

TOWN OF IPSWICH  
Select Board Meeting as Electric Light Commissioners  
Monday, January 8, 2024 at 7:00 PM  
Meeting Room A – Town Hall, 25 Green Street

Pursuant to Open Meeting Law M.G.L. Chapter 30A, §§ 18-25, a written notice posted by the Town Clerk and delivered to all Board members, a meeting of the Select Board was held on Monday, January 8, 2024 at Town Hall, 25 Green Street

Select Board members present: Sarah Player (Chair), Linda Alexson (Vice Chair), Michael Dougherty, Charles Surpitski, Carl Nysten

Also Present: Stephen Crane (Town Manager), Catherine Gabriel (Finance Director)

**1. Pledge of Allegiance – S. Player**

**2. Welcome/ Announcements – S. Player**

- The next Select Board meeting is Tuesday, January 16 at 7 PM.
- The ELD Subcommittee will meet on January 10 at 7 PM in the Utility Conference Room.
- Whittier is hosting a building tour on-site on January 13 from 9-11AM.
- Linda thanked the ELD and the DPW for getting the Town up and running quickly last night.
- The Waste Reduction Advisory Committee is meeting on Wednesday, January 10 in Meeting Room C.
- The Essex Pastures Project will not be heard by the ZBA on January 18 because the peer review paperwork is not finished. They will instead hold a meeting on Zoom on Tuesday, January 30 at 7:30 PM.
- There is a Climate Resiliency meeting on Tuesday, January 16 at 5:30 PM.
- There is another storm coming so please make sure fire hydrants and storm drains are clear.
- Last night during the storm the back-up generators didn't turn on in town, they believe because the power pulsed. It was resolved by 8:30 PM but if anyone called 911 during that time it was re-routed to Hamilton. Michael asked if any of the generator systems need to be replaced or fixed. Stephen said he thinks the systems are good, it was an issue with the switch. Michael asked if Town Hall will be available for shelter if needed for the next storm. Stephen said yes. Linda said the Council on Aging was available for a shelter the last time they had a 3-day outage. Charlie said it's important to remember the redundancy in the 911 system, how it automatically transfers to Hamilton so there is no lapse in services.
- Stephen said one of the goals of the Select Board was to look at the boards and committees in Town and to have them meet with the Board to provide updates. Stephen provided a list of boards in Town. Sarah said the ELD Subcommittee is missing. Linda said the Waste Reduction Committee would like to meet in March. Michael asked if this list was supposed to be the boards that we don't have representatives on. Sarah said she thinks the list should be made up of boards we don't hear from much, or haven't heard from in a while. Linda said there are a few on there that she doesn't think are active. Linda said we should also add the Cable Advisory Committee.
- Ken Swenson, Linebrook Road, said the Athletic Field Study Committee voted to disband.

**3. Citizen Queries and Responses – S. Player**

- None

#### **4. Town Staff New Hire Introduction, Finance Director, Catherine Gabriel – S. Player**

Stephen introduced Catherine Gabriel, the new Finance Director for the Town. Catherine started just before Christmas. She is new here but not new to municipal finance and came to us from Topsfield. Sarah Johnson used to work with Catherine and they are keeping Sarah on retainer to help manage the budget. Catherine said she has worked in municipal government for 20 years. She has a Master's in Education and an MBA, and is certified as a Government Finance Official. Michael asked Stephen when they would have the budget book, Stephen said probably the week before the January 22-23 meetings.

#### **5. PUBLIC HEARING: Amendment of Beach Stickers Policy and Fee – S. Player**

Sarah read the legal notice.

