

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Select Board Meeting as Water and Sewer Commissioners
February 21, 2023 at 7:00 PM
Ipswich Town Hall, Meeting Room A
25 Green St. Ipswich, MA

Pursuant to Open Meeting Law M.G.L. Chapter 30A, §§ 18-25, a written notice posted by the Town Clerk and delivered to all Board members, a meeting of the Select Board was held on Tuesday, February 21st, 2023, 7:00 PM at Town Hall, 25 Green Street.

Select Board Members present: Sarah Player, Vice Chair, Linda Alexson, Kerry Mackin

Also present: Stephen Crane, Town Manager

Not present: William Whitmore

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Announcements – Sarah Player

- The Public Safety Re-use Working Group will meet tomorrow night at 6pm in room A to continue a discussion about Bialek Park and the public gardens relocation.
- Ms. Mackin announced her resignation from the Ipswich Select Board effective at the conclusion of the 2023 annual town meeting on Tuesday May 9th. Kerry thanked the town of Ipswich for their support.

3. Citizens Queries – Sarah Player

- None

4. Public Hearing: Water and Wastewater Rates (2 of 2) – Vicki Halmen

Sarah read the legal notice.

- Motion to open the Public Hearing made by Linda, seconded by Kerry.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 3-0*

Vicki Halmen, Water Wastewater Director, went over performance measures, actions, and results. Actions included seasonal rates that have been in place since 2003, an aggressive drought management plan that was created in 2001 and updated in 2019, and a newly created healthy lawn happy summer program, which is a program developed by the MA DEP that encourages healthier lawns through less watering. The department also has a new water resource manager position that the board approved last year. They are offering a lot of rebates, did an M36 water loss audit, and discussed capital water progress. Results from these actions are the following. The lowest calendar year pumping in 33 years, the lowest gallons per resident, and only 9 water main breaks which is the lowest it has been in 10 years.

Vicki gave a water budget summary and said the FY24 budget increase is 2.7%, which is a proposed total of \$4.98M. The chart broke down the increases and decreases by categories. Expenses are due to increases in cost, and salaries are step and lane increases. They are also funding OPEB back to \$30k this year. Linda asked if there is a breakdown of salary costs, Vicki said that was in the GFOA spreadsheet that was presented last week.

All of the rate increases are due to water infrastructure improvements and Vicki showed a slide on the 2020 Asset Management Report. She discussed cost and the risk of doing nothing. Vicki then went over the 5-year plan which

includes a Dow Dam regulatory compliance project, the water treatment plant replacement, groundwater well replacements, new well construction, and water main replacements on High Street. Sarah asked what the projected timeline is for the well replacements, Vicki said there are 5 of them and they need to be done within the next 5 years. They will be staggered between other projects. Two of them are necessary within the next 18 months. Linda asked how much of High Street will be repaired. It's from Lord Square down to East and County.

Vicki went over future projections for debt. The debt service alone is approaching half of the entire budget. The "retained earnings fund" is used for the debt service. They have built the fund over the past few years and will continue to increase rates to continue to fund the debt service. The current rate is \$13.76 per cubic feet of water and will move to \$14.71 per cubic feet of water. Vicki showed a comparison of our water rates as compared to other communities. If we didn't have debt service, we would be a lot lower in comparison.

Linda asked if there is a way to consider larger families, so they aren't being charged the excess water rate that others are paying for over-usage. Vicki said they don't have a way to do that, and larger families will be charged more. They will have to work harder to not go over. Stephen said they could possibly do an exemption for families of a certain size. Citizens would have to seek it out and demonstrate that they are a larger family and that's why they use more water. Vicki also talked about the seasonal water rate and showed a chart to demonstrate its successes over time. A discussion ensued about whether this should be called a revenue-neutral program. Vicki said that is the goal of the program, but there are variabilities that can affect it.

