

KNOX COUNTY COMMISSION

Public Hearing

Wednesday – May 14, 2008 – 6:30 p.m.

A public hearing was held on Wednesday, May 13, 2008, at 6:30 p.m., at the county courthouse, 62 Union Street, Rockland, Maine, in the Commission Hearing Room. Administrative Assistant Candice Richards was present to record the minutes of the meeting.

Commission members present were: Anne Beebe-Center, Commissioner District #1, A. Mason Johnson, Jr., Commissioner District #2, and Lawrence F. Nash, Commissioner District #3. County staff present included: County Administrator Andrew Hart, Administrative Assistant Candice Richards, Executive Assistant Candy Johanson, EMA Director Ray Sisk, Chief Deputy Ernie McIntosh, Airport Manager Jeff Northgraves, Communications Director Linwood Lothrop, Communications Supervisor Stephanie Gibbs, and EMA Clerk Donna Allen.

Media representatives in attendance: Leanne Robicheau, reporter from the *Village Soup* and Erin Rhoda, reporter from the *Courier-Gazette*.

Also present were: State Senator Christine Savage, Interim Town Manager for the Town of Union as Moderator for the Public Hearing; Joseph E. Berry of Hope, Sid Lindsley of Camden, Robert Coombs of Thomaston, Wayne Brown of South Thomaston, Philip Netzorg of Thomaston, Roger Moody of Camden, Adam Miceli of Rockport, Brad Carter of Rockland, Tom Johnston of Washington, Don Choquette of Spruce Head, Kevin Soule of Union, Chris Knight of Rockport, Bill Jones of Hope, Judy Lindahl of Rockport, Douglas Erickson of Thomaston, Craig Cooley of Rockport, Austin Jones of Union, Ian Erickson of Thomaston, Barry W. Norris of Union, and Scot Sabins of Union.

Commissioner Mason Johnson started the meeting at 6:30 p.m. by striking the gavel.

I. Introductions

Moderator Senator Christine Savage introduced herself. She stated that she lives in Union and is currently the Interim Town Manager for Union. She stated that she is also a state senator. She introduced the commissioners by name, as well as the county administrator. She stated that Jeff Northgraves would be acting as a presenter.

II. Guidelines for the Public Hearing

Senator Christine Savage instructed those attending the hearing that she would recognize individuals if they stood and raised their hand. She instructed them to state their name and their town of residence. She stated that each person would only have five minutes to speak but if there was time, people would have another chance to speak. Ms. Savage stated that debating, rebutting, or personal attacks would not be allowed. She stated that the public hearing was an open forum for those present to express their viewpoint on the leasing of the Old County Road property by the county.

Ms. Savage stated that the Public Hearing was now in session.

III. Presentation by Jeff Northgraves

Airport Manager and former Interim County Administrator Jeff Northgraves introduced himself. He stated that for the last couple months, as he was serving as the Interim Administrator, he learned a lot about the Old County Road property lease and the history of it. Mr. Northgraves stated that he strongly supports the lease that is currently on the table. There have been changes to the numbers since the lease was negotiated and those changes would come out in the presentation. He stated that he wanted the public to know his opinion up front before beginning his presentation. He stated that he would try to be as objective as possible but that he did support the current lease. He stated that he did not have any problems with being asked questions during the presentation.

Mr. Northgraves stated that he was going to talk about two main things. The first part is was a depiction of whether or not there is a requirement for the Sheriff's Department, EMA, and Dispatch, to change their facilities. The second part of the presentation would be numbers, representing financial figures. The following information represents the current situation at each of the three departments.

Dispatch:

- 310 square feet
- No supervisor space
- No training space
- No break/kitchen area
- Shared restroom in Sheriff's Office area, on the other side of the building
- Old (non-state of the art) equipment
- Old (non-ergonomic) work station
- No storage space

- Director's office is a closet

Sheriff's Office:

- About 1500 square feet
- No Interrogation/Interview room
- Detectives share space with Sergeants
- Insufficient Patrol Space, not enough computers
- No fitness area, pay stipends to send them elsewhere
- No break/kitchen area
- Limited locker area
- No public areas

EMA:

- About 500 square feet
- No EOC
- No radio/comm rooms
- No training room
- Little to no storage space
- No public access

The question was asked, what is the staff size of EMA? Mr. Northgraves stated that on a normal basis there are two, but if there is an emergency, there would be more staff using the work space.

