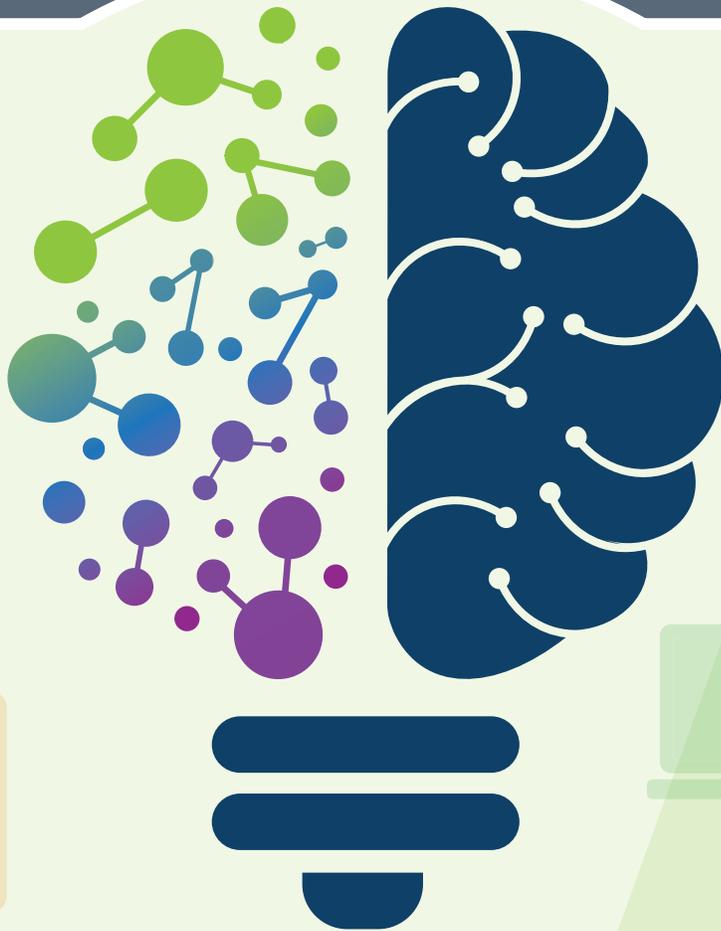


# Maine Town & City

The magazine of the Maine Municipal Association

APRIL 2025 | VOLUME 87 | ISSUE 4



Taking on AI...both  
the benefits and  
potential risks.

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MMA GOES TO D.C.

MUNICIPAL AUDITS

Q&A WITH RUTH BIRTZ,  
LINCOLN ASSESSOR

# 2025 MUNICIPAL TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE





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MAINE TOWN & CITY (ISSN 2578-4374) is published monthly, except in September, by the Maine Municipal Association, 60 Community Drive, Augusta, Maine 04330. (207) 623-8428. Periodicals postage paid at Augusta, Maine, and at additional mailing offices. All rights reserved. Postmaster send address changes to: Maine Town & City, 60 Community Drive, Augusta, Maine 04330. Information, policies and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Maine Municipal Association. Subscription prices: \$10/member; \$50/non-member.



In this issue

**Message from MMA.** On March 12, Melissa Doane, Bradley town manager and MMA President, led a group of municipal officials in meetings with members of Maine’s congressional delegation. This event, part of the National League of Cities’ Congressional City Conference, provides opportunities for municipal leaders across the country to discuss how federal policy impacts the people back at home. [Page 5](#)

**Q&A with Ruth Birtz.** This month, the Town & City spoke with 2024 Assessor of the year, Ruth Birtz, to discuss the developments taking place in Lincoln, as well as the challenges the current housing market is placing on assessors. [Page 7](#)

**Municipal Audits.** The annual municipal audit...adored by some and feared by others. Regardless of how you feel about audit season, municipal officials agree that it is a vital accountability tool. [Page 11](#)

**Municipal Profiles.** This month the Town & City turns its attention to Abbie Lenoard, Rockport Harbormaster. Leonard has been described as perfect for the jobs because “she can connect with anybody.” [Page 19](#)

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# Taking Our Messages to Washington, D.C.

By Melissa Doane / Town Manager / Town of Bradley



In mid-March, this small-town girl headed to Washington, D.C. Also joining me were MMA Vice President Justin Poirier, Monmouth Town Manager, MMA Executive Director Cathy Conlow, and MMA Director of Advocacy and Communications Kate Dufour. While we walked in the footsteps of history (a lot of footsteps), we also attended the National League of Cities Congressional Conference.

This annual event allows elected and appointed officials to network and learn about the issues facing different communities in different states. What I quickly learned is very much the same as what occurs in our local government in Maine. We are all facing similar issues, just on varying scales. I also learned that these officials are very much like you and me. We know that local government is the government that works.

The conference highlighted the need to strengthen the local-federal partnerships. EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin emphasized “cooperative federalism” to share governmental programs among states and the federal government. He seemed to recognize that the federal government’s work cannot be completed without local government. Maryland Governor Wes Moore spoke about the Key Bridge Collapse in Baltimore, reiterating that cooperation among local, state, and federal entities was essential to recovery efforts.

One of the most impactful messages was delivered by NLC President, Steve Patterson, mayor of Athens, Ohio (also one of the keynote speakers at the 2024 MMA Convention—I gave him a ride in my pickup truck). Mr. Patterson provided an acronym using a four-letter word we all need to use more, LEAD. Meaning, *Leadership* in every action, make decisions based on *Evidence*, promote *Accountability* in the provision of services, and display *Decisiveness* when making tough choices.

As it does every year, the 2025 conference ended with Hill Day.

On March 12, hundreds of municipal leaders met with their elected federal leaders to discuss issues

of municipal importance. This year, we were joined by municipal leaders from the communities of Bangor, Bath, Brewer, Hampden, Portland, and South Portland as we met with Senators Collins and King, Congresswoman Pingree, and Congressman Golden. Our discussions were guided in part by the

2025 Federal Issues Paper, which is posted on MMA’s website and briefly described in the sidebar to this article on page 6.

The entire delegation appreciated the dialogue on building strong federal-municipal relationships, protecting our connection with our neighboring allies of Canada, the threats to repeal the tax exemption on municipal bonds, and fears surrounding the OSHA fire brigade rules. My takeaway from Hill Day was that our Maine delegation knew about many of the issues we brought forward and were not only working on solutions but encouraging our participation and input. They also recognized and valued our dedication to the 207. Quick outtake: This small-town girl sat at the Appropriations table and in a Senate confirmation room, who would have thought!

Thank you to the members of the federal delegation and their staff for taking time to meet with us. I also would like to thank the municipal leaders who took time out of their busy lives to join us in D.C. Your contributions and real-life stories were invaluable and instrumental to a successful advocacy mission.

I will close this article with another quick outtake: A lesson this small-town girl was taught is to respect every governmental office, regardless of party, issue, or personal belief. That is a challenge today, but I know it can be overcome. Our Vice-President JD Vance was also a speaker at the NLC conference; some of the participants were, let me say, not that impressed by his speech and, in my opinion, disrespected the office. It was such an honor for this small-town girl to be not only in the same room as him, but also to be within throwing distance. I didn’t throw anything and hope you wouldn’t either. Civility, in its simplest form, means polite and respectful behavior. 🏡

# Federal Issues

On March 12, municipal leaders from Bangor, Bath, Brewer, Hampden, Portland, and South Portland, met with Senators Collins and King, Congresswoman Pingree and Congressman Golden, as part of the National League of Cities 2025 Hill Day event. Although the discussions were free flowing, the conversations were guided by the 2025 Federal Issues Paper. The document, which was drafted by MMA staff, addresses the federal level issues of interest and concern to municipal leaders.

