

Maine Town & City

The magazine of the Maine Municipal Association

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Where In Maine?

The Forks!



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

88TH ANNUAL MMA CONVENTION AGENDA

Q&A WITH KERRY LEICHTMAN

THE MANAGER SHORTAGE



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In this issue

TRUST IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT. According to a Pew Research study, 63% of U.S. adults have little to no confidence in the political system. Although trust in local government is higher, more needs to be done to ensure the community is engaged in the decision-making processes. **PAGE 7**

WHERE IN MAINE? This month the Town & City travels to The Forks to explore the community's mountainous terrain, and watch bald eagles fly over rivers replete with fish and white-water rafters. While recreational opportunities fuel the modern-day economy, the community is also cognizant of the vital need to protect its natural resources. **PAGE 11**

THE MANAGER SHORTAGE. While long hours, increasing responsibilities, as well as a decline in public civility have impacted recruitment efforts, communities are filling manager vacancies, with an eye toward the candidate's "fit with the community." **PAGE 19**

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PROFILES OF SERVICE. From culinary arts to assessing. This month Valerie Moon, Brewer assessor takes center stage. While described as having a lot of bravado, underneath it all, everyone knows she is a "very caring, able, kind person." **PAGE 35**

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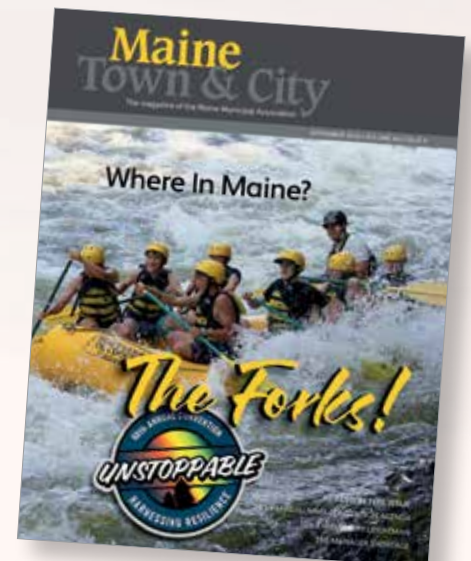
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ABOUT THE COVER

One of several groups of rafters that were guided down the Kennebec River at The Forks on a recent Sunday. (Photo by Rebecca Lambert, Maine Municipal Association)



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Nontraditional Paths to Traditional Roles

By Diane Hines / Town Manager, Town of Ludlow



In this edition of the magazine, Betty Adams explores the challenges communities are facing with the process of recruiting town and city managers. As she notes, “Filling the top administrative post in a municipality comes with a myriad of challenges and some exciting possibilities.” The article also provides evidence that “good things come to those who wait” through the telling of the story that led to appointment of Denise Ducharme

as Madison town manager. As you will read, Denise cleverly likens her municipal management journey to a situation where you have all the ingredients but not the recipe.

Not surprisingly for those who know me, I too have taken a less than traditional path to a career in town management. While some might call my path free ranging, the experiences gathered along the way have helped me acquire the skills to lead a community in a transparent, fair, and honest manner.

Like any good story, it all began in 2006 at the annual Hammond town meeting, where the selectboard wanted to combine a variety of municipal responsibilities (e.g., tax collector, motor vehicle agent, dog licensing agent, etc.) into one job. All the tasks had traditionally been farmed out to different people in town and the selectboard thought it would be more efficient to centralize the tasks into one role and house the single employee at the old schoolhouse in the center of town.

While the voters readily approved the idea, no one wanted to assume the task.

Being one to never back down from a challenge, I found myself raising my hand to volunteer for the job. In exchange for my interest, I was presented with an office and several boxes brimming with paperwork, but with no filing system, desk, or chair.

However, I persevered.

What is wonderful about the town/city manager world is how readily other professionals will share what they know. A neighboring town’s tax collector shared her knowledge of the timeframes for setting liens and foreclosures on uncollected taxes. To this day I refer to her handwritten note, which reminds me of the quality of the people who work in municipal government. One town clerk in the area even shared her computer with me, so Hammond could get online with the Central Voter Registration System.

When in 2010 the Town of Ludlow advertised for a town manager, I applied and got the job. I also added the management of the municipal affairs of Wypitlock to my workload in 2015, which included oversight of all municipal buildings and departments, including a team of volunteer firefighters.

Turning to a career in municipal management has not only enabled me to give back to my communities but has also led to an opportunity to serve on MMA’s Executive Committee, currently as president. Although my work at MMA resulted in the need to train my replacement in Wypitlock, it was an incredibly satisfying experience. I found that teaching someone else the job was a great way to “pay it forward” for all the assistance and training I was privileged to receive over the years.

As I was recently overseeing the election for MMA Vice President and three members of the Executive Committee, a duty of the president, I decided to write down the name of each municipality as ballots were counted. The process was interesting, and I realized how many Maine towns I knew and have visited, and how for many of these communities the name of the town or city manager came to mind.

I’ve worked for communities whose names were read and was reminded that running a town involves continuous learning. There is always a new challenge presented in government service, which lends to the beauty of the work. There is really no time to be bored.

For a life-long learner, municipal management is the perfect occupation. You do not have to do it alone. MMA offers a wide array of training courses that are necessary to stay on top of your game, as do several state agencies, and many peers are eager to share their experiences and knowledge.

This is one of the many reasons I look forward to the MMA Convention on October 2nd and 3rd, which will also offer opportunities to continue education in government service. This year’s convention will hold special meaning for me, as it will be truly an honor and a privilege as the outgoing MMA president to oversee the schedule of events.

I welcome anyone new or old to the municipal management profession to participate. This is a time of learning, networking, and celebrating for all. 🏡

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Trust in Municipal Government

While public trust in government continues to erode, all is not lost as towns and cities continue down the difficult course of encouraging community engagement in decision making.

By Colleen Hennessy

Between 1936 and 2012, eleven out of fourteen incumbent U. S. presidents won re-election. Only ten candidates seeking re-election have ever lost. Despite these odds, President Biden has faced sufficient media pressure and political distrust that he didn't fancy his chances and dropped out of the race. While some commentators have framed this as the ultimate act of public service, it might also be a marker of the extreme discontent and distrust of national government influencing candidates at the highest levels of our government.

Indeed, Lee Drutman, the author of *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America*, lecturer at Johns Hopkins University, argued in *Time Magazine* that incumbency is no longer a political advantage because crucial swing voters are “perpetually dissatisfied and frequently disengaged.” Considering the dismal view Americans have of national politics with just 4% of U.S. adults, according to a Pew Research study, believing the political system is working extremely or very well and the majority (63%) expressing not too much or no confidence at all in the future of the U.S. political system, it seems being in power is perceived as a disadvantage.

Campaigns and elections aside, the day-to-day work of government still happens by those in office at all levels and often by unelected public officials and employees. So how is this climate of distrust and disengagement impacting the functioning of government in Maine and across our cities and towns? The good news for Maine Municipal Association members and the citizens they serve is that the public trust in government is highest for municipal government. Gallup's annual Governance Survey, conducted last fall, shows that trust in all levels of government is at historic lows since the polling began in the 1970s, but 67% of Americans do have a great deal or a fair amount of trust in their local government to handle local problems in contrast to only 32% expressing trust in Congress.

Regardless of that good news, local government lead-

ers are feeling the decline in public trust experienced across the country and there is cause for concern. However, there is also an opportunity for increased transparency and engagement. The “2023 State of Local Leadership Pipeline Survey” reveals that local government leaders believe trust is the biggest issue facing them today. Lack of trust and then evolving public perception were the top two issues identified by respondents, ahead of funding and budgeting issues.

These issues are seen nationally, and of course in Maine, in the struggle to attract and retain a workforce across local government roles, and they have also raised concern for the pipeline of developing future leaders. As service delivery in public safety, housing, and social services has come under increased demand and been subject to public scrutiny, and when coupled with a decline in informed constituencies, existing staff are strained, and potential recruits are wary. State and local governments have hundreds of open positions across services, and recruitment and retention has left law enforcement, the fire services, and our emergency medical services running short-handed since before the pandemic, with no immediate relief in sight.

Here in Maine the members of the 131st Maine State Legislature faced a session that was marked by procedural confusion and what many observers, including legislators themselves, deemed chaos. School budgets have repeatedly failed around the state. Communities are struggling to fund infrastructure, like school upgrades, despite a well-documented school infrastructure problem that's keeping Maine children from school daily. Additionally, school board meetings and processes have been targeted by national special interests, and town and city budgets and meeting processes haven't been all smooth sailing either.

However, there are stark differences between the processes at the State and municipal levels. Locally the work of government and decision making is transparent, predictable, and full of interaction between constituents and

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government officials, according to democracy researchers.

During a public hearing in July, the legislature's Joint Rules Committee heard testimony from senators and representatives outlining issues with the lawmaking process which undermine transparency and accountability by making communication difficult. Ironically, while the meeting and oral testimony was streamed (and available as a recording later), I was unable to access the written materials, which included the majority of submitted testimony and agenda online and could not get copies by contacting the clerk.

The date for the meeting was also changed at the last minute, presumably making it difficult for members of the public to attend or review the testimony. Many of the processes and conduct raised as issues by legislators included what, how and when proposed legislation is made public (and how constituents can participate), as well as the operations of committees. Who should have influence over committee discussions are strictly governed at the municipal level, both in city council and town meeting systems, which might explain the higher levels of trust felt by constituents in those forms of government.

The consequences of these standards were on display this spring when four selectboard members in Milo resigned after an illegal meeting following an executive

session, according to news coverage at the time. The "illegal meeting" was a hallway conversation caught on camera and released to the community in which the board members continued discussing personnel issues, including public works employees and police officers. Within days, 200 community members signed a petition to recall the recent election, but the targeted selectpersons resigned making it unnecessary and a new election was held within a month.

Town officials kept the public and local media informed and made it clear that trust had to be rebuilt. That swift action, which was based on clear procedures and expectations, also helped by recordings and local press, is in stark contrast to the standards state lawmakers, and members of congress, can be held to by their constituents, let alone their own institutions.

Creating a culture of trust isn't easy, especially when trust is intangible and often process related. It is challenging to quantify the cost-benefit and fund the expertise, training and time needed to foster engagement, communication, and responsiveness that results in a system of two-way communications between constituents and local government. Ensuring information is timely, accurate and accessible is only the first step to public participation and when COVID closed public meetings, municipalities were left to figure out the technicalities of live streaming meetings.

Both Bath and Falmouth had their inaugural virtual

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meetings hijacked by people displaying pornographic images and vulgar language. Towns and cities had to purchase video conferencing platforms to ensure public safety while encouraging ease of public access and interaction. In Vassalboro, meetings were recorded but not live streamed, so one woman bought a tripod and camera and began live streaming each meeting on Facebook because she recognized that “information is power.”

Larger municipal governments have invested in communications professionals on staff or contract for expertise when needed. However, there are also ways to harness the expertise or pool resources of community organizations, local press, and volunteers to support more robust community participation and increase transparency. Traditionally, municipalities used the press and social media like a notice board to post public notices to fulfill a legal obligation or share information and be done. Unfortunately, that approach doesn’t offer opportunities for responsiveness or for the public to influence processes, and a focus on good news or required news only, misses an opportunity to increase trust.

This kind of communication can seem risky, especially since social media is designed to be less formal and much harder to control. But with honesty, creativity, and a good dose of humor, as with the case in the Bangor Police Department, the resulting engagement can quickly multiply.

When Lt. Tim Cotton took over the Public Information

Officer (PIO) role in 2014 for the Bangor Police Department, he had no communication or writing training or experience. Despite this, the chief supported him to do whatever he wanted and what Cotton wanted was to let people know they were being heard and that he, as a representative of his government agency, was human. In his posts he complained, admitted mistakes, shared bad news, and most importantly, in his opinion, responded to comments and questions. In a city with a population of 32,000, their Facebook page has over 330,000 followers which means probably everyone in town sees or hears about their posts and has a connection with the department. Cotton’s number one advice to other PIOs, “People should know that you’re reading their comments because that’s what makes them feel like they’re being heard. If you want them to pay attention you need to let them know that you’re paying attention.”

Paying attention to the feedback and participation by community members means being open to changing the status quo. If no one submits input about posted plans, budgets, or developments, or attendance is extremely low at town meetings, despite following a charter or legal requirements, municipalities aren’t engaging the right people or in the right method. While frustrating, it’s up to the government to build trust (or at least try).

While working for the local government in Ireland, I developed and managed a community participation

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strategy with the goal of creating policies and processes that effectively improved the lives of residents in specific neighborhoods, in which the local government was the owner and landlord. A big task, but ultimately the purpose of local government is to create conditions that are reflective and responsive to what the people living in a place want and need (as defined by them and a variety of stakeholders).

While not all entirely transferable, some of the engagement structures and initiatives created in Ireland are already happening across towns and cities in Maine. Many of these efforts can be funded creatively or by supporting partner agencies in applying for grant funding, considering that many federal grants build in requirements for community involvement and decision making.

We provided money for childcare and training for volunteers who attended meetings. This can be done by partnering with a high school and middle school. Boothbay and Boothbay Harbor recruit students to babysit at school during the annual school budget vote so parents can attend. If parents can't attend meetings or be on boards or committees, that results in excluding much of your community.

We partnered with community organizations and ensured monthly community meetings with town officials from various departments, which were conducted in the evening at community centers. We trained volunteers and community members about how local government decisions were made, projects funded, and progress measured. We trained local officials in participatory research methods and how to monitor, evaluate and facilitate planning processes. We used mediators and conflict resolution

experts when relationships were historically strained or there were legal disputes, rather than heading to court. We provided media relations support to volunteers and to government officials by using resources of our larger county government. I helped write speeches given by volunteers in front of national politicians for visits and advocacy events rather than relying on officials to deliver important community messages.

