

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee
Meeting of February 4th, 2020
Town Hall, 25 Green Street

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

Finance Committee members present: Michael Dougherty, Walter Hartford, Michael Schaaf, Joseph Bourque, Jamie Fay, Rob White, Timothy Goodrich, Chris Doucette

1. Citizens Queries – Michael Dougherty

- none

2. Acceptance of Finance Committee Minutes

- Motion to accept minutes from January 14th made by Joe, seconded by Walter.
→*Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 7-0*

FY21 Budget Reviews: Planning and Community Development

3. Public Health – Colleen Fermon

Colleen Fermon, Director of Public Health, went over the makeup of the Public Health Department as well as the mission. She then discussed the goals, as written in the Budget Book. The department plans to work with Northeast Mass Mosquito Control to improve and align their plan for mosquito control with that of the state's. Colleen discussed the EEE threat last year and how the department handled it. The Board of Health will also be looking at the Best Management Plan and will determine how they want to move forward. The biggest change this year will be that residents may be able to call and ask for their yards to be sprayed. This will be an open discussion to decide if people want this. In addition to that, the Harbor Virus Plan for this year will be revised.

Colleen reported that staffing levels are not proposed to change. There was a change in mileage starting in July of 2019, which was when the Health Inspector started and began using his personal vehicle for transportation. They also had to replace a copier so the maintenance cost for the old copier was removed. There was an additional \$25 increase to dues. Other than that, there are no changes. Michael D. said there have been a lot of changes with tobacco regulations and he asked Colleen if she feels like their department has been able to stay on top of everything. Colleen said they email everyone with changes, and the Inspector also goes out to hand deliver notification changes and then checks back in a week later.

Colleen said the greatest challenge this past year was the emergency regulation about signage, which can be confusing for the retailers. To help with this, the department has been trying to educate retailers and help them through each phase so they can avoid fines. There will be compliance checks coming up as well. Michael asked if Ipswich will have to update the bi-laws to match what's on the State and Federal level. Colleen said that is what is typically done but they aren't planning to do this right away. She also said that one of the biggest questions is how marijuana and CBD is affected by the law about vaping and they are hoping to get clarity in February. Jamie asked about how much of their \$200,000 of revenue is offset by fees. Colleen said revenue for 2019 was a little over \$104,000 which was through permitting fees and some re-inspection fees. Jamie asked if this is reimbursing the town for the costs of the inspections. Colleen said there are housing re-inspection fees which are for if violations are found in the initial inspection. That is separated in the housing revolving fund. They try to look at how much it costs the Board of Health to do inspections and then how much it would need to cost to be equitable to the town. They are trying to walk a fine line of not overcharging but still generating revenue. Jamie asked what Colleen thinks the two biggest public health issues are for the town. Colleen said she thinks substance abuse is one and the other would be mental health. They have joined with Regional Collaboratives to try to address these issues because their department is structured more for code compliance which is typical for a smaller community.

Michael Schaff asked Colleen to discuss the housing inspection process and trends. Colleen said they don't have a pre-rental inspection program, they just do inspections if someone files a complaint. The department must be allowed into the unit by the tenant. They do an inspection and write up violations if they are found and then issue an order. If someone doesn't want to allow them in, they would have to go to court to get a court order. They don't run into this often. They saw an increase in 2018 but that has dropped off. There is a higher percentage of elderly residents in Ipswich and because

of limited funds or ability things start to get away from them, so they might try to tie them to resources to help keep people in their home. They also get referrals from police or fire department at times typically due to hoarding. Michael. S. also asked about how things are going with Biolabs. Colleen said things have been pretty steady and they have had no complaints. They are limited to level 1, least risk possible activities. From their expansion plans they are simply planning to increase capacity and are not planning to raise their low risk level. Rob asked about the mileage and why it grew. Colleen said the Health Inspector started in July and originally, they thought they would be sharing a vehicle, but the fleet was decreased in town so the inspector used his own vehicle. The remainder of it is for the Public Health Nurse or for Colleen if they are going to seminar. Chris asked about how the fees that the department collects stacks up with surrounding towns. Colleen said they are in the mid-range but how the total compares is hard to say because each department is structured differently. The price/per cost they are usually mid to high. Whenever they look at the fee schedule they look at least 15 other communities to make sure they are not charging too much. Walter asked about the food revolving fund. Colleen explained that the revolving fund was set up because they were struggling to try to pay for inspections when they fluctuated, so they increased the inspection fees and made the revolving fund. Walter asked if there are any PDF's that show the revolving fund, Sarah said they are updating it. Colleen said they also have a revolving fund that is used for flu clinics. The variability of the expenses causes the need for the revolving fund. Colleen said they also regulate mobile food vendors.

