

Maine Town & City

The magazine of the Maine Municipal Association

MARCH 2025 | VOLUME 87 | ISSUE 3

Alewife Season

A sight for spectators, and a source
of revenue for municipalities.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

UPDATES FROM MMA STAFF

THE TRANSFER STATION...ORIGIN OF RECYCLING

Q&A WITH LUKE DYER, VAN BUREN TOWN MANAGER



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In this issue

UPDATES FROM MMA STAFF. In this edition, MMA staff preview a new communication approach focused on ensuring municipal officials receive routine updates about what is happening in each department. This is a trial run of the new initiative, so please let us know what you think. **Page 5**

HARVESTING ALEWIVES. In this “occasional series” the focus is on relics of bygone days that often are left to municipalities to manage. The first article in the series features municipalities that have retained the right to harvest river herring. **Page 7**

MUNICIPAL PROFILES. This month the Town & City turns its attention to Jim Kiernan, the Town of Farmington’s Public Works Foreman. Kiernan is described as an all-around good person who does the right thing. **Page 11**

THE TRANSFER STATION. A place where acquaintances catch up, fans of the Antiques Roadshow snag “the find” of the century, and a furniture repair hobby is born. Most notably, however, the transfer station has long supported the state’s waste management hierarchy with reducing, reusing, and recycling topping the list. **Page 15**

Q&A WITH LUKE DYER. From deputy police chief to Van Buren town manager, Dyer attributes the town’s success to the commitment of community volunteers, council members and residents. **Page 21**

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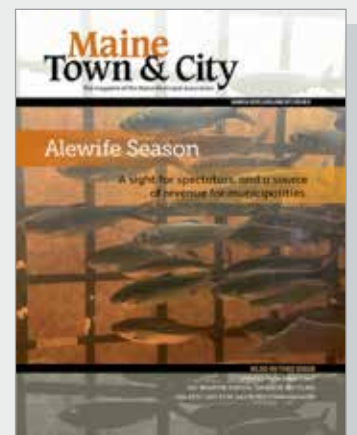
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*Alewives at the Benton Mills Dam
fish lift. (Photo submitted)*



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Updates From MMA

By Kate Dufour / Director / Advocacy & Communications



In response to the feedback received from municipal officials who participated in the 2024 member engagement survey, MMA's Executive Committee and staff are working on implementing the suggestions members had for improving the association's services and programs. One of the issues raised in the survey was the need to improve the way in which MMA communicates with its members.

While at first it was assumed members were overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information shared, via subsequent conversations we found that the issue is not necessarily about the volume of materials but rather how that information is shared. We learned that members would like MMA to use different means to promote and remind members of our services and programs, including social media platforms.

While we are still wrapping our arms around the initiative, staff are using this edition of the "Page 5" feature, which due to my verbosity will inevitably run into page six and possibly page seven, to conduct a test run of a suggestion coming from members of MMA's Education & Training Advisory Council. The proposal is to routinely publish updates from all MMA departments highlighting a nifty tidbit or two. While the suggestion may have involved the publication of a monthly update newsletter, suffice it to say that staff needs to crawl before lunging headfirst in an Iron Man competition.

Hence the trial run of our department update series here. Based on reader responses to this attempt, you may find department updates in the June, September and December editions of the magazine. Please let us know what you think by emailing me at kdufour@memun.org.

Without further ado, here's what is going on at MMA.

Advocacy. Due to unresolved concerns with the FY 2025 supplemental budget, which is testing the patience of all involved, the session has commenced on an interesting foot. Despite the issues related to the supplemental budget, bills are being printed, and committees are conducting public hearings and work sessions. Of the 820 bills printed as of March 3, members of MMA's Legislative Policy Committee established positions on 130 bills, and staff are keeping a watchful eye on an additional 210 initiatives.

Educational Services. MMA is excited to announce its new FREE bi-monthly Lunch & Learn series, designed to give members the chance to engage with MMA staff and one an-

other on timely and relevant topics throughout the course of year. The sessions, held via Zoom, will rotate topics and give members the opportunity to engage in conversation and connect over the ways that MMA staff can support you. Our first session on February 25 was led by MMA's Advocacy and Communications department and a recording of

it is available to members on our website. Further sessions will take place from 12-1 p.m. on April 22 - Legal Services; June 24 - Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust; August 19 - Information Technology; October 21 - Educational Services; and December 16 - Risk Management Services.

Executive Office. Later this month, 21 municipal officials representing communities across the state will participate in the National League of Cities' Hill Day and meet with Senators Collins and King, Congresswoman Pingree, and Congressman Golden to discuss issues of municipal importance. Those conversations will be led by Melissa Doane, MMA President and Bradley town manager, and guided, in part, by the topics addressed in the 2025 Federal Issues Paper, which is posted on MMA's website at <https://www.memun.org/Media-Publications/Federal-Issues-Paper>. In the category of interesting factoids, MMA is the envy of other state leagues and associations because all our elected federal officials make time for these meetings. In the April edition of the Page 5 feature, Melissa will share what we learned during the 2025 Hill Day.

Finance. To improve the efficient delivery of financial services, MMA's finance professionals are encouraging communities to pay invoices, such as dues and insurance premiums, via the Automated Clearing House (ACH). The ACH process allows for the electronic transfer of revenues between financial institutions. For more information about the process, please contact Eben Gilman, MMA's chief financial officer at egilman@memun.org. By happenstance, this update provides the perfect segue for introducing Eben, who stepped into the role in December. Eben has a bachelor's degree from the University of Maine at Augusta, a master's degree in business administration from Thomas College and received certification in accounting and finance from the Healthcare Financial Management Association.

Health Trust. What do Acadia, Baxter, Katahdin, Moosehead and Pemaquid have in common? If you answered they are all Maine treasures, you would technically be correct.

However, these are also the names of the newly updated health insurance benefits plans offered through the Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust. The Trust implemented several changes to the health plans, effective on January 1, 2025, including removing the requirement that members on former POS plans must obtain an insurance referral from their primary care physician to obtain in-network specialty care. However, some specialists may still require a medical referral to schedule an appointment. The Health Trust Department staff reminds all participating members to show their new insurance cards when accessing services or filling prescriptions, and to call Member Services at 1-800-852-8300 with any questions.

Information Technology. By the end of the month, municipal officials will have access to a new Cybersecurity Portal featuring a variety of resources designed to keep municipal information out of the hands of cyber criminals. The portal will provide answers to frequently asked questions, information on how to implement a cyber security awareness program in your community, and tools to keep track of your employee's participation in related training modules. Perhaps of greatest interest, once members sign in, they will be greeted by none other than the infamous Brian McDonald, Director of Information Technology and Administration, in chat bot form, who will help answer your cybersecurity questions.

Legal Services. In response to the letter from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency inviting state and local law enforcement agencies to collaborate with ICE on its immigration enforcement efforts, MMA Legal Services prepared a guidance document to help walk municipal officials through the process. The guidance document explains the program, commonly referred to as the 287(g)

Program, provides an overview of the training requirements that must be met to assist in federal immigration activities, and delineates the steps municipal officials should take in assessing municipal engagement. Additionally, after a long hiatus, the legal services team is excited to announce that it has issued a new edition of the *Code Enforcement Officers* manual. Municipal officials can access the manual on MMA's website at <https://www.memun.org/Members/Legal-Manuals/Code-Enforcement-Officers>.

Personnel Services & Labor Relations. It is with tremendous reluctance that the Association bids farewell to Rich Cromwell, Personnel Services and Labor Relations Director. However, the City of Bangor is the winner, as he will return to assist the city's human resources department. Considering that MMA enticed him away from the city, as they say, turn-around is fair play. To ensure continuity of services, MMA has contracted with seasoned and now retired town managers to complete the work on several municipal executive searches.

Risk Management Services. Last but by no means least, RMS is pleased to announce that the **ServeStrong** program, launched last year to provide first responders access to tailored behavioral health programs and services, was just recently upgraded. The program, which is provided in collaboration with the National League of Cities, is now available via an app. As described by the provider, Talkspace Go is a self-directed app enabling users to take the steps to live healthier and happier lives by accessing hundreds of classes and therapist-led live workshops. Please encourage your community's first responders to access this valuable resource by visiting MMA's website at <https://www.memun.org/About/Serve-Strong>. 🏔️

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Alewife Season Is Around the Bend

A sight for all who gather to watch the herring migrate from the ocean to rivers and lakes to spawn and a source of revenue for the communities who have retained the authority to harvest the fish.

By Janine Pineo

Open up a town report and you never know what might jump out.

This time, it was a word—alewives—in a recent Warren town report, and it spoke of how their arrival in the spring of 1782 “brought some relief to hungry families.”

“Each spring since, a weir is constructed in the St. George River and thousands of alewives, an anadromous species of herring, are funneled into waiting nets,” the report read. “While the industry does not provide employment, it has been a source of revenue to the town since 1802, when an act was passed by the legislature giving the town the exclusive rights to catch and sell the fish on the condition that the town allow residents an amount of alewives for personal consumption. Of note, the Warren firehouse was paid for by alewife revenue.”

