

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Select Board – Tri-Board Meeting with School Committee and Finance Committee
Tuesday, September 26, 2023, at 7:00 PM
Meeting Room A – Town Hall, 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 Tuesday, September 26, 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: Finance Committee, School Committee, Stephen Crane (Town Manager)

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Welcome/ Announcements – S. Player

- Sunday October 1 there is a Love Your Neighbor 5K hosted by the Ipswich Human Rights Commission.
- The MEPA comment period for the dam project is open until October 10.
- The next Select Board meeting is Monday October 3.
- There is a Special Town Meeting on Tuesday October 24 at 7 PM in the high school auditorium.
- There is an Audit Committee meeting on September 27 at 7 PM.
- The Shellfish Advisory Board meets on Tuesday October 3 at 7 PM.
- The annual Polish Picnic is this Saturday at the Masonic Lodge.

3. Citizen Queries – S. Player

- Gary Champion (3 Palomino Way), Chair of the Government Study Committee, read a statement concerning Mr. Surpitski's comments on the September 12 Finance Committee meeting which influenced the Finance Committee's vote on the article. Gary asked, going forward, will the Select Board fully assess all GSC research and facts? Will the Select Board move forward in a collaborative, transparent, and respectful way with the GSC toward legislative recommendations? Sarah said she cannot speak on behalf of the full Select Board and they are not going to deliberate on this tonight because it's not on the agenda, however she appreciates the sentiment of the questions and understands the concerns.

4. Whittier Regional Technical School Capital Project Presentation – Superintendent Maureen Lynch

Maureen Lynch, Superintendent of Whittier Tech, gave a presentation to explain the Whittier Tech capital project. Whittier Tech was built in 1973 and a lot has evolved in vocational technology. Maureen gave a presentation showing what has changed in the charter and the needs of the buildings.

Robert Hardy, Facilities Manager at Whittier Tech, showed photos of the library, auditorium, classrooms, and locker rooms. The spaces are not up to code, there are leaks, and the buildings are not wheelchair accessible. There are many upgrades needed. Robert said there will be an open house from 9-11 on January 13 to come see the school. The building inspector said they are not able to do another renovation until a sprinkler system is installed. Maureen also went through a timeline of what has been done so far toward the project. They looked at doing upgrades, doing an addition plus upgrades, and doing a new building. The new building was the most economical. There will be a district-wide vote on January 23 from 11-7. It will be the only question.

Maureen went over the finances showing code compliance upgrades vs. a new school. The code compliance upgrades would be \$364M vs. \$298M for the new school after reimbursement from MSBA. The next steps are to finalize the budget and the impact to communities, receive state approval to move forward, and the final vote on January 23.

Michael asked why we are doing 11-7 polling times, he is concerned it will cut out a significant portion of the people who vote before work. Maureen said they met with the city clerks and it can only be 8 hours. The clerks said they thought it would be better to do later vs. earlier. Michael also asked if the polling will happen at typical polling locations where votes usually happen, Maureen said they are still working on locations. They will be back to Ipswich November 20 at the library to do a community forum. Michael asked how the voting works. They combine all the communities' votes together and it is a total vote, simple majority. Carl said Ipswich has a lot of capital project needs. Maureen said every community right now is facing similar struggles. Whittier Tech is having to cancel school sometimes because they are having leaks, electricity outages, and extreme heat on the top floor.

Linda asked what the total project cost is and what Ipswich's share is. Maureen said the total cost is \$298M that would be spread out between the 11 towns. Ipswich would be responsible for 7.85% of the total cost. Linda said they have come really far in the process and she doesn't recall hearing a lot about this project until very recently. The residents have been taken by surprise. Linda asked, if they began this process in 2016, why hasn't there been communication. Maureen said they have met with all municipal leaders since 2016. They have been very transparent and upfront so everyone knows what's going on. She thinks the change in municipal leaders in Ipswich may have something to do with it.