Jail Study – Final Report by SMRT 2007

In 2006, SMRT was commissioned to do a study of the Jail. The SMRT Final Report issued in 2007 said that Dispatch, Sheriff, and Jail "...space needs...can only be addressed by developing a plan for new construction, including renovation..."

1999 – State and County

- Consolidate Dispatch
- RCC "shoe horned" (temporarily: 5 – 10 years into Jail offices/Sheriff's Office)

2005 – Jail's boarding out costs: \$245,000

2006 – Jail's boarding out costs: \$465,000. The rising costs are why SMRT was commissioned to do a study at the jail. A jail study committee was also formed.

The question was asked, what are the current boarding costs? Mr. Northgraves answered that the boarding costs are currently at zero.

\$465,000 per year

- Jail study committee
- Hired SMRT: Jail/prisoner predictions for the future and recommendations:
Option I: No new beds (jail cells) = \$4.2 million, new administration space
Option II: Needed beds (build jail cells) = \$10.8 million

Mr. Northgraves stated that SMRT noted that if another facility was found for the Sheriff's Office and dispatch, the county could save \$2.7 million in renovation costs for either Option I or II.

As a result of the SMRT study and Final Report, the Maine DOC issued a variance to the county. Normally, the Knox County Jail can board 56 prisoners. With the variance, the jail is now able to board 80, but only if the county is actively working to lower the number of beds needed. The Jail Study Committee came up with other suggestions which have brought down the number of prisons in jail and the amount spent on them. So far in 2008, the jail has exceeded 56 prisoners, but not the variance of 80. Without the variance, the county would have had to pay to board out prisoners.

One of the provisos of the variance was that the county would develop and move forward with long-term plans to provide a jail facility that complies with all the rules and regulations of safety.

The question was asked, what year was that, and won't it change now with the state take-over? Mr. Northgraves stated that his last slide would deal with this issue.

The variance is for two years; it runs out in 2009. The Maine DOC can extend the variance or it can be taken away at any time if the DOC does not believe that the county is moving forward to correct the overcrowding problem.

The Old County Road property, formerly occupied by DHS, had been on and off the market several times. The county had been looking at the property, as well as other properties, to see if it was a viable space to move Dispatch and the Sheriff's Office into. In the fall of 2007, 360 Old County Road was back on the market. At that time, the County Administrator went to the Commission and

the Budget Committee and gave them five options to correct the space problem. The Commission and the Budget Committee chose option five, which was to set aside money for possibly leasing the Old County Road property until permission could be granted to buy it.

Don Choquette stated that Budget Committee did not approve a specific plan when the budget was approved in November of 2007. The committee approved a provision of funds. They stated that it was up to the Commissioners to find the most cost-effective proposal. The committee did not pick out one specific proposal to support. Mr. Choquette thought that about \$217,000 had been added to the budget for this purpose.

**Note: the actual total amount added to the budget for the three departments was \$215,100.*

Mr. Northgraves stated that the County Administrator was also authorized to begin negotiations with the owner of the 360 Old County Road property, as well as someone who was planning to buy it.

In 2008, the Commissioners signed the agreement after negotiations. It is currently a five-year lease with the option to buy. The building is 15,600 square feet. The rental comes out to \$12.5 per square foot per year. The initial buyout if the county purchased it from the start of the process would be \$1.55 million dollars. Over time, the buyout price goes down.

The owner agreed to help pay \$500,000 in moving in costs, provide equipment that would be going into it, move walls around, and have the building accommodate the needs of the county. The rent was agreed to be \$5,500 per month until the county moves into the building. After that, the rent goes up to \$16,250 per month. A portion of the building would not be occupied and could therefore be leased out.

The question was asked, how much space could be rented out? Mr. Northgraves answered that it was about 3,000 feet.

Mr. Choquette stated that Mr. Northgraves was trying to equate the savings in boarding out costs to the cost of the lease. He stated that they are not connected in any way. The boarding savings that were achieved were done by adding one person to Maine Pretrial staff, as well as adding another program to try to keep people out of jail. That is a separate and distinct program and the two cannot be linked. The boarding out savings should not be used as justification for this program.

