

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee
Meeting of February 17, 2022
Remote

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:40.

Finance Committee members present: Michael Dougherty, Joseph Bourque, Rob White, Michael Schaaf, Emily Smith, Janice Clements-Skelton, Walter Hartford

Not Present: Jamie Fay, Christopher Doucette

1. Citizens Queries – Walter Hartford

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

2. Acceptance of Finance Committee Minutes – Michael Dougherty

- No minutes to approve.
→Roll Call *Vote*:

FY23 Budget Reviews: Public Works and Cemetery & Parks

3. Cemetery and Parks – J. Putur

Jeff Putur, Superintendent of Cemetery and Parks, went over the accomplishments. This past year they continued improvements to the Old North Cemetery, which is in year 5 of the improvement phase. They completed year 7 of the GIS mapping of all of the cemeteries in Ipswich and they are at 70%. They are expecting another 3-5 years to finish this. They continued improvements to Bialek Park. Goals include continuing improvements on Bialek Park, a replacement on the cabin chassis and mower for the dump truck, continued improvements to the monuments at Old North Cemetery, and continued mapping of the cemeteries. There are a few budget increases, one under Permanent Wages which has to do with contractual union wages and adding some hours to the part time clerk (20 hours to 30 hours). There is a 22% increase in expenses, which is due to adding picnic tables to parks as well as for supplies.

Michael. D asked how many parks there are in town, Jeff said there are 5 different parks, 4 of them have actual play grounds and structures. There are 9 cemeteries. Jeff said the department maintains 43 different properties which is about 430 acres. Michael asked what types responsibilities the clerk is responsible for that justifies the additional 10 hours per week. Jeff said scheduling and insurance for Pony Express has taken up more time. Also, funeral homes have had difficulties reaching out to the cemetery during the office hours, so extending hours would be more convenient. They have also received several phone calls from people saying they have tried to stop by and they are closed. Currently, the office closes at 1pm each day. They are also trying to digitize documents.

Joe asked Jeff what we charge for a grave opening, Jeff said they charge \$700 for a weekday and \$1,000 for a Saturday. Joe said there is \$57,000 in revenue and said he was confused by that figure. Jeff said that is for full burial, cremation rates are \$300 for a week day and \$450 for a Saturday. Jeff said they do a rate survey every few years to make sure Ipswich is in line with other towns. He said he would be happy to share that spreadsheet with FinCom. Michael S. asked for more details on the comparables. Jeff said they surveyed 10 other towns on all aspects of cemetery services for municipal cemeteries and they have not made any increases in cemetery rates since 2011. Jeff said this year he is going to make a recommendation to increase the fee for Saturday full service burial. Michael asked why the overtime budget has not decreased since they are now adding 10 hours to the part time position. Jeff said they looked at that, but they had decreased the overtime budget a few years ago. He didn't want to reduce it and then have a deficit if he needs it for the rest of the crew that gets the overtime. Janice said its less hours, but same amount of money because salaries have gone up. Michael D. said perhaps it makes sense to reassess the number of overtime hours, even if we can bring it down a little since the clerk's hours are going up, and overtime will not be needed for her position.

Rob asked about the temporary part time labor and if the benefits would go up. Jeff said they would not because this part time position already has benefits. Rob also asked about the increases in structures, Jeff said it is for the F550

dump truck, the toddler structure at Bialek, and a tent. Emily asked if the scheduling for Pony Express could be done online so it's not as much work for the clerk. Jeff said it is done online but it has to be approved by the clerk and talk to the individual and get the insurance information. Janice asked how we are doing with inventory for the cemeteries. Jeff said they are currently selling in 3 different cemeteries in town and an additional cemetery is for veterans and lots are awarded vs. sold. Michael D. asked about the public bathrooms at Bialek. Jeff said the bathrooms are open and it's a seasonal building so they are open from April to October and there are security cameras there as well so there isn't any vandalism. Michael also asked where the new structure will be. Jeff said the tent/shade structure will be by the wood chips. Mike also asked if they could do a splash pad at Bialek like at Bradley Palmer. Jeff said they looked at it 10 years ago but the water was the issue and would have been a substantial cost. Michael asked about the Bialek Park Planning committee, Jeff said it hasn't been active for a few years.

4. DPW- Administration – R. Clarke

Rick gave accomplishments for the entire department which included doing a temporary overlay on Market Street, Topsfield Rd. from town line to Kennedy Drive, reclaiming and bonding Town Farm Rd. and Locust, redoing all of Heartbreak Road and spots on Little Neck Road and North Bridge Road. This year they will work on Town Farm Road, Locust, Fairview Ave, Payne St. and Poplar including sidewalks, and a section on Hillside Road. They also applied for two TIP projects and will be working with contractors on the best pricing for the trash contract. Michael D. asked how long the trash contracts last for. Rick said 5 years. Mike asked if we should do a longer contract since prices are going up, Rick said the prices for recycling are going up much more than trash.

Rick went over the Public Works Budget. Nothing major has changed other than the 2% salary increase and \$200 increase for part time. The biggest increase is the out of state travel. The last two years they didn't have this line item because of Covid, so they added it back in.

