

GRAFTON COUNTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Administration Building

North Haverhill, NH 03774

May 19, 2025

PRESENT: Reps. Baldwin, Bjelobrk, Bolton, Franz, Oppel, Sellers, Spahr, Stringham, Sykes. Commissioner Piper – via Teams, Commissioner McLeod, Commissioner Hedberg, County Administrator Libby, Assistant County Administrator Elsholz, and Administrative Assistant Norcross.

OTHERS PRESENT: Treasurer Cryans, Rep. McFarlane – via Teams, Sally Brown – via Teams, Tim Egan – via Teams, Register Monahan, Emilie Smith, Paul Varcak, Lorainne Prescott David Rivers, Roy Russell

Rep. Sellers called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Rep. Sellers stated that the first item of business to be completed was the approval of the minutes from the March 24th meeting.

MOTION: Rep. Stringham moved to approve the minutes from the March 24th Executive Committee meeting. Rep. Bjelobrk seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Treasurer Cryans arrived and gave the following Treasurer's Report:

TO: GRAFTON COUNTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
FROM: MICHAEL CRYANS, TREASURER
SUBJECT: TREASURER'S REPORT
DATE: MAY 19, 2025



CURRENT CASH POSITION (as of 04/30/2025)

Grafton County General Fund

Checking Account (ICS @ 4.15%)	\$	1,177,653.28 (Woodsville Guaranty Savings Bank)
Investment Account Money Market (4.36%)	\$	376,653.28 (NH Public Deposit Invest. Pool)
Investment Account (ICS @ 4.25%)	\$	568,169.79 (Mascoma Savings Bank)
Investment Account ICS @ 4.25%	\$	292,803.10 (Bank of NH)
Investment Account (ICS @ 4.41%)	\$	2,598,010.80 (Claremont Savings Bank)
Investment Account (ICS 4.33%)	\$	1,006,186.46 (Franklin Savings Bank) Investment
Investment Acct. (26 Week CDARS 4.50%)	\$	2,501,000.00 (Bar Harbor Bank & Trust)

Grafton County Reserved/Dedicated Accounts

Deeds Surcharge ICS (4.17%)	\$	310,353.80 (Claremont Savings Bank)
Dispatch Capital Reserve ICS (4.17%)	\$	120,785.21 (Claremont Savings Bank)
Nursing Home Capital Reserve (4.25%)	\$	720,292.44 (Camden Bank)

Northway Money Market	\$	58.75 (Camden Bank)
American Rescue Plans Funds (4.25%)	\$	1,670,898.93 (Bank of NH)
NTIA Letter of Credit ICS (4.25%)	\$	4,582,285.54 (Bank of NH)

RECENT TRANSACTIONS of NOTE

- The combined accumulated interest in the current fiscal year (7/1/2024 – 04/30/2025) is \$283,452. We continue to be projected below our anticipated interest revenue of \$450,000 for FY2025.

Re. Oppel asked if the transition of Woodsville Guaranty Savings Bank to Bar Harbor Savings Bank will impact the County. CA Libby explained that the transition will happen in the fall, and that is when they will see if there is any impact. Treasurer Cryans noted that he does not foresee any changes.

Rep. Spahr asked about the letter of credit for the NTIA Grant. CA Libby explained that when the County did the broadband grant, they had to have a cash-secured letter of credit. The County received a \$12 million NTIA grant. There was a \$5 million match, and the County had to have a cash-secured letter of credit for 25% of that match, or \$4.5 million. As they complete percentages of the project, they can decrease that \$4.5 million. She stated that they have yet to start that project, but are supposed to start this week, and she hopes to reduce that line of credit in the coming months.

Rep. Bolton stated that the County partners with local banks, and now two (2) of these banks are becoming Maine banks. CA Libby explained that the County works with any banks with branches in Grafton County.

MOTION: Rep. Baldwin moved to approve the Treasurer's Report. Rep. Franz seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Commissioner McLeod gave the following Commissioner's Report:

Commissioners' Report
May 19, 2025

Nursing Home:

- The nursing home's census is currently 120. Our budgeted census for FY'25 is 116; we have been exceeding that for the last several months. This has allowed us to budget for a higher census in FY'26. We received our preliminary Medicaid rate for July 1st, which is projected to increase by \$5.95. Senate Finance has also removed the 3% rate reduction from the State budget, which is good news for the county.

Department of Corrections:

- The current in-house census is 68, with another 36 out of the facility. We have 23 in pretrial services, 6 in other facilities, and 7 NHSP.