We paired with youth organizations and created participatory processes for the design of any community or recreational space or facility to ensure young people and families influenced the design, use, maintenance, and management of parks, playing fields, and playgrounds.

Public art in Maine towns and cities are good examples of joint planning processes that can be expanded to land use, budgets, zoning, and planning committees. The ultimate signifier of mutual trust is of course who and how constituents participate in budgeting decisions and even the spending itself. Participatory budgeting is a community-led process that offers opportunities for higher levels of engagement than commenting or voting on a proposal crafted by officials.

The City of Portland has used participatory budget processes to allocate federal American Rescue Plan Act funds and with the opioid settlement money, and the majority of Maine's towns use town meetings, either by referendum or public meeting, for major spending decisions.

Engaging community members in local government processes goes a long way toward building public trust and an informed constituency, which in turn, can help engage other community members in the processes. 🏔️



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WHERE *in* MAINE?

By Rebecca Lambert / Municipal Issues Specialist

A beautiful late August sunrise over Moxie Lake.

The “Where in Maine?” series showcases the more whimsical sides of our communities. Municipalities in Maine will be explored with a focus on their vibrant downtowns, historic landmarks as well as the things that make each Maine town or city unique.

Photos in this series by Rebecca Lambert, MMA

The Forks

The tiny town in which every corner holds a secret treasure waiting to be discovered.



The glow created by the rising sun turns these dew-coated webs into a glittering tapestry, perfectly capturing the quiet beauty of a world waking up.

This month, the “Where in Maine” series heads away from the coast to the confluence of the Kennebec and Dead Rivers, where a tiny town of 48 sits nestled in Somerset County. I use the word tiny in terms of population, since physically the entire town is approximately 41.5 square miles, larger in mass than Biddeford, the city featured in the last article of the series, which is about 30 square miles. The Forks is a well-known area for outdoor recreation, specifically whitewater rafting, fishing, and hiking. However, much like other parts of rural Maine, The Forks also has fascinating historical roots, enabling the community to capitalize on their natural resources to bolster the local economy.

Before European settlers arrived, the region that is now The Forks was inhabited by the Wabanaki Nation who utilized available natural resources for subsistence, while the Kennebec and Dead Rivers provided a vital transportation and trade route.

In 1775, Benedict Arnold made his famous expedition through the Maine wilderness with the help of Reuben and Samuel Getchell, residents of Vassalboro who were known for their knowledge of the local geography, particularly where the Kennebec and Dead rivers intersect, and expertise in navigating the challenging wilderness of Maine, including The Forks region. This knowledge made them invaluable assets to Arnold’s expedition to capture Quebec City during the Revolutionary War.

Their story is often told in the context of the broader narrative of Arnold’s expedition, emphasizing the difficulties faced by the Continental Army in a harsh and unforgiving landscape. Their connection to The Forks underscores the strategic importance of this location on their journey toward Quebec.

Not to mention, it’s a cool bit of trivia you can whip out at parties.

When European exploration and settlement began in the 17th century, early settlers were primarily engaged in logging, farming, and river-based transport. As you can imagine given the vast forests surrounding the area, The Forks became integral to Maine’s lumber industry as a rich source of timber—a crucial material for shipbuilding and construction during the Industrial Revolution. The arrival of the railroad further catalyzed the area’s economic growth, enabling easier transport of lumber, and in turn boosting the local economy.

The logging boom did not come without consequences, however. As deforestation led to environmental degradation, it prompted early conservation efforts. Yet, despite the industry’s decline in the early 20th century due to resource depletion and changing economic conditions, The



A boat full of rafters practically disappear in Magic Falls, a big rapid on the Kennebec River.

Forks remained an important regional hub for logging and related activities well into the mid-20th century.

In recent decades, The Forks has transitioned from a primarily industrial economy to one focused on tourism and outdoor recreation. Its picturesque landscapes, including lush forests, clear rivers, spectacular waterfalls, and mountainous terrain have made it a popular destination for adventure tourism.

Whitewater Rafting

The Forks is particularly known for some of the most thrilling and varied whitewater experiences in the north-eastern United States. The Kennebec and Dead Rivers are renowned for their challenging rapids, attracting rafters and kayakers from across the country. The region's seasonal water flow variations create ideal conditions for all skill levels. There are many guide services available in the area, some with lodging and meal options and some offering full weekend adventure packages.

The Kennebec River, originating from Moosehead Lake, flows southward through The Forks before continuing its journey to the Atlantic Ocean. This river is fed by numerous tributaries, including the East and West Outlets, which contribute to its volume and flow rate. The Kennebec is controlled by several hydroelectric dams, including the Harris Station Dam, which releases water in a manner that creates ideal rafting conditions in the summer months.

The stretch of the Kennebec River below the Harris Station Dam, known as the Upper Kennebec, is famous for its rapids, including "Three Sisters" and "Magic Falls." These rapids offer thrilling drops and waves, making for an exhilarating ride. The river then transitions into calmer waters in the Lower Kennebec, allowing rafters to enjoy the surrounding wilderness and possibly spot wildlife such as

bald eagles and moose.

The Dead River, in contrast, is known for its remote and wild character. Flowing out of Flagstaff Lake, the Dead River winds through dense forests and rugged terrain, offering a more isolated and challenging rafting experience. The river's flow is also controlled by dams, with scheduled releases creating some of the most intense whitewater conditions in the region.

One of the most famous sections of the Dead River is the "Poplar Hill Falls," a series of powerful rapids that test the skills and endurance of even the most seasoned rafters. The Dead River's wilderness setting adds to the sense of adventure, with rafters often encountering remote and untouched landscapes that are inaccessible by road.

Guided trips on the Dead River are available but are typically scheduled around the dam release dates. These trips require a higher level of physical fitness and rafting experience, and participants are usually provided with more advanced safety gear and instruction.

I had the opportunity to sit at Crusher Pool, where the rafters end their journey, and chat with a couple bus drivers for one of the guide companies. As we waited for the first wave of rafters to float in, one of the bus drivers started "talking" to the eagles flying around and the eagles were calling back. It was quite amusing.

Fishing

Additionally, the rivers are fed by numerous tributaries and surrounding lakes, creating a network of aquatic habitats that support a wide variety of fish species, making The Forks a favored spot for both recreational and sport fishing.

The ecological diversity of The Forks is a product of its unique climatic conditions and varied topography. The re-

gion experiences cold winters and cool summers, creating an ideal environment for cold-water fish species. The rivers and lakes are teeming with brook trout, landlocked salmon, smallmouth bass, and other species of fish.

Fly fishing is perhaps the most iconic form of fishing in The Forks, particularly in the Kennebec River. The river's cool, oxygen-rich waters provide an ideal habitat for brook trout and landlocked salmon. Anglers can often be seen wading into the river, casting their lines in pursuit of these prized fish. The stretch of the Kennebec River below the Harris Station Dam is especially renowned for its excellent fly-fishing conditions, with plentiful insect hatches that attract trout and salmon.

Spin fishing is another popular method in The Forks, particularly for those targeting smallmouth bass. The Dead River, with its slower-moving sections and deeper pools, offers prime conditions for bass fishing. Anglers using spinning rods and lures can expect to catch smallmouth bass, which are known for their fighting spirit and make for an exciting catch.

The region's numerous lakes and ponds also provide

excellent fishing opportunities, with both largemouth and smallmouth bass and other fish species readily available.

Hiking & Camping

As would be expected, the wilderness surrounding The Forks is a hidden gem for hiking enthusiasts offering numerous trails and camping or glamping sites and cabins, catering to those who seek to explore the area's natural beauty.

The Appalachian Trail (AT), one of the most famous long-distance hiking trails spanning from Georgia to Maine, passes through the western part of The Forks. One of the most notable sections of the AT is the Kennebec River crossing, which is infamous among thru-hikers due to the river's dangerous currents. This segment of the trail provides hikers with a true wilderness experience, far from the distractions of modern life, and is ideal for those looking for multi-day backpacking adventures.

One of my personal favorites to do with my little guy is the Moxie Falls trail. It's a perfect choice for those seeking a less strenuous but equally rewarding experience, since the hike leads to one of Maine's highest and most spectacular waterfalls. The trail is approximately two miles round-trip and is well-maintained, making it accessible for hikers of all skill levels. The highlight of the trail is Moxie Falls, which plunges over 90 feet into a deep gorge, surrounded by dense forest.

Bald Mountain and Pleasant Pond Mountain are two prominent peaks near The Forks, both offering hikers a challenge with rewarding summit views. The Bald Mountain Trail is a moderately difficult hike that leads to the summit of Bald Mountain, where hikers will experience views of the surrounding mountains and valleys. The trail is steep in sections but is well-marked and maintained.

Pleasant Pond Mountain, located to the northeast of The Forks, is a more strenuous hike, with a trail that climbs steadily through forest before reaching the open summit. From the top, hikers can enjoy expansive views of Pleasant Pond and the surrounding wilderness. This trail is part of the Appalachian Trail system, making it a popular choice for section hikers and those wanting a more challenging day hike.

As I researched other hiking opportunities in the region, I found one I hadn't heard of before, Mosquito Mountain. Based on the reviews I read, the name is apt, so bring bug spray if you plan to venture out on this hike. It was a bit dark when I got here and couldn't find the trail head, so I opted to take another trail that I had forgotten about, the Magic Falls Trail. The trail leads to the spot on the Kenne-

The Moxie Falls trail, a short and easy hike to a gorgeous waterfall."





The “spotter” raft comes through just after the kayaker.



Rafters begin the descent into Magic Falls on the Kennebec River.

bec River where Magic Falls is located, a rapid on that river mentioned earlier in the article. Hiking into this location gives you a riverside view to watch the rafters float by.

I figured this could make for some good photo opportunities and the trail started as I remembered, a fairly easy hike, but the middle became a bit more challenging, created by the blown down trees in and along the trail that I assumed was storm related. There was evidence of logging activities that I hadn't remembered from previous hikes—full disclosure that was approximately 10 years ago—but overall, the trail was easy to follow.

As you get closer to the gorge, you can hear the river getting louder before the trail turns sharply left and heads down a steep grade to a lovely spot on the rocks next to the river. I was there at about 9:00 a.m. and the water seemed low, and I wondered how rafting would be in such low water, not realizing in that moment the river was controlled by a dam release.

As I sat there, enjoying the sounds of nature, trying to calculate the time rafters would be coming through the gorge, everything seemed to get louder. As I looked around, I noticed the water level had risen and was now starting to flow over the exposed rocks faster, creating much more impressive white-water conditions. Then it dawned on me, of course, the dam release!

OK, now THIS was more like water to raft on!

It was at this time I was joined by a friendly man, Albert Marinelli, who has made a career of photographing rafters coming down the river. He explained the timing of the dam release and assured me that I wouldn't get swept away in the current from where I was sitting.

His business is called Rapid Shooters, and he contracts with rafting companies and private guides to photograph their trips. Although he isn't from Maine originally, he has been in The Forks region for approximately 40 years. He was very knowledgeable of the area, and we had a great chat while waiting for the rafters.

The moment had finally arrived when the first person, a kayaker who supervises the rafters as they go down the river, came into view, followed by several brightly colored rafts. It was amazing to watch them come through the rapids, yelling with excitement and cheering each other on—furiously paddling at the beckon of their guide.

It was exhilarating just to watch!

The Forks is home to several campgrounds that cater to a variety of camping styles, from tent and RV camping to glamping and cabin rentals. These campgrounds are typically located near popular hiking and rafting areas, providing convenient access to the region's outdoor activities. Facilities at these campgrounds often include picnic tables, fire rings, restrooms, and, in some cases, electrical hookups.

One of the most popular campgrounds and outfitters in The Forks is Northern Outdoors, which is situated along the Kennebec River. This campground offers a full range of accommodations and serves as a base for guided rafting trips and other outdoor adventures in all four seasons.

As a side note, I would be remiss if I didn't mention Three Rivers Rafting, which is the company whose bus drivers I spoke with at Crusher Pool. They were happy to answer my questions, and I appreciate their time.

For those seeking a more remote and immersive camping experience, backcountry camping in The Forks offers the opportunity to camp in pristine wilderness settings. Backcountry camping requires a higher level of preparation and self-sufficiency, since there are no facilities or amenities available. It's also important for campers to be cognizant of their environmental impact and ensure that the natural beauty of the area is preserved. Popular backcountry camping spots include areas along the Appalachian Trail and near remote ponds and lakes, where campers can enjoy solitude and the sounds of nature.

You can also find lean-to shelters in backcountry camping areas, which are three-sided wooden structures that

provide basic shelter from the elements and are typically located along popular hiking trails. In The Forks, several lean-tos are available for use by hikers and campers and are free to use on a first-come, first-served basis, perfect for those who prefer not to carry a tent.

I prefer to stay in lean-tos in the fall after the bugs have gone. The nights are cool and with the right sleeping bag, nothing beats sleeping in the crisp, fresh air...of course, until an animal wanders into your lean-to, but that's a story for another time. Just be forewarned, there are no amenities beyond basic shelter, so campers must be prepared with their own food, water, and sleeping gear.

Winter Recreation

During winter, the region transforms into a hub for snowmobiling, ice fishing, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. The Forks' proximity to several snowmobile trails and groomed cross-country tracks enhances its appeal as a winter destination.

Snowmobiling is the most popular winter activity in The Forks, drawing visitors from across the northeastern United States and beyond. The region boasts an extensive network of well-maintained snowmobile trails, including over 100 miles of groomed trails that connect to the larger Maine Interconnected Trail System (ITS). This network allows snowmobilers to explore vast stretches of wilderness, traverse mountain passes, and access remote areas that are otherwise inaccessible in winter.

