

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee Minutes
Warrant Hearing 2
2023 Annual Town Meeting Warrant – Voting Only
April 11, 2023 at 7:30pm
Ipswich Town Hall, Meeting Room A
25 Green St. Ipswich, MA

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

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

1. Welcome – Michael Dougherty

2. Citizens Queries – Michael Dougherty

- Gary Champion, 3 Palomino Way, commented on Article 23 and said there was an agreement at the Select Board meeting last night that the GSC will make a report under the consent calendar, and the GSC will review the GSC bylaw and make a recommendation at the Fall Town Meeting. The citizens petitioners agreed to take no action at Town Meeting. Gary asked the Finance Committee not to vote in support or against this, but instead vote to take no action. Gary thanked the Committee for always being respectful.

3. 2023 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Hearing Votes – Michael Dougherty

- Motion to open the 2023 Town Warrant Hearing made by Emilie, seconded by Rob

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 22:

Jon Blair, ELD Manager for the town of Ipswich, went over the article and said the program that is applicable to Article 22 has two distinct components that are closely related but mutually exclusive. It pertains specifically to acquiring a loan from the Federal Government through the Department of Agriculture's Rural Energy Savings Program. The amount requested is \$5M and is an unconventional loan that functions similar to a line of credit. It is available for a wide array of channels for public good. The loan is the subject of Article 22. The ELD intends to use the \$5M to invest in customers' homes and in limited cases, small businesses. They would invest in properties for things like insulation, solar panels, and air and source heat pumps. This program is compelling for landlords and for homeowners that find difficulties with doing projects. They have been working on this program for over a year and received a \$30k grant last year. They are also receiving funds to help with startup. This money comes with 0% interest and is available to the ELD for a period of 5 years. Each disbursement has a payback period of 10 years. An application has been submitted and a Town Meeting vote is required for the loan. There has also been some discussion about whether this would trigger the Bamford Bylaw. Adding it to the warrant makes it more transparent and seems like the right thing to do.

Michael asked what happens if we don't pay the money back. Jon said they could provide an assurance bond, or could have the loan guaranteed. Michael also asked why they chose \$5M. Jon said it's an open-ended request. He does not know what the bulk funds are that are available but he had heard of towns going back 2 or 3 times to ask for more money, because it has been successful. Other towns have borrowed up to \$30M. They wanted to be conservative and did the highest ask they could for the more conservative application. Emilie said for her job she works with people on collecting bad debt so she would be happy to work with Jon to help with this when the time comes. Jamie said it could be risky if someone leaves town but it sounds like the Town of Ipswich would stand behind the loan. Michael said Mass Save offers a 0% interest loan through National Grid but it is an important resource that is only available to people who have natural gas. It's good this will extend to everyone in town. Ken asked if there are penalties for not using the entire \$5M. Jon said no, but it wouldn't look good to not use it and they expect to sue the entire \$5M. Rob asked if the school can take

advantage of this for insulation or solar panels. Jon said he doesn't have a clear indication on that. Bob asked if this can be used for solar panels. Jon said yes. Jon said the subcommittee has not formally voted on this but the conversation has been favorable. The Select Board voted unanimously to support Article 22 and the School Committee took no position.

- Motion to support Article 22 made by Jamie, seconded by Joe

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 12: The Empower Act

- Motion to support Article 12 made by Bob, no second
- Motion to oppose Article 12 made by Ken, seconded by Joe
- Michael D. said they have seen this before and appreciate the fact that there are 16 and 17-year-olds that want to participate in Town Government. There is no limitation in participating even if people cannot vote. People under 18 do not experience the repercussions of the votes through paying taxes and for that reason Michael is opposed.
- Michael S. said he is ambivalent about this. On one hand we have seen young people who have taken a long perspective on significant issues taking place today, particularly regarding the environment. Michael said he would be happy to encourage that.
- Emilie said she supports David's efforts and encourages him to stay involved but she does not think it's a time to make a voting change.
- Rob said he opposes this, but he would encourage the high school to vote on the articles and bring the results to the Finance Committee for consideration.
- The Select Board voted in favor of this 3-1.
- Walter suggested that they could also have a non-voting student representative on the Finance Committee.

