

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee Minutes
Meeting of February 2nd, 2023
Ipswich Town Hall, Meeting Room A
25 Green St. Ipswich, MA

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:30.

Finance Committee members present: Michael Dougherty, Emily Smith, Walter Hartford, Jamie Fay, Michael Schaaf, Ken Swenson, Joseph Bourque, Rob White, Robert Chambers

1. Citizens Queries – Michael Dougherty

- No citizens queries.

2. Meeting Minutes Approval – Michael Dougherty

Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Hearing: Public Safety

3. Shellfish – Chief Nikas

Chief Nikas said the constable is unavailable tonight so he will present the budget instead. The biggest accomplishment is the funding of the green crab initiative. This is a regional program and is now the model for the state. The town dedicates \$15k of general fund money for the program, using both the enhancement fund and partial reimbursement from the state. Last year the program got off to a late start because there was a ban on trapping due to endangerment of humpback whales. They are trying to get a waiver for this for the following year since the small traps in the Ipswich River would not trap a whale. There is a small personnel increase, with a total amount expending \$115k. Chief Nikas said the town took in \$72k of fees for permits this past year. All 125 commercial permits are out and there will be a lottery for next year's allotment. For last year's enhancement funds, we took in \$10,500 and all of that money goes to a revolving account which is strictly used for management and protection of the flats. Michael asked if this fund gets used up in total every year, Chief Nikas said no, but it is slowly dwindling. Currently there is about \$30k.

Michael S. asked about the studies the Department of Marine Fisheries conducted and said he didn't realize they had permanently closed shellfish beds. Chief Nikas said they have some that have been permanently closed, but this was more about mooring fields. Michael also asked how the harvest is looking for this year. Chief Nikas said there was another seeding last year, so that's good. He thinks a lot of it has to do with minimizing the effect of the green crab. Last year they took out 90k green crabs.

4. Harbormaster – Chief Nikas

There are no shocking changes within the personnel lines. They have been updated for benefits. They usually do 5 months of the year paid out of the waterways account for the full-time officer. They reduce the permanent wages out of the police line and use it here to offset costs. There was an increase in services and gas. There is \$18k for boat supplies which is for the fire departments boat. It is currently out of service and there is not a viable engine. They requested for this in emergency funds but Chief Nikas wanted to add it in here just in case it doesn't get approved at town meeting. The other increase for services is for professional installation and removal of docks at the end of Peatfield street for kayaking access. Jamie asked if it's something the DPW could do because it's a lot of money to spend. Chief Nikas said he can look into what is involved but he would like to keep it this way for now because of the legalities. We don't want them installed incorrectly and then have someone get hurt. You have to actually go into the water to do this and some of the people at the DPW had reservations about that because it's not their expertise. Michael asked about the increase in health insurance, Sarah said the actual cost of the insurance is increasing, they don't have the final number from MAIA yet.

The account currently has \$38k and people are starting to pay mooring fees now so this will go up. The last few years mooring permits alone took in about \$120k-\$130k per year. Most of the permits are seasonal and are purchased online. You can also buy a daily pass on the app but Chief Nikas said nobody does that, people either have a season pass or have \$5 in cash. Emily asked if they are considering going to app only, for easier checks and balances. The Chief said they are looking into it and are also looking into a mobile kiosk so they can catch the mid-week crowd. Jamie asked about the Harbor Plan, Chief Nikas said they have plans to increase public awareness, reorganize mooring fields, and up mooring fees. Joe asked who maintains and installs the moorings, Chief Nikas said they have private companies and some

people also do self-installation. The town is not liable for the mooring upkeep. Rob asked about people that have multiple moorings. Chief Nikas said some people have a few moorings because they were passed down by families. They don't allow one person to use multiple moorings, but if families want to give immediate family access to their moorings they can. They require that there be one boat per mooring.