Mr. Northgraves stated that a portion of the decrease of boarding out costs has come as a result of the other two programs, but a portion has come from having the variance.

Mr. Choquette stated that to solve the problem, the county has to add additional cell space.

Mr. Northgraves stated that he must be reading the report a little bit differently. He stated that Option I was adding no cell space. It was a \$4.2 million dollar modification cost to bring the jail into compliance with their current bed structure. It does not add a single bed.

Mr. Choquette stated that Phase I was to solve the congestion problem and was broken up into two pieces so that people would understand the implications of the over-all program. The first was to solve the congestion problem, and the second was to solve the cell capacity.

Mr. Northgraves stated that subleasing part of the building could result in revenue of around \$40,000. EMA would also receive reimbursement from FEMA for part of the EMA expense. He thought that amount would be about \$36,000.

The lease agreement was contingent on two things. The first was a permit for a 75-foot tower. Mr. Northgraves stated that he believed that process was almost completed. He stated that there were things that Communications Director Linwood Lothrop had been able to work out so that he might be able to live with a 75-foot tower. The second contingency was that if the move-in costs exceeded \$500,000, the Commission could back out of the agreement. This is because in the lease, anything above \$500,000 for the move-in and modifications, has to come from the county at the time the cost is incurred. Mr. Northgraves stated that while the move-in costs change all the time, the following is the current estimate:

Building:	\$544,000 to modify the building to move into it.
Building inside:	\$519,000
Building outside:	\$25,000
Comm. Package:	\$453,000 to move equipment into the building.
	<i>(Consoles \$117,000; Tower \$100,000; 911 Equipment \$100,000; Equipment 36,000)</i>
TOTAL:	\$1,541,000

The buyer has agreed to increase the move-in cost amount from \$500,000 to \$750,000. That still leaves Knox County with needing to come up with \$222,000. Since negotiating the lease, the costs have gone up. Mr. Northgraves stated that instead of the buyout cost being \$1.55 million, he estimated that it would be around \$2 million just to buy the building. Instead of \$195,000 for the lease and operating costs, it would be around \$230,000. Even with all the unknowns, the lease is still a good deal. Both the buyout and lease are currently below the fair market value.

Recent state legislation caps county costs for the jail at 2008's numbers. Anything above that are taken care of by the state. If the boarding costs go up, the state pays for it, but the taxpayers still end up paying for it because the state would tax the citizens for to fund the jail system. The state may come in and change the jail structure all together or even change or eliminate the jail all together.

The move-in and modification costs do include replacing equipment and consoles for Dispatch. Communications Director Linwood Lothrop has been delaying replacing the outdated equipment because of the cost of moving that equipment once it is in use. Even if Mr. Lothrop did not replace the equipment as part of the move, he would eventually still have to purchase new equipment because of the state of the currently used equipment. It is cheaper to move the existing equipment into the new facility and then upgrade.

Mr. Don Choquette asked when Communications Director Linwood Lothrop came forward with his requests for money that would be needed to purchase new equipment.

Mr. Northgraves stated that when he had started working as the Interim County Administrator, the information from Director Lothrop was already on administrators' desk.

Mr. Choquette stated that to many people, Director Lothrop's request was late in the budget process, and he wondered when the Commission was made aware of it.

Mr. Northgraves stated that he did not think of Director Lothrop's need as an increase because it was already on the table when he first became Interim Administrator.

Mr. Choquette asked if this was a mandatory need, or if it was just something that the Director would like to do. He stated that from reading the material provided by Director Lothrop, it appeared that some of the equipment only had a life expectancy of 5 years.

Mr. Northgraves replied that that is the nature of electronics; more specifically, dispatch equipment. The demand on the equipment is great. It is expensive and it is the same for everybody. It takes money to run the program. The county could get into the building for a cheap price, but eventually Dispatch going to have to replace the equipment.