Emilie Smith asked if Ipswich has 7.85% of the students. Maureen said no they don't, they have 28 students. This is the regional agreement. Bob Chambers asked if the programs are typically the same number of years and how many students graduate compared to those who begin. Maureen said they have the same requirements as the Ipswich HS. Students have to have 2 years in the trade in order to get their trade certificate and they have to pass the MCAS. Ken Swenson asked how it works regarding how many students apply vs. get in. Maureen said not as many students apply from Ipswich. Kate Eliot asked what the median home price is in Ipswich. The median single-family value is \$634k, and the average single-family value is \$704k. Kate said they would appreciate being kept in the loop as the numbers get nailed down.

Ken asked how often the member agreement is reassessed. Maureen said it hasn't been reassessed in 50 years. The issue is if one town wants to change something, all of the other towns have to agree to it. Ken said he sees that as a problem. He also said he would encourage them to speak with the School Committee as well as the Town Manager because for Ipswich, the Town Manager has changed and this year is the first time the Finance Committee is hearing about this \$30M ask. Regardless what the need is, to be told we have to pay \$30M and there's nothing we can do about it isn't leaving a good taste in their mouth. This should have been on a 5-year rolling capital plan and instead they have 6 months to figure it out. He also asked if Ipswich is guaranteed a certain amount of enrollment. Maureen said that is not a part of the regional agreement. Kate asked if most students get in. Maureen said if a student doesn't get in they can appeal the process, if they don't get in again they can continue to apply twice a year until junior year.

Michael Schaaf. asked about the sustainable aspects of the building design. One of the major features is to install a geothermal well system which will be used for heating and cooling and will also have financial incentives and paybacks. The building will be PD ready so that solar can be installed in the future. Jamie Fay said there were options as to how to vote this project. It can be voted district-wide or community by community, and he asked why they chose this way. Maureen said if they did it town by town it would have to be unanimous and they couldn't add a future vote for debt exclusion. With 11 cities and towns and having to meet the MSBA timeline of 120 days, it was agreed that the district-wide vote would be the better way to go. Jamie asked which members of the community were involved in this discussion and decision about how it should be voted. Maureen said it was the School Building Committee and meeting with the mayors and town managers. Jamie said he was hoping they would have the real numbers for what this would cost us, which is based on the regional agreement. Jamie said they are coming here tonight asking us to spend \$1M per student, because we only have 28 students. Maureen said she doesn't think that's correct to frame it that way. We are providing a work force for this region. Dr. Blake said it will be around \$23M. Jamie said the issue is that other communities are not paying the same proportion that Ipswich is when compared to the number of students enrolled. Jamie said he does not think this is a wise use of expenditures for our community.

Michael Dougherty. asked how far along we are in the MSBA process and how confident are we in the number. Maureen said they are pretty far along in the process. Those numbers will be final at the end of this week. They're very confident in that number. Michael asked because it is a regional school, is there any potential for federal funding. Maureen said they are always looking for federal funding.

Sarah asked if she could see the distribution and the student population. Michael S. asked when the original agreement was struck, is the basis for the percentage the proportion of children in each community relative to the total? Maureen said yes, school age children grades 1-12. He asked, what was the percentage in 1973, is that the same percentage now? Is the percentage the same? It fluctuates every year though, it changes based on the populations of the towns.

5. Public Safety Building Project Update – S. Crane, C. Surpitski, Jamie Fay

Stephen went over the FAQ's and said the project has received its approvals through the permitting process. It was a long process to get here, they received a lot of feedback from the community and tried to integrate as much of that feedback into the plan as possible. They are pleased the plan has been approved. The town has also been the subject of litigation related to the project and they are working with town counsel on answering those claims. There is an upcoming hearing in regards to that.

Bob Weatherall (Labor in Vain Road) said they are looking to put this out to bid and hire a contractor in January and get construction started soon after. Jamie said it has been a challenge, they have had over 90 public meetings on this process. It's been challenging to get the message out. This document FAQ is meant to set the record straight because there is a lot being said about the building that is not true. This project has been reviewed thoroughly by all of the town boards. Stephen also said it should be clear that there really is no alternative location. Charlie said he doesn't want people to lose sight of the fact that this is going to provide a great service to the public.