In that 2023 report, it listed alewife sales at \$62,628.

Alewives are river herring and, for the record, actually a combination of two species: blueback herring and alewife, which are fairly difficult to tell apart in a passing glance. These fish that spawn in fresh water and migrate to the sea (the definition of anadromous) have returned to the inland waterways of Maine every spring for centuries.

It turns out that a small number of municipalities maintain exclusive harvest rights, 37 as of 2024 on 42 waterways in the state. Last year, 25 municipalities were allowed to harvest alewives.

The fishery landings fell precipitously in 1980 then wobbled back slightly over the next decade before crashing again in the 1990s. At one point, there was serious consideration to list river herring as threatened or endangered, with a determination in 2019 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries that it was unnecessary.

River herring populations along the Atlantic seaboard are still a fraction of their historic numbers but appear to be stable, with Maine’s populations doing “a little better” with some increase, according to Mike Brown, a Maine Department of Marine Resources scientist with the Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries and Habitat.

“Much of that improvement is attributed to improved water quality, restoration of historic spawning habitats that were closed off by dams and improvements in fish passage at dams that still exist,” Brown wrote in response to email questions.

Long before Maine became a state, alewives provided a good source of protein in the spring. The fish were smoked, pickled and salted, and like many Maine goods, often were shipped elsewhere including to the Caribbean. While the fish has fallen out of culinary favor (the complaint usually is it’s too bony) and only a small portion ends up smoked today, the harvest shifted to use in the lobster industry, providing a local, inexpensive, fresh bait source.

‘Place of many alewives’

The name Damariscotta is a variation of a Native American word that roughly translates to “place of many alewives,” so it is no surprise that the Damariscotta River

Looking upstream at the midsection of the restored Damariscotta Mills Fish Ladder. (Photo by Dan Friedland)



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

alewife fishery was once the state's largest, according to the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

The fish make their way up Great Salt Bay to reach Damariscotta Lake, a mere 50 feet above the bay. Back in 1795, a legislative mandate ordered that a fish ladder be built at Damariscotta Mills because waterway obstructions from mills were affecting the fishery even then.

In 1807, Newcastle and Nobleboro constructed a stone fish ladder to aid the alewives in their annual migration. It's a joint agreement that continues to this day and even was put to a vote in late January in Newcastle to further solidify the interlocal arrangement.

It wouldn't be until 200 years after the original construction that major reconstruction would start on the ladder, when the towns were joined by a new community group, the Damariscotta Mills Fish Ladder Restoration (DMFLR), which got its start as part of the Nobleboro Historical Society and is a newly minted nonprofit as of late January.

What followed was a decade-long effort to rebuild the stone fish ladder, creating 69 pools that ascend to the lake.

Before the restoration, about 70,000 alewives would make it to the lake each year, said Bob Barkalow, DMFLR board president. Now, more than a million fish climb the ladder annually.

Richard Powell Jr., a member of the Nobleboro selectboard and the fish committee, grew up right next to the fish ladder. "I'm one of the older people in town who can remember some of the activity there," he said.



Visitors check out the Benton Mills fish lift and observation area in 2023.

The land and the ladder are owned by Kruger Energy, Powell said, which is responsible for counting the fish ascending the ladder.

2023 was a bad harvest year, Powell said, a not unusual occurrence, although the harvest averages \$60,000. The money is split three ways after expenses with funds going into the towns' reserve accounts specifically for upkeep of the fish ladder and the fishery.

Newcastle Town Manager Kevin Sutherland said the town got \$13,000 in 2024, \$6,000 in 2023 and has \$125,000 in the reserve account.

Everyone stressed that there is always work to be done around the alewife fishery in town. "Maine winters, running water and stones," said Barkalow, stating that there may be work ahead on the lower pools which are in the tidal zone. There is a possibility one or two more pools will be added at the bottom of the ladder to help make the trip easier for the fish.

The harvest equipment is aging, too. The dippers were built in the 1950s, Barkalow said, and the iron is rusted, signaling the need for replacement soon.

The DMFLR now has the legal authority to raise money, he said, and the intent is to develop a five to 10-year plan. The annual festival hasn't been revived, he said, citing the need for 200 volunteers for the event, so fundraising efforts will come from different projects that can make money without the personnel requirements. The 5k road race over Memorial Day weekend will still take place, as will weekend fundraising during the alewife season.

Powell and Barkalow said getting younger people involved is a challenge. Particularly with the harvest, Powell said, finding younger workers available to learn the process and be available twice a day to dip for alewives isn't easy. The youngest person on the crew last year was in his 50s, Powell said.

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Benton gets a lift

Something wild happened in Benton when the second of two dams was removed: The alewives came back in a big way.

"It's our identity and most people don't even know about it," said Dwight Gagnon, Benton's alewife warden.

It was a long time coming. The first removal was Edwards Dam on the Kennebec in Augusta in 1999. It would be almost a decade later before Fort Halifax Dam on the Sebasticook in Winslow would follow.

In 2014, 64 bald eagles were spotted in a five-mile stretch of the Sebasticook during the alewife run, and in 2018 NOAA Fisheries reported five million alewives moving inland via the river, "making it the largest alewife run in the United States."

There is, in fact, a hydropower dam at Benton Falls. But there is also a fish lift.

"It's really efficient," Gagnon said. "The fish lift has way over-performed what anyone's expectation was."

Gagnon said it is a sight to see. Below the dam, "they are just swarming down there." Above the dam, they can be seen jumping.

The return of alewives has meant other species are there in force: eagles, osprey, river otters and all sorts of other wildlife that can catch and feast on the abundant fish.

Last year's harvest was handled differently, Gagnon said, because a turbine on the dam was under repair, changing where and how the fish were caught, with a temporary dock put in for the harvest.

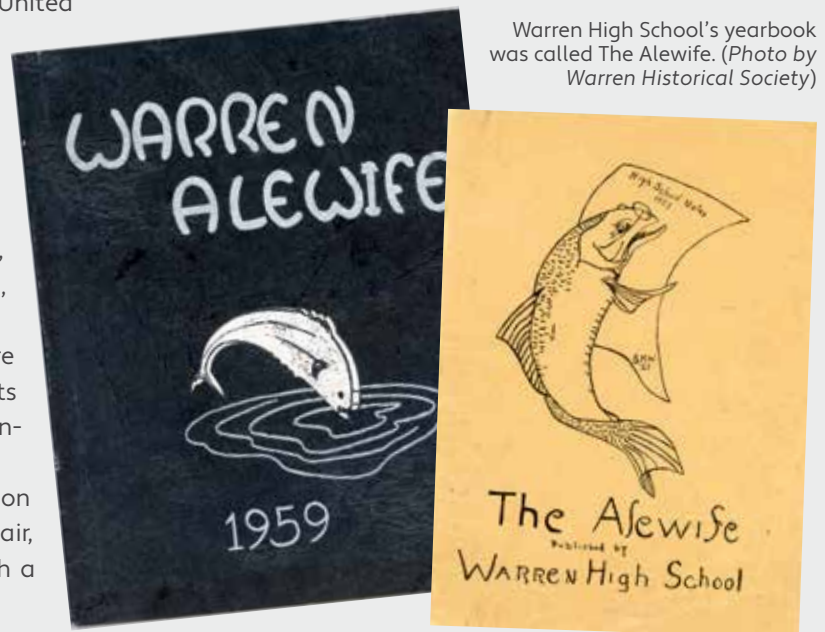
It also changed what the public could see last year. Usually, visitors can walk to the fish elevator and stand in

the observation area to see the fish moving through.

It's a highlight of the annual Benton Alewife Festival, headed by Amy Gagnon, Dwight's daughter. They improvised, she said, using a live feed from the dam's counting room and showing it on a big screen at the town office during the four-hour festival.

About 500 people typically attend the event, which includes interactive art activities for children, free food including samples of smoked alewives, live music and a number of local nonprofits on hand.

The 2024 harvest was around \$40,000, Dwight Gagnon said, with \$9,000 going to the town. The year before, the harvest was \$100,000.



Warren High School's yearbook was called *The Alewife*. (Photo by Warren Historical Society)

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Maine has a storied past, one that left behind relics of bygone days that often fell into the keeping of the municipality. It may be an historic building or a special piece of land. It might be an artifact or piece of equipment. It might be something like a centuries-old right, such as harvesting alewives.

The first story of this occasional series focuses on a few of the handful of municipalities with the right to harvest river herring and what it means to those towns.

We welcome suggestions for future stories. Email Janine Pineo at jepineo@gmail.com with your idea and some information about the unique item.

The great invasion

The Maine alewife fishery gets an interesting mention in an historical society article out of Indiana by John Hmurovic in 2021. He wrote for the Whiting-Robertsdale Historical Society:

"As far back as anyone remembers, they were abundant off the shores of Maine. They were very familiar to fishermen in towns like Warren and Damariscotta Mills, especially when the fish would swim up rivers along the coast to spawn. In 1890, a reporter from the New York Tribune, watching the alewives crowd into the Damariscotta River, was fascinated by what he saw. 'An alewife run is ... a marvelous sight,' he wrote. 'They come all at once down the river. With startling suddenness, a queer sort of tidal wave seems to form. It moves rapidly upstream, extending from bank to bank. The waves roll a foot high. And it is a wave of fish—alewives!'"

