

TOWN OF IPSWICH  
Finance Committee  
Meeting of February 4, 2021  
Remote

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:35.

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.
- Sarah said she sent an email out to FinCom about Open Space. There was a legislative act that was passed regarding the Open Space and Water fund. This money is used to fund the Open Space Budget. Salaries and health insurance are taken out of that fund. The amount of money in this fund is \$221,000 which was slowly declining with two employees. Now that we only have one employee it's doing okay. Sarah said she also sent a staffing change sheet from the Board of Health; the Public Health Nurse is becoming a contractor vs. an employee. John Morris is being bumped up from 5.5 hours to 8 hours.

**FY 22 Budget Reviews: Public Safety – Janice Clements-Skelton**

**3. Fire Department – Chief A. Theriault**

Chief Theriault said he was very proud of how the department handled the pandemic. Inspections were down and all of the programs done with the public were shut down this past year. In June they were able to continue doing inspections for home sales. Online payment was implemented for inspections which has worked well and they will move forward with more online permitting. Chief Theriault went over the employees in the department and said there is one vacancy. They have continued working with seniors on smoke detector inspections and medical boxes. Chief Theriault then went over the goals and accomplishments, as noted in the budget book. He also went over the grants received this past year which included grants for student awareness and fire education, senior grants, and grants for equipment. Janice asked for the total of grant dollars that came in, Chief Theriault said probably close to \$65,000-\$70,000. The Chief went over the performance measures. Incidences were down 15% from last year which is most likely due to Covid.

Jamie asked about the vacancy. Chief Theriault said they will promote a lieutenant and then will hire a new fire fighter. Jamie also asked about the requests for turnout gear. The chief said they are ordering 8 sets which will be the second set of turnout gear for the 8 call firefighters. It takes a while to wash the gear after it's used so they need backup sets. Rob asked who is responsible for writing the requests for the grants. The chief said he does all of the department grant writing except for the SAFE program. Rob said well done. He also asked how the activity will change over the next 4 or 5 months now that most of the staff is vaccinated. The Chief said nothing will really change until the vast majority of the population is vaccinated. Walter asked how much they are spending on building maintenance, Chief Theriault said the furnace needs to be fixed about once a week. He said to ask facilities how much is being spent.

Walter asked about data regarding the kinds of incidences and how many fires there were. Chief Theriault said there were 33 fires. Michael S. asked about the reduction in overtime, the Chief said he keeps a close eye on things and they have been within the weekly and monthly parameters. Joe said he was looking at the incidents per year and asked if that was for the fiscal year or calendar year, it is calendar year. He also asked if there is anything that was expensed from the CARES act that are not reflected in the budget. Sarah said there was a lot of PPE and protective measures put in place to protect the staff. The fire station is closed to the public and the police station has been closed as much as possible. Joe asked if there is anything that is being funded through CARES that they may want to continue to do after the CARES funding is done. Sarah said we will keep using all of the protective measures that we have in place now and most of the

policies that we have in effect now due to Covid were driven by the state. Chief Theriault said they used the money for a lot of medical equipment and PPE that was paid for through grants and as time goes on they will have to pay for those.

Janice asked if there was a retirement this year, there was. She asked what Chief Theriault is thinking will happen over the next few years, he said there will be a good amount of turnover in the next few years. Janice asked about the radio box communication capitol request, if it is an upgrade or a new system. It was for repeaters which are designed to boost the system. That has been pushed out a year and it might have been something that facilities asked for. Janice also noticed the new pumper and the two engine replacements. Chief Theriault said the payment in 2022 will be the last payment for the two engines. Janice said we will also set aside money this year for the ladder truck.

#### **4. Police Department – Chief Nikkas**

Chief Nikkas went over the accomplishments for the department as outlined in the budget book. There were a lot of changes this past year including protocol changes for interacting with each other and with the public. They hired a 26<sup>th</sup> officer to help offset where officers needed to be stationed this summer. They also had a dedicated traffic officer funded through the CARES act. There was a large police presence downtown and at the beach this summer due to high volumes of people. They also purchased two new hybrid vehicles. Chief Nikkas went over the grants they received. Chief Nikkas also went over changes in the budget which included step grades and collective bargaining with unions. Some expense lines were shorted due to Covid so instead of putting in for two new cruisers which they usually do, they redistributed that money to other areas. Michael D. said he thinks that is very wise. He also asked if they are trying to go 100% hybrid. Chief Nikkas said they are, 5 of the 6 frontline cruisers will be hybrids if the 2022 funding goes through. There are details in the budget report about gas savings from the hybrids. There are also many incentives to do so and rebates are available from Electric Light, Green Communities, and from the state.

