

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

With a quorum present, the Vice 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 – Michael Dougherty**

- No minutes to approve.

**FY21 Budget Reviews: Public Works and Cemetery & Parks**

**3. Cemetery and Parks – J. Putur**

Jeff Puter, Superintendent of Cemeteries and Parks, and Rick Clarke, DPW Director, spoke about the department's accomplishments for this past year. One of the major things the department overtook was opening the fields at Pony Express and property improvements. There is a lot that was done over the last few years to get the fields ready and last year they were kicked off with youth soccer. The fields were open again in the fall. There were some minor glitches that were not unforeseen, they were able to make some adjustments and things are running smoothly. Another thing the department did this past year was replace a dump body on the dump truck. It's a 2009 and they have it in the Capital Plan to be replaced in a few years. Since they replaced it with stainless steel they are hoping to be able to extend the life a bit, and once they purchase a new one they will be able to use the same stainless-steel bed. They also made improvements to the Old North Cemetery which focused on restoration of monuments. This project started a few years ago. They are now at about 20% of the monuments. This will be a long-term process, but overall, they are saving money. They have spent \$10,000 from the Operating Budget, and over the next few years they expect to spend \$50,000-\$60,000 total. This project was brought up by the Historical Commission and when they originally looked at companies to restore monuments the cost estimate was about \$500,000-\$600,000. The department has worked with two local people in town that are skilled in monument repair and that has helped to keep costs down. They are going section by section and that has worked well. They have also focused on brush removal, tree removal, eradicating animals, and fixing fences. Lastly, along with property maintenance, the department is continuing with GIS mapping of cemeteries. They are about 60% done and that has been done completely in town. It has been a slow process but it isn't costing the town any more money because they are doing it with their own personnel. It has also been beneficial for the department to do this vs. outsourcing it because the people that are doing it are the people that know the most about the town and the properties. It is going to be very accurate and will be helpful to people doing genealogy. This is something that usually happens in the winter when things are slower.

This upcoming year they will continue with GIS mapping and stone repairs, and will be installing a shade structure and picnic tables Bialik Park. Jeff is also hoping to add some more sidewalks stretching from opening of parks to the parks. Right now, most parks are not ADA compliant because of a lack of walkway.

The budget this year is pretty much a zero balance. They did have some union contract increases that came to \$2,800. The department was funded for a half-court basketball court last year and they will be installing it this year. There is also an increase for a few thousand dollars for grounds keeping such as fertilizing. There is one other increase that is related to parts and supplies for repairing parts. The department does a lot of their own maintenance and repairs.

Mike asked how Jeff feels staff-wise and how he has been doing with managing the department. Jeff said the more staff the better but they are managing. A few years ago, they got the third shared-labor employee and that has been helpful. It would be great if that was a full-time role but they are not looking to do that yet. They reached out to the schools and got 3 young students for part-time help and Jeff said he thinks they will stay with them for a few years. Part-time staff through the growing season in the summer months is great and there would be no way to do it without them. They are making it work. Mike also asked about equipment and asked if there are any major purchases for the next few years. Jeff said they have a lawn mower in the Capital Plan this upcoming year for \$12,000. They will also need a slice eater and a core aerator, which are for athletic fields. They didn't need them before because Bialik Park was the only

athletic field previously and it was so small. We are currently spending \$5,000-\$6,000 a year to have this done, so by purchasing our own they will pay for themselves within the first two years. We are currently putting money away for them, both will be about \$8,000. They aren't used often so they should last 15-20 years. Mike asked if there has been anything available to the town for historical preservation funding for the cemeteries. Jeff said Ethan did a lot of work with this through the Mass Historical Commission, he applied two years in a row and both years he was denied. They had such strict regulations on how the money could be spent, and it was a reimbursement grant so the money had to be spent up front. They would have had to have a plan for each and every stone and they also wouldn't have been able to use the people from Ipswich to help. It would have cost more to do it this way and would have been more of a headache.

Michael D. also asked about the Bialik Park subcommittee and asked if Jeff is in contact with them, Jeff said he is part of the subcommittee. Mike asked how it has been going because he has noticed some vacancies. Jeff said that last spring they went to town meeting looking for some money and they didn't get it. They had put together a 3-year proposal plan and the next step was to get a consultant and then go out to bid. Since they didn't get the money at town meeting they haven't met again because they had already met the goal that the Town Manager had set. The next step for the park will be to become ADA compliant by adding pathways. They plan to open the skate park in June and they have started the removal of the tennis courts and make it a small field. After talking to the Police Department and the Planning Board they decided not to put any kind of structure back there. They have been waiting for it to freeze to remove it and there has only been one good day so far. Jeff said they are also adding a shade structure, which will replace the pavilion that they had originally planned.