Information Technology:

- We have hired an Information Technology Director. He will begin in early June.

Sheriff's Department:

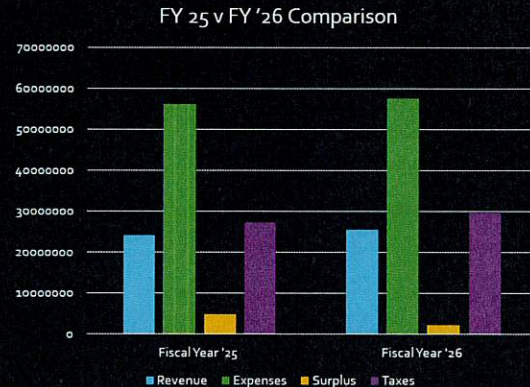
- A majority of the Commissioners agreed to send a letter to Sheriff Myers requesting a meeting with her to continue the discussion regarding the 287 (g) Agreement with ICE. Sheriff Myers has not responded to that request.

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget:

- The Commissioners' Proposed FY '26 Budget is complete. The Commissioners' proposed FY'26 budget is complete. They approved it by a vote of 2 – 1. Budget books have been mailed out.
- The recommendations show an overall budget of \$57,657,147, an increase of 2.55% or \$1,435,097 from fiscal year 2025. The amount to be raised by taxes is \$29,828,722, an increase of 9.14% or \$2,497,558 from fiscal year 2025.
- The most significant contributing factor to the tax increase in fiscal year 2026 is a reduction in the fund balance used to offset taxes by \$2,489,294 to \$2,250,000. The reduction in the "surplus" used to reduce taxes accounts for 9.11% of the 9.14% increase. There are several reasons for this reduction. Over the past several years, decisions have been made to use a higher surplus in order to have no increase or slight decreases in the amount to be raised by taxes. While that worked well in those years, it has set the stage for what we are now experiencing. The past two (2) fiscal years, the overall fund balance position has decreased as expenses have exceeded revenues. Additionally, the County used \$5,000,000 in surplus for the Broadband Middle Mile project. As a result of these factors, the county's overall fund balance reduction leaves less available to offset taxes. The County has a fund balance policy, and the \$2,250,000 budgeted will put the unassigned fund balance at the minimum end of the policy range for the second year.

Fiscal Year '26 Budget Summary

- Revenue increased – 5.91
- Surplus Used decreased – 52.52%
- Expenses increased – 2.55%
- County Taxes increased – 9.14%



- A Public Hearing on the Commissioners' Recommendations will be held on Tuesday, May 20, 2025, @ 6:00 PM in the Administration Building Extension Conference room.
- Executive Committee meetings to discuss the FY '26 budget begin on June 2, 2025. Meetings are scheduled for 6/2/25; 6/6/25; 6/9/25; 6/13/25 and 6/16/25 (if needed).
- The Delegation will meet on Monday, June 23, 2025, @ 9:00 AM to vote on the budget.

Broadband Update:

- eX2, our contractor, is working to submit all pole license applications and can work with utility and telecom companies to complete make-ready work on poles to begin running fiber for our project. We have received final approval from the NTIA grants office on a change from underground to aerial on a one-mile stretch of road in Lyman. eX2's vendor, Auction, should start construction within the next week. We have also received approval on the remaining funds budget, meaning that eX2 can begin to order more materials and pay for make-ready. The project should be moving at full speed now.
- We have had some challenges with the time it has taken for the make-ready work and the skyrocketing price of make-ready. We have had to make some route changes to alleviate some of the cost overruns.
- We continue to work with Hub 66 on the contract. They will be the Internet Service Provider that the County partners with to bring fiber to homes from the Middle Mile. Hub 66 is currently working in many parts of the County, and we are excited to work with them to deliver high-speed, reliable internet to our constituents.

Courthouse Update:

- Lavallee Brensigner Architects (LBA) have completed Task # 2, which was the Space Block & Site Design Diagrams. They have begun work on the Conceptual Design, which

includes floor plans, building elevations, and 3D images. The building is approximately 63,713 square feet. It is roughly 15,000 square feet larger than the existing courthouse.

- As parts of the process have been completed, the building layout site has been approved by the Commissioners.
- After several discussions with the Sheriff, it has been decided that a direct connection to the Jail will not be needed. The Sheriff has indicated that more deputy staff may be needed to transport prisoners from the Department of Corrections
- The final report from LBA with the conceptual design and estimated full costs for construction is due mid-June.
- After receiving the final report, the Commissioners will thoroughly review everything and decide on the next steps. If they want to proceed with design and construction, they will come to the Delegation for a proposed Bond Vote to finance the project. This is expected to occur in the early fall of this year.