Equipment Maintenance also had a 2% salary increase, as well as an increase in gas prices and parts for in-house labor because of price increases. Rick said we have a full-time mechanic and most of the repairs for town vehicles are done in-house. Michael asked about electrifying our equipment. Rick said the smaller equipment is electric such as the weed whacker. There is a new Ford Lightening truck that they are looking into pricing wise. The heavier trucks like the snow plow are not available in electric yet. Michael S. asked if they are able to keep up with all of the repairs, Rick said he thinks they are doing well with the mechanics they have. Rob asked if they still wash the police cars and other vehicles in town. Rick said they installed a bay wash with drainage and we wash all of our town vehicles. Police and fire also use the bay. Rob asked if Rick thinks that has been a good investment, Rick said he thinks the equipment has remained in good shape due to washing it, especially because of the under-bay wash. The Fords have some rust but the rest of the equipment is lasting a long time.

5. DPW- Highway and Forestry – R. Clarke

There were 2% increases in salaries and a \$300 increase in part time. Prices also went up for the uniform allowance, \$5,000 in street lights and repairs, increases in the paint services and road treatments. Rick said they were asked to try to keep the budget level funded and this is what they came up with. They could always use more for road repairs. Michael D. said perhaps the money they do not use for snow and ice should go to this budget vs. going back into the general fund. Rob asked if anything has changed to the Pavement Management Plan. Rick said they are doing Market Street now but they try to stick to the plan. They also got money from National Grid when they re-did the gas lines. Michael S. said we are 25% under what we should be for the Pavement Management Plan budget and asked if that is going to really put us behind. Rick said by continuing to crack seal and do overlays, it will become where a road is not worth fixing, it just needs to be repaved. The Pavement Management Plan budget gives the ability to manage roads to maintain them longer. Michael S. asked Tony about timeline for infrastructure funds. Tony said not yet. Walter said we should definitely think about ways we can use federal funding for Ipswich towards the roads to get to that \$1.1M. Walter said it would be good to get a simplified graphic that shows the way they decide which roads get done, because people ask about that a lot. Michael asked about how communication has been between the Highway and Water Department. Rick said they each came up with a 5-year plan.

There were also 2% increases for Forestry. They have also increased part time and overtime which has been helpful, but other than that it is level funded. Michael S. asked what happens to the wood when they cut it up, Rick said they cut it up and leave it on the side of the road for residents to take. Wood that can't be used is chopped up into mulch.

6. DPW- Snow & Ice – R. Clarke

The snow and ice budget has not changed in a long time. There is a \$5,000 increase to install a diesel fuel supplement to make the diesel run smoother. They will be spending less money on diesel in the future since they will be using it properly. There is a monthly fee to keep it up and running. Everything else has stayed the same. Rob asked about the salt purchases, where they buy it from and how much they buy. Rick said they pre-order salt if they know there is a storm coming in. It is not cheaper to pre-buy the salt, but they always fill up at the end of the year so they go into the season full. Michael S. asked Rick to explain the overtime budget line. The overtime is the highway, forestry, cemeteries line. The vehicle rental is the contractors they use for the bigger storms and for the schools. Michael S. said the town has been plowing his road the past few years and the roads have been great. He asked how that compares cost wise to hiring out contractors. Rick said it is about one third of the cost but that does not include wear and tear of equipment and gasoline. They still have to contract out for the schools and for big storms because they can't do it all. Joe asked if using brine to pre-treat the road is effective. Rick said they do that at times depending on the storm. Michael D. said Boxford doesn't do the pre-treatment and he could tell the difference when driving on the roads in Boxford vs. in Ipswich. Rick said it makes a big difference for ice.

7. DPW- Sanitation Contract and Recycling Enterprise Fund – R. Clarke

The department has a grant that pays for the recycling coordinator. We only pay for 20 hours a week of that. The sanitation collection contract with JRM is changing. The annual fee is larger this year and this is the last year of that contract. Janice asked what the recycling coordinator does. Rick said she gets grants and also fields calls and answers questions to the public. She also organized to two collections per year and she runs the monthly recycling committee meetings. Janice asked about the possibility of making the composting program free to Ipswich residents. Rick said they still have to pay the contractor to do it but it would be \$55-\$75 pp. Janice asked if it would work as an offset to the trash budget. Rick said if everyone in town did it, it would be another truck running every day. Michael S asked about the decline in recycling tonnage. Rick said the price is declining, not the amount.

8. DPW- Solid Waste Transfer Station– R. Clarke

Solid Waste went up a little for overtime as well as in meals and lodging. Mike D. asked for an example of an overtime expenses. Rick said Saturdays for the transfer station are overtime. They are open 8 hours and they also get 2 meal tickets. Mike asked about adding another hazardous waste removal day because last time the line was down the road. Rick said it is about \$12k-\$15k each time they do it.

9. New/Other Business – Michael Dougherty

- Michael D. said next week there will be no meetings, the next meeting will be March third for water, and March 8, 9, and 10 for the schools.

11. Adjourn – Michael Dougherty

- Motion to adjourn made by Rob seconded by Janice.
→Roll Call *Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 7-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
3-14-22