*VOTE: Motion to open the Public Hearing, made by Linda, seconded by Charlie. The motion passed unanimously 5-0*

Sarah said this is the second Public Hearing. There is some information in the packet which includes a historical look back of the rates of beach sticker prices and their increases over time. There is also information in the packet about the revenues taken in over the past few years. The Town sells more than 7,000 beach stickers each year. Stephen provided information about costs of maintenance. The boardwalk replacement is about \$250k. They did the parking lot side a few years ago which should be good for another decade or more. The ocean side is often covered in sand so that probably has an additional 5 years. We spend about \$5k per year on labor and materials for repairs and inspections of the boardwalk. Cleaning and grading the parking lot is about \$2k per year. The annual cost for stickers is about \$10k. If we take the idea that Argilla Road is part of what the funds can be spent on, we have done some paving out there which was \$130k. We have been working on the bigger project for Argilla Road to raise it up, and we have spent \$812k on that so far. The Trustees have also contributed an additional \$60k over the last 5 years. There are ongoing annual costs, if we were to do a major upgrade to the parking lot or road it would be hundreds of thousands of dollars. In looking at the information, the premise that the annual maintenance could be covered by the Trustees is probably justified, but looking forward, the work on Argilla Road will need much more.

Charlie asked about the boardwalk and asked if it would be replaced or built on top of, Stephen said he believes it's for a replacement. Michael thanked Stephen for the information because that was something that was missing from last week's discussion. Michael said the revenue they have received from the Trustees alone in the last 6 fiscal years is almost \$1M. If we were to create a revenue account and had it specifically for parking lot maintenance, sticker costs, Argilla road, and boardwalk maintenance, we would have money left over. Michael said he can't imagine a better source to get any matching moneys for when we do a full replacement of Argilla Road. With that being said, all of those things can be funded or partially funded without the sticker fees. We have a lot of asks coming down the pike and it would be nice to give something back to the community by giving this back to people. This would also be living up to the original intent from the Crane family. This would allow us to do a Town-wide dump and beach sticker for both beaches which would be much easier. Michael said he is in favor of reducing the beach sticker down to \$0 for 2024.

Linda said she agrees with everything Michael said. Linda asked that if the vote is not to eliminate the fee, that we subsequently consider reducing it to \$0 or a nominal fee for residents over 70. Charlie said he doesn't hear a big cry from residents about the fee. He doesn't think it's a problem for the residents at all, but he does think they can better serve the Town with the funds from the fees. There have been a few things even over the past few weeks that people have said they would like to see in Town. Ideas are to hire someone to deliver books to people who can't get out, or a coordinator for the Council on Aging for the use of rooms, or the construction of another playing field at Pony Express. We can do a lot to bring the community together and improve the quality of our Town. There are things we can do to enhance the life of the residents and that would make a big difference, bigger than a \$20 savings. He said he agrees with Michael that we should have a fund for the Trustees money and that we should look down the road at possible costs. We should also make a community advancement fund that can be used for the betterment of the Town.

Carl said he understands the sentiment behind it but he is not in favor of reducing the fee. He does not see a compelling reason to do so. It seems like a reasonable cost and the money goes to good use. Carl said he thinks this would be symbolic but an ineffective use of time and time that would be better spent making sure how this money is applied. A good place to start would be to do a proper accounting of the funds and to do a separate account for the funds. We have a

lot coming up and every penny counts, now is not the time to cut. Carl also said unless we are proposing to reduce the levy limit, we aren't actually cutting anyone's fees. We're just redistributing the cost to the tax payer. He doesn't think this should be proposed as a savings. Sarah also said it's only a savings to people who buy the sticker, it's just spreading the fees out. Carl said he thinks we should take a look at the upcoming costs to Argilla. Sarah also said that we know of some upcoming costs for Argilla but with climate change, that road could be washed out at any point from a storm and we can't predict that.

Carl asked Stephen if we set up a dedicated revenue account for the parking fees and Trustees contributions, would withdrawing from that require a Town Meeting vote? Stephen said yes. He has been researching a special revenue account. Sarah Johnson felt strongly that the auditors would insist that it would be a local receipts account, so this would need some thought in how to approach that. We may not be able to do it in time for the upcoming warrant because the type of account we would need turns out to be a bigger question than originally thought. Linda asked if we were to consider the revenue funds, would we be looking at two funds? Stephen said he doesn't know. Charlie said Open Space has funds for the cell towers and the local meal tax and they don't have to go to Town Meeting to use the funds. Stephen said he thought that Town Meeting did have to appropriate those funds. Michael said if they can't give the money back now, then they're never going to give it back.

