

TOWN OF IPSWICH  
Finance Committee Minutes  
Meeting of January 31st, 2023  
Ipswich Town Hall, Meeting Room A  
25 Green St. Ipswich, MA

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:30.

Finance Committee members present: Michael Dougherty, Emily Smith, Walter Hartford, Jamie Fay, Michael Schaaf, Ken Swenson, Joseph Bourque, Rob White, Robert Chambers

**1. Citizens Queries – Michael Dougherty**

- No citizens queries.

**2. Meeting Minutes Approval – Michael Dougherty**

- Motion to approve meeting minutes 9/13/22, 12/13/22, and 1/10/23 made by Rob, seconded by Joe.  
→*Motion passed, 9-0*

**Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Hearing:  
Planning and Community Development/Code Enforcement**

**3. Pubic Health – C. Fermon**

Colleen went over accomplishments and goals for the Public Health Department. The first goal is to update the permitting process which would make the department more efficient, eliminate the use of so much paper, allow people to pay online, and allow employees to communicate through the system. The second goal is to continue doing food establishment trainings for the operators and their staff. They are planning on two next year. The state is also revising the housing code and they have made some amendments to the current regulation which goes into effect in April. The department is going to publicize this change to spread community awareness. They will also offer guidance for the regulation. They want landlords and tenants to understand the responsibilities and provide them with the framework of what they are supposed to do.

There are two significant budget changes. The first is an increase in the administrative assistant position. There was a grade increase, step increase, and longevity increase. The second item is the online permitting system. Colleen went over the breakdown of the costs for the permitting system. Michael asked how many grades there are in the union steps. Colleen said she believes there are 25 steps and this only effects this position. Michael asked about Title 5 activity, Colleen said the biggest impact was on plan review. Soil testing and installations were steady. Design plans grew by 13%. There is a slight change in FTE's, it went from 2.54 and is now 2.6.

Emily asked about digitizing the SureSafe certificates. Colleen said food establishment operators have to provide that to the town, it's an outside system. Emily also asked what efficiencies the town will gain from the new software. Colleen said it won't change headcount but it will make the department more efficient. It will also make it easier for applicants to complete paperwork. Ken asked how long this software will be good for before we need to upgrade. Colleen said she isn't sure, there are tweaks that happen frequently and they are included in the cost. The building department has been using this same software for 6 years and haven't noticed a lot of extra fees.

Ken said the existing draft version of the Waterways Advisory Report, under water quality, lists failed septic systems as one of the contributors to the detrimental water quality. Ken asked if they keep a list of failing septic systems or potential failing septic systems to try to stay on top of it. Colleen said when a system fails people have 2 years to replace it. As far as trouble spots, there is a report that identifies areas that should be replaced and there was a big push to replace septic systems in and areas over the last 20 years. There are still some out there but most have been replaced. Joe said they might want to consider tacking on a \$1-\$2 charge for the 25-page reports, because the engineering firms are gaining efficiency too and perhaps that could help offset the cost. Jamie asked about the septic loan program and said we have close to \$1M in loans out, and asked how those loans get serviced. Colleen said in 2012 the town approved \$1M through the MA Clean Water Trust. It provides the town the money, then we loan it out to the town for a 2% interest rate, and they have 18 years to pay it back. Colleen handles the paperwork and disperses payments based on the agreement. The loans get repaid by an extra assessment on the tax bill and the treasurer is responsible for collecting that.

Walter asked if we have rolled back changes we made for Covid. Colleen said once restaurants opened back up and people started going out again, nobody wanted to continue the things they had set up. There was a huge growth in food plan review because people were changing what they were doing or offering.

#### **4. Conservation – J. Pirrotta**

Jenna, Conservation Agent, went over accomplishments for the past year. The Conservation Office is a part of the Planning Department and consists of Jenna, a part time assistant, and a part time conservation field inspector. Their main tasks are to support the Conservation Commission and their administration of the wetland's protection act, the Ipswich wetlands protection by-law, and the storm water management regulations. Day to day they assist homeowners with commercial and residential projects. The main goal is to identify a conservation project to fund as part of the newly established Conservation Fund that was set up this year. They will also do an offsite mitigation of the Ipswich River. Lastly, they are working on issuing permits under the new storm water regulations.

Michael asked how the permitting is looking so far, Jenna said so far it is a little high but it has been steady over the last 5 years. Michael also asked about the appointed salary for the conservation agent. Jenna said it had to do with her negotiated starting salary, a small increase after 6 months, and then a 3% COLA increase. Jamie asked how many permits we are getting under the storm water bylaw on a regular basis. Jenna said the storm water filings are for projects not within any wetlands buffer. So far, this fiscal year there have been 5. Michael asked how many FTE's there are in the department, there are 2.1.

