally. Always remember that you're not alone in this field. Don't hesitate to reach out to the many experienced managers and tap into our list serve network. Stay committed to continuous learning and professional development. 🏡



Michael A. Hodgins

Land Use and Zoning Attorney

Mike represents towns in contract disputes and other general litigation, land use enforcement actions, Rule 80B appeals to Superior Court and he has participated in several appeals to the Law Court. Mike was recently recognized as a Lawyer of the Year by The Best Lawyers in America® for land use and zoning law. Mike has been recognized for his general litigation practice by New England Super Lawyers.

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Profiles of Service...Amanda Shelmerdine, Warren Cemetery Sexton

“You’re kind of a voice for those that don’t have a voice anymore.”

By Stephanie Bouchard

WARREN’S CEMETERY SEXTON, Amanda Shelmerdine, never dreamed she’d one day be perusing 200-year-old town documents trying to determine where people are buried in the graveyards she is responsible for, but she has always been interested in the past.

Until recently, however, that interest was mainly in her own past.

Shelmerdine, who grew up in upstate New York and in Colorado, was adopted as a newborn, and always wondered about her birth family. In 1995, when she was in her mid-twenties, she got answers to her questions about her biological family. On her way to interview for a job at the Camden Area YMCA, she stopped in New York to meet her birth mother. The two set off by car for Maine, getting to know each other along the way.

In the years since Shelmerdine took that job in Camden and she and her husband, Paul, moved to Maine, she has embedded herself in her community in a variety of ways, including participating in the school system as a substitute teacher, health aide, and track coach, and as an EMT in Thomaston, and through Scouting with her children.

While a career in public service has never been an “end goal” for her, giving back to her community has always been important. “I’ve always done a lot of volunteering,” she said. “I really feel that volunteering should be something that everyone does; it gives back to society.”

It was through Scouting that she first became involved with the local cemeteries, she said. When her children first began Scouting, one of their volunteer commitments was to put flags on veterans’ graves in the spring and remove and retire them in the fall.

“I remember that first year going with my son and daughters to [the cemeteries] and being really concerned about the state of some of the cemeteries,” she said. “[There were] a lot of broken headstones. Things were not mowed. Branches down everywhere, and I just thought it was very disrespectful.”

Over time, Shelmerdine and her Scouting troop were responsible for six cemeteries, and she and some other people from Warren formed a cemetery committee. In the two years the committee functioned, members got together and toured the cemeteries and came up with a list of what they thought needed to be addressed and prioritized at each cemetery.

Even though the cemetery committee eventually disbanded, Shelmerdine remained interested in the town’s cemeteries, and that interest led to her becoming Warren’s assistant cemetery sexton and then interim sexton in 2021. She was appointed sexton in 2022.

“I didn’t realize once I got started with this how much more beyond just the bubble of making sure that the cemeteries are kept up and that you provide burials and documentation paperwork, is the historical layer to it.”

A lot of her time is spent trying to piece together modern burial information with the historical information, and sometimes – often – the town records don’t have complete information on those historical burials and lot sales.

“Doing public service with the work of the cemeteries...I think I get more out of it really than I give back,” she said. “And a lot of it is discovering information that’s been lost, and righting a wrong, in regard to the history of our veteran from Peterborough.”

The veteran Shelmerdine mentions was a member of the family that founded Peterborough, an interracial com-

About the Author: Stephanie Bouchard is a freelance writer from Nobleboro and regular contributor to Maine Town & City. stephanie@stephaniebouchard.net

munity within the Town of Warren, in the 1780s. While some descendants of Peterborough still live in the area, Peterborough Cemetery is the only remaining public structure of the once-thriving community.

In 2021, an Air Force veteran active in the VFW in Friendship contacted the Warren town office about the possibility of his paying to have sunken stones resealed and flag holders for the specific theaters of war placed at veterans' graves in Peterborough Cemetery. The town gave its permission for this to be done, and gave permission again in 2023 when he asked to pay for the installation of a memorial stone for the cemetery.

