

**IPSWICH SELECT BOARD**  
**Meeting of Monday, September 20, 2021**

Pursuant to Open Meeting Law M.G.L. Chapter 30A, §§ 18-25, written notice posted by the Town Clerk and delivered to all Board members, a meeting of the Select Board was held on Monday, September 20, 2021 at 7:00 PM in Meeting Room A.

Board Members present: Dr. Tammy Jones, Chair; William Whitmore, Vice Chair; Linda Alexson; Kerry Mackin; Sarah Player

Also present: Tony Marino, Town Manager; Eileen Page, Recording Secretary

With a quorum present, Dr. Jones called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

**Welcome/Announcements**

**COMMENDATIONS**

Ms. Alexson thanked the Ipswich Police and Fire departments for holding a public 9/11 memorial service.

Alex Doyle has been named the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce Person of the Year.

**UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS**

The Public Safety Facility Committee has been holding a series of informational sessions for the public. The final presentations will take place simultaneously on October 5 at 7 PM, at Agawam Village and Caroline Avenue.

Special Town Meeting will be held on Saturday, October 16 at 9 AM on the football field. In the event of rain, the meeting will be held on Sunday, October 17 at 9 AM.

Ballot voting on Article 9 will take place on Tuesday, October 26 at The Y.

COVID-19 vaccines are available on Mondays from 1 PM to 4 PM at Our Lady of Hope Church.

**Citizen Queries**

Kelley Jane Kloub (Mitchell Road) asked that Reverse 911 calls be utilized for severe weather alerts. Ms. Kloub also stated that at a previous meeting, another resident was incorrectly chastised for swearing at the Board; Ms. Kloub stated that she was the one who had yelled the obscenity.

Charlie Surpitski (Ipswich Police, Retired Chief) asked if comments would be allowed regarding the North Shore Regional 911 Center (NSR911). Dr. Jones confirmed that they would be.

**Board and Committee Appointments**

- I. Sandra Cohen, New Appointment, Ipswich Cultural Council
- II. Brian Kubaska, Reappointment, Water and Wastewater Subcommittee

- *Vote: Ms. Mackin moved to appoint Ms. Cohen to the Ipswich Cultural Council, and reappoint Mr. Kubaska to the Water and Wastewater Subcommittee. Mr. Whitmore seconded. The motion carried unanimously.*

**Consent Agenda**

- I. One Day Wine and Malt License Applications
  - a. Michele McGrath of the Ipswich Cultural Council for the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Art Show and Sale at the Town Hall Tent, 25 Green Street on October 1, 2021
  - b. Trudi Perry of Alfalfa Winery for Wine Your Way Out of the Maze event at Marini Farm on October 10, 2021

- *Vote: Ms. Alexson moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Mr. Whitmore seconded. The motion carried unanimously.*

### **Approval of Minutes**

- I. August 9, 2021
- II. April 13, 2021 – Bean Counting

The Board did not vote on April 13 minute due to typographical errors.

- *Vote: Ms. Alexson moved to approve the minutes of August 9, 2021. Mr. Whitmore seconded. The motion carried 3-0, with 2 members abstaining.*

### **Vote to Approve Special Town Meeting Ballot for October 26, 2021 Election**

- *Vote: Ms. Player moved to approve the ballot. Mr. Whitmore seconded. The motion carried unanimously.*

### **Select Board Member Subcommittee Update**

#### **EASTERN ESSEX DISTRICT VETERANS**

The Eastern Essex District Veterans Board of Directors met on September 8 to hear a presentation by Donald Jarvis, who works for the SAVE Team providing veteran services in the region.

The Veterans Board approved a job description for a part-time administrative assistant position.

The department will undergo a financial audit. The last audit was conducted about five (5) years ago.

The High Street Bridge will be dedicated to veterans who served during the Global War on Terror on May 21, 2022.

Plans for a 2021 Veterans Day parade or ceremony are not yet known.

#### **PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITY COMMITTEE**

The Public Safety Facility Committee held an informational session at the Ipswich Bay Yacht Club last week. Tours of the current police and fire stations will be available during Illumination.

#### **ELECTRIC LIGHT SUBCOMMITTEE**

The Electric Light Subcommittee met on September 15. The department audit came back with no adjustments. The Subcommittee also discussed the Town's goals for carbon neutrality, and reviewed the proposal made by Green Development at the September 7 Select Board meeting.

