

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Select Board as Electric Light Commissioners
Bi-Board with Electric Light subcommittee
Wednesday, August 2, 2023 at 6:00 PM
Electric Light Department, 272 High Street
Utility Conference Room/ Zoom

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 Wednesday, August 2, 2023 at the Electric Light Department, 272 High Street.

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

Select Board members attending via Zoom: Charles Surpitski, Carl Nylén

Electric Light Department Subcommittee members present: Jim Engel, Michael Schaaf, Ted Dillon

Electric Light Department Subcommittee members attending via Zoom: Bill Craft, Whitney Hatch

Also Present: Stephen Crane (Town Manager), Jon Blair (ELD Manager), Dylan Lewellyn (ELD Business Manager)

2. Citizen Queries – S. Player

- none

3. Electric Light Department Manager Transition Process – S. Player

Sarah began the conversation by asking who will be in charge of the administrative functions and who will be managing the day to day operations over the next few weeks. Jon said he has taken some vacation but he is not going anywhere so he's going to be around via phone or email. Things will continue to operate as normal. The distribution team, powerplant crew and clerical staff all have what they need to continue to move forward with the day to day operations. What is lacking is progress on the larger projects and some of the decisions that are going to impact us in the future. An example of that is interviewing someone for the vacancy on the line crew. Jon does not feel comfortable appointing a new lineman when he is not going to be here moving forward. Appointing an interim manager is imperative so we can start to bring that person up to speed and allow those decisions to be made by someone that is going to be here.

Sarah said Michael D. and Carl met with ELD leadership about recommendations moving forward. Michael D. said the general consensus was that it would make sense to find someone internally for the short term and possibly the long term. Michael D. also said we need to be prepared that the interim person might be in that position for many months and we may need to give the responsibilities over in stages over time. Carl said he met with the entire leadership team and he agreed with what Michael described with regard to the question about internal, and that it seems there are qualified candidates to fill the role. The department is feeling uncertain about the future so what we do about this appointment will say a lot about the direction of the department. Carl said he thinks we should think about an interim for a potentially lengthy period because we have a lot of issues that we need to get resolved, particularly the governance issue. This should be done before naming a new director. Charlie agreed that hiring someone internally is good for continuity. Jon and the staff seem to feel confident that we have someone for the role as interim general manager. As time goes on, if this person proves himself, we may not even need to do a formal search.

From the subcommittee perspective, Jim said Jon has always emphasized "building the bench" and being able to move people into positions if vacancies arose. We have brought strong and capable people into the organization and have developed them well to be in positions to fill greater roles. Jim said he is strongly in favor of the interim manager being hired from within. Jim also said he knows Jon well enough to know that he will be available if the interim manager needs him for something. If we went with an external interim manager we would lose that connection and support.

Michael S. said he is concerned about waiting to address the structural issues before we hire a new manager. But

he also thinks it will take a long time to get these issues taken care of and that is a long time to have an interim manager. Michael D. said perhaps we just get the projects started and then hand them over to the new manager. Ted said he thinks it's okay for an interim manager to be in place for a year. Whitney said he agrees with hiring an interim manager internally, and suggested we come up with a list of items that we can definitely put on the back burner. This would allow us to narrow down what the interim person should focus on. Jim said Jon made a specific recommendation, which is Dylan. Jim said it seems there is a general consensus to go with someone internally and asked if the subcommittee wanted to support the recommendation as Dylan.

Carl asked Dylan and Jon who would also be supporting Dylan in this role. Would we internally staff these roles or would we reach outside of the organization? Dylan said it would need to be a blend of both. We already have external resources that we rely on and we would continue to do that. There are also opportunities to leverage internal support. Jon drafted up some specific recommendations. Michael D. asked Dylan if he would be interested in taking the position. Dylan said he is more than willing to step in and support the department as best he can. Michael D. asked if he feels he has a comfortable handle on the work Jon has been implementing. Dylan said yes.

Michael S. said Jon brought engineering and technical skills as well as financial and managerial skills. Michael S. said Dylan seems to have learned a lot but he is not an engineer and that is the most significant shortfall. Dylan said he is not an engineer and although he has learned a lot, he knows when he doesn't know enough and knows when to ask for help. He has a lot of engineering resources that he can use. Bill said he supports Dylan's candidacy to keep things moving. He has a good scope of what Jon has been trying to accomplish. The day to day tasks are being handled well. Bill said Dylan had a lot of things he has been working on that will need to be taken over by someone else.