In seeking to determine the names to be etched into the granite of the memorial stone, Shelmerdine spent months researching and eventually identified 22 men and boys buried in the cemetery who served in the American Revolutionary War, the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. Space has been left on the stone in case other "lost" veterans are found in the cemetery or buried along its borders.

Her research for the memorial stone cleared up a case of mistaken identity. It had long been thought that the Peterborough descendant had deserted his military unit, but Shelmerdine discovered there were two men with the same name in the same unit and it was actually the other man who had deserted and was dishonorably discharged.

"She's been really an incredible advocate for ensuring the dignity of these people in perpetuity, which is really

just so important, and I know has been incredibly meaningful to the descendants," said Kate McMahon, historian of global slavery at the Smithsonian Institution's Center for the Study of Global Slavery, which is part of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

McMahon, a Shapleigh native, wrote her master's thesis at the University of Southern Maine on Peterborough. She and Shelmerdine gave a joint presentation on the Peterborough community at the Camden Public Library in 2024.

"[Shelmerdine's efforts] show her care and compassion for people - for the people that are alive now - that are the descendants - as well as the people that are in the ground," McMahon said. "We could all be so lucky after death to have someone who cares so much about making sure that our descendants and families have a place to go that is comfortable and taken care of."

"When it comes to Amanda and all the work that she's done - she's just amazing," said Thomas Zeigler, a descendant of the founders of the Peterborough family who lives in Texas and has done extensive research on his family.

Not only did she clean up all the overgrowth at the cemetery and do in-depth research on who is buried there, but she also helped arrange a commemoration ceremony to dedicate the memorial stone and a gathering after the event so that descendants who hadn't known about each other could meet.

"To have someone who is just a part of keeping that story straight, documenting that story, keeping what's left,



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well-kept and maintained well, and somebody who’s just done a lot towards ensuring that the community up there knows about it and respects what happened – that makes a big difference to me, and that’s why it’s so personally important – gratifying to me – and why I have so much appreciation for what she’s done,” he said.

“I must give her huge kudos for what she did with that Peterborough Cemetery,” said Peter Lammert, a select-person, tree warden, and cemetery sexton for Thomaston. “It really got me that somebody has bothered to put that much effort into recognizing the history of a town.”

While Peterborough Cemetery and the memorial stone project are outside the day-to-day norm of sexton work, the passion and dedication Shelmerdine brings to the role are commendable, Lammert and others who know her say.

“She’s just a ball of fire. She’s a wicked good person and very, very civic minded,” said Jan MacDonald, who is the vice chair of the selecboard for Warren and the president of the Warren Historical Society.

“If she sees something is just morally wrong,” MacDonald said, “she has no problem stepping up and saying, ‘We could handle this in a different way. Why don’t we try an alternative route?’ She’s creative that way, and she isn’t nasty about it.”

And she’s not afraid of getting her hands dirty, either, said Sherry Howard, Warren’s town manager. Shelmerdine, she said, goes out to the cemeteries, walks around them, cleans them up herself, cleans the fragile older stones by hand, and even asked the town to pay for her to enroll in chainsaw classes so that she could do some tree cleanup in the cemeteries herself.

“She goes above and beyond,” Howard said. “The people who visit the cemeteries constantly will call and say the cemeteries have never looked so nice.”

While Shelmerdine wants to make sure that Warren’s cemeteries are being taken care of properly and carefully to honor those who have died and those who visit the deceased, she pays particularly close attention to the veterans’ graves, Howard noted.

“She makes sure that flags are out for all of our veterans,” Howard said, “and she’ll periodically walk through and make sure that a veteran wasn’t missed.”

Shelmerdine herself was not enlisted in the military, but she did volunteer emergency services work for the armed forces, and her husband, Paul, served and was seriously wounded in Iraq. But her personal connection to the military is not what solely drives her commitment to the cemeteries, she said.