Michael Schaff thanked Jeff for his work in the cemetery, he said it is a nice asset to the town and they are doing a nice job. He asked about the \$23,000 overtime line item on the budget and asked what that is for. Jeff said it is for Memorial Day Prep, funerals, and snow plowing. When families pay for a Saturday funeral those costs go to pay for the overtime. Michael asked when the last time was that the pricing was adjusted for funeral services. Jeff said a few of the costs were adjusted last July. They do a survey of costs for the 10 surrounding towns and Ipswich tries to stay in the middle. There haven't been many rate increases in the surrounding towns. The only increase has been for Saturday funerals only because it costs more to pay people. The last major price increase was in 2010. They make sure they are setting the costs so that they make a little money. Michael also asked if Jeff's department is maintaining the extended Riverwalk section. Jeff said it's shared by them, forestry, tree shade, and free space. It falls under rec but everyone shares the responsibility. The maintenance is tough because it grows quickly. They are looking to do it before July 4<sup>th</sup> and before Labor Day. Jeff said this was built and there wasn't a maintenance plan so they are figuring it out.

Jamie asked Jeff about the scheduling of the Pony Express Fields. Jeff said a few years ago the Pony Express Task Force reached out to all of the youth organizations in town to see who would be interested. Ipswich Youth Soccer was the only one that had interest so last year they worked directly with the part-time clerk. They are able to schedule online. They used it from April to June and again September to November. There were about 500 kids in both programs. This upcoming spring Ipswich Youth Lacrosse also plans to use the fields. Jamie said he's glad to hear the fields are being really well used and that he appreciates Jeff's hard work.

Walter asked how much is in the trust fund. Jeff said he thinks it's a little over \$90,000. There is a perpetual care trust fund and the only money that can be spent is the interests gained. There is another fund that isn't a trust fund that had over \$150,000 from the sale of lots. They transferred \$75,000 of it a few years ago for matching the MA Historical Grant, but in a year or so if they do not use it they will put it back in for improvements. Walter asked if it is used to augment this budget. Jeff said not really, those funds are supposed to be used for the cemeteries so the trust funds have been matching some of the stone repair. They may need to make a few purchases for equipment to help with repairs. A few years ago, that money was used for trucks and lawn mowers but then they were being used in other parts of the town, which is not what the money was set up for. Now it is strictly used for cemetery.

Chris brought up the Public Safety Building and what to do with the existing buildings if it is passed. Chris said one idea was to turn the Police Department into a green space. He asked Jeff how that would actually happen, who would do the work, and what the budget would look like to maintain that. Jeff said a lot of the work to get rid of the building and the hot top would be contracted out. Rick said the cost to put in a playground is expensive. For the new part of Bialik Park that was built in 2009, the equipment cost upwards of \$100,000. To update the playground at Father Ryc's Park they got a quote for \$30,000. The cost for the equipment is expensive and depends on the size of the park but the maintenance for playgrounds isn't a lot. It's pretty much just mowing and replacing woodchips, and they are already mowing the area. They wouldn't need to increase personnel for equipment. Walter said he thinks the Winthrop Playground was a quarter of a million.

Joe asked about shared expense and asked if it's done interdepartmentally. Jeff said they share one worker between Forestry, Highway, and Cemetery and Parks. Essentially each department gets that person for 4 months per year.

They work together to make sure the person is transferred over payroll wise. If a person calls in sick or goes on vacation they can also use that floater position. Joe asked about the Civic Observances line. Jeff said they do two parades each year, flowers for Memorial Day, flags on all of the flag poles, and stick flags for Veteran's Day. The cost of the stick flags is usually reimbursed 75%.

#### **4. DPW Administration – R. Clarke**

Accomplishments include receiving a grant for the electric charging station, applying for a CZN grant to raise the road on Argilla down to the beach. They are working with the Crane Estate on this, they are sharing the cost. Between the town and the estate, they will pay 25% of the cost. The grant will cover the remaining 75%. They are continuing to work on Jeffery's Neck, they are at 95% design, it was approved by Conservation and they are waiting for more funding from the state. They should receive the extension at the end of the month and they will likely be able to complete the project to raise the road within the next 2 years. They will not install any culverts because of the tide. Rick said the road floods a handful of times each year. It's about a \$1.2M project but it's only a temporary fix that should last the town about 30 or 40 years. Part of this plan is to narrow the lanes down a little to create a 3 ft gutter line for bikers. The width has to remain 26ft. They are also going to put guard rails in a few areas.

For the next year the department is aiming to go paperless. The guys in the field will use iPads and Tough Books so everything can be electronic. The budget is up about \$400 for budget items as well as increases in salaries. Mike asked about the increase in legal fees, Rick said they have been doing more Notice of Intents for Conservation.