What follows is a brief description of the topics discussed in this year's paper, which is posted on the association's website at <https://www.memun.org/Media-Publications/Federal-Issues-Paper>.

## **CDBG: Protecting the Federal-State/Local Partnership.**

In the ongoing discussions and analysis regarding the distribution of federal revenues, municipal leaders asked the federal delegation for their ongoing support for investments in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Since 2015, Cumberland County, Auburn, Bangor, Biddeford, Lewiston, Portland, and all other communities through state passthrough funding, received \$17.5 million annually from the CDBG program to help fund a variety of programs that promote economic development and well-being in Maine towns and cities.

**Protecting Tax Exempt Municipal Bonds.** Since September 2024, the National League of Cities has sent out two urgent messages informing municipal leaders that the tax exemption on municipal bonds is at risk. The repeal of the exemption is an issue of grave concern for municipal leaders. Simply stated, municipal bonds are the financial lifeline for countless community projects, which enable local governments to fund essential infrastructure projects, such as schools, roads, water systems, and public safety facilities. The tax-exempt status makes these bonds especially valuable, as it keeps borrowing costs low for municipalities and reduces the financial burdens placed on property taxpayers.

**Supporting Border Communities.** For the thousands of residents that share the U.S.-Canadian boundary, crossing the border for services, employment and to visit with family and friends is not a foreign concept, but part of a daily routine. However, the fear among Maine residents, as well as those residing in the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick and Quebec, is that tariffs may cause irreversible damage to a unique way of life and mutually beneficial economic practices. Additionally, it is highly likely that increasing costs and dissension between our two countries will affect Maine's tourism industry and related meals and lodging sales. Those potential losses could adversely impact the revenues available to fund state, municipal, county and school services, including the state revenues distributed through the revenue sharing program that are used to reduce the burdens placed on property taxpayers.

**Improving Communication Avenues.** Through the association's conversations with municipal leaders on federal issues, we are routinely informed of the litany of roadblocks that exist when working with federal agencies. The general observation among municipal officials is that it is rapidly becoming more difficult and frustrating for municipal leaders and employees to communicate with federal government agencies. To add insult to injury, when assistance is desperately needed, phone numbers and email addresses are either hard to come by, or non-existent, leaving municipal officials to deal with a chatbot. These helpful AI-fueled assistants can, at times, drop a session for taking too long to respond, leaving the human on the other end of the line with no other option than to start over. Municipal leaders understand the need to hold recipients of taxpayer funded grants accountable for spending funds appropriately, and that President Trump's Administration will continue to focus on the importance of accountability. However, there is a balance that must be achieved, particularly when the inability to follow through on a federal level reporting requirement comes with financial penalties.

**OSHA Fire Brigade Rules.** MMA and its member communities understand that the modernization of rules adopted nearly 45 years ago is necessary. The equipment available to protect first responders has improved, vehicles have become safer and more durable, training requirements are better targeted at arming full-time, part-time, and volunteer firefighters with the skills necessary to keep themselves and others safe, and light has been shed on the importance of information sharing, trained leadership, post-incident analyses, standard operating procedures and annual health and skills checks. However, in light of a potential reduction in federal support and investment in state and local programs, municipal leaders hope that the changes proposed in the OSHA rules will not be advanced without federal financial assistance.

**Treatment In-place.** On a positive final note, municipal leaders appreciate Senator Collins for introducing the *Improving Access to Medical Services Act*, which proposes to make the medical treatment services provided at the scene of an emergency that does not result in the transport to a hospital, eligible for Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement. The introduction of the bipartisan bill represents a significant step in the right direction, as the Maine Blue Ribbon Commission on EMS found that on average 26% of emergency calls do not result in transport. This means that even though property taxpayers have funded the cost of operating the ambulance, as well as the staff and the medical equipment and supplies used at the scene of an emergency, reimbursement under the Medicaid and Medicare programs is not available. Making reimbursement available regardless of whether transport occurs, will enable communities to continue to provide this vital public safety service. 🏔️

# Ruth Birtz: Housing market challenges assessors

By Liz Mockler

Lincoln has evolved from a busy mill town into a popular year-round recreation destination, and Ruth Birtz has seen it all.

Birtz has helped shape the landscape of the town as both assessor and economic development director over her 33-year career. She watched as the paper mill was closed, reopened and finally shuttered in 2014, an economic blow that cost the town nearly 400 jobs.

On a recent late winter Saturday, Birtz looked around the town and saw a chili chowder cookoff competition, a fishing derby, kids and parents getting ready to leave for the annual state high school basketball tournament and others just enjoying the sunny day.

"It was so nice to see, Birtz said. "It was like the community was enjoying itself. I thought, 'Lincoln at its finest.'"

Birtz said the town has recovered financially from the loss of the mill, thanks largely to vast tracts of undeveloped lakeside property. She said the effort took many years and multiple people to make the transition successfully.

"We've recovered from the mill loss thanks to increased (property) values and increased values of undeveloped property, she said. The town "is very unique, very diverse" and that has made the difference.

"Rebranding as a recreational destination worked," she said. "Our motto is 'Come for the lakes, stay for the lifestyle' and I think that says it all."

Lincoln is a double township measuring 75 square miles and is home to 13 lakes. Developing the lakes was key to the town's transformation.

Once known as "Stinkin' Lincoln," the town is now moving to clean up and redevelop the abandoned mill site, with the hope of attracting more economic activity and ideally technology-driven jobs.

"We're hoping to bring back (the lost jobs)," Birtz said, adding that "not having the smell has made quite a difference" in the town's path to recovery.

The biggest concern Birtz has as an assessor is the known inequity of some of the property values in town. She said



Ruth Birtz

the housing market continues to raise issues of fairness as homes that are virtually alike carry varying values based on the market.

The only way to truly resolve the problem, she said, is a full revaluation where all properties are assessed at the same time. The problem? There is a three-year wait for a good revaluation firm to carry out the assignment.

Municipalities don't have the staff to conduct a full revaluation "and you have to get into the queue."

"The big problem for us right now is that housing prices are rising so fast we

can't keep up with the necessary adjustments," she said. "We know that a lot of properties are not assessed properly. But you can only do a couple of (annual) adjustments before you actually increase inequity in assessing."

Birtz is preparing bid documents for a townwide revaluation, a job that will cost at least \$500,000, Birtz said.

Lincoln's mil rate is about \$20 per \$1,000 in property value. Its property is currently assessed at about 60 percent of market value.

"In order to do an appropriate reval you have to see all properties at the same time," said Birtz, Maine's 2024 assessor of the year, "so everybody has the notice in the same time frame."

She said property owners often connect an increase in the town budget to the increase in their tax bills even though municipalities must lower the mil rate as the value of town property increases.

Birtz, an appraiser before taking the Lincoln position, recently took time to talk about the market, how she manages two major departments and the ongoing economic development projects in the town of 5,000.

## Q. Were you surprised to win the Assessor of the Year award?

**A.** Yes, very. I have worked for 33 years as an assessor for the Town of Lincoln. I never expected any recognition for the work I have done. The assessing community is full of very intelligent, dedicated professionals. All of them are entitled to this recognition, I still am humbled that they chose to recognize me.

**Q. What do you like best about public service?**

**A.** What I like best is taking a negative and turning it into a positive. Most people would think being an assessor is a negative position. Everyone questioning what you do and blaming you for their taxes. I like to look at it as an educational opportunity. Most people do not know the process of how a community arrives at a mil rate. Once explained there is a better understanding and relationship with that individual. Being in a public position has brought so many people through my office that I would never have had the opportunity to meet. I value those relationships. I have met some pretty extraordinary people over the years. I am grateful for that.