#### **5. Open Space – B. O'Connor**

Beth O'Connor, Open Space Steward for the town, presented the accomplishments and goals, as outlined in the budget book. Going forward, they will work with the conservation commission on continued leases, and will continue to work on the open space bond list. They will focus on continued maintenance/improvement/expansion of recreational opportunities and routine conservation restriction monitoring. The department is anticipating having an intern over the spring and summer that can help with property boundary marking.

Michael asked what the revenue streams are to fund the Open Space Program. There are 3 sources. One is the wireless communication leases, second is any rollback taxes for chapter 61 properties, and third is the meals tax. Beth said they are predicating revenue of \$154k which is a sizeable jump from the past and they are proud of that. Rob asked about the compensation line, Beth said she is 30 hours and Molly is 19 with no benefits. Ken asked if there are any opportunities for community gardens on properties with conservation restrictions. Beth said she can't think of anything now because most of those properties are privately owned. Emily asked how they plan to find their intern. Jenna said there are a few places they will post the description. There is also a conservation website that gets the attention of a lot of college graduates that they will use. They will also reach out to Antioch and Salem University.

Michel S. asked if the town has ever carried out an agricultural inventory, Beth said she believes it was done a few years ago. Stephen said they are looking to add a GIS coordinator position to take care of this. Jamie asked what the projected revenue will be for the wireless lease program. Beth said it will be \$74k for the first year, plus a 3% riser each year for a 20-year lease. Walter asked what their role is in the Waldingfield Rd. project and if there are any expenses. Beth said to date their role has been confined to providing review, comment, feedback, and expertise specific to the open space. The legal costs will go through the Town Manager's budget. Robert asked if there is anything the department can do for the Marini family for their request for more farm land. Beth said there are a lot of wetlands and not a lot of forested land, but if a GIS coordinator is hired they can do an analysis of the land the town owns.

#### **6. Building Department – J. Bone**

The Building Department will present on a different night.

#### **7. Planning Board – S. Crane**

Ethan is no longer with the Planning Department. Stephen said there are a lot of challenges with being a municipal employer right now and they haven't had a lot of applicants, but they have had a few and they are talking to them now. Michael asked about the 6% increase for the salary even though the position is vacant. Emily asked if the salary range is set by the state or the town, Stephen said the town. Michael said there aren't many changes to the planning department budget. Stephen said the new senior planner came it at a lesser rate than the prior. Michael asked what Glen's primary role is. Stephen said its board administration. He's also helping with the search process. Stephen quickly ran through the goals and accomplishments that Ethan had written, which will be in the budget book. Michael S. asked Stephen about the substantial task of addressing the MBTA zoning opportunities. Stephen said he appointed a task force,

they submitted a compliance plan today. The senior planner has been managing this before Ethan left. Town meeting vote is necessary because it would be a zoning change. Jamie complimented Stephen on creating a committee to address the 3A zoning project. Michael asked when they should expect to hire a new Town Planner, Stephen said as soon as they can.

#### **8. Historical Commission – S. Crane**

This budget covers the part time archivist and “other expenses” which are for signs and postage. Also \$2,100 for flags and plaques. Michael asked if they have any specific goals for the upcoming year, Stephen said he hadn’t gotten a chance to talk to Ethan about that before he left.

#### **New/Other Business – Michael Dougherty**

- Michael said they will see if the Building Inspector can come in to talk to them about accomplishments and goals.
- Michael said it’s important to get the budget page information on the town website.
- Joe said he thinks they should meet the Climate Resiliency Manager, she had hoped to present at the tri-board meeting but didn’t get to. Michael said the presentation was not ready in time and he just reached out to Stephen to follow up about this. He will reach out again.
- Jamie gave an update on the Public Safety Facility. They are moving into design development which is the middle part of the design process. They are finalizing the building program, layout, and floor plans. There was is an open public forum coming up soon to show where were at and get feedback from the public. They have run into issues because building costs have skyrocketed, so they made an alternate building design. They are also exploring more sources for funding so that they can hopefully add some things back in.
- Michael went over upcoming dates for FinCom meetings.

#### **9. Adjourn – Michael S. Dougherty**

- Motion to adjourn made by Rob W. and seconded by Joe.  
→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Respectfully Submitted By  
Alyson von der Esch  
2-1-22