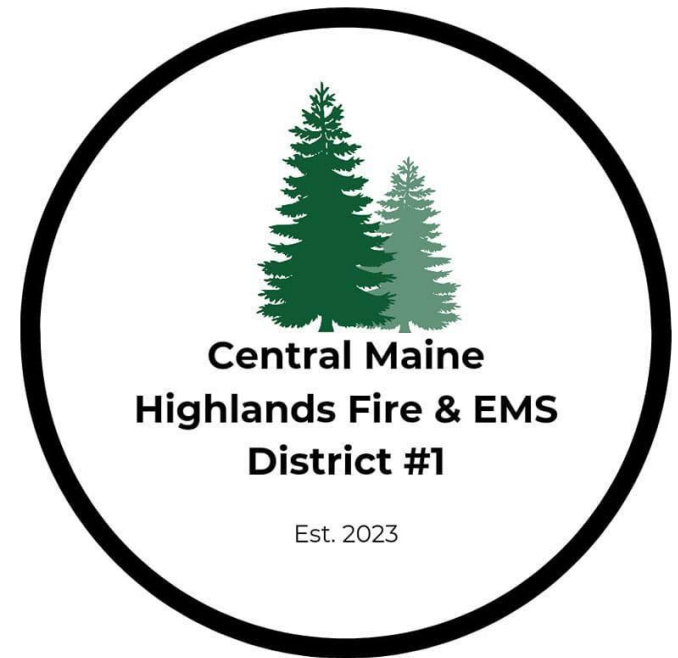


**Public Hearing to
Join
Central Maine
Highlands Fire &
EMS District #1**





Why are we doing this?

- This is an **invaluable and vital service** that the Howland Fire Department offers to our residents as well as the surrounding community townships (and what we would really like to be an ongoing community partnership).
- Many of the expenses for this service have gone up drastically.
 - Fuel costs – most obvious
 - Employee Retention & Acquisition – minimum pay rates for these skills are getting more competitive with a continually shrinking pool of candidates, as well having to compete with relatively close and larger departments with better pay/benefits/schedules.
 - Employee Training – required training hours and new training requirements
 - Equipment costs – replacement - both small equipment (stretchers, monitors) and large equipment (ambulances and fire engines)
 - Vehicle repair costs
- Revenues from the EMS service transfers have dwindled for a multitude of reasons.
 - We have seen a slight move back towards pre-Covid Numbers.



District Coverage Stats



The newly formed district will cover a stated population in covered towns of over 4,500.



The district will protect and ease insurance coverage rates of over 438 million in assessed valuation of all District partner towns.



The District will cover 8 communities and 2 county Unorganized Territories consisting of over 500 sq. miles.

Budget - Expenses & Revenues

The budget is up 35.41% from last year.

Budgeted Expenses:

(2023-2024) 1,920,000 (Ttl Exp thru 5/19 - \$1,556,601 // Expected ~ \$1,835,000)

(2024-2025) 2,600,000 (Per Cap Cost of \$634.15)

Expected revenues:

(2022-2023) \$1,125,211

(2023-2024) \$1,100,000 (Projected \$1,015,934 - Thru end of Apr - \$846,612)

(2024-2025) \$1,100,000

The budget process for the last 2 fiscal cycles has been a collaborative effort on the part of all partner towns. ***These efforts have lead to a better understanding of overall expenses and how they relate to revenue.*** Fiscal responsibility is at the heart of the collaborative efforts for both the partner communities residents as well sustainability of the department and retention of the employees.