There are FEMA grants that the county can apply for. The money is available for a generator, which Mr. Northgraves stated that he was fairly certain that FEMA would pay for, as well as the installation. FEMA would do this since FEMA would be housed in the building. FEMA will also possibly pay for renovations and other equipment. Unfortunately, there is no way at present to know exactly how much FEMA will actually pay for. A decision would have to be made before knowing what FEMA grants the county would receive.

IV. Public Comment

Senator Christine Savage stated that the Public Hearing was now opened up for questions. She reminded those gathered that each person would only have five minutes to speak. She also stated that anyone who spoke would need to stand and state their name and place of residence.

Brad Carter from Rockland

Mr. Carter stated that he had the specks for the communications tower. He read aloud from a paper that listed allowable weather conditions for the tower. The tower is designed to withstand 100 mile an hour winds with no ice, or 40 miles an hour wind with one inch of ice. Those are conditions that the county has seen, and a lot of towers fell down in the last ice storm. If our tower falls down, it will possibly fall on the building because of its proximity to the building. Mr. Carter stated that he agreed that there are space issues for the three departments that need to be dealt with, but asked if there was a better tower available.

Ms. Savage asked Communications Director Linwood Lothrop if he could answer the question.

Director Lothrop stated that Mr. Carter brought up good point that was also brought up by the Board of Appeals in several meetings.

Mr. Carter stated that he knew that in Owls Head, as well as in other towns, the tower would not be allowed to be anywhere near the building because of what is called the fall zone.

Director Lothrop stated that the original tower was questioned by the Zoning Board of Appeals. It had a seven-foot, nine-inch base, while the new one has a twelve and a half-foot base. The new tower is designed to withstand 100 mile hour winds with no ice, or 60 mile an hour with two inches of ice. The tower is fifteen feet from the building, and the reason for that is because the distance between the antenna and tower needs to be as short as possible for optimal performance. The base of tower is not a cheap tower; it is structurally sound. The tower industry has its own tower regulations. Director Lothrop stated that he had specifically requested a heavier grade tower.

Mr. Carter asked Director Lothrop if he had taken into consideration the fact that ice might fall from the tower onto the building.

Director Lothrop stated that yes, this was taken into consideration, and this is why the tower is fifteen feet away from the building.

Don Choquette from Spruce Head

Mr. Choquette stated that Jeff Northgraves had stated in his presentation that the proposal for Old County Road is being compared to saving \$2.7 million in the SMRT Phase I study. Mr. Choquette stated that there were a number of things that the people should understand. He stated that he was the one who recommended that the county administrator look at the property on Old County Road because at the time, the expenditure was expected to be about \$1 million dollars. On the surface it looked like something worth looking into to relieve congestion problems at the jail; however, the construction at the jail is completely different than what is at Old County Road. The Jail is a much higher quality construction than Old County Road, which is a stick-built facility, versus brick and mortar. The Old County Road property may be cheaper, but it has a shorter life expectancy than the jail building. Mr. Northgraves stated a \$2.7 million savings, including a 15 percent contingency of \$352,000. The contingency was added as part of Phase I of a two phase study. Phase II was to do all of the other architectural work and come up with specific blueprints that could become a bid package. This was an estimate that could be refined. The contingency comes very close to what it would cost for the current proposal. There are other advantages of staying at the jail. There is still extra land there for future expansion for the next fifty years. The property is very valuable and available to use for what the county sees fit. Mr. Choquette stated that he felt that this factor was not talked about at all. In looking at the study, there was a letter from the architect for the Old County Road property, John Hanson, which explains why the expenses are increasing. For example, all of the siding has to be replaced as well as all the windows. The interior of the building is being gutted. The building is only ten years old. The entire package has to be looked at. In the Phase I proposal, based on the numbers Mr. Choquette calculated, Dispatch and Jail would get about 2,000 additional square feet if the county went with Phase I versus Phase II. He urged the Commission to take all of the information into consideration. He stated that he wanted the public to know that he had written two letters to the Commissioners to make sure that they had all of this information in detail, at their disposal, before they make their final decision.

Doug Erickson from Thomaston

Mr. Erickson stated that he wanted to be upfront and state that he was involved with the property. He asked Mr. Choquette if the \$2.3 million figure that he had used included the cost of replacing the dispatch equipment.

Mr. Choquette answered no.