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021:

- Grafton County received \$17.4M in ARPA funding. Ninety-two (92) ARPA projects were approved by the Commissioners and Executive Committee. Most of the projects have been completed. All funds were required to be obligated by December 31, 2024. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) defines an obligation as an order for property or services or the creation of contracts, subawards, or other similar transactions that require payment. ARPA regulations require local governments to return unobligated grant funding to the U.S. Department of Treasury beyond the December 2024 end-of-year deadline.
- All of our ARPA funding has been obligated. Eleven (11) open projects have obligations totaling \$1,381,407.33 that will be paid out over the next two (2) years. The deadline to expend ARPA funds is December 31, 2026.
- ARPA spending was allowed in four (4) categories:
 - Public Health
 - Premium Pay
 - Infrastructure (specifically Water, Sewer, & Broadband)
 - Revenue Loss (Local governments can claim up to \$10 million of their ARPA SLFRF grant allocations for revenue replacement)
- Below is the breakdown of Grafton County's obligations:

Response to Public Health Emergency	Premium Pay for Essential Employees	Water, Sewer or Broadband Infrastructure	Revenue Replacement	Total Allocation
\$ 2,565,414.07	\$ 1,158,536.24	\$ 4,058,854.89	\$ 9,676,496.80	\$ 17,459,302.00

Commissioner Meeting Format

- Currently, there is no virtual link for the Commissioners' meetings.
- As of April 22nd, Chairman McLeod decided to remove the virtual link because the COVID-era pandemic is over, and we only offered this during COVID, other than for

elected officials who were not able to be in person. Recent use of the virtual meeting format has resulted in constant complaints about the sound not being audible. She noted that all meetings are open to the public, and a public comment item is on the agenda. Commissioners' meetings are audio recorded, the recording is available upon request, and the recording is clear and provides complete transparency of the meeting. In addition, meeting minutes are posted online.

- As a result of many discussions, the majority of Commissioners passed a motion at their meeting on May 13th as follows: Commissioner Hedberg moved, despite her support for real time online virtual participation, to continue a pause while they are working to develop specific meeting procedures and how they relate to real time virtual meetings and continue work on getting the recordings of the meetings posted online as well as posting an online agenda. This action will be revisited no later than July 8th. Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion. Commissioners Hedberg and McLeod voted in favor. Commissioner Piper voted against the motion. The motion passed 2-1.
- The Commissioners will work with the new IT Director and the Administrative staff to find viable options for viewing Commissioners' meetings. This will include examining available technology and improving the equipment we currently have for streaming meetings.

Rep. Bjelobrk asked how much ARPA funding has been used so far for the courthouse. CA Libby stated that \$280,000 has been used out of ARPA. The Executive Committee approved \$765,000 for the design and development phases. The current contract with the architects is for \$280,000, and the rest of the allocated funds are set aside to use if the project moves forward. If it does not move forward, those funds will have to be returned to the federal government.

9:24 AM Rep. Sykes arrived.

Rep. Oppel asked for clarification regarding the surplus issue. He asked what the total fund balance is going into the next fiscal year. CA Libby explained the county has a policy that they will have an undesignated fund balance of 8-16% of their total expenditures. Until last year, they had good fortune; they were at the higher end of that percentage. Last year, they used \$4,739,000 in surplus to help reduce taxes. They have done this for the last couple of years, and the County has had no or minimal tax increase, but she noted that this has been done by using more surplus. Last year, they had to reduce the amount they used, and by the end of last year, they ended up with a balance of around 6%, below the targeted range.

CA Libby further explained that starting in February, she estimates what surplus they will have available to use for the upcoming budget. She stated that the County will see a reduction in overall fund balance at the end of the fiscal year, which leaves less money to use to reduce the budget. For the FY26 budget, they propose using \$2,250,000 in surplus. She added that if they could use the same \$4.7 million as last year, they would only have a .03% tax increase. Because of that, 9.11% of the 9.14% tax increase is caused by the surplus reduction. This will leave the overall fund balance at 5%. CA Libby explained that revenues over expenses establish the surplus. The current fiscal year was budgeted tightly, and many departments are close to their budgets. She also noted that the Proshare payment two (2) years ago was \$4.1 million, and last

year was \$795,000, which was a tremendous decrease and has accounted for a lot of the surplus issue they have.

