

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Select Board Meeting as Water and Sewer Commissioners
Monday, October 2, 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 Monday, October 2, 2023 at Town Hall, 25 Green Street

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

Also Present: Stephen Crane, Town Manager

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Welcome/ Announcements – S. Player

- This weekend is Ipswich Illumination October 6, 7, and 8 downtown.
- Special Town Meeting is October 24.
- The MEPA public comment period for the dam continues to be open until October 10.
- The Shellfish Advisory Board meets tomorrow night at 7 PM in Meeting Rm A.
- The Veterans Board of Directors meets Wednesday at 6:30 PM downstairs in the Veterans Office.
- Whittier Tech will be holding a series of community meetings regarding the new school building. The meeting for Ipswich will be on Monday, November 20 at 6 PM in the library.
- The Affordable Housing Trust/ Ipswich Housing Partnership will meet on Thursday October 12 at 7:30 AM.
- There will be additional traffic disruptions in Lord Square tomorrow and possibly into Wednesday.

3. Citizen Queries – S. Player

- KelleyJane Kloub, Mitchell Rd, asked where the meeting minutes are for the 3A Task Force. Stephen said the 3A Task Force was put together to analyze impacts and help develop recommendations. They are a task force to advise the Town Manager. They are not a public body and do not fall under public meeting law. They have taken notes, but in the initial phase, it has been more conversational. Now that they're getting into a more structured process with the MAPC, Stephen has advised the Planning staff that they should take minutes and post them to the project website as we move forward.
- KelleyJane said the tree that is down on the river is owned by the Town. Stephen said they talked to the conservation agent about it. It doesn't need to be cleared unless it's making the river impassable or unnavigable. KelleyJane said it is impassable. Stephen said it would require an emergency declaration by the Conservation Commission. Stephen said he has been trying to get an answer and trying to move forward.

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

Sarah read the meeting notice.

VOTE: Roll call vote to open the Public Hearing passed unanimously, 5-0.

Vicki Halmen, Water and Wastewater Director, said this is the second rate hearing. Vicki said they are there for

the typical seasonal update as well as for the revenue shortfall. Vicki reviewed the rate setting process as outlined in the presentation. Historically they have used 5-year average consumption to set the rates. Historically this has worked well, but FY22 and FY23 both came in short in revenue, which means the current consumption model is not working. The proposed solution is to switch from using 5-year averages to using 5-year lows. This is more of a conservative approach which allows us to collect the revenue we need to support the budgets.

Linda asked if we increased the base rate last year, Vicki said last year at this time we made an adjustment to try to mitigate what we are seeing here. Linda asked about the proposed rate for May and June of 2024 and said that is different than what we are approving tonight. Vicki said she does not assume it's going to be approved so she left it. Linda asked what the average rate payer would save with this proposal if they are consistent with their water usage. Vicki said the 7.5% is carried, but this is a rate increase because we're correcting the revenue shortfall. Linda also asked if there is a way for this to be a betterment. Stephen said the rate payer and the tax payer aren't always these same, but we can look into it.

Sarah suggested they could look at a rate stabilization fund. Vicki said they have discussed that, the ELD has one. Michael said if you dip into the reserves this year, you would negatively affect your future spending. Michael said he thinks we need the leadership guidance on whether we should use the reserves and push back certain projects. Linda said the rate increase in May was 8% and is an additional 7.5%. Mike asked what the rate increase was for next May, it is another 8%. He suggested we don't have to increase that as much in May. Mike said this is difficult because we have told people to conserve and now that they have conserved they are having to pay the same money for less water.

Charlie said he thinks it's a good idea to increase the rates now but he thinks they need to take a look at other budget options. Carl said he understands the sentiment about trying to buffer or protect the rate payer but in this case, it doesn't make much sense to delay it. We have and are significantly underfunding our capital needs. Carl supports the rate change.

Vicki also showed the wastewater fee schedule update. There is an after-hours call out fee of \$200 and an "actual cost" fee for emergency service calls.

VOTE: Michael recommended that the Commissioners support the plan as proposed with the mid-year increase, with the recommendation that they direct Vicki's department and the subcommittee to investigate the rate structure when it comes to commercial usage and how that is different than residential usage. We should also have the subcommittee reinvigorate conversation about a CARE fund or separating and itemizing the capital costs on the bill for transparency, and we should also request that Vicki comes to us in May with a rate increase that is few percentage points lower than originally planned, in a way that doesn't negatively impact the spending plan for replacing capital assets. Sarah said she would also like the subcommittee to take a look at different rate structures and user fees. Michael also said he would like Vicki to come to us in a few months with an update. Charlie said he also would like to add something about conservation measures. Seconded by Charlie. No Vote was taken.

VOTE: Motion to close the Public Hearing made by Linda, seconded by Charlie. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 5-0.