4. Conservation Commission – Brendan. Lynch

Brendan Lynch, Conservation Agent for the town, went over his responsibilities and also went over the goals for the year, as written in the Budget Book. He is currently working on grant opportunities and storm water management. There are a lot of town projects and resiliency projects. Ethan Parsons, Director of Planning and Development, was also there. Michael D. asked what Brendan's biggest takeaway is so far from Ipswich. Brendan said people are passionate and well-educated. Mike asked why the conference line item has increased so much. Brendan said conference fees have increased a lot and interest from the commission members has also gone up. Jamie said that one thing the town has been working on is moving all documents to electronic. He asked what Brendan sees going on in the Conservation Department. Brendan said the DEP is trying to implement electronic filings, however there are some things you can't send to the state electronically so they have to send it in. They accept PDF versions of applications in the office but many people like to hold the plan itself. Brendan said it can be hard to see the scale on a screen, and although he would like to get away from having hard copies of reports, he does not think they would easily be able to get rid of hard copy plans. Jamie said it's also hard to store all of the paper. Brendan said there are companies that will organize and store paper electronically, but it would be a huge initiative and would take a lot of time but there are ways to do it. Rob asked what kinds of things they would be able to get grants for and what are the problems in the town. Brendan said coastal erosion is a big issue including the river systems and there are plenty of grants out there for this. The town has shown in the past that when we get grant money we use it which is good. Brendan would like to focus on living shorelines, meaning plants on the shorelines instead of structures. Ethan said there are also several grants they have already had in the works that are still going to continue to play out over the next few years. Everything they do has a wetland component to it too. Michael Schaff asked if the Conservation Commission is involved in the inspections on the Linebrook road housing project regarding nitrogen load. Ethan said that a portion of the project is in their jurisdiction and they are reviewing the project in front of the Conservation Commission. Michael S. also asked if the project has been able to keep the farm safe the way they had hoped, Ethan said yes. Michael S. said in the 2020 expenditures they are to date at 40% of the budget, and he asked why that is and if they are overbudgeted. Brendan said this was submitted after they paid for conference fees. Michael said he sees that they have less than 50% of their money spent and it has been 50% of the year. Sarah said a lot of the expenses might come in February

5. Planning Board, Historical Commission, – Ethan Parsons

Ethan said he took over the directorship last June and there is a delta reflected in the budget between Glenn's salary and Ethan's salary. Ethan said he is proud of what he does in terms of how much they do for staffing. They are currently leading the Community Development Process and the Strategic Planning Process. They are also actively perusing several grants. He discussed the accomplishments for the previous year as discussed in the Budget Book. He also discussed the goals for this upcoming year for the department as stated in the Budget Book. He talked about the Housing Production Plan which is a plan that will encourage the town to be productive in creating affordable housing. Ethan also discussed the budget. He said he did not calculate the revenue that the Planning Board has brought in but he knows it is less than \$10,000. They generally see larger projects and the application fees are not significant. They are not seeing the volume of projects that other departments are seeing. The planning board looks at special permits and site plan reviews for

larger projects such as the biolabs. With regard to the revenues, they don't charge higher fees because sometimes it costs \$10,000 to apply for permits. As far as the planning budget numbers, it decreased due to the delta in salaries. The funding levels will stay the same, they are appropriate for the services they are providing. He would also like to get AICP certified and he is budgeting for that, although it may not happen until next year. The printing line is for advertising and brochures. They also have opportunities for professional development.

Michael D. asked Ethan if he is seeing a lot of engagement with the community and getting opinions from people. Ethan said the CDP staff would have loved to see more participation but he thinks there was a fairly high level of interest and participation. There is a lot of interest in housing. He is looking forward to the housing production plan process in conjunction with the CDP. He said they have an open-door policy which has been invaluable. They are problem solvers and they want to sit down and interreact with people. Michael asked where we stand percentage wise for affordable housing in Ipswich. Ethan said he thinks we are at 9.6%, or maybe a little lower, and it is a moving target. They are about 60 units low from the target. The Whittier motel is converting to affordable housing so that will help, it will likely be 37 units. There is significant money that will be coming into the affordable housing trust fund. Once the Census comes out the number may move further away from the 10% due to some of the development, but with the 40B projects, he is confident that there will be more units added soon.