Mr. Erickson said that if the cost of the dispatch equipment was taken out, the figure drops down to around \$1.5 million, versus more than \$2 million. It is a difference of about \$800,000.

Adam Miseli from Rockport

Mr. Miseli stated that work in the Fire/EMS field as the Assistant Fire Chief in Rockland, so he works very closely with EMA and Dispatch. He stated that he supports their need for space, but not the Old County Road property. He stated that he had a few reasons for not supporting it. One, at the last Commission meeting, Communications Director Lothrop stated that the radio study people said that 105 feet for the communications tower is optimal to cover Knox County. Mr. Miseli stated that despite that, only a 75-foot and 82-foot tower is all that has been discussed. These heights are less than what is needed. Director Lothrop should not have to “live with” 75 feet, as Mr. Northgraves suggested. The county already has redundancy problems with signals between these departments and the towns. If all three departments are moved into the same building, the problem would most likely be worse. Mr. Miseli stated that he did not believe that Knox County has a big threat from terrorism. If something were to happen at the Old County Road property, which is less than 100 feet from the road, everyone would have to evacuate the building. The very people who should be responding are the ones being evacuated. There would not be anyone to respond from another location. He stated that people could talk to the state about why they did something similar at Augusta, but they have their property far back from the road which is safer. The Old County Road building is right next to the road, which happens to be a high-traffic route. The Jail has a high safety value because of being

made of brick and having secured doors. The Old County Road property does not have a sprinkler system, which means that the entire building would have to be evacuated if there was a fire. Jails do not have to be evacuated even if there is a fire because of the secure doors. It is a defend-in place. It makes sense to keep Dispatch in a safer place than at the OCR property, which is not safe. In the SMRT study, the \$2.7 million dollar savings is based on the \$10.8 expansion project, which included 120 beds by the year 2027, not the \$4.1 renovation project. If the jail study is the driving factor, the county is still looking at a cost of about \$8.1 million dollars. Mr. Miseli stated that one thing he wanted to comment on was the statement by Mr. Northgraves that there is no training space at the Jail. He stated that he, himself, has conducted training in a room outside of Dispatch at the jail. The space is not optimal, but there is still space available. The Jail is being handed over to the state in the next few months, so do the taxpayers want to pay for the expansion now, or do they want to share the cost with the entire state of Maine later?

Austen Jones from Union

Mr. Jones stated that he was not equipped to comment on financial or technical issues. His reservations are specifically with the location and the building itself. There seemed to be too much space for the three small departments. It appeared that about one third is unnecessary space. Mr. Jones stated that he believed that the layout for the property is very generous in the amount of space allotted to each department. The economy is taking a nose dive and inflation is up. There are no simple solutions to those problems. A very good point brought up at the hearing was that the proper location for these departments is for them to be co-located with the jail. There is room and it would be a more central, more efficient location. Safety is an issue too; the jail is significantly safer. Mr. Jones stated that was also concerned that the buyer of the Old County Road is making a profit off of the county by our leasing it. He stated that he questions the process. He asked if somebody was being accommodated beyond what is on the surface. Mr. Jones stated that he feels that this whole process has been sprung on the public and is happening too fast for such a significant, major move.

Bill Jones from Hope, Budget Committee

Mr. Jones stated that he wanted to make it clear that when the Budget Committee authorized the Commission to enter negotiations and set aside an amount of money, the committee was not favoring one option over another. They wished for the Commission to consider all options. This whole issue is very complicated. Mr. Jones stated that he shares some of Austen Jones' worries. He hoped that all the options are considered. There is no shame in putting the decision off in a situation where there are so many uncertainties. Mr. Jones stated that he does not know how recent legislation will affect the Jail, but the County needs the best professional advice. All options should be considered with great care.

Roger Moody from Camden

Mr. Moody stated that he wanted to give the Commission credit for starting the process a couple of years ago when the boarding costs for the jail had increased so much. What started this process in the first place was the need for jail beds. Now that the state is taking over that problem, it might be a good idea to find out what their plans are for the jail. All three departments do need more space. It might be a good time to stop and look at the original factors for change because so many things have changed.

