

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee
Meeting of February 2, 2021
Remote

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:33.

Finance Committee members present: Janice Clements-Skelton, Michael Dougherty, Walter Hartford, Joseph Bourque, Jamie Fay, Rob White, Michael Schaaf, Chris Doucette

1. Citizens Queries – Janice Clements-Skelton

- There is an open chat room for any citizens queries.
- No citizens queries.

2. Acceptance of Finance Committee Minutes – Janice Clements-Skelton

- No minutes to approve.
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FY 22 Budget Reviews: Planning and Community Development – Janice Clements-Skelton

3. Public Health – Colleen Fermon

Colleen Fermon, Department of Public Health Director, explained the goals of the Public Health Department. Colleen said she also serves as the septic system betterment coordinator. Within the department there is also a full-time administrative assistant, a public health nurse, and a health inspector. Colleen went over goals and objectives which include continuing to train on sanitary objectives for food establishment operators, developing drive-through emergency dispensing plans for vaccines, and operating these as well. They will also continue to share information with residents of Ipswich and look at sector specific guidance. There is a Covid-19 blog on the town's website for sharing information.

Colleen also went over the accomplishments of the department. Last year, the Best Management Plan was looked at by the Board of Health to make sure it was aligning well with the state's plan. They also looked at doing tobacco sales compliance checks and signage checks. There were a lot of changes at the state level and the department wanted to make sure everyone was educated on what needed to happen. They also carried out compliance checks to make sure these changes took place properly. The department also focused on food establishments and provided employers documents on employee health which would help the operator understand which illnesses and symptoms would require staff members to stay home from work. They looked at the pandemic and came up with procedures for how to work with the schools for if a student was ill. Lastly, they spent time working with Action Ambulance to see what they could do to work with seniors during flu season. Action Ambulance provided in-home flu vaccines. Janice asked if they were doing in-home vaccinations or testing, Colleen said it was for flu vaccines. But they also set it up with Action Ambulance to go to people's homes for Covid testing if they had transportation or childcare issues and if they had been in contact with someone with Covid.

Colleen said it has been a busy year, there have been some significant budget changes. The public health nurse position changed from an employee to a contracted position. The health inspector's hours will be increased slightly to 8 hours a week, based on the amount of work that he has had to do. Lastly, the cost of greenhead traps went up \$4 per trap.

Jamie said he could see where \$14,355 was added, Colleen said that was for the public health nurse position. Jamie said he didn't see where there was a reduction. Colleen said it is in the employee salary line but the numbers don't look like they have changed because the health inspector position increased from 5.5 hours per week to 8 hours per week. There was also a wage adjustment and there was some money put into contractors as well. Sarah said when we increased John's time, and decreased Pam's time, there was a savings. Pam's hours also increased.

Jamie asked Sarah to send him the individual changes by position because he didn't see how the numbers were adding up. Jamie also asked Colleen to discuss the separate budget for Covid-19. Colleen said in the spring they had to staff up to handle cases and contact tracing. Colleen added 5 additional part time nurses, now they are down to 3. They had to follow up on existing cases, identify close contacts, and make sure everyone understood the process of quarantine. More recently, now that vaccine is available, they are working on planning vaccination clinics. Rob asked if the staff are

1099's and asked how they were recruited. Colleen said the nurses that were brought on board were temporary part time employees. The public health nurse reached out and contacted nurses to try to get help. Rob asked if there is anything else Colleen thinks the budget could use, Colleen said John Morris' hours could increase. He does a lot to help with both businesses and citizens, and this past year his hours increased so much because of the pandemic that he would be benefits eligible due to the number of hours he was working. The department received state funds to pay him to work many more hours than what he is paid for. Janice asked if he is going to continue to get paid by his normal hours as well as extra hours from the state, what will we do if he hits the number of hours for benefits? Janice said if we continue to need that number of hours, which is reasonable, we have a legal responsibility to provide benefits. Janice told Sara she thinks we need to look into the this and budget for benefits. Rob asked if the state would pay the benefits as well, Janice said no. Once you hit that threshold for hours, you become eligible for the rest of the year. Sarah said the benefits would end up in the miscellaneous benefits 191, because that's where all of the health insurance ends up. Sarah said this specific person is not built in for health insurance in that budget but Sarah built in several extras last year in case more town employees needed benefits due to a spousal job loss. Janice said she thinks we should plan for at least this position, just to be safe. Colleen said she doesn't think he would need health insurance, Janice said she thinks we need to treat it by the role rather than the individual, in case we need to bring someone else in. Michael S. asked if the state money is a certain thing. Colleen said there is money that is promised, the exact amount or exact time for this is uncertain but it will be in the next week or two.

