

**TOWN ADMINISTRATOR
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A Message from the Administrator

The Financial Planning Committee's five-year financial forecast is completed along with a list of suggestions. To no one's surprise, the financial picture will be very challenging over the next several years. The report shows that we spend less money than our peers for the same or better school/municipal services. (Read the full report online.) We have already reduced positions, consolidated services, and streamlined operations.

To the average taxpayer, our constant struggle to make ends meet does not make sense. Taxes rise every year; fees increase, and the town/school continue to cut positions. What is going on?

First, for every new house/family in town with school-age children, we lose money. The average property tax bill is \$4,300 while the cost to educate one student is about \$10,000. If you net out the state aid, it costs about \$5,000 per student. Our school age population has increased the last 15 years by over 3,000 students. While 15 years ago the property tax paid for 70% of the school budget, today it is only 50%. The huge infusion of State Aid over the last 15 years eased the tax burden on the citizens, but when State Aid is reduced, the only option to replace those funds is an override. Relying on State Aid is great when the State provides sufficient funds, but it is quite painful when those funds are reduced due to the poor economy.

Second, municipalities are burdened with outdated laws that drive up the cost of government. The civil service system is one. Adopted in Massachusetts in the 1880's, the intent was to protect workers rights but it's useful purpose has long since passed given Unions and State and Federal laws that protect employees' rights. It should be abolished. That is one of a long list of laws that drive up the cost of government with little public benefit. Change comes slowly to the Commonwealth, so it will take time to make significant progress to eliminate old and outdated laws.

Third. At the local level we need to be more open-minded to "shared services". There are many barriers to looking beyond our boundaries, the least of which is trying to change 350 years of history. We love living in our "Small New England Village", but delivering services on a much larger scale is more efficient and effective. If the communities of the Commonwealth want to thrive, we have to remove our "borders" and think "big".

"Business as usual" is not acceptable. Even in good economic times, we can't sustain ourselves without raising property taxes. The only way to thrive is to be allowed to control our costs by eliminating old laws that drive them up, and regionalizing services.

Please let your voice be heard. Together we can make a difference.

Respectfully,

Jeff Nutting

*There are no gains without pains.
~ Benjamin Franklin*