Sid Lindsley from Camden, Budget Committee

Mr. Lindsley stated that during budget process, different figures were discussed than what has been brought up recently. He stated that he has no doubt that Dispatch needs more space. It is ridiculous that Dispatch is currently in such a small space. Mr. Lindsley stated that he cannot go back to Camden and say that the commissioners are going to spend that much money.

Doug Erickson

Mr. Erickson stated that he wanted to respond to Mr. Austen Jones' questions concerning the buyer of the property. Originally, the buyer was negotiating with another party to move into the building. He stated that he approached Administrator William Post at the suggestion of Don Choquette. After he spoke to Mr. Post, Mr. Erickson went back to his party and said that they were better off leasing to the county because the county is more financially stable. At that point, since the county expressed interest in the property, Mr. Erickson moved forward with the County instead of the third party.

Wayne Brown from South Thomaston, works for the Maine State Prison

Mr. Brown stated that he had not followed the process too closely but it seemed all too familiar. The Maine State Prison came forward with a plan that the SMRT was involved in. SMRT came up with a plan that they claimed would save money by moving into a high tech facility. There were never any savings; instead, the costs kept rising. The prison was ill conceived, designed, and poorly built. As an example, SMRT designed rooms with enormous ceilings, which makes the prison very hard to heat or keep cool. Mr. Brown stated that he was mainly concerned that SMRT had also done the Knox County study because they had done so poorly with the Maine State Prison study. Mr. Brown stated

that it was time to start living within our means. It is not about what we want, but what we need. There is no question that Dispatch needs more room. Mr. Brown stated that he does not know all the proposals that have been submitted, but it sounds like building and expanding at the jail site is the best idea.

Commissioner Mason Johnson

Commissioner Johnson stated that he has mixed emotions about which way the Commission should go with the Old County Road property. It is pretty obvious that Communications Director Linwood Lothrop's space is limited. Commissioner Johnson stated that he commends Director Lothrop for being able to do his job in the limited space. It is the same with EMA, which is located in the basement of the courthouse. Commissioner Johnson stated that in tenure of 16 years, it has always been his feeling to provide the best decision in the interest of the constituency that he represents. He felt that he had been diligent in doing that. He stated that there are people he has talked to who have been disagreeable, if not hateful, about purchasing the Old County Road building. People call him at home day and night, and come find him at his place of work. Commissioner Johnson stated that he has not yet decided what to do. The first lease that was drawn up was a very extensive lease. It was 28 pages and highly favored the landlord. The county hired two high-powered attorneys from Bangor to scrutinize the lease. The attorneys said that the lease was much too long. Commissioner Johnson stated that he wanted to read some notes from the early stages of the process. He stated that Sarah Reinhart and Mike Trainor are the legal advisors for the project.

“Mike Trainor and Sara Reinhart (our primary legal advisors for this project) want to ensure the County Commissioners understand the following:

1. The \$550k is an estimate. We're getting the final numbers so it may change; that's why it's in yellow. If the original estimate is less than \$500k then the LLC is borrowing less than \$500k for construction and therefore the rent and purchase prices will be re-calculated. The LLC can not borrow more than \$500k if the estimate is higher than \$500k.
2. If after we have the estimate and the construction has ended, the costs were less than \$500k, per \$100k less, \$800 will be deducted from the rent amount; however, no deduction will be made from the purchase price at that stage. The LLC could construe this as being in its best interest to spend less than the \$500k even though the construction is the sine qua non of the reason the County wants the building. Further, this could be construed as the County paying for something it didn't receive as it would take more than 10 years for the \$800/month in reduced rent to actually equal the \$100k less paid in construction.
3. Warnings about this looking like debt which requires a referendum first:
 - A. Rent and purchase price numbers were originally created from amortization schedule for the Landlord's debt.
 - B. 8 years is a long lease, particularly because if the referendum fails, the County is still stuck in the Lease and the real estate market seems to be just going down. We would prefer 5 years but they couldn't agree to that.
 - C. Risks of ownership are on the County: lease payment is keyed to this loan structure (plus profit) and the Tenant is paying for the insurance Landlord is getting for fire. (While the latter is normal, with all of these other elements, it contributes to the issue.)
 - D. The LLC told you what their debt service looked like so there is no paperwork in the file that shows the above.
4. There's no assurance that the referendum will pass. (My note: it will be to our advantage to get this to referendum as soon as possible.)”

