



FINANCE COMMITTEE
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RECEIVED TOWN CLERK
GRAFTON, MA

Finance Committee
MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, April 11, 2023
6:00PM
Conference Room A
AND
via Zoom

CALL TO ORDER

The Select Board meeting was called to order at 6:00pm by Chair Colleen Roy. The Finance Committee meeting was called to order at 6:02pm by Chair Mark Haddad. In attendance by roll call were Chair Mark Haddad, Vice Chair Greg Marr, Sue Robbins, Dan Cushner, Skip Currier via Zoom, and Nick Rioux via Zoom. Staff in attendance were Town Administrator Evan Brassard, Finance Director Mary Lauria via Zoom, Assistant Town Administrator William Blake, Superintendent James Cummings, and Director of Finance Anita Patel.

JOINT MEETING with Senator Moore, Select Board, and School Committee

➤ **Discuss Chapter 70 Funding**

Mr. Marr presented the graph of Grafton School Funding FY2010-FY2024.

Mr. Haddad explained that the state aid formula does not work for suburban communities. He highlighted that \$47M is being split among 212 school districts with a 0.7% increase for Grafton.

Mr. Marr presented the table of aid and enrollment figures from 2010 and 2024.

Amy Marr of the School Committee spoke about Grafton's established kindergarten and pre-k programs not receiving funding from the new initiative to build those programs.

Sen. Moore stated that he is just starting to meet with communities to discuss state aid and spoke about the history of the formula. He and Mr. Marr discussed the per-pupil aid in recent years.

Ms. Roy asked Sen. Moore if he supported a minimum of \$100 per pupil. Sen. Moore stated that he would like to see \$100 per pupil, but the House and Senate must bargain.

Mr. Haddad noted a portion of revenue from the Fair Share Amendment is required to go toward education. Sen. Moore explained that this revenue is not required to go toward Chapter 70 aid and listed the other ways it may be used for education.

Ms. Robbins asked Sen. Moore why the universities are receiving so much funding. Sen. Moore spoke about increasing salaries and the growth of technical programs which require more equipment. Ms. Robbins expressed her concern about children being left behind.

Mr. Haddad stated that the state aid formula does not work statewide and highlighted the importance of local government in providing the most basic services.

Mr. Cusher spoke about resources shifting from some communities to others under the Student Opportunity Act and the potential for communities to become more homogenous as overrides rise in wealthy communities.

Dr. Cummings stated that he would appreciate Sen. Moore's support for the bill that would help communities with out-of-district tuition costs.

Sen. Moore spoke about the aid that communities receive outside of Chapter 70, such as universal meals and special education funding.

Mr. Marr highlighted that the Chapter 70 formula is based on property values and personal income, but the Town only gets to tax on property values.

Mr. Cusher and Sen. Moore discussed the state of the economy, sources of revenue, and the proposed increase to the estate tax exemption.

Sen. Moore described the timeline of the Senate's budget process and spoke about the frustrations with the Chapter 70 formula.

Andy Jefferson of the Select Board noted the burden that another override by the Town would place on seniors.

Mat Often of the Select Board and Sen. Moore discussed how Chapter 70 is prioritized by the state. Mr. Often appreciated the quality of education that Grafton provides at a low cost per pupil and noted that this makes Grafton a great place to invest in education.

Ms. Marr stated that Grafton is facing a crisis and will not be able to educate students properly 10-15 years from now.

Mr. Often suggested raising the limits on abatements and work off programs to help those who are most heavily impacted by these overrides.

Mr. Haddad, Mr. Often, and Ms. Marr discussed revising the six-year formula prior to 2027.

Sen. Moore asked what the goal is for state aid per pupil. Mr. Haddad stated that Grafton spends \$14,700 per pupil and he would like to see that number move closer to the state average of \$19,000. Mr. Marr stated that Grafton's per-pupil spending increased by \$532 this year, and Mr. Haddad noted that their costs increased by significantly more than that.

Elizabeth Spinney of the School Committee highlighted the importance of investing in education to improve lives.

Sen. Moore agreed to try increasing the per-pupil aid but stated he could not change the formula.

ADJOURN

The Finance Committee meeting was adjourned at 6:56pm by Mr. Haddad.

The Finance Committee's meeting materials are available at: <https://www.grafton-ma.gov/AgendaCenter/Finance-Committee-6>

A recording of this meeting is available at: <https://youtu.be/emcwjWDBZo0>