Michael S. asked about the greenhead trap increase. Colleen said they locked in a 3-year price and now that is up. They put out 200 traps each year. They go out and replace whatever is damaged. Michael asked if it would be possible for citizens to buy these or for the town to buy them for citizens. Colleen said the town gets them through the mosquito control district. Joe asked if this should be the responsibility of the purchasing agent to take this off of Colleen's to do list. Colleen said they interact with the Mosquito Control District and she attends meetings anyway. They spend a lot of time working together on mosquito issues every year so it's not too much extra work.

Jamie thanked Colleen for all of the work that she has done over this past year in the greatest public health crises any of us have seen. He said she has done a great job with so many different things.

4. Code Enforcement – J. Bone

James Bone went over the mission of the Building Department. He also went over his staff which include himself, a full-time administrator, a full-time building inspector assistant, two part time inspectors for building and electrical, and a sub-contractor. Goals and objectives include improving software, streamlining applications, and making the system more user friendly. They have been using the same software for 11 years so they are going to update the software as well. James said he has also been looking for a way to digitize files which would make them more easily accessible within the department but also to the community. One of the features includes parcel management which allows them to label and attach documents to any parcel, which was not easily done prior to this. James said he would like to get an intern to help with digitizing documents. It isn't in the budget for this year, but perhaps next year. Currently they have a senior volunteer that is helping with this and it's going well.

Accomplishments for the department include updating the office to make it more efficient and to help with heating as well. It is now easier to find things and conduct plan reviews. Having Tom full time has allowed the department to keep up with demands. For the past two years it has been constant catch up, and having Tom as a full-time staff member has made a huge difference. There have been the same amount of permits as usual, but the jobs have more scope than they have had in the past. In calendar year 2020, the department did 1,950 permits and collected \$597,819 in permit fees. Compared to fiscal year 2020, that was over \$4M more in estimated construction cost and over \$45,000 more in permit fees collected. We can only look at half of fiscal year 2021, we have already collected \$350,219, which is trending 14% higher.

Significant budget changes include an increase in the building Inspector Assistant position. Tom is a certified local building inspector and he has been with us for over 2 years now. James said he thinks he deserves a significant raise and wants to be able to keep him around.

Michael D. asked about the WUMP fee and asked what the reaction has been from applicants when it comes to this step, and what are the positive or negative impacts they are seeing with this new fee. James said everyone is doing everything they can do avoid it. For the most part, once people wrap their head around it they understand that it's for a good reason. Mike asked what the communication is to applicants to help them understand what triggers the WUMP fee and what doesn't. It is meant to be for additional bedrooms, not additional common areas. He also asked if this would negatively impact the growth in town. James said a bedroom means a door that closes for privacy, and a window. How

the department looks at a bedroom is very consistent. James said he doesn't think this would deter big developers but it may deter small improvements by citizens. \$1,500 doesn't usually kill a project.

Rob asked about the scanning of documents and if he has made any plans with Tony to use the open conference rooms due to Covid to rent machines and hire a few people to just get it all done. Rob also asked if perhaps we have people on the staff that are idle due to Covid, and perhaps they could step in and help out. James said if there were a few months where permitting is slow they can work on it, but if we can have somebody that comes on full time they can be trained how to do this properly. It would be hard to have it done right if there are a lot of people working on this. Janice said that the entire business world uses OCR and it seems like there is a portion of this that can be scanned in. James said OCR just scans everything without going through it or organizing it and a lot of things would be lost amongst so much paper. Rob said they would like to see this getting done. James said the files are packed with so much garbage, it really needs to be organized. But he is open to moving things faster.