Rep. Franz asked if there is a report that outlines how the ARPA funds were allocated and distributed. CA Libby stated that the County submits a quarterly report to the US Treasury that reports how they have used the funds. She also stated that she has a spreadsheet that outlines all of the projects.

Rep. Bjelobrk asked what happens if there is no surplus. CA Libby stated that they do not have a backup plan, and she does not know what that would look like. Rep. Bjelobrk stated that freezing executive salaries or COLAs helps, and asked if there was a plan to do that. CA Libby stated that there has not been a discussion at the Commissioner level regarding freezing executive salaries.

Rep. Oppel stated that he is pleased that they are going to examine virtual meetings, noting that there are simple and inexpensive ways to improve their quality. He thinks it is important to disclose this information to the public from a transparency standpoint.

Rep. Oppel then stated that when they discussed the 287 (g) agreement with the Sheriff in March, he had stated that it was important to get ahead of these issues and explain why they are doing what they are doing and how they are handling it. They now seem to be going in the wrong direction at a time when they are all aware of what has been happening nationally and in our region. He stated that this gives him real concerns, and it appears to be a lack of transparency and willingness to discuss important issues with the public. Commissioner McLeod stated that most would agree that the liability to the County is real, and the liability to the employees who participate in the MOA. The MOA does not have due process. It is about the task force and training for the deputies. It was done without the Commissioners' authorization or discussion beforehand. The due process piece is very important, and the MOA does not state that they are there to ensure due process is included. Rep. Spahr asked who has the ultimate authority to determine if the County participates. CA Libby stated that it is in question. The Sheriff thought she had the authority to make that decision, and there is pending legislation to allow the Sheriff to make that decision without consulting with the Commissioners. She added that the bill has passed the House and Senate.

Commissioner McLeod stated that the Commissioners have control over the funding for the Sheriff's Department, and she would like to see how much it costs to participate in the MOA and not fund that amount. Rep. Spahr asked if it is a unanimous decision or a majority decision for the Commissioners regarding this topic. Commissioner McLeod stated that the majority do not agree with the MOA.

Rep. Bjelobrk stated that Commissioner McLeod wants to cut funds so the Sheriff's Department cannot participate in the MOA. Commissioner McLeod stated that they should not be paying for this with county funds, and she would like to estimate the costs associated with the agreement. She would also like to know how many staff are participating in the training and do not support that funding in the budget. Rep. Sykes stated that further discussion about the budgets will be within the purview of the Executive Committee, and they can have this discussion. The

Commissioners have finalized their budget, and they do not need to rehash this thinking. He said the Executive Committee will discuss this topic during their budget meetings.

Rep. Sellers added that regarding 287g, SB62 has passed the House and Senate; therefore, this is a moot issue. Law enforcement will have to follow what the law states. The Executive Committee should only be concerned about money. Rep. Sellers also indicated that he does not see a difference as to what's online right now for virtual participation. He does not understand what the problem is. By taking away the virtual option, all they are doing is making folks travel to come here, and noted that this is right during the budget meetings, they stopped it.

Commissioner McLeod stated that they did not have regular meetings for public online. This started when someone requested the link to be there. The Commissioners did not have them regularly. She stated it was disruptive; the Commissioners had to devise a public comment policy to conduct their meetings, and people couldn't hear. She also stated that staff were being rudely involved in terms of one specific person. That person needed a lot of help getting online or could not find the link on the website. Commissioner McLeod stated that they do not have staff set up or a meeting process for virtual meetings. She also noted that people were putting comments in the chat that they did not know about. The Commissioners have heard from others that they should set up meeting protocols. Commissioner McLeod stated that what bothers her the most is people saying it is not transparent. The audio is available, and people do not need to travel anywhere to get it. Her job is to make sure they get through the agenda. It is a work session, not a public hearing. It is a public meeting, but people do not participate in it. They have a window for public comment and will work on virtual meetings with the new IT Director. She noted that they also want a public access channel or a YouTube channel. There's nothing anyone will miss.

Commissioner Hedberg asked to address Rep. Sellers' concerns about virtual meetings. She stated that she is a huge supporter of virtual meetings. She made a motion to give them time to implement policies. She wants to do this well before the date she gave, which was based on the new IT Director being on board. She noted that the Commissioners have already finished their portion of the budget, and it will now go to the Executive Committee, which will all be available virtually.

