

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee Minutes
Meeting of February 9th, 2023
Ipswich Town Hall, Meeting Room A
25 Green St. Ipswich, MA

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:36.

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

- Joe made a motion to open approve the minutes from Bean Counting, Rob seconded.

→ *Motion passed, 7-0 (Robert C. and Ken abstained since they were not members of the committee during the Bean Counting meeting)*

Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Hearing: Public Works/ Cemetery and Parks

3. Cemeteries and Parks – J. Putur

Jeff Putur, Superintendent of Cemeteries and Parks, gave an overview of the department. Property maintenance is one of the main things they do year-round, and covers 42 different properties in town. They do everything themselves. There are 4 full-time crew members, one shared employee with the highway and forestry departments, a clerk that works 30 hours, and the superintendent. They also have 3-4 seasonal workers in the summer, and use the correctional inmates a few different weeks of the year. Accomplishments include finishing the seventh year of monument repair at Old North Cemetery. They also repaired a tomb. All of the repairs come from the cemetery trust fund. The department also continued to work on the GIS mapping, which is 75% complete. The goal is to have this online for the public to view genealogy. Lastly, they worked on the Pony Express fields to bring them back after the drought. Goals for the upcoming year are to continue with monument repair, wall repair, and GIS mapping. They also plan to install two shade structures and a toddler structure at Bialek Park. They do not have any major budget changes. There are a few contractual stipends increases. They have five items under expenses which are mostly inflation related and have to do with repairs.

Jamie asked if we expect the same thing to happen again with Pony Express. Jeff said he doesn't think so, they have learned a lot about the property after having it for a few years and don't to have any issues. It was only because it was such a bad drought and there was no watering allowed. Joe asked about the T12 account, Jeff said it's the PC account for every time a lot is sold. It's for perpetual care of the commentaries. Mike asked if it is pretty consistent, Jeff said yes because they try not to draw off of it too much. Mike asked if they have anything coming up that they would withdraw from it, which they do not. In the long term, they need to redo the stairs at one of the cemeteries so they are saving up for that. Michael S. asked if they collaborated with the Historical Commission on the gravestone restorations, Jeff said yes, they worked extensively with them on the survey. He also asked if they have ever analyzed the cemetery fees. Jeff said yes and they always look at which services incur overtime work and charge extra for those services. Michael also asked about green burials and Jeff said they don't accept those yet.

Rob asked how the equipment is looking and if there is anything coming up. Jeff said they have a pick-up truck with plow that they are looking to get replaced this year that they bought it 2011. They are also trying to get a new utility vehicle or gator. They don't have one now and it has been on the capital plan for a few years. Rob said they met with Open Space last week and they have about \$20k in maintenance of open space and asked if Jeff could do any of it. He said he talks to Beth frequently and she always asks them first if they can help. A lot of times they can help, but they don't have the equipment to hay the fields so that needs to be outsourced. They also have some trails that need special equipment. Rob asked about the Greenbelt maintenance. Jeff cuts right up to the Greenbelt property and they cut up to that line too.

Rob C. said they do such a good job with the upkeep of the properties in town. He also asked about the GIS mapping and what it would be used for. Jeff said it is used for each plot for the cemeteries. It used to just be hand drawn on a map and not to scale, but it is now going to be on a map to scale and will be put online. Ken said he thinks we need to

revisit how we treat athletic fields in droughts. The town made a huge investment in that property for recreational purposes and they are not protecting their investment if they don't keep up with it. It's not just decorative, it serves a function if it's maintained. Stephen asked if there would be interest in turf. Artificial turf expands the amount of time that the fields can be used and will extend the life. Stephen also noted to Jeff that they should perhaps price the cremations and burials the same because it needs to be priced based on what it takes to run the department vs. each task. Cremations are on the rise and if we keep charging minimal amounts for cremations, we won't be able to continue to run the department. Mike asked what the differential stipend is for. Jeff said it is a new stipend that was put in for the hoisting license.

4. DPW – Administration and Equipment – R. Clarke

Rick Clarke, Public Works Director, went over the makeup of the department. Under Rick there are 6 workers in the highway department 2 in forestry, 1 mechanic, and 1 floater position that does 4 months in highway, 4 months in cemetery, and 4 months in forestry. There is also an assistant, a DPW Clerk, and a recycling coordinator. Rick went over the accomplishments of the department which included redoing Mill Road, Fairview Ave, Payne Rd, and Hillside Rd. They have also been working on Topsfield Rd. and will continue to work on that and do the sidewalks. Upcoming projects include Central Street, the County St. Bridge, and High Street.

The only real change in this budget was in the salaries which were through the contract. Jamie asked about the 10% increase in permanent wages, Rick said it was a contract negotiated through last year's budget which was negotiated with the union. It was a grade and step scale change, and it was also a reclassification of the position. Emily asked if reclassifications are performance based, Stephen said they aren't, they are based on a change in responsibilities. However, if you aren't doing a good job you usually won't advance to the next position. A discussion ensued about collective bargaining and Stephen explained to the Finance Committee how the steps and grades work.

5. DPW – Snow and Ice – R. Clarke

Rick said the first item increase is for the mechanic, who was brought up a grade and a step. The other increase was a negotiated CDL stipend. There were also increases for gas and diesel. Jamie asked how they are doing on usage. Rick said snow and ice will change that drastically and this year will be down a bit because they haven't had a lot of storms. Jamie asked if there has been an impact on the gas usage since the new electric vehicles, Rick said not yet because they're new and those vehicles don't get a lot of miles put on them.