“You’re kind of a voice for those that don’t have a voice anymore,” she said. “So, trying to make sure that things are taken care of, that veterans are honored, that spaces are kept up – because they’re sacred – graveyards are sacred areas – it’s just a way of respect.” 🏡



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Jim Bennett

After an illustrious career, **Jim Bennett**, Biddeford City Manager, is retiring and leaving behind a legacy of innovative governance and compassionate advocacy. Bennett began his municipal government career in 1982 at the age of 21 as a member of the Lisbon selectboard, before succumbing to the lure of local government

service and assuming the manager roles in the communities of Dixfield, New Gloucester, Old Orchard Beach, Westbrook, Lewiston, Sabattus, Presque Isle, and Biddeford. His dedication to public service has deep roots, as Bennett has been involved with the Masons for over 40 years, serving as the Kora Potentate in 2023. He is also known as Ginjo the Klown, a moniker that pays respect to his mother, and in this role has entertained numerous audiences and raised thousands of dollars to support Shriners Hospitals for Children. Bennett has also served on the boards of several professional associations, including the Maine Town & City Management Association, International City/County Management Association, and Maine Municipal Association (MMA), moving up the leadership ranks in each organization to serve as its president. Bennett has been an invaluable member of MMA's Legislative Policy Committee since 1990. Bennett also developed and instructed Cash Management for Municipalities and Basic Municipal Budgeting for MMA. He will complete his career on April 18, by driving off into the sunset on his Harley Davidson, affectionately called the Purple Stallion.

Longtime Auburn planning and code director **Eric Cousens** was promoted in December to executive director of public services. As part of a restructuring effort, Cousens will take the planning and code department under the public services banner. He has 20 years of experience in municipal government; he joined the city in 2006. Cousens replaces **Denis D'Auteuil**, who was named assistant city manager in July 2024. Cousens, a graduate of the University of Maine, has more than 20 years of experience in Maine municipal government. Meanwhile, **Stephen Almquist** has been named deputy fire chief. Almquist has 17 years of experience in firefighting and EMS services. Before joining the Auburn department, Almquist worked for the Augusta Fire Department as a firefighter and paramedic, as well as serving as director of education and quality management for Northeast Mobile Health.

The Somerville Selectboard has hired town resident **Russell Gates** as town clerk. He replaces **Samantha Peaslee**, who resigned last September. Gates, a former appeals board member, is a member of the RSU 12 school board and the Somerville Budget Committee.



Jacob Gran

Jacob Gran has taken the position of assistant manager for the Town of Bucksport. He put in his notice to the Pittsfield Selectboard in October and worked through 2024. Before taking the Pittsfield town manager job, Gran worked as town clerk and registrar of voters for Bucksport. **Cornell Knight**, a retired veteran town manager, has

been hired during the interim while the town looks for a new manager.

Jeffrey Hewett retired in December as Skowhegan director of economic and community development, ending his 34-year career with the town. Hewett earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural business from the University of Maine but decided not to continue farming after the death of his father. He ran a real estate agency for six years before being hired by the town in 1990 as community development director supervising housing programs. Soon after taking the position, he was asked to also oversee the nonprofit Skowhegan Economic Development Corp.



Lincoln Jeffers

Longtime Lewiston economic and community development director **Lincoln Jeffers** retired at the end of December after serving in the position for 25 years. City officials said \$1.4 billion in new investments were made in the city during Jeffers' tenure. He was praised for helping transform Maine's third largest city from a mill town to a thriving diverse economy. In addition

to projects as large as a Walmart distribution center, 1,200 multifamily housing units were either built or approved under his leadership. Jeffers studied at Middlebury College in Vermont and the Muskie School of Public Policy.

Maine Resource Recovery Association

MRRRA Winter Webinar Series in 2 parts

Topic
We will be discussing the Materials Management Task Force with an overview of the task force itself followed by overviews on each recommendation that was made.

When
9am-10:30am
January 24, 2025 - Part one
February (TBD) - Part two

RSVP Today

mrra.net

The Farmington selectboard in December recognized **Jim Kiernan**, public works foreman, for 40 years of service to the town. He joined the department in November 1984 and has worked for three directors and eight town managers. Kiernan is also a longtime on-call firefighter.

