



**COUNCIL DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
GARDINER CITY COUNCIL
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2025**

1. ROLL CALL / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

City Council Present: Mayor Hart, Councilor Cone, Councilor Greenleaf, Councilor Babcock, Councilor Kimball, Councilor Dolley, Councilor Grant. **Councilor Cusick was unable to attend.**

City Employees Present: Denise Brown-Finance Director, Alyssa Jones- Deputy City Clerk, John Cameron- Public Work Director, Todd Pilsbury- Chief of Police, Melissa Lindley -Economic Development Director, Dawn Thistle- Head Librarian, Rick Sieburg- Fire Chief.

Others Present: Joseph Pietroski, Debby Willis.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT (anything not on the agenda) No Correspondence. No Public Comment.

3. PETITIONS / PUBLIC HEARINGS PETITIONS / PUBLIC HEARINGS

a) Public Hearing regarding changes to City Code: Chapter 13 Quarrying

Mayor Hart opened the public hearing at 6:04pm. There being no comment, she closed the meeting at 6:04pm.

b) Public Hearing regarding Gardiner Elks Club Victualers and Games of Chance Application

Mayor Hart opened the public hearing at 6:04pm. There being no comment, she closed the meeting at 6:04pm.

4. NEW BUSINESS

a) Kennebec County Budget Update:

Commissioner Joseph J. Pietroski ~ **Thank you for having me. I have been a Winthrop resident for 54 years; I have served in many different positions over my time there. I would like to welcome any comments in terms of suggestions. The City of Gardiner has been very well represented by Kathleen Cutler. This is the best budget committee I have found. They ask questions and come to the different departments to get knowledge of what is truly going on. Very important issues and costly issues are being dealt with currently. If you go to the Kennebec County, Maine website there you will find the commissioner website where you can see the budget by department. It is very important that we have this open for people to see, we may not all agree but all need to know what is going on. One area you can help us to lower the budget involves the state of Maine. I would like to talk to you about unfunded mandates, in particular one mandate that requires the jails to provide full medical service to all residents. It costs us \$1.5 million dollars a year to do it. This year, Commissioner Laliberty basically has said one we have no money to help you and two you did not give us the right figures because you didn't give us the total amount of figures. We agreed we would spend the money on improving the services we had all in which didn't come out of the taxes at that time, also are not**

services of such that we would have to renew every year and put more tax money into each year. Buildings are an absolute mess; roofing that has to be done, total cost is well over a million dollars as they also have to look like they are still in a historical district. I need you to help us get the legislators that represent Gardiner, to take support in getting LD 7-19 passed and full funding.

Mayor Hart~ Thank you, commissioner Pietroski, we are glad to have you here and glad to get that background as you heard me say last night the county portion of our taxes has increased 57% in two years, that's not sustainable we really need the budget committee to sharpen their pencils and go back and cut some things out, we all know its hard we are all elected officials, its not easy to sit and look at hard working staff and say you can't get what you want we need to cut some of these things because the tax payer cant pay for it. You also heard last night that 13% of people in the county live in poverty but another 50% do not earn a livable wage, so we have 63% of the families' paying taxes that cannot afford it. Look forward to seeing what you cut out of the budget.

Councilor Dolley~ Welcome commissioner, I am happy to hear about the programs that you're accomplishing and how they are helping people. I would like to point out that we appreciate your grievance with the state, but for us as well they don't always pay for their portion in education so what means we must step up to pay it they don't pay back their share in sales tax so that means we lose it. We certainly understand you have grievance with that state, and you must fill in the budget. The difference is you can turn to us to come up with the money but who do we turn to. We must then raise taxes from our people to get that money. We understand where you're coming from, we all have the same problem, but we don't have someone to turn to, to fix it.

Councilor Grant~ I have a couple of questions- one on LD 7-19 it doesn't have fiscal note on it because it hasn't passed, but you have an estimated cost on what this is going to cost the state? **Pietroski**~ Its going to be under \$20 million because it's based on fifteen jails saying what it costs them to do the MAT program. Kennebec County Jail is the fourth largest in the state and the third largest in inmate population. It is a very serious problem. Originally the state took an allocated \$4 million dollars for this project. \$4 million vs \$20 million really cuts down what you need. If we can get this, we can make big headway.