→ *Motion passed to oppose Article 12, 7-2. Michael S. and Bob opposed*

Article 13: Resolution in Support of Changing the State Flag and Seal of Massachusetts

- Michael said the state is in the process of changing the state flag and a citizen added the petition to support this. He said he does not support this because he doesn't think the town should be getting involved with something the state is doing, and also, he does not generally support citizens petitions without presentations.
- The Select Board voted in favor 4-0 and the School Committee Recommended at Town Meeting.
- Motion to oppose Article 13 made by Ken, seconded by Rob
- Ken said he is not opposed to the change of the state flag, he just doesn't want to get involved in the state's business. Emilie agreed.
- Joe said he watched the Select Board meeting last night and the Town Manager explained that this is a sense of the meeting issue and is meant to show the community's support. From that perspective, Joe is in favor of this.

→ *Motion passed to oppose Article 13, 5-4 (names of those who supported and opposed were not mentioned and not shown on camera)*

Article 23: Town Government Study Committee Report to Town Meeting

- Michael said the petitioner recommended the Board take no action but Michael would recommend that they RATM this and take no action at the meeting. Jamie said he understood that Gary was going to move to take no action, and Jamie said he would support that. Joe said it seems like they made great progress at the Select Board meeting last night and he would respect the request of the petitioner to take no action.
- Stephen said he thought it would be confusing to recommend an article when the plan is to take no action.
- The School Committee and Select Board both voted to RATM.
- Motion to take no action on Article 23 made by Joe, seconded by Jamie

→ *Motion passed unanimously to take no action on Article 23, 9-0*

Article 24: New Construction Moratorium

- Michael said he understands the passion behind this article but he is concerned there are no parameters in it, no exceptions, and no metrics to show if this was worth it to the town.
- The School Committee took no position and the Select Board opposed unanimously
- Motion to oppose made by Emilie, seconded by Ken
- Rob asked if we excluded commercial or municipal building, how does that make people feel. Emilie said there is not enough data to support this.
- Rob said if this article gets the town to start talking about expanding its water base, he would support it with some modifications.
- Michael S. said this is a big deal and this would have a very big impact on the town. Michael said he does not support this because he doesn't think it really addresses the issue. There are far more substantial issues having to do with water and he would rather devote our attention to the real problem.
- Emilie said she doesn't oppose the spirit in which this was written but there is too much of a financial impact to stop additional growth.

→ *Motion passed to oppose Article 24, 8-1. (Rob opposed)*

- Rob said he is looking for the proposer to change the wording to just residential.

Article 25: Amendment to the Noise Control Bylaw

- Motion to oppose Article 25 made by Emily, seconded by Bob.
- Michael said he thinks there are parts of the article that make sense but there is a bit of an overreach.
- Emilie said she thinks 7pm is too early to have to stop yard work.
- Jamie said the petitioner is out of town otherwise he probably would have been here.

- The Select Board Recommended at Town Meeting and the School Committee took no position.
- Stephen said he thinks it could be problematic from a legal/liability standpoint regarding the holiday hours for companies. The Select Board did not feel they had enough information to take a position until they learn more about the legality of the holiday hours restrictions.
- Jamie recommended for the future to have Town Counsel’s opinion before the Warrant Hearing.

→ *Motion passed to oppose, 6-3, Michael, Rob, and Bob opposed (this should be double checked because camera did not show or record voices)*

Article 1: Consent Calendar

- Motion to support the Consent Agenda made by Michael S, seconded by Emilie

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 2: Amend FY23 Municipal Operating Budget

- Motion to support Article 2 made by Rob, seconded by Ken

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 3: Finance Committee Election

- Michael said last year they changed it so a name is not listed, it will just simply state that the Committee will make a nomination.
- Bob is up for reelection because he was nominated last year for a one-year fill-in since Janice stepped down a year early. Bob said he would enjoy staying on the committee.
- Motion to RATM Article 3

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 4: FY24 Municipal Budget

- Motion to support Article 4 made by Joe, seconded by Michael S

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 5: School Budget

- Motion to support Article 5 made by Joe, seconded by Rob
- Jamie said he is troubled by the level of spending with the schools. They have benefited from an override which the Committee supported. Over the last 4 fiscal years, including this upcoming year, there will have been 19 new positions created. There has been such a bump up in staffing and enrollment is declining. We are looking at class sizes of 15 or below in the elementary schools which is substantially below surrounding towns. Insufficient efforts have been made to roll back some of the temporary positions created during Covid. No offsets were made for the new assistant principal positions. Jamie said he encouraged the School Committee to take another look at the budget and make some offsetting cuts, but no changes were made. Jamie does not think this is sustainable.