5. Animal Control – M. Sousa

Megan Sousa, Animal control Officer, went over the goals and accomplishments, as outlined in the budget book. The main goal for the next year is to regionalize. The team is also planning to complete level three animal cruelty training, and just finished updating a shelter. Chief Nikas said there was a \$1,000 increase for the online system. The \$2,250 is a record keeping system specifically for animal control that gives real time information and can be shared with other municipalities. Mike asked about employees, Chief Nikas said they have had money for an assistant for 3 years but they can't find anyone. This is why they are trying to regionalize. This is an expertise and the state has changed the laws and the liabilities for towns. A lot of towns in the areas are also struggling to find staff. Stephen said normally if a part time position is vacant for a number of years, he would typically zero it out because we obviously don't need it. However, since there is talk of regionalizing, they left it in the budget so they can fund the position if they regionalize. We would be the host community because we have the staff and the shelter. We would likely have two full time animal control officers and perhaps also a part time person for weekends and nights. They are working on drafting an agreement now, and the new software will help us to collect data to see what we really need. We would likely save money but more importantly our neighbors are really struggling and we're trying to help them and make sure everyone in the area gets good service. It would be us, Newbury, Boxford, and Rowley. Mike asked if we would need any additional vehicles. Chief Nikas said he doesn't think so but that would be part of the assessment to see if we need anything additional. Stephen said to get it started we are going to try to have a "less is more" strategy. Chief Nikas said Megan is also a certified barn inspector and other towns have been having her inspect theirs as well, which she gets paid for. Michael S. said they might want to consider looking at the animal population vs. the human population when doing the study. Emily asked if the state gives them the ability to charge for the barn inspections, Megan said no but you can charge for barn permits. They have a barn permit process in place but haven't set it up yet because they don't know who would process those and collect those fees. They don't have the staff to set it up. Emily said perhaps they could do it on the permitting app.

6. Emergency Management – J. Hubbard

Jon Hubbard, Emergency Management Director for the town, presented to goals and accomplishments for the year. They were able to get back to normal last year and were able to do the Illumination event. They also worked closely with Terry in the finance office to get the Covid grants closed up, replaced 2 radios, and started the FEMA readiness program back up at the schools. They hope to get more grants to replace equipment in the upcoming year. They are also looking to get an emergency management vehicle because the car they currently have won't pass inspection and needs over \$4k worth of work. They are hoping to get a used police vehicle. They are looking to get the Emergency Management grant again this year as well as the Citizen Core grant. Emily asked if there is a vehicle they have in mind. Jon said the current car they use is a used police car, so once the Police Department gets two new cars next year they will hopefully be able to take one of those. Jamie asked what the biggest concern is, Jon said the nor'easters are always a problem.

7. Civilian Dispatch – Chief Nikas

Chief Nikas said all of the increases are collective bargained. The expense lines are mostly flat. They get about \$46k from equipment and maintenance grants and about \$10k in grants for training. They have 4.5 FTE's and they have all been with the town for years. They have been steady for decades and some communities have really struggled with staffing. They meet all of the federal and state standards. Michael asked about the differential increase, Chief Nikas said it is just based on hourly wages. Michael asked how the equipment is overall, Chief Nikas said it's good. They upgraded the equipment in the upstairs of the police station which is backup equipment, the tower on town hill is being built with the new water tank. It will be on its own platform and use the same bunkhouse as Vicki's equipment. Mike asked if this will help with the dead zones. Chief Nikas said they are hoping this may give us the extra reach they need.

8. Police – Chief Nikas

The top half of the police budget is the 3% increases and the collective bargaining agreements. The holiday pay increased because of the new holiday. They also had a few people who got masters degrees which upped their pay. Overtime has also gone up because staff is getting more senior and is able to take more vacation time. The maintenance

contracts have gone up because the requirements for tasers went up though the Police Reform Act, so they needed to get new tasers. The state also mandates now that everyone has to have a 6-hour training for tasers and then each year a 4 hour follow up training. They entered into a 5-year contract with Axon Tasers for the trainings. They also added money for ammunition since prices have gone up. Michael asked about the Bridge Academy, Chief Nikas said they don't have anyone in this year. Michael asked how the fleet is, Chief Nikas said it is all hybrid now and they have put it into capital for 2 more, so hopefully that gets funded. There are 6 on the front line. Most of them survive about 2 years and after the two years they usually have between 95k-150k miles. They try to get new ones every 2 years and then repurpose them. The administrative vehicles last much longer, around 8 years. They will be getting rid of the Hum V because it is getting too expensive to maintain.