Several key trails, including those that lead to the major routes in Maine's ITS offer a mix of terrain, from smooth, wide-open stretches to challenging mountain paths, catering to both novice and experienced snowmobilers. The area's trails are maintained by local snowmobile clubs and supported by the Maine Snowmobile Association, ensuring that they remain in excellent condition throughout the season.

Snowmobiling in The Forks also provides access to scenic destinations such as the expansive views from Curn Mountain, the highest groomed snowmobile trail in Maine. This destination offers not only the thrill of the ride but also the opportunity to experience the natural beauty of Maine's serene winter landscape.

For those seeking a quieter winter experience, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are excellent options in The Forks. The region's rolling hills, dense forests, and frozen lakes provide a perfect backdrop for these activities. Cross-country skiing trails are abundant, with options ranging from groomed tracks to backcountry routes that allow for deep exploration of the wilderness.

A popular area for cross-country skiing is on the Ken-

nebec River Trail, which offers groomed trails that follow the course of the river. This trail provides scenic views of the river, surrounding forests, and occasional glimpses of wildlife. The relatively gentle terrain makes it accessible to skiers of all skill levels, while more challenging routes can be found in the surrounding hills and mountains.

Snowshoeing offers a way to explore areas that are too rugged or remote for skiing. The Forks' trail network and public lands provide endless opportunities for snowshoeing, whether along established trails or in the backcountry. Snowshoeing allows for close encounters with nature and the chance to explore off the beaten path, with the solitude of winter adding to the sense of adventure.

While The Forks is not home to large alpine ski resorts, it offers excellent opportunities for backcountry skiing, which has grown in popularity as more outdoor enthusiasts seek out less crowded and more adventurous experiences. The region's mountainous terrain provides numerous routes for backcountry skiing, with opportunities for both steep descents and gentle glade runs. For those interested in alpine skiing, nearby resorts such as Sugarloaf and Saddleback Mountain are within a reasonable driving distance.

Ice fishing is a traditional winter activity in Maine, and that is no different in The Forks. When the region's lakes and ponds freeze over, those eager to witness the spring of a flag will find ideal conditions for this popular pastime. Moxie Pond, Indian Pond, and the nearby Moosehead Lake are among the most popular spots. Ice fishing is often viewed as a social activity, with groups of anglers setting up ice shacks and spending the day on the frozen lakes. The experience is as much about camaraderie and enjoying the winter landscape as it is about fishing.

Conserving Natural Resources

Relying heavily on tourism for their economy, the shift towards eco-tourism and sustainable development reflects a broader trend of integrating environmental stewardship with economic growth. One step toward that



The Hawk's Nest Restaurant & Lodge, a great spot to eat overlooking the Dead River.

goal is to institute conservation initiatives to preserve the natural landscapes and waterways, which is essential in maintaining the appeal to tourists and the balance between recreation and preservation.

These efforts include habitat restoration projects, wildlife monitoring, and public education campaigns aimed at encouraging responsible outdoor practices. The involvement of the local community in conservation initiatives is a crucial aspect to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the region's natural resources.

For fishing, conservation efforts look like monitoring fish populations or managing fishing regulations. Also, the introduction of catch-and-release practices, along with strict regulations, ensures that the fish populations remain healthy and sustainable for future generations.

Increased human activity from hiking and camping presents its own challenges to the environment. The impact of foot traffic on trails, improper waste disposal, and the potential for habitat disruption are all concerns that need to be managed to preserve the area's natural beauty.

Even whitewater rafting, a significant economic driver in The Forks, also comes with its own environmental impacts. While the rafting industry provides jobs and revenue in an otherwise remote and economically limited region, the subsequent environmental impacts cannot be overlooked for the industry to be sustainable. Coupled with increased human activity, the construction and operation of hydroelectric dams, which create the conditions for whitewater rafting, have altered the natural flow of the rivers, affecting aquatic ecosystems and fish populations.

Local organizations and government agencies have implemented conservation measures and regulations that include monitoring the environmental effects of dam releases, promoting sustainable tourism practices, enforcing strict guidelines on waste disposal, wildlife protection, maintaining and improving trail systems, promoting "Leave No Trace" and "Carry In, Carry Out" principles, and regulating backcountry camping.

A former rafting guide shared with me that the rafting community is encouraged to participate in conservation efforts, such as river clean-up events and educational programs on environmental stewardship, and many of the outdoor recreation businesses work conservation and sustainability into their business plans.

Sustenance & Rejuvenation

Being a small rural town, you might be wondering what kind of food you can find in this area of the state. Well, you won't find an array of restaurants with a variety of cultural choices intertwined, but there are options. Many

of the rafting companies offer food as part of their packages or have restaurants catering to visitors, most serving classic pub fare with local craft beers and other spirits, and of course nonalcoholic options.

After my hike, the snacks I had packed were not satiating my hunger, so I decided to stop at the Hawk's Nest Restaurant & Lodge for a giant pretzel with beer cheese, complimented by a beer. I sat on their deck, overlooking the Dead River, and began chatting with my waitress, Emily Batchelder. I found that she was not originally from The Forks, but fell in love with the area, and wanting to make it her home, moved from Carmel, Maine. She shared that her favorite part of being there was the people that come and go from The Forks. She said, people just respect you for who you are, young or old, no matter the background, "if you have a good heart, you're good."

That type of environment, coupled with the excitement of recreation opportunities in the region drew her in, but she also sees the healing aspects of nature and the importance of self-care. One thing Emily feels is missing from the area is the part where you take care of yourself after recreation. "There are so many opportunities for recreation, I want to promote the other side of that...rejuvenation." To that end, in addition to being a raft guide and waitress, she wanted to be able to provide something to aid in healing, leading her to open Confluence Massage Therapy, offering massage and Reiki.

I loved that idea and was impressed at how incredibly intuitive that was to not only pick up on the lack of that specific service in the area, but also put in the work to make it happen. Emily has a natural, warm, and fun personality, and I have no doubt she will bring an added benefit to locals and visitors alike.

As avid "Where In Maine" readers will know, I always scope out the best ice cream shop in whatever town or city I am in. Sadly, this was one thing that was missing from The Forks region. Perhaps I could convince Emily to add that to her business plan!

The economic benefits of tourism in The Forks are clear, but it is crucial to balance this with careful management of the environmental impacts to preserve the region's natural resources and sustain the industry. As outdoor recreation continues to grow in popularity, The Forks stands out as a model of how remote, rural areas can leverage their natural assets to create sustainable tourism opportunities while maintaining the integrity of the environment. By continuing to promote conservation practices and efforts, The Forks will continue to be a premier recreation destination while preserving its natural beauty for future generations. 🏔️



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A Shortage in Municipal Managers

While the number of experienced managers is declining, at the end of the day it is “fit with the community” that tops the list of qualifications.

By Betty Adams

Filling the top administrative post in a municipality comes with a myriad of challenges and some exciting possibilities. Fewer people apply for the job than in previous years and some come without experience or education in public administration, and there’s no escaping the politics involved.

In mid-August, the Municipal Career Center on the Maine Municipal Association’s website listed five communities seeking a town manager or administrator.

The Town of Union in Knox County sought candidates with experience and with a bachelor’s degree in public administration or a related field. The Town of Sebago in Cumberland County listed similar requirements.

The Town of Sangerville in Piscataquis County wanted a candidate with management experience and knowledge of road commissioner responsibilities.

The Town of Ashland in Aroostook County was looking for a town manager with a thorough knowledge of public administration, while the island community of North Haven in Knox County wanted a town administrator with “demonstrated leadership and management skills” preferably by late August to shadow the current administrator.

Searches were underway by other communities as well.

“The issue that we’re finding is we’re not getting the quality and quantity of really experienced managers in searches,” said Don Gerrish, who retired after 37 years as a town manager in Maine and went to work as a consultant in 2009 for the law firm of Eaton Peabody. He has performed more than 70 city and town manager searches since then and offered some examples of the market change:

“Eight years ago, we did a search in Bar Harbor for a manager; we received almost 60 applications with pretty qualified people. I did it two years ago and had 18 applicants for the position. It doesn’t mean we can’t find people. You get some numbers. More recently I did



Yarmouth and Cape Elizabeth. We had 22-23 applications; we got some good applications.”

He noted that the City of Gardiner in Kennebec County recently went out three times to find a new manager, adding, “We’re seeing less qualified, less numbers. People aren’t getting into the profession like they were in the past.”

Gerrish said part of the problem is the lack of a feeder system. He graduated in the public management program at the University of Maine, but that program was discontinued. Currently the University of Maine at Augusta offers the only public administration bachelor’s degree in the state.

Another problem is the demands of the public management role itself. “The job is much more difficult today than it’s ever been. There are a lot of different viewpoints. Social media has made it very difficult to do the job and do it correctly. It causes issues for a manager. Elected officials trying to come to agreement and compromise is not as good as it’s been. Again, it’s not that we don’t find people, but looking at it you have less choices.”

Some success comes from those already within the municipal employee ranks, including police chiefs, finance officers and public works personnel who transition to the chief administrative role, he noted.

“We get many applicants in different professions. It doesn’t mean they couldn’t be a manager.” Gerrish said, adding that it helps if the applicant has been in a job that involves working with a board.

The City of Augusta hired him to help find a new manager as William “Bill” Bridgeo was retiring from that role

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in 2021. (Bridgeo currently represents part of Augusta in the state House of Representatives.) When the search ended without a candidate being chosen, Susan Robertson, then the city’s human resource director, agreed to become city manager. Then Jared Mills, who retired as Augusta’s chief of police and who worked as assistant city manager, was hired as city manager in 2024.

Ultimately, Gerrish said, “You need someone who’s going to fit your community.”

Historically many municipalities required the manager to live within that community; however, that has changed from a mandate to a preference.

“They need to make a commitment to be part of the community,” Gerrish said.

Or you can find a qualified applicant who’s already a resident.

That happened a little over a year ago, when the Town of Madison was able to find a new manager, Denise Ducharme, after a search that lasted about six months. Ducharme has lived in that Somerset County town since 1983, and then-manager Tim Curtis was departing to take on the role of Somerset County administrator.

“We put out an ad and didn’t feel that we had the quality we were looking for the first time,” said Al Veneziano, chairman of the Madison Selectboard. “We went back again and that’s when Denise applied.”

Veneziano noted that at the time a number of towns in the area, including larger municipalities, were seeking new managers as well, with the latter offering more money. “We’re not going to win that battle,” he said. “We aren’t going to offer the salary to the point where

they’re going to take that job.”

He also said he thinks it’s important for a manager to live in the community as Ducharme does. “She certainly has experience in the workforce,” he added. “The only thing she was missing was municipal experience, and she certainly has picked up on that very quickly.”

For her part, Ducharme was reluctant to apply even after encouragement from other town officials and her husband, state Rep. John “Jack” Ducharme. Her husband told her “You’d be perfect for the job.”

Ducharme grew up in a family of public servants. Her father, Richard “Spike” Carey, served in the state Legislature and as mayor of Waterville, and her mother, Helen Carey, was city clerk in Waterville for many years.

Ducharme had graduated from UMaine with a degree in public management in the early 1980s. “I looked for a public management job, town manager, and did a couple of internships,” she said. “I worked in Bar Harbor for Ed Ainsworth, which I absolutely loved, but nobody wanted to hire somebody right out of college. I ended up going in a different direction, had a family, and was working for the state as a Medicaid auditor, then in the state Auditor’s Office for unclaimed property. She spent 15 years there as manager.

After almost 22 years as a state employee, she migrated to the vendor side and did software support for a company that worked with unclaimed property offices in various states.

Then Ducharme was laid off in June 2023.

“Forty-plus years after graduating with a degree in public management, I put my application in for town manager,” she said. “I must have rocked the interview.

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Apparently, I impressed them.” Twelve hours later she was asked to come in to negotiate a contract.

“I honestly was scared to death to take the job,” Ducharme said in August 2024. “I had the ingredients, but I didn’t have the recipe.” Her employment background, however, gave her many skills. “I’ve been able to cobble together my own recipe and make this job my own,” she said. “As I come up on a year, I’m delighted to have the job. I love it. I really enjoy serving the public.

I’ve been finding aspects to it every single day that really speak to my heart and why I should be doing this.”

Ducharme said she also has a group of people, both active and retired town and city managers, that she can reach out to when she needs help on a particular issue.

Occasionally, a municipality hires a retired manager to come in as an interim manager and to help a new manager get off to a good start in the role.

Mitch Berkowitz aided the Town of Madison in its search for a new manager. Berkowitz is an ambassador – a resource for other officials – with the Maine Town, City and County Management Association. He retired as town manager in Durham in 2014 after 42 years working in municipal management posts. Since then, he has served as interim manager in more than a dozen communities.

He talked of the importance of educating an interim or a new municipal manager and the selectboard or

council members in their respective roles and responsibilities, pointing out that policymaking is the domain of elected officials while policy implementation is the domain of the town administrator or city manager.

As Berkowitz said in an email, “The issue of lines blurring between elected and appointed officials is constant and creates the angst in this profession and the turnover. The problem is that there are not many folks willing to step into the administrative positions, so the smaller communities tend to have frequency of disruption and turnover though every community faces some of these challenges... The other major challenge is the work week which can at times be brutal to a person and their family.”

In mid-August, Berkowitz was working as a consultant with the Chebeague Island Selectboard. He and Viktoria Wood, town administrator, produced *The Chebeague Island Elected & Appointed Officials Orientation and Guide Est. 2024*.

“The Working Relationship Between the Selectboard and the Town Administrator” section notes that “The best of working relationships generally are a team effort with the elected officials signing off through a vote of the Board. The most non-productive outcomes usually come from a poor working relationship where no team effort is achieved, and decisions become solely political.”

The Town of Chebeague Island became a town in

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2007 after seceding from the Town of Cumberland, but Berkowitz noted that despite its relatively young age, it still must meet various governmental requirements.