Paul Calebaugh, Belle Street, said the Crane's had a very specific request that the beach be used by residents at no cost. By listening to the fact that we will have revenue in excess for upcoming projects, the Select Board should honor the original intent. This would be a show of good faith.

Linda said the bylaw was enacted and approved, and shortly after there was a fee begun to cover the cost of the stickers. Shortly after, it became a revenue fund. Stephen said we have a levy limit. We have a hard cap on what we can levy and we have an expectation on the breadth and depth of services that we provide. It is common municipal practice to charge for services and assets. Every other place Stephen has been it is common to charge for a dump sticker because it's expensive to run a transfer station. With the limitations of Prop 2.5, it is likely there will be more fees or fees for other things because we have to educate our children and keep our community safe. The amount we can generate to provide services is limited. This would just contribute more to our budget deficit. Stephen said although he understands this idea in principle, it doesn't say anywhere that the Crane's didn't want them to charge for this. In fact, the group they gave this to charges. The fee itself matters and makes a difference to the Town.

Chris Cerino, Broadway Ave, said he agrees that they probably shouldn't be charging, but he does believe that any revenue should be earmarked toward beach related items, not just to the General Fund. Chris also said if there are going to give a break to seniors, it should be 65 or 66, not 70. Linda said Gloucester has a senior beach fee for 65 years and older.

Stephen said there are other options for community improvements and we could make a Community Preservation Act fund, especially because we have open space. Stephen said he will continue to work on the question of them creating a special revenue fund specifically for the beach funds.

*VOTE: Motion to close the Public Hearing, made by Michael, seconded by Linda. The motion passed unanimously by 5-0.*

*VOTE: Motion to reduce the annual cost of the Crane's Beach parking sticker to \$0, made by Michael, seconded by Linda.*

*Discussion: Michael said this is a reasonable way for us to provide a little relief and do a little good. Carl said he thinks they do all agree on the pursuit of a dedicated revenue account and that we should also continue to pursue the accounting of needs. What should the timing be for creating this? Stephen said he will discuss this with Catherine and Sarah J. more. We are heading into the budget procures so we may need to put this on pause. Perhaps this could be done for the fall for the 2025 sticker year.*

*The motion failed 2-3. Sarah, Charlie, and Carl opposed.*

*VOTE: Motion to reduce the annual cost of the Crane's Beach parking sticker to \$10 for residents 65 years of age and older who own a vehicle, made by Charlie, seconded by Linda. Linda asked if the motion could*

*be amended for this to begin calendar year 2024.*

*Discussion: Sarah said her concern would be how does that impact administrative. Stephen said Kevin voiced concerns about the administration of a separate rate. Stephen said he doesn't want to create an administrative burden without better understanding what that would be. Linda said they have a reduced senior fee for dog licenses so we already have a policy for this. Stephen said a lot of the procedure is verifying the residence and the age which would add a layer. Michael asked why from \$20 to \$10, Charlie said just to help out. Charlie withdrew the motion pending a discussion with the Town Treasurer about the issues that may create. Sarah said she will put that on the agenda for the next meeting. Michael said he spoke with Peter at the Trustees and the typical grace period for the use of previous years beach stickers is January, but he said he would be happy to extend this as the Board continues to discuss.*

## **6. Whittier Tech School Building Project Discussion – S. Player**

There is a tour at Whittier on the 13th for people who want to see the building. The vote is on January 23 from 11-7 at the Y. All of the member districts will be voting on the same day and it is a majority vote from all districts. Newburyport has organized a meeting at the middle school from 6-8PM tomorrow night and they have invited member districts. They also invited Whittier and they declined attending. Michael said that is very upsetting regarding transparency of the process. The School Committee discussed it last week and they voted in favor to support it as proposed, 6-1.