5. Conservation Commission – B. Lynch

Brendan Lynch, Conservation Agent for the town, presented the Conservation Commissions goals and achievements. He said permitting has gone down a lot this year due to Covid, which has allowed the department time to do more in-depth project oversight. This has stopped violations and enforcements which would have been dealt with on the back end. Catching things early saves everyone money. Brendan went over the goals which include finalizing revisions to Ipswich storm water bylaw, continuing the permitting of the county street restoration, continuing to work with DPW on a multitude of projects including reconstruction of Argilla Road. Objectives include applying for more grants and continuing plans for climate change resiliency. The budget is unchanged from last year.

Michael S. asked about the purpose of the Conservation Commission and said he understands that the Conservation Commission has applied standards for septic tanks that far exceed the state standards. Brendan said it would be to reduce nitrogen loading. Any source of pollution from septic tanks usually points to nitrogen. They want to prevent as much nitrogen from seeping into the wetlands as possible. If it gets into the water supply it effects the vegetation and water quality. Michael said he would be interested in seeing the analysis that supports this by-law because it makes other goals of the town difficult, such as affordable housing. Brendan said he will send him whatever he can find. Michael asked if it's possible to have different standards in different parts of town that have to do with proximity to water. Brendan said he doesn't believe so but he can look into it further and get back to Michael about it. Rob asked about the permanent part time person and asked why it went up 24%. Brendan said his admin was split part time between planning and conservation, and now she has been put into conservation full time. Michael D. asked what her responsibilities are. Brendan said she knows enough of the regulations to be able to answer questions for most people. She handles phone calls, scheduling, handling new permits, and going through archives.

6. Planning Board – Ethan Parsons

Ethan went over the goals of the Planning Board which include implementing the Community Development Plan and the Housing Production Plan. Both will require significant implementation. They would like to provide increased access to open space and recreational opportunities to create more trail access and improve access and connectivity to the Kamen Farm property and Turkey Hill area. They would also like to create enhancements in climate resiliency which will include pursuing MVP grants, working on storm water management and updating the by-law, coastal zone management and hazard mitigation. They would also like to complete the wayfinding project.

This past year the department completed phases one and two of the Community Development Project and anticipate adoption by the Planning Board and town meeting this spring. They completed the Housing Production Plan this past fall, this plan will help to create a reprieve from an undesirable 40b project. They also completed the Open Space and Recreation Plan and facilitated the open space project on Linebrook road, commenced construction on the Pavilion Beach storm water project, and secured funding from town meeting to acquire the Kamen property on Linebrook Road. They also made some zoning by-laws to include regulations to allow adult use marijuana. They have worked with Vicki and Jim Engel, as well as other community members to develop WUMP changes. Currently the Planning Board is working to wrap up articles for town meeting, one of which will include the inclusionary housing requirements. There haven't been any significant requests or changes for the upcoming fiscal year. The open space manager position is vacant, so they are looking for someone but haven't had any luck yet. Ethan said projects remain steady and he has been very impressed with everyone in the department and their resiliency of this past year.

Janice asked Ethan about the grant opportunities he mentioned and the strategy around which grants should be perused, and how we ensure that a grant doesn't take us off of our stated path and goals. Sometimes free money ends up costing the town a lot too. She also asked about what progress has been made on the payment in leu of. Ethan said we are