Jamie asked if they are in the process of updating the Open Space and Recreation Plan. Ethan said it is not on the list because they are still working on it, Jamie said he should add it as an objective. Jamie asked how they are paying for the consultants because it's not in the budget. The housing production plan is through a grant and the CDP work is funded through the Capital Plan. The complete streets work was through a grant from the state. The open space plan is being done in house, MVP was funded through a grant from the state. The hazard mitigation plan was funded through the police department. Jamie said there is a lot going on in this department that is not reflected in the budget and he asked Tony and Sarah if this should be reflected somewhere. Tony said they can include it next year in the budget book. Jamie said maybe a few sheets could be added for each department to just to see what revenue they are bringing in.

Michael Schaff asked about the affordable housing trust fund expenditures and impacts. Sarah said the auditors wanted more definition on this so she dug into it and looked at the overall revenue, what was paid off and what was outstanding. Michael asked Sarah if she could share the report. Michael also asked if there is a way to keep track of the affordable housing units to make sure they are continuing to be occupied by affordable housing residents. Ethan said they have someone that keeps track of this and the person that used to do it has left so they are interviewing to fill that position soon. Michael also asked for an update on the 161 Topsfield Road project. He said there is a lot of useful data that needs analysis and it would be beneficial to see those. Rob asked about what the housing production plan looks like in regards to tax revenue. Ethan said if the town is subsidizing housing it goes without saying that there is a financial implication to the town. On the other hand, if we don't do it then we will never be proactive about creating affordable housing which will create unfriendly 40B projects that they don't have control over. If we want to manage our growth and have a balanced approach we need to be proactive about this. The alternative is not having the opportunity to manage this growth so we have say about where we want affordable house, who will pay for it, who will we work with. Rob asked about securing long term funding for the open space program. Ethan said the contribution that the open space program makes to the town is very important and they need to make sure they continue to get funding. Open space is what forms community character almost as much as the marsh and downtown. There are open space holdings throughout the town that need programing, infrastructure like trail maintenance and bridges, ensuring there are dog bags and trash cans. They are also seeking out additional open space for water supply protection and athletic playing fields.

Beth O'Conner, open space steward for the town, spoke about creating the access, parking areas, and permitting for the fields for Pony Express. They have had one season under their belt for soccer so far. At the time they were looking at getting the fields up and running, soccer was the only group that said they needed the fields. They didn't exclusively plan for soccer but they were working with soccer. Shortly after the fields opened some lacrosse teams asked to use the fields as well. The groups are currently figuring out what they need in terms of practice and game schedules to work collaboratively to all use the fields. Beth said over 1000 kids are using the fields so far. Rob asked how many fields there are. Beth said there are 4 very large fields, they try to only use 2 fields at a time due to drainage issues and so that they don't overuse the fields. They also have plans for adding more fields in the hay fields but the costs would be high so they aren't doing it yet.

Walter asked for the report on the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and noted that he would like to see this yearly. Secondly, he asked how we can make sure we structure things so that we can keep a degree of control. Ethan said in the Select Board had a big job to do to acquire this land and had to waive the right of first refusal in order to get this property. They had to structure something that allowed for the most open space to be preserved. The Planning Board had to look at multiple aspects of this. One of the bumps was the nitrogen level and there have been a few other bumps but this had

nothing to do with the Select Board. Walter said another issue was the windmill. He asked if the Planning Board takes charge of these things, Ethan said Tony and Sarah are in charge but in the future communication is key for when there are bumps in the road. Ethan said he is involved with a lot this but does not think that he is the one that is taking the lead.

6. Historical Commission – Ethan Parsons

Ethan said he wanted to discuss the part time temporary archivist. The historical commission wants to hire someone short term to do some projects. Jamie said for such a small amount of money it seems like it would be a consultant position. Ethan said it will likely be an intern for few weeks. Jamie said he thinks it should be called consultant vs. a part time hire. Ethan said they would talk about this. Ethan also discussed plaques and said their department has been paying for these. They would like \$2300 to pay for the fabrication and installation of these. Ethan went over other changes in the budget such as a drop in printing as well as advertising and administration fees.

