

SOMERSET COUNTY

Maine

Somerset County serves 51,000 people spread over 4,000 square miles in various towns, plantations and unorganized territories filling the gaps between State and Local Services.

2023 brought in some significant changes to the people involved in County Government with three new Commissioners. Scott Seekins (District 3), John Alsop (District 4) and Joel Stetkis (District 5) joined Cyp Johnson (District 2) & Chairman Robert Sezak (District 1).

Leanne Dickey joined the Administrative Team as the Deputy Administrator/HR and Tim Curtis was hired in July as the new County Administrator replacing Dawn DiBlasi who had served in that capacity since 2013. Leanne served for several years in the Farmington Town Office and Tim had been the Madison Town Manager for nearly a decade.

In May the County Budget Committee finalized the fiscal year budget for 23/24, approving a 9.8% spending increase fueled by the increased costs of goods and services that impacted most municipal budgets. The overall County Budget is \$26.5M of which \$14.5M is paid from local property taxes. Nearly two thirds of County spending supports the Sheriff's Office and the Jail. The SO and Jail also make up two thirds of all County employees.

Like local police, fire and rescue departments, the County faces the same struggles in hiring and retaining employees in the public safety sector. Having open positions can result in some cost savings which will be rolled forward into the coming year's budget to help offset the impact on the taxpayer. The best case scenario however, is to be fully staffed in those important positions.

The Communication Center received 95,000 calls for service in 2023. Dispatching all those emergency calls throughout the County is a huge undertaking. Emergency Management has also seen a significant uptick in activity with Federal Emergency Declarations from storm damage in December 2022, May of 2023 and most recently the record flooding along the Kennebec in December 2023.

County services such as Probate Court, the Registry of Deeds and the District Attorney's office stay busy with a steady stream of work.

Coming in 2024 a new website will be available to guide residents to County services. Our intention is to make access as user friendly as possible. The address will be the same at www.somersetcounty-me.org

One of the goals of the Commissioners is to help fill funding gaps in local services by offering Matching Grants with Community Benefit Funds. These funds come from an agreement with Blue Sky West in conjunction with the windmill projects in central and northern Somerset. In November 2023, a pilot grant program was launched that funds projects from municipalities and non-profits throughout the County. Overall, 12 grants were awarded to projects ranging from ADA accessibility, to recreational trail signage to new rescue equipment. Keep an eye out for another funding announcement for this program in the spring of 2024.