You might ask why an Indiana historical society was writing about alewives when the fishery is linked to the ocean.

At some point, alewives made their way up the St. Lawrence and entered the Great Lakes. He writes that by the 1870s, they were in Lake Ontario but Niagara Falls halted their progress. “But a canal designed to aid shipping between the Great Lakes and the coast gave the alewife a chance to bypass the falls. By the 1940s, they were in Lake Michigan.”

What followed was a surging population that resulted in years of die-off, with the worst of it in 1967 when 40 miles of shoreline was covered with millions upon millions of dead alewives.

“In Chicago alone, the dead alewives formed a pile 500-foot high, nearly the size of two football fields,” Hmurovic wrote. “The amount of fish disposed of in Chicago was four times greater than one year’s worth of garbage collected by the city.”

If you like a fish horror story, you can find the article here: www.wrhistoricalsociety.com/alewife. 🏔️

What are harvesting rights?

A number of conditions are in place before any alewife harvest takes place, according to Mike Brown, a Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) scientist with the Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries and Habitat.

First, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) determines if the population meets sustainability guidelines, which require 10 years’ worth of either biological data or run counts or a combination of both. The state must also maintain a sustainable fisheries management plan, updated every five years, for the waters with current fisheries. Once the ASMFC gives approval to open or continue a fishery, then the next steps begin.

State statute Title 12 §6131 is on river herring fishing rights and lays out what municipalities must do if they have or want to acquire harvest rights.

To maintain rights, there are two requirements for municipalities to fulfill by April 20 every year, Brown said.

The first is a decision by the town to accept the opportunity the state provides by extending to the town exclusive harvest rights.

The second is that a harvest plan must be submitted to DMR explaining how the town will conduct the fishery, including details such as fishing location, type of gear used in the harvest, days the town plans to harvest, how fish is distributed to buyers, reporting requirements and sampling obligations.

“Once the town has been awarded the exclusive right to harvest fish for the year,” Brown said, “they will contract with a harvester to conduct the harvest.”



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Profiles of Service...Jim Kiernan, Farmington Public Works Foreman

“I like being out in the weather and the sun and I don’t want to be stuck in a building, and there’s something different every day, so it’s not boring.”

By Stephanie Bouchard

People in Farmington who know Jim Kiernan – and everyone in town knows the public works foreman – all agree on one thing: Kiernan is 100% dedicated to the community.

Case in point: After one of February’s back-to-back snowstorms, Kiernan returned to the public works building following 14 hours of plowing, but before he could get home for some much-deserved sleep in came news of an ice-clogged culvert and water pouring across the road and freezing from the cold.

Without hesitation, Kiernan got a crew together and a pressure washer with a boiler and went out to the blocked culvert. “They went out to the field and steamed a culvert,” said Phil Hutchins, Farmington’s public works director. “With no sleep. Jim came back and he was soaking wet.”

Getting soaked to the bone on a cold winter day after plowing all night is just part of the job he’s done for the town of Farmington for 40 years, and he takes whatever comes up in stride.

“I loved my job, and I still do,” said Kiernan, who is 65. “I like being out in the weather and the sun and I don’t want to be stuck in a building, and there’s something different every day, so it’s not boring.”

Kiernan got started in public works in the mid-1980s “at the bottom,” he said. He made \$4.98 an hour (“big money back then,” he noted) doing whatever manual odd jobs that came up and things like emptying trash barrels, maintaining the sidewalks, and running the sweeper and the sander.

When he was given the opportunity to “graduate” from the old Bombadier snow machine he used to clear the sidewalks to driving a plow truck, he jumped at the chance. “It [the Bombadier] beat the snot out of you going down the sidewalks,” Kiernan said.

Kiernan was no stranger to demanding labor, though. After graduating from Farmington’s Mt. Blue High School



Jim Kiernan

in 1979, he’d planned on going into construction rather than following in his father’s and older brothers’ footsteps of joining the military.

“I figured he’d be mad I didn’t go into the military,” Kiernan said of his father, who joined the army in 1932 and served for 32 years. He ended his military career shortly after the army shut down Fort Williams in Cape Elizabeth, where he was stationed with his family when Kiernan was born.

The youngest of eight, Kiernan was the only one of his parents’ six sons to not join the service. “I was engaged to

get married in my senior year of high school, so I didn’t really want to go in the service, because I never heard things usually work out when you do that,” he said. “And of course, I heard all kinds of stories from my brothers . . . I said, ‘I don’t think that’s the thing for me.’”

To his surprise, his father didn’t say much when Kiernan told him he wasn’t joining the military. “He told me years later when I was working for the town that he was proud of me and what I did – bought my own house a year out of high school. I think he’d be proud today. He died in ‘98, but I think he’d be very proud of what I’ve done.”

With his decision not to join the military, Kiernan sought work in the construction industry, but no one was hiring. Newly married and living in an apartment, he got a seasonal gig on MDOT’s bridge crew. After only a couple of months on the job, he got the chance to go full-time, and by the fall, purchased his first house.

He stayed with MDOT for three years before he, his then-wife and in-laws moved to California to see if they could “make a killing” as people they knew said they could do out there. But after a month of trying to get work, Kiernan was ready to return home to Farmington.

“I don’t regret going,” he said, “but it wasn’t my type of life out there, either.”

Back in Farmington and working for Bass Shoe, Kiernan wanted to get a job with the public works department, but jobs in municipal public works in those days were hard to come by. “They didn’t have a big turnover of help

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back then," he said.

Working for public works was a good career opportunity, with plenty of work to do, no history of layoffs, no commute and benefits. "I had a good opportunity with the town back in '84 when I started here," he said, "and back when I did it, it was something to have a job for the town."

As the years passed, Kiernan took on more and more responsibility, becoming foreman in 2000. "When I was made foreman in 2000, it was quite an eye-opener for me that they felt that I was good enough to do that," he said. "I was pretty excited."

One of the highlights of his career occurred not long after his promotion to foreman: a new public works building was built. "I was one of the biggest promoters behind getting it," he said, "and it [the new garage] was just a world of difference."

At over 50 years old, the old garage was falling apart, it was made to accommodate smaller trucks and it had no insulation or heating system. "We used waste oil to heat it and we froze to death in there," he said.

The "new" building, now over 20 years old, "is still a beautiful facility," with bright lighting, heated floors, offices and a break room.

Whether it's advocating for needed infrastructure and maintenance or steaming culverts, there's no question that Kiernan is an asset to the town, said Clyde Ross, who was one of Kiernan's ninth grade teachers and now

serves with Kiernan in Farmington's fire department. "I think his knowledge of the infrastructure, as far as public works is concerned, is second to none," he said.

But, more importantly, he's "a good citizen," said Ross. "He's an all-around good person. Jim, to me, is an honest, hardworking young man - I shouldn't say young man. He's conscientious and he does what he thinks is the right thing to do."

Ross, who is one of Farmington's deputy fire chiefs, has seen his former student - a typical "ninth grade boy" - under some of the most trying of circumstances, including September 16, 2019, when a building explosion killed the fire chief and injured six other firefighters, including Ross, and the building's maintenance manager, Larry Lord.

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"[Kiernan] played a very vital part in taking care of the situation, making people safe and getting things taken care of," Ross said.

For Kiernan, September 16, 2019, was one of the toughest days of his career in public works and as a veteran firefighter. In his role as public works foreman, he was one of the first people to arrive at the devastated site. As he set about managing traffic and clearing debris, he knew that a firefighter had been killed, but didn't know who.

"I think the hardest thing was being there and not knowing who it was," he said. "You get close to them guys after years working with them."

Over the years, Kiernan has experienced the power of community in the fire department and at public works, both as the giver of support and the receiver.

When he was badly injured in a motorcycle accident and laid up for a long time recovering, his public works coworkers and fellow firefighters arrived at his 1840s


farmhouse, which is heated with firewood, cut logs into stove length, split the cut logs and stacked the firewood in his dooryard so he could easily access it.

During his 40 years in public works, he's missed holidays and special family events, as well as being present at the farm on a day-to-day basis to care for the animals and garden, in order to meet the needs of the larger community.

"He dedicates a lot of his time to make sure everyone's happy, to make sure that things are functioning correctly," said Hutchins. "I've seen him put the public before himself... He's highly vested in this community."

The commitment, Kiernan said, couldn't happen without the support of his family. "It's a demanding job... We're on call 24/7 in the winter," he said. "It makes a world of difference to have a partnership with your wife and family to be able to do a job like this. You couldn't do it on your own. My house would freeze up and my animals would be in bad shape if I didn't have anybody to help me do all that stuff while I'm at work."