Sarah asked what types of resources we would have to bring in to support the work Dylan is currently doing. Dylan said he is the primary project manager on the meter conversion project which is the department's biggest priority right now. We need to ensure the successful completion of this project. The business office team right now is in a very strong position. The existing structure that we have there will go a long way.

Charlie asked about the powerplant and substations. Dylan said the power plant is one of our biggest vulnerabilities right now. He feels confident in their ability to step up, but the loss of Jeff Tuner is going to be a challenge. He does not have an immediate recommendation for how we proceed but maintaining that priority should be a critical action for the department.

Jim asked about Dylan's relationship with joint action agencies. Dylan said he serves on NEPAS customer service committee and he has been involved with the net-zero subcommittee. He is not as well networked as Jon but he knows where to go to build those connections. Carl asked Dylan if he feels like there are projects that should be slowed or paused. Dillon said he thinks it's important to maintain momentum on a lot of what we are doing. It is possible that there are projects that could possibly be slowed.

- Michael D. made a motion for the Select Board to recommend Dylan as the interim ELD Manager, seconded by Linda.
- Michael S. said we should discuss what the nature is of this interim appointment before voting.
- Stephen said from an administrative standpoint, the effective date would be August 14th. He will defer to the commissioners about the timeline but does not necessarily think we need a specific timeline.
- Bill said Dylan's current position will not go away, so once he is no longer interim manager his position is still secure.
- Carl said the idea of working with Dylan to create a position description and support plan makes sense. It's important to send a message about the role and the responsibilities of this position. It is not going to be watered down. The director position should perform all functions relative to that.

→ *Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 5-0*

- Jim made a motion for the ELD Subcommittee to recommend Dylan as the interim ELD Manager, seconded by Michael S.

→ *Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 7-0*

Carl said one of the things that became evident as he talked to people was the strength of the collaboration between the ELD and the water/ wastewater director. As we move this process forward, we should make sure we include Vicki in appropriate ways as we continue this conversation. They work as a team so we should continue as such.

Sarah asked if we want to initiate a search with a search firm to find a manager for long term. Sarah said they haven't even asked Dylan if he is interested in the position for the long term, if that is eventually what is decided is best. Michael said he is comfortable moving forward with Dylan as the interim for now and not moving forward with a long-term manager yet. This way we can give a few months for everyone to see how things are going and for Dylan to decide if he is even interested. Michael suggested establishing an initial benchmark for a check in, and they can then decide if they want to begin a search for a new manager. Jim said he agrees but he thinks 2-3 months from now we should have a decision made on if we should look for another candidate for the long term. Charlie said he agrees we should wait and see but he isn't sure if 2 months is long enough. Ted said he thinks waiting three months to get the process started is losing valuable time. Carl said he thinks there is some urgency to analyzing the process to figure out the governance issue. Michael said there are three stakes in the ground. One is the exact terms of the interim position regarding compensation and support for Dylan. The second is the Commissioners getting together with the ELD subcommittee to define roles and responsibilities for the position. The third could be a general agenda placeholder check in to see how things are going. Jim said we are not going to be successful with eliminating the concern within the department about governance, and we are not going to be able to get a candidate if there are governance issues. Michael S. said if we don't go out and look for a candidate, we don't know what's really out there or what is best for the organization.

Sarah said she is hearing we have some immediate work to do with Dylan on the scope of the position and support, as well as the governance issue. We also can have another subcommittee meeting to dig into the priority list and short term vs. long term projects. Then perhaps the Commissioners can have another conversation about when the search might continue. Jon said he likes the direction that is being considered. The organization has its strengths and weaknesses. When you are looking at who you want to bring in, you have to define what you are looking for. This involves understanding the current strengths and weaknesses and looking at what we are missing and what we need to fill. Jon would strongly advocate for ironing out the wrinkles with governance. It's also important to define the role. Sarah suggested doing a subcommittee meeting Wednesday night, August 9, to meet with Jon. The Select Board will also find another time to meet soon.

4. Adjourn – S. Player

- Motion to adjourn Select Board made by Michael D, seconded by Linda

→ *Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 5-0*

- Motion to adjourn ELD Subcommittee made by Jim, seconded by Michael S.

→ *Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 7-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
August 3, 2023