Matthew Kilpatrick was named Nobleboro fire chief, effective December 5. He succeeds **Kevin Rawley**. Kilpatrick joined the Nobleboro Fire Department in 2020 and is also a full-time EMT for the City of Augusta. He is studying to become a paramedic. He began his career in 2016 working in the emergency medical field as an ambulance driver and EMT for several towns including Searsport, Clinton and Union.



Geraldine Matherne

Geraldine Matherne will serve as the City of Biddeford's next finance director after the city council unanimously endorsed her in early December. Matherne, a Biddeford resident, has nine years of experience in the city's finance department. She previously served as a staff accountant and was promoted to deputy finance director in 2018. Matherne has most recently served as the finance director for the City of Saco since July 2022. She holds a graduate certificate in accounting from the University of Southern Maine. Matherne assumed her new duties on January 5, replacing **Sasha Pavlak**, who resigned in December.

Interested in having your community featured in the People or News segments of the Maine Town & City? Share your successes with municipal officials across the state.

Please send to Liz Mockler at: lizmockler1@hotmail.com.

Photos are encouraged.



Debbie Laurie

Bangor City Manager **Debbie Laurie** will retire in May after serving three years in the top administrative job. Laurie was hired by the city in 1992 as finance director, a position she held until being named interim manager in August 2021. She was promoted permanently as manager in February 2022. 🌲

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STATEWIDE

Maine infrastructure continues to receive a so-so rating from the American Society of Civil Engineers, which releases a report card every four years. The 2024 report showed an overall rating of C, a small improvement over 2020, when the rating was C-minus. It is the fifth report card by the engineers' society to give the state a mediocre ranking. Highlights from the report include aviation infrastructure, which earned the state's only B grade, while rail and port each received B-minus. Meanwhile, state dams, bridges, levees and transit systems all received a D-plus rating. Only about half of Maine dams are in satisfactory condition, the report found, and one in seven bridges are in poor condition. Roads earned an improved C-minus ranking, with 74% of road pavement considered in good or excellent condition. The improvement was credited to the more than \$1 billion in federal investments in Maine over the past four years.

BANGOR

The city council has contributed \$500,000 toward a resident group trying to buy their mobile home park before it's sold to investors. The 129-lot park includes 80 vacant, undeveloped lots. The council approved a forgivable grant to the group, which has 90 days to make a deal. The money comes from a community development block grant and American

Rescue Plan Act funds. In late December, the state granted the group \$1 million toward the purchase. The group hoped to raise \$8 million to buy the property.

BAR HARBOR

As tourist visits continue to climb year over year, the resort town home to Acadia National Park collected \$4 million in parking revenue in 2024. That's a significant increase from the \$3.4 million collected in 2023 from May 15 through October 30. The national park expects its visitor numbers to increase by 80,000 for 2024. More than one million people visit the park annually.

BELGRADE

The town planning board has received recommendations for 12 new ordinances aimed at improving the water quality in the Belgrade Lakes Watershed. One proposal is to ban lawn mowing, tree cutting and the use of some fertilizers near the seven lakes and ponds that comprise the watershed. The recommendations came from the town's Lakes and Natural Resources Committee, which noted that all the lakes and ponds are categorized as "threatened" or "impaired." The committee said human development and activity is directly responsible for the lower quality of water.

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BIDDEFORD

The city was named one of the best places in the world to visit during the month of December by Good Housekeeping magazine. It was listed with places such as Belize and Belgium. The city is considered a unique holiday experience because it holds a menorah lighting each night for Hanukkah. Specific places, such as the Lincoln Hotel, were also praised for being like “a Hallmark card.”

CARIBOU

The city council in December agreed to build a new police station at an estimated cost of \$10.3 million, just over the \$10 million approved by voters in 2022. A revamped plan shows a footprint of 11,100 square feet and a budget of \$8.7 million for construction, \$437,340 for a design contingency fee, \$317,500 for administrative costs and \$872,150 in legal and environmental services. The existing police station is located under city hall. Built in 1939, the station has not seen significant renovations since the 1970s.