Rob asked about drug use in town, Chief Nikas said they just received \$1.6M to keep the Essex county outreach program running. Any time a resident has a drug related problem, even if it is out of town, the town gets notified so they don't slip through the cracks. Stephen said they also received a good amount of money from the J&J settlement and there will be another round of settlements coming in from other pharmacies that were involved. They will use this money to increase education on addiction within town. Ipswich is in line with other towns in the state in regards to drug overdoses. Michael S. said looking at the stats, we haven't had a lot of crime in town for a few years and he asked why. Chief Nikas said it's a nice town and we just don't have a lot of those issues. Michael asked if the police force are keeping up with training so they still feel prepared for situations that come up. Chief Nikas said yes. Ken asked if there are some cases that are moved over to detectives. Chief Nikas said yes depending on the depth of the investigation sometimes they turn it over to the CID and the officer will continue to assist.

9. Fire – Chief Parisi

Paul Parisi, Fire Chief, went over the accomplishments from the last year. They hit a record number of emergency incidents this past year and if they look at the trend line, it continues to go up. They successfully planned and executed a call firefighter recruitment process. They only had 6 call fire fighters on the roster and were successful in hiring 5 more for a total of 11. They participated in the public safety building design committee. They have established and reviewed 12 standard operating guidelines which they will continue to review and update. They received two public education grants from the commonwealth totaling about \$7K, and are in the process of expending those funds for fire education through both the schools and the Council On Aging. They also applied for and received a \$19k Department of Fire Services grant for equipment.

Goals for the upcoming year are to safely respond to and mitigate over 2000 incidents, continue to actively participate in design and construction of the public safety facility, and to take a deep dive on their ability to meet NFPA 1710, which is the standard on organization and deployment of fire suppression, EMS, and hazardous materials response to the public. This focuses on staffing and how quickly they can arrive to emergency incidents. They also want to continue to increase staffing, and are working to do a cashless system for permit payments. Lastly, they are reviewing the vision and mission for the department, and plan to upgrade radios.

Significant budget increases include more funding for part time call firefighters, an increase in holiday pay for Juneteenth, and an increase for educational reimbursement. The most significant change is in overtime, which is a 36% increase. They are looking to increase this line item because they currently have 4 shifts of firefighters. When one takes leave, they don't currently replace that member. Michael asked what the discrepancy was in the training, Chief Parisi said the town manager was able to fund some of the paramedic training so he requested the entire amount. Stephen suggested to put in for \$2500 and if they need more they can add more. Stephen said there is a low subscription rate for fire training and they don't want to tie up levy if it's not going to be used. If it gets subscribed past the \$2,500, they can use the management transfer fund. Walter asked why we wouldn't hire another person to eliminate overtime, Chief Parisi said it wouldn't be cost effective to hire several new firefighters because of the benefits packages, and they would also be using vacation time. Stephen said they will do that analysis this year.

Rob asked about the mutual aid numbers and if those are all in Ipswich. Chief Parisi said those are all Ipswich fires. Robert asked about the New England Biolabs. Chief Parisi said they work closely with them. They are the experts in their field and the fire department can support them if ever needed. They have also provided the fire department with biohazard equipment and are poised to do so again. Chief Parisi said they will need to replace their aerial ladder next year that they would need for the New England Biolab buildings. Jamie said the overtime budget is significant and the committee needs to take time to look at that. This community has worked in the same way with 4 fire fighters and no backfill for 40 years. He said he can't recall a situation where anyone felt that was inadequate. At the same time, Jamie said he has deep respect for the Chief and his professionalism and knowledge of the industry so he takes his words with that respect. Jamie said any additional information the Chief could provide them about the overtime increase would be

helpful. Michael asked if there will be any other major requests coming down the pike other than the aerial ladder. Chief Parisi said they need to radios and will also need a ladder truck and a UTV. They are going to look into a grant for the ladder which usually costs \$1.2M. Michael asked if there are grants for the radios, Chief Parisi said they applied for one but didn't get it.

10. New/Other Business – Michael Dougherty

- Michael said he has been in touch with the building inspector and are shooting to have him on the Feb 28th meeting.

11. Adjourn – Michael S. Dougherty

- Motion to adjourn made by Ken and seconded by Emily.
→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
2-7-22