When he's not at work or at the firehouse, he and his wife, Nancy, and their granddaughter, run their hobby farm, make maple syrup and sell Christmas trees. When they can, they take their camper to Rock Pond where he fly fishes for trout.

"I stay pretty busy," he said. "I enjoy it. It keeps me younger." 



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Transfer Station Swap Shops & Pick Piles

A time-honored tradition of finding what's needed and maybe what's cherished.

By Betty Adams

Long before the heightened interest in Barbie, thanks to the 2023 comedy fantasy film, two Kens sat side by side in the front seat of a classic toy convertible on a shelf in the swap shack at the Phippsburg Transfer Station.

They inspired thoughts of how much the granddaughters would enjoy playing with the barely used toys.

And while the girls showed little interest, a sister-law fell instantly in love, so the vehicle – with its functioning headlights, taillights and AM radio – and the dolls, including one with a tiny cellphone in a shirt pocket, are parked comfortably in a place of honor in the kitchen of her home in Woodbury, New Jersey.

While not every transfer station swap shop find goes that far, the tradition of finding what's needed and maybe what's cherished remains.

Then there's the opportunity to recycle other items at the transfer station: furniture, wood, tires, mechanical bits, anything that could be reused or repurposed or even burned to keep the home warm.

And a new law passed last session allows those traditions to continue without raising undue worries about liability should a picker or even a swap shop visitor get injured on the property.

The change was initiated by Kent Ackley, a member of the selectboard in Monmouth who had served two terms in the state Legislature. He approached state Rep. Tavis Hasenfus, Readfield, who agreed to sponsor the bill.

"I've grown up in this area, and I used to go to the Winthrop dump with my grandmother and we'd come back with more than we went there with," Hasenfus said. "It seems sensible that if there are people that can reuse stuff to let them do that."

These days, however, he is unlikely to be one of them. "My wife instructed me that I'm no longer allowed to take anything back from a transfer station," Hasenfus said. "I've been informed a number of years ago that that part of my life is now over. I'm not supposed to take anything back."

The Readfield Transfer Station, which serves residents of Readfield, Fayette and Wayne has Swap Shop Guidelines posted on its website noting, "The Swap Shop is an important component in the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

cycle. Reusing is a time-honored practice that Mainers know and practice well. Please bring items in and feel free to take items you can use."

Hasenfus, an attorney with an office in Winthrop, said, "Basically the statute alleviated a lot of the liability concerns. The state said, 'If you (the town) do this in a reasonable manner and post that people can do it at their own risk, then you're not liable if someone sues you if they slip and fall in a pile or step on nail or something like that so long as reasonable precautions are taken.'"

While testifying in support of the bill on behalf of the Monmouth selectboard, Ackley said, "The problem this bill solves came to my attention in 2020 when the Town of Monmouth's insurer was asked for a legal opinion on the question of whether the Town had any legal liability if it continued the decades-long practice of allowing the recycling of unwanted, but useful items at our Town Transfer Station."

He also said, "This is a bill that is as much about recycling



Kent Ackley (Photo by Betty Adams)

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as it is about local control. It's a bill about 'picking' and the 'free' tables at the Transfer Station.

Monmouth resident Ginger Jordan-Hillier told legislators, "On occasion, I accompanied dad to the dump in Millinocket, then Orland and Bucksport where inevitably there was a board just the right size for something. For more than 30 years I have routinely found useful items at the Monmouth transfer station: baby carriage and unexpired car seat for a grandchild, skates, toys, books, clothing, dishes, large bottled water containers for garden clothes, bricks to edge gardens, flat rocks, fir boughs to cover gardens in winter, etc. Frugal reuse is a way of life for many Mainers. Our transfer stations are funded with our tax dollars."

In an interview at the Monmouth Town Office in February, Ackley detailed the history:

"It was 2020 and COVID hits and everyone was concerned about transmission of disease. We were not sure at that time if it was airborne or surface-borne and we were short-handed at the transfer station." So, the transfer station and swap shop in Monmouth were closed to pickers to conserve labor costs.

"Then there was a spike in lumber prices," he said. "Everyone was staying at home and doing renovations themselves because you couldn't find anybody to do it. The waste material just piled up and piled up. It was crazy, and Monmouth was not the only community where this happened. I discovered there were at least six or seven small Maine towns that responded to COVID the same way."

Then in 2022, Bill "Woody" Woodward, a retired Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife biologist and avid recycler, was one of several people who complained to Ackley about the closure. Ackley recalled Woodward saying, "I'm just trying to run a microbusiness here and you're my supply chain problem. I used to get all my material for my fishing boxes - my storage boxes - from the transfer station. Oh, and by the way, the town is paying to dispose of them."

Woodward himself recalled one bonanza from years ago at the transfer station when he found "some really good plywood thrown away" that had served as props for Monmouth Theater productions. "I was using it to make container boxes for ice fishing bait," he said. The boxes are 6 feet long, 4 feet high and 4 feet wide. "They can hold a lot of bait." Today, he still repurposes the wood he finds at the transfer station, and his bait boxes were holding his bait in a nearby stream this winter.



Jeff Levasseur, left, and Joseph White, transfer station manager at the Monmouth Transfer Station. (Photo by Betty Adams)

Ackley frequents the town transfer station, both dropping off items and then checking out the pallet pile for reusable ones. "I use them for storing firewood and building countless things. I'm a recycler and a person who will repurpose things. It's kind of what I do in my working life. I go down and I look and there's great lumber if you want to take the time to take the nails out of 2x4s," he said, adding that "2 x 4s are going for \$5 or \$6 a pop and all you have to do is grab it from the pile and pull out the nails. That's what this whole policy is about: just letting people do their thing."

At the Monmouth Transfer Station, manager Joseph White and employee Jeff Levasseur said a good deal of the

items brought in get recycled, particularly children's bicycles which are usually in good shape, and wood for heating.

In writing about the bill in April 2023, Maine Municipal Association noted, "Ultimately, there would be a reduction of material to transport to its next processing location. It's clear that the way to incentivize the property taxpayer to better appreciate the work of managing waste is through community-based incentives, local decision-making authority, and equal access to recycling markets . . ."

Years ago, the Town of Hermon had an informal policy where residents could take things from the piles on the ground at the transfer station, according to Scott Perkins, who serves as assistant town manager and director of the economic and community development, recreation and transfer station departments.

However, that was halted in 2014 when the town switched to using 30-yard roll-off containers for the various discarded materials, making them less accessible.

Now, having learned of the new protection for municipalities, he said, "I'm going to see if there's an interest."

Back in Phippsburg, Town Administrator Ross McLellan said, "We have a large seasonal population in the summertime. We expand the hours, we add an extra day, Friday, and have a much higher volume of use of the transfer station."

There are separate piles of wood and metal available for picking as well as the separate shed for the swap shop.

"Our transfer station attendants keep an eye on it," he said, "and they are responsible for clearing items out if they've been in there for a while. We also have a group of volunteers who go through and sort and clean up at the swap shop as well."

Anna Varian, a lifelong resident and a recently elected member of the selectboard there, is active in promoting the

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use of the swap shop and helping to arrange for the volunteer staffing. There are about two dozen active volunteers. The swap shop is currently known as Charlie's Collectibles in honor of the late Charlie McKenney who managed the transfer station for years.

"There are many of us in this town that care about that facility," Varian said, adding, "We just put in textile reuse boxes." Those boxes are for clothing and other textiles that cannot be reused. They must be dry, free of odors and not soiled with oil or gas.

Similar textile collections are offered elsewhere around the state, including programs partnered by the Androscoggin Council of Governments which serves western Maine, and the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments. They divert hundreds of tons of material from the waste stream.

Because Phippsburg is a coastal town, the transfer station gets canoes, kayaks and catamarans as well as all types of fishing gear. "We had a lot of items worthy of resale as well," Varian said. "There is a lot of value to whoever the person is that wants it."

She also pointed out that transfer station access is limited to Phippsburg residents with decals on their windshields. That policy is similar to the rest of the state.

Most recently Varian snagged a black leather bag with a skull on it and ended up giving it to her tattoo-loving niece as a birthday present. Varian told her, "Here you go; you know I shop local at the transfer station." The niece recognized it as the work of a well-known tattoo artist and was thrilled to have it. "I'm just square and I had no idea," Varian said.

She said the swap shop is valuable to the town and priceless to her and she keeps a list of items she'd like to find at the transfer station.

"I needed a certain bagger for my self-propelled mower,

and one came in," she said. "I enjoy saving a dollar and getting something for nothing. I have more volunteer time than I have money to put into the economy, and I just think that it's camaraderie. People chat when they're in there, they say hi to each other, they notice when somebody's not there."

Among the most popular items at the swap shop are dishware, clothes—including retro clothing from senior citizens cleaning out their houses—and steamer pots for lobsters and clams.

"I asked fellow shoppers what their favorite finds were," she said recently. "One perfect answer was 'Anything I need when I needed it.' One guy said, 'a brand new in the box, unopened bird feeder with AI in it.' It tells him what bird that was and what their song is. One woman said all the yarn for her knitting and crocheting. One woman said all the cloth she needs to make her dolls and quilts. One woman said all the stuff she needs for her menagerie of pets on the farm."