Councilor Grant ~ before this administration there was a group of sheriffs who came together above politics and came up with a plan to share some costs and economy of scale, but it fell apart. Is this all going to fall on the legislature or are the sheriffs going to play nice and do what they are supposed to do as well? Gardiner pays for a full-time police department and a big portion of the budget is the sheriff's department, what are the changes and what is the process for communities like us to get recognition for that fiscally.

Pietroski~ That is a legislative process, it's a statute to determine how you're going to do it. I don't deny the fact that we are lucky to have some local police forces to supplement no question about it, I just have never gotten involved to see how much it's worth financially.

- b) Second Read regarding changes to the City Code: Chapter 13 Quarrying~
Action: Councilor Grant moved to approve the second read regarding changes to the City Code: Chapter 13 in regard to Quarrying. Councilor Greenleaf seconded the motion. No Further Discussion. Of the members present, unanimously approved.
- c) Consideration of approval of a Victualer and Games of Chance for Gardiner Elks Lodge
Action: Councilor Greenleaf moved to approve a Victualer and Games of Chance License for Gardiner Elks Lodge. Councilor Cone seconded the motion. No Further Discussion. Of the members present, unanimously approved.
- d) Consideration of Appointments – Jay Simanski to the Economic Development & Community Development Committee and Phil Garwood to the Merry meeting Trail Board of supervisors.
Action: Councilor Grant moved to appoint Jay Simanski to the Economic Development & Community Development Committee and Phil Garwood to the Merry meeting Trail Board of supervisors. Councilor Kimball seconded the motion. No Further Discussion. Of the members present, unanimously approved.
- e) Discussion regarding the FY26 Budget Schedule
Discussion~ May 14th 2025 was added to the schedule, depending on budget discussion May 28th 2025 may have to be added as well. No Further Discussion.
- f) Consideration of approval of the City Council meeting minutes from March 5, 2025
Action: Councilor Babcock moved to approve the City Council meeting minutes from March 5th, 2025. Councilor Kimball seconded the motion. No Further Discussion. Of the members present, unanimously approved. Councilor Dolley abstained as he was not present.

5. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORTS

February Reports~ Thank you to all the department heads for their reports. No Further discussion.

6. CITY MANAGER REPORT **Robert Peabody City Manager Report~**

General

I have had the opportunity to meet one on one with four of the Councilors and have a scheduled meeting with one other next week. I look forward to meeting with the remaining Councilors at their respective convenience.

Financials

The Financials as of February 28th show Revenues at 63% and Expenditures at 67%. Based on the fiscal year monthly percentages, February's benchmark is 66.6%.

Harrison Avenue

The city received notification from the Maine Emergency Management Agency that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has awarded disaster assistance for incurred expenses due to the April 30-May 1, 2023 Severe Storm and Flooding event affecting Harrison Avenue. The total

projected costs are \$777,612.18 with 75% (\$583,209.13) reimbursed by Federal funds, 15% (\$116,641.83) reimbursed by State funds, and 10% (\$77,761.21) being the City's share. The funds should be arriving soon.

For the December event, FEMA has obligated \$692,540.18 with 75% (\$519,405) reimbursed by Federal funds, 15% (\$103,881) reimbursed by State funds, and 10% (\$69,254), but notification of anticipated disbursement has not been received.

Discussions with Christine Whelan, State Hazard Mitigation Officer, confirmed the ability to bid both the repair and mitigation as one project. Should the bids come in greater than available funding, staff would apply to the State for mitigation funding, and we would proceed as two projects. The PW Director will provide the Council with a project update.

Dearborn Park

The Economic Development Director will provide the Council with a Dearborn Park project update. ~Melissa reported that the final bid is ready for publishing tomorrow. There will be a pre-bidding on-site meeting on March 27th. The bid will close April 14th, and the project must be completed by August 15th.

Public Works

The Public Works Director and I are reviewing the Sidewalk Removal Project and will provide the Council with an update at your April 2nd meeting. *Councilors would love an updated list of sidewalks to be removed.*

Wastewater Department

The Wastewater Superintendent will provide you with an update on Phase 2 and our plan is going forward. There was a memo regarding that project passed out. ~ Stephen, with recently coming on board, I had to do a lot of quick learning with the phase two project with several iterations of what was going to be done. In discussion in meeting yesterday it was decided to dial it back to what was previously approved by the council with some changes there has been some cost increase and the roof at the wastewater treatment plant was going to be repaired but now we are looking at replacements. We put together a list with updated costs with the addition of the roof replacement and boiler systems being more costly. We are currently looking at a \$413,000 increase to that project. Still working on the funding side of it, Oil Tanner is currently working on a couple items on their end to finalize the application for USDA funds. The city was not approved to receive the funds last time but will be applying for it again.