“A municipality is a business, but many taxpayers see it as a superfluous luxury,” Berkowitz said. “That’s unfortunate.” He added, “It’s a complex business model. We say that the voters and taxpayers are shareholders, as they are, but the state regulates how you operate, so much more than private enterprise.”

Berkowitz talked of the state’s Right to Know Law and likened those in government to the fish inside a small fishbowl: “The people looking in are the taxpayers, ratepayers, stockholders, whatever, and have the right to see almost everything that we’re doing. Therein lies the reason why we have evolved the way we have. We should be transparent. There are some communities where that is not happening.”

He also pointed out that council and selectboard membership can change with each fiscal year election, which poses another hurdle for managers. He added, “It’s an interesting, challenging profession; for those who last, good luck to them.”

The International City/County Management Association website notes, “As the needs of our cities, towns,

and counties have become more complex, so has the job of professional local government managers and administrators. Back in the day, these individuals were recruited from the ranks of civil engineers, who were trained to build and maintain the community’s bridges, roads, and water systems. Today’s managers and administrators also possess the management “know-how” to build strong communities, if not from the ground up, then by ensuring the continuous improvement of community services.”

It notes that many of them hold bachelor’s degrees in public administration, political science, or business and that increasing numbers have MBAs or other advanced degrees.

Some served previously as directors of other municipal departments and/or as assistant managers.

The ICMA also offers a handbook for communities seeking a new top administrator, saying, “Recruiting and selecting a local government manager or administrator is one of the most important responsibilities of a local governing body. It requires careful planning, astute evaluation of candidates, and a clear understanding of the relationship between the local government and the administrator.” 🏔️



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Kerry Leichtman: From writer to assessor

By Liz Mockler

Kerry Leichtman seemed like a poor candidate for municipal assessing. He was a magazine writer, a book publisher, and a newspaper freelancer. Not surprisingly given his creative acumen, he was awful at math.

Yet he used his communication skills and experience serving on the Rockport Planning Board to parlay them into a successful career as an assessor for two of Maine's most popular coastal towns. He was named the state's 2023 assessor of the year.

"I never liked math. I was that kid in junior high who would say 'when am I ever going to use this,'" Leichtman said. "The joke was on me."

Leichtman was 48 years old when he took the state assessor's course from Maine Revenue Services and passed a grueling eight-hour exam. Soon after, he was hired as the assistant to Rockport assessor Judith Mathiau, who remains a friend and colleague today. In fact, the duo created and to this day teach an assessing course that gives students an on-the-ground education in assessing property. Mathiau left Rockport for Winslow, where she continues to serve as assessor.

"I had to reinvent myself," he said. "I tried appraising, but I didn't like it. Someone recommended assessing, so I signed up for property tax school and I liked it."

As a member of the Maine Municipal Association's Legislative Policy Committee, Leichtman keeps abreast of all the changing state and federal laws and is able to serve as a mentor to young assessors just starting their own careers.

Leichtman spent 25 years as a writer for trade magazines, including the first-ever magazine to focus on computers that could produce colored material. It was groundbreaking and popular with hobbyists and computer programmers. After working for a world-wide pub-



lisher, who tried repeatedly to lure him away from Maine, he settled in Camden and opened an office.

"I wanted to write, so I filled it with books and desks, and I started writing," he said.

He started a book publishing company and wrote a best-selling book called "What's Cooking at Moody's Diner." It told the story of the family who founded the popular Waldoboro eatery and included recipes, including for their famous pies.

"It was a hit," he said.

But Leichtman's real love was writing screenplays. He wrote three, including a script that won a prestigious award and opened the door

to a possible sale to Hollywood. The call never came.

"It was what I really wanted to do," he said, "but I had to get practical."

His long experience as a member of the Rockport Planning Board proved essential in what would become his public service career. He served 14 years on the board, the last dozen as chairman, and loved how he "didn't have to make things up" in his tired mind.

"I liked that I didn't have to be creative," he said. As with planning board applications, assessing offered the kind of structure he never enjoyed as a writer.

"With assessing, there are construction rules, statutes and common practice. There was all kinds of structure," he said. "I didn't have to make it up."

"It was like exhaling," he added.

Leichtman has assessed property in Rockport since 2009; four years later the Town of Camden wanted to share him when they were without an assessor. He hasn't turned back.

"I like helping people. I believe everyone deserves to know how their property is valued and their taxes derived," he said. "I will keep explaining it until the light bulb goes on and they understand it. I like knowing that

About the Author: Liz Mockler is a freelance writer from Newport and regular contributor to Maine Town & City, lizmockler1@hotmail.com.

everyone in my jurisdiction, rich and poor, are being treated fairly under the system.”

Despite overseeing a full reevaluation of Camden, Leichtman took time recently to discuss his work and why he finds satisfaction in his day-to-day duties.

Q What led you to a career in municipal assessing?

A. I served on Rockport’s planning board for 14 years, the last 12 as its chairman. It was during a period of rapid growth (late 1990s through 2008 or so). To meet the demand, we met twice a month. The agendas were so full, I’d map out each meeting beforehand, estimating how much time each application would need, and, while making sure everyone who needed to speak was heard, would do my best to keep the meeting on track. Recognizing that many who came before the board were nervous, I tried to strike a balance between the serious, official side of what we were doing with being human, not getting too wrapped up in the necessary formality of it all. I used humor to keep it real and relax those who were uneasy about speaking in public.

I had three rules for participating – what they had to say should be pertinent to the discussion at hand; their tone and comments needed to be civil; and they weren’t to be repetitive. I also had a few rules for my boards. They had to read the material before the meetings and had to stay within our parameters of authority. The thing I said most often was, “That’s none of our business,” when a board member asked a question or made an objection that was not within our purview.

My tenure with the board was very successful. I was as surprised as anyone. Sometime around 2005 or so, I needed to decide between moving to continue my publishing career or reinvent myself and find other work. I liked helping people and didn’t want to move, so—and here’s where it gets foggy—somehow wound up taking courses at Maine Revenue Services’ annual Property Tax School.

I didn’t know anything about assessing at the time. Assessing required math skills I didn’t possess—if not for the generosity of a high school math teacher who, on my second attempt at geometry, gave me a passing grade I didn’t deserve, I’d still be in tenth grade—and a fidelity to rules and regulations that were foreign to my way of thinking. I had always made my way by being creative, unorthodox in approach, unafraid to open the next door (sometimes foolishly so). Assessing seemed to be quite the opposite, and I loved that about it. I take comfort in the parameters as laid out in statute, case law and Maine Revenue rules.

Now that I’ve been at it 17 years, as I consider your question, I see interesting parallels. First, creativity is still important. Whether I’m dealing with a taxpayer’s issue, putting together a presentation for a selectboard meeting, or presiding over a State Board of Property Tax Review hearing, creativity counts. I enjoy working on legislation and with Maine Revenue to make the rules better and fair to all. And I am helping people all the time. I believe everyone has a right to know and understand how their property is being valued. I work hard to ensure that everyone in my jurisdiction is treated fairly, equitably and compassionately.

Q How would you describe a typical day in your department?

A. Hectic. Assessors do so much more than value property. The variety of tasks and responsibilities keeps things fresh. The work never gets boring. I used to think that when I got older I’d learn a language or finally learn to play an instrument, to keep my brain lubed. Assessing is all the mental exercise I could ever need.

Q You assess for two towns. Are there any differences in the work and how do you balance your workload?

A. When we first started talking about me doing Camden as well as Rockport, one of the anticipated advantages was that the towns were so similar I’d be able to draw

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from each and have a larger universe of data to analyze. I'll back up a second, to explain why that matters. We use recent sales to assess property. The more data we have, the better. Most small towns have few sales in a year, which makes the job more challenging.

But back to your question. As it turned out the towns were not as similar as they originally seemed to be. They do have many attributes in common: both have a wide variety of property types, from mobile homes whose values are so low the Homestead Exemption reduces their tax obligation to zero, to high-value waterfront properties; both towns are minimum receivers for state education aid; both use a town manager/town meeting form of government; and so on.

Where they differ is the real estate market, which is a pretty important point of departure for assessing considerations.

But that aside, I look at it as one big town of approximately 9,000 people, rather than two towns of roughly 3,500 and 5,500 people. We use the same assessing software system (Vision), the same GIS software (ArcGIS), and the same administration system (Trio).

There are other advantages. I recently subscribed to an ortho photography service (EagleView) for both towns and received a substantial discount for the multi-town purchase. I did the same thing with an iPad-based inspection system (Mobile Assessor), also earning a lower price

for both towns.

The key to being able to do both towns is I have an excellent staff. My Deputy Assessor, Caitlin Thompson, and Assistant Assessor, Rebecca Ewen, are smart, hard-working and self-motivated. Caitlin and I have worked together for nine years. Rebecca just started a year and a half ago.

Q What is the biggest concern or complaint you hear from property owners?

A. This will shock you – taxes are too high. That has always been, and always will be, the standard complaint. But I take issue with being referred to as a tax assessor. I am not. I assess property, not taxes. Spending decisions made by the towns' leadership and appropriations by the schools and county are what determines a person's taxes. In my two towns, the school appropriation is responsible for 60% to 70% of the tax bill. My role is to ensure that the property value, on which the tax is based, is correct.

Okay, semantic argument aside, that complaint has real merit now more than ever. Assessors are obliged by the state Constitution to assess at market value. A constitutional mandate is not one to be taken lightly. We have to follow the market, whether it goes up or down. The market dynamic caused by the Covid pandemic has driven up real estate prices incredibly since late spring/early summer 2020.

I was no different than my colleagues in thinking when the pandemic arrived the bottom would fall out of the market, and we'd be forced to raise mil rates to compensate for falling real estate values. But the opposite happened. We went from properties sitting on the market for weeks or months to bidding wars every time a new property was listed. At the height of it, a property listed on Friday was gone by Monday. The inventory of properties for sale in both of my towns was fewer than 10 for many months. People often told me the reason they paid such an exorbitant price was they kept getting outbid on properties they were previously interested in.

We're just concluding a reval in Camden. Our taxable value increased 44%, or \$740 million. This is after a 2022 update that saw a \$300 million value increase. I did updates in Rockport in 2022 and 2023 to keep my ratios up and we're just starting a full revaluation now that will conclude in 2025. Even though the mil rate decreased with each update and reval, it doesn't go down enough to fully offset the increase. Working people, and retired people on fixed incomes, are truly struggling to stay in their homes. There is very little I can offer them. There are two state programs available, but they are inadequate.

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Q What is the most challenging part of your job?

A. That's it. Dealing with people who are struggling to stay in their homes. It's always a tough story. To people from other parts of the country, Maine is a bargain. They can afford to overpay, by Maine standards, for property, which drives up the value for everyone already here. Remember, we have to assess at market value. You can no more put a cap on what people are spending than you can on what sellers are willing to take. Those buyers and sellers are the market that the Constitution says we must assess to.

Q Would you explain the basics of a full revaluation?

A. A full revaluation starts with "listers" visiting every property in town. They measure each building and perform an interior inspection of all buildings with dwelling units. The point of that exercise is to perfect our database so that the adjusted values are based on accurate data.

Next are the sales ratio studies. We study sales from the previous year, always April 1 to March 31. If there weren't enough sales in that one year, we might go back two years. We use the results from the ratio studies to adjust the cost tables in our CAMA (Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal) system. We test the resulting values by redoing the ratio studies, dividing the same sales into the new values. By doing this we'll discover where further adjustment is needed, make those changes to the appropriate tables and test again. This will continue until the adjusted values produce the sought-after ratio in all categories. I typically target a ratio of 95%.

Once we're comfortable with the new values we send letters to all property owners. The letters show the old and new values and provide a phone number for people to call if they'd like to discuss their new value in an informal hearing.

We'll make further adjustments to individual properties based on what we learn in the hearings.

Once the hearings have been concluded, we will have the town's new valuation and can set the mil rate, fill out the Municipal Valuation Return and other state forms, and send the necessary files to the tax bill printer.

Q How do you keep up with changes in your field?

A. Statutes and rules are constantly changing. Fortunately, assessors have numerous organizations dedicat-

ed to our continuing education needs. There is what we refer to as the mothership, the IAAO, (International Association of Assessing Officers). We have two statewide organizations: The Maine Chapter IAAO and the MAAO (Maine Association of Assessing Officers). There are also regional organizations: CMAAO (Central Maine AAO) and the Northern Maine AAO. There is also the NRAAO (North-east Region AAO). One of the features of MAAO membership is access to the assessor's listserv where we share ideas and information.

We also have a mentoring program called JATA (Just Ask the Assessor). It was a Maine Chapter IAAO program, the brainchild of my good friend, Judy Mathiau, intended to help new assessors. There are around a dozen mentor assessors who have volunteered to do everything from answer questions on particular topics to welcoming job shadowing.

I am a past president of the Maine Chapter IAAO and a member of the MAAO, CMAAO, NRAAO and, of course, the IAAO, for which I am a state representative. I am also on MMA's Legislative Policy Committee and, via the listserv, work to keep assessors informed of new legislative initiatives as well as represent their views to the committee.

The organizations work cooperatively, rather than competitively, to keep Maine assessors informed of regulatory changes, best practices, new technologies and whatever else we need to be aware of.

We also take advantage of the generosity of others, such as MMA's Kate Dufour, who meets with us regularly to present on property tax legislation and other related municipal issues.

The final avenue for keeping up is Property Tax School. Maine Revenue Services runs the school the first week of August every year where they offer a wide variety of courses, many of them taught by assessors. I co-teach a course called The Assessor's Practice. It is geared toward new assessors, selectboard assessors, board of assessors members, and people considering becoming an assessor. Experienced assessors are also welcome as they add perspective gained from their own experiences. Judy and I created the course a number of years ago now and have taught it together since its inception, but this year Judy's unable to do it so Caitlin will join me.