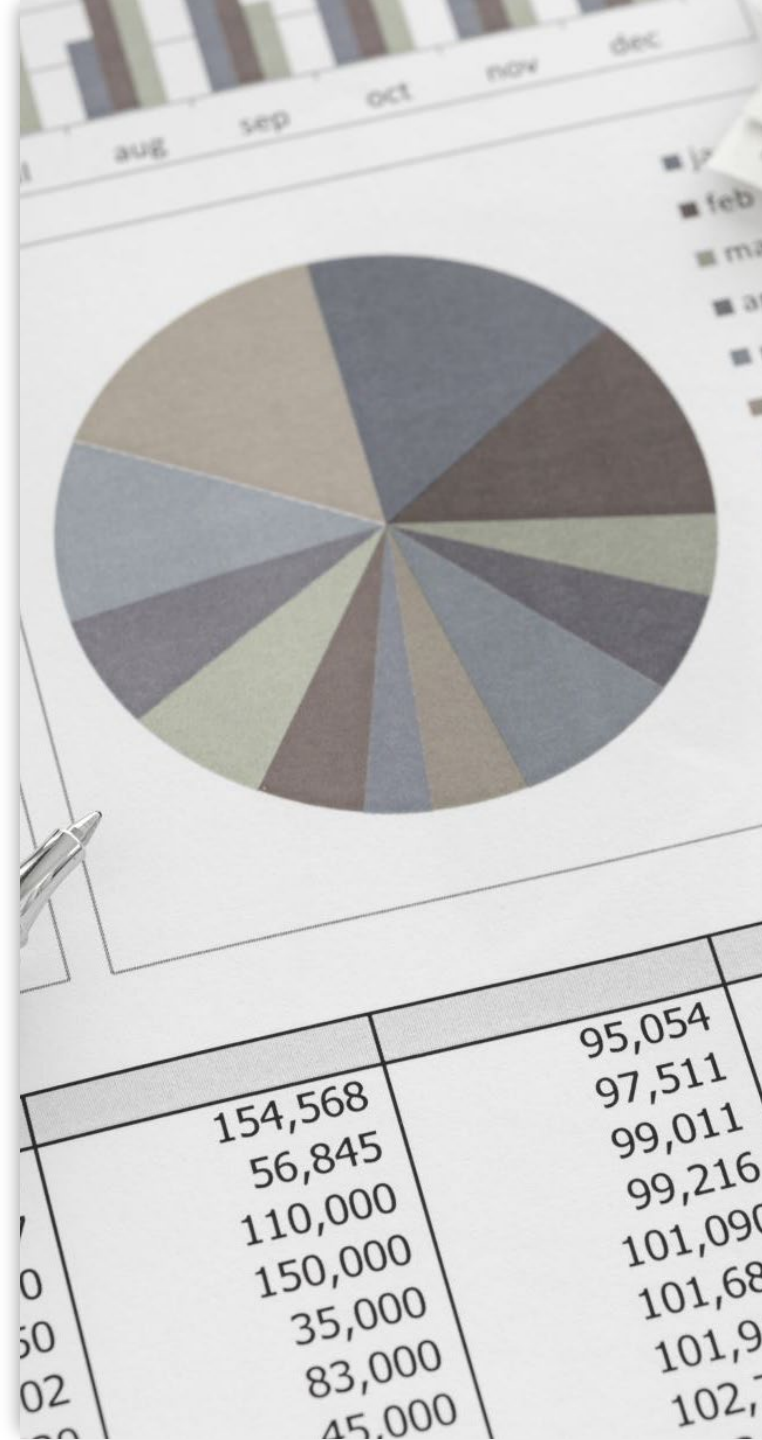
Of the total \$2.6 mil budgeted expenses:

\$1.7 mil is Employee pay + Benefits + insurance + Workers Comp + unemployment insurance which is over 65% of the total cost of the budget 19 full-time & 8 part-time employees.

Employee pay alone rose 19% from the previous budget, necessary for employee retention.

The station is staffed 24/7 all year long!

The highest priority will always be to provide an excellent service to District partner communities!





**Why are we pursuing a regional model?
What was wrong with what we are doing
as an individual town?**

Why did our local department fail?

- Our local department(s) did not fail. We were simply faced with a perfect storm of factors that proved too much to overcome as individual stand-alone departments. The costs associated with operating an organic home-based department have continually crept up over the past decades and our smaller rural tax base has not been able to keep pace.
- The stagnation of reimbursement rates by insurance providers like Medicare, MaineCare, and others has led to a situation where the operational costs of the service now exceed its revenues.
- The Central Maine Highlands region is not immune from a national downward trend of volunteerism.


We cannot provide a sustainable level of suitable fire and EMS coverage without partnering with our neighbors who face the exact same challenges.



**Who will be in charge?
What will stop Howland
from doing anything they
wish -- taking our tax
dollars just to turn around
and prioritize their
residents?**

The District will be structured on a “one Town, one vote” mandate.

- Every District Partner and County Unorganized Territory will have an equal voice at the governing board level. Under the previous contract model, Howland’s first priority was their taxpayers.
- The new district model will prioritize response based strictly on available resources of the District (staffing and equipment).
- The District fully intends to maintain a Mutual Aid agreement with Lincoln, who continues to be a great partner.