### **PUBLIC HEARING: Winter Water Rates Hearing (1 of 2)**

“Residents of the Town of Ipswich, please note that the Select Board, as Water Commissioners, will hold Public Hearings on Monday, September 20, 2021 at 7:15 PM, and Monday, October 4, 2021 at 7:15 PM to consider and act on the modification of the current water rates effective for billings on and after October 1, 2021.” – Dr. Tammy Jones, Chair, Board of Water Commissioners

- *Vote: Ms. Mackin moved to open the Public Hearing. Ms. Player seconded. The motion carried unanimously.*

Vicki Halmen (Water & Wastewater Director) stated that the residential customer rates are adjusted twice a year, in May and October. The summer rate, which is in effect from May 1 through September 30, is 1.5x the base rate. The winter rate is in effect from October 1 through April 30, and is set based on revenue collected through the summer so as to meet a revenue neutral target. The 2020 summer rate was delayed by a month due to COVID-19, which delayed the removal of the summer rate by a month. As a result, the winter rate was lower in order to remain revenue neutral.

The winter rate for 2021 is recommended to be set at \$7.19 per 100ft<sup>3</sup>, effective October 1, 2021 through April 30, 2022.

Ms. Alexson stated that based on the data presented, a rate of \$6.78 per 100ft<sup>3</sup> should be sufficient to meet the revenue target. Ms. Halmen responded that last year's increase was 8%, and this year's increase is 6%. Ms. Alexson suggested continuing the base rate through summer 2022 in an effort to gather data about water usage without financial penalties. Ms. Halmen disagreed, saying the risk of an increase in usage was too great.

Mr. Whitmore stated that he would like to discuss an ascending block rate structure, previously suggested by Ms. Mackin.

Ms. Alexson asked what kind of impact new developments coming online, such as those on High Street, Linebrook Road, and Essex Road, would have on Ipswich's withdrawal limits. Ms. Halmen responded that even with Linebrook Road and Essex Road building at fully capacity, Ipswich would remain below their authorizations. She stated that if the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) lowered the withdrawal levels of the Parker River Basin, the Town would appeal the decision.

KelleyJane Kloub (Mitchell Road) asked when hydrant flushing would take place. Ms. Halmen responded that it would take place beginning Tuesday, September 21. Ms. Kloub noted that flushing before October 1 would require residents to run their water at the summer rate, and asked the Town to delay hydrant flushing until the rate returned to its base cost. Ms. Halmen responded that due to staffing and equipment needs, the flushing must be conducted tomorrow.

Mr. Whitmore asked what the cost of hydrant flushing would be to the rate payers. Ms. Halmen responded that it would amount to about \$1.00 per household.

Ms. Alexson agreed that flushing should be delayed until after October 1.

- *Vote: Mr. Whitmore moved to close the Public Hearing. Ms. Player seconded. The motion carried unanimously.*

#### **PUBLIC HEARING: Discuss Proposal from North Shore Regional 911**

"Residents of the Town of Ipswich, please note that the Select Board will discuss North Shore Regional 911 dispatch for emergency communications operations at its public meeting on Monday, September 20, 2021 at 7:45 PM in Meeting Room A of Town Hall, 25 Green Street." – Dr. Tammy Jones, Select Board, Chair

Alyson Dell Isola (Director, North Shore Regional 911 Center) and Chris Ryan (Deputy Director, North Shore Regional 911 Center) appeared before the Board to answer questions related to their proposal made at the August 2, 2021 Select Board meeting.

Ms. Alexson asked how many times services have been dispatched to the wrong address (e.g., Juniper Street in Ipswich versus Juniper Street in Wenham.) Mr. Ryan stated that while he did not know the exact number, any mistaken addresses had been caught within a few seconds of being made, and were always made during trainings. Ms. Alexson stated that a July 25 news article quoted an Amesbury firefighter as saying he has been dispatched to incorrect addresses on numerous occasions. Ms. Dell Isola stated that there had been no complaints from the Chiefs of Amesbury Fire or Police. Ms. Alexson asked how many complaints had been filed by member towns. Ms. Dell Isola stated that over the last year there had been twenty-two (22) sustained complaints. She stated that the complaints logged were mainly related to incorrect tones being used. She stated that in 2020, Amesbury Fire Department did not file any complaints with NSR911.

Dr. Jones asked if the current Intermunicipal Agreement (IMA) provides funding for the emergency locks at the police station. Ms. Dell Isola stated that the IMA only provides station monitoring.