Ackley too recalled another Monmouth resident Curtis Fox who ran Fox Small Engines and who died in May 2024. "He was a master mechanic, and he would get all of his spare parts from the metal bin at the transfer station. When the transfer station couldn't allow picking because of liability concerns he couldn't get any parts.

"With this little change in the law, he'd go down there every Saturday and harvest the lawn mower parts that he needed to fix people's motors. He'd take a few lawn mower wheels and some parts from discarded small engines and bring them back to his shop and fix somebody else's small engine that had just come in, and that was his supply chain. It sure beats having the town pay to dispose of things and there's not a lot of oversight to that other than making sure people understand they're responsible for keeping themselves safe. And it's a beautiful thing." 🏔️



Michael A. Hodgins

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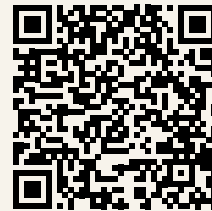
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Dyer: Public support can win the day

By Liz Mockler

Luke Dyer has parlayed his law enforcement skills into award-winning leadership in the northern Maine Town of Van Buren. Dyer credits local officials and residents for the town's recent spurt of economic activity, praising their enthusiasm to collaborate and make lasting changes to the border town of 1,900.

In just two years as town manager, Dyer has helped bring the community together through collaboration, listening, and following through on great ideas that boost the livability and likeability of the town.

Dyer emphasizes the community's resilience and willingness to work together while discussing new and ongoing projects such as an incubator facility, a community garden and greenhouse, a new arts center and more.

"You don't want just selectmen and town officials to decide" on proposed projects, Dyer said. "If you let people make decisions and listen to what they're telling you that eliminates the kind of strife that can kill a project."

Once public approval is won, supporters will "tell the naysayers to step back," he said.

Dyer is no stranger to Van Buren. After attending the University of Maine at Fort Kent, Dyer worked as a Madawaska patrol officer for several years before taking a patrol job with the Town of Van Buren in 2005. The following year, he was promoted to sergeant. In January of 2019, Police Chief Michael Bresett was seriously injured while responding to an 11-car pileup. But rather than accepting the title of police chief himself, Dyer took on the responsibilities of the top job while retaining his rank of sergeant. He retired when the department closed in 2021 and was promptly hired as deputy town manager. He was hired as manager in 2022.

He has lived in Van Buren since 2006. "They knew me well here," he said.

While serving as deputy manager, Dyer would look across the street from town hall and watch two brothers revitalize an old theater that was co-owned by the town.

"I thought, 'If two guys can do all that renovation, what



Luke Dyer

could 50 people do?" he wondered.

One project that Dyer initiated has become a popular gathering place for residents. He approached the recreation director with his idea to paint two pickleball courts on the hockey arena that stands empty eight months of the year. They learned it would cost \$200,000 to create the courts and quickly discounted the possibility. Instead, Dyer called the paint company "and by some act of God, I ended up talking to the owner."

Dyer was told that he and the recreation director "absolutely could" do it themselves. After seeking volunteers,

eight people showed up to help paint the courts. It has been wildly popular; there are now 40 pickleball players in town, who often must wait on the sidelines to play. A third court was created, Dyer said.

"When you engage the public then you're doing what they want and they will stand up for you," Dyer said.

Dyer received the 2024 William F. King, Jr. Downtown Champion Award from the Maine Downtown Center for his work in Van Buren. It was the only individual award presented by the group.

As key as public support is to making progress, Dyer said elected officials must be on board to get a proposal off the ground. "You just cannot do it without a solid council," he said. "If you have a council with a forward vision, that is not looking behind but ahead, I think that's made all the difference. A manager cannot make it happen alone."

Dyer recently talked about the town's progress, the importance of collaboration, and the many successes the town has achieved in recent years.

Q. To what do you credit for your early success in Van Buren?

A. I don't consider the early success in Van Buren's revitalization to be mine—it's the success of an entire community that was struggling but refused to give up. It was the collective effort of groups like the Van Buren Revitalization Association, the Community Garden Project Committee, and our Community Heart & Soul Program that truly drove change. These organizations brought people together, gave them a voice, and created a shared sense of purpose

that empowered us all to take action. Additionally, a forward-thinking progressive town council has helped guide quick solutions to resolving decades-old issues.

The early guidance we received from the Citizen's Institute on Rural Design was invaluable, helping to focus our efforts and transform ideas into achievable projects. Identifying our assets and deficiencies gave us the clarity and confidence to prioritize initiatives revolving around placemaking, economic growth and creative community space initiatives, which sparked a sense of pride and renewed hope throughout the town.

This success belongs to the people of Van Buren—residents, volunteers and stakeholders—who embraced the challenge and worked together to build something better. It's a testament to what can happen when a community rallies around its strengths, listens to its people, and strives for a brighter future, regardless of the obstacles.

Q. Were you surprised to receive the Downtown Champion Award?

A. Absolutely, I was surprised and deeply honored to receive the Maine Downtown Center William F. King, Jr. Downtown Champion Award. While I've always been passionate about revitalizing Van Buren and supporting our community's growth, my focus has been on the work itself rather than recognition. I gratefully accepted the award on behalf of our entire team of volunteers, council members and community members.

The award came as a humble reminder of the impact that collaboration and dedication can have on a community. It's not just about one person—it's about the collective efforts of the town, the creativity of our partners, and the resilience of our residents. Yes, my name is on the award, but I view it as a testament to what Van Buren has achieved together. It inspires me to continue advocating for our community and striving to make our downtown a place where people want to live, work and visit.

Q. Tell us about the Village Partnership Initiative project.

A. Van Buren is actively participating in the Village Partnership Initiative with the Maine Department of Transportation, collaborating with consultants from Gorrill Palmer to reimagine our downtown with a people-centered approach. Our town is guided by the wisdom of placemaking expert Fred Kent—"If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places," therefore, our focus on the initiative prioritizes walkability, accessibility and vibrant public spaces over vehicle traffic. Through this partnership, Van Buren identified "unused spaces" in the central downtown that are now destined to be thriving placemaking projects, such as the Community Garden Project and the Star Stage, a tiered amphitheater located in the heart of the village. These efforts are transforming the area into a welcoming hub that fosters community connections, supports local businesses and celebrates Van Buren's unique heritage.

Q. Are there any new downtown projects in the pipeline?

A. Yes, there are several exciting downtown projects in the pipeline for Van Buren! One of the most significant is the development of the Acadian Arts Center, which will transform a historic building on Main Street into a vibrant hub for arts education, public gallery space, and an artist residency program. This project will celebrate our rich

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Acadian and French-Canadian heritage while fostering creativity and cultural exchange.

We're also advancing the Community Connectivity HUB project, which will provide high-tech conference rooms, telehealth spaces, and flexible workstations to support education, healthcare access and entrepreneurship. This project is designed to address some of the deficiencies and unique challenges of our rural community while encouraging innovation and growth of Van Buren and our surrounding communities.

Additionally, the Van Buren Community Market & Small Business Incubator, a renovation of the former municipal building, will offer a flexible space for local vendors, with a minimum of 10 incubator stalls for small businesses and established home businesses looking for more public interaction.

These projects, combined with ongoing efforts like the "Music on Main" summer series, are all part of a broader strategy to create a dynamic and sustainable downtown that reflects the spirit and resilience of our community.

Q. Are there any skills you developed over your long career in law enforcement that have served you well in municipal government?

A. Absolutely. Many of the skills I developed during my law enforcement career have been invaluable in municipal government. First and foremost, I learned the importance of effective communication and active listening. As a patrol sergeant and an instructor at the Maine Criminal Justice Academy, I often had to navigate complex situations and bring people together to find solutions. These skills have been essential in fostering collaboration and trust with residents, businesses and stakeholders in Van Buren.

Problem-solving under pressure is another skill that has carried over seamlessly. Law enforcement requires quick decision-making and adaptability, and I've found those abilities equally important when managing municipal projects and addressing community challenges. Whether it's troubleshooting issues with infrastructure projects or responding to the needs of residents, being able to stay calm and focused has been critical.

Finally, my background instilled a deep commitment to service and accountability. In both roles, I've been driven by the belief that leadership is about being a steward of the community, and that mindset has guided my approach to governance. Whether working on economic revitalization, sustainability, or public services, my law enforcement experience has given me a strong foundation to lead with integrity and purpose.

Q. What is your long-term vision for the town?

A. My long-term vision for Van Buren is to create a vibrant, resilient and sustainable community that honors its rich Acadian heritage while embracing innovation and opportunity. I see a future where our downtown is a bustling hub of activity, driven by small businesses, cultural attractions and community-focused spaces.

I want Van Buren to be a place where residents of all ages feel connected and supported—a town that provides access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities through projects like the Community Connectivity HUB & Small Business Incubator. By fostering entrepreneurship and collaboration, we can empower our community members to take an active role in shaping our future.