Charlie said he thinks it critical for people to understand what happens cost-wise if the new buildings are not supported relative to the cost of the upgrades that need to be made. Stephen said he agrees that is a critical discussion. The frustrating part is the lack of communication. They have followed the MSBA process. They have been given a lot of information about what the costs would be for the upgrades but haven't seen any of the information about the costs of the school. We have to just believe they have done this because MSBA has decided to fund them. The short of it is, the information that Whittier has provided both to us and to the member communities and to the MSBA is that if the vote fails, they will move towards implementing improvements to the wastewater treatment plant, the access road, and the sprinkler systems. The amount of that improvement would trigger code compliance upgrades. If you hit a certain threshold, you have to do code compliance upgrades. Their estimation of that is \$350M and Stephen said he doesn't know if he is qualified to say if that's accurate or not, but MSBA does look at that as part of their decision-making process. Whittier Tech is a school district but the building is in Haverhill and the city of Haverhill has a building inspector and fire department that will enforce upgrades. If the vote fails and they don't get the funding for the \$440M project of which \$180M is coming from the MSBA, then they would begin the work of the code compliance and MSBA does not participate in the code compliance. How that would get assessed to us is the exact same way the new school would be assessed to us. Because of this, we should think about what is the best value and option for the tax payers. It's a tough question when this feels like this has been forced on the Town of Ipswich.

Michael said the MSBA has to go with the best bang for their buck project and they have determined this is better than renovations. The biggest problem is the time aspect. If the vote were to fail, time may be on our side. Even though we may have larger costs, it would be over time and could possibly be less over the timeline. Sarah said if the project were to be approved we have a finite timeline and we know where this project would fit into our capital project timeline. If we do the longer-term plan, it might make our plans get kicked down the road. It would also make the costs go up for the projects.

Carl said we all acknowledge that the process has been terrible and the way to make a statement about that is to vote the project down, but that may be worse for us in the long run financially. Carl said it's hard because they haven't had the time to do due diligence on this. Carl also said that when we were looking at our elementary school project, we were told that code compliance updates would be needed as well and that hasn't happened. Sarah said that's because we haven't done any updates. Carl said he thinks the MSBA process is unfair to regional schools because of the number of costs they have to incur that MSBA thinks are non-reimbursable. He also wondered if those costs have been looked at again. Stephen said he doesn't know for certain but what he has been told is once the vote failed on the schools here, there wasn't a commitment to start investing in the buildings we have. There was the idea to give it some time and try again. Because there were no major renovations done to the schools, it didn't trigger the code compliance updates. Stephen said if Haverhill doesn't feel that the school is safe they will shut the school down. This regional agreement was signed in the 1960's before Proposition 2.5, and it didn't really contemplate a whole new building because the state funded the initial

round of construction. We have all asked the question of our legislators about what can we do. The feedback Stephen has gotten is that the attempt to change regional agreements at the legislature has been unsuccessful because all of the towns have to sign off and Haverhill likely wouldn't agree to pay more.

Linda asked if the vote goes through, what are our options of paying for it. Stephen said they are talking to the legislature about that. If it is approved, can the state create a legislative solution. The biggest thing is this would hit the levy limit. We would have to cut because we have been close to our levy limit in the past few years. The other option is they could do an operational override or could do a debt exclusion vote to borrow money to pay the \$1.3M assessment. If we don't pay it, we would get a poor rating for our bond rating.

Michael said a point of clarity is what are the major cost drivers of this project. Are there areas they can find small costs savings that would add up? Is everything in there a need or are there some wants as well? Michael said he will personally be voting no because of what we have coming down the pike. He believes that this could be resubmitted down the road in a less costly way. Linda said that would also give the communities time to figure out how to pay for this. Carl said regardless, he would like us to pressure revisiting of the legislation not just for our district but for all of the regional agreements. Michael said he thinks it's possible for them to enter into a new proposal if it is voted down. It seems like less effort than doing the updates and would have a better outcome. This would also give the towns more time to work with delegation on this. Michael said this is an affordability issue for Ipswich and if the vote fails, they won't get saddled with a \$300M bill right away. Michael said he thinks we should get some sort of consensus from the Board to offer leadership from the Town. Sarah said they will wait for the FinCom report and they will put it on an upcoming agenda. Charlie said from the presentation they gave us, the things they needed to be fixed seemed to be critical. So hopefully Michael is right that it would be in small chunks, but it could be a lot all together. Linda asked when we would ask for a debt exclusion, Sarah said it would be a few years out. Stephen said if it does pass, the Town does have a few years to work towards it and figure it out. They could work on a debt stabilization to flatten it out a bit. Sarah thanked Stephen for all of the work he has put into getting information on this.