**Q. Do you have a system to help you manage two major departments?**

**A.** It definitely is a challenge to manage two major departments. I am lucky I have the assistance of some great people. With economic development, I am assisted by the Eastern Maine Development Corporation on grants and managing grants. We are very supported by both federal and state agencies and by our contractual environmental engineers. The Town of Lincoln’s law firm has also been so beneficial when it comes to all the lease agreements, TIFs, loan contracts, etc. We also have a nonprofit development corporation, the Lincoln Lakes Innovation Corporation, that

I rely on greatly for professional guidance for bids, development, etc. Without this team it would be impossible to keep track of all we are doing.

As far as the assessing side of things, that is a little more difficult. Lincoln is a very active large area. We have 75 square miles, 13 lakes, one river, over 4,000 real estate accounts and 300 business equipment accounts. It would be a challenge for any single assessor if that was their only job. I struggle keeping things up-to-date such as tax maps, addressing and reviewing properties. However, an unexpected thing happened. The citizens recognize my workload, and several have volunteered to come in and assist me with these projects.

**Q. What is Lincoln’s biggest economic development challenge?**

**A.** Lincoln’s biggest development challenge is financial. Without the help of grants and state and federal agencies we would not be able to do the work that needs to be done. A small rural Maine community that was once a primary-industry town does not have the fiscal means to handle brownfields cleanup and infrastructure development. We can sell ourselves; we have a central location with all the amenities most businesses are looking for—power, gas, water, sewer—but we need to be able to offer a location that is clean and free of contaminants.



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**Q. Are there any proposals or projects in the works?**

**A.** We have several projects in the pipeline and some we prefer not to discuss until we have a firm commitment from them. We have a lease agreement with Biofine Developments NE. This is a company that will produce green heating fuel from wood waste. Development on this should start in 2025. We are finalizing a lease with Revision Energy for a community solar project. This relationship will be beneficial to the town because they are also taking a second option for solar development on our newly permitted Asbestos Containment Management area. This could provide added benefits for direct energy connections for businesses locating on the former mill site. We also are finalizing the lease with Form Energy for a battery storage facility on the site. While all of this is going on we have several grants from the Environmental Protection Agency and the state brown-fields program undergoing remediation efforts. In addition, we have several applications in the works for infrastructure upgrades and an innovation business incubation center.

**Q. What is the most common problem you face as an assessor?**

**A.** The biggest issue all assessors are facing in the state of Maine right now is keeping up with the current market trends. I have been an assessor for 33 years and, in my tenure, I have never experienced the market we have had over the past three to four years. I formerly could easily identify trends and market adjustments. Statistically, sales are all over the place. I like to give the example of three sales of a standard single-family ranch with a two-car attached garage, on a half-acre lot, on town utilities. Everything about the three homes is the same, however the selling prices range from \$180,000 to \$260,000. These ranges I am finding for all categories of properties in Lincoln. This type of sales data reduces your quality rating, which will directly reduce your subsidies from the state. Explaining this to residents as their taxes are going up due to increased costs to run our communities is very difficult. The easiest association is if the value goes up, my taxes go up. I am sure that eventually the market will self-adjust and become more stable, but right now it is just difficult being an assessor.

**Q. What's your favorite thing about Lincoln?**

**A.** I don't think I could identify one specific thing. We have an abundance of natural recreational opportunities here. All the services with a small-town atmosphere and ease of access. But I would have to say it's the people here. Lincoln has a tremendous amount of volunteer participation. If they see a need or a problem they try to find a solution. Years ago, some residents recognized we had many people experiencing food insecurity. All the area churches banded together under the leadership of a volunteer and founded the Food Cupboard. To sustain the program, volunteers started a local thrift shop. The proceeds from the thrift shop support the Food Cupboard. We had an issue with no place to take stray animals. The community held fundraisers and built the Penobscot Valley Humane Animal Shelter, again run by volunteers. We recognized we had an opioid crisis, so volunteers banded together and with the help of grant funding now run Save a Life Center. Our schools, whether it's sports, music, or arts, also enjoy huge support from the community. These are just a few of the things that happen here. I could list many, many more. I like to say Lincoln is proactive not reactive.

**Q. What's the one big thing Lincoln needs?**

**A.** The one thing we really need are jobs with life-sustaining wages. All I can say is we are working hard to bring that back to Lincoln. We would like to see our younger residents be able to stay and raise their families here.

**Q. Do you have any advice for young municipal officials?**

**A.** I think the best advice I could give a young person who is considering working for a municipality is to have patience. There will be some rewarding days and some not-so-rewarding days. The old statement that you can't please everyone is a reality. You just need to do the best job you can do to the best of your ability. Sometimes that won't be enough, but for those times when it is, it can be very rewarding. If you want to bring about positive change, you need to be involved in planning and preparing for the future. Working in municipal government gives you that opportunity. 🏔️

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# The Municipal Audit

While the process can be terrifying and hectic, municipal officials know that it is an important accountability tool that ensures that tax dollars are being invested appropriately.

By Janine Pineo

“The audit is my whole world.”

For Mae Wyler, finance director and treasurer for Mount Desert, it isn't hyperbole to think this way about a state-mandated requirement.

The Maine statute is clear, calling for an annual post audit made of a municipality's accounts for the last complete fiscal year. Every municipality—no matter the population or number of employees—has the same obligation to its taxpayers.

A great deal rests not only on finishing the audit in time for the town meeting, but also in receiving a clean audit. Then that audit must be filed with the Office of the State Auditor. Failure to do an audit or file one can lead to state intervention.

Beyond that are the problems that can follow from lack of an audit, both from financial institutions and state and federal sources.

Financial institutions wouldn't work with the town, Wyler said. Without an audit, it would require more tax dollars to cover projects, and everything would have a higher level of scrutiny from taxpayers to financial institutions to state and federal government.

“We'd lose the trust of the people,” she said.

## Corinth, Penobscot County

This year will mark the first audit for Corinth Town Manager Jacob Spinney, who came on board last September.

The town's fiscal year runs January to December, with the town meeting occurring annually about mid-March. The town report will hold the preliminary audit report, but it won't be until after town meeting that the auditors, RHR Smith & Co., Certified Public Accountants, show up for a field visit, Spinney said.

The field visit involves an inspection of paper copies of documents, he said, and spot checks. They will look at invoices and approvals from the selectboard.

Bank account reconciliations will be scrutinized, as will

assets and total depreciation, Spinney said. “I think it's pretty comprehensive.”

The auditors might give the staff a few assignments, too. “They might ask for additional documents,” he said.

“We did send them an initial round of information as we were closing out 2024,” he said. “There are procedures we go through at the end of the year to close out the year.”

“We spend the whole year preparing for the audit,” Spinney said. “When they are actually here, it's an intense two days.”

TRIO, the government software used by Maine municipalities, will do most of the work the town needs for the auditors, he said. “It's not an incredibly manual process.”

Spinney said the goal is for the town's 2,900 residents to have confidence that Corinth's financial status is accurate. Beyond that, he said, is wanting people to know what doesn't come through in the audit, as in “are we paying more than we should” for a service or purchase.

Expenditures are put in the town report, Spinney said, but he wishes more people would attend town meeting. “The town's money is spent where it's supposed to be,” he said.

The goal is to show “there's nothing worth reporting on,” he said.

## Baileyville, Washington County

Like a number of Maine municipalities, Baileyville ran into a rough patch when it came to having an auditor.

Town Manager Chris Loughlin recounted that the accountant the town had used for several years decided to retire. There was a scramble to find someone new and the town did, but that accountant died suddenly.

Some time later, Loughlin said, the town got a call that led them to a new firm, RHR Smith & Co., their current auditors.

“We seemed to have landed on our feet,” he said.