Rep. Sellers asked regarding the design of the new courthouse, which is 63,000 sq ft, if this encompasses everyone, including the Register of Deeds. Commissioner Hedberg explained that they are looking at one (1) design that includes the Register of Deeds. They are continuing to work on the conceptual design. She added that if anyone has been on a tour of the current building, they would have seen insufficient space. This new design is what they need today and for the future, and includes anticipated growth. They were able to pare down the sizing as they worked through the process. They have developed one conceptual design that is now being worked on with the specifics.

MOTION: Rep. Stringham moved to approve the Commissioners' Report. Rep. Baldwin seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

CA Libby gave the following County Administrators Report:

County Administrator's Report

Grafton County Executive Committee Meeting

May 19, 2025

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Financial Reports

- ❖ Cash Management Report – This report shows where the county's funds are invested. This includes operational monies and reserve accounts. County taxes are due on December 17th every year. Our cash position is good. We have money tied up securing our Letter of Credit for the Broadband grant, which impacts our cash flow. We will continue to monitor our cash position. I anticipate we will need to borrow funds in August/September.
- ❖ The Monthly Variance Report compares the budget to actuals on an equal monthly basis and looks at the positive (black) or negative (red) variances. These reports represent ten (10) months complete.

Nursing Home Revenue:

Payer Source	FY 2025 Budget	FY 2025 YTD Actuals
NH Medicaid	69	70
VT Medicaid	20	19
Medicare	3	7
Private Pay	17	17
Veterans	7	9
Total	116	122

- In fiscal year 2025, we budgeted for a census of 116 broken down by the payor sources as listed above. The current census at the nursing home is 120. We are now showing a positive revenue variance. If we can maintain the census at the current level, revenue numbers will continue to improve.
- Proshare/Bed Tax – ProShare is a lump sum payment received in June. Bed Tax is paid quarterly. ProShare is an unknown amount. We will learn what our Proshare payment will be in May. We will not receive the \$2,650,000 that was included in our budget. We received a preliminary estimate about a month ago that indicated the payment will be between \$1.5 and \$1.6 million. Our 3rd quarter bed tax payment (received on 5/16) also suggests that bed tax revenue will come in below projections. We will continue to monitor.
- The Department of Corrections currently shows a slight unfavorable variance of due to the timing of grant payments from the State of NH.

- The farm shows a favorable variance of \$112,706! Several things have contributed to the favorable position. We completed a logging operation this summer/fall that produced \$42,832.74. In addition, our sale of livestock revenues are exceeding estimates, and we were able to sell several acres of standing corn at the end of the season. Currently, the farm is still operating in the black for FY'25.
- The Sheriff's Department shows an unfavorable variance of \$64,432.85. This is due to timing of receipt of certain revenues.
- County Attorney/Victim Witness. These are both grants. We receive \$30,000 in grant funding from the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA), which is used to offset the salary of the prosecutor who does this work in the County Attorney's office. We also received funding from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). This grant reimburses costs associated with our Victim Witness program. It is a direct reimbursement for expenditures. Reimbursements are requested quarterly.
- CA – Circuit Court – The County Attorney's office provides prosecutors who provide Circuit Court services for police departments throughout the county. We had two (2) contracts through April. The contract with the Plymouth Court Jurisdiction Association (PCJA) ended on April 30th. The attorney who was under contract for the PCJA resigned. These contracts reimburse the expenses for these two (2) positions. This shows an unfavorable position due to several payments being overdue.
- Alternative Sentencing is currently showing an unfavorable variance of \$6,769.74. 5,990.04. That is due to the timing of revenue collection.
- The Register of Deeds revenue shows a favorable variance of \$52,553.46.
- Interest income shows an unfavorable variance of \$91,798. This is due to less cash being invested in the fall than anticipated. Tax revenues have been invested, and we will see a rebound in this revenue. Interest rates have decreased somewhat, and we will likely not realize all the projected income. Projections as of now indicate total interest collections for the year will likely be between \$325,000.

Overall revenues appear to be on target for the budget.

Expenses

- Through ten (10) months, the variance report shows several departments with negative variances. This has been the trend this fiscal year. Each month continues to show improvement, and most of the negative variances result from the timing of expenditures. I don't see any trends that are concerning at this point. The bonded debt line shows a negative variance because the only bond payment for the fiscal year was made on July 1st.

Overall, expenditures are trending lower than the budget in most areas. We will continue to monitor that as well.