Commissioner Johnson stated that it costs a lot of money to get the good advice that led to the second, far more agreeable, lease. If the county continues with the jail study, using Maine Pretrial Services, and if the state takes over part of the Jail, the County will not need an \$8 million dollar addition onto the Jail. The money proposed to lease the Old County Road property could be used to make ample room for Dispatch and the other two departments. If the County entered into a lease for the Old County Road property, the voters would never approve a referendum to purchase the building, so the County would be stuck continuing the lease after the initial lease ends in five years. Money will have already been spent moving into the building, and it would cost too much to move back out. The feeling of the public out there is not very warm. The Commission will do what the people want done.

Commissioner Lawrence Nash

Commissioner Nash stated that the driving force behind the whole process was when the county had to spend \$465,000 per year to board out prisoners. Various options were looked at to solve the problem. Leasing the Old County Road property was the option that was chosen, so this is why a public hearing was scheduled. Paying \$465,000 per year is a waste of taxpayer money.

Commissioner Anne Beebe-Center

Commissioner Beebe-Center stated that she would like to thank people for coming and for sharing opinions. The Commission would take it all into consideration and figure out the next step.

Commissioner Mason Johnson

Commissioner Johnson stated that he had a letter from the Executive Committee of the Knox Regional Communications Center that he wanted to read, dated May 9, 2008, and signed by the Executive Committee:

“Resolved

The Knox Regional Communications Center Executive Committee cannot support the move of the Dispatch Center to 360 Old County Road at this time, due to the lack of information and lack of answers to pertinent questions.”

Barry Norris from Union

Mr. Norris stated that the people have been told that the driving force behind the whole issue is the Jail. He asked if anyone had thought about putting that question aside and taking the square footage of the need, less the extras, and coming up with a free-standing structure at the site that is already owned where the jail is located. Responders need increased space for EMA and Dispatch, as well as Sheriff's Office. The public needs to have access to the departments and visa versa. The County already owns the property, so why not build there? The jail administration would get its space back. Even if the state reallocates the Jail for something else, the County would still have the other free-standing facility. The County could build a new building to house all three departments. It may be best solution to ignore the jail over-crowding at this point and to just look at the three departments and their needs.

Don Choquette from Spruce Head

Mr. Choquette stated that the idea of a free-standing structure was given some thought about a year ago. It was felt that it could be done for a few less dollars by doing it all in one building. However, the idea was discarded because it seemed better to add onto the jail and use existing resources instead. The powerhouse at the jail could handle a lot more than was being utilized, so it would have been more cost-effective to add onto the jail than have a separate building next to it. Now that the state is taking over the jail, it would be wise to reconsider the idea of a free-standing building. There is still room next to the Jail to build another building that could be connected to the powerhouse. The current jail project was started in 1988, and opened in 1991. Things were working fine until Dispatch moved in sometime in 1991. Having Dispatch use up space compromised the operations of the jail. Mr. Choquette stated that he has worked on the jail study for four years and thought that SMRT did an excellent job. The building has given provided good service and still has a lot of life in it. The Jail cost \$4.9 million to build back in 1988. If the same jail was built in 2008, it would cost about \$12 million. It is a very valuable asset of Knox County.

Austen Jones from Union

Mr. Jones stated that the Governor's move to consolidate jails was welcomed with a lack of enthusiasm from practically every county. The action may have colored the efforts of county officials to get the jail and security procedures in order so that they would not be criticized for doing less than they should have. Mr. Jones stated that he had a problem with there still being land over at the Jail that was not being used. The County should avoid taking tax-producing property away from the City of Rockland. Mr. Jones stated that citizens owe commissioners a thank you for giving the public the opportunity to voice their opinion, even if the commissioners do not like what they hear.