MADAWASKA

The town joins the City of Waterville and a host of other Maine municipalities that have moved recently to a four-day workweek for nonessential workers. The change will

allow residents to do their town hall business either before or after their work hours, while also boosting employee morale and improving retention of workers.

SOUTH PORTLAND

The city council in December endorsed a plan to spend \$1.5 million from the city’s Open Space Fund to buy a 37-acre parcel of land for conservation and recreation. The Open Space Fund was authorized by voters in 2021 and financed with an initial \$4.5 million. The land, across from an existing park, was reviewed by the Open Space Acquisition Committee and recommended to the council.

VASSALBORO

The largest class in the history of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy graduated in late December, with 71 cadets graduating to join municipal, state and county law enforcement agencies. The Vassalboro facility was founded in 2000. The cadets graduated from the Basic Law Enforcement Training Program, led by former Farmington Police Chief Jack Peck. The new officers come at a time when departments statewide are struggling to fill vacant positions. Fire and ambulance departments also are dealing with vacancies left by retiring baby boomers. 🏔️



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2025: A NEW STATE MINIMUM WAGE

Maine's minimum hourly wage for most workers increased from \$14.15 per hour to \$14.65 per hour on January 1, 2025. State law mandates that each January 1st the state minimum wage is adjusted based on the cost of living as measured by the percentage increase (if any) in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) for the Northeast Region, as reported by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

For more information on wage and hour issues, see MMA Legal Services' Fair Labor Standards Act Information Packet, available free to members in the "Legal" section of MMA's website. (By S.F.P.)

IMPOSING FINES & PENALTIES

(Updating the December 2011 Legal Notes)

Question: Can the municipal officers (select board/council) or other municipal officials impose fines and penalties for ordinance violations?

Answer: If, by "impose," you mean assess or levy fines and penalties and enforce their collection, the answer is no – only a court can impose legally enforceable fines and penalties for ordinance violations.

Many land use ordinances, however, including virtually all shoreland zoning ordinances, authorize the municipal officers or their authorized agent to enter into voluntary consent agreements with violators in order to eliminate violations and recover fines in lieu of court action. However, these agreements depend on the willingness of violators to agree and to comply with their terms. If a violator is unwilling to cooperate, a consent agreement is not an enforcement option, and court action may be the only way to enforce compliance and recover fines and penalties.

In a few instances, municipalities are authorized by statute to assess and collect, via a special tax levy and lien, the municipality's costs for correcting specific nuisances. These include dangerous buildings (see 17 M.R.S. § 2853), malfunctioning septic systems (see 30-A M.R.S. § 3428), and the court-ordered clean-up of junkyards and auto graveyards (see 30-A M.R.S. § 3758-A). However, these statutes do not authorize municipalities to impose fines or penalties for related ordinance violations. Again, only a court can do that.

We should also mention 2024 legislation that allows a municipality that has prevailed in a court action involving shoreland zoning violations to file a lien against the subject property for all costs awarded by the court (assuming the court has not already authorized a lien). See 30-A M.R.S. § 4452(1-A). This lien, however, cannot be enforced through a property tax levy, collection or lien process.

Outside of the situations above, a statute or court order is necessary to authorize a municipality to impose a lien

or attach property for the purpose of securing the payment of fines or penalties for ordinance violations.

Note that in the case of land use ordinance violations, fines and penalties are established by statute (see 30-A M.R.S. § 4452). In general, these fines range from \$100 to \$5,000 per violation for each day the violation remains and are payable to the municipality. The violator will also usually be ordered to correct the violation. If the municipality is the prevailing party, it must be awarded reasonable attorney fees, expert witness fees and costs. (If the violator prevails, the court may award fees and costs to the violator.)

The fines and penalties set out in 30-A M.R.S. § 4452 also apply to violations of the state plumbing and subsurface wastewater disposal rules, laws administered by local health officers, fire prevention laws, the state junkyard law and numerous others.