Baileyville, with a population of about 1,300, is home to Washington County's largest employer, Woodland Pulp. Loughlin said because of the mill, the town contributes about nine percent to the county budget.

That's one of the reasons the numbers need to be right, he said, and the audit makes sure they are.

“Audits are fun,” Loughlin said. “The one thing you don't want to do is get behind. The sooner you have the data ...

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

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the sooner you know the numbers are going to be accurate.”

The town relies on the auditor to say where we are and what has happened, he said.

Loughlin said it is important to make sure everything is taken care of in a timely fashion. For Baileyville, that means a bill comes in and its payment often goes out the same day.

Some residents understand what the audit is telling them, Loughlin said, but for others, any sign of a surplus can “freak them out.” They even may push to zero out the surplus.

If you take all the surplus, he said, you can’t pay the bills.

### Mount Desert, Hancock County

On paper, Mount Desert skews toward the definition of a smaller municipality with about 2,100 year-round residents. But the population swells with the arrival of the summer residents, not to mention all the tourists flocking to Mount Desert Island, also home to Bar Harbor, Southwest Harbor and Tremont.

And let’s not forget Acadia National Park, which flirts with nearly four million visitors annually and is the state’s largest tourist attraction.

Mount Desert’s operating budget is reflective of its prime tourism and real estate location, coming in at \$26.57 million for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Not surprisingly, the town has three full-time employees in its finance department. According to Finance Director Wyler, the key to their success when it comes to the annual audit is preparation.

Throughout the year, the department compiles its documentation for the auditor, James W. Wadman, CPA. Files are scanned and saved electronically, which is the most efficient way to get them to the auditor, Wyler said.

Because of that, the auditor does not do a field visit because everything is available electronically, she said.

“We have a lot of complexity in our town,” Wyler said. She pointed to the marina and other financial sources. “We have a substantial investment portfolio.”

A couple of times Wyler used the word terrifying to describe the audit process, citing the “insane time constraint” and the complexity of the town’s finances. People, she said, think audits are simple and straightforward, but they are not.

And it all has to be done by town meeting, she said, which is usually in early May. The town’s fiscal year runs July to June, and the books for that year generally close sometime in October or November, at least three months into the new fiscal year.

She said items can still be found that need to be adjusted and said they are still discovering variances in 2024 even though the auditor has the audit. “Variances, they happen,” she said. “The timing of the discovery makes every difference.”

Adjusting journal entries is an involved process and must be done, Wyler said, adding it is crucial to make sure that every year variances are decreasing, or you are not repeating the same mistake over and over.

Many municipal employees wear more than one hat. Wyler does, too, serving as both finance director and treasurer. That juggling act of numerous responsibilities increases the pressure on municipal employees in small municipalities, she said, and “it is an insane amount of duties.”

Another strain on a municipality is the dearth of municipal auditors in Maine. “The pool of auditors is getting smaller and smaller each year,” Wyler said. “Nobody’s going into auditing.”

Wyler, who has been Mount Desert’s finance director for about 15 months, has some thoughts on why so few people are pursuing careers in governmental audit.

While she was in school in Wisconsin and Texas, she saw the Big 4—national accounting firms Deloitte, Ernst & Young, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler—repeatedly sponsor events and give a certain level of financial help and benefits to the students and programs at those schools.

It is how businesses recruit new employees, of course.

Governmental agencies don’t have the money to sponsor this way, Wyler said.

Governmental accounting is a whole other kind of accounting, too, she said. It isn’t exciting and is a lot more complex. She added that governmental accounting is not an entry-level class in college, either, as it tends to throw out a number of regular accounting rules learned in the entry-level courses and turns it all on its head.

On top of all that, she said, when you are auditing governmental entities, you are dealing with taxpayer money, which brings a different kind of pressure.

There also is a stereotype that government and municipalities are slow to enact change. Wyler recounted her own accounting internship and said that the work was unwieldy because it was mostly paper based. There was an unwillingness to change, which is another layer of influence on what avenue a would-be accountant might pursue for a career.

It’s not very glamorous being an auditor, Wyler said. 🏔️

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Maine Municipal Association

# 2025 MUNICIPAL TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

## Date:

Wednesday,  
May 14, 2025

## Location:

Jewett Hall,  
University of Maine  
at Augusta

## Registration Rates:

MMA Member:  
\$100.00;

Non-Member:  
\$200.00

## Leveraging AI for Towns & Cities

Artificial intelligence (AI) presents so many opportunities to do the work of municipal government more efficiently and effectively—yet it also presents challenges and potential risks with its use. MMA’s Municipal Technology Conference will dive into the topic and share perspectives and expertise related to harnessing the power of AI; evaluating AI solutions in procurement and purchasing; developing and implementing AI policies and practices; using AI tools safely and productively; crafting an AI strategy; and navigating potential risks. This conference will empower municipal officials of all stripes to embrace innovation through the use of AI thoughtfully and responsibly.

## Agenda

8:00 – 9:00 a.m.

Registration and Breakfast

9:00 – 10:30 a.m.

Welcome and Keynote Speaker

Welcome from Brenda McAleer, Associate Provost and Dean of the College of Professional Studies, University of Maine at Augusta

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Cassandra Madison,  
Chief Operating Officer, Center for Public Sector AI**

**Beyond the Hype: Harnessing the Power of AI to Build  
Faster, Smarter, and More Responsive Local Government**

Artificial intelligence is already transforming how governments serve their communities. From streamlining operations to improving public engagement, AI has the power to make local government more efficient, effective, and responsive. But to harness its potential, local leaders must understand both the technology and its impact. This keynote demystifies AI, explores real-world applications for municipalities, and provides a roadmap for thoughtful adoption. Whether you’re a town manager, finance director, IT leader, or elected official, this session will help you build the knowledge and tools to explore AI safely and effectively.

*(This session offers 1.50 MTCMA Certification Credits in ONE of the following categories: Leadership, Legal, HR or Finance)*

10:30 – 10:45 a.m.

Mornina Break and Visit with Sponsors & Exhibitors

Conference details and registration can be accessed at <https://www.memun.org/Training/Conferences-Conventions/Technology>



10:45 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. **Concurrent Sessions #1**

**AI Procurement Playbook: 10 Questions Every Government Should Ask**

AI solutions promise to make government more efficient and effective—but how can governments separate real value from vendor hype? This workshop provides a practical guide to AI procurement, helping local government leaders ask the right questions before investing in AI technologies. This session will equip attendees with the tools to evaluate vendor claims, assess risks, ensure ethical and transparent implementation, and align AI purchases with agency goals. Whether you're in IT, procurement, or leadership, this workshop will help you make informed, strategic AI decisions.

**Cassandra Madison**, Chief Operating Officer, Center for Public Sector AI

*(This session offers 1.50 MTCMA Certification Credits in ONE of the following categories: Leadership, Finance)*

**Shaping Responsible AI Policies for Your Organization**

This workshop is designed to help organizations create clear and effective AI policies and teach employees how to handle the technology in a responsible way. You will learn about the key components of strong AI policies through the use of real examples and important events from the past. We will look at AI related case studies and ethical questions to help everyone understand how to manage AI carefully and train employees to use AI thoughtfully. Whether you want to build a basic AI policy or improve your own understanding, this workshop will provide helpful tips and tools for success.

**Brian McDonald**, Director of IT & Administration, Maine Municipal Association

*(This session offers 1.25 MTCMA Certification Credits in ONE of the following categories: Leadership, Legal or HR)*

12:15 – 1:00 p.m.

**Lunch and Networking**

1:00 – 1:30 p.m.

**Sponsor & Exhibitor Break / Sponsor Demos & Presentations**

1:30 – 3:00 p.m.

