

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Select Board Meeting as Water and Sewer Commissioners
Monday, September 18, 2023 at 6:00 PM
Meeting Room A – Town Gall, 25 Green Street

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 Monday, September 18, 2023 at Town Hall, 25 Green Street

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

Also Present: Stephen Crane (Town Manager), Vicki Halmen (Water/Wastewater Director)

1. Executive Session

VOTE: Carl Nysten moved to convene into executive session, Linda Alexson seconded. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote. The Board entered into executive session pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws chapter 30A section 21(a) for the following purposes:

To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the government's bargaining or litigating position pertaining to the public safety building. Also, to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel; to actually conduct collective bargaining and contract negotiations with non-union personnel pertaining to treasurer/collector.

a. Approval of Executive Session Minutes – September 5, 2023

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Welcome/ Announcements – S. Player

- The Select Board is pleased to announce they have hired an interim ELD Manager, Dylan Lewellyn, who previously served as the Utilities Business Manager. He will be coming to an upcoming Select Board meeting in October to introduce himself and give an update.
- The MEPA comment period has been extended until October 20.
- There is as scheduled special Select Board meeting tomorrow night at 7 PM specially to discuss the dam project. Tomorrow night's meeting does not take the place of commenting through the official MEPA process.
- There is a Tri-Board meeting on Tuesday, September 26 at 7 PM in Meeting Room A.
- The Moderator has an appointment to make to the Government Study Committee and is looking for residents who are interested.
- Ipswich Illumination is October 6-8.
- There is an ELD Subcommittee meeting on September 20 at 7 PM in the Utilities Conference Room.
- There is a 3A Task Force meeting on Monday, September 25 at 7 PM.
- Charlie volunteered to go to a meeting with the veterans' groups who are organizing a parade to celebrate the 80th anniversary of D-Day and Memorial Day in May. Charlie is unable to attend the meeting, Linda said she can attend and Stephen will also be there.
- There is a Climate Resiliency Meeting tomorrow night at 5:30 PM in Meeting Room C at the Town Hall.
- There is an Audit Committee Meeting on Wednesday, September 27, in Meeting Room A at 7 PM.

4. Citizen Queries – S. Player

- none

5. Ipswich Human Rights Commission Introduction, Love Your Neighbors 5k Walk/Run – S. Player

Christina Donahue and Sharon Schiffer, both Co-Chairs of the Human Rights Commission, introduced themselves and let the Select Board know what they have been working on for the past year. This is a new commission. They have put together resources and provided information to the community on how to access different recourses. They held a small Juneteenth event and also planned a small pride event which was rained out. Sharon did a bystander training and the Commission has also collaborated with both the Hamilton-Wenham and the Beverly Human Rights Commissions. They also partnered with Ascension Church for a collaborative inclusion event. They are planning a 5K on October 1 at 11 AM. The goal of the event is to bring the community together. The cost is \$25 to register.

6. PUBLIC HEARING: Winter Water Rate Hearing. (1 of 2) – V. Halmen

Sarah read the legal notice:

Residents of the Town of Ipswich please note that the Select Board, as Water and Sewer Commissioners, will hold public hearings on Monday, September 18, 2023, at 7:20 p.m. and Monday, October 2, 2023, at 7:15 p.m. to consider and act on the increase and/or modification of the current water and sewer rates effective for billings on and after October 1, 2023.

VOTE: Motion to open the Public Hearing made by Linda, seconded by Michael. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 5-0.

Vicki Halmen, Water/Wastewater Director, read an overview of the presentation. There will be a revenue shortfall, a rate adjustment and proposed solutions, a residential water winter rate adjustment, a water and wastewater rate structure overview, wastewater fee schedule and update, and recommendations.