Preserving our natural beauty and outdoor recreation economy is also central to my vision. I aim to enhance our trail systems, promote sustainable practices, and make Van Buren a destination for visitors who want to experience the unique charm of northern Maine.

Ultimately, my goal is to ensure that Van Buren remains a place people are proud to call home, where tradition meets progress and where future generations can thrive. By investing in people, partnerships, and projects, we can build a town that stands as a model of community revitalization and resilience.

Q. What are the town's strengths?

A. Van Buren's strength lies in its unique combination of cultural, economic and geographic advantages. At the heart of the community is its rich Acadian and French-Canadian heritage, which is on display at our Acadian Village, and provides a strong sense of identity and pride. This cultural foundation is reflected in the town's traditions, festivals and creative placemaking projects, making Van Buren a distinctive and vibrant place to live and visit.

The town's outdoor recreation economy is another significant asset. With access to the St. John River and extensive trail systems, Van Buren is a hub for snowmobiling, ATV riding, hunting and fishing. These activities not only enhance the quality of life for residents but also attract visitors, bolstering the local economy. Additionally, Van Buren's location as a border town creates unique opportunities for international trade, cultural exchange and cross-border tourism with Canada.

Van Buren's resilience and community spirit are its most valuable intangible assets. The people here are deeply committed to the town's success, and their willingness to collaborate has been a driving force behind recent revitalization efforts. This community-driven approach is comple-

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mented by innovative municipal leadership that has embraced forward-thinking projects, such as the Community Connectivity HUB & Small Business Incubator, EV charging stations, and the development of the Acadian Arts Center. These initiatives position Van Buren as a leader in rural innovation and sustainability.

Another major strength is our subscriber based electric utility (as opposed to investor based), Van Buren Light & Power, which provides the second-lowest electricity rates in Maine, if not the entire East Coast. This unique asset not only lowers costs for residents and businesses but also makes the town an attractive location for new development and investment. Coupled with affordable living costs and new affordable housing projects, Van Buren offers an ideal environment for families and entrepreneurs looking to establish roots in northern Maine.

Van Buren's combination of cultural richness, outdoor opportunities, affordable living and innovative projects creates a strong foundation for growth and resilience, positioning the town as a model for rural revitalization in Maine.

Q. What is the one big thing lacking in Van Buren?

A. The one big thing lacking in Van Buren is a municipally owned meeting space, a critical asset for fostering community development, collaboration and engagement. While the town has made notable progress in revitalization and innovation, the absence of a dedicated public

meeting space has left a gap in Van Buren's ability to bring people together effectively. Such a space is essential for hosting events, encouraging civic dialogue, supporting local organizations, and creating opportunities for residents to connect and collaborate.

A community meeting space serves as more than just a physical location; it is a hub for building relationships and strengthening the social fabric of a town. Without it, there is no central place where people can gather to discuss ideas, celebrate achievements, or work on collective solutions to shared challenges. In Van Buren, this void limits the ability to nurture a strong sense of community and to engage residents in initiatives that contribute to the town's growth and resilience.

The lack of a municipally owned meeting space also hampers the ability to attract events, workshops and educational opportunities that could benefit residents. Providing a space where people can meet, learn and collaborate is vital to fostering economic development, civic engagement and cultural enrichment. This need is especially pronounced in a rural town like Van Buren, where a centralized and accessible meeting space would help bridge the gap between diverse community groups and ensure inclusiveness for residents of all ages and abilities.

Efforts like the Acadian Arts Centre, the Community Connectivity HUB & Small Business Incubator are steps toward addressing this issue, as both would provide a multi-use space for high-tech conferencing, educational programs,

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and telehealth services. However, to fully realize the vision of a connected and engaged Van Buren, a dedicated community meeting space must become a priority. Such an investment would serve as a foundation for building a stronger, more cohesive community while supporting the town's broader revitalization efforts.

Q. How was the community garden and greenhouse developed and is it a success?

A. The project began with a unique opportunity identified during the town's participation in the Maine Department of Transportation's (MDOT) Village Partnership Initiative. As part of this initiative, a landscape designer from Gorill Palmer evaluated potential redevelopment sites in the town and singled out an overgrown, neglected 3.1-acre field—a former neighborhood devastated by a 2008 flood—as a site with tremendous potential for a park and green space. This recommendation planted the seed for what would become a vital community resource.

The concept of a community garden truly took root in June of 2023, when I was visiting my daughter in Putney, Vermont. During my visit, she introduced me to their local community garden, where, at 32 years old, she was proud to be the youngest participant among several retirees in their 70s and 80s. Seeing her pride and hearing about the camaraderie and shared purpose among the gardeners, I was struck by the profound value of the project. It wasn't just about growing food; it was about addressing criti-

cal issues like elderly loneliness, food sustainability, and placemaking. The garden was a hub of connection and vitality, and I knew immediately that such a project could bring immense benefits to Van Buren.

Inspired, I returned to Van Buren and presented the idea to our town council. They immediately embraced the vision, recognizing it as an ideal way to revitalize the abandoned 3.1-acre space. With strong community and council support, the project moved forward. Funding from the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation & the Future's Community Action Grant helped us transform the once-overgrown field into what will be a thriving garden and greenhouse project for all.

Today, the Community Garden Project is being developed through citizen volunteers and is expected to be a resounding success in early spring 2025. It will serve as a place where residents of all ages can come together to grow fresh, healthy food, share knowledge and build relationships. The garden will become a vibrant symbol of renewal and resilience in Van Buren, addressing not only practical needs like food sustainability, but also fostering a sense of belonging and community pride. It's a testament to how thoughtful redevelopment and collaboration can turn even the most neglected spaces into vital assets for the community. I highly recommend developing a similar project to any community—this is literally “low hanging fruit.” 🌱

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Join the Maine Municipal Association's Education & Training Advisory Council. Your Opportunity to Shape Municipal Training and Professional Development!

The Maine Municipal Association (MMA) is excited to announce the call for nominations for our Education and Training Advisory Council – a pivotal initiative tasked with supporting and advising MMA on ongoing municipal education and training needs across the state.

Why Join the Advisory Council?

The Advisory Council plays a crucial role in shaping the educational and training landscape for Maine's municipal workforce. By joining, you'll have the opportunity to influence educational and training programs for municipal officials, ensure that MMA's education and training programs remain responsive to members' needs, and foster collaboration and partnerships that will strengthen training programs. Since 2023, the Advisory Council has focused on municipal leadership training, workforce development, marketing and outreach for training programs, and ongoing training needs assessment.

Who We're Looking For:

We invite ALL municipal elected officials, appointed officials, and employees from MMA member municipalities to nominate themselves for a two-year term beginning on July 1, 2025. We are particularly interested in individuals who fall into the following categories:

- Elected municipal officials
- Front-line supervisors
- Human resources professionals

The Advisory Council meets five times annually – twice in person for a full day, and three times via Zoom for 2-3 hours. For in-person meetings, all travel expenses for Council members are reimbursed by MMA.

Nomination Details:

If you're ready to take on this exciting opportunity, submit your nomination by Monday, April 28, 2025 to Peter Osborne, MMA Director of Educational Services, via email at posborne@memun.org or by US Mail to: Peter Osborne, c/o Maine Municipal Association, 60 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330.

Please Include:

- A brief letter of interest outlining your motivation for serving on the Council; your relevant skills and experiences; and which of the above categories apply to you (if any), and
- A letter of support from your direct supervisor, or selectboard chair, mayor, or council chair in the case of a manager. A letter of support is not required for elected officials.

Appointment Process:

MMA's nominating committee will review all nominations and recommend candidates for the Advisory Council to the MMA Executive Committee, who will decide on appointments at their June 2025 meeting.

Connect with Us:

For any questions or additional information, feel free to contact Peter Osborne by email (posborne@memun.org) or phone (207-623-8428 x2390).

Your commitment to municipal training and professional development can make a lasting impact. Join the MMA Education & Training Advisory Council and be a part of shaping Maine's municipal future!



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For more information call the Affiliate Office – Maine Chapter APWA, 1-800-452-8786.



Kristen Barth

Kristen Barth has been promoted to Scarborough town clerk, replacing longtime clerk **Yolande “Tody” Justice**, who has been named executive assistant to the town manager. Barth started her municipal career in 2012, when she was hired as a general assistance case worker for the City of Biddeford. She was promoted

to administrator in March of 2016. She accepted the job of social services director for the City of South Portland, where she worked until she joined the Scarborough staff in February 2023 as an assistant town clerk. Barth holds a bachelor’s degree in rehabilitation services from the University of Maine at Farmington.

Richmond Fire Chief **Stephen Caswell**, who has 15 years of experience in fire department management, has been named Manchester fire chief. Caswell will continue working 20 hours a week in Richmond while he transitions to his new job. An open house to introduce Caswell to the town was held on February 16. He replaces Francis Wozniak, who resigned last August.