Linda asked based on the lack of snowfall this winter, is there a plan to declare drought restrictions right away. Vicki said the drought management plan is quite detailed and they look at a variety of factors to determine this. She wants to wait to rely on the data before they enact restrictions. Linda asked if we will see other options for rate structures. Vicki said they will keep things as they are now but will do some analysis in the future to see what a change would mean and how to do it. Linda said she has asked this question several years in a row and gets the same answer. Vicki said they have had a lot of changes in the past few years, but yes need to get to some concrete options to present.

Vicki went over the wastewater budget. It is a 2.9% increase from FY23 and will total \$2.88M. The biggest expense was \$144k and was new long-term debt. There were also expense increases and salary increases. The 2020 Asset Management Plan also included wastewater, and rate increases are due to infrastructure upkeep. In the next 5 years they plan to relocate the town wharf pump station, upgrade the wastewater treatment plant, and rehab the collection systems on High Street. Vicki went over the future projections and said there are consistent rate increases due to the Capital Improvement Plan. Linda asked why O&M is going down, Vicki said it is because of planned operating capital. The wastewater increase is proposed at 8%, the current rate is \$11.96 and would go up to \$12.92 per 100 cubic feet of water.

- Motion to close the Public Hearing made by Linda, seconded by Kerry.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 3-0*

5. Select Board Vote FY24 Water and Wastewater Rates – Sarah Player

- Motion made by Kerry and seconded by Sarah to amend Article 8 of the Water Division Regulations of the Town of Ipswich to change the water rates as follows:

Section 5: Normal User Charges

- a) Residential Rate from May 1, 2023 to September 30, 2023
From \$5.59/100 cu. ft. to \$22.07/100 cu. ft.

All Other User Charges Year-Round (base rate) Effective May 1, 2023
From \$13.76/100 cu. ft. to \$14.71/100 cu. ft.

→ *Motion passed, 2-1, Linda opposed*

- Motion made by Linda and seconded by Kerry to amend Division 4, Sewer User Charges and Industrial Cost Recovery, Article 1, Sewer User Charges as follows:

Section 1, Subsection a, by deleting the last sentence thereof and by substituting in lieu thereof the following sentence:

“Effective May 1, 2023, each sewer user in the Town of Ipswich will be charged for the use of sewer at the rate of \$12.92 per one hundred cubic feet of water as measured at each sewer user’s water meter.”

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 3-0*

6. Request to name 54 Country Street Park from Jenny Slew Park Coalition – Sarah Player

Heather Leonard, 9 Bush Hill Road, and Isaac Ross, 32 Summer Street, members of the Jenny Slew Park Coalition, proposed the naming of the park to the Jenny Slew Park. Heather read a proclamation to explain the decision to rename the park. Sarah said she has read many letters of support for this re-naming and appreciates the groups effort on this. Linda said they need to have a public hearing to do this, and also that this parcel is under the care, custody, and control of the Conservation Department. There is a policy that there will be a separate process for the naming of conservation land so this might qualify. Stephen said they need to make sure the park hasn’t already been named. If it hasn’t been previously named, they would need a public hearing, but if it has been named this change would need to take place at town meeting. Isaac said they checked with the DPW and there is no indication it has been named in the past. Stephen said he will do a little more research to make sure. He said this is a very noteworthy cause and we want to make sure it is done properly.

7. New Common Victualler and Weekday Entertainment License Applications from BirchWood Restaurant, LLC, 25 Hammatt Street – Sarah Player

Tom DeSilva, 14 Esty Way, Groveland, is the new owner of the BirchWood Restaurant. He applied for an entertainment license, completed the application, and paid the fees. The entertainment license is for a sound system inside, it is not for live music. The hours of operation for the music would be 4pm-11pm Tuesday- Saturday.