- Walter shares Jamie's concerns that we won't be able to stick to the override.
- Michael S. said he agrees and he has concerns about the sustainability of this budget. Michael also said if they support the budget, they should express concern at Town Meeting.
- Rob said he does not support the Assistant Principals and doesn't think it is a wise investment.
- The Select Board voted in favor 4-0 and the School Committee voted in favor 6-0.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 6: Whittier High School Regional Budget

- Walter said he thinks the representative on the School Committee should come before this board to discuss the substantial capital needs.
- Motion to support Article 6 made by Michael S, seconded by Emilie
- Rob asked how many students there are, Sarah said she would send Rob the enrollment and the costs.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 7: Essex Tech

- Motion to support Article 7 made by Joe, seconded by Ken

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 8: Transfer of FY23 Appropriated Budget Funds to Education Stabilization Fund

- Motion to support Article 8 made by Rob, seconded by Ken

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 9: Finance Committee Stabilization Fund

- Motion to support Article 9 made by Michael S, seconded by Joe
- Rob said maybe we should not move the \$70k out so it can be there as a buffer, and the likelihood that Sarah will find extra money somewhere. Rob said he thinks we need to be much more aggressive, and much more concerned about out tax payers. Jamie said we can't use this for the roofs because it's in Free Cash. We would have to appropriate it.
- Sarah said she doesn't think we will have a lot of extra this year.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 10: OPEB

- Motion to support Article 10 made Jamie, seconded by Rob

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 11: Annual Capital Plan

- Motion to support Article 11 made Jamie, seconded by Rob
- Stephen said they added a summary and they will be purchasing a new detective car using drug forfeiture money.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 14: Ipswich River Ecological Restoration Permitting

- Motion to support Article 14 made by Joe, seconded by Michael S.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 17: Authorize Select Board as Water Commissioners to enter into Lease of Farm Field at 16 Mile Line

- Motion to support Article 17 made Jamie, seconded by Emilie

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 18: Middle School High School Roof

- Motion to support Article 18 made by Michael, seconded by Joe
- Rob asked if this goes toward the towns Green Communities goals and said he doesn't know why the metal roofs or solar roof ideas were scrapped.
- Jamie asked if perhaps we don't have enough information on this article to vote in favor of it.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 19: Doyon and Winthrop School Roofs

- Motion to support Article 19 made by Rob, seconded by Emilie
- Jamie said he thinks we should consider changing the language of the article so the town can fund it if this is not passed. A conversation ensued about ways to do this. Jamie said perhaps we would have to have a Special Town Meeting to fund it if it doesn't pass.
- Ken said he will support this because it needs to be done, but he doesn't understand why this wasn't on the Capital Plan. He also said its delusional to think this is going to be enough to keep these schools up and running.
- Emilie suggested the Finance Committee express the urgency of the need to the town at Town Meeting

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 20: Water Department Infrastructure Improvements

- Motion to support Article 20 made by Joe, seconded by Rob

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 21: Waste Water Department Infrastructure Improvements

- Motion to support Article 21 made by Joe, seconded by Emilie
- Jamie said he is going to oppose this because he doesn't feel like there has been enough discussion about it and doesn't think that it is the best solution

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 8-1 (Jamie opposed)*

Article 22: Authorize Select Board as Electric Commissioners to Borrow \$5 Million From USDA

- Motion to support Article 22 made Rob, seconded by Emilie

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

4. 2023 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Hearing Votes Recess – Michael Dougherty

- Motion to go into Executive Session made by Jamie, seconded by Rob

→ *Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 9-0*

5. Executive Session –

To consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property if the Chairman declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiation position of the public body.

1. Article 15 – 69 South High Street
2. Article 16 – Hammatt Street Parcel

6. 2023 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Hearing Votes – Michael Dougherty

- Motion to go back into Warrant Hearing made by Michael S, seconded by Emilie

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Article 15: Grant of Easement to 69 South High Street

- Motion to support Article 15 made by Walter, seconded by Joe

→ *Motion passed, 8-1 (Rob opposed)*

Article 16: Acquisition of Hammat Street Parcel

- Motion to support Article 16 made by Rob, seconded by Emilie

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

- Motion to adjourn the Warrant Hearing made by Rob, seconded by Joe

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

7. New/Old Business – Michael Dougherty

- none

8. Adjourn – Michael Dougherty

- Motion to adjourn made by Bob, seconded by Emilie

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
4-24-23