Vicki discussed the Water/Wastewater revenue shortfall. Both are billed based on metered water consumption using 5-year consumption averages. This has been very stable and accurate until recently. The current model no longer seems accurate because consumption is at an all-time low which means our assumption in revenue is then low. There is an expected \$300k water shortfall and a \$130k wastewater shortfall. Vicki's suggestion is to use the 5-year low consumption figures to more accurately project revenue. This aligns more closely with actual consumption. Both funds are enterprise funds, which means any extra funds stay with the enterprise fund. If we over collect, excess goes into retained earnings and gets reevaluated with the budget season to offset any rate we have projected.

Sarah asked if this is the approach our neighbors are also taking. Vicki said she is not certain but she knows the surrounding communities have different rate structures. Charlie asked, since consumption is going down, does that affect our withdrawals limits at all. Vicki said no.

Vicki presented a slide showing residential water seasonal (winter) rate that was approved by the Water/Wastewater Committee. The seasonal rate structure is revenue neutral. Linda said it seems like the seasonal rate structure doesn't work anymore because we have all become so good at reducing water usage. Linda asked if the subcommittee had talked about a different rate structure. Vicki said this is the rate structure they are approving this year but they have discussed a different rate structure and will continue to discuss this more. The base rate will increase 7.5%.

Vicki went over the current water and wastewater rate structures as well as adjustment options. One adjustment option would be to reduce commodity component to lower variability. Another option is to create a fixed fee based on meter size to cover fixed costs. Lastly, we could create a capital asset replacement (CARE) to cover capital improvement costs. These have all been considered by the Subcommittee, and each one has a downfall and the subcommittee still feels the current model is the best.

Charlie said they need the rate hike to balance the operating budget. He asked, is part of the operating budget capital expenses, and will it improve the ability to upgrade the system? Vicki said it will allow us to stay on track as planned. Charlie asked, if this is successful will we be able to dedicate more money to projects? Vicki said it will allow us to not change our spending plans that were budgeted.

Linda asked how much they have in reserve funds, it's about \$2M but they do have long range plans to spend this down. Linda asked if they considered using the reserve funds to offset this shortfall since this was an anomaly. Vicki said

this would have to be an appropriation of the use of reserve funds at Town Meeting. Vicki said that money is planned for and needed, so if we use it now Vicki will still be coming back for more money because the plan would not be not tracking.

Michael asked what those reserves are going to look like on year 4 of the 5-year spending plan. Vicki said the debt service is about \$1M. In FY28 that goes to over \$3M. Michael said what is going to stop Vicki from having to do a 15-18% hike increase is that we have the cushion in the reserves now. Charlie also said its good to keep this money in reserves in case we need it for an emergency.

Vicki also went over the wastewater fee schedule. Vicki said she wants to add the afterhours callout and the emergency services fees as they are also included in the water fee schedule.

7. Discuss/ Vote Sewer Extension Time Extension, Jeffrey’s Neck Road – V. Halmen

The Ganley’s are asking for a 1-year extension for their sewer extension because they have not been able to get a contractor to complete the work.

VOTE: Motion to extend the sewer extension request to 23-25 Jeffrey’s Neck Rd for one additional year until October 5, 2024 made by Charlie, seconded by Michael. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

8. Memorial Bench Request – Leitner – S. Player

Sarah said there is a 6ft long recycled memorial bench request to be placed at Pavilion Beach. There are 3 other memorial benches in this location. The Select Board has been asked to review the application for approval of the bench. Sarah thanked Olivia Mitchell-Eby who has made this request in honor of her partner.

VOTE: Motion to approve the request made by Linda, seconded by Carl. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

9. Budget Guidelines Discussion – S. Player

Sarah said Stephen created a memo for us to take a look at considering this as part of our process for setting guidelines around budgeting. Stephen said it’s a draft sample from the Board to the Town Manager based on guidelines and memos Stephen has experienced in the past. The Board would approve this as a part of the early budget process. The Select Board’s role in the budget process, the budget goals, and the guidelines would all be at the beginning for everyone to see. The Town Manager’s budget would be based on these things. The guidelines would be a level service budget, but to ask people to explain why they need to increase the budget and how that increase meets the other goals set forth by the Select Board.