These statutory fines and penalties apply whether or not the law, ordinance, rule or regulation in question expressly cites them and even if it provides differently (see *Town of Holden v. Pineau*, 573 A.2d 1310 (Me. 1990)). Also, the courts may not waive or reduce the statutory minimum per-day penalty for each offense unless authorized by statute (see *City of Lewiston v. Verrinder*, 2022 ME 29; *Town of Orono v. LaPointe*, 698 A.2d 1059 (Me. 1997)). (By S.F.P./R.P.F.)

TIPS FOR USING MMA LEGAL SERVICES


The primary focus of MMA's Legal Services program is our legal inquiry service, through which MMA's municipal members can seek legal advice and opinions on specific matters. The service is one benefit included within an annual municipal membership. No additional fees apply and there are no limits on the number of inquiries to the program.

Below are a few tips on how municipal members can get the most out of the service:

- Call or write as soon as possible after identifying the problem. Early contact helps us provide you with the best answer possible by allowing more time to research the question (which may not be as simple as it seems). If you are under a deadline, let us know; we will try our best to meet it.
- Choose a single point of contact for each matter (e.g. the board chair, town manager) to help avoid the confusion that can result when multiple officials contact us with differing information or speak with different attorneys.
- Along the same lines, if your inquiry is a follow-up to a matter you have been discussing with one of our attorneys, please let us know so that we may direct your question to that attorney.

- Please let us know if you are currently working with the municipality’s attorney on the matter or if you are looking for a second opinion on an issue. This may impact our ability to become involved or may require that we seek more information from you or the attorney. For ethical reasons, it is very important that we are aware when these situations arise.
- To avoid delay, please provide sufficient background information with your question. The context and circumstances surrounding an issue are important and will impact the advice. Likewise, if your question involves interpretation of an ordinance or contract, please forward that material or tell us how to access it online so that we may review it before rendering an opinion.
- Most written correspondence is subject to public access under Maine’s Freedom of Access Act. If your inquiry involves a sensitive matter, we suggest that you call instead of writing.
- The municipality itself is MMA’s “member” and our client. Advice provided to individual officials is given to assist the municipality in fulfilling its legal responsibilities, and our loyalty must be to the municipality, not to any individual official. This fact and the ethical standards governing Maine attorneys prevent us from responding to questions from officials on subjects outside their area of responsibility, providing officials with personal legal advice, advising one municipal member against another, or giving advice to private citizens.
- Similarly, when advising members of a board, we advise on behalf of the board itself (which acts via majority), and we may need to decline to advise members in the minority challenging the majority position. If a board conflict does arise, the board may find it helpful to agree upon and submit a set of questions seeking a legal opinion directed to the entire board.

For more information on our inquiry service, see “Legal Services Opinions: Not Transferable,” in the February 2024 Legal Notes, and the Legal Services “Overview” on MMA’s website (www.memun.org/legal).

MMA Legal Services also publishes numerous manuals, information packets and guidance materials (which are not legal advice), available upon request or on MMA’s website. We also participate in MMA and affiliate trainings, and occasionally participate as *amicus curiae* (“friend of the court”) in appeals involving municipal issues. (By S.F.P.) 

Municipal Calendar

JANUARY 20 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the third Monday in January, is a legal holiday (4 M.R.S. § 1051).

BY JANUARY 20 – State Treasurer posts maximum interest rate that municipalities can vote to charge on delinquent property taxes (36 M.R.S. § 505).

JANUARY 31 – Deadline for employers required to submit quarterly withholding taxes to file return and remit payment to State Tax Assessor (36 M.R.S. § 5253).

DURING JANUARY – In towns with a March annual meeting, select board members should begin preparing the town meeting warrant and annual town report. Arrange to have annual audit completed before town meeting. Check 30-A M.R.S. §§ 2801, 5823 for annual report and audit requirements.

BEFORE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING — Unless otherwise provided by charter, select board members must have a warrant posted at least seven days before town meeting by a constable or named resident who must make a return on the warrant. (30-A M.R.S. § 2523).