**Concurrent Sessions #2**

**Using Generative AI Safely and Productively in the Workplace**

This session explores how to harness generative AI in the workplace. While ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, or Google Gemini are not designed to take the place of humans—yet—they can be truly invaluable assistants,

sounding boards, and editors for any number of tasks. Using real-world examples from a municipal workplace, Kyle will walk attendees through how to best utilize generative AI, and how to be safe while doing so.

**Kyle Hadyniak**, Director of IT and Communications, Town of Gray

*(This session offers 1.50 MTCMA Certification Credits in ONE of the following categories: Legal, Finance)*

### **From Buzzword to Blueprint: Crafting Your Municipality's AI Strategy**

AI is everywhere—but what does it really mean for local governments? This interactive session cuts through the hype to help municipal leaders think strategically about AI. We'll break down the key components of an AI strategy, explore real-world examples, and tackle the big questions: Where do we start? What should we be thinking about? And how do we ensure AI serves our communities effectively? Whether you're AI-curious or already experimenting, you'll leave with practical steps to start shaping an AI approach that makes sense for your municipality.

**Lena Geraghty**, Founder and Principal, Data Spark Consulting

*(This session offers 1.50 MTCMA Certification Credits in ONE of the following categories: Leadership, Legal or Finance)*

3:00 – 3:15 p.m.

**Sponsor & Exhibitor Break**

3:15 – 4:00 p.m.

### **Closing Plenary – AI in Local Government: Navigating the Risks, Maximizing the Benefits**

As local governments explore AI tools and strategies, ethical considerations must be part of the conversation. While concerns like bias, privacy, transparency, and security are widely discussed, other challenges, including copyright and intellectual property, the accountability of AI-generated work, open records requests, and document retention, are just beginning to surface. This session will break down the key risks municipalities need to anticipate, using real-world examples to illustrate both pitfalls and best practices. Participants will gain a broader understanding of AI's ethical implications and walk away with practical considerations for integrating this tool responsibly in their organizations. Like all technology, AI is a tool with both risks and opportunities. Understanding its potential enables municipal leaders to maximize the benefits and better serve their communities.

**Lena Geraghty**, Founder and Principal, Data Spark Consulting

*(This session offers 1.50 MTCMA Certification Credits in ONE of the following categories: Leadership, Legal or Ethics)*

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**FREE AI TRAINING SESSIONS – AVAILABLE NOW.** MMA is pleased to announce its partnership with InnovateUS to provide free, self-paced training on the benefits and potential risks associated with the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools. When used appropriately, AI can help towns and cities implement efficiencies in the delivery of daily tasks, fuel innovation in the provision of services and programs, and improve the ways in which information is shared with the public.

Through this partnership, MMA member communities will have access to two courses:

- **USING GENERATIVE AI AT WORK.** This track consists of modules focused on the ethical implications, risk mitigation, and practical applications of AI in public service work
- **SCALING AI IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.** This track provides participants with the tools necessary to determine when it is most appropriate to use AI tools to achieve intended outcomes, including ensuring data quality.

Both courses include: (1) hands-on activities enabling participants to experience how AI can be used; (2) information and tips from industry experts; and (3) flexible learning options, allowing participants to work through sessions at a pace that is comfortable, accommodates learning styles and supports the work-family-life balance. Participants will receive a certificate once the training is completed.

In addition to the online courses, InnovateUS offers weekly workshops on a variety of topics, including sessions focused on program evaluation and data use. Not only are the workshops free but they are also recorded, enabling municipal officials to review sessions as schedules allow.

For more information about this exciting and free training opportunity, please visit InnovateUS at <https://innovate-us.org/partner/maine-municipal-association>.

## SAVE THE DATE!

MMA 89th Annual Convention  
October 8 & 9 / Cross Insurance Center, Bangor

# Profiles of Service...Abbie Leonard, Rockport Harbormaster

It didn't seem like that was even something that would ever be on the table. How does one even get to become that? It was just always like, oh, that's a cool job.

By Stephanie Bouchard



Abbie Leonard with her children

If Rockport's harbormaster, Abbie Leonard, were as superstitious as sailors of old were, she would have walked away from her new job within her first summer season.

A "trifecta of interesting things," Leonard said, began a week before she officially took on the role of harbormaster. On the day she signed her employment agreement in May 2008, a man drowned in Rockport Harbor when his dinghy capsized in waters that were still brutally cold.

While the tragedy gave her pause, she forged ahead into her new role. A few short weeks later, though, another tragedy: Flames were shooting out of the cabin house of a lobster boat in the harbor.

"There was a pretty strong southerly breeze blowing the boat into the harbor where Rockport Marine builds some of the most premier wooden boats in the world," Leonard said, "and here's this Molotov cocktail that's just kind of floating towards all of these beautiful boats and the fuel dock."

Acting fast, Leonard called 911 to get the fire department on-scene and rushed out to her 23-foot Pacific aluminum patrol boat. She picked up a firefighter who arrived at the harbor before the rest of the truck crew did, and the two of them went out toward the burning boats. By then, the fire had spread to a couple of other boats that the flaming lobster boat had bumped up against.

Leonard and her firefighter crewmate were able to douse

the fires on the other boats quickly then turned all their attention to the lobster boat, still drifting toward the fuel dock. Leonard nudged the bow of her patrol boat right up to the back of the lobster boat and threw her anchor onto the burning boat to keep it from drifting.

With the lobster boat still burning and now chained to her patrol boat by her 10-foot anchor, Leonard called the Coast Guard for assistance. "I called them and they said, 'Well, we have no firefighting capabilities,' and I was like, 'You what?'" Leonard said. "That was not what I was expecting to hear."

When the Coast Guard arrived on-scene, they did so with a cutter that had what amounted to a garden hose and an inflatable vessel with a 50-caliber machine gun on its bow. "I'm like, 'What are you going to do with that? That's not helpful.'"

Luckily, the *Spirit of Bermuda*, a sail training vessel, was anchored in the outer harbor and it had a submersible water pump that they used to knock the flames down enough that Leonard could tow the boat to shore.

Eschewing a suggestion that she tow the still-burning boat to the brand-new composite docks, she proved her boat driving skills with everyone watching by threading through a harbor tight with moorings at the height of the summer season to the nearby beach, where the fire department doused the lobster boat with flame retardant foam.

"So, that was death and fire," Leonard said. People around her began joking with her, "What's next – pestilence?" And yes, sort of. Not two days after the boat fire, a sailboat out in the harbor was swarmed with bees. "It was like, all right, we need to get the harbor smudged or something," Leonard said.

Leonard's introduction to being Rockport's harbormaster was intense, but she didn't flee. This summer, she'll have been in a job for 17 years that she didn't even consider as a career option when she was a kid growing up in Camden. Despite familiarity with harbormasters due to sailing regularly with her family and directing the sailing program at the Camden Yacht Club, choosing to be a harbormaster as a career wasn't something on her radar.

"It didn't seem like that was even something that would ever be on the table," she said. "How does one even get to

become that? And there's not a lot of turnover, so it never was really like, okay, that is something I can strive for as a career. It was just always like, oh, that's a cool job."

Leonard studied journalism in college but gained most of her work experience on waterfronts. In addition to directing the sailing program and teaching sailing in Camden, she managed a marina in the Bahamas, was the dock master at the city marina in Charleston, South Carolina, and did some private captaining.

It was her father who saw the job posting for the harbor-master in Rockport. He told Leonard that if she didn't put her resume in for the job, he'd do it for her. She arrived at the town office literally at the last minute of the last day resumes were being accepted, and all through the three interviews that followed she figured going through the process was just going to end up a good learning experience. And then she got the job.

Besides having the best office space anywhere—the harbor-master's building sits on the waterfront where Leonard can see the lighthouse on Indian Island, which flanks the east-side entrance to the harbor—the sheer variety of her days is one of the things she enjoys most about her role.

