

## KNOX COUNTY COMMISSION



Special Meeting

Wednesday – August 3, 2005 – 1 p.m.

A special meeting of the Knox County Commission was held on Wednesday, August 3, 2005 at 1 p.m., at the county courthouse, 62 Union Street, Rockland, Commissioner Johnson being the chair and the county clerk present to record the minutes of the meeting.

### Board Members Present:

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

Anne Beebe-Center - Commissioner District #1

Lawrence F. Nash - Commissioner District #3

### Special Meeting – Agenda

Wednesday, August 3, 2005 – 1:00 p.m.

1:00 Meeting Called To Order

1:00 Communications and EMA – Communications Director L. Lothrop; EMA Director S. Birmingham  
✓ Discussion of Possible Merge of the RCC and EMA into One Facility

1:30 TAX ABATEMENT APPEAL DECISION

✓ Starbird v. Town of Thomaston (2)

2:00 – 3:30

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR FINALISTS INTERVIEWS

4:00 ADJOURNMENT

### MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Chair Johnson called the August 3, 2005 special meeting to order at approximately 1 p.m.

### COMMUNICATIONS AND EMA

#### Merger of RCC and EMA into One Facility Discussed

##### In attendance:

RCC Director Linwood Lothrop

EMA Director Sylvia Birmingham

Director Lothrop noted he had provided the commission with copies of minutes from two previous meetings when the consolidation of the RCC and EMA offices had been discussed. At this point, the director said he had done all that he could do; it was now up to the county commissioners as to the direction from this point. Discussions thus far had addressed space needs for the next 15 to 20 years of both offices. He also provided the commission with a copy, which he called a “photo essay” that depicted the cramped quarters of the emergency dispatch facility. He informed the commission he would be taking digital photos of the area that would also highlight inefficiencies in the facilities, and would put together a full report for the county commissioners, budget committee, and others to review.

Commissioner Beebe-Center inquired about possible funding for a consolidated emergency services center. Director Lothrop reported Senator Collins and others were currently working on procuring Homeland Defense funding that could be put towards infrastructures; now federal funding was only available for radio equipment. The director said he had pushed as far as he could, but there currently were no funds available for buildings.

Chair Johnson remarked funding would be a concern. Unless grant money could be procured, he was doubtful the citizens of the county would vote to borrow any money for a new facility, no matter the need.

Director Lothrop said he would still like to proceed and obtain a plan of what a merged facility would look like. He reminded the commission that when he became director over six years ago, the plan was that the current facility would be used for between seven to 10 years, as a Band Aid approach. Now, in his sixth

year, he had identified to the commission the space requirements of his department, and that of the EMA. He further told the commission he had funds held in reserve that could be used to hire an architect to look into this.

Commissioner Beebe-Center suggested it was important for the county commissioners to be able to get cost estimates and layout projections, and whether the facilities proposed would be a stand alone building or included as part of another structure. She mentioned there might be some way to include airport functions in the same building as the RCC and EMA, including the TSA.

Director Lothrop said he was looking for direction and input from the commission, and asked if the airport was a viable option as to where a facility might be located. He commented he was eager to move this issue along.

Commissioner Beebe-Center noted the county would have to determine if there was available funding, and what it might cost to construct a new facility. Director Lothrop responded by saying he didn't believe the costs would change much from a stand alone building to a unit attached to an existing county building. However, it was noted that relocating the emergency dispatch center to a new site would bring an additional cost in relocating the emergency communications equipment.

Director Lothrop again said he was looking for some direction. Chair Johnson suggested Director Lothrop pursue putting some type of plan together for the commission. Commissioner Beebe-Center suggested the plan offer different options for consideration. Director Lothrop said he would be willing to work on a proposal for submission at the commissioners' September meeting. Commissioner Beebe-Center suggested the director identify some people that could do the work necessary to assess the needs, develop and plan, including space and funding requirements. She also suggested the director speak with the airport manager about the possibility of combining facilities at the airport, with the possibility of gaining some federal funds in the event TSA or other airport services were offered out of the same building.

Discussion continued. Director Lothrop assured the commission he would have a plan to them at an upcoming board meeting.

Commissioner Nash commented the commission also had other problems to address, such as the overcrowding at the jail. He noted the state had talked about using county jails as a way to alleviate overcrowding at state facilities.

In closing Director Lothrop noted he would stay on this issue, and prepare a plan for emergency services 25 years down the line.