- Motion to approve made by Linda and seconded by Kerry.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 3-0*

8. 2023 Renewal of Class II License from High Level Car Repair, Inc. 57 Mitchell Rd. – S. Player

- Motion to approve made by Linda and seconded by Kerry.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 3-0*

9. Discuss and Vote Opt in to Opioid Litigation and Settlement and Authorization of Town Manager to Act on Behalf of the Town – Sarah Player

Stephen said they received funds from the Sackler Family opioid settlement that the town submitted a claim for. This version of that is for Walgreens, Walmart, CVS and other distributors. This authorizes Stephen to enter into the agreements to be part of the settlement. The funds would be used for treatment and education.

- Linda made a motion to opt in to the opioid litigation and settlement, and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any and all documents necessary to join the settlement on behalf of the town, and further to authorize the town manager to opt in to any settlement with the remaining defendants in the opioid litigation that may be recommended by counsel, and to sign any and all documents necessary. Seconded by Kerry.
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→ *Motion passed unanimously, 3-0*

10. Approval of Minutes – Sarah Player

- Motion to approve minutes from January 24, 2023 made by Linda, seconded Kerry.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 3-0*

- Motion to approve minutes from February 6, 2023 made by Linda, seconded by Kerry.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 3-0*

11. Town Manager Report – Stephen Crane

Stephen provided a brief printed report and said there are a lot of things in the works but not ready to report out yet. Stephen said the fire department had done training at the car wash site that the owner of the property allowed. The fire department doesn't have a lot of structural fires so when they are allowed to practice on a structure it is very helpful. Stephen then discussed a recent swatting scam in Ipswich where someone prank calls the police department and says there is a public safety threat at a school. This happened to a few districts in MA a few weeks ago. The school went into lockdown and the Police Department responded quickly and was able to confirm there was no credible threat. Stephen discussed the High Street reconstruction project and said there is an opportunity to move the wastewater pump station. They had a team meeting that included public works and utilities, and created an initial planning process with an engineering firm. Approaching High Street as a joint public works and utilities project makes sense and will be a real win for the taxpayers and ratepayers. They also re-advertised the planning director position but did not get the applicant pool that they thought would best meet their needs.

12. Select Board Member Sub-Committee Update – Sarah Player

Linda reported that the Shellfish Board met on February 7th, there is interest in the development of a shellfish management plan. That will be the primary focus of the April meeting. The Public Safety Property Re-Use group met on January 31st and had a lengthy discussion about a small section in the back of Bialek Park for a community garden. They are meeting again tomorrow night and are hoping to have a recommendation to the Select Board soon. Linda asked Stephen to work with them on policies and regulation. Stephen said if they could get him an outline of priorities to narrow the focus, that would be helpful. Finally, the Veteran's Board met last week and talked about the FY24 budget and will be meeting again next week.

Sarah reported the ELD met on February 8th and they had a budget discussion. They discussed how to make the budget presentation more accessible to citizens and want to add more language and descriptions about the different funds. On the 13th, the 3A task force met and there are videos now on the town website explaining the MBTA communities and Ipswich's role in that. The first public forum will be on March 22nd at 6:30pm in room C. Stephen said there was a discussion at the last Planning Board meeting about the idea of compliance. He wanted to clarify that the task force's effort is not about whether or not to apply. The goal of the task force is to come up for a plan for compliance and identify what that will look like, and then a decision will be made down the line. There was also an Affordable Housing Trust, Ipswich Housing Partnership/Planning Board bi-board meeting last week. The Planning Board had asked the groups to come and discuss roles and ways they could collaborate with each other regarding future zoning changes. Sarah said it was a good discussion and the chair of the Planning Board recommended a working group to look at zoning amendments that are coming down the pike to make sure the amendments are meeting the town goals.

13. New Business – Sarah Player

- none

14. Old Business – Sarah Player

- Linda asked Stephen if there is any movement on the Select Boards goal setting. Stephen said he needs to find a location and they will work on that soon.
- Sarah asked when the tri-board meeting is, Stephen said March 14th.

15. Miscellaneous and Correspondence – Sarah Player

- none
- Motion to adjourn made Kerry, seconded by Linda.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 3-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
2-27-23