7. Zoning Board of Appeals – Ethan Parsons

Michael asked if we have any zoning articles coming up. Ethan said one is regarding adult use marijuana shops. The other zoning change being proposed by the board is going to correct some numbers in the dimensional table that should have been changed a few years ago.

8. Open Space Budget – Ethan Parsons

Ethan said they have a goal of securing long term funding for the program which was already discussed. He turned it over to Beth to discuss major goals and numbers. Beth discussed the goals for the upcoming fiscal year as outlined in the budget book. Hannah is leading finalizing and submitting the open space and recreation plan for the next round through the state. They will continue to maintain, improve, and expand on existing passive recreational public access properties including conservation areas, the Kosinski property, Pony Express, and Strawberry Hill. The plan to create public access is in the works now through the permitting process and they will also work with the Marini family. There is \$4M in the open space bond and a number of properties that have not been protected, so they will continue to work on relationships and outreach with land owners to protect property for potential land development. They also monitor conservation restrictions and produce reports, as well as foster relationships with land owners that are a part of the open space program and help to answer questions and support land owners. They also continue to work on the long-term sustainability of the fund which is the source for paying the staff. They operate around \$135,000 a year primarily in staff costs. Michael D. asked about increase. Beth said they had budgeted for an intern and they had found that what they were budgeting for was not being spent. They reduced the payroll cost for this, as well as the cost of the laborer due to volunteer work and working with the Parks Department. They have moved that money to set aside for specialty work if they need to hire consultants for help. They also budgeted for both staff members to attend the Annual Land Trust Alliance every year. The budget is level but things have been moved around a bit. Jamie asked where the revenue stream is coming from. Beth said the New England BioLabs 15-year TIFF ended but they still get money from the hotel/motel tax and Chapter 61 rollback taxes. The current balance is \$219,000 and annual revenue into the account is \$70,000. Jamie also asked if they are keeping an eye on Candlewood Golf Course. Beth said she believes Hannah reached out to someone in the family and there has been some attention paid but it is a land court situation. Michael S. said he doesn't think it's on the Open Space list. Beth said she will check. Ethan said the ownership structure is up in the air and they are trying to stay on top of it. He said Hannah is the one handling this. Michael D. asked if the Open Space Fund is supposed to be self-funded. Jamie said yes. Originally some of it was funded through the bond but people were uncomfortable with this and the goal was to figure out a way to bring it in as an ongoing town program. Michael S. said he is pleased to hear about an emphasis on agricultural land. Michael asked if they have data regarding the amount of land and tillage and the amount of farm land and its location in the town. Beth said there is approximately 23,000 acres in Chapter 61 which includes forestry and horse farms. She doesn't have a precise number but probably about half of that is in tillage. That number needs to be verified for the Open Space and Rec. plan, so they will have a more accurate number soon. Michael also asked if they have thought about volunteers for trail maintenance. Beth said they have used volunteers in the past and there is one particular property where there are a lot of invasive species that need to be removed from the trail path so Beth would love volunteers for this. She also works with ECTA. Michael also asked about the health insurance line. Beth said only one staff member receives health insurance. Michael said it seems like a lot of money. Sarah said that is what it costs per staff member across the board. It's one of the biggest budget items. Walter asked about the money in the Open Space Bond and if the money is going toward the Open Space Committee. Ethan said he doesn't want to assign uses for that money.

9. Code Enforcement – J Bone

James Bone, Director of Code Enforcement and Building Commissioner for the town, went over goals and achievements. Last year they were able to improve on turnaround times with permits and also implemented a new permitting software. This helped to streamline their processes and helped to reduce the amount of paper and time people had to spend on applying for permits. The new software makes it easier for applicants to understand what they need in order to apply and limits the department from having to contact people for more information. James also added additional information about the stretch code so everyone would be informed and understand the requirements. They are also able to use the new software to track projects and will be able to use this for performance measures. James also introduced a building code and live links to code documents, so if someone is researching or trying to find a building code they will be able to access it easily. James has had positive feedback on this. The department has also utilized the Department on Aging and is working with someone to upload documents to create a complete digital file for all of the permits that have been filed since 2010. It would be nice to make more progress on this if they could get grant money to hire someone, or if there was more clerical help. Right now, they are chipping away at it slowly. The permit levels have remained strong, about 2000 permits last year. The department has a lot of work and is likely to fall behind if someone takes a day off. Even with the ability to streamline things and make processes more efficient, they are still falling behind in work and would like to add someone else. Mike asked if they should hire someone just for peak seasons. James said he thinks they need a full-time employee.