Michael asked Stephen if he has worked with a town that broke the budget into different articles for voting. Our town’s budget is a bottom line budget. You can also do line item voting but that can get tricky. Most towns prefer to hash out line items ahead of time and vote on the entire budget. Michael said he saw Wilmington’s budget and they group them by department for voting. It allows them to vote a portion of a budget down or make an amendment vs. having to vote down an entire budget. Stephen said he thinks the approach of the town the way we have it is very good. He said he has worked with towns that do it differently and it has not been beneficial.

Sarah said they also discussed reconstituting the Strategic Working Group to help with capital needs and debt schedule. We do not currently have someone appointed to this group and we will be discussing it at the Tri-Board meeting. Carl said perhaps the group can help us keep track of what the major expenses are that are anticipated over the next few years and we can use that to help guide decisions for the current budget.

Sarah said she discussed moving the next Tri-Board meeting up to either November 14 or 15. Carl also suggested we take fresh looks at our expenditures from time to time. Stephen said he thinks more of that happens at the microlevel than you might think. Stephen said instead of doing zero-based budgeting, he does value-based budgeting to ensure we are getting a good value out of our budget.

10. Town Manager Evaluation Process – S. Player

The Select Board needs to provide Stephen an evaluation by November 1. The way we did this with the ELD Manager was everyone completed an individual evaluation and then it gets compiled into an executive summary. We could also do a 360 to get anonymous feedback from staff from a variety of levels. Mary said the last time we did a 360 they got feedback that the document wasn't customized to them. Stephen said there is an ICMA 360 requirement so they could look at that too. Stephen said from his experience the most meaningful feedback is from direct reports, because he doesn't interface with all levels of staff. Sarah suggested maybe they send it to all department heads. Linda asked if they should send it out to a variety of levels, Michael said he thinks that's a good idea. Sarah said they can begin their individual evaluations and we will also put this on next meeting's agenda so we can finalize the discussion. Sarah said she and Mary will look into which 360 we will use. Sarah said they can each fill out their individual forms and then Mary or Leah will write the executive summary.

11. Select Board Norms and Protocols – S. Player

Sarah read the School Committee's norms and said Mel Kleckner also provided examples of Select Board norms. Examples were preparation for matters coming before the Board, discourse, compliance with Open Meeting Law and Public Records Law, to abstain from interfering with the administration of Town Government, effective communication with other town committees and independent bodies, and be respectful of staff. The Select Board also discussed possibly creating some guidelines or protocols for citizen queries to help balance public input with meeting management.

Carl stated his support for norms 1, 2 and 6 as suggested by Mel. Complying with open meeting law is a requirement so maybe should not be on the list of norms. Abstaining from interfering with town government doesn't seem like a norm.

In regards to citizens queries, Charlie said he thinks it is important for there to be a question, and that comments should not be allowed. Michael agreed. Michael also suggested citizens queries should be reserved for items that are not on the agenda. If it's on the agenda, citizens should wait to ask the question until that agenda item. If a citizen raises a topic that is already on the agenda, it could trigger questions and conversation on that topic prior to the agenda item discussion. Charlie agreed and said he thinks if it's an agenda item, it should be discussed during the agenda. We should not take items out of order.

Sarah said she thinks it's okay for citizens queries to be either a question or a comment. Sarah also said she thinks it is better to have citizens queries and comments all at the beginning vs. having citizens wait for the agenda item, because having citizens make comments during agenda items can slow deliberation and interrupt conversation. Sarah said she is looking forward to them creating a norm and telling people what it will be so that she can stay consistent throughout each meeting.

Linda said she is also ambivalent about whether citizen queries are a question or a comment. Also due to the recent court decision, it seems legally, citizens can make a comment. Linda also said she thinks time limits are crucial.

Regarding comment vs. question, Charlie said he thinks it's important to hear those comments but it doesn't mean the Select Board has to comment or discuss it at that moment.