6. DPW – Highway and Forestry – R. Clarke

Rick said under permanent wages there were some step increases. Police detail and overtime also went up, and there were some CDL stipends. The cost of electricity has risen so the street lights line is \$5K more. There is also an increase in paint costs for street lines, and an increase in road treatment and drain maintenance. Keeping the roads up with the way they are now is about \$1.1M annually. We get some money from different sources and some projects are bonded, but we are still about \$300k short. Stephen said he sent out an analysis that Sarah had done about the impact of inflation on expenses. Rick's department in particular had a lot of inflation related expenses.

Jamie asked what the outside consultants line item is for, Rick said it was for the conceptual designs for High Street and the survey for Market Street. It is typically engineering related. Michael S. asked about when High Street will be fixed up, Rick said that is the next project and it will be full reconstruction. Ken asked about the conversion of street lights to LED. Rick said that is the ELD, but he believes it is done. Robert C. said he noticed the state has done a lot of work on the highways and they eliminated a lot of the bumps on High Street and Essex Road, and that it seemed to happen very quickly. He asked what the process was that they did.

For the Forestry department, they went up in supplies and repairs. A lot of towns don't have arborists. A few years ago, they created a certified tree warden and Rick took the class and got certified. It's a once a year training and renewal. Emily asked why the budget lists the arborist as an FTE. Rick said that is the leader and he is the one in the bucket truck. Walter said it may have been that the title didn't change, Rick said they have never had an arborist before and that person is not an arborist. Emily asked what the 2 FTE's do and if two are needed, Rick said they are always busy and, in the winter, they help with snow and ice.

7. DPW – Sanitation Enterprise Fund Contract – R. Clarke

The first item is a raise for the recycling coordinator, which is a non-union position. It is a 20% raise and also a title change to recycling coordinator/grant reviewer. The state pays 7 hours per week of her time, which Rick expects to continue. Rick said he looked at other towns recycling coordinators and even with this raise and additional responsibility, she is still getting paid less than other recycling coordinators in nearby towns. Rick went over the costs for recycling and

trash compacting. Mike asked if we could add composting as well, Rick said they looked at that and the prices were double to triple what Black Earth is charging. It would be about \$100pp. Michael asked if composting was offered to everyone, would it help the cost of trash to go down. Rick said he doesn't think so because a lot of people not in downtown compost in their yards. Jamie asked about the mandatory composting in Hamilton. Rick said if you don't have your bin out, they don't pick up the recycling. Rick said those bins don't have to be filled. If you want to compost, you will and if you don't, you won't. Ken asked if the transfer station is staffed exclusively with overtime, Rick said the Saturdays are overtime.

8. DPW – Solid Waste Transfer Station – R. Clarke

Michael asked about the temporary part time line item and said it's not funded, and hasn't been for years. Stephen said they can eliminate that. Jamie said it has been well-run and everyone working there is helpful. Rick said they have a good bunch of guys working for the DPW now and Marlene has helped with the appearance. Mike asked about the special collections. Rick said the one in September is bigger than the one in May, you can bring paints and paint cans. They put up banners and also advertise it a lot. Mike said he has heard from residents that its very popular but there is often a long time. He asked how much it would be to also do it in May. Rick said it's about \$15k-\$20k. But it likely wouldn't be the same amount twice because people just save it all year now. It would probably just be more overtime, but he thinks it's working well now.

9. DPW – Recycling Enterprise Fund – R. Clarke

There is an increase in sanitary collection which Sarah explained. Sarah said because it's an enterprise fund, it needs to be self-sustaining. They looked at the revenue stream, looked at how much they would be bringing in, and then looked at how much they would spend to create the budget. Stephen said it is an enterprise fund, but not really because it doesn't self-sustain. Gloucester is a 100% pay as you go recycling fund. If you have levy problems, one way to help that is to go to "user fee". Rob said they tried to do that a few years ago but there was an override in the 90's that stated they wouldn't charge for trash in the future, so there may be some push back.

Michael asked about how Argilla Rd. is going with the proposal that was given to the Select Board. Rick said it's a few years out. Ken asked about the Jeffrey's Neck project because it was permitted but hasn't been started. Rick said through Covid they shifted the money around, so it's just a different process to get it funded. He is confident they're getting there. Emily asked about the Market Street/ Five Corners light. Rick said TEC, the design engineer, did a traffic study and they found that a light will make it smoother and less traffic backup. Rick said this has been an almost 10-year project. He didn't feel like they were moving forward with the other engineering consultant and it is finally starting to move along. If we want TIP money, we have to follow to MA DOP standards, so they are following that. Mike said the state is also trying to get funds for the County Street Bridge. Jamie said most people don't really see the traffic in Market Square as a problem. Rick said it's a safety issue. Mike asked if they have done public outreach, Rick said not yet. Jamie asked if they are going to put electric under High Street. Rick said they will put the pipes in so it is possible in the future.

10. New/Other Business – Michael Dougherty

- Mike said he spoke to the School Committee and there is a conflict in the third night if its needed. Mike also said they need to go through capital, and perhaps they can combine night one and two, and then use the bean counting time to discuss bean counting topics but also discuss capital with the other two committees. Then whatever is not discussed related to capital during the school committee nights can be discussed at Bean Counting. Walter said he thinks pushing capital to bean counting is too long to wait. Jamie and Michael S. agreed.

11. Adjourn – Michael S. Dougherty

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

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
2-16-22