Q What advice would you give someone thinking of pursuing a career in assessing?

A. That's an easy one, "C'mon in, the water's fine." 🏔️

Honoring Volunteerism...On A Whole New Level

It is often noted that municipal governments operate, in large part, due to the kindness, commitment to civic duty and the contributions of volunteers who run for office, serve on committees and assist in performing a variety of functions such as staffing recycling centers, hosting community forums, and helping to run elections. Unfortunately, these countless and invaluable contributions often go unnoticed and are performed without the deserved praise.

That was, however, until Bruce Flaherty with the help of others created the Spirit of America award.

The idea for the award was sparked in Flaherty when newly elected Governor John McKernan mentioned interest in recognizing the work of volunteers in his 1987 inauguration speech. While Flaherty wasted no time reaching out to the governor with an idea for a recognition program focused on celebrating the vital contributions municipal volunteers, like many new ideas, it took a little time for the program to officially take hold.

But take hold it did.

The first award was bestowed upon Alma Jones by Augusta Mayor, William Burney, on November 26, 1991. Jones, a Washington, Maine native, dedicated years to helping those in need and is rumored to have volunteered over 9,000 hours of her time at the Maine Veterans Home, just one of the many groups to benefit from her selfless dedication to others.

Not only did the program find its stride, since 1991 the Spirit of America Foundation has issued over 500 awards in the name of municipalities that recognize the work of community volunteers. In 2023 alone, 150 Maine residents, businesses and organizations were honored for their contributions. Among last year's honorees was Galen Larrabee, who not only served on the Knox Selectboard for many years but was also elected by his municipal peers to serve on MMA's Executive and the Legislative Policy Committees. Larrabee, unfortunately passed away in June of 2023.

Although he has over three decades of experience under his belt, he is not ready to retire. According to Flaherty, "The Spirit of America involves teamwork. I'm deeply impressed by the accomplishments of Spirit of America winners and the conscientiousness of municipal officials who select and enable them to be honored. Using our unique God-given talents each of us makes individual contributions to society, but in another sense we're all working together to make this a better world!" When it was suggested that the award was "losing luster," he upped the ante. Rather than succumbing, he embraced the criticism and decided that rather than recognizing individuals for their contributions to Maine communities, why not recognize the contributions of an entire group.

Due to his ongoing work and commitment and MMA Immediate Past President and Solon Selectboard Chair Elaine Aloes' efforts, during the annual convention MMA will bestow the first ever "Municipal Officials' Appreciation Month" award to Maine town, city and plantation clerks during the Leadership and Recognition Luncheon on Wednesday, Oct. 2.

Clerks from around the state are warmly welcomed and highly encouraged to join the celebration and bask in the words of praise for a job well done, as the following resolution is read.

MAINE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION SPIRIT OF AMERICA PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Spirit of America Foundation cherishes Municipal Officials' help with its program and created October as 'Municipal Officials Appreciation Month', and in 2024 dedicated it nationally to Municipal Clerks and Ballot Clerks, to express gratitude;

WHEREAS, Municipal Officials make personal sacrifices to serve constituents and deserve more public recognition and respect than they generally receive;

WHEREAS, Municipal Clerks are some of the most dedicated and generous members in our communities, who are almost always involved in a community event or civic organization within a town and most of the time are doing that work on their own personal time;

WHEREAS, Ballot Clerks serve at each polling place throughout Election Day, to ensure the voting process goes smoothly and are vital to democracy;

WHEREAS, the Maine Municipal Association greatly appreciates the services provided by its Municipal Clerks, Ballot Clerks and other Municipal Officials;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED that the MAINE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION designates October 2024 as "MAINE MUNICIPAL CLERKS AND BALLOT CLERKS APPRECIATION MONTH" and urges citizens to show gratitude to their Municipal Officials, and especially to Municipal Clerks and Ballot Clerks, for all they do to make our communities better.

Signed and Sealed



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2024 MMA Convention: 88th Anniversary Year

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

9:00 – 10:30 am:
Welcome and Keynote Speaker
(Sponsored by the Affinity LED)

Resiliency in the Aftermath of a Tragedy
Presenter: Dr. Michele Freeman, Retired Chief, City of Las Vegas
Department of Public Safety
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following category: Leadership

10:45 am - 12:00 pm: Concurrent Session Block #1

Situational Awareness for the Municipal Official
Presenter: Autumn Clifford, Founder, She's an Asset

Effective Local Leadership: Policy Development & Implementation
Facilitator: Jen Thompson, Staff Attorney, MMA Legal Services;
Panelists: Kristen Dow, Consultant, Berry Dunn, and former Director, Portland Department of Health & Human Services;
Jill Goldthwaite, former Town Councilor, Town of Bar Harbor
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Leadership & Finance/Budget

Elections Updates
(Sponsored by the Maine Town & City Clerks Association)
Presenter: Julie Flynn, Deputy Secretary of State, Maine Department of the Secretary of State
MTCCA Certification program - Attendance at MMA Convention can be used for 2 points per year

General Assistance Overview
(Sponsored by the Maine Welfare Directors Association)
Presenters: Angelia Christopher, GA Administrator, City of Gardiner; Jane Maynard, GA Administrator, City of Saco; Ryan Gorneau, General Assistance Program Manager, City of Portland
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following category: Finance/Budget

Addressing the Demand: The Critical Need for Affordable Housing

(Sponsored by the Maine Community Development Association)
Presenters: Kristen Henry, Project Manager/Community Development Specialist, Northern Maine Development Commission; Ben Averill and Hilary Gove, Housing Opportunity Program Coordinators, Maine Department of Economic and Community Development; Cullen Ryan, Director, Community Housing of Maine; Laura Mitchell, Executive Director, Maine Affordable Housing Coalition
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Legal, and Finance/Budget.

12:00 - 1:15 pm

MMA LEADERSHIP AND RECOGNITION

LUNCHEON *(Sponsored by the Mejoorando Group)*
Join us to celebrate the installation of the incoming MMA President, recognize the MMA Executive Committee and Past Presidents, and announce other municipal awards.

Maine Community Development Association (MCDA) Annual Meeting and Luncheon

Advance registration required.

1:15 – 2:30 p.m. Concurrent Session Block #2

MMA Annual Business Meeting

Please join MMA President Diane Hines, Vice President Melissa Doane and Executive Director Cathy Conlow as they share highlights about MMA's upcoming priorities, tally election votes for the Executive Committee, and reflect on the events and activities happening in 2024.
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credit in the following category: Leadership.

Lessons Learned from Local Government Exploration of AI

Presenter: Lena Geraghty, Founder and Principal, Data Spark Consulting
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Leadership & Ethics.

Lessons on Infrastructure Resilience from MaineDOT

Presenter: Joyce Taylor, P.E., Chief Engineer, MaineDOT
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Leadership, and Finance/Budget

Vital Records Updates

(Sponsored by the Maine Town & City Clerks Association)

Presenter: Theresa Roberts, Supervisor and Deputy State Registrar, Maine CDC

MTCCA Certification program - Attendance at MMA Convention can be used for 2 points per year

Retire/Rehire – Legal Considerations (Sponsored by the Maine Government Finance Officers Association)

Presenter: Molly Gilligan, Bernstein Shur

Securing Support: Resources and Funding for Affordable Housing Development (Sponsored by the Maine Community Development Association)

Presenters: Scott Dionne, President, Aroostook Partnership; John Egan, Senior Program Officer for Strategic Initiatives, Genesis Fund; Tuck O'Brien, President, Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority; Rhiannon Hampson, Maine State Director, USDA Rural Development; Don Guild, Counsel, Maine State Housing

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following category: Legal, and Finance/Budget.

2:30 – 3:00 pm

EXHIBIT HALL BREAK AND SPONSOR/EXHIBITOR PRESENTATIONS

- 1) Energy Efficient Investments
- 2) Thomas College
- 3) Sigma Tactical Wellness

3:00 – 4:15 pm Concurrent Session Block #3

MMEHT Annual Reporting Meeting

Presenter: Lisa Rigoulot, Assistant Director, Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust

How Livable Communities and Age-Friendly Programs Help your Municipality

Presenters: Christine Landes, Town Manager, Town of Chelsea; Jane Danforth, Town Councilor, Town of Millinocket; Anne Krieg, AICP, Director of Economic & Community Development, City of Bangor; Candy Eaton, Coordinator, Age-Friendly Sullivan, Town of Sullivan; Noël Bonam, State Director, AARP Maine

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Legal, and Finance/Budget.

DIScovering Workplace Harmony: Working with Various Personalities

Presenter: Danielle Abbott, Leadership Development Educator & Founder, Danielle Abbott Coaching

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Leadership and Human Resources.

Maine State Cemetery Preservation Commission Overview (MSCPC)

Presenters: Helen Shaw, Chair, Maine State Cemetery Preservation Commission; Julie Cromwell, Secretary, MSCPC on behalf of the Maine Realtors Association; Debbie Allen-Grover, Member MSCPC, North Yarmouth Town Clerk, on behalf of the Maine Town & City Clerks Association

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Legal, Leadership and Human Resources.

Gun Law Changes and Best Practices

Facilitated by Rebecca Graham, Senior Legislative Advocate, MMA; Panelists: Lt. Michael Johnson, Northern Troop Commander, Maine State Police; Sgt. Jaron Stedman, Maine State Police

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Leadership, Legal and Human Resources.

Property Tax Sales and the Foreclosure Process (Sponsored by the Maine Municipal Tax Collectors & Treasurers Association)

Presenters: Kristin Collins and Cameron Ferrante, PretiFlaherty 5 Tax Collector Certification Credits Available

4:15 – 5:00 pm

Presentation of MMA's Ethel N. Kelley Memorial Award

Join us for refreshments, appetizers, and the presentation of the Ethel N. Kelley Memorial Award, MMA's most prestigious award, honoring the service and dedication of a municipal official.

5:00 – 6:30 pm

Member Appreciation Reception and Entertainment

(Sponsored by Bangor Savings Bank)

Enjoy networking with colleagues, refreshments and light appetizers, and music by the Pelletier Lovejoy Jazz Ensemble!



The Pelletier Lovejoy Jazz Ensemble, from Aroostook County, Maine, is comprised of founding members Vocalist Shelby Pelletier & Pianist Cori Lovejoy who started exploring their favorite jazz standards together in the Fall of 2022. This humble project quickly grew to include current members Jon Simonoff on Bass, and Carl Gallagher on Saxophone. In the Summer of 2023, Mickey Carter joined the group as their percussionist and, they are excited to have David Wells on Tenor Saxophone sit in when he is available. The ensemble enjoys putting their own spin on classic standards and new jazz favorites.

Thursday, October 3, 2024

7:30 am – 1:00 pm MCAPWA Fall Meeting

Sponsored by Maine Chapter of American Public Works Association (MCAPWA)

7:30-8:30 am:	Registration and Breakfast Buffet in Exhibit Hall
8:30-8:40 am:	Opening Remarks (Scott Holland, APWA Chapter President)
8:40-9:10 am:	Maine Department of Transportation Update (Bruce Van Note, MaineDOT Commissioner)
9:10-9:40 am:	85 th Percentile Speed, Fall of a Legend: Setting Speed Limits Using a Context Approach (Steve Landry, State Traffic Engineer, MaineDOT)
9:40-9:55 am:	Break
9:55-10:15 am:	Upcoming Training Sessions by Maine Local Roads Center (Peter Coughlan, P.E., Director of MaineDOT Maine Local Roads Center)
10:15-10:45 am:	Municipal Response Options to Brown Tail Moth and Emerald Ash Borer (Allison Kanoti, State Entomologist, Director of Forest Health and Monitoring)
10:45-11:00 am:	Break
11:00 am-12pm	Frost Solutions: Frost Solutions allow snow and ice management professionals to monitor weather conditions from anywhere with location-specific forecasts, customizable alerts, and on-demand images (Mike Kirsh)
12:00-1:00 pm:	Lunch

9:00 – 10:15 am:

WELCOME AND FEATURED SPEAKER

The Urgency of Building Resilient Communities

Presenter: Hannah Pingree, Director, Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, and Co-Chair, Maine Climate Council

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following category: Leadership

10:15 – 10:45 am

EXHIBIT HALL BREAK AND SPONSOR/EXHIBITOR PRESENTATIONS

- 1) Harbor Digital Systems
- 2) Titan Energy
- 3) American Promise

10:45 am – 12:00 pm Concurrent Session Block #4

We've Always Done It That Way Is Over: What's Next?

Presenter: Patrick Ibarra, Co-Founder and Partner, The Mejorando Group

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Leadership and Human Resources.

Land Use Planning & Housing, Tools, Tips and Changes: Building with Community Consensus

Presenters: Rebecca Graham, Senior Legislative Advocate, MMA; Judy East, Director, Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning; Jennie Francheschi, CEO and Planner, City of Westbrook; Sarah Curran, Deputy Director, Climate Planning and Community Partnerships, Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future; Kevin Bunker, Founding Principal, Developers Collaborative

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Leadership, Elected Relations, and Finance/Budget.