VOTE: Michael recommended the following motion, seconded by Carl: To amend Article VIII of the Water Division Regulations of the Town of Ipswich as follows: Section 5: Normal User Charges (a) Winter Residential Rate from October 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024 from \$22.07/100 cu. ft. to \$9.33/100 cu. ft. All Other User Charges October 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024 from \$14.71/100 cu. ft. to \$15.82/100 cu. ft. Motion passed by roll call vote, 4-1. Linda opposed.

VOTE: Michael recommended the following motion, seconded by Carl. To amend the Ipswich Sewer Regulations, Division IV, Sewer User Charges and Industrial Cost Recovery, Article I, Sewer User Charges as follows: Section 1, Subsection a, by deleting the last sentence thereof and by substituting in lieu thereof the following sentence: "Effective October 1, 2023, each sewer user in the Town of Ipswich will be charged for the use of sewer at the rate of \$13.57 per one hundred cubic feet of water as measured at each sewer user's water meter." Motion passed by roll call vote, 4-1. Linda opposed.

Vote: Michael recommended the following motion, seconded by Linda. To amend the Ipswich Sewer Regulations, Appendix VI – Fee Schedule to add the following services and fees: After Hours Call-Out \$250, Emergency Service Calls Actual Cost. Motion passed by roll call vote, 4-1. Charlie opposed.

Charlie said he sits on the Shellfish Advisory Board and asked Vicki about the Harbor Management Plan. He said people are concerned about something happening to the wastewater treatment plant and closing the flats. He said he read there are standards imposed, and asked if the improvements that are being done will meet the standards. Vicki said she hasn't read the newest version but the previous version were not actual EPA regulated components that affect our operation; there was confusion about how were regulated vs. how other places are regulated. Vicki said there is a lot of work going into compliance and the health of the river.

5. Water Resource Manager, Education, Programming, and Grant Efforts – Rachel Belisle-Toler

Rachel Belisle-Toler, Water Resources Manager, introduced herself to the new members of the board and gave an update on what she has been working on this year. She has been with the department for almost a year and has been spending time getting to know the challenges of the water supply, getting to know the community, and getting to know the different stakeholders involved and the different concerns of stakeholders. Rachel went over her background and also the unique needs of the water supply in Ipswich. Rachel presented a website she created for the town which went over the unique water supply in Ipswich, challenges the town faces, outreach within the community, and upcoming projects. They have been working on the water use mitigation program, the Ipswich outdoor water use supply program, and a native plants of Massachusetts program. Rachel has also applied for several grants and the town was recently rewarded \$235k for the town wharf pump station project.

Linda asked if part of the water mitigation program includes reaching out to communities such as Cable Gardens. Rachel said she is focused right now on discretionary water use because it's the easiest to tackle. There are lots of ways to support people in discretionary water use. When it comes to non-discretionary water use with facilities that have nursing homes, there is usually a medical cleaning water use guidelines that would not be changed. Linda said she is thinking more about educating the people living there and the people running the facilities. Rachel said she has been focusing on multifamily units currently but plans to do that in the future.

Michael said from his perspective he would argue that Ipswich is doing a really good job in low water consumption. However, we are still investing money and resources in continuing that charge. Michael asked what the recommended goal is. We're at 40, are we near the benchmark or are we still way off in terms of water usage? Rachel said each town and municipality has their own needs. In terms of a goal, more importantly we are focused on how we figured into the entire system.

6. Discuss/ Vote Harbor Plan Review – Waterways Advisory Committee

Chris Murray, Chairman of the Waterways Advisory Committee, said several years ago they spoke with the chief about ways to improve utilization of the river and understand how to make it a better resource for the town. One of the things they came up with was to create a more formalized harbor plan. They realized most of the towns in the area have this kind of plan and they realized they needed the assistance of professionals at UMass Boston as consultants. They assisted the group in trying to understand the range of what was needed for the plan, to put together a task list which focused on robust public outreach. The first phase was to do a very extensive survey. As they have reached various milestones they have also held public information sessions to get public comment along the way. They ended up with several areas of key findings for the community. Each area has a stated goal and objectives as well as suggestions about how to achieve those goals. Areas are economic benefits, water quality, natural resources, explore potential for aquaculture, and congestion at the wharf.

Charlie said he thinks it's a great plan and the next step should be an implementation timeline and to work on funding sources. Chris said there are so many items in this list that they have decided to try to tackle 1 or 2 or 3 of them. Sarah suggested looking at which of the items would be able to be funded through grants. Stephan thanked the group for the very comprehensive and dynamic report. Linda asked about the quality of the water in the river that is included in the report, Chris said that is in the draft report from the UMass consultants. Linda said that may send a negative message if it is in that document and perhaps we should get more clarification. Linda also thanked the group and said she appreciates

the Shellfish Advisory Board having the opportunity for some of their members to collaborate on this.