Stephen said he looks at it as us setting a clear and consistent expectation for citizens so they know what to expect. Carl said he would encourage us not to get too granular with it because we're bound to break our own rule. He thinks we should leave the decision to the Chair and we would be better served by talking about the spirit of citizen queries. Stephen said if the Board believes that public comment needs to be more structured, then you have to be pretty specific with it.

Linda brought up the "abstain from interfering with government" norm. Sarah said she is guessing that it a product of frustrations with roles and responsibilities from other towns. We may not feel we need this. Carl said he thinks norms are good to have and to refer to when there are issues. Even if we don't think this norm is needed for this current

Board, it may be helpful for a future Board.

Carl suggested the norms surrounding being prepared for meetings, civil discourse, and respect of each other. Sarah said she will draft those three and will bring them back to the Board.

12. Consent Agenda – S. Player

a. One Day Wine and Malt License Application(s) –

- i. Tim Griggs for True North Ale Co. for Illumination on October 6, 2023, Take out Terrace, Union Street and October 7, 2023, at 25 Green Street.
- ii. Jessica Porter for Appleton Farms for Farmhouse Wood-Fired Pizza Picnics at 219 County Rd. on October 1, 8 & 22, 2023.
- iii. Maria Tilkens for Tilkens Corporate LLC dba Bubble Bar Boston for Ipswich Illumination at 4 Union Street on October 6, 2023 and 25 Green Street on October 7, 2023.
- iv. Sarah Blackston of Essex County Brewing Co. & Ipswich Ale Brewery for Appleton Farm Day Beer Garden at 219 County Rd. on October 29, 2023.
- v. Bea Tiberii for Monarch and Rose Foods Inc. for Music Nights at 1 N. Main St. on October 6, 2023.

VOTE: Motion to approve the consent agenda as written in the packet, moved by Michael, seconded by Linda. The motion passed, 5-0.

13. Town Manager Report – S. Crane

- Stephen said Illumination is shaping up to be a really fun event.
- The DPW just issued a paving contract and Stephen attached a map of the streets in the packet.
- Water/Wastewater received a \$235k grant for the town wharf pump station relocation.
- They will be working on replacing the water main on Peabody Street.
- There will be a significant sewer project at Lord Square.
- There was a water rescue over the weekend that the police, fire, and coastguard all partnered on. The dispatch center was essential in the coordination of this rescue. Sarah suggested a commendation.
- The fire department had a memorial remembrance service for 9/11.
- Carl asked about the bridge repair. Stephen said they are waiting to hear from the state on what to do and if there will be funding. They may close the bridge all together. Michael said this is on Senator Tarr's radar, Stephen said he has been a big help.
- Linda asked if there was any update on the Winthrop Street Bridge, Stephen said it's still closed.
- NORESCO will be at the Tri-Board meeting to give an update.

14. Select Board Subcommittee Updates – S. Player

- Linda said the Veterans Board screening committee is moving along. Last week they reviewed 13 applications and narrowed it down to four. Next week they will do interviews.
- The shellfish advisory board held a special meeting on September 6 to hear shellfish-related concerns about the dam. There was good attendance and they heard some very serious concerns as well as comments both for and against. Charlie and Linda will summarize those comments and send them to the Select Board.
- Linda attended the Waste Reduction Advisory Board last week. State Rep. Kristin Kassner joined them to discuss the upcoming bottle bill. They also discussed the upcoming electronic and Styrofoam collection event which will be on October 21. The next meeting will be on October 11.
- Charlie said the fire department did a nice job with the 9/11 memorial celebration. Brett Emerson deserves a lot of credit for putting it together.

15. New/ Future Business – S. Player

- Linda said we need to put the Crane’s Beach resident sticker fees on an upcoming agenda. Sarah also said she spoke with the Police Chief about coming in at some point in November to discuss beach parking fees and for the buoys at Pavilion.

16. Miscellaneous and Correspondence – S. Player

- none

17. Adjourn – S. Player

VOTE: Motion to adjourn made by Michael, seconded by Linda. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
September 19, 2023