

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee
Meeting of February 10, 2022
Remote

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:36.

Finance Committee members present: Joseph Bourque, Jamie Fay, Rob White, Michael Schaaf, Christopher Doucette, Emily Smith

Not Present: Michael Dougherty, Janice Clements-Skelton

1. Citizens Queries – Walter Hartford

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

2. Acceptance of Finance Committee Minutes – Walter Hartford

- No minutes to be approved.

FY23 Budget Reviews: Community & Cultural Services

3. COA/Adult Services – Sheila Taylor

Sheila gave an update on the past year. They vaccinated 1,200 people at the large vaccination clinic and also held several smaller vaccination clinics as well as did home visits. They held a memorial for lives loved and lost during the pandemic; the grab and go dining program was offered through June; and they then transferred to a dining together option. They had a lot of success with inter-generational programs including reading support for elementary students, the Huntington Theater program with the high school, a monthly visit with students from Small World Preschool, and they have collaborated with students from Harvard and Northeastern to offer socialization and intellectual stimulation. The outreach and social services caseload has increased by 55% over the past two years. Situations have become very complex and include mental health issues, economic insecurity, housing challenges, and physical decline. Staff have worked with the state regarding unemployment cases, food stamps, mental health intervention and mortgage assistance. Transportation has also seen a large increase in services, especially for medical transportation. Van transportation is offered for out-of-town medical appointments through CATA. Extra funding has also allowed CATA to provide taxi services for appointments in Burlington and Boston. All of this is possible because of the amazing staff, volunteers, and support of the town. Sheila also went over the changes in the budget which include the Senior Tax Work Program which changes with minimum wage, an increase in the outreach coordinator position from 32 to 35 hours per week, and an increase in hourly rate of each position by 10% to bring salaries closer to the average pay for the industry.

Walter said her crew has been on the front lines during the pandemic and he applauds all that they have done. Ipswich has a large older population, Sheila said they have at least 36% of the population age 60 or more. Jamie said they have seen large salary increases consistently across the budget, the most they have ever seen in a budget. Tony shared a salary comparison chart and Sheila explained that the salaries we are paying the staff now are significantly lower than other towns. Even with a 10% increase they will still be underpaid, and if they leave we would never be able to hire new staff at the same salary and would also have to spend money to train them. Jamie said he understands the need, he just finds it remarkable how many salary increases there are this year. Emily said she understands they have comparable towns potentially in size or geographical location or population segment but she sees a lot of gaps in the informational chart. She asked if it is possible to search other communities that are not the same size, such as Gloucester, Amesbury and Haverhill for example, that would have similar titles and additional hourly compensation. The titles of the positions should be comparable no matter what the size of the town is, so let's look at more towns in the area regardless of the size so we can get a better picture of salary comparables. Walter said for the last columns, \$20 an hour doesn't seem to be an aggressive pay rate for anybody of any skill so he doesn't love that its going up but understands why. Joe said he agrees that we have seen a trend this year of salaries going up. He said after looking at this chart he agrees that we need to raise pay. Chris said he thinks there are a couple ways of looking at it. We have seen an increase but we also noticed this last year and the year before as well. Chris asked Tony, in the last few years do we know how many people we have lost across town due to compensation issues. Tony said he would get the numbers but he knows in the past 4 months we have

lost two people. Those positions are being filled at a higher rate. Chris said perhaps we shouldn't be trying to match competitors or step everyone up at the same time, perhaps instead we should be looking at who do we really not want to lose or who would we not be able to replace and step those positions up. We can't step our budget up every year just to keep up with other towns budgets. Michael S. said it does appear that many of our employees are paid less and it makes sense to pay comparable for comparable communities, but we can't do that every year. Michael said he will support it but he is concerned about a continual increase. He also asked Sheila how much of this is a short-term problem, is this a budget that is based on a few difficult years or will this budget support the needs going forward. Sheila said the pandemic created a new set of needs but even before the pandemic, we saw economic and housing insecurities increasing, and mental health issues increasing. We also know that the aging population is increasing and we do not see any of this changing. Michael asked if there have been any new mental health resources during the pandemic. Sheila said the mental health industry overall has become very limited because of the increased need of people and the decreased number of mental health clinicians. They have worked with a number of different groups to try to address that need, and they also have a new partnership with the Police Department and the social worker, Lisa.

4. ReCreation and Culture – K. Bates

Kerry said for the last three years the ReCreation Department has had a level funded budget except for a few salary increases. Kerry went over the accomplishments of the department over this past year, as well as over the past 10 years. The Recreation Department has many partnerships with regional organizations and continues to support community arts, culture, and commerce. This year 70% of the budget is going directly back into the Ipswich economy. Kerry said there were 2,500 in-person visits to the Visitors Center this year, the department received \$12,000 worth of grant money for LitSwitch at the wharf, they put on a Science Walk, and they continue to host shows at the gallery space where artists can showcase and sell their work. Looking ahead they will continue development with the Switch Rideable Artscape, continue fundraising, increasing the concrete canvas for Phase 1.5, and they will be installing 2 and 3-D artscape elements. Takeout Terrace was funded by the Mass Department of Transportation and they worked with the town to get this done at 30% under budget which allowed the addition of a performance stage. Kerry has been invited to join Changemakers, a professional development opportunity for leaders in the community. Kerry said they would like to create an arts and culture master plan and would like to form an Ipswich Arts Association which would be a membership association supported by fees from participating artists.