Ms. Player asked what the cost would be to withdraw from ESR911 at the end of a contract and return to a local dispatch service. Frank Pozniak (Executive Director, North Shore Regional 911 Center) stated that he was unsure of

the cost to leave NSR911, but currently there would be a \$0 cost to remain with the system into an eleventh year of the IMA.

Mr. Whitmore asked how the center is funded. Mr. Pozniak stated that every phone bill includes a \$1.50 surcharge, which is reallocated by the State to regionalized 911 centers.

Dr. Jones asked how long onboarding would take if Ipswich joined NSR911. Ms. Dell Isola responded that it would take at least a year to fully train the staff, and four (4) additional staff would be hired. She added that existing Ipswich dispatchers would be able to apply for a position with NSR911.

Ms. Player asked what NSR911's average response time is. Ms. Dell Isola responded that the median pickup time is 3 seconds, and the average pickup to dispatch for Priority 1 calls is 70 seconds.

Mr. Whitmore asked what factors might influence a dispatch to take longer. Mr. Ryan responded that language barriers or moving calls (e.g., a call coming from a car where the driver is unsure if they are headed north or south) could influence response time. He added that the average dispatch time for fire alarms is 60 seconds.

Ms. Alexson noted that NSR911's Intermunicipal Agreements stated that State 911 reserves the right to make changes to decisions made by the Executive Board. Ms. Dell Isola stated that while the right exists, it is not exercised often, and day-to-day operations are decided by the Chiefs and Town Administrators.

Charles Cooper (Ipswich Police Detective, Retired) stated that he would be acting as a spokesperson for the "Keep Ipswich 911 Local" group that has formed in response to the NSR911 proposal. Mr. Cooper asked how many employees at ESR911 had reached their five-year anniversary; Ms. Dell Isola responded that all of the supervisors, at least four (4) dispatchers, Mr. Ryan, and herself had been with NSR911 for a least five (5) years. Mr. Cooper asked what the pickup to dispatch time was not included in the feasibility study presented to the Town; Mr. Ryan responded that NSR911 has set a goal of 80% of calls being answered within 80 seconds. Mr. Cooper stated that NSR911 has failed to meet the NENA industry standard of responding to 99% of calls within 120 seconds. Mr. Cooper asked if the center has ever been fully staffed; Ms. Dell Isola responded that it has not.

Mr. Whitmore asked why the center has never been fully staffed. Ms. Dell Isola responded that from 2013-2018 the center was struggling to get on track, and in 2016 they had a 42% turnover rate. The center's current turnover rate is 13%, which is less than the industry average of 17%.

Mr. Cooper asked what the process would be for withdrawing from NSR911 at the end of the current IMA, should the Town join and be dissatisfied with the service; Mr. Pozniak stated that he was not sure what the cost of Ipswich leaving the center would be. Mr. Cooper asked if NSR911 had the capability to communicate with the Department of Public Works (DPW) via radio during storms, as the current IPD dispatch does; Ms. Dell Isola responded that the center does not offer such a service. Mr. Cooper asked who addresses technical issues that arise with the servers; Mr. Ryan responded that an IT consultant is on staff. Mr. Cooper asked what caused the computer outages that occurred in August for the Topsfield and Essex dispatch systems; Ms. Dell Isola stated that the center occasionally conducts planned outages for maintenance. Mr. Cooper stated that he was told by a Topsfield police officer that the computers were out for 24 hours, and officers were unable to access arrest records.

Allyson Boyington (35 County Street) asked how many times services were dispatched to the wrong location, across all five (5) communities currently served by NSR911. Ms. Dell Isola stated that she did not have an exact statistic for that.

#### PRESENTATION FROM THE IPSWICH DISPATCH STAFF MEMBERS

Dan Morris (Ipswich Police, Dispatcher) gave a presentation on the current dispatch system in place for Ipswich. The Communications Center was established in 1999 to allow more officers to be on the streets. The center is staffed by four (4) full-time dispatchers, one (1) part-time dispatcher, and three (3) per diem dispatchers. All officers maintain State training requirements. The Communications Center is staffed 24/7, and maintains regular radio contact with the DPW, Crane's Beach, Crane's Castle, the Coast Guard, other area police and fire departments, the MBTA police and commuter rail, BAPER, CoMIRS, MEMA, NEMLEC, UTAC and VTAC nation-wide Interop

Channels, and HAM radio repeaters. The center runs on IMC software, which was most recently customized to fit Ipswich's needs in 2015. The system also maintains the same idiosyncrasies as the NSR911 system, such as specific directions for hard-to-find addresses, or notes such as "use back steps" on addresses that make frequent calls for service.