Janice said there are 12 line items that are showing significant increases year after year. She said it is unusual to have that many increases dispersed across the budget. Chief Nikkas said those increases put them back to what they were funded for last year. They took a huge amount of the decreases for last year's budget cuts due to Covid. The majority are restorative from the previous year's budget and they are being covered by the savings from not ordering the two cruisers.

Chief Nikkas said they will be getting a Tesla SUV for the department, and it was cheaper than the Ford. Chris asked if they have looked into the life of the Tesla as compared to the Ford hybrids. Chief Nikkas said the battery life is 10 years. This will be an admin car so it won't get as much wear and tear as the front-line cars so after 10 years of use this car will hold its resale value. There will also be a savings in maintenance. Chief Nikkas said the Model S would not work well for the frontline cars because it is more expensive and it wouldn't work best for our climate. But down the road it might be something to look into. Rob said he is surprised we are looking into getting a Tesla when we need a Public Safety Building that has such a high price tag. He doesn't think the optics will look good here and there may be a disconnect to the tax payer. Janice said that the numbers seem to make sense but that won't be peoples first reaction. There will need to be a lot of education to the public about how this was a good decision financially. Chris said he understands the optics but if it's more affordable than we can explain that. Rob said the insurance is certainly going to be more expensive for the Tesla and it seems like the car is significantly more money than what we usually spend on a car. Chief Nikkas said the budget from last year was for an administrative car and nothing has been added to the town budget for the car. There have been grants received to supplement which were designed for the purchase of electric vehicles. Rob said although that is true, we don't have to spend all of the money. If there have been grants received to supplement the cost of the car they could still buy a less expensive car and save that money or use it for something else. Rob said he thinks the optics of this are bad considering the Public Safety Building and how much financial burden people are feeling this year. Jamie said he understands Robs point, he also thinks a Tesla is less of an elite choice than it was 2 years ago.

Michael S. asked about the Mental Health Counselor and Substance Abuse Counselor and asked if that level of staffing seems adequate. Chief Nikkas said both of those positions are funded through grants. They are going to look to get their own local grant as well and to partner with Rowley to get a counselor 40 hours a week. In Ipswich, the court is in Newburyport and the hospital they use is in Beverly. It can be confusing since the criminal and mental health sides are in different districts. Janice said looking at the statistics of incidents since the counselors have been in place, it seems to be a nice downward trend. Jamie asked about the 4% increase in staffing. Chief Nikkas said its part of the collective bargaining agreements for step increases. One officer also got his bachelor's degree which bumped up his pay. There have been no new employees.

#### **5. Animal Control – M. Boissonnau**

Megan went over the accomplishments and goals as put forth in the budget book. Megan said there has been an increase in chicken permitting as well as an increase in the turkey population reports.

## **6. Harbormaster – Chief Nikkas**

Chief Nikkas said the harbors were slammed this year. The amount of people on the beaches was huge and the waitlist for moorings also went up from 180 last year to 325 this year. Prior to the shutdown there was training done on the south shore that was paid for by Homeland Security. The budget has decreased this year because the items that were added in last year have already been purchased. They also requested to purchase another small boat from Marblehead for the creeks because there has been an uptick in kayakers. Jamie asked how many vessels they have, Chief Nikkas said they have the pump out boat, the main boat, and a 21 ft Boston Whaler. If they buy the additional 15-footer, the Boston Whaler would be retired and would be used for a work boat to pull navigational buoys in and out of the water. Currently we hire a company to do this which has been difficult to get done in a timely manner. Jamie asked if that is something police officers should be doing vs. hiring it out. Chief Nikkas said the problem has been getting the mooring company to put these in when they actually need them in vs. having to wait a month. Jamie asked if the pump out boat could be used as a work boat. Chief Nikkas said he would have to check the grant to see if it's allowed but he will look into it. Jamie said it might be better in terms of overall maintenance to have fewer boats. Jamie asked if we are maxed out in moorings, Chief Nikkas said yes. Adding more would be too difficult to manage. Joe asked what the increase was for in "other structures". Chief Nikkas said it was for more buoys. Rob asked why some people are allowed to have more than one mooring. Chief Nikkas said it is only when it has been grandfathered in or when a family member passes away and leaves the mooring to a direct family member. Janice asked if people can rent or lend out a mooring. Chief Nikkas said no. You can lend a mooring for under 30 days if it's approved by the Harbormaster and each mooring must have a boat attached to it.