Michael asked about the exterior aesthetic design, is it still being molded or is it final. Broadly speaking, it will be the red brick veneer. It is the building that was approved. Michael asked if the current buildings will be used for public safety or storage needs, Bob said no.

Sarah said she thinks when considering big municipal capital projects, we need to look at as they stand individually and as they stand in our whole infrastructure. If we delay this important project, other things also get delayed. This is imperative to support our emergency workers so we can keep the town safe. This is an opportunity we need to capitalize on and this is not a time to be complacent and quiet. This process has been thorough and detailed, and we have a group of professionals, neighbors, and friends who have been working on this for a long time.

Walter Hartford asked if there is any place where there are actual cost estimations. Bob said there is a document that is a working document. They are at \$27.5M. There is a version of this document that was updated two weeks ago.

6. Statement of Interest (SOI) School Building Project Update, School Committee – S. Player

Kate said they submitted two statements of interest to the Massachusetts School Building Authority back in April and had a phone call with MSBA in mid-August. The purpose of the call was to confirm they received the SOI's and had no further needs from the town. The MSBA said they do not need a site visit because they are already familiar with the community and the school sites. They confirmed they received 63 applications to their core program this year. They wanted to know what has happened since the failed vote and what is different now. Kate was able to give an update about what is different in the town, including the town-wide strategic capital plan. The public safety building and athletic fields have since moved along. The DUDE Solutions Facilities Report in 2019 made a roadmap for capital plans. The Town boards also seem to be working more cohesively now. Kate also went over the listening sessions and surveys, the demographic enrollment study, two 3-hr school community workshops, and the town-wide non-binding vote that we had last May. Kate said the response from the MSBA was very positive. They make their decision on who they invite into the process at their board meeting in December. Kate also said the MSBA recommended they do what they think is best for the town. Some towns chose to do one big school. Some towns decide to keep the neighborhood schools intact and receive funding for one school, and solely chip away at the others on their own.

Jamie asked if they filed two SOI's, one for each school. Kate said yes. Jamie asked if it's typical to have to apply several times because Whittier said they had to apply 6 times. Dr. Blake said that may not be typical but every year is a fresh look and it depends on who else applies each year. Linda asked what the timeline is for the committee to make the decisions about 1 vs. 2 schools. Kate said they are a new committee and they need to begin those conversations. Michael D. said he has sat in on many MSBA meetings and he does not think they would approve two schools in a small town within the same year. He said we have a lot of big projects right now and will need a lot in the future too, and we have to look at what the town can afford. Carl said we also need to look for guidance from the School Committee about what is educationally best for the students.

Stephen said his takeaway from the meeting regarding funding two schools was that they would not be funding two schools. When they asked about it, they gave examples about different districts that have been funded. Most of them go down to one school and build it with the help of the MSBA. The towns that chose to keep separate schools, like Newton, only received MSBA funding for one of the schools. Some communities have a top priority of keeping separate schools. Other communities' top priority is to get funding. Sarah said they need to relay that message. Ours is not a community that can afford to pay for this on its own.

7. Energy Services Company, NORESCO Project Update – S. Crane

Stephen said they pursued an Energy Services Corporation project for a request for qualifications last year. They entered into an agreement and committed a breakup fee. We entered into a contract with NORESCO. John from NORESCO said they started the process of the audit right after Labor Day and had a formal kickoff meeting. They are in the discovery phase and are doing due diligence right now. Doing site visits, gathering utilities data, putting together a baseline to see how each building is performing, and also chatting with people about how things are working now. They plan to present opportunities to help the town further their goals to decarbonize and electrify the buildings.