From 2018-2021, 9,198 people visited the police station for service, 78% of which were fully served by a dispatcher. Mr. Morris added that in addition to dispatch, the Communications Center also handles all police/fire business inquiries, Animal Control inquiries, Shellfish business and inquiries, burning permits, inquiries related to Crane's Beach, License to Carry permit scheduling, and Town business outside of regular business hours.

From 2018-2021, 9,193 911 calls were received. The average ring to dispatch time for Priority 1 calls was 47.6 seconds. A recent fire on Stagehill Road had emergency crews dispatched 27 seconds after the call was received. A recent medical call was dispatched in 25 seconds.

Mr. Morris stated that if dispatch is regionalized, there will be a loss of trust between the dispatchers and fire/police, loss of the safety and security of fully staffed, 24-hour police lobby, loss of interoperable communications, and a loss of decision making at the local level.

Mr. Whitmore asked how multiple incidents at once are addressed, such as a 911 call being received at the same time a hysterical person walks into the lobby. Dave Irvine (Dispatcher) stated that in the situation presented, a dispatcher would get on the police frequency and call for support in the lobby, and address the 911 call while police were arriving, but added that the situation presented does not happen often.

Dr. Jones asked if there was a residency requirement for Ipswich dispatchers, and if not, how they become more qualified to know Ipswich better than a regional dispatcher. Mr. Irvine responded that the biggest difference during onboarding is that Ipswich dispatchers only need to learn Ipswich, and not five (5) other communities as well. Dr. Jones asked who services the Communications Center computer system; Mr. Morris responded that Sgt. Eric Copithorne handles in-house computer upgrades, while IMC equipment is serviced by their contractors and specialty vendors.

Ms. Alexson asked if the Communications Center had ever dispatched services to the wrong address. Neither Mr. Irvine nor Mr. Morris knew of any instances where this occurred.

Ms. Player asked about the life expectancy of the current equipment. Mr. Morris reported that radio infrastructure has been upgraded within the last five (5) years.

Dave Costa (Ipswich resident; Beverly Police Officer) asked if dispatchers joining the Communications Center are onboarded and trained by veteran dispatchers. Mr. Morris responded that current full-time dispatchers have at least fifteen (15) years of experience each.

Saasha Parent (9 Second Street) asked if the police station would still be available to residents if dispatch was outsourced to NSR911. Police Chief Paul Nikas responded that if dispatch was regionalized, the station would need to be closed from 4 PM to 8 AM, unless the Town hired 3-4 additional officers to staff the station overnight. Other alternatives would be utilizing the NSR911's lobby remote monitoring system, or reducing the number of officers on patrol.

Michael Schaaf (1 Shagbark Woods) asked how many times in the last five (5) years someone had sought refuge in the police station. Chief Nikas responded that residents walk in under a variety of circumstances, including family crisis and medical emergencies. While he did not have the exact numbers, he noted that people have had heart attacks in the lobby.

Robert Donohue (12 High Street) asked if Ipswich was able to regionalize with another municipality and take advantage of the \$1.50 surcharge on their own. Mr. Pozniak responded that under the state statute, a region was considered the combination of two (2) or more municipalities.

Christine Hezzey (18 Green Street) asked how the regional center would be able to keep call straight during a nor'easter. Ms. Dell Isola responded that NSR911 tracks weather patterns, and staffs the center accordingly.

Charlie Surpitski (Ipswich Police Chief, Retired) noted two (2) Facebook posts by NSR911, instructing residents not to call the center with power-related questions, and asked callers to remain on the line in the event of a wait so as not to lose their place in the queue. Ms. Dell Isola argued that the post was taken out of context to imply the call center could not handle an increase call volume, and stated that hang-ups would be classified as an abandoned call, and need to be followed up on.