Jack Clukey, the longtime town manager of Dover-Foxcroft has been named Pittsfield town manager. He re-

places **Jacob Gran**, who resigned last December to take the job of assistant town manager in Bucksport. Clukey has managed Dover-Foxcroft for 20 years. **Cornell Knight** served as interim manager until Clukey was appointed on January 28.



Cameron Clark

Cameron Clark has been named Houlton interim town manager. He is a Houlton native who started his first business at the age of 13. The Houlton selectboard noted that his experience in finance is extensive. A regular at select board meetings, Clark volunteered his services while the town conducted a search for a

permanent manager following the resignation of **Jeremy Smith** in mid-January. Clark earned a master’s degree in business from Husson University and operates his own landscape business.

Rockland has hired **Elias Kann** as its new city planner, effective in mid-June. He replaces **Rhett Lamb**, who retired but agreed to work two days a week under contract until Kann takes over. Kann is presently earning a master’s degree in regional planning from Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y.



Stephen Langsdorf
slangsdorf@preti.com

Kristin Collins
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Cameron Ferrante
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David Hediger

The former planning and code enforcement director for the City of Lewiston has accepted the job of Auburn planning director, effective February 24. **David Hediger** replaces **Eric Cousens**, who was promoted to executive director of public services in January. Hediger worked for Lewiston for more than 20 years,

focusing on planning initiatives and overseeing zoning and land use regulations. Most recently, he worked as a senior planner for the Land for Maine's Future program, where he managed land conservation projects and grant administration. Hediger earned a master's degree in public policy and management from the Muskie School of Public Service, and a bachelor's degree in geography and environmental planning and policy from the University of Maine at Farmington.



Bryan Kaenrath

The Lewiston City Council has hired former state Rep. **Bryan Kaenrath** as its new city administrator, effective May 5. The decision comes after a long search for a replacement for **Heather Hunter**, who resigned last spring. Kaenrath said he intends to shake up municipal government and attack longstanding problems

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Photos are encouraged.



in Maine's second-largest city. Kaenrath is currently Waterville city manager, where he has served since 2023. He won a five-year contract with Lewiston councilors. **Brian O'Malley**, who served as interim administrator, will stay in his position as deputy city administrator. Kaenrath, a New Jersey native who spent summers in Maine as a child, has also managed the City of Saco. He earned a bachelor's degree in political science in 2006 from the University of Maine and served in the Maine House of Representatives from 2006-2014, representing Portland and South Portland. He said his priorities include public safety and economic development, including downtown revitalization.

Debra Lane has announced she will retire this summer after serving as Cape Elizabeth's town clerk for 40 years. Lane was driving by the town office during a visit home from college and told her mother she would work there someday. She applied for the open clerk's job in 1986 and never turned back. She is credited with shepherding town staff through many changes over the years. Lane doubled as assistant town manager for much of her time with the town and has served as assistant manager full-time for the past year.

The Bremen selectboard announced in January that **Eric Teele** has been promoted to fire chief. Teele, who has worked for the fire department for 15 years, succeeds **Bruce Poland**, who retired after 52 years with the department.

Ellsworth City Planner **Matt Williams** resigned in February to accept a job with The Musson Group, a consultant company based in nearby Southwest Harbor. Williams said his new job will offer more flexibility and variety. Williams joined the Ellsworth city staff as an assistant planner in July 2022. He was promoted to city planner in December 2022. 🌲

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NEWS FROM AROUND THE STATE

STATEWIDE

The Legislature will consider a bill this session that would provide \$4 million to restore and protect lake quality. According to advocates, the state must help protect the more than 6,000 lakes and ponds, assets that generate \$14 billion a year in economic activity. According to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, 123 lakes are at risk of algal blooms, which is a rapid increase in the density of algae in an aquatic system, 18 of which bloom often and 40 more that bloom sometimes. Maine's lake associations have been raising money to monitor and treat lakes, a commitment they said cannot be sustained with fundraisers and grants. The state owns all lakes and ponds larger than 10 acres. A bill last session asked for \$2.5 million for water quality monitoring and mitigation, but the final bill provided just \$200,000.

AUBURN

A Maine Turnpike Authority maintenance garage burned to the ground on February 2, destroying multiple vehicles as well as tools and other equipment. It was a total loss, officials said. The garage was fully engulfed when firefighters reached the site just off the turnpike. Four plow trucks, a traffic control truck, loader, pickup truck and box truck were all destroyed. The vehicles and related equipment were used to snowplow the turnpike from New Gloucester to Sabattus. Officials said the losses would not affect the authority's ability to keep that section of the highway clear. Ten employees worked out of the garage. The fire is being investigated by the state fire marshal's office.

AUGUSTA

The city council voted in early February to sell the naming rights to the main auditorium at the Augusta Civic Center for \$828,000 over 10 years. Officials received the permission of the family of Paul G. Poulin, for whom the auditorium was previously named, to rename the auditorium the Hammond Lumber Auditorium. The city will rename the main entrance to the building for Poulin. In addition to changes in the signs, a Hammond Lumber logo will be added to the basketball court, where high school teams compete in the annual statewide tournament. The agreement also allows Hammond to advertise in other areas of the civic center. Officials hope the new revenue stream will help the civic center rebound from pandemic-era losses, balance the budget and finance upgrades to the facility to keep it competitive for

events in the future. The civic center opened its doors in January of 1973.

CUMBERLAND

The town council in January adopted a new rule that restricts future turf installations from using synthetic infill materials to protect the health and safety of town residents and surrounding ecosystems. It is the first such rule in Maine and is the latest effort by the town to address environmental concerns. The new rule will require developers to get a permit from the code enforcement officer and attest there are no synthetic materials in the turf. Manufacturer's specifications also must be disclosed. Recent studies have shown that synthetic turf includes materials with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), known commonly as "forever chemicals."

HERSEY

A solar farm developer received an icy reception from half of the town's residents who attended an informational meeting in late January. The developer has proposed a 5,000-acre solar farm in the town of 84, located near Patten. Residents assured the developer they did not want the farm in their community. If it were developed, it would become the largest utility-scale solar project in Maine as measured in acreage and power generation. Residents asked Next Phase Energy Services officials about the benefits to the community of such a project, as well as impacts on land and water safety, wildlife, insurance and fire risk. The Timberland Solar Project would be located off Route 11.

HOULTON

Municipal officials in early February temporarily shut down the police department's surveillance camera system out of concern its facial recognition program might violate state law. The cameras have been controversial since they were installed last year. A 2021 state law prohibits public officials or departments from obtaining, accessing or retaining a facial surveillance program or any information associated with it. The cameras—50 at a cost of \$130,000—were financed by American Rescue Plan Act funding.

KITTERY

A New Hampshire lawmaker has sponsored a resolution to move the boundary between that state and Maine to encompass the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard

and relieve some 3,100 employees from New Hampshire from paying income tax to Maine. While Congress would have to redraw the boundary, President Donald Trump has the authority to change duty stations where employees are assigned. The naval yard is situated on the Piscataqua River on the Maine side. It was unclear how much tax revenue would be lost to state coffers. Kittery officials said New Hampshire would inherit the traffic problems now shouldered by the town should it take possession of the naval station. Both land-based access points to the facility run through Kittery. The economic impact of the naval station reached \$1.5 billion in 2023, including purchased goods and services, military construction work and maintenance. It employs nearly 8,000 workers.

SOUTH PORTLAND

The city council voted unanimously in February to quash a proposed ordinance which would have outlawed gas-powered leaf blowers after hearing from residents. The council had voted in favor of the ban by a 4-3 preliminary vote in January. The ordinance would have affected businesses and residents, who argued against the higher-cost option. Councilors noted the hateful emails and calls they received from many residents after the early vote, but said they changed their vote on behalf of all the residents who complained respectfully. The council was expected to act on an order requiring city departments to convert to electric blowers, including the public works and recreation departments. The conversion cost is pegged at \$9,000.

WASHINGTON

All but two of more than 100 residents voted in late January for a six-month moratorium on commercial development after a Dollar General store was proposed in the town of 1,500. The town joins other midcoast communities that have passed moratoriums on retail construction or outlawed them completely. A citizen group was formed to oppose the new store after a proposal surfaced last fall. Group members are concerned about the impact of a dollar store on local retailers as well as not reflecting the character of the town. 🏔️



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ANNUAL CONVENTION: MMA Annual Convention: October 8 & 9 / Cross Insurance Center, Bangor

Emergency board Meeting Notice

(Updating the July 2019 Legal Notes)

Maine's Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) requires prior public notice of all "public proceedings" or meetings of a board or body consisting of three or more members. See 1 M.R.S. § 406. Ordinarily, meeting notice must be given in ample time to allow public attendance and in a manner reasonably calculated to notify the public in the jurisdiction served by the board or body concerned. But what about those times when a board absolutely must meet sooner than normal notice can be given—to address an emergency?

The FOAA does not define "emergency meeting," but in our view it means a meeting where, by virtue of unforeseeable circumstances, a board is required to act before its customary public notice can be given (which should be a rare exception).