Right to Know Law Training

Presenter: Rebecca McMahon, Director, Legal Services, MMA

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Legal, Leadership and Elected Relations

Maine Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML)

(Sponsored by the Maine Local Government Human Resources Association)

Presenters: Luke Monahan, Director of the Maine PFML Program, Reginald Pearson, Deputy Director of the Maine PFML Program, and Ann Freeman, Labor and Employment Attorney with Bernstein Shur

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Human Resources, Leadership, and Legal

Municipalities and Mental Health: Behavioral Health Liaisons and First Responder Resources

(Sponsored by the Maine Animal Control Association)

Presenters: Chief Robert MacKenzie, Chief of Police, Town of Kennebunk; Rachel Schlein, Behavioral Health Liaison, Town of Kennebunk; Rebecca Parker, Officer & Animal Control Officer, Town of Kennebunk

Community Risk Reduction Overview

(Sponsored by the Maine Fire Chiefs Association)

Presenters: Richard Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst, Office of State Fire Marshal; Robby Gross, Forest Ranger Chief, Maine Forest Service; Greg Day, Assistant Fire Marshal, Office of State Fire Marshal; Kent Nelson, Forest Ranger Specialist, Maine Forest Service

12:00 – 1:15 pm FEATURED SPEAKER LUNCHEON

Building Resilient Communities Through NLC Advocacy

Presenter: Steve Patterson, Mayor, Athens, OH, and Second Vice President, National League of Cities

Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following categories: Leadership, and Legal

MAINE MUNICIPAL BOND BANK

2024 FALL BOND ISSUE SCHEDULE

Capital financing through the Bond Bank's General Bond Resolution Program allows borrowers to take advantage of the Bond Bank's high investment grade rating, low interest rates and reduced issuance and post issuance costs. Traditionally twice a year, in the spring and fall, the Bond Bank will consolidate eligible applicants and engage in a bond sale. From application to receipt of funds the bond issuance process usually lasts three to four months. Below is the schedule for the Bond Bank's Fall Issue. Applications can be founded on our website at www.mmbb.com.

August						
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

September						
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					

October						
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		

November						
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

Thursday, August 1st – Application Deadline

Wednesday, August 28th – Application Approval (Board Meeting)

Wednesday, September 11th – Preliminary opinions and loan agreements due from bond counsel of each borrower

Thursday, September 18th – Last date for signing school contracts and rates in place for water district. PUC approvals due

Week of September 30th – Maine Municipal Bond Bank Pricing

Thursday, October 24th – Final documents due from bond counsel

Wednesday, November 6th – Pre-closing

Thursday, November 7th – Closing – Bond proceeds available (1:00pm)

If you would like to participate in or have any questions regarding the 2024 Fall Bond Issue, please contact Toni Reed at (207)622-9386 ext. 213 or treed@mmbb.com.



1:15 – 2:30 pm Concurrent Session Block #5

Getting the Most Out of Your Mental Health Resources

Presenter: Anne Charles, Health Promotion Manager, Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust; Jim Toman, Loss Control Consultant, MMA Risk Management Services; Jason Johnson, Loss Control Consultant, MMA Risk Management Services
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following category: Human Resources

Simplifying Your Workers Comp Audit: A Step-by-Step Guide

Presenters: Mike Mayette, Underwriting Services Manager, and Marcus Ballou, Member Services Supervisor, MMA Risk Management Services
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following category: Human Resources

Enhancing Municipal Buildings Through Energy Efficiency Upgrades

Presenter: Satchel Toole, Program Manager, Efficiency Maine
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following category: Finance/Budget

Women Leading Government: Leading in Male-Dominated Fields (Sponsored by the Maine Town, City, and County Management Association)

Presenters: Christine Landes, Town Manager, Town of Chelsea; Chief JoAnne Fisk, Chief of Police, City of Biddeford; Mary Ann Brenchick, Deputy Director of Public Works, City of Augusta; Erin Bean, EMS Director/Chief, Wiscasset Ambulance Service
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following category: Leadership and Elected Relations

Short-Term Rentals: The Assessors' Side

(Sponsored by the Facilitator: Luke Vigue, Tax Assessor, Town of York)
1.25 Continuing Education Hours available toward Certified Maine Assessor certification.

2:45 – 4:00 pm Concurrent Session Block #6

What To Expect When You're Expecting a Disaster

Presenter: Kelsey Preecs, CVA, Individual Assistance Officer, Maine Emergency Management Agency

What's Your Property Worth Today?

Presenter: Mark Hessel, SVP, HCA Asset Management

Title II Website Accessibility Requirements: What Every Municipality Needs to Know

Presenters: Brian McDonald, Director of IT & Administration, MMA; Sarah Jancarik, Staff Attorney, MMA
Certification: Valid for 1.25 MTCMA Certification credits in the following category: Legal

The Code Enforcement Officer and Public Opinion

(Sponsored by the Maine Building Officials and Inspectors Association)

Presenters: Jeff Wallace, Code Enforcement Director, City of Bangor; Mark Stambach, Code Enforcement Officer, Town of Lisbon; Brian Longstaff, Zoning Administrator, Town of Scarborough; Justin Brown, Code Enforcement Officer, Town of Falmouth

4:00 pm Convention Adjourns

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Profiles of Service...

Valerie Moon, Brewer Assessor

“We were always told it was important to give back to your community.”

By Stephanie Bouchard

At the age of 14, Valerie Moon convinced Jonathan Chase, chef and owner of Jonathan’s Restaurant in Blue Hill, to give her a job.

“She was sufficiently convincing about lying about her age that I hired her,” Chase said. At the time, Moon’s two older brothers were already working for Chase. “I wanted to make money, so I went and asked Jonathan if I could wash dishes,” Moon remembers. She worked for him for the next 16 years.

Little did she know then, that the customer service work she did at Chase’s restaurant would set her up for her future career in municipal government. Today, she’s the assessor for the City of Brewer, and the contracted assessor for the Town of Prospect.

But back when she was working at Jonathan’s, sitting on an overturned bucket used to collect food scraps to give to a local pig farmer and peeling garlic faster than anyone else, being an assessor wasn’t something she was aspiring to.

Not that community service wasn’t in her blood, though. “We were always told it was important to give back to your community,” Moon said. “We learned at a young age to participate.”

As a child growing up on property in Surry owned by her family since before Maine became a state, Moon and her siblings were “dragged” to town meetings by their parents. While she wasn’t keen on going to those meetings when she was a child, they got more interesting to her as she grew up, she said.

Once she was an adult with children of her own, she started participating herself, over time volunteering for Surry’s planning board, comprehensive plan commission, recreation commission, waterways commission, and appeals board.



Still, her interaction with her hometown’s municipal government isn’t what set her on the path to actually working in municipal government. That was a fluke.

Moon got a degree in legal technologies from the University of Maine and worked in law enforcement in the court system, but after having her first child, she attended Eastern Maine Community College with support from the ASPIRE program and the Hope Milliken McNally Scholarship for Ellsworth High School graduates, earning a degree in culinary arts.

She thought she’d use that degree for a career as a head chef at a restaurant or running a catering business, and while she did both those things, she found herself at a crossroads after five years of teaching culinary arts for Job Corps.

“I loved it (teaching for Job Corps),” she said. “I loved the kids so much. But (management) wouldn’t give me a day off when my dad was in the hospital, so that was the end of the line for me. I had to find something else.”

She saw an ad for a temp position in the assessing department for the city of Ellsworth to cover someone’s maternity leave. She applied, thinking the 10 weeks in the assessing office would get her to the summer season in Bar Harbor when she’d be able to find restaurant work. But as fate would have it, instead she found a new career: The employee on maternity leave decided not to return and Moon was asked to stay on as a regular employee.

“One person that really stands out in my whole career about wanting to learn everything and just understanding it so easy – even though she didn’t have any appraisal experience – she was it,” said Larry Gardner, the assessor for the city of Ellsworth and Moon’s former supervisor. “She’s just a very strong woman who sees what she wants and she doesn’t think of it as a dream. It’s just ‘Hey, I can do that’ (and) she’ll go do it.”

While Moon didn’t have assessing experience, she had worked at Fosters Law Offices in Ellsworth where she

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

learned a lot about real estate, and was particularly useful in the assessing department, about deeds.

Moon loved her new gig as an assistant assessor. “You have to answer a lot of tax questions and legal questions,” she said. “I’ve always loved the law, and that’s the part of assessing that I love. I could read law court cases all day long.”

Her love for the law, government and learning can be traced back, in part, to her childhood in Surry, where, in elementary school, she relished taking parts in classroom debates. “At the Surry school when I was there, teachers taught you to look at all sides of a subject and argue for yourself,” she said. “It was great because we were taught to think for ourselves.”

To this day, she gets excited about legal and governmental topics that many others don’t, said Vicki Proulx, the property appraiser for Brewer. “Property tax, school, and different stuff that’s coming through the legislature, she’ll read it and she’ll get all excited about it,” said Proulx, “and most people would just say, ‘Really?’”

When Moon gets excited about things she’s passionate about, Proulx noted, she can come on strong, but that abruptness belies her desire to help people. “She cares about what happens within her town and if she sees something (that’s a problem), she’ll say something,” Proulx said. “She’s always trying to make things better.”

Moon’s caring nature isn’t always apparent to those who don’t know her. She has a strong, take-charge personality that may not jive with everyone, Chase explained. “She’ll set me straight and I’ll set her straight and we’ll give each other the finger,” he laughed. “She has a lot of bravado to her . . . (but) underneath the bravado is a very caring, able, kind person,” he said.

For instance, long after Moon no longer worked for Chase, she still stepped up when he was diagnosed with lymphoma about a year ago. While Chase spent eight months in a hospital, Moon got a group of people together to clean his house, which he hadn’t been able to do before he was hospitalized, and took his dog to her home.

“My dog’s very important to me. She took care of my dog for almost seven months without even being asked. She just stepped up and did it,” he said. “I can’t say enough good about her.”

Moon might tell you that helping people is in her blood, learned from her parents, who made sacrifices to support her. A 20-year veteran of the Air Force, her father, now 89, who lives with her in the house she grew up in, is her “hero” she said.

“Because of that sacrifice (military service), we had a better quality of life than a lot of the people around us,” she said. “We had health insurance. We just went to the doctor when we needed to. I never realized as a kid how important that was.”

After Moon had her second child, her father partially retired so he could help his wife take care of Moon’s children. “I never understood what everyone else faced for daycare,” she said. “So, yeah, he’s my hero.”

She pays her gratitude forward in her work life by doing her best to do right by the residents and business owners in Brewer and Prospect, whether that’s holding Walmart accountable or making sure those who are eligible for the homestead or veteran exemptions have those applied.

“Taxes are part of life; we have to deal with it,” she said. “I want to make it less painful for people if I can, but I still have to follow the law. So, I try to do it as cheerfully as possible.” 🏔️

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Stats, Trends & Costs

While the data around Maine weather are fascinating, the trends are having adverse impacts on municipal finances.

By Janine Pineo

Perch Pond, also known as Mud Pond, at Sewall Park in Old Town in late July (Submitted photo)

Ask a meteorologist about weather events in Maine and the response might surprise you.

Ask two meteorologists about it, and you get a lot of data and graphics and then some cautions about what we are seeing and what we might see when it comes to types of storms that will affect the state.

The National Weather Service (NWS) has offices in Gray, covering western Maine, and in neighboring New Hampshire, and Caribou, which covers northern and eastern Maine. Email queries to both offices resulted in answers that show the science of examining the vast array of weather, from debris flow to sneaker wave to wildfire, along with all the usual suspects, such as tornadoes, winter weather and flash floods.

Donald Dumont, a warning coordination meteorologist and incident meteorologist at the Gray office, and Matt Strauser, an information technology officer and meteorologist at the Caribou office, provided insight from the decades of raw Maine data available from the NWS. Some unexpected trends belie what some perceptions might be.

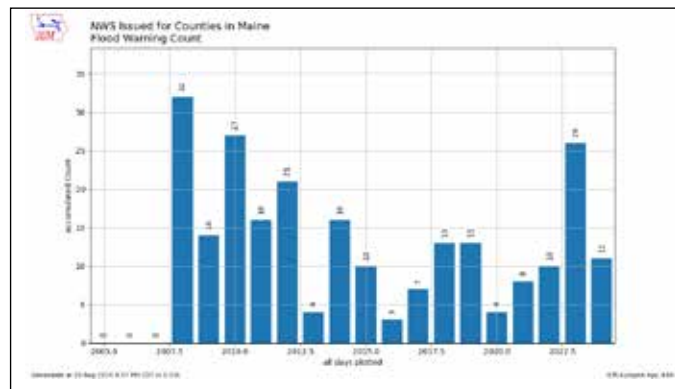
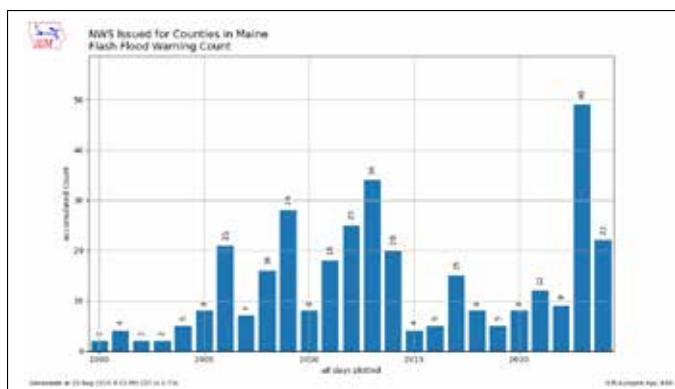
Strauser's example was one. "Regarding summer severe weather," he said, "we have been on a downward trend for observed large hail and damaging wind events in our area."

The graphic he supplied showed that between 2008 and 2023, the average of these events in the Caribou

service area was 60 per year, peaking around 150 in 2011 and showing fewer than average since 2017.

"We also have not observed a tornado in our area since 2019, and the average is about once every other year," Strauser said.

For fall and winter storms, high-wind warnings are a common headline issue, he said, defined when wind gusts are expected to reach or exceed 60 miles per hour, which is the same threshold for a severe thunderstorm



About the Author: Janine Pineo is a freelance writer from Hudson and regular contributor to Maine Town & City, jepineo@gmail.com.

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warning in the summer.

“The trend for those has also been downward,” Strauser said. “2024 isn’t finished yet, but even if it doubled, it wouldn’t have a significant impact on the overall trend.”