Jamie said he is impressed with the range of programs that the ReCreation Department has put on. Jamie mentioned the salary comparables and said most of them are probably recreation department positions vs. arts and culture like Kerry's position. He asked Kerry if she knows how many towns have a paid position like hers. Kerry said Salem has a job that is similar and there are other towns that have different structures, they may be non-profit or organized in the same way. Kerry said she is not aware of a community that has anything like this department. Jamie said this is something that makes us unique and shows our commitment to arts and culture. He asked Kerry how she thinks we are doing on the traditional recreation department. Kerry said some towns run both departments by doing fee for service. They used to run that way in Ipswich but it made it difficult with insurance and it wasn't a cost-effective model.

5. Veterans – K. Taylor

Karen Taylor gave an overview of Chapter 115, which is a state law that ensures every city and town have a Veteran's Service Officer. The town receives 75% reimbursement for the services. Karen went over the budget. The number of cases has gone down from 30 to 22. The budget is also lower because people didn't go to as many medical appointments during the pandemic. Karen also said some of the veterans have moved into housing where their fuel is included so the fuel budget line has gone down. Walter said he wants to make sure we keep in mind that the budget went down due to less medical visits during the pandemic but that line item might go back up again this year. The department also does a lot of outreach like visits, stockings and food at Christmas, helping people with transportation, etc. They always try to make sure everyone is taken care of and that they meet people where they are at. They also had a speaker series and were able to get the High Street Bridge renamed to the National War on Terror Bridge. Walter said to make sure in the future to include FinCom in the speaker series announcements.

Jamie asked about the number of veterans being provided services and asked if the population is dropping or if we are missing some people. Karen said some people are still receiving services, they just don't fall under Chapter 115. They are continuously trying to reach out to people because they are always worried they aren't reaching someone and that people aren't getting the benefits they're entitled to. Karen said if anyone has any ideas of ways to do more outreach she would be happy to hear. Jamie asked how many veteran's the department helps each year, Karen said there are 600

veterans in town and it's hard to know exactly how many they help because people may just call and ask a question, it's a short interaction so they don't keep track. Rob asked if there are any trips planned. Karen said they did an event with the North Shore Collaborative at the Ipswich Watershed but turnout wasn't great. Karen said she would love suggestions for ways to reach more people. They don't have any trips planned now but she could look into it to figure out what people would be interested in. Rob said he just had a meeting at the military museum at Faneuil Hall and people might enjoy that. Walter asked if Karen collaborates with Sheila Taylor from the Council on Aging. Karen said the largest population are the Vietnam veterans.

6. Library – N. Blake

Nora started in the position in September. In 2021 the library was closed for the first 5 months other than appointments. In June the library opened and there were more than 5,000 people that went to the library. There are 5 computers available to the public and 219 programs were offered since June. Goals for the upcoming year are to do a hybrid program, expand the library of things collection, and to fill vacancies. Recently they hired a new part time archivist so look forward to doing that work. Nora also said they plan to work with other town departments in the library of things and would also like to meet with the social worker that works with the police. Budget wise, salaries have increased 3.5%, and they have added \$5,000 to the e-book budget. Other than that, it is level funded.

Michael S. asked about the new program for evaluating news sources, Nora said it can be difficult to evaluate what you are taking in from the media. This adult education program will teach people how to do research and assess what they are reading or watching to make sure what they are hearing is accurate and the whole picture, and if there is an angle to it. Michael asked about the current status of the archives, Nora said a new archivist has been hired but hasn't started yet. The previous archivist put in a climate monitor to make sure the climate in the room is ideal for the paper in the archives, so they know it is a good climate currently.

Jamie asked Nora to share a little about her background and also asked about her ideas for the library strategic plan. Nora said she grew up in Winthrop and received her master's in library science from Simmons. She went over her career prior to joining Ipswich. Nora said now that staffing is getting settled she would like to focus on adult programming, which she has asked the assistant library director to work on. Interior wise, we need to modernize the work stations for the staff. She would also like to focus on hybrid programming so that people can benefit from the services from home or from the library. She would also like to put more focus on the streaming services. Rob said he uses the audio book service frequently and it is a fantastic service.

7. New/Other Business – Walter Hartford

- Jamie said he will not be at the meeting the following Thursday.
- Tony said the week of vacation week, FinCom will not be meeting.

8. Adjourn – Walter Hartford

- Motion to adjourn made by Jamie seconded by Joe.
→Roll Call *Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 6-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
3-11-22