getting flooded with grant opportunities because a lot of towns aren't perusing grants right now due to low staffing. They are trying to stick to Covid related grants and focus on enhancements to outdoor living and dining, as well as the environment. They are also applying for grants that they think have a good likelihood of being carried through. They do not anticipate going for new complete streets projects, for example, because they were just award money for streets two years ago so they wouldn't have a good shot. There is a lot of money out there right now so we don't want to lose out on those opportunities. In regards to Janice's second question, Ethan said they created a small working group to look at restructuring the way the affordable payments are required which would go hand in hand with the payments for affordable units. We would require 15% of all units to be affordable, which would mean for every 7 units created one would be affordable. They haven't figured out the payments yet but they plan to amend the zoning bylaw to include the new 15% threshold, and then they will call a public hearing after that is approved at town meeting, and the public hearing would allow them to amend how it would be paid. Janice asked why we have to wait until after town meeting to address this. Janice said she is concerned that this is taking so long because FinCom decided to support the Planning Board as opposed to support the citizen's petition, with the understanding that this would be taken care of. Ethan said the citizen's petition was about lowering the threshold for affordable units from 10 to 5 but it didn't make a change to the payment in lieu of. Michael D. asked if they have talked about any new numbers for payment in lieu of. Ethan said it will likely be between \$10,000 and \$40,000 per unit. Michael D. said the citizens didn't believe that the \$10,000 had enough of an impact to encourage developers to create affordable units, so although it wasn't specifically about the payment in lieu of, it was all discussed together. If we don't discuss that people will be frustrated. Ethan said payment in lieu of is determined by the zoning by-law, so citizens cannot petition and have an effect on this. The Planning Board has control of this. The Planning Board does not want to change the fee without looking at the real issue which is the threshold for affordability. They want to lower the threshold first. Michael said we're never going to get ahead if a big development comes through like Symes, they just have to pay a measly \$10,000 fee and move on. Walter said he doesn't understand why the fee has to be low if we aren't going to get a unit. The fee still isn't a deterrent.

Rob asked when the Community Development Plan will be complete and when the boards will vote on it. Ethan said it's not in the Capital Plan, the only board that has to vote is the Planning Board although there is still debate about if they even have to vote on it. Ethan said he would like to have town meeting vote to accept it, but he hasn't discussed that with Tony yet. Michael S. asked about the housing trust fund and how that money will be used. Ethan said the money has been coming in over the last few months and they aren't sure how they will use it yet. Janice asked if they are spending money in a way that helps the town reach the affordable housing obligation. Ethan said no. Janice said she hopes the Planning Board can understand how frustrated the town feels that the money being paid by developers to not build affordable houses is not being used in any way to meet the affordable housing needs of the town. Ethan said \$90,000 was granted to people in low-income houses who were affected by Covid. It helped people to stay in their house. So, although it didn't go toward meeting the 10%, it helped with housing. Janice said the community is seeing the impact of not being at that 10%. The goals of the community and the Trust Fund Board don't seem to be aligning. Ethan said this is not a new conversation and it is a difference in thinking. The Trust Fund Board hasn't ever had enough money to actually create affordable housing until now. Now that they do have enough, further conversations need to be had. Janice asked if the Trust Fund Board should reflect the need of the community, not the desire of the board, and they should be asking the community what they want. Ethan said the Trust Fund Board cares about the community and is doing what they think is best for the town based on what's feasible, what makes sense, and what land is available. Their job is to create, maintain, and protect affordable housing. Not just to create affordable housing, but to keep seniors in their homes and give out first time buyers loans. They care about keeping people in the community. Michael S. said he shares some of Janice's concerns, at the same time he knows the issue of affordable housing in town far exceeds the 10% issue. He would like to see the trust come up with some plan of action such as buying land or asking the town for land, or assist in acquiring existing housing. Michael said he suggests strongly to come up with a plan of action. Michael said although they have some concerns, they also appreciate all of the hard work the department is doing.

7. Historical Commission – Ethan Parsons

The budget for the upcoming year will be very similar to last year. The department hired an intern this past summer to do research on the National Register of Historic Places, and she also catalogued some of the historic places in town. It was about 2 weeks of work and was \$975. The commission also designed and developed a plaque at the Riverwalk extension. They have ideas for new plaques to explain the history throughout town, each one is \$2,100. Ethan also went over the goals for the department. They want to design the plaques, work with the APDC to strengthen the by-law, review and give out Mary Connolly awards for preserving historic properties. The chair of the website also has a

private website that the Historic Commission also works on. They meet once a month. Michael D. said he is always surprised how little of the budget the Historical Commission takes up considering how much history is in town.