Dumont pointed to the frequency of severe thunderstorms for the entire state with a chart showing the variability over 17 years. “You can see no strong trend and very variable from year to year,” he said.

The same is true for the state when it comes to river flood warnings and high wind warnings.

The flash flood warning data for all 16 counties showed even more variability from 2000 to the current year. Some years had just two warnings and more recently there were eight in 2020, 12 in 2021, nine in 2022 and 22 in 2024 as of mid-August. The “standout season,” as Dumont called it, was 2023, with 49 flash flood warnings, the next highest back in 2013 with 34.

Coastal flood warnings are a different story. For the Caribou NWS region, 2024 has the most on record with four of the top six years happening since 2020. Strauser said that for 2023 to 2024, it was “bad luck of storms aligning perfectly with the highest astronomical tides of both the day and month, which is not normally the case.”

The trend, Dumont said, has been toward more extreme and higher water levels lately, pointing to Portland’s data for the highest storm tides from 1912 to 2024. Three events in 2024 are in the top 10, with Jan. 13 ranking first, Jan. 10 at fourth and March 10 at eighth.

Both meteorologists had observations beyond the raw data, however.

“Storm frequency and severity from a meteorological perspective might be different than the impacts they cause,” Dumont said. “Meaning, the factors of impacts increase as infrastructure changes and population increases. Also, getting one bad year doesn’t mean a trend is forming; trends can take decades to show a signal sometimes, thus we like to see more data.”

“I would say the coastal flooding trend over the last five years is interesting for sure. The heavy rain events are also a trend to watch closely as this is the most likely signal to show itself first in a warming climate,” he said, “specifically the extreme rainfall rates.”

“We have noticed an increase in the number of and length of power outages in the last de-

cade. However, this may not necessarily be due to the weather alone,” Strauser said.

Coastal flooding damage is also on the rise, he said, which is not unexpected because sea level rise is about an inch every 7.5 years. Damage from winter storms and severe weather, such as winds, tornadoes and hail, has not increased noticeably in northern and eastern Maine.

“Given what we’ve been seeing across New Hampshire, Vermont and even western Maine,” Strauser said, “it is likely only a matter of time before we see more flash flooding events also. Warmer air can hold significantly more moisture, so warmer summers like we’ve been seeing correlate with more potential for torrential rainfall rates that can produce flash flooding, which in turn can damage ATV trails, roads, and culverts.”

The costs of cleanup

The state estimates that the cost of the December 2023 storm that sent a deluge of water through parts



The view of Main Street in Farmington during the Dec. 18, 2023 storm. (Submitted photo)



The view toward Perch Pond from the edge of the multipurpose field at Sewall Park shows the path of damage from a June 5 storm that ran from the pond's shoreline to the field. (Submitted photo)

of inland Maine and the back-to-back January 2024 storms that battered the coast caused an estimated \$90 million in damage to public infrastructure state-wide. Tack on the April nor'easter and it added another \$3.5 million in damage in York and Cumberland counties.

The April storm was the eighth disaster declaration request by Gov. Janet Mills in two years, a record unprecedented in the state. The string of disasters prompted Mills to establish the Governor's Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission to develop the first plan for long-term infrastructure resilience, examining the state's response to the recent storms and identifying areas that need investment and policy attention.

Each municipality hit with infrastructure damage has unique hurdles to cross, for each has a unique tax base, unique geography and unique structures. Machias, for instance, had flood damage to its town office in the Jan. 10 storm that required a move to rooms in a different town building and the future possibility of a new town office completely. Stonington's fire department building on the waterfront sustained damage in January flooding, fueling that town's intention to move the department from the waterfront. Harpswell lost its town wharf and realized it needed to invest in a new communications system since the current one went down in January and April. Castine lost its critical wa-

terfront hub – the town dock – racing to build a new structure in time for the summer tourist season.

For Farmington, 2023 was a disastrous year, with a major flood in May and then an even bigger one in December. Town Manager Erica LaCroix said the town still awaits more than \$300,000 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for these events, which means town coffers are low as tax money will not start to come in until October.

"It wasn't a problem to pay for the emergency repairs at the time back in December, but now those chickens are coming home to roost as we have had to initiate a spending freeze to make sure we don't run out of money to keep the town afloat," LaCroix said. "When these events happen, we need to look carefully at what are truly emergency repairs."

Road washouts and a damaged municipal garage wall had to be fixed quickly but work at parks and recreation facilities was delayed. "This included not opening the ice rink this winter, which disappointed some residents, but it wasn't a necessity," she said. "Where roads were damaged but still passable, those repairs were delayed as well."

The town did get a surprise from FEMA: requiring flood insurance on the historic Field House at Hippach Field.

"They have now paid for storm repairs on that struc-

ture twice and will not continue to do so if the town doesn't take some steps to protect ourselves against future loss," she said. "While FEMA only required a policy covering a little more than \$8,000 in damage, flood insurance is expensive, and even that low threshold resulted in an unanticipated expenditure of just under \$1,200."

Flood insurance isn't financially feasible for broad coverage of town assets, she said. "If we were to have another significant event prior to tax revenues coming in we would be looking for short-term financing."

LaCroix said the town has "been getting creative" by investing any surplus in short-term certificates of deposit, which have generated about 4.75 percent interest. The town also is applying for as much of the infrastructure resilience grant money as possible.

As for the future, the work continues. "We are looking at how we can change traffic patterns, improve drainage systems and work with surrounding communities to bolster our readiness and share resources," LaCroix said.

Little storms, big mess

June 5 was a hot spring day with a forecast that predicted pop-up severe thunderstorms across the state as the day wore on.

Around 4:30 p.m., that's just what happened in Old Town along Poplar Street by Sewall Park, a heavily wooded recreation area on the shores of Perch Pond.

A storm with heavy wind and hail passed through, City Manager Bill Mayo said, blowing down or damaging a swath of trees in the park between the shoreline and the multipurpose field near the road and knocking down more than 40 trees into Poplar Street itself, taking down power lines and blocking road access to Pushaw Lake and the homes along that side of the lake.

Mayo said that aside from the Public Works Department's efforts, the cost to clean up the damage, which included cutting down the destroyed or damaged trees in the park, was \$22,500. That amount was covered by insurance, minus the deductible.

The next step? "We are looking to do some planting while maintaining some of the open area that the storm created," Mayo said.

He thinks the city is prepared with staff and equipment to respond to unexpected events of this size and nature.

"When they get bigger and for longer durations, there is often not a lot we can do during the event without endangering staff and equipment," Mayo said, "so more times than not, it becomes a cleanup event after the fact. Fortunately for us, there are several large construction companies in the area that we reach out to for assistance, whether summer or winter storms, to assist our Public Works Department, which works well for Old Town." 🌲

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For many, the ice storm of 1998 is writ large upon the memory, the storm to end all storms with its days of accumulating ice and the resulting aftermath of hundreds of thousands without electricity for weeks. But more recent weather events have been hitting Maine repeatedly with a power and frequency that have left in their wake damage in amounts that can be difficult to grasp as a whole because of the enormity of the destruction in town after town, city after city.

Our third story talks about the unexpected – from the costs of cleanup to data about weather.



Blaine House ceremony: Interns and supervisors participating in the 2024 Maine Government Summer Internship Program on August 1 were recognized by Gov. Janet Mills in a ceremony at the Blaine House. The internship program, managed by the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center at the University of Maine, supports summer internships within local, county, and state government in various functional areas across the state. Of the roughly 50 interns who participated in the program in summer 2024, ten worked in municipal government. The Maine Municipal Association also provided grant awards to the municipalities of China, Northport, Casco, and Oakland to support their internships. Pictured from left are Rebecca Hapgood, China town manager; Gracie Stagnito, Economic & Community Development Specialist Intern, Town of China; Kyle Hadyniak, Director of Communications & IT, Town of Gray; Britt Barton, Town Clerk, Town of Gray; Emma Keniston, Clerk Records Administration Intern, Town of Gray; Riley Flannery, GIS Field Assistance In-

tern, Town of Casco; Kara Briand, Code Enforcement Office Assistant and Filing Clerk Intern, Town of Chelsea; Christine Landes, Chelsea Town Manager; Oscar Herrera, Planning and Development Intern, Town of Lisbon; Sarah Bennett, Assistant Town Manager, Town of Lisbon; and John Clifford, Climate Resilience and Infrastructure Intern, Town of Northport. The town of Oakland also received an MMA Intern Grant Award but was not at the ceremony where the photo was taken.

Richard Caton, IV of Wilton has been named Rangeley police chief effective in early August. The town's plan is to hire three full-time officers to replace coverage by the Franklin County Sheriff's Office. Caton has worked as interim police chief in Rangeley, while also fulfilling his duties as Jay police chief. In Rangeley, he worked to ensure policies were in place and compliant with related state and federal regulations and rules. Caton, who has worked in law enforcement for more than 20 years, was promoted to Jay police chief in 2014. The Jay department was the first in Franklin County to achieve accreditation by the Maine Chiefs of Police Association.

The City of Biddeford has promoted **Deanne Vail** to assessor. Vail joined the office in 2022 as an assistant assessor. Her prior experience includes serving as deputy assessor for the Town of Bar Harbor and as a property appraiser for Maine Revenue Services. She is a member of the Maine Association of Assessing Officers, as well as the Maine chapter of the International Association of Assessing Officers.

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Hallowell Police Chief **Christopher Lewis** has resigned to take a job as patrol officer with the Gardiner Police Department. Lewis, who has been in law enforcement since 1994, was named chief last August. He is the second chief, after **Scott MacMaster**, to take a lower-ranked job with Gardiner.



Maggie McLoughlin

Maggie McLoughlin is the City of Portland's new Health and Human Services Department director, effective August 19. She replaces **Kristen Dow**, who resigned last December. Deputy Director Shaza Stevenson served as interim director since Dow's departure. McLoughlin worked for 10 years in senior management

roles at Mercy Corps, a humanitarian aid nonprofit that serves regions that have experienced economic, environmental, social or political instability. Most recently, she served as the program's director in Abuja, Nigeria. She earned a master's degree in public health from George Washington University.

The Southwest Harbor selectboard has named **Karen Reddersen** as the new town manager, effective September 18. She replaces **Marilyn Lowell**, who served as town manager since 2021. Lowell worked for the town for more than 10 years and retires on September 30. Most recently, Reddersen, who owns property in Southwest Harbor, worked as the extension director for the University of Maryland, where she earned a master's degree in business. Reddersen worked as an assistant director of internal services for the City of Salisbury, Maryland, and as a management analyst at the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Maryland.



Corey Saucier

The Caribou Police Department has a new chief for the first time in nearly 20 years. Sgt. **Corey Saucier**, who joined the Caribou force in 2008, has been promoted to replace **Michael Cahagan**, who retired in July. Saucier is on his second stint with the department, his

first from 2008 through 2015. He worked from 2015 to 2019 for the Aroostook County Sheriff's Office, returning to the Caribou department as a patrol officer. He was promoted soon after to sergeant.

The Farmington selectboard in July presented a plaque to firefighter **Junior Turner** in thanks for his 53 years of service to the western Maine town. Turner joined the fire department in May 1971 and officials called him a "general great firefighter (and) a great person to have around." He started his service for the Farmington Falls Fire Company, and then joined the Farmington Fire Rescue Department. He was praised for being an exemplary example to young recruits, as well as chiefs.



Darci Wheeler

Bath Town Clerk **Darci Wheeler** has earned the designation of master town clerk from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. The designation is granted only to clerks who complete grueling education requirements and who have a solid record of contributions to local government, the community, and the state. Wheeler joined town government in the treasurer's office in 2017, after managing a chocolate business in Freeport for 18 years. She was named clerk in March 2019.

Dottie Perham-Whittier has retired from the communications office for the City of Lewiston after 42 years in local government service. She is searching for "a new adventure" once she takes a break from work. Perham-Whittier joined the city in September 1982, first as an administrative secretary, then administrative assistant and executive assistant. Her final job was communications coordinator, which included both community relations and marketing. Perham-Whittier helped create the Lewiston Youth Advisory Council, which she said was her most rewarding work over the years. She has served as an advisor since 2001. 🏔️

STATEWIDE

The U.S. Department of Commerce has awarded Maine \$69 million to help underserved municipalities develop and implement plans to protect infrastructure and other assets from the impacts of climate change, including flooding, storm damage and extreme weather events such as the back-to-back storms that pelted the state in January and tore up coastal communities. Federal officials lauded the state for its “ambitious vision to become a national leader in climate resilience.” The grant money should also help foster new economic opportunities and prosperity, as well as advance equity, officials said. It is the state’s largest climate action grant. Activities to be funded include expanding flood risk training, dealing with saltwater intrusion and strengthening working waterfronts, which were especially hard hit by the January rainstorms.

STATEWIDE

The only passenger train in Maine recorded its highest ever ridership and revenue during the fiscal year. Nearly 600,000 people rode on the Amtrak Downeaster, a 4% jump in ridership that surpassed the last record set in 2019. Officials said ridership broke records in 10 of the 12 months. Revenue from tickets reached \$13 million, up \$2.63 million and surpassed the previous record set in 2023. The train makes five roundtrips to Boston daily, leaving Brunswick and stopping at multiple communities along the way. The service expects to carry 66 million riders a year by 2040.

BANGOR

Versant Power Co. cannot alert police to suspected cannabis-growing facilities after the Maine Public Utility Commission rejected the proposal in August. The vote was 3-0 to exclude the provision from changes to Versant’s governing rules. The commission decided the proposed rule would likely violate customers’ privacy rights and could cause an innocent person to be subjected to criminal investigation. Cannabis grow houses use large amounts of electricity to run lights and fans, sometimes 24/7. The commission said if police encounter a suspected illegal grow operation, they can seek utility records via a subpoena. The power company has received 50 subpoenas from police to see customers’ electricity bills. Versant serves 165,000 customers in eastern and northern Maine.