Officer Joe Perna (Ipswich Police) read a prepared statement on behalf of the Ipswich Police Association:

“The members of the Ipswich Police Association respectfully offer our views and objections to the proposed closing of the Ipswich Emergency Communications Center and subsequent transition of emergency communication services to the North Shore Regional 911 Center in Middleton, Massachusetts. These views are based on the over twenty years of experience we have in working with these dedicated, long-serving professionals, who, along with the members of the Ipswich Fire Department and locally based Action Ambulance paramedics, Animal Control, Harbors, and our Shellfish Constables, continually deliver the entirety of police, fire, medical emergency, and public safety responses that our community has come to expect. In 1999, the Public Safety Department transitioned emergency communication services from a department-based model of separate communications to a combined police-fire dispatch system. A civilian staff was hired to operate an updated communication center, which was located in the police station. Among the many advantages gained in this transition was the reassignment of the police officers from dispatch duties to patrol or other functions, thus increasing the police department’s presence and availability to the community. The presence of a civilian dispatcher in the Communication Center also allowed the police station to remain open to the public for walk-in assistance on a twenty-four hour basis. Eliminating the civilian personnel would thus result in either closing the police station lobby to the public, or reassigning a trained police officer from patrolling the community and responding to calls, to remaining on stationhouse duty. This would clearly be a regressive step and detriment to public safety. As you are aware, Ipswich is unique in its geographical makeup, which often creates complex public safety challenges. Unlike the other five communities currently involved with the regional system, Ipswich encompasses the seacoast, a heavily utilized river, State forests, and public beaches, all contained within a land mass of thirty-three square miles. Successfully responding to emergencies in the more remote regions of town requires coordination of emergency services by a professional communications staff with broad knowledge of the community, its people, and the public safety personnel. The current communications staff with decades long service possesses these attributes. As police officers, we work closely with them, often discussing calls we are responding to, including warrant service and other potentially dangerous actions, or critiquing completed calls with the goal of improving our response and service. Eliminating these obvious advantages will only bring less service, safety, and satisfaction to the community and public safety staff. Finally, we have long been in communication with fellow officers from those departments utilizing the regional 911 system. They candidly admit their frustrations with the deficiencies of the regional system and all have stated that they preferred their long-gone local systems. The safety of our officers, firefighters, and residents should come first when deciding on a proposed change of this magnitude. It is our belief that Ipswich is a unique and special place, and so deserves to keep its highly functioning and professional Public Safety Communications system that has served the community so well for over twenty years.”

Firefighter Jeff Stone (Ipswich Fire) read a prepared statement on behalf of the Ipswich Firefighters Local 1913:

“We the members of the Ipswich Firefighters Local 1913 write to you to express our full support for the skilled and dedicated members of the Town’s emergency communications staff, and our opposition to joining the North Shore Regional 911 Center. Our jobs protect the lives, health, and property of our town’s citizens rely heavily on the knowledge and abilities of the professionals that answers calls to 911. When it comes to knowledge of emergency dispatch procedures, we would put our local dispatchers up against any agency, anywhere in the Commonwealth. The NSR911 could, perhaps accurately, make the same claim about the abilities of its own employees. But can anyone possibly argue that our local personnel’s

comprehensive, first-hand knowledge of our town's unique geography and resources is not a vital asset when it comes to swiftly and effectively dispatching firefighters, police, and emergency medical services to a potentially life-threatening crisis? In any dire emergency - a fire, a heart attack, and incidence of violence - the difference between life and death is counted in seconds. No doubt you have seen the data gathered from both the Ipswich dispatch center and NSR911. The numbers show a highly significant difference between the two agencies in the time it takes from the receipt of a 911 call and the dispatch of emergency responders, with regional dispatch 53% slower than our local professionals. If that gap means the difference between life and death in the outcome of only one single emergency, how can our town possibly justify discarding the agency with the proven faster response? While safeguarding the lives of our citizens is the single most important priority of our town, we must furthermore give the utmost consideration to the livelihoods of the men and women who have dedicated themselves to that sacred duty. The best these people who have given so much to Ipswich can hope for is to successfully apply to NSR911, at a loss of seniority and the well-earned compensation that comes with it. That would be a betrayal of the values we like to believe our Town government holds. We fully understand how tempting the promises from NSR911 are: that we can have an emergency dispatch service that is almost as good as our current one, at a savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars. But we are urging you, our Town leaders, to look beyond that monetary figure to the numbers that really matter: the nearly 14,000 citizens of our town and the fine men and women whose professionalism, dedication, and local knowledge make those citizens safer."