## **7. Civilian Dispatch – Chief Nikkas**

Chief Nikkas said Civilian dispatch stayed on 24/7 during Covid. They handled all the calls coming in and all of the stress. They were able to secure equipment and training grants and everyone kept up with their training. The budget has remained flat other than the 2% pay raise. Chief Nikkas went over the details of the budget. Michael S. asked if this is the right service to use vs. the regional dispatching model. Chief Nikkas said this was the best option to go with when looking at the options presented. The state has offered to do a feasibility study to see what it would cost to have Ipswich join the regional dispatch. This would be at no cost to the town and the Select Board will review this in the next month to decide if the state should do this study. Chief Nikkas said he thinks we might as well take the opportunity to look at things. He also said he would want to make sure the service is either the same or improved. The study would take 6-10 months. Michael D. said he is not against the study but he is against regional dispatching. It is important and beneficial, especially in a town like Ipswich, to have someone who knows the town specifically as opposed to a regional dispatch that may not know the ins and outs of the town. Janice said she can bring this up at the chairs call.

## **8. Shellfish – S. Lapreste**

This year was tough for shell fishing because most of the restaurants were closed and there wasn't a big demand for shellfish. The price jumped for clams over the summer though so most people made their money back. The big thing this past year was keeping up with the green crabs. They trapped over 70,000 pounds of green crab this past year using money from the general fund, the enhancement fund, and grants. This year's budget has a \$15,000 request in it that will hopefully be augmented again. Nothing has changed in the budget except for the standard 2% increases in pay.

There was a discussion about whether or not there should be an increase in the permit fees or the permit cap since there haven't been many increases over the last 15 years. Scott said the cap keeps people in the game that are knowledgeable and know what they are doing vs. having a lot of new clambers that don't know what they are doing. It has proven to be a wonderful measure on management and conservation of the resource, as well as keeping people that are knowledgeable in the game. Chris said he thinks it may be beneficial to add 10 licenses which would add income to the town but wouldn't have too much of an effect on the current permit holders. Scott said he can't remember a time when someone has applied and hasn't gotten a permit. He also said extending it by 10 permits would not be a big deal. They also discussed the idea of increasing the cost of the permits. Chris said instead of doing one large increase, perhaps do a 5% increase each year so it's small. Michael S. asked if there was any research done on how many acres can support different numbers of clambers. Chief Nikkas said its usually about how the sets look and how much new seed we see annually. In the past it has been that every 7 years or so there is a huge increase in clams. Scott said Ipswich has a huge amount of acreage for clamming, much more than other towns, so the price of a clamming license in Ipswich is well worth it.

## **9. Emergency Management – Lt. J. Hubbard**

Lt. Hubbard went over the accomplishments and goals in the budget book which included completing the mitigation grant, becoming certified in municipal vulnerability grant, and completing several other grants. He also went over the FEMA reimbursements that he has applied for. Programs and services were mostly canceled this year, and there was a training meeting last month. There is only a \$200 increase for the budget next year due to a satellite phone increase inside the mobile operations center. Rob told Lt. Hubbard that he has done an excellent job with the grant writing. Janice asked Sarah to give FinCom a total number of grant money that has come in by department, she wants to make sure the people that are writing these grants are recognized for saving the town so much money.

**10. New/Other Business** – Janice Clements-Skelton

- No new business.

**11. Adjourn** – Janice Clements-Skelton

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

Respectfully Submitted By  
Alyson von der Esch  
5-18-21