## **7. Town Manager Update - Turkey Shore/County Rd. Bridge – S. Crane**

Stephen said some residents of Turkey Shore Road came in and they have a few updates for them. There are no direct reports right now but there is a meeting with MA DOT this week about the bridge. They are scheduling a meeting with the neighbors on January 23 and they will have a report from the meeting with MA DOT. They are getting the road surveyed to figure out where the rights of way are, which will help with potential sidewalks. We have continued to evaluate reversing the detour. They also spoke with the engineering firm about temporary signals but continue to get negative feedback about how those would work and some possible unintended negative consequences. Reversing the detour is one way we could reduce traffic on Turkey Shore but could also cause some unintended consequences. They are speaking with the traffic engineer about ideas as well. Michael asked who is meeting with MA DOT, Stephen said Rick Clarke is coordinating it. Michael asked if our legislative delegation is aware of that meeting, Stephen said he thinks so but he'll make sure. Carl asked how long it would take to receive funding to replace the bridge, Stephen said it would be years because it would take at least a year to break ground and then a year or two to do the bridge.

Mark Hodgson, County Street, asked the date and time of the meeting. January 23, 5:30 at Town Hall. Stephen said they have been talking to the residents on Turkey Shore Road primarily because the County Street residents have an issue with the bridge being closed, but the Turkey Shore Road residents have an issue with it being a cut-through road. Mark asked if the County Street residents could be invited to the meeting as well because they have a lot of issues with the bridge as well. Stephen said yes and asked Mark to send him and Mary an email so they could give Mark a flyer to give to his neighbors. Linda asked if it should be posted on the website, Stephen said he doesn't want it to be a public meeting because he doesn't want the point of the meeting to get derailed and they wouldn't be able to meaningfully deal with the specific issues they're trying to deal with. Anyone is welcome to join but he does not plan to post it to the general public.

## **8. Discussion of Select Board Goal Progress/Status Update – S. Player**

Sarah gave status updates on the five goal areas and asked other Select Board members to fill in as needed. The first goal was Water, to investigate and incentives for water use reduction, to evaluate rates, and to increase communication and advocacy for the water supply. The Select Board has worked with Vicki on evaluating the water rate structure and is planning to have Vicki and Jim Engel come speak in February about the North Shore Water Task Force.

Michael added that the resource manager gave a presentation and has been doing excellent work on making people more aware of water conservation and looking at different programs, community awareness events, and community outreach.

The second goal is boards and committees. Sarah said the town departments and staff are making big progress on these goals. Carl said he was presently surprised to attend meetings and hear department heads presenting these goals to their staff and he thanked Stephen for his help with that. Sarah said a lot of our committee members have a lot of experience in town and a lot of knowledge, and it's really great to get to hear from them and for the Town to get to hear from them. Linda said the people on the boards also have a lot of excitement about what they are working on.

The third goal is leadership. Sarah said when she reviewed the way they have approached supporting the Public Safety building process, having regular updates at meetings, the way they have approach the dam project and the 3A process. They have had community forums, more formal public hearings, and live tours on site. On the community outreach piece, they have really tried to come out and meet people wherever they are along the process and provide information and responses to concerned citizens. Stephen added that supporting the article for the Public Safety Building was a big deal. Establishing budget guidelines is also a big demonstration of leadership.