Unidentified citizen, 64 East Street, said he doesn't want it to get lost that this is just a draft and they need to formalize it. They need to figure out the next steps to move this to formalization.

Linda asked if we were to vote to approve this, are we essentially approving all of the recommendations in here? Linda said she thinks each one merits its own discussion. Stephen said this is a plan and the Waterways Advisory Committee is an advisory board to the Select Board. The recommendations are just advisory recommendations. There are short, mid, and long-term next steps. Accepting and finalizing the report does not mean we are obligated to fulfill all of the recommendations. It is more of a pathway forward. If there are recommendations that the board feels are deal breakers, they don't have to accept them.

Chief Nikas, Harbormaster, said it does not obligate them but it gives the town a step up when we are applying for a grant. Knowing that it has been approved by the Select Board helps when competing against other communities for funding. Linda said she wants to be careful about some of these, particularly about aquaculture. Michael said like any other long-term town-wide plan, it is amendable. Sarah said since this is a draft, we should have a formal public hearing. In the meantime, Sarah said if the Board has any questions they can get those to Chris before the hearing.

7. Electricity Light Department, Department of Public Utilities (DPU) Report R. Leczynski

Ray Leczynski, Utilities, and Ashley Wilson presented the annual DPU Report. The Select Board is required to sign off on the report. Ray went through the report and said it has a lot of financial information, information on sources of power, and rate information. The only real thing of interest is how much more we pay for electricity in this calendar year. The other item to note is we operate on a fiscal year that matches the town, this report is based on calendar year.

Charlie asked about page 38, is the municipal street lighting a fixed amount and has it ever gone up? Ray said it is fixed, it changed once when we changed to LED lighting and it went down. Linda asked about page 41 regarding the uncollectible accounts. Ray said its negative \$129k. During the time of Covid they were not able to do collections for late payments and there was a possibility that we would never get those back so the money was set aside. We did get it back. That \$129k is reversing that allowance, it's a decrease in expense. Ray will submit this now as soon as he gets it back signed.

VOTE: Charlie moved to submit the DPW Report, seconded by Linda. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 5-0

8. Electric Light Manager Introduction, Electric Department Project Review – S. Player

Dylan Lewellyn, Interim ELD Manager, gave an ELD project update. Dylan provided a document that showed current projects and upcoming projects. This is a living document and will change with the department's priorities. The first section is policy. The subcommittee has identified this section as an area they would like to take a more active role in reviewing the policy index. There are a number of stagnant policies and Dylan said he would like us to take a look at these more proactively. Dylan also went over the time of use rate structure and said there has been interest in moving in this direction. Dylan also went over projects that can be done at the power plant. Carl asked if the new charging stations will be managed the same way the current charging stations are managed. Dylan said we need a new rate structure for this new kind of ancillary service we have been providing. That will be a part of a larger discussion about how we will charge for this service. Dylan discussed electrification preparation and that electric loads will increase. We need to be able to meet that demand safely and sustainably. Two of the three substations in town need to be upgraded. One is 20 years past its useful life. It's still operational but it needs to be rebuilt. Another one of the substations is at its useful life. It will be at least a 5-year project to get them replaced. The department also needs a new SCADA system and a new bucket truck, and there are a few vacant positions within the department.

Carl asked if they will put restrictions or qualifications around who qualifies for the new loans that will be available. Dylan said their approach is that it is not wise to say this program is specifically for one group or another. We will market it toward certain groups but legally it gets tricky if we put restrictions. Linda asked if there is an interest rate on the program, Dylan said no. Lastly, Dylan said it is public power week and he will be at the utilities office with coffee and pastries from 9-10 all week.

9. Community Garden Discussion – S. Player

Sarah said will discuss this at the next meeting.

10. Discuss/Vote Select Board 2023 Special Town Meeting Speaker Assignments – S. Player

Special Town meeting isn't until the 24th so this can be discussed next meeting. Jim Engel, 362 Linebrook Rd, Town Moderator, brought up the speaker assignments for Town Meeting and how he intends to manage that process. This affects Article 8, Government Study Committee and Article 9, Specialized Stretch Code. Those are articles the Select Board opposed so he will give the opportunity for someone to speak from both the supporting and opposing positions. Jim also said he wants to make sure they are clear about who makes the motions. Carl said they had discussed revisiting Article 9 and asked if they still planned on discussing this further. Sarah asked if anyone is planning on changing the vote. Charlie said the only way to change the vote is for one of the members who voted in the majority wants to change it.

11. Discuss/Vote Select Board Appointment to Strategic Working Group - S. Player

Carl has expressed interest in the Strategic Working Group and he was a part of the group when he was on the School Committee. Michael said he can help if needed. Carl asked Stephen when he might try to get the group back together. Stephen said he can post an agenda and pull together a meeting. The working group can organize and select a chair and clerk, and those people can take on the role of posting meetings and agendas. Carl said there is an open citizen slot.