Mr. Surpitski read the contents of a petition signed by over 300 Ipswich residents:

"We, as citizens of Ipswich, Massachusetts, support keeping our 911 local and opposed the proposal to employ the regional 911 dispatch service. Our Ipswich dispatch team provides our citizens with local response, local commitment, and local competence. This results in faster arrival to our emergencies, a police station open 24/7, a direct connection to all public safety services for non-emergency situations, and the ability to summon and coordinate all Town services including DPW, Electric, Animal Control, the Water Department, Forestry, and others whenever needed. The safety and support of our citizens must be prioritized."

Mr. Surpitski then read a prepared statement on behalf of himself, Mr. Cooper, and Gavin Keenan (Ipswich Police Chief, Retired):

"First I would like to thank the Chief of Communications for the excellent presentation. It contained many of the points that spurred me and other former public safety officials to advocate that the Town not transition to the NSR911. Together we represent over 100 years of public safety experience, both in the areas of operations as well as management. Charles Cooper served not only as our police detective, but also as our Emergency Management Director and in-house radio expert. Chief Keenan rose through the ranks to Chief of Police in charge of all public safety operations. I was the chief of Police/Director of Public Safety, which included all the divisions of public safety including fire services. As such, we all have experience in effective public safety communications and have been ultimately responsible for the effective, timely, and efficient delivery of all emergency and non-emergency public interactions. We have all seen the proposal that is before you today. There have been others during our tenures. This one is packaged a little differently now than those in the past. Today its touted as being free, but we know that nothing is truly free, and, to quote on old adage, 'If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.' This is as true today as it was when first proposed, and when it was implemented by other communities. We will end up losing. What is also true is that for the very same reasons that it was rejected in the past, by the Town's management and Select Board, it should be rejected today. And we are not alone. Obviously, this lack of enthusiasm to join NSR911 is evident in the vast majority of Essex County communities. Although many of the specific reasons to reject it have been discussed or will be by other speakers, there are two that we believe deserve special attention. First, it eliminates local control. It can't do what we want or need. This is clearly identified in their management study, and I quote, 'Regardless of what they stated their needs would be, or what they wanted the center to do for them, every potential participant was promised that the ECRECC would do exactly what they wanted and be able to fulfill every request. While this type of service delivery to exact specifications is possible in small communities with their own dispatch and communications operations, it just is not realistic, or possible, in a regional endeavor such as the ECRECC. In essence,

based on the promises that were made, the ECRECC is operating five small municipal dispatch centers. This customization requires more resources that have contributed to a fiscally unrealistic environment. Nonetheless, participants still expect, at least to a certain extent, what they were promised, and have resisted the inevitable suggestions that a more standardized approach to operations is necessary. Requiring that telecommunicators be familiar with multiple policies or procedures for the same type of incident based upon the jurisdiction it occurs in is not conducive to effective operations.' Second, we should not put barriers in place that isolates our public safety personnel, who also serve as the face of local government 24/7, 365 days per year, from timely communication with citizens. We should remember that despite the severity of the issue, it is important to the citizen who took the time to contact us, and it therefore deserves our timely attention. Each year there are thousands of these interactions. They should not be ignored, minimized, or delayed. To do so is to erode the public's confidence in public safety as well as the Town and its elected representatives. We know that NSR911 cannot and will not be able to meet our expectations. This service along with others is simply too important to lose."

Lt. Brett Emerson (Ipswich Fire) expressed support for the current Communications Center, saying that police and fire know each dispatcher personally, and the trust and confidence this has afforded is invaluable.

Mr. Keenan read a prepared statement:

"Madame Chair and members of the Select Board, thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening. Please know that my comments represent the collective thoughts of many individuals who have spent decades in public service and these comments will center on what we have heard tonight and what it means for the future of public safety in Ipswich. Our spirit is buoyed by the strong positions taken by our police and fire personnel and the wide outpouring of public support for our local Emergency Communications Center and its very competent staff. As you know, our Emergency Communication Center has been serving our residents and others for twenty-two years. In that time, it has functioned not simply as a 911 Public Safety Answering Point linking those in need of help with the professionals who render that help, but as the connective tissue of our public safety function; providing the timely and accurate information necessary to a safe and effective police service, communicating hazard and caution alerts to our firefighters in times of critical need, coordinating medical aid, water rescue, flood and storm emergency responses with Action Ambulance, the Coast Guard and local Public Works, all while maintaining an open and accessible police station that serves as our only twenty-four hour, seven day, point-of-government location in Ipswich. Tonight, you have heard once again from the Director of NSR911. You have heard the questions posed and the answers given. You have heard the perspective of Chief Nikas and others. You have also, for the first and only time, given a public forum to our own Emergency Communications staff, and have had the opportunity to question them and develop an understanding of the very unique and important array of services that they deliver to our community on a daily basis. You have also been made aware of the deficiencies within the NSR911 feasibility study and the additional information contained within their annual reports as well as the 2018 audit commissioned by the Essex County Sheriff. These documents are telling, and the 125 recommendations of the audit cautionary. You now know of the punitive provisions contained within the Interagency Municipal Agreement and can surmise for yourselves the rationale for their existence. You know that rather than a Chief or Supervisor taking a simple walk down the corridor of the police station to address an issue or correct a problem within the Communication Center, corrective action would, per the dictates of the Interagency Agreement, be deferred to a committee for possible consideration, long after the fact. You know of the stark contrast in ring to dispatch times, and the reason why the Ipswich Communication Center staff can dispatch aid and assistance in emergency situations in nearly half the time as NSR911. You have stated publicly that you wished to conduct site visits to both the NSR911 Center in Middleton and the Ipswich Communication Center. We stipulate that you will find the NSR911 facility modern, well lighted and with an impressive array of the latest technologies and radio equipment. You will witness very professional call-takers answering 911 phones, and then transposing the information into a computer that will then convey that information to a separate dispatcher who will then broadcast the call. The Ipswich facility will seem small in comparison. The radios and equipment are of the same caliber, though the alarm board that NSR911 will not maintain still holds a prominent place in our radio console. The building is older, vintage 1938, but this is hoped to change soon. What you will see in Ipswich that is absent in Middleton are citizens entering the lobby for personal

assistance and police officers and supervisors engaged in information exchanges with communication staff. These very tangible assets cannot be maintained remotely, and the ability to problem solve and innovate cannot wait for an advisory committee decision. On February 8<sup>th</sup> of this year, you voted to authorize the Town Manager to send a Notice of Intent letter to NSR911 requesting the feasibility study. Some seven weeks have passed since the August 2<sup>nd</sup> presentation of that study. This has, we believe, allowed ample time for the exercise of due-diligence on your part. You can now compare and contrast the relative value of our local Emergency Communications Center and discern what would be lost following an outsourcing to NSR911. Only four weeks remain until the all-important Town Meeting seeking tax-payer support for a new Public Safety Facility. Although one can argue that these are separate issues, public sentiment would suggest otherwise. As you know, one of the charms of living in a small town is the awareness that people know who you are and care when you have trouble. Maybe that, like so many other good things, is fading away. We sure hope not, and in our view, the proposed outsourcing of our Emergency Communication capabilities is a poor solution in search of a non-existent problem. The rank and file members of both the police and fire departments reject it, other stake-holders in local government services reject it, and as you have no doubt learned from the feed-back you have received, a wide swath of the public does as well. It is also a terrible detriment to the hard work and loyalty exhibited every day by our Emergency Communication staff, who sit before you tonight and wonder for their future. Surely, they deserve better. For these reasons, we urge you to move on the matter tonight and vote to maintain our local Emergency Communication Center and staff.”

Joni Soffron (Agawam Village) stated that Ipswich public safety employees are “the best of the best.” She also stated that the Select Board is elected by townspeople and works for the townspeople, and it has been made clear that the town does not want to regionalize the Communications Center.

- *Vote: Ms. Mackin moved to not accept the proposal by NSR911. Ms. Alexson seconded. The motion carried unanimously.*

The motion was met with a standing ovation by residents.

Mr. Whitmore asked that the public supporting a local 911 dispatch show the same support for funding the Public Safety Facility at Special Town Meeting.

- *Vote: Ms. Alexson moved to close the Public Hearing. Ms. Mackin seconded. The motion carried unanimously.*

#### **New Business**

None.

#### **Old Business**

- *Vote: Ms. Alexson moved to add Ms. Player to the Electric Light Subcommittee as the Select Board representative. Ms. Mackin seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.*

#### **Town Manager Report**

Mr. Marino reported that a mitigation plan is currently underway for the Board to review regarding studies of the Ipswich River Mill Dam and the effects its removal would have on the EBSCO building.

- *Vote: Ms. Mackin moved to adjourn. Ms. Player seconded. The motion carried unanimously.*

The Select Board adjourned at 10:38 PM.

*Respectfully submitted by Eileen G. Page  
09.30.2021*