The fourth goal was electric light commissioner goal. The Board has made big steps there, having monthly meetings with Dylan and supporting him in the process to hire an Electrical Engineer Consultant. Charlie and Sarah will be meeting with Stephen and Dylan next week to formally discuss how the supervision process is going right now. The ELD subcommittee is going to come before the Board to discuss roles and responsibilities of the committee. Sarah said we have made steady and significant progress and continue to see regular contact with the department which is important. Charlie said this Board and the members of the Select Board on the subcommittee have continued to support Dylan, and Dylan has continued to show great leadership over the department. Charlie said he thinks Dylan is growing more comfortable within the position every day. Stephen said he has tried to follow the Select Board's lead on that goal and Dylan has been an excellent communicator.

The last big goal area is the Housing Production Plan. The Planning Department is working on evaluating the payment-in-lieu fee. There have also been some preliminary discussions about a housing summit. Sarah said she serves on both the Affordable Housing Trust and the 3A task force, so she thought she might have a discussion with both of them about this. Carl suggested those groups spend some time at one of the meetings to dig into what a housing summit would be for and when. Carl said he thinks it's a great idea but thinks we should get something on the calendar otherwise it could get away from us. Both Carl and Stephen said they could help. Sarah said they will try to get something on the calendar for April.

## **9. Select Board Vote 18 Hammatt Street Unique Property Designation – S. Player**

Stephen said there is a resolution in the packet. Town meeting approved the authorization to the Select Board to proceed with the purchase of the property. The resolution is a unique property designation under Chapter 30B.

Sarah read the following notice:

### **RECORD OF VOTE OF THE SELECT BOARD OF THE TOWN OF IPSWICH January 8, 2024**

At a duly called public meeting of the Select Board of the Town of Ipswich ("Board") on January 8, 2024, the Board voted as follows:

That the Board has determined that advertising under General Laws Chapter 30B for the Town's acquisition of that certain land and the improvements commonly known as 18 Hammatt Street, Ipswich, Essex County, Massachusetts, constituting approximately 6,601± square feet as shown as "Lot & AUL Area" on the plan dated April 21, 2017 and recorded with the Essex (South District) Registry of Deeds ("Registry") in Plan Book 463, Page 62 (the "Property"), will not benefit the interest of the Select Board or the Town of Ipswich due to the unique qualities of the Property. Specifically, the Property abuts other property owned by the Town of Ipswich lacking direct frontage on Hammatt Street which, when combined with the Property, will provide needed parking and vehicle charging resources needed by nearby commercial and residential uses.

*VOTE: Motion to approve made by Michael, seconded by Carl. The motion passed, 5-0.*

**10. Board and Committee Review – S. Player**

**11. Select Board Subcommittee Updates – S. Player**

- None

**12. New Business\*/Future Business – S. Player**

- Linda wanted to keep the Town Hall overflow parking for boaters on the list for future agendas. Sarah said it is on a future agenda.
- Linda also wanted to have an overhaul on parking signs. We should look at current signs and also discuss parking limits. Sarah said she would like to handle the Pavilion and boat parking first, and then tackle this broader parking after. Stephen said the parking plan they have identified Hammatt Street as an area for increased parking. We would have to assess what conditions have changed and we want to avoid trying to make solutions but actually causing problems. Stephen said since we don't have a problem with double parking, it seems like parking is working okay. Unless there is a compelling need, it is a huge consumption of time. Linda said at the very least, to just look at the signs downtown to eliminate confusion.
- Michael said February 28 is preferred for him for the TriBoard meeting but he is able to make February 27 if needed.
- Carl suggested at some point they should have a conversation about the Government Study Committee and if there are any topics we would like them to research. Sarah said she will put it on a future agenda.

**13. Miscellaneous and Correspondence – S. Player**

*VOTE: Motion to adjourn made by Linda, seconded by Michael. The motion passed unanimously, 5-0*

Respectfully Submitted By  
Alyson von der Esch  
January 18, 2024

Meeting Packet Link: <https://www.ipswichma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/16419/01-08-2024-Select-Board-Meeting-Packet>

**List of Documents:**

Crane Beach sticker fee change legal (12-13-2023)  
Crane Beach parking sticker fees (A0164984)  
18 Hammatt Street Notice of Unique Property- Vote(1568395.1)  
Town Manager Memo Board and Comm Updates