## **TAX ABATEMENT APPEAL DECISION**

### **Starbird v. Town of Thomaston**

*The commission started the review of this case prior to the designated time of 1:30 p.m. Representatives of both parties joined the meeting in progress.*

Chair Johnson noted the town's assessor had indicated a willingness to work with the landowner to look at various items that could possibly affect the overall land values. However, Mr. Starbird had been reluctant to speak to Mr. Martucci any further. The chair noted he had spoken to both Mr. Starbird and his daughter about talking to the town in an effort to reduce the property values, to no avail.

Commissioner Beebe-Center noted Mr. Martucci had previously invited the Starbirds to make a list of items they felt devalued the properties.

Chair Johnson noted previously both he and Commissioner Nash had said they wanted to go and look at the land in question. The chair said he believed the Starbirds were overtaxed to some degree, but the parties needed to get together to discuss it. Chair Johnson then suggested the commission vote to deny the abatement as drafted, but urge the parties to meet and look at possible devaluation items.

### Motion and Discussion

- ❖ Commissioner Nash motioned to stand by the decision to deny the abatement as requested, and to encourage the parties to discuss possible reductions in land value based on evidence to be provided

by the landowner to the Town, as the town had indicated a willingness to discuss it. Motion seconded by Commissioner Beebe-Center for discussion.

(Melissa Starbird arrived at the meeting at 1:26 p.m.)

The commission then conveyed to Ms. Starbird the pending motion of the commission. Ms. Starbird said she recognized the difficulties the town had in the assessments, and further stated her father was prepared to request Mr. Martucci simply take their appraiser's assessment value of the land to use as the tax value for the property.

Commissioner Beebe-Center noted the commission's decision would then require that the parties try to work this out, but also they would be under a 30-day deadline to appeal to the Superior Court if they could not reach agreement or if they were not happy with the commission's decision.

Commissioner Nash also pointed out that if the Starbirds received no satisfaction from the 2004-2005 assessments, they could start the appeal process again for the 2005-2006 tax year.

*[A message was received at this point in time that Mr. Martucci was on his way to the meeting, but was stuck in traffic.]*

Ms. Starbird suggested there had been some personality conflicts from the beginning that could have hampered any negotiations or concessions. She further suggested the town had handled this matter in a poor manner.

Commissioner Beebe-Center noted it was not up to the commission to decide whether or not the matter had been handled poorly. Rather, the commission was tasked with determining whether the town had used the same approach in assessing the Starbird properties as they had other similar properties within the town.

Ms. Starbird remarked if this matter could have been resolved in the beginning, her parents would have saved a great deal of money.

(Dave Martucci arrived at the meeting at 1:50 p.m.)

Upon the arrival of the town's assessor to the meeting, the commission then had repeated to Mr. Martucci the motion the commission was currently deliberating.

Mr. Martucci again said the town would take into consideration possible reductions in the assessment, but it was up to the taxpayer to provide the town with the information. He noted he had recently spoken to the Starbird's attorney – James Strong – and indicated the town's willingness to meet and discuss issues that might lead to a reduction in the land assessments. Mr. Martucci acknowledged he had visited the Starbird properties, but had not walked the sites with the landowner. Again, he said it would be up to the landowner to initiate the discussions with the town. Again, Mr. Martucci referred to the Glidden property in which the property received some reduction due to vibrations caused by blasting.

Chair Johnson said he believed Mr. Starbird was entitled to some type of consideration, as he had walked the properties himself and viewed the sites.

Commissioner Beebe-Center informed Mr. Martucci that Ms. Starbird had called his office to arrange a meeting, and was waiting a return call. Ms. Starbird indicated she was anxious to get this issue settled. Mr. Martucci and Ms. Starbird then agreed to meet the next day to begin discussions.

#### Vote on Motion

- ❖ When the vote was taken to deny the Starbird tax abatement request, the commission voted unanimously to deny the abatement appeal.

### **COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR FINALISTS INTERVIEWS**

**Executive Session** *(The county clerk was not present during the closed interview session.)*

#### Motion and Vote

- ❖ The commission unanimously voted to go into executive session for the purpose of conducting interviews for the new county administrator position, pursuant to 1 MRSA § 405 (6)(A).

**MEETING ADJOURNED**

The meeting concluded sometime around 4 p.m. and the conclusion of the interview session.

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Virginia B. Lindsey  
County Clerk