7. COUNCIL REPORT/COMMITTEE UPDATES

Mayor Hart~ I emailed you all the draft letter that Commissioner Pietroski was referring to. We can have the City Manager fix it up and sign it. It is a draft letter basically supporting changes so that the state funds some of the programs in the jail that the county would like them to. I do not see any harm in joining the group. Mayor Hart read the letter outloud for those that could not find the attachment. Councilors all vigorously head nodded for the City Manager to go forth on the draft letter.

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Councilor Grant~ Had a quick question and or comment, Maine DOT was going to put in a request for our CDS report for downtown Gardiner, and sense there is no CDS funding they have skipped a round and that will be pushed back. Question- When is Gardiner hazardous waste day ~ *John May 10th and can get a permit at City Hall.*

Councilor Dolley~ I do have some feedback about the lights, one resident has been in contact with City Hall now for a couple of months he has been told that the lights were being worked on, but maybe some better communication with him would be nice. As we have had a contractor who installed the wrong component, there was a shortage of the right component as well as some other issues. There may not be a great answer but some more communication would help. Right now, we are trying to get some sort of timeline for the lights on Brunswick Ave. The crosswalk light at the common is very dangerous and not working. *~John, I sent someone up to look at the light today and will hear back from them tomorrow. We are also looking into replacing that flashing light with a new model like the ones downtown as it is outdated and seems to not be working as well as it should. There have been some issues in the past with the solar light on it and not being able to get parts. Every so often the state does a program to give out those new fixtures we are going to look into that.* ~ City Manager Stayed that we would do what we need to, to keep it running. ~ Dolley If it is not working some signage would be good as it is a sharp hill. The last thing that was mentioned to me was the gravel going into the common on church street. Do we have a plan for that? *~ John, I plan to pave the hill section going into the common and fixing up the walkways by raising them higher than the grass to allow for run off into the grass and not the walkways.*

Councilor Babcock~ I had a couple of residents on Harrison Ave who asked me about getting the signs removed and the upcoming timeline on the Harrison Ave project. Thank you to the City Manager and John Cameron for the quick answer and response to the residents.

Councilor Kimball~ Nothing to report at this time.

Councilor Greenleaf~ Thank you to the department heads for reports we do appreciate getting those. I know there is one section of lights on Water Street that cannot be fixed as it is an underground issue, but just recently noticed that Water Street from the post office to Johnson Hall on the right-hand side is out. John indicated he would have the electrician in town in the next couple of weeks and it would be addressed at that time when they come to also turn off Dearborn due to construction.

Councilor Cone~ Melissa put together a poster for the climate resilience public meeting, hoping to finalize it and get it posted next week. There is a First Park budget meeting tomorrow night that I will be attending. I had a good history lesson with Creig Nelson regarding First Park. Another thing I wanted to bring to the council's attention is the email we got from MSAD 11 with the increased budget, which is up 22% from last year. Last night I attended the School Board meeting, they made some significant cuts. I would like to note some highlights from the meeting, there is no increase in staffing. One of the key things that seems to be increasing cost is facilities upkeep, which should not be a surprise, but they are trying to figure out ways to put things off and prioritize what must get fixed. I am passing this on and will continue to follow this process.

8. ADJOURN

Action: Councilor Greenleaf moved to adjourn at 7:20PM. Councilor Cone seconded the motion. No Further Discussion. Of the members present, unanimously approved.

Upcoming Meeting Dates

March 5, 2025	August 6, 2025
March 19, 2025	August 20, 2025
April 2, 2025	September 3, 2025
April 16, 2025	September 17, 2025
May 7, 2025	October 1, 2025
May 21, 2025	October 15, 2025
June 4, 2025	November 5, 2025
June 18, 2025	November 19, 2025
July 2, 2025	December 3, 2025
July 16, 2025	December 17, 2025