

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee Minutes
Tuesday July 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 7:35pm.

Finance Committee members present: Ken Swenson, Jamie Fay, Michael Schaaf, Joseph Bourque, Leah Crespi

Not Present: Emilie Smith, Rob White, Walter Hartford

Also Present: Sarah Johnson

1. Citizens Queries – J. Fay

- none

2. Approval of minutes –J. Fay

June 13, 2023

- Motion to accept minutes from June 13, 2023, made by Ken, seconded by Joe

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 5-0*

3. Town Manager Update– J. Fay

Stephen was not able to attend but Jamie gave a brief report from Stephen. There are no charter transfers or year-end financial matters at this time. Stephen also gave an update on the spring town meeting articles. The purchase and sale agreement between the Town and National Grid is under legal review. Town Counsel and Stephen have not had discussions with the owners of 69 Main Street as of yet. The school roof projects are in design and should go out to bid soon. Stephen is talking to the Ipswich River Watershed Association about making a presentation to the Select Board about the dam removal/ MEPA process.

Sarah said they are starting to work on the invoicing for regional animal control and she is working on a format for billing. Boxford is 25%, Newbury is 20%, and Rowley is 20%. Sarah said she was not involved in the budget and expenses process but she would like to be going forward so that they can ensure they capture all of the expenses associated with this. We may have to go forward as is for this year but next year we can add the expenses in. Sarah said the Town received \$75k in opioid funds this year and the legislature says we have to take it in as General Fund and then turn it into Free Cash at the end of the year. After that, we can put it in a Stabilization Fund for opioid use. Jamie asked if we anticipate this to be recurring, Sarah said it should come in for 6 years.

Michael said it's important to be diligent in defining what the costs really are for regional animal control. Jamie asked Sarah how the end of the year things are going. Sarah said things are looking better than she thought. Revenue is roughly \$1.2M above estimates and we should get around \$500k for cherry sheet in. Sarah said when she pulled the report, we are now at \$2.2M for revenue, including real estate. Expenditures are looking good as well. Sarah asked the Town Accountant if we could release any old purchase orders because we were running a little low this year. They were able to do that which helped with expenditures.

4. SB FinCom Appointment – J. Fay

The Select Board interviewed two of three candidates last night for the FinCom appointment. They may interview the third candidate at the next meeting and will then vote.

5. Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles and Timeline – J. Fay

The Select Board opened the Warrant last night and Linda asked that the Board consider a building moratorium article. No other articles were suggested. We know there will be a corrective article for the Dow Dam article as well as an appropriation for regional animal control, additional state aid, and the Planning Board zoning articles. The Warrant Hearing is the second Tuesday in September.

6. Zoning Articles – J. Fay

Jamie talked to Glenn Gibbs, Town Planner, and Toni Moorad, Chair of the Planning Board, about where they are in their zoning article review process. Jamie sent around a list of topics and asked them if they would like to come present tonight but they declined because they haven't gotten far enough on their end. They plan to have the articles ready by the end of the month. If we want to have a meeting in August, we can put that in the meeting then. Jamie asked the Committee if they saw anything out of the ordinary in the zoning articles.

7. Quarterly Reporting Format and Timing – J. Fay

Sarah went over a summary report for year-end revenue and expenditures over the past few years so the committee can compare. Jamie said he thinks the objective for the quarterly budget review is to see if we are tracking right so he doesn't think they need too many details. Leah said if they receive it in an abbreviated format, they can always ask for more detail if they want. Michael asked Sarah when we will have an internal financial report for this fiscal year. Sarah said probably the first week in August.

8. Subcommittee Updates – J. Fay

Michael said the ELD Manager, Jon Blair, has resigned. Michael said it seems there was a consensus to retain Jon and a counter offer was made but has not responded yet. He provided a 6-week notice. Jamie said we also have a Town Planner position vacant, Sarah said they are negotiating with someone now.

Jamie gave an update on the Public Safety Building Committee. There is an active group of people in Ipswich that are unhappy with the design of the building as it has been presented. The Public Safety Facility Committee decided to have a meeting specifically to listen to concerns of citizens. They did not invite the architect because they wanted it to be a listening session for people to express concerns. The Committee felt they got a good sense of people's concerns and were able to go back to the architect with specific feedback. He is going to work on the design and the next step will be a follow up meeting to share the design with the community. The challenge we face is that the cost of the building is escalating significantly every month. Jamie said there are things they can likely do that can vastly improve the design without too much cost increase or time delays. We are continuing to push the project through various boards and commissions. There is plenty that can still be done while the design is being tweaked. This is a real challenge we are facing. Ken asked what the timeline estimate is for conservation commissions and planning board approvals. Jamie said it can certainly take some time.

9. New/Old Business – J. Fay

Jamie reached out to Gary James who is the Whittier Tech representative for Ipswich but he did not respond to his email. Jamie then called him and Gary was reluctant to give Jamie information about the project even though he is chair of the Building Committee and the School Committee. He referred Jamie to the superintendent, so Jamie reached out to her and has asked her to come give a presentation. He has not heard back yet. Jamie said he will raise this issue with the School Board and Select Board chairs as well. Michael asked what the rationale is for the inconsistency for the use of Whittier and capital share. Jamie said it has to do with the 1967 agreement that we entered into. The capital costs are shared based on the student population in each town. Operating costs are based on actual enrollment. We are paying 8% of the cost of the new school when we only have 2% of students there. It may not be a fair agreement. Jamie said we need to update our strategic plan and put this into it.

Jamie asked if anyone had anything else that they think should be brought to the chairs meeting, Ken said he thinks we should reactivate the Strategic Planning Committee.

Michael said the MBTA 3A Task Force has not met in a number of months and there seems to be a lack of leadership. This needs to be done. Ken said Sarah gave an update at the Select Board meeting last night and said they intend to get together soon.

Joe said he thinks we need to work with someone on updating the group mailing list for FinCom. Joe said there are two things that were mentioned tonight that he did not receive.

10. Adjourn – W. Hartford

- Motion to adjourn made by Michael, seconded by Ken

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 5-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
7-31-23