- If adoption of an ordinance is proposed, comply with 30-A M.R.S. § 3002.
- Referendum question wording must be “filed with the clerk” 60 days before the election unless a charter provides otherwise. See 30-A M.R.S. § 2528 for hearing and notice requirements.
- The registrar of voters must accept the registration and enrollment of voters prior to the municipal election according to the hourly schedule prescribed by 21-A M.R.S. § 122, unless changed by the municipal officers according to the needs of the municipality.
- Copies of the annual report must be available in the municipal office or a convenient place of business at least three days before the annual meeting (30-A M.R.S. § 2801).
- Send copy of the annual report to: State Tax Assessor, State Librarian, UMO’s Folger Library, and MMA.

BY JANUARY 31 — Written statements of wages withheld in the previous calendar year are to be furnished to each employee in form prescribed by State Tax Assessor (36 M.R.S. § 5251).

TRAINING

JANUARY

1/22	Wed.	Municipal Summer Internship Information Session	Zoom Meeting	MMA
1/23	Thurs.	Elected Officials Workshop	Zoom Webinar	MMA
1/28	Tues.	The Legislative Process A-Z	Zoom Meeting	MMA

FEBRUARY

2/4	Tues.	MMA Leading a Culture of Belonging and Psychological Safety	Zoom Meeting	MMA
2/5 & 6	Wed. & Thur.	MTCCA Title 30A– Town Meeting and Local Election Law	Zoom Webinar	MTCCA
2/11	Tues.	Planning Board/Boards of Appeal	Zoom Webinar	MMA
2/11	Tues.	MWDA GA Basics Webinar	Zoom Webinar	MWDA
2/13	Thurs.	MFCA Legislative Breakfast	Augusta - Senator Inn	MFCA
2/19	Wed.	MBOIA Northern Chapter Training: NFPA/Fire Blocking	Brewer - Brewer Auditorium	MBOIA
2/25	Tues.	MEWEA Legislative Breakfast	Augusta - Augusta Civic Center	MEWEA
2/26	Wed.	Moderating Town Meetings	Zoom Meeting	MMA
2/27	Thurs.	MEGFOA Winter Training Webinar	Zoom Webinar	MEGFOA

MARCH

3/4	Tues.	Understanding the Freedom of Access Act	Zoom Webinar	MMA
3/5 & 6	Wed. & Thur.	MTCCA Athenian Dialogue	Zoom Meeting	MTCCA
3/6	Thurs.	MBOIA March Membership Meeting & Training	Portland - Portland Elks Lodge #188	MBOIA
3/11	Tues.	MWDA Advanced GA Webinar	Zoom Webinar	MWDA
3/13	Thurs.	MMTCTA Preparing for an Audit	Augusta - MMA	MMTCTA
3/19 & 20	Wed. & Thur.	MTCCA Vital Records	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar	MTCCA
3/21	Fri.	MTCMA Interchange	Bangor - Hollywood Casino Hotel & Conference Center	MTCMA
3/24	Mon.	Basic Municipal Budgeting	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MMA
3/26-28	Wed.-Fri.	MFCA Professional Development Conference	Newry - Grand Summit Hotel Sunday River Resort	MFCA

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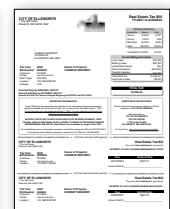
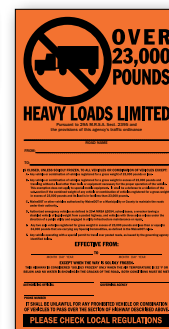
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2025 SPRING BOND ISSUE SCHEDULE

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February						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	

March						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

April						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

May						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Wednesday, February 5th – Application Deadline

Wednesday, March 12th – Application Approval (MMBB Board Meeting)

Monday, April 7th – Preliminary opinions and loan agreements due from bond counsel of each borrower

Wednesday, April 9th – Last date for signing school contracts and rates in place for water district. PUC approvals due

Week of April 21st – Maine Municipal Bond Bank Pricing

Monday, May 12th – Final documents due from bond counsel

Wednesday, May 21st – Pre-closing

Thursday, May 22nd – Closing – Bond proceeds available

If you would like to participate in or have any questions regarding this bond issue, please contact Toni Reed at treed@mmbb.com or (207)622-9386 ext. 213.





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