8. Open Space Budget – Ethan Parsons

Ethan said one big accomplishment was the acquisition of the Kamen Farm property with the Essex County Greenbelt Association. A lot of work went into applying for the grant. For the upcoming year they hope to work with the Greenbelt Association to connect some trails at Turkey Hill. They will be managing the trails, maintenance, and connectivity elements. The town also has areas that we would like to connect. The department is also continuing to talk about open space acquisition and would like to fill the open space manager position. Everything is going smoothly at Pony Express, and they would like to update the list of properties vulnerable to climate change. They are also continuously working on encroachment issues. Janice asked why we have line items for health care with this department. Sarah said with the Open Space Fund they are going to increase health insurance and Medicare by about 2%. Janice asked if the part time role is benefits eligible, Sarah said no. there are two positions, one is benefit eligible (30 hours) and the other is not (19 hours). Walter asked Ethan to pass along the updated Open Space Recreation plan that was sent to the state. He also asked about the CDP plan and the implementation. Ethan said the thinking is that we would have an implementation committee. The consultant is still wrapping up the final implementation plan and then they will create a committee. Michael S. said he agrees that it is very important to have some kind of implementation monitoring or coaching. Jamie asked which town boards have endorsed this plan. Ethan said at this point, zero. No town boards are required to endorse it, but Ethan still plans to include each of the boards. Jamie said he encourages Ethan to put that plan into action, he thinks they would get more support for implementation if the boards endorse it. Ethan said they plan to do so and they anticipate additional revisions to the plan after meeting with the boards.

9. New/Other Business – Janice Clements-Skelton

- Jamie said he believes the Town Moderator has the ability to provide a replacement for Tim in May. Janice said because it is an unexpired term, it would fall on FinCom to find a replacement. After the term has expired, it will be the Town Moderator's appointment.
- Rob asked Janice if there has been any further discussion in the chairs meetings on the strategic planning documents. Janice said they have not had a chairs call since before the tri-board. Rob said he doesn't think we can go without prioritizing those investment areas. We're going to lose credibility as FinCom if we don't do so. Janice said she agrees that the prioritization is critical, but it falls to the Select Board. She said they could offer an opinion on how they should be prioritized. Rob said he thinks we need to be prepared if a tax payer asks what all of these investments mean to their taxes.
- Chris said he originally thought it was a great idea to put together a committee and build out some type of plan so we can report to the tax payers. Dr. Blake said they aren't going for a new school any time soon. Public Safety is ready, so FinCom needs to have an opinion on where we think the priorities lie. We don't want to just plan based on what is ready to go vs. what makes sense for the town. We need to have an explanation behind why we are making decisions. Janice said timing and readiness is certainly a consideration but perhaps not the primary reason. Janice said she can schedule time for FinCom to have a discussion on this to send a recommendation to the Select Board. Joe said the whole school conversation seems to be at the center of the issue and perhaps it needs to be revisited and looked at again from the ground up. Jamie said he doesn't think there is a right answer as to whether we present this in the spring of the fall. The committee thought it would be better to do this in the fall because it would be a lot to get this ready for spring town meeting. Jamie said the committee is trying to get strong support from the Select Board and the School Committee and will likely also be back to FinCom asking for an endorsement for this project. Michael S. said he shares Chris' point of view in that the tax payers will look to FinCom to have a fully developed plan which addresses priorities. Failing to do so fails to acknowledge that there is going to be a cumulative effect on taxes. Walter said it seems like the School Committee is also going for an override in the fall as well so those are two big ticket items. Michael D. said that is terrible timing and is going to cause the school vs. public safety divide again. Jamie said he thinks they are going for the override in 2022. Janice said she will look to schedule this discussion in March.
- Chris asked Jamie about building up the reservoir and asked if he had any more information that they could look at before they have a discussion on it. Jamie said he just found out his employer is potentially a contractor for the reservoir so he is going to recuse himself from the conversation. Michael D. said he can distribute those

documents, and it looks like there may be an additional 20M gallons available with the dam and fixing the valve issues. In the summer that would mean an additional 20 days depending on draught conditions.

- Janice scheduled a meeting for March 16th.

10. Adjourn – Janice Clements-Skelton

- Motion to adjourn made by Joe, seconded by Walter.
→Roll Call *Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 8-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
3-31-21