From literally putting out fires to managing boat traffic during the busy summer season to dealing with sinking boats or boats on the rocks to working with Marine Mammals of Maine to rescue baby seals to hauling off dead sea animals that have washed ashore (that's "not fun,"

she notes) to responding to storms and planning for future storm resiliency to being a community event creator and organizer—requires Leonard to use a broad set of skills.

"Our harbor is a really unique area because it does have a wide range of users," said Jon Duke, Rockport's town manager.

The harbor is home to boatbuilders and fishermen, has a park and beach where locals and visitors alike walk their dogs, picnic with their families, and attend entertainment events, and also where moorings and docks are available to those with sailboats, motorboats, and multimillion dollar yachts.

Given this variety, Duke said, it's important that the person at the center of all that activity on the waterfront—the harbor-master—"be able to work with people from all dif-



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ferent stripes,” he said. “And that’s why she’s so perfect in that role because she does; she can connect with anybody.”

Duke and Leonard have known each other since their elementary school days, Duke said. “Abbie was a phenomenal athlete in school, great at everything, and her personality was always one that everybody was friendly with her. She was always so welcoming, got along with everyone,” he said. “In terms of who she was and how she related to people, all the skills that I knew when she was in fourth grade, she applies now on a daily basis.”

“Everyone knows her. Everyone likes her. Everyone wants to be around her,” Duke added. “She is somebody who’s great for the culture of wherever you are.”

“I think she is a real treasure of this town,” said Peter Ralston, who works with Leonard as a member of the town’s harbor committee.

Ralston is well-known as a photographer of Maine’s coasts and harbors and as the cofounder of the Island Institute, a Rockland-based nonprofit dedicated to working with and advocating for coastal and island communities.

“I’ve been in an awful lot of harbors here and worked with or gotten to know a serious number of harbor masters over 40 years,” he said. “We have one of the absolute, drop-dead best here in Rockport.”

“When storms blow in, I’ve seen her out there,” Ralston

continued, “putting her physical being in jeopardy to respond to crisis situations. I’ve seen her talk down—I mean calm and level out—irate people—fishermen to billionaire, Yachty types. I have seen her work really thoughtfully within a budget. I’ve seen her go beyond the call of duty, if you will.”

Some of the items Leonard has spearheaded that are outside her harbor master job description include helping to launch a donut festival and a free concert series in the summer, and what started off as a Christmas-related community event in the harbor park that has morphed into a New Year’s Eve extravaganza complete with fireworks, food trucks and streets lined with luminaries.

“I don’t think a lot of harbor masters will curate that kind of stuff,” Leonard said, “but I really feel strongly about that community involvement piece.”

When she’s thinking up ways to make the harbor a place for everybody, it’s a calculated decision, she said, because she’s seen many places like Rockport commercialize their harbors at the expense of a hunk of the local community.

“It’s really a tough balance not to exploit, because you could be like, ‘This is a million-dollar view, let’s capitalize on it.’ But no; let everybody be able to enjoy it,” she said. “I feel really strongly about accessibility and making sure that people can access the water. They don’t have to have an expensive boat to do that. They can get in a skiff, they can get in a kayak, they can get in a canoe, and they can go out and experience what (has become) my happy place and peaceful spot.” 

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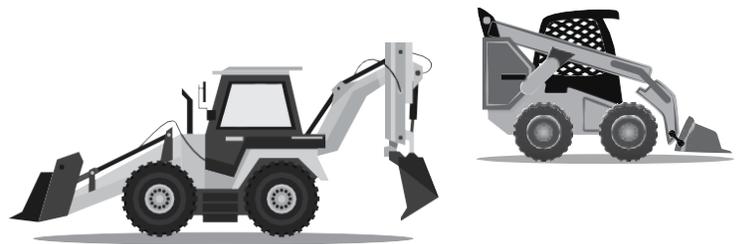
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Veteran Franklin County Jail Administrator **Douglas Blauvelt** of Farmington resigned his position effective February 24. County commissioners plan to develop a new job description before posting the opening both internally and externally. Blauvelt joined the county in 2003 as a corrections officer at the Franklin County Jail. He was promoted to sergeant and then to assistant jail administrator in 2008. He was named jail manager in 2009.

Presque Isle City Manager **Tyler Brown** resigned in March, just over a year after being hired, citing challenges of working in the public sector. He is a former Delta Air Lines operations manager who resigned for the first time just weeks after being hired but returned to the job to give it another try.

**Nick Cliche**, Portland parks and recreation director since 2022, has accepted the post of Scarborough Community Services director. He joined the Portland department as an after-school coordinator and worked in various positions until promoted to director after 18 years. Cliche was one of 16 applicants for the job and one of six who were interviewed. He lived for many years in Portland before moving to Scarborough five years ago.



Tim Goff

Fort Fairfield Town Manager **Tim Goff** has resigned his post after 18 months on the job, effective March 28. He has accepted the public relations job for Cary Medical Center in Caribou. The new job returns Goff to his work in marketing and public relations. Goff was hired as town manager in October 2023, and helped the town climb

out of significant debt following allegations of financial mismanagement.

The Roxbury Selectboard in March named **Renee Hodsdon** as town administrator. Hodsdon has worked as tax collector, treasurer and deputy town clerk since 2008. At the 2024 town meeting, voters changed the position to town administrator, effective after the 2025 town meeting.



Michael Johnson

**Michael Johnson** has been named chief of emergency medical services for the town of Whitefield. He succeeds **Julie Cowles**, who resigned in late January. Johnson helped Cowles oversee EMT services for 18 months before succeeding her. Johnson is a California native who graduated from California State University in Los Angeles in 2001 with a bachelor's degree in philosophy. He brings 20 years of experience in emergency medicine to the job. He worked for the National Park Service from 2004 to 2013 working on a trail crew and decided he should know emergency medicine in case of an emergency on the trails. On the advice of a friend in the park service, Johnson and



Jason Moffitt

his wife moved to Maine in 2010, establishing a commercial farm, Around the Well Farm, where they raise cows, chickens, pigs, sheep and sell hay.

**Jason Moffitt**, who retired in February as Brewer public safety director after 25 years with the department, has been named assistant city manager, effective April 1. In his new



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position, Moffitt will work with city departments to develop more efficient operations, among other goals. Moffitt was hired by the department in 2000 and was named chief in 2016. Deputy Police Chief **Christopher Martin**, who joined the department as a patrol officer in 1994, has been promoted to chief. Meanwhile, Capt. **Anthony Pinette** has been promoted to deputy chief.



John Smith



Donna Culbertson

Thomaston Public Works operator **John Smith** retired in February after serving the town for 30 years. Town officials said Smith was a determined and hard worker. Meanwhile, Tax Collector **Donna Culbertson** retired in December after 13 years with the town. Over her career, she worked as executive secretary, motor vehicle agent and recording secretary for the selectboard and planning board. 🌲

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# NEWS FROM AROUND THE STATE

## STATEWIDE

The value of Maine's statewide fishery landings increased by \$74 million in 2024 to \$710 million, up from \$635 million in 2023, according to new state data. Most of the increase was seen in the lobster industry, which accounted for \$46 million of the increased income. However, lobster landings decreased by 11 million pounds across the state, from 97 million pounds in 2023 to 86 million in 2024. It was the lowest catch since 2009, when 81 million pounds of lobster were landed in Maine. The reduction was blamed on warming Gulf of Maine water, which is forcing lobster to stray farther toward Canada, and major damage to working waterfronts after a vicious storm in January 2024, which reduced access to waterfronts. Meanwhile, many of Maine's other fisheries saw a decline in harvests, including scallops, which decreased by \$900,000 in 2024, and elvers, which dropped by \$7.3 million to \$12.2 million. The second most valuable fishery, softshell clams, remained steady at about \$15.4 million.