Michael S. asked if the school buildings are a part of this as well, John said yes. Michael asked for an example of a project they have accomplished in which there were savings achieved. John said he has done a few phases of work in Reading. The initial phase was the typical smaller projects that can save electric, gas, and oil by converting technologies and adding cash flow. It was about \$400k per year in savings and paid for the first phase of the project. A more recent project was partially offset by savings and was driven by decarbonization. Stephen said the Sustainability Manager is going to work with NORESCO as well and we are supported by the Facilities Department on this effort.

8. Budget Process Discussion – S. Player

The School Committee has some proposed changes to the calendar. Kate went over the budget timeline. The start date has been moved to November 1. Important dates to note are January 19, when the working draft budget goes to the budget subcommittee and the administrators. The full School Committee gets the draft on January 30. The budget presentation to the School Committee from the administrators will be January 31 and Feb 1. The hearing is on Feb 8, and the final vote for the School Committee budget will be on February 29. They will present to the Finance Committee the week of March 4. Jamie suggested we add a third night for capital discussion.

Sarah said it would be helpful to have one combined full town calendar as well as the individual board calendars. Sarah said perhaps at the next Tri-Board meeting in November we can confirm dates. Jamie said he would prefer to figure dates out before then, and said perhaps Sarah, Kate, and Jamie can get together to discuss dates. Sarah said the Select Board is looking to develop budget guidelines for the town budget and will bring those to the November Tri-Board meeting.

9. Strategic Working Group Discussion – S. Player

Sarah provided the previous document from the Strategic Working group. The Select Board has done some goal-setting regarding re-constituting that group. We should also add the ELD Manager into this group. Carl said they should think about which categories of investments were not addressed last time. Rob White said he thinks it would be good to add more citizens to this group because it would be good to get some more people with a municipal background. Stephen

said having the Finance Director in this group is essential. Michael said he agrees that more than three citizens would be too large. Stephen said the Town Manager would be more of an advisory role and the stakeholders from the boards would do more of the deliberation. Sarah said the School Board and Select Board will elect someone to the group and Stephen will get the group together.

10. Shared Board Alignment of the Tri-Board Goals

Sarah said the goals of all three of the boards are in the packet. They wanted to look at where the goals align and what sort of things can we work on together. All groups had goals on budget, 3A, and capital projects. Sarah asked if there are other areas where we should be aligning or thinking about alignment. Walter said regarding electric and water, we need to think about how the reserves are built and utilized. Kate said she thinks having regularly scheduled Tri-Board meetings is very helpful and is showing people that we are aligned and updating each other on a regular basis. Jamie asked Sarah about the Select Board's goal to clarify the roles of the other committees. Sarah said the conversation they had was talking about our common work and our separate work, and making sure everyone is in agreement of what each of the group's roles are. They will be looking at Stephen's role and the Select Board's role as well as looking at the roles of each subcommittee, and meeting with them more regularly. Sarah also said they would like to have a roles and responsibilities workshop to aid in ways for the groups to work better and more efficiently. Jamie said it's a very high priority of the Finance Committee to get back to a full time Finance Director as well as a Climate Resiliency Director. A discussion ensued about the clarity of the line between the certain goals. There is some overlap but Stephen said he thinks there is overlap in a positive way.

Carl asked what the School Committee meant by their long-range strategic budget goal. Kate said they didn't have anything in particular in mind, they wanted to acknowledge the fact that they don't want to be thinking year to year and want to be thinking in the long term. That can be difficult for schools to do but it is a nod to the Committee putting more effort into projecting further out, as requested by the Select Board. Particularly regarding the override calculator and capital expenditures. Michael S. asked about the goal regarding reviewing FEOFEES policies. Kate said this is something they have been discussing for a while. It has been in place since 2012 and the money has been managed well and we have gotten solid distributions. It is time to look at the policy to make sure it is written the best way and make sure they are leveraging the money the best way possible.

11. New Business – S. Player

- Sarah asked if November 14 or 15 would work for the next Tri-Board meeting, November 14 works well for everyone.

12. Approval of Minutes – S. Player

- Minutes will be approved at the next Select Board Meeting.

13. Adjourn – S. Player

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

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
October 5, 2023