When a board needs to hold an emergency meeting, the law requires that local representatives of the media be notified of the meeting, whenever practical, by the same or faster means as used to notify board members. (It's a good idea to document when and how media notice was provided). This is the only prior notice required in the event of an emergency meeting, although we recommend that the board also provide the public with notice of the meeting to the extent possible (e.g., posting notice outside the municipal office, on a public bulletin board, website, etc.).

Note that the FOAA's purpose in requiring media notice is not so the media can notify the public—it is so the media can send a reporter to cover the emergency meeting and report on it afterward if they wish. However, since almost all media outlets now maintain their own websites and social media sites, it may be possible for them to post public notice of an emergency board meeting even if only a few days or hours beforehand. Similarly, the municipality could post notice of an emergency meeting on its own website or social media too—again, even if only a few days or hours in advance.

One final point: the FOAA provides a "floor" or minimum level of required notice in advance of public proceedings. Local charters, ordinances or board bylaws may require specific methods or time frames for notice of emergency meetings, some of which may exceed the notice requirements in FOAA. A board must also comply with any applicable local notice requirements.

For more on the Freedom of Access Act, see our "Right to Know" information packet, available free to members in the "Legal" section of MMA's website. (By *S.F.P.*)

Municipal Officer vs. Municipal Official

(Updating the September 2014 Legal Notes)

Question: What's the difference under Maine law between a municipal officer and a municipal official?

Answer: A "municipal official" is defined in statute as "any elected or appointed member of municipal government." See 30-A M.R.S. § 2001(11). This includes any municipal official elected or appointed to an office. Generally, a municipal office is a position created by statute, charter or ordinance, and the officeholder is elected or appointed into that position, usually serves for a specific term and takes an oath of office. For example, positions such as municipal clerk, treasurer, tax collector, road commissioner, fire chief, code enforcement officer, animal control officer, selectperson, councilor and members of the planning board and board of appeals are all "municipal officials."

In contrast, the law defines the "municipal officers" as the "members of the select board or councilors of a town" or "the mayor and alderman or councilors of a city." See 30-A M.R.S. § 2001(10). In other words, municipal officers are a subset of the larger group of municipal officials—for example, a select board member or councilor is both a municipal officer and a municipal official, however, the municipal clerk, treasurer, and tax collector are municipal officials but not municipal officers.

The difference is important because only the "municipal officers" are the chief elected officials of a municipality. As such, they may be vested with a combination of executive, administrative and legislative authority, depending on whether the municipality has a manager and whether the municipal legislative body is a council or a town meeting. (Note: 30-A M.R.S. § 7007 provides plantation assessors with responsibilities similar to select board members in towns.)

For a full review of the powers and duties of municipal officers, see our *Municipal Officers Manual*, available free to members in the "Legal" section of MMA's website (www.memun.org/legal). (By *S.F.P.*)

Death and Tax Assessments

Under Maine law, property taxes may not be assessed to a deceased person; specific rules apply in the case of both real and personal property tax assessments.

Real estate. State statute requires that the real estate of a deceased person be taxed to that person's (1) heirs where there is no will or devisees where there is a will, or (2) to the personal representative ("PR") named in the will or appointed by the Probate Court to settle the estate. See 36 M.R.S. § 559.

And, until the assessors receive notice of the division of an estate and the names of specific heirs or devisees, they may tax the undivided real estate of a deceased person to

that person's "heirs" or "devisees" generally without designating them individually (or, as noted above, to that person's PR, if any).

When the assessors become aware that the owner of taxable property has died, they must update the municipality's tax assessment records. If the owner died after April 1st of the current tax year, the update would occur in the next tax year's annual property tax commitment. If the owner died before April 1st of the current tax year (or more than a year previously) the assessors will need to update the assessment in the current year's tax commitment. They may also need to abate and supplementally assess tax assessments in previously issued tax commitments (within the time limits allowed in 36 M.R.S. § 713), depending on the date of death.

Note that the general rule (found in 36 M.R.S. § 557) allowing the assessors to continue assessing real estate to a property owner until they receive written notice of an ownership change does not apply in the case of a deceased taxpayer. Maine's Law Court has held that the authority in § 557 only applies to assessments involving living persons, which means that the assessors need to exercise due diligence to learn of taxpayer deaths and update real property tax assessments promptly in order to maintain their validity.

Along the same lines, *real estate* may not legally be assessed to the "estate of" a deceased person. Moreover, assessing property to the "heirs of" a deceased person where there is a will, or to the "devisees of" the deceased where there is no will is invalid. An attempt to cover all the bases by assessing "to the heirs of or devisees of . . ." is also invalid. For those reasons, the assessors should investigate whether a deceased owner had a will and, if so, its status as of April 1st.

Personal Property. The rules differ for personal property tax assessments. The personal property of a deceased person must be assessed to the PR of the deceased in the municipality where the deceased person last resided, until the PR notifies the assessors that the property has been distributed. If the deceased did not reside in Maine at the time of death, the personal property must be assessed to the person's PR in the municipality where the property is situated. However, until a PR has been appointed, the *personal property* of a deceased person should be assessed to the "estate of" the deceased in the place where the deceased last resided, if in Maine; otherwise, in the place the property is situated. See 36 M.R.S. § 605.

For much more on real and personal property tax assessment, see our *Municipal Assessment Manual*, available in the "Legal" section of MMA's website (www.memun.org/legal). (By S.F.P.) 🏠

Municipal Calendar

APRIL 1 – Status and value of property for property tax assessment purposes is fixed on this date (36 M.R.S. § 502).

BY APRIL 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)

APRIL 21 – Patriot's Day, the third Monday in April, is a legal holiday (4 M.R.S. § 1051).

ON OR BEFORE APRIL 30 – Deadline for employers required to submit quarterly withholding taxes to file return and remit payment to the State Tax Assessor (36 M.R.S. § 5253).

BY APRIL 30, 2025 – Project and Expenditure Reports for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds are due to the U.S. Treasury.

BY APRIL 30, 2025 – Biennial Solid Waste and Recycling Municipal Reporting forms are due to the Maine DEP covering calendar years 2023 and 2024. See DEP website for form (38 M.R.S. § 2133(7)).



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TRAINING CALENDAR

MARCH

3/13	Thurs.	Preparing for an Audit	Augusta - Maine Municipal Association	MMTCTA
3/13	Thurs.	MeWEA Ski Day	Attitash Mountain	MEWEA
3/19 & 20	Wed. & Thur.	MTCCA Vital Records	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar	MTCCA
3/21	Fri.	MTCMA Interchange	Bangor - Hollywood Casino Hotel & Conference Center	MTCMA
3/24	Mon.	Basic Municipal Budgeting	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MMA
3/26 - 28	Wed - Fri.	MFCA Professional Development Conference	Newry - Grand Summit Hotel - Sunday River Resort	MFCA

APRIL

4/1	Tues.	Elected Officials Workshop	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MMA
4/3	Thurs.	MCAPWA Annual Spring Meeting	Augusta - Augusta Civic Center	MCAPWA
4/8	Tues.	MLGHRA Spring Training	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MLGHRA
4/11	Fri.	MACA Professional Development Training	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MACA
4/16	Wed.	MMTCTA Accounting 101 for Governments	Augusta - Augusta Civic Center	MMTCTA
4/18	Fri.	MAAO Northern Maine Spring Workshop	Caribou - Northern Maine Development Commission & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MAAO
4/22	Tues.	MMA Lunch & Learn	Zoom Meeting	MMA
4/23 & 24	Wed. & Thur.	MTCCA New Clerks	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar	MTCCA
4/24	Thur.	MMTCTA Basic Excise Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MMTCTA
4/28 & 29	Mon. & Tues.	MWDA Spring Training Seminar	Bangor - Hilton Garden Inn	MWDA
4/29	Tues.	Women Leading Government Symposium	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar	MMA

MAY

5/1	Thurs.	Personnel Practices	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MMA
5/5 & 6	Mon. & Tues.	Verbal Judo for the Contact Professional - 2 DAY	Augusta - MMA	MMA
5/7	Wed.	MAAO Board of Assessment Review	Zoom Webinar	MAAO
5/8	Thurs.	MMTCTA Annual Conference	Bangor - Hilton Garden Inn	MMTCTA
5/13	Tues.	MTCCA Notary Training	Zoom webinar	MTCCA
5/14	Wed.	Municipal Technology Conference	Augusta - University of Maine Augusta (UMA)	MMA
5/15	Thurs.	MEGFOA Spring Training	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MEGFOA
5/19 & 20	Mon. & Tues.	MBOIA Spring Code Conference	Carrabasset Valley - Sugarloaf	MBOIA
5/21	Wed.	Planning Board/Boards of Appeal	Presque Isle - The Northeastland Hotel	MMA
5/29	Thurs.	Elected Officials Workshop	Lewiston - The Green Ladle	MMA

Registration for trainings is typically open 8 weeks prior to the event date, please check the website for availability - www.memun.org/Training

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- Bond issues and financing options
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Clodhna O'Malley



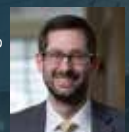
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