JONESPORT

Developers are closer to breaking ground on a proposed land-based fish farm after a court denied an appeal from a project opponent who argued the planning board had misinterpreted the local land use code. Project Downeast also argued the project would degrade water quality. The Maine Business and Consumer Court ruled in favor of the planning board, saying the board followed municipal ordinances and heard ample evidence and testimony in approving the project. The developer, Kingfish Maine, estimates the facility will produce 8,500 metric tons of yellowtail broodstock annually.

LINCOLN COUNTY

A group of Lincoln County towns is the latest collaborative to win state grant funding to give thousands of homes reliable high-speed internet. Two communications partnerships will receive grants totaling \$9.6 million to provide coverage for 15,500 homes and businesses in Alna, Boothbay, Dresden, Edgecomb, Nobleboro, Waldoboro, Whitefield and Wiscasset, as well as in Woolwich, which is located in Sagadahoc County. The Maine Connectivity Authority approved the two grants in early August.

SCARBOROUGH


The town council has responded to a common complaint in Maine around cannabis grow operations – the odor that wafts to properties near the cultivation facilities. The council voted 6-1 to give police the authority to respond to odor complaints rather than the code enforcement staff. The change was done via amendments to the town’s Cannabis Enforcement Ordinance. Another change is requiring growers to be licensed if they lease property for their grow houses. Operations that receive five verified odor complaints will face a hearing before the council.

WELLS

Residents voted overwhelmingly to stop large-scale housing projects until later this fall. The moratorium affects proposed projects of 45 housing units or more. The moratorium is retroactive to April 6 and will be lifted on October 15. The six-month period will give the community time to draft and pass ordinances to address land uses related to multi-family complexes, open space,

cluster density, traffic impacts, wetlands and setbacks. The moratorium will be extended if officials decide more time is needed to accomplish the goals. The vote in favor of the moratorium was 980-82.

WESTBROOK

The planning board in August unanimously approved a proposed Asian American community complex that will feature a community center, a Buddhist temple and a worship hall. The sponsor of the project, the nonprofit Khmer Maine, hopes to break ground next summer. The center will be located on 30 acres and will be built in phases. The project will cost multiple millions of dollars, officials said. Khmer Maine, which raises funds for the community center portion of the project, hopes to raise \$5 million for the effort. Separate fundraising efforts will be held for the worship hall in phase two, and for the temple in phase three. It is believed to be the first project of its kind in Maine. Officials expect the entire project to take five years to build. 

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CHARTER COMMISSION DISCRETION CONFIRMED

In *Good v. Town of Bar Harbor*, 2024 ME 48, Maine’s Supreme Court addressed a municipal charter commission’s discretion to decide how to present its recommendations to voters.

Maine law states that a charter commission tasked with revising a municipal charter may recommend, in its final report, that the present charter continue in force with only minor modifications, and those modifications may be submitted to the voters in as many separate questions as the commission finds practicable. See 30-A M.R.S. § 2105(1)(A).

In 2018, Bar Harbor residents voted to establish a charter commission, and in 2020, the Commission issued its report. The Commission determined that 19 discrete changes were necessary within the current structure of the charter, and that these were “minor modifications” rather than a comprehensive charter revision. As the Commission recommended, the Town Council presented the proposed changes to Bar Harbor voters in nine separate ballot questions.

A group of citizens filed suit in late 2020 arguing that the charter changes approved by voters (eight of the proposed nine) were invalid because they were not “minor modifications” and should instead have been presented to voters as one ballot question seeking an “all or nothing” vote on the entire slate of changes. On appeal, the Maine Law Court upheld the Town’s decision to present the changes in several separate ballot questions.

The *Good* decision is significant because it provides new and helpful guidance on how a charter commission may present proposed charter changes to voters. The Court explained that when a charter commission develops changes that are sufficiently narrow in effect

to be considered separately by voters “without affecting the functionality of the charter as a whole,” those changes constitute “minor modifications” that may be broken into separate questions. (This is similar to the way charter “amendments” are presented to voters). In contrast, when a proposed revision is akin to a wholesale rewriting of the charter and involves interdependent changes that cannot be considered piecemeal without rendering the charter unworkable or internally inconsistent, those proposed changes must be presented to voters as a “package” in a single ballot question.

The Court also relied on the legislative history of Maine’s Home Rule Act, finding it intended to allow municipalities to give voters more choices than a single ballot question would allow when multiple or minor charter changes are involved. According to the Court, thwarting the Bar Harbor Charter Commission’s decision in this situation would not accomplish the statute’s purpose.

MMA Legal Services participated in the appeal arguing in support of the Town through an *amicus curiae* (“friend of the court”) brief prepared by Staff Attorney Jen Thompson.

Filing “friend of the court” briefs is one of the services MMA’s Legal Services Program provides free of charge to our members. If your municipality is involved in appellate litigation of statewide significance to municipalities, we invite you to contact us to discuss this form of assistance. (By S.F.P.)

BONDING REQUIREMENTS

State law requires some municipal officials to be “bonded.” In this context, a “bond” is an insurance policy or security that protects the municipality and municipal taxpayers in the event the official fails or refuses to faithfully perform required duties or to properly account for monies received. If the municipality incurs losses as a result, the surety agrees to cover those losses up to the limits stated in the bond instrument.

The surety may be a bonding company, insurance company, or other corporate or individual surety. The bond can be a blanket fidelity bond covering all municipal officials, or individualized bonds covering specific municipal officials, or a combination of the two. Some sureties bond the position itself, while others bond the specific individual holding the position.

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example, if a blanket fidelity bond is used, confirm that it covers the officials desired, as some blanket bonds exclude certain officials or special coverages. Also, for individualized bonds or bonds specific to an officeholder, the surety should be promptly notified whenever a new person takes office so that official can be properly covered.

Listed below are municipal officials that commonly must (or may) be bonded under Maine law.

Municipal clerks may be required to be bonded if the municipal officers (selectboard or council) desire. See 30-A M.R.S. § 2651. The bond amount is within the board's discretion; it may be either a corporate surety bond, or an individual surety bond provided it is accompanied by a detailed sworn statement of the surety's personal financial ability. The municipality must pay for the bond. 30-A M.R.S. § 5601. The clerk and the surety are liable for all acts and omissions of deputy and assistant clerks. See 30-A M.R.S. §§ 2603, 2654.

Constables must be bonded in the amount of \$500, with two sureties approved by the municipal officers, before serving process (*i.e.*, court papers). See 14 M.R.S. § 703.

General assistance (GA) administrators must be bonded. The bond amount and type of surety are within the municipal overseers' discretion. See 22 M.R.S. § 4302.

Road commissioners must be bonded. The bond amount and type of surety are within the municipal officers' discretion. See 23 M.R.S. § 2701.

Tax collectors must be bonded. The bond amount is within the municipal officers' discretion; it may be either a corporate surety bond, or an individual surety bond provided it is accompanied by a detailed sworn statement of the surety's personal financial ability. See 36 M.R.S. § 755. The tax collector and the surety are liable for all acts and omissions of deputy collectors. 30-A M.R.S. § 2603.

Treasurers must be bonded. The amount of the bond is within the municipal officers' discretion but need not exceed twice the amount of taxes to be collected during the municipal year; the bond may be a corporate surety bond, or an individual surety bond provided it is accompanied by a detailed sworn statement

MUNICIPAL CALENDAR

BY OCTOBER 1 – Assessors should receive the municipality's proposed current state valuation from the State Tax Assessor. (36 M.R.S. § 208).

OCTOBER 1 – Annual junkyard and automobile graveyard licenses expire. (Automobile recycling business licenses are valid for five years from date issued). (30-A M.R.S. § 3753).

OCTOBER 14 – Indigenous People's Day, the second Monday in October, is a legal holiday (4 M.R.S. § 1051).

BY OCTOBER 15 – Monthly/quarterly/semi-annual expenditure statement/claim for General Assistance reimbursement to be filed via online portal, faxed to (207) 287-3455, emailed to GeneralAssistance.DHHS@maine.gov, or sent to DHHS, General Assistance Unit, #11 SHS, Augusta, ME 04333-0011 (22 M.R.S. § 4311).

OCTOBER – Registrars of voters must accept registration prior to the November state election (if held) according to the schedule prescribed by 21-A M.R.S. § 122(6), and must publish the schedule in a newspaper having general circulation in the municipality at least 10-15 days before election day. In municipalities of 2,500 or less population, the schedule may be published by another means deemed sufficient by the registrar. (21-A M.R.S. § 125).

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

of the surety's personal financial ability. The municipality must pay for the bond. See 30-A M.R.S. § 5601. The treasurer and the surety on the bond are liable for all acts and omissions of deputy treasurers. See 30-A M.R.S. § 2603.

In plantations, tax collectors, treasurers and constables must be bonded in the same manner as their counterparts in towns. See 30-A M.R.S. § 7007.

School District Treasurers. Although not municipal officials, treasurers of RSU and SAD boards of directors and CSD school committees must be bonded; the amount of the bond and the type of surety are within the school board's discretion. See 20-A M.R.S. §§ 1251, 1471, 1652. (Note: in municipal school units, the municipal treasurer serves as the school's treasurer.) (By S.F.P.) 🏰

ACO APPOINTMENT & TRAINING

Maine law requires every municipality to appoint an animal control officer (ACO). Unless a charter provides otherwise, the ACO must be a U.S. citizen, Maine resident and at least 18 years old. See 30-A M.R.S. § 2526. If qualified, an employee of an animal shelter may be appointed as ACO.

A person may not be appointed as an ACO if the person has been convicted of murder; of a Class A or Class B offense under Maine law; of a violation of Title 17-A, chapters 9, 11, 12 or 13 (generally, crimes of violence or sexual assault); of a criminal violation under Title 17 chapter 42 (generally, cruelty to animals); or if the person has been adjudicated for a civil animal cruelty violation under Title 17 chapter 739, or has been convicted or adjudicated in any other state, provincial or federal court of a violation similar to those listed above. See 7 M.R.S. § 3947.

Because of the disqualifications listed above, municipal employers should conduct a criminal background check on any person who will be appointed as an ACO. See MMA Legal Services' information packet on Employee Background Checks for more information.

In addition, within six months after appointment, an ACO must complete basic training and be certified by the commissioner of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry (DACF). Basic training includes training on investigation of complaints of cruelty, response to calls concerning rabid animals, enforcement of dog licensing and rabies immunization laws. See 7 M.R.S. § 3906-B.

To maintain certification, ACOs must take at least 8 hours of advanced training annually, which includes training on animal cruelty with respect to hoarders of animals and with respect to domestic violence, and training on new laws, case reviews and report writing. See 7 M.R.S. § 3906-B.

The municipal clerk must notify DACF within 10 days after a new ACO is appointed and within 10 days of any vacancy.

We advise municipal employers to periodically confirm with their ACOs that training and certification requirements are being fulfilled. For more on ACO responsibilities, see our Animal Control Information Packet, available in the "Legal" section of MMA's website. (www.memun.org) (By S.F.P.)

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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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TRAINING CALENDAR

Maine Municipal Association & Affiliates

OCTOBER

10/2 & 3	Wed.-Thurs.	88th Annual MMA Convention	Augusta Civic Center	MMA
10/8	Tues.	Labor & Employment Law	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar	MMA
10/10	Thurs.	Planning Board/Boards of Appeal	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar	MMA
10/17	Thurs.	MMTCTA Municipal Law for Tax Collectors & Treasurers	Augusta - MMA	MMTCTA
10/18	Fri.	MWDA Advanced GA Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MWDA
10/29	Tues.	MUBEC Training: Co-Sponsored with the State Fire Marshal's Office & Maine Fire Chiefs' Association	Portland - Keeley's Banquet Center	MBOIA
10/30	Wed.	MUBEC Training: Co-Sponsored with the State Fire Marshal's Office & Maine Fire Chiefs' Association	Brewer - Jeff's Catering	MBOIA
10/31	Thurs.	MUBEC Training: Co-Sponsored with the State Fire Marshal's Office & Maine Fire Chiefs' Association	Waterville - Elks Lodge	MBOIA
10/31	Thurs.	MEGFOA Fall Training Workshop & Annual Meeting	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar	MEGFOA

NOVEMBER

11/1	Fri.	MUBEC Training: Co-Sponsored with the State Fire Marshal's Office & Maine Fire Chiefs' Association	Waterville - Elks Lodge	MBOIA
11/8	Fri.	MAAO Advanced Excel Training	Augusta - MMA	MAAO
11/14	Thurs.	The ABCs of Assessing - for Non Assessors	Zoom Webinar	MMA
11/12	Tues.	Fit for Duty Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MMA
11/19	Tues.	Elected Officials Workshop	Zoom Webinar	MMA
11/19	Tues.	MLGHRA Fall Training	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar	MLGHRA
11/21	Thurs.	MMTCTA Cash Management Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MMTCTA

DECEMBER

12/4	Wed.	Understanding the Freedom of Access Act	Zoom Webinar	MMA
12/4 & 5	Wed-Thurs.	MTCCA Athenian Dialogue	Zoom Meeting	MTCCA
12/5	Thurs.	MBOIA December Training & Annual Membership Meeting	Lewiston - The Green Ladle	MBOIA
12/6	Fri.	MWDA Winter Issues	Augusta - MMA	MWDA
12/10	Tues.	Planning Board/Boards of Appeal	Zoom Webinar	MMA
12/10	Tues.	MFCA Membership Meeting	Augusta - MMA	MFCA
12/19	Thurs.	MMTCTA Small Claims Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MMTCTA
TBD		MTCCA Vital Records	Location TBD	MTCCA
TBD		MTCMA Joint exchange - NH hosting	New Hampshire TBD	MTCMA/MMANH



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