- ❖ Pro-rated Report: This report looks at the percentage of the year completed and then pro-rates revenues and expenses based on known variations in revenues and expenditures.
 - 83.33% of the fiscal year completed. On the pro-rated report, I factor in the revenue and expenses that are either over or under at this point in the fiscal year. Based on the April reports, we are at 83.39%, above revenue by \$30,606.23. We are at 79.80% or under-expended by \$1,983,921.
- ❖ Over-Expenditure Report—This report shows any over-expended line item at month-end. Per the by-laws of the Grafton County Delegation, the Commissioners have the authority to transfer money within departments to cover department over-expenditures. In addition, they have permission to transfer up to \$5,000 between departments. Anything above \$5,000 requires approval of the Executive Committee.
 - We do have several over-expended accounts. Most will have ample funds within their department budgets to cover the overages. The Tax Anticipation Note Interest and Outside Counsel lines will require transfers greater than \$5,000 into them. A request is attached to cover those accounts.

Appropriation Transfers – CA Libby presented the following letter requesting appropriation transfers:

May 19, 2025

*TO: Grafton County Executive Committee
FROM: Grafton County Commissioners
SUBJECT: Appropriation Transfer Request*

Per the Bylaws adopted by the Grafton County Delegation under the section “Other Duties of the County Delegation,” we, the Grafton County Commissioners, request written authority from the Executive Committee to transfer \$18,682 from the Employee Benefit Payout line (01-8670-008) to the Tax Anticipation Note Interest line (01-9100-920) for the following reason: Interest rates were higher than anticipated when we were required to borrow funds. Also, due to a cash shortfall caused by the lower-than-anticipated ProShare payment in May 2024, we needed to borrow more funds than anticipated. These things led to a much higher than anticipated interest expense for borrowing.

Additionally, the Commissioners request authority to transfer \$50,000 from the Nursing Home LTC Expense line item (01-4190-560) to the Outside Counsel line (01-92120-040) for the following reasons:

We have had two (2) outstanding claims against the county that carried over from previous fiscal years and have been expensive. One is a Right-to-Know lawsuit initiated by a former inmate at the DoC. This case was taken to the Supreme Court. During the fiscal year, the Supreme Court remanded the case to the Superior Court. The case is ongoing, but the County Attorney's office is handling much of the work at the Superior Court level. Therefore, the expenses have tapered off currently.

The other case is the lawsuit against the Commissioners by former Sheriff Jeff Stiegler. This case also went to the NH Supreme Court. The Court recently upheld the Superior Court's decision in favor of the Commissioners. This claim is now closed.

We have also had labor relations expenses as we contracted with an attorney as our lead negotiator for negotiations with the Teamsters Union. It has taken approximately 15 months to get our first agreement in place. The agreement is one (1) year and expires 6/30/25. We will begin negotiations for a new contract soon.

In addition, this year, we have had several legal expenses that we have not had for a while. We incurred legal costs for our tax anticipation note and a legal review of the Architect and engineering contract for the Courthouse project.

There are also expenses that we incur annually for miscellaneous related items for which legal advice is sought.

The Commissioners, therefore, respectfully request your authorization to make these appropriation transfers for the stated purposes.

Rep. Sykes stated that he would like to take up the two (2) requests separately so they can have discussions regarding both.

MOTION: Rep. Stringham moved to transfer \$18,682 from the Employee Benefit Payout line (01-8670-008) to the Tax Anticipation Note Interest line (01-9100-920) Rep. Oppel seconded the motion.

Discussion: Rep. Sykes stated that this requirement for Executive Committee approval for transfers of over \$5,000 is in their bylaws and noted that it is inconsistent throughout county government. He is pleased they have this oversight. Rep. Sellers asked how much they borrowed and if that would be paid off. CA Libby stated that the Tax Anticipation Note was paid off in December. The interest bill was \$26,000, and there was only \$7,500 in the budget. Rep. Franz asked about the impact of taking money from the employee benefit payout line. CA Libby stated that they have a surplus in that line item this year; therefore, there is no impact. This line item is budgeted for employees who terminate their employment in good standing, and they are paid out their earned time bank and a portion of their extended sick leave. It is an estimate each year.

The Committee voted on the motion, and all were in favor.

Rep. Sellers expressed concerns about the \$50,000 transfer to the Outside Counsel line. He asked why they had the Right to Know lawsuit to start with. CA Libby explained that a lot of information was given in the right-to-know request. A piece of what was asked for was significant video footage from within the Department of Corrections. It was objected to for security reasons, and the Superior Court upheld that decision. She stated that the rest of the requested information was given to that person, and the video request was determined inappropriate due to security concerns.