Jamie asked James his thoughts on the upcoming BioLabs project. James said it's a big project and there will be multiple trips down there, but there will also be construction control so engineers and architects will also be providing additional oversight. The Sims project is also going on which they will continue to oversee. Jamie asked if the BioLabs will be a big permit fee. James said they have a credit, about \$55,000. He isn't sure why or how but that money will take a lot from their permit fee. Tony said it was negotiated when they did the prior TIFF and he isn't sure why but he will look into it. Jamie said he thinks this needs to be considered when talking about the upcoming TIFF. Michael S. said it sounds like the department certainly needs some help and asked if he knows what the staff looks like for comparable towns. James said towns of similar sizes average 1,700 permits per year whereas Ipswich averages 2,000 a year. Michael said it could be useful to understand if we are gearing up toward where other towns are of similar size. Tony said the increase of adding another full-time inspector this year is a step in the direction and is long overdue. They want to add this and then take a look again next year to see if the one addition is enough. Michael said the overtime budget looks like it is projected to decline 15%, James said if we look prior to 2008, the electrical permits were issued and the inspector worked out of the ELD. In 2008 they moved this over to the Building Department. That increased the permit load between 300 and 400 permits a year. To help with this a compromise was made to add an additional 2.6 hours per week to the administrator's hours which is added to her salary. James said she works very hard and is efficient, he would not want to mess with this. Rob said they are asking for an increase in a building inspector but permits haven't gone up. James said the department has been running understaffed for a long time and everyone in the department has been working extra hours just to keep up. Back in 1998 the department was seeing between 1500 and 1700 permits per year and things were managed nicely. After the recession it went up to 2000 permits and Ipswich developed a bad reputation for taking a long time to turn permits around. Many people in the department put in a lot of unpaid time because they can't stay on top of things. Tony said this addition is long overdue and this would bring the department up to the same amount of staff as similarly sized towns. Chris said that he is all for reducing FTE's across town whenever possible but this seems to be a long-standing issue. People say the town is expensive and its hard to stay in town and hard to build in town, and this has an effect on growth. This could be a sizeable benefit to the town for people trying to build. Joe asked if code enforcement suffers when permits re running high and if revenue is being left on the table in terms of fines because they can't get to it. James said those are the types of things he does over the weekend or by coming in early. James has a part time assistant that does a great job and he is willing to go full time.

10. New/ Other Business – Michael Dougherty

Mike said it looks like everyone will be able to make the warrant hearing change date from 3/17 to 3/18. The first warrant hearing will be on 3/18 and the next day will be 3/19 if needed. Jamie said the Public Safety Facilities Committee had a meeting last week. There was a good turnout with about 60 people there. They gave a great presentation that explained the parameters of the project. There were a lot of concerns from abutters regarding noise, lights, and sirens. There wasn't opposition, people were there to ask questions and learn about the project. People recommended the committee do a mail-out to the abutters to tell them when the next meeting is. Rob asked about the water rate increase. Mike said the commissioners had their first meeting and they are pulling back the throttle on the CARE plan due to concerns that the Select Board brought up. There are still active projects that will be next year and these rates reflect that. They want to keep a certain cash balance. \$250 for water and \$200 for sewer and they structured the rates so that they

don't go below those mandated balances. This year will be a 15% increase for water and 13% increase in sewer. Rob asked if that was tied to a project. Mike said it pays for operational costs to continue the goal of addressing things that need to be addressed. Anthony said the PowerPoint from the meeting will be posted on the website. Michael S. asked about the project for the improvement and renovation of the wastewater plant. Mike D. said it's 5 years out and they are trying to incorporate that cost in the increased cost this year. Vicki will present this project to FINCOM in a few weeks. Mike said the concern from the boards about the CARE Fund was that projects weren't specifically listed. They are going to get a handle on specific projects and then revisit the CARE Fund. Rob said there is a strategic planning group meeting planned for Thursday morning and he will report on that Thursday night. He will also send out the documents he has from the meetings.

11. Adjournment – Michael Dougherty

- Motion to adjourn made by Rob and seconded by Chris.
→*Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 8-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
2-9-20