

## CALAIS COUNCILLORS VOTE (from page 1)

get back to work and open businesses.” Contrary to Sherrard’s assertion, public health experts state that COVID-19 is significantly more lethal than the flu.

“We need to make sure that the rest of the state knows that we are open for business,” stated Sherrard. “Because if it does not happen soon, we’re not going to have anything left. That is worse than the disease itself.”

Mayor Billy Howard stated, “I think we need get open as soon as possible. Anybody who is worried shouldn’t go out.”

Councillor Artie Mingo commented, “Store businesses, recreation businesses, if you can only run at 25% of business, you can’t survive. We’re open for business. We need to let people know that.”

Mayor Howard added, “We’re not going to force anybody” to reopen.

Councillor Mark Carr said, “The state says restaurants can open on Monday [May 18].” However, under the state’s plan hotels and bars are to remain closed statewide until at least June 1. Campgrounds are now being allowed to reopen beginning May 22, while the reopening of gyms, fitness centers and nail salons is being delayed.

In response to the vote, Rep. Will Tuell of East Machias comments, “I guess we will have to deal with the consequences. It will be up to the governor. I don’t see how the town can deal with the federal government. It puts everybody in a bad situation.”

Checking with a random few businesses in town on May 18 found Hardwicke’s Country Store at Ferry Point empty of customers. The Best Stop across the street had already been closed for lack of business. The VIP on North Street had two men working in the garage. While a few calls came in, the next appointments were

being scheduled for May 21. The close-out squeeze at the Olde Boston Shoe Store was offering 50% off deals. The three clerks recognized not everybody was going to wear masks, and they had already arranged for police to remove those who were not.

### Other business

During the April 23 council meeting, the council accepted a \$1,000 grant from Walmart to be used for COVID-19 issues and CARES Act funds of \$33,790 from the federal government.

Motions regarding deferment of economic development loans, sewer bill interest, shared fireworks expenses at the International Festival with St. Stephen and cancellation of voluntary road tolls were approved. At that point the April 23 meeting moved to executive session. There followed mention of the sewer budget, but nothing was decided.

During the May 14 meeting, the council approved the 2018/2019 audit and awarded a bid for the 2020 infrastructure improvement project to Donovan Construction in the amount of \$583,936. The 2020 paving program for Garfield St., Palmer St., McLean St., Plaster Mill, Sawyer Avenue and the city building parking lot, totalling \$203,640, was approved.

The council authorized the public works director to contact the contractors who have solicited the lowest bids on the different components of the salt shed project and to offer the jobs to them.

Mayor Howard appointed Eddie More-side, Michael Sherrard and Mike Ellis to the newly formed Calais Regional Hospital liaison committee.

Councillors voted to accept a grant of \$4,525 from the Maine Health Access Foundation.

## Group to study impact of conserved lands

by Lora Whelan

Back in December 2018 a group of about 25 municipal officials and employees and staff from conservation and other organizations gathered for the annual meeting of the Washington County Council of Governments to discuss issues associated with conserved lands, open space and tree growth programs. The number one concern to percolate to the top of the discussion was the need for policy changes at the state level, in particular when it comes to revenue sharing and the cost shifting that has occurred from state to local municipalities, placing additional financial burdens on communities as land in conservation and other state programs reduces real estate tax collection.

The 2018 meeting was “quite a success,” says Downeast Conservation Network Coordinator Erin Witham. The result was the formation of the Municipal Budgets and Conservation Collaboration, a partnership between researchers, municipal leaders and conservation groups to figure out how the impacts of conserved lands, or lands in programs such as open space, play into the larger picture of town budgets in Downeast Maine.

There were misconceptions floating about on both sides of the issue, explains Jacob van de Sande, Maine Coast Heritage Trust land manager, who also works to support the goals of the collaboration. Witham adds that the partnership identified “a lack of information as the main barrier” to municipalities and conservation groups understanding concerns, common goals and how to move forward. To that end the collaboration is using a two-part approach: gathering data and preparing it in a usable format that promotes decision-making based on fact, not per-

ception; and engaging the wider community on how the information can be used for community-informed solutions with far-reaching benefits.

“Well-planned conservation projects can provide economic benefit to a community, but it can come at the cost of loss in property tax revenue, which has impacted the relationship between conservation organizations and their communities,” explains Witham. “This fall we will be working with Dr. Adam Daignault and one of his [doctoral] students at [the] University of Maine natural resources and economics department to begin the data collection needed to complete this research project.”

The project is configured to answer questions that community members, leaders in municipal government and conservation organizations in Washington County have about the many stresses on municipal budgets, including conservation. Witham adds, “This project is a first-of-its-kind opportunity for conservation organizations and towns to collaborate on solutions to this issue in a comprehensive way.”

For additional information visit <www.downeastconservationnetwork.org>.

## Breast cancer group sets online meeting

The Calais Area Breast Cancer Support Group will meet on Friday, May 22, at 3 p.m. using the Zoom video conferencing platform. This free “gathering” is a comforting and safe environment to find encouragement and hope. The group will discuss the book *Thriving After Cancer* by Lise N. Alschuler. For more information, call Marianne Moore at 454-0501.

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