MOTION: Rep. Stringham moved to transfer \$50,000 from the Nursing Home LTC Expense line item (01-4190-560) to the Outside Counsel line (01-92120-040. Rep. Bolton seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

MOTION: Rep. Bolton moved to approve the County Administrator's Report. Rep. Oppel seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Comments from the Delegates

Rep. Sellers stated that concerning the upcoming budget, he would like to see how much it would cost each of their towns if they went with the budget as presented. CA Libby stated that there is no answer to that question currently. The equalized valuations have not been set by DRA yet, noting that those will be done within the next month. Once that is done, she can say what town each town's increase or decrease would be. CA Libby further explained that the amount to be raised by taxes increasing by 9.14% does not translate to any taxpayer or community. There will be towns whose tax bills will go up and towns that will go down. It will depend on their equalized valuation. Once the equalized valuations are done, she will give the representatives the information on the impacts on each community.

Rep. Oppel stated that regardless of what laws are passed by the House and Senate and signed by the Governor, all elected officials have an obligation that does not begin or end on election day. That obligation includes being transparent to the public.

Next Meeting Date

Schedule Budget Meetings Dates: Monday 6/2; Friday 6/6; Monday 6/9; Friday 6/13; Monday 6/16 (if needed) – Delegation Meeting 6/23/25 Budget Vote

Public Comment

Rep. McFarlane stated that it is important that he shares his concerns for his constituents regarding the decision to end remote online access to Commissioner meetings. He has listened to the comments around that and other meetings addressing that topic. He noted that between the April Commissioner meeting, when this was first brought to light, and today, they have heard from the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners that her motivation for making this change is that the COVID pandemic is over. He stated that he is not looking to dispute that, however as he listens to the further comments that have been brought up, when there was pushback, the Chairman has also articulated several other issues including poor audio and confusion. Rep. McFarlane stated that he has attended these meetings online on more than one occasion and has not had that problem. It is not perfect, but it is far better than the audio recordings they are told to rely on. When he listened to the audio recordings from the April meeting, he had to listen to it several times to determine who was talking, but on Teams, he can see who is talking. Rep. McFarlane added that they were told they only had the virtual option for the current year. He stated that while he does not have as long of a presence in Grafton County as some of them, he attended some meetings online before he was elected. He even provided testimony during a meeting on an agenda item. He stated that he heard another reason was that they do not have

appropriate meeting protocols, but those can be put into place at the drop of a hat. Rep. McFarlane stated that the reasons given do not make sense, but after listening to the April recording several times, it is abundantly clear from that recording that the pandemic being over is not the real reason that the virtual meetings were ended. There was discussion in a nonpublic session related to “safety concerns”. He stated that it appears from that recording that Commissioner McLeod believes some regular attendees of those online meetings present a safety concern to her or the County. They must come to an understanding of the real reasons for doing away with virtual meetings. What they are seeing appears to represent a lack of transparency and promotes an appearance of corruption. He expressed concerns that he is hearing excuses rather than the real reasons. If safety is a genuine concern, he struggles to understand how the transparency of a public meeting could be a safety concern.

Dave Rivers, Thornton – D. Rivers stated that from a taxpayer perspective, he knows the county budget is not a big issue. One (1) of the main concerns is that Grafton County is bigger than the State of Rhode Island. Many are interested in getting information on the County and attending the meetings online. The small costs associated with that and the procedures to tighten that up should be given to constituents. D. Rivers then stated that there was a comment on a letter sent to the Sheriff regarding ICE, and that there has been no response. He asked if the public could see that letter. He would like to understand the petition against the Sheriff and noted that it is probably a small number compared to the total number of people in Grafton County. He stated that he is against this petition.

Paul Varcak, Landaff – P. Varcak asked if the budget will be available to the public. CA Libby stated that there is a public hearing on the budget tomorrow night, and she would get him a copy of the budget before he leaves. P. Varcak then stated that the budget for 2025 is \$57.6 million or a 2.5% increase. However, the taxpayer funded \$29.8 million at a 9.4% increase. He asked for an explanation on why there is a 2.5% increase overall, but what the taxpayers are paying is up 9.4%.

Loraine Prescott, Haverhill – L. Prescott stated that the Town of Haverhill had that problem when they first started putting their meetings online. Everything said was a problem, but it is no longer a problem. She stated that you can have a meeting, people can listen to it, and not have the opportunity to interfere with what is going on. She stated that if there is a problem with money, they can go to any high school where they have kids who would be glad to show them how it can be done. There is no excuse for not having this available to the entire public.