What if in the future we, as our own little Town, decide we want to reestablish our previous fire department?

Is there an opt-out clause?

- The Charter and Bylaws will include language as to how a town can withdraw from the District. However, we must be realistic. The start-up costs associated with a properly structured fire department are not what they used to be.
- A new and safe fire truck costs almost ***a million dollars***, a new and safe ambulance costs ***several hundred thousand dollars***, and in absence of a tidal wave of volunteers, the salaries and benefits needed to attract the best qualified and trained firefighters and EMS providers have reached levels that we likely could still not afford on our own.





Are there any other options for us, if we don't want to join the District?

- The board does not see other immediately viable options, and we truly believe this proposed model is best suited to keep our community as safe as possible. The community leaders worked hard with our neighboring Town leaders and we trust that the agreements made will yield equitable coverage for everyone. This is a Win-Win situation.
- Additionally, **we can vote to not join and not have a seat at the decision making table**, but we will still need EMS and Fire service coverage and will have to continue “purchasing” the service from either the newly formed district or from Lincoln, but we will have no “say” in the price/cost of that service other than to vote it up or down, similar to how we do the school budget.





Is this new model going to save us money?

For example, an overall Administrator and assistant will almost certainly be needed, and possibly other positions like a professional grant writer, a certified mechanic, a payroll clerk, or other similar essential skill sets that none of our smaller departments had, although we probably should have, if we could have afforded them.



We believe it will, eventually, though certainly not immediately. As a de facto “corporation”, the District will need to seriously consider a few new positions for the team.



If other municipalities join the team, there is a real potential for reduction of individual Town tax burdens as we progress through future fiscal cycles.



What will happen to our existing fire department building and equipment, if we vote to join the District?

What about the firefighters and EMT's that we currently have on board for our Town?

- The answer is “it depends”. The building and equipment will be professionally evaluated for its worth and viability. Some property may be kept to immediately support the District, some may be sold off with the proceeds steered towards supporting District operations, and some may be of no value at all.
- Decisions as to whether to repurpose equipment or an already existing Town structure will be determined by a data-driven “heat map” analysis (put the resources where data dictates, not nostalgia). As to existing trained firefighting and EMS staff, all are encouraged to meet with the Chief of the new District to transparently discuss continued service.





How will this affect the quality of service that will be provided to my community?

The quality of service provided will always be a top priority for the district. **We are stakeholders -- we all want quality and affordable care.**

The district will be made up of a board of individuals who live within the district, thus have a vested interest in making sure that when there's a call for help, it doesn't go unanswered.



State Laws Governing the District

State laws which govern the municipalities to enter into such an agreement are noted:

Title 30-A M.R.S.A. Chapter 153 - law which gives the towns authority to provide for fire prevention, fire extinguishment and emergency services.

Title 30-A M.R.S.A. Section 107 - law which gives the county authority to provide for fire prevention, fire extinguishment and emergency services.

Title 30-A M.R.S.A. Chapter 164 - law which specifically gives the towns & county the ability to enter into an agreement as this to form a fire district.

Finance and Appropriation

Same formula which was used last year will be used for the first two initial fiscal cycles.

- The District charter gives the board the ability to tweak the apportionments but has some circuit breakers so the small towns can't gang up on the larger towns.
- **Currently appropriation is based on a 50% population/50% assessment.**

Mutual Aid (Howland & Lincoln)

Currently Howland has a mutual aid agreement with Lincoln. If we are called for something other than a minor incident, departments start moving towards the call has come in from until called off.

- There are laws in place for minimum firefighters on scene for entry, etc.
- There are laws in place for minimum EMS, EMT, paramedics on scene depending on the severity of event

Bottom line: Mutual Aid with other departments in county – Lincoln, East Millinocket, Greenbush, Milford is Critical.





Mutual Aid (History)

- We are seeing the death of the volunteer EMS/Fire departments in real time before us.
- Volunteer departments – lack of mutual aide
- Couldn't continue to respond to towns with volunteer departments because it "wasn't really mutual".



Last few items of note

Things to keep in mind:

- All towns have to vote to join the district (June 25th).
- All our EMS and Fire crews are Class A crews!





Thank you for attending! Any final questions?