## AUBURN

The planning board in March approved a 160-unit housing development that will feature 30 quadplexes and 20 duplexes that will be built in three phases. A number of conditions were placed on the project, including year-round vegetative screening, and completion of all infrastructure improvements before the housing can be connected to the city's sewer district lines. The project will be the second constructed in Auburn by the Pennsylvania-based A.R. Building Co.

## FALMOUTH

The town council in late February passed a preliminary pesticide and fertilizer ordinance that will augment an ordinance passed in 2020, which required licensed applicators of commercial pesticide and fertilizer to register annually with the town. The new ordinance more strictly regulates chemicals that can be used in Falmouth and where they can be applied. Fertilizer containing nitrogen and phosphorus can only be applied to lawns twice a year and in limited quantities. The new ordinance bans pesticide and fertilizer use within 75 feet of any body of water and within 20 feet of storm drains. The ordinance prohibits pesticide and fertilizer use from December 1 to March 31. People who violate the ordinance could be subjected to a \$250 fine for the first violation and up to \$1,000 for each subsequent violation.

## MOSCOW

Residents voted 35-10 during a March 21 annual town meeting to rescind an ordinance that prohibited solar farms. The vote opens the way for a proposed farm at a vacant military radar site and abolishes an ordinance passed in a special town meeting in November 2023 to ban all commercial solar development in the town of 490. Developers, including Cianbro Corp of Pittsfield, plan to build a 60-megawatt solar farm in remote Caratunk and Moscow. The area is already the site of a wind turbine project, which is in the commissioning phase. The proposed Radar Solar project would constitute 105 acres in Caratunk and 97 acres in Moscow. The project is expected to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 57,000 tons a year and generate \$180,000 in tax revenue in Caratunk and \$150,000 in Moscow beginning in 2028.

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**PORTLAND**

The city council in March voted 8-1 in favor of establishing a municipal ethics commission, two years after voters approved it. There were several workshops, more than 25 proposed amendments and multiple public forums while the council worked to approve the commission, which will oversee elected and appointed officials in Maine's largest community. The new commission will be tasked with establishing a code of ethics, reviewable every three years. The commission was established by making changes to the city charter. It will be empowered to render written decisions over alleged code violations, as well as issuing advisory opinions regarding questions about the city charter, the code of ethics and city council rules. All appointed officials, such as planning board members, will be covered by the commission's code of ethics. The final step in the commission's creation requires the council to appoint members of the new panel.

**ROCKLAND**

Free trees will be distributed to any resident who wants one planted in front of their homes thanks to a donation from Trees Unlimited of Rockport. The trees will provide shade and other benefits to homes on the sunny side of residential streets. Property owners will be asked to water the trees for two years, until roots are established. In addition to cooling the air and pavement, the trees will create habitat for birds and bees, help reduce stormwater runoff and improve air and water quality, officials said.

**SOMERVILLE**

The selectboard in February rescinded a recently adopted conflict resolution policy after consulting with Maine Municipal Association's Legal Services Department. The policy was recommended by a board member who previously taught at a private school and would have named that board member the mediator in any personnel conflicts. It was rescinded on February 19 by unanimous vote.

**STEUBEN**

Voters in March approved an ordinance that puts the kibosh on a company's plan to build a space manufacturing facility and to launch commercial rockets from the Washington County town of 1,100. Maine rocket company bluShift Aerospace said it would look for an alternate community that would accept its operations. An effort to win over Jonesport residents also recently failed. 🏔️



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## LEAVE LAW “ALPHABET SOUP”

We’ve received questions lately from municipal employers confused about the numerous employee leave laws that now exist. Who can blame them! Most of the acronyms sound maddeningly similar. So, here’s a brief run-down of commonly encountered leave laws.

**FMLA: Family Medical Leave Act** (29 U.S.C. §§ 2601-2654) is a federal law that applies to all municipalities, but only those with 50 or more employees working within a 75-mile radius have eligible employees. The law generally provides up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave within a 12-month period for, among other reasons, the birth, adoption or foster care placement of an employee’s child; for an employee’s or a family member’s serious illness; for exigencies involving a family member’s military duty; and up to 26 weeks of leave to care for a covered servicemember. See [www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla](http://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla).

**MFMLA: Maine Family Medical Leave Act** (26 M.R.S. §§ 843-849-A) is Maine’s version of the federal FMLA; it applies to municipal employers with 25 or more employees. Eligible employees are allowed up to 10 weeks unpaid leave in any two-year period for similar reasons as the federal FMLA – although there are significant differences between the laws (e.g., the MFMLA covers employee organ transplants, domestic partners, etc.).

**PFMLA: Paid Family Medical Leave Act** (26 M.R.S. §§ 850-A-850-R) is a new Maine law applicable to all Maine employers that will provide up to 12 weeks of paid employee leave within a 12-month period beginning May 1, 2026, for reasons including family leave, medical leave, leave to deal with a family member’s military deployment and leave to stay safe after abuse or violence. Payroll deductions and/or payment of premiums to the state were required beginning January 1, 2025. Leave benefits will be administered and approved by the state. See [www.maine.gov/paidleave/](http://www.maine.gov/paidleave/).

**EPL: Earned Paid Leave** (26 M.R.S. § 637) is a Maine law enacted in 2021; it requires employers with more than 10 employees to provide one hour of paid time off for every 40 hours an employee works up to 40 hours of accrued paid time off in a year. See [www.maine.gov/labor/labor\\_laws/earnedpaidleave/](http://www.maine.gov/labor/labor_laws/earnedpaidleave/).

**USERRA: Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Act** (38 U.S.C. §§ 4301-4355) is a federal law covering all employers. It requires reemployment of employees absent from work due to voluntary or involuntary service in the uniformed services, including active duty, active duty for training, inactive duty training, National Guard duty, National Guard or Reserve funeral honors duty, and some

duty under the National Disaster Medical System for public health emergencies. See [www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/userra](http://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/userra).

**Note:** Each of the laws listed above contains unique eligibility standards and its own definition of covered “employee” and “employer.” Most also include employee benefit and reemployment protections and prohibit discrimination or retaliation against employees taking leave. Some leaves may apply concurrently to covered employees and with other leaves such as leave under workers’ compensation laws, the Americans with Disabilities Act, or employer sponsored disability or medical leaves. (By S.F.P.)

## POLITICKING @ TOWN MEETING

*(Reprinted and updated from the April 2015 Legal Notes)*

**Question:** We know political activities are prohibited at secret ballot elections, but what about at traditional “open” town meetings?

**Answer:** That’s right – political campaigning, including asking for votes, displaying or distributing campaign materials, or otherwise attempting to influence voters, is strictly prohibited during secret ballot elections, both at the voting place and on public property within 250 feet of the entrance. See 21-A M.R.S. § 682. A similar rule applies during the time prior to a secret ballot election when the clerk’s office is open and may be conducting absentee voting. See 21-A M.R.S. § 753-B(8).

However, there is no law against any of these activities at a traditional open town meeting, where, in fact, political argument and advocacy are expected. Indeed, town meetings would be pointless if voters were prohibited from trying to persuade others – this is the essence of open debate (think “Freedom of Speech,” Norman Rockwell’s inspiring depiction of a Vermont town meeting).

But the town meeting is not meant to be a free-for-all either. It is a deliberative body, with an agenda (the warrant) and a presiding officer (the moderator) whose role, mostly, is to ensure the orderly conduct of business. While carrying signs, handing out flyers, debating the issues and similar political activity is generally permissible at an open town meeting, the moderator has ample authority to prevent unreasonable interference or disruptions and to preserve order and civility. See 30-A M.R.S. § 2524(3).