Roy Russell, Plymouth – R. Russell stated that he lives in an 1811 house and has spent money to fix it up, and he thinks it is more magnificent than anything he could have built. He stated that he thinks this is a magnificent structure and does not feel it could be constructed as well today. He stated that it has its failings. He stated that they may need to carve out space or add on for a few more meeting rooms. Spending money willy-nilly, he finds infuriating and nonsensical. He asked the Commissioners and Delegation members to sit down and think this through. He does not see the point of spending millions of dollars on a new courthouse when the current one can be fixed, made better, made beautiful, made right, and made good.

Emilie Smith, Lyman – E. Smith, stated that she was a Zoom participant and there were problems listening sometimes, but it would be fine if everyone would speak up. She stated that there is a county-contracted IT company and that she does not think we need an IT Director. The County can save money and use them. E. Smith stated regarding the ICE agreement; the Sheriff has to enforce the law as she swore to follow the constitution. She has to do that, and she does not have any choice. E. Smith reported that one (1) of the Sheriff Deputies has the training. The training is free, and the more training any officer has, the better they will be, no matter what the training is. She stated that the Sheriff's Department will not look for these people; these incidents would happen when they come across them during their daily stops. If they pick that person up and do not enforce those laws, they are not doing their job. E. Smith stated that if the County does not have this MOA, they will have to house this person at Grafton County in the Department of Corrections. If they have the MOA, there are two (2) places they can be immediately transported to. She stated that the County would save money and would not cost money. She stated that she also would like to know where the Sheriff's Department had input to the building plans, and whether the concerns around safety and transport back and forth without a connection were addressed.

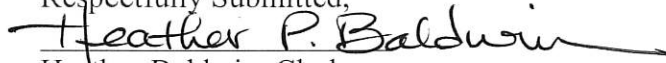
Register Monahan stated that she has served the County for fifteen (15) years. She stated that Rep. Sykes was one of the few here during COVID when this conference room furniture was purchased, and it was stated that he wanted an existing standing Zoom link for meetings. She stated that they have been talking about this for years. On December 5th, she wrote to the Delegation with suggestions about transparency. She emailed the Commissioners stating she wanted standing microphones and an agenda posted online. This was not just COVID, this is an effort to hide transparency. It's not getting any better, and the Delegation ignored her suggestions. She recommended that Commissioner Hedberg put the audio online under the meeting minutes so people do not have to request the audio from staff. There is \$333,000 in staff salaries sitting at this table, and they pay a fortune to SNS. They have one (1) IT staff member here every day and one (1) here every third day. There is no reason this could not have been taken care of. Register Monahan then stated, as far as disrespect to the Sheriff and her integrity being questioned, Register Monahan had texted her, and she is in training all week. She is doing her job. Register Monahan also reported that they have had their first e-recording fraud and forgery. It has been handled with the Sheriff and the Attorney General's Office. The first thing is to tell the citizen to contact law enforcement in that town. Law Enforcement then sends it to the AG, and she sends it to the Attorney General. There is an investigator on this. She stated that Coos, Carroll, and Stafford all have it, and it is organized crime. She highly suggested that people look at their website, which has a free property fraud alert. Someone is alerted via text, phone call, or email if a document comes in with their name on it. She stated that there are a lot of things going on in this County that law enforcement and people in her position cannot share for security reasons. They are trying to protect the public, and the disrespect from this Board of Commissioners is off the charts and always has been.

Rep. Sykes stated that he enters these discussions with a great deal of trepidation. They are important questions that are being asked that deserve their attention. He believes there are a couple of things to do moving forward. Anything they can do to bring more access for the public to their meetings is the way to go, and it sounds like there is a plan moving forward. He stated that the government never works as fast as they would like it to, and sometimes that is a good

thing, as they do not want to make mistakes. He would caution everyone about ascribing motivations to public officials. He does not always agree with everyone and gave Rep. Sellers as an example, but stated that they do not ascribe motivations towards each other as they recognize they are trying to bring the best result as they see it. He wants to work in a society that does that rather than ascribing motivations to others. Rep. Sykes stated that lastly, relating to the question with the Sheriff and her department, they may never agree with how things should go, but they can agree on some items. He stated that they can all agree that the written law should be followed. If there is a warrant, a person should be held on that. As people are asking us to be transparent, there was not a lot of transparency on how this agreement was arrived at. He wished they had done a better job on that. On all of these questions, they have been asked, as the Executive Committee, they have only one tool in their toolbox: budgetary. They will be exercising that authority through their budget meetings and will have more questions for all departments

10:55 AM With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,


Heather Baldwin, Clerk