VOTE: Motion to appoint Carl to the Strategic Working Group made by Linda, seconded by Charlie. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 5-0

12. Consent Agenda – S. Player

a. Partial Street Blocking Application(s) –

i. Laura Ouellette for a partial street blocking from Cleveland Avenue to Blaisdell Terrace for a Block Party on October 14, 2023.

b. One Day Wine and Malt Liquor License Applications –

- i. Rene Pelletier for Appleton Farms, The Trustees of Reservations for a Retreat/Business Meeting at 219 County Road on October 11, 2023.
- ii. Sarah Blackstone for Ipswich Ale Brewery & Essex County Brewing Co. for Illuminations event at Riverwalk Extension/EBSCO Parking on October 6, 2023, and Illuminations Day Two at 25 Green Street on October 7, 2023.
- iii. Joe Karr for Appleton Farms for Winter Farmers Market at 221 County Rd. on December 9, 2023, a Harvest Market at 209 County Rd on November 18, 2023, and Culinary Workshops with Cocktails at 219 County Rd on December 3 and 15, 2023.
- iv. Maria Tilkens for Tilkens Corp. LLC dba Bubble Bar Boston for Ipswich Holiday Market at 4 Elm St. Unit B on December 9, 2023.
- v. Bea Tiberii for Monarch and Rose Foods Inc. for Private Event at 1 N Main St. on October 14, 2023.
- vi. Dan Clapp for the 1634 Meadery for Raise Money for Farm event at Appleton Farms, 219 County Rd on October 14 & 15, 2023, Moonlight Meander & Mead Walk at 219 County Rd on October 21, 2023 and December 8, 2023.

- vii. Trudi Perry for Alfalfa Farm Winery for Marini Farm Wine Your Way out of the Maze at 259 Linebrook Rd on October 8, 2023.
- viii. Alexis Harwood for Helen’s Bottleshop for a Pop-Up Wine Bar at Sandpiper Bakery 29 N Main Street on October 7, 2023.

c. One Day All Alcohol Liquor License Applications –

- i. Andrew Skillman for Ipswich Masonic Temple for a Comedy Show at 70 Topsfield Road on October 21, 2023.
- ii. Joe Karr for Appleton Farms for a Barn Dance at 219 County Road on November 4, 2023, and a Cocktails by the Fire at 221 County Rd. on December 2, 2023.

VOTE: Motion to approve the Consent Agenda, as it is listed in the packet, made by Linda, seconded by Carl. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 5-0.

13. Approval of Minutes– S. Player

- August 28, 2023
 - Sarah said there is one amendment, instead of MBTA it said MVTA
- September 5, 2023

VOTE: Motion to approve minutes from August 28, 2023 with the amendment, and September 5, 2023 made by Michael, seconded by Carl. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, 5-0

14. Town Manager Report – S. Crane

- Stephen said they got the bidding for the school roof projects. They all came back slightly under budget. They will be awarding those contracts and getting the work started before winter.
- Ipswich illumination is this weekend.
- There is a flu vaccine clinic at the Council on Aging that is sponsored by the Health Department and Conley’s Pharmacy.
- The town will be hosting Shred Day where you can bring your documents to be shredded in the Town Hall parking lot.
- DPW has a special recycling event on October 21.
- There will be a traffic disruption in Lord Square tomorrow.
- The library provided a 1-page summary of their 4-year strategic plan.
- The police will be doing some active shooter training in over the next few couple weeks.
- Stephen included a mailer from the Office of Campaign and Political Finance.
- The first Love Your Neighbor 5K was a success. There were over 200 runners.
- Stephen said he asked John Colantoni to come in to discuss a development he is doing on Washington Street because some residents voiced concerns about it. John Colantoni, 343 Linebrook Rd, is the developer at the 5-11 Washington Street project where the car wash used to be. It’s not moving as quickly as they would like because the site was more difficult than what they imagined. All of the demo has been done and things have been

removed. They also had to do soil testing which has been finished. They are just about to the point where they can pour footings, make the foundation walls, and close up the holes. They are hoping to have the foundation permits this week and the pits will be closed in 14 days. Stephen encouraged John to tighten up the fence because there are spaces where people can get through and citizens are worried about children falling into the pit.

15. Select Board Subcommittee Updates – S. Player

- The Audit Committee met last week. The audit came up clean and they had the audit significantly earlier this year. They will be working on wire transfers instead of checks. They voted to recommend the audit as presented.

16. New Business/ Future Business – S. Player

Recording stopped after 4 hours, was not recorded.

17. Adjourn – S. Player

VOTE: Vote was not recorded

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
October 16, 2023