For more on conduct of town meetings, see MMA Legal Services’ *Town Meeting & Elections Manual* and *Moderator’s Manual* available in the “Legal” section of MMA’s website ([www.memun.org/legal](http://www.memun.org/legal)). (By R.P.F./S.P.F.)

## "CAPPED" MONEY ARTICLES

(Reprinted as revised from the January 1997 Legal Notes)

In towns operating under the general state laws governing town meetings, the municipal officers generally have the final say on the wording and format of the town's non-school budget appropriation articles (school budget formats are more complicated and are not discussed here) – absent a municipal charter provision to the contrary or a valid citizen petition proposing the article.

The board may draft appropriation articles that are either open-ended or "capped." Generally, open-ended budget articles state no dollar amount in the article, although specific recommendations may appear below the article (e.g., "To see what sum the Town will vote to raise and appropriate for..."). A motion from the floor is required to specify the amount and (usually) the funding source for an open-ended article; voters may approve any dollar amount at all, including an amount greater than the amount recommended.

"Capped" budget articles state a specific dollar amount in the text of the article (e.g., "To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000 for..."). The amount requested within a "capped" article can be reduced by voter amendment but cannot be increased above the stated figure (except for eminent domain damage appropriations, which can be increased).

This means the municipal officers may limit the flexibility of town meeting voters by choosing to draft articles in "capped" form. The board might choose this format for several reasons, such as to prevent the voters from substantially and unexpectedly increasing a budget item, thereby jeopardizing other budget priorities or raising the property tax mill rate. The "capped" format might also occasionally be used to reduce the potential for an intimidating atmosphere at town meeting created by "single-issue" factions of voters seeking major increases in particular budget accounts.

The "capped" format also provides some assurance to a voter who reads the warrant but who cannot attend the meeting or who takes no position on the matters to be voted upon. If that voter is absent, the voter can be assured that those who do attend the town meeting cannot spend more than the amount stated in the capped article.

Overall, use of the "capped" format is not a legal issue, but it may occasionally be a political one, for example if a disappointed faction or individual voter feels (incorrectly) that some legal power has been taken from the town meeting voters.

## Municipal Calendar

**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)).

**MAY** – Municipal officers meet to license innkeepers and tavernkeepers during the month of May or at another time they determine. Notice requirements apply. (30-A M.R.S. § 3812).

**MAY 1** – Any holder of certain life insurance, gift and stored-value property presumed abandoned under 33 M.R.S. § 2091 must file a report covering the 12 months preceding July 1 of the last year to the Administrator of Abandoned Property in the State Treasurer's Office by May 1. (33 M.R.S. § 2093). See State Treasurer website for forms.

**BY MAY 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](mailto:GeneralAssistance.DHHS@maine.gov), or sent to DHHS, General Assistance Unit, #11 SHS, Augusta, ME 04333-0011 (22 M.R.S. § 4311).

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For more on drafting warrant articles, see our *Town Meeting & Elections Manual*, available in the “Legal” section of MMA’s website ([www.memun.org/legal](http://www.memun.org/legal)). (E.P.C/S.F.P.)

## SOME PLANS REQUIRE A SEAL

State law requires certain professionals to sign or seal documents they issue. For example:

- **Licensed architects and landscape architects** are required by law to seal technical submissions prepared by or under their supervision. See 32 M.R.S. § 225.
- **Licensed professional engineers** must stamp the plans, specifications, plats and reports they issue with their seal. See 32 M.R.S. § 1355.
- **Licensed land surveyors** must sign and seal all final documents, including plans, descriptions, reports, maps, plats and other drawings. Moreover, the law expressly prohibits municipal officials “charged with the enforcement of laws, rules, ordinances or regulations” from accepting or approving plans or other documents prepared by a land surveyor that are not sealed and signed by the surveyor under whose charge they were prepared. See 32 M.R.S. § 18226.

Municipal officials reviewing documents issued by the professionals listed above should look for a seal; unsealed submissions are likely preliminary documents not ready for final approval by a municipal board or official.

**Subdivision Plans.** The Municipal Subdivision Law requires subdivision plans to be signed and sealed by a licensed professional land surveyor and expressly prohibits the municipal reviewing authority (commonly a planning board) from accepting or approving a final subdivision plan unless it has been signed and sealed by a professional land surveyor. See 30-A M.R.S. § 4403(3)(D). The signature of an engineer, architect or landscape architect is not sufficient for this purpose unless they are also a licensed land surveyor.

This requirement is important because subdivision plans establish the legal boundaries of lots to be conveyed, and the failure to include the endorsement of a licensed land surveyor could impact real estate titles.

**Recorded plans.** Along the same lines, the law prevents county registries of deeds from accepting any plan for recording unless it is embossed, sealed or both, with the seal of an architect, professional engineer or professional land surveyor and the signature and address of the person who prepared the plan. See 33 M.R.S. § 652. (By S.F.P.) 

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# TRAINING CALENDAR

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
<b>5/14</b>	<b>Wed.</b>	<b>Municipal Technology &amp; Innovation Conference</b>	<b>Augusta - University of Maine Augusta (UMA)</b>	<b>MMA</b>
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
JUNE				
6/3	Tues.	MMTCTA Tax Liens Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MMTCTA
6/5	Thurs.	MCAPWA Highway Congress	Skowhegan - Skowhegan Fairgrounds	MCAPWA
6/5	Thurs.	New Managers Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MMA
<b>6/11</b>	<b>Wed.</b>	<b>MMA Municipal HR &amp; Management Conference</b>	<b>Portland - University of Southern Maine Campus</b>	<b>MMA</b>
6/17 & 18	Tues.-Wed.	MTCCA Athenian Dialogue	Zoom Meeting	MTCCA
6/18	Wed.	MBOIA Northern Chapter Training: Septic/Plumbing	Holden - Town of Holden Highway Garage	MBOIA
6/24	Tues.	MMA Lunch & Learn	Zoom Meeting	MMA
6/24	Tues.	Understanding the Freedom of Access Act	Zoom Webinar	MMA
6/24	Tues.	MFCA Membership Meeting & Luncheon	Bar Harbor - The Bar Harbor Club	MFCA
JULY				
7/8	Tues.	MTCCA Municipal Law Training	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MTCCA
7/10	Thurs.	MBOIA July Membership Meeting & Training	Augusta - MMA	MBOIA
7/22	Tues.	MTCCA Licensing Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MTCCA
7/24	Thurs.	MMTCTA I've Got the Job - What Now? Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MMTCTA
7/29	Tues.	Planning Board/Boards of Appeal	Freeport - Hilton Garden Inn	MMA
AUGUST				
8/5	Tues.	You're the boss - Now what?	Augusta - MMA	MMA
8/5 & 6	Tues.-Wed.	MTCCA New Clerks Training	Orono - Orono Town Hall & Zoom	MTCCA
8/13-15	Wed.-Fri.	MTCMA New England Management Institute	Newry - Sunday River - The Jordan Hotel	MTCMA
8/14	Thurs.	MLGHRA Summer Training	Augusta - MMA & Zoom Webinar Hybrid	MLGHRA
8/19	Tues.	MMA Lunch & Learn	Zoom Meeting	MMA
8/21 & 22	Thurs. - Fri.	MMTCTA Governmental Accounting Workshop	Augusta - MMA	MMTCTA
8/26	Tues.	MTCCA Voter Registration Workshop	Augusta - Augusta Civic Center	MTCCA
8/27	Wed.	MTCCA Title 21A Workshop	Augusta - Augusta Civic Center	MTCCA
8/27 & 28	Wed.-Thur.	MTCCA Athenian Dialogue	Zoom Meeting	MTCCA

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

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