Scott Sabins – Union Fire and Ambulance

Mr. Sabins stated that it was in 1999 when the municipalities in Knox County changed over to the present dispatch center. At the time, the Town of Union paid \$300 a year to the Maine State Police. When the Knox Regional Communications Center was created, there were public meetings in different towns to explain how things were going to be. The public was told that the new dispatch center was far superior to what the municipalities were used to. Bob Duke told them the price of \$300 that Union was used to with the Maine State Police, was now going to be \$23,000 a year. Mr. Sabins stated that he believed this was unnecessary. If the Town of Union was happy with the State Police services, why should they have to change? Mr. Sabins felt that they were not kept abreast of what was going on. The current issue of the Old County Road feels like this is the same. Every time something is in the paper, the costs are higher than the last time. Mr. Sabins stated that the taxpayers in Knox County cannot afford this purchase or lease. The departments may need more room, but maybe adding onto the jail or constructing a free-standing building would be a better idea.

Airport Manager Jeff Northgraves

Mr. Northgraves stated that he wanted to make a couple comments on the numbers being thrown around by various speakers. He said that amount of \$2.7 million dollars is the amount that SMRT said that the county would save if the county did something different than what was planned (constructing a building somewhere else for the Sheriff's Office and Dispatch). \$4.2 million was to build onto the existing jail to make room just for the Sheriff's Office and Dispatch. It did not include any extra bed space. **Mr. Northgraves began to give an example of how much it would cost to construct a building to house the three departments at \$300 per square foot when several members of the public began shouting at him for his use of \$300 per square foot. Ms. Savage had to call the room back to order.*

Joe Berry from Hope

Mr. Berry stated that the estimate of \$300 per square foot building costs was outrageous. He said that the Jail costs have nothing to do with EMA costs. It is the same as comparing apples and oranges. He stated that it sounds like the county is using the Jail as an excuse to buy the Old County Road property. He does not know the condition of the building. He stated that if the members of the Commission have any doubts in their minds, they should not go any further with this plan, or at least put it out to referendum to give voters a chance to voice their opinion.

Tom Johnston – Washington Fire Service

Mr. Johnston stated that he was upset that the Old County Road building does not have sprinklers. It is ridiculous to put emergency responders in a building that is meant to burn. Dispatch and EMA need more space, but they need to be in a fire-resistant building like the Jail. The County should invest in buildings that are going to last 100 years or so and make it fire-protected.

Don Choquette from Spruce Head

Mr. Choquette stated that he wanted to respond to some of the numbers that Jeff Northgraves had stated about the costs for building a free-standing building next to the Jail. Mr. Choquette stated that Mr. Northgraves was completely out of line for having said that it would cost \$300 per square foot to construct that building. He said that \$300 per square foot is the cost to build the jail because it is a high security space. A free-standing building for Dispatch, the Sheriff's Office, and EMA would not cost anywhere near \$300 per square foot. He said that Mr. Northgraves' comment was on the outrageous side.

Ms. Savage reminded Mr. Choquette that there should be no personal attacks.

Mr. Northgraves stated that he used the numbers right out of the SMRT study, which stated that \$100 per square foot was for renovation costs, and \$300 per square foot was for construction costs.

Adam Miseli from Rockport

Mr. Miseli stated that he wanted to draw the Commission's attention to the Jail Study recommendations. He stated that Mr. Northgraves had mentioned that \$2.7 million was the savings on the expenditure of \$4.1 million. Later on in the same paragraph, it states that the \$2.7 million is connected with the \$10.8 expenditure. The savings would not be the same. One of the major costs of this project is to move the equipment. If the Sheriff's Office were to move out of the Jail, the Dispatch could spread out and there wouldn't be any moving expenses. The County would gain more space for Dispatch at a lesser costs.

Craig Cooley from Rockport

Mr. Cooley asked if the Commission has looked at the school buildings now abandoned by towns.

Doug Erickson from Thomaston

Mr. Erickson stated that he wanted to thank the members of the Commission. He stated that they are in a tough position and he commended them for their efforts. He said that they were doing a superb job.

Ms. Savage stated that she wanted to thank the Commission as well because it is not easy working for the public. She thanked everyone for coming to the hearing.

V. Adjourn

Christine Savage closed the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candice Richards

The Knox County Commission approved these minutes at their regular meeting held on June 10, 2008.

Anne H. Beebe-Center – Commissioner District #1

A. Mason Johnson, Jr., Chair – Commissioner District #2

Lawrence F. Nash – Commissioner District #3