#### **5. DPW Equipment & Maintenance – R. Clarke**

The department hired a new mechanic this past year after their previous mechanic retired after 12 years. They will also start taking over the maintenance for the police vehicles since Ipswich Ford won't be doing it anymore, and they are installing new GPS tracking equipment in all of the vehicles. The increase in parts is to meet the demand in the police fleet, and over time they will be taking over all of the town vehicles. Mike asked how many former town vehicles do we have that aren't being utilized. Rick said if we aren't using them they will be auctioned off. Currently we have 10-12 vehicles that are being fully utilized.

Objectives are to take on the police vehicle maintenance and to keep up with maintenance and with the certifications. This year in the capital Plan they asked for a new backhoe. Down the line they will need a new street sweeper, but Rick is also getting prices to sub that out. Mike asked about the sidewalk snow blower. Rick said we have 2 snow blowers that can be used for deep snow and 2 that can be used for 6" or less. Walter asked about Green Communities and if the department will benefit. Rick said the trucks need to remain diesel but the other vehicles are moving to hybrid. Michael S. asked if they have sufficient personnel to maintain the vehicles in good working order. Rick said he believes so but if the new mechanic needs a hand he can ask the floater to help. They also bought a new lift last year that can hold a one-ton truck. Michael S. asked about asset management and if they are doing a good job maintaining the vehicles. Rick said he thinks they are doing better every year and they will get a longer life out of the vehicles. They also have a new wash bay to wash the vehicles. They have an excel spreadsheet to track the life of vehicles. The new GPS software has a tool to help track as well. The town is now trying to figure out one uniformed tracker.

#### **6. DPW Highway and Forestry – R. Clarke**

Rick went over the streets that were paved last year. They also installed generator pads around town, a water station at the information center, and an electric vehicle charging station. The department will also be renting an excavator that will allow them to remove a building and the asphalt at Bialik park. They also completed the drainage work at Bialik park and helped with the installation of the skate park. They are doing a lot with other departments.

Currently the department is working on the Jeffrey's Neck project, they just finished up Mile Lane, and they will be installing 3 culverts on Town Farm Road, Labor & Vein, and Topsfield Road. The money for the culverts is from a grant. Mike asked if there are any major roadway arteries that are being redone. Rick said High Street is at 25% design, Topsfield road will be milled and overlaid. Jeffery's neck is mostly paved but they plan to take new sidewalk from the playground over to the beach and pave the parking lot area. They have to go through conservation so they are installing a new catch basin to pave that area. Mike said there has been excellent communication between the departments to find balance. National Grid is coming in to install a new gas line and they are giving the town \$160,000 for after the project is done to re-do the area. New sidewalks, new paving, trees capes, and Vicki is also having pipes installed.

Michael S. asked if \$160,000 is enough to cover this, Rick said its close and he thinks its fair. Rick also said there is a TIP project coming up in 2023 that is Central Street down to the DPW Yard that will be new drainage, new roads and sidewalks and bike lanes. Jamie asked when that request went in, Rick said 11 years ago. The Winthrop Street Bridge is

also on a TIP for 2023 and that cost will be shared with Hamilton. Joe asked if there is a spill that the town has to clean up are we able to recoup some of the funds. Rick said if it is a business that has a spill the town will clean it up but the business will be responsible to pay for it. Michael S. asked about the reduction in the street light budget. Rick said that is the power for the lights and they have now been transferred over to LED lights which is why the cost has gone down. Michael S. asked about the road maintenance and asked if we are staying on top of maintenance to extend the life of the roads. Rick said the maintenance budget was dropped for a few years but it is back up now. To keep roads maintained would be about \$1M a year, so we are underbudget. They are looking at using Bond money to maintain the 5 major roads in town to help with the budget. Michael said it seems like we will pay more later if we don't do proper maintenance. Jeff said the Pavement Management Plan allows them to enter in their budget and it will then tell them what would be best to do. If the roads aren't funded properly than the Pavement Management can't do what it is meant to do. It's all about the budget. Michael said he thinks it would be useful to the Finance Committee to see what kind of budget would be needed in order to properly maintain this asset annually. Michael S. also asked about the County Road Bridge guardrail. Rick said they are working with TetraTech to do a feasibility study of the bridge and they have 3 concepts for the bridge to re-do it. They will also be adding a water main and a sidewalk. This will be presented to the town this summer. It's a costly project.

Jamie asked who the tree warden is, Rick said its him. Rick said a lot of trees are dying and they don't know if it's because of climate change or the age of the trees. First Ipswich Bank just donated trees and the department also plants around 30-40 trees each year. They are doing a lot of surveying of trees as well. Jamie also asked about the Storm Water Subcommittee and asked what they are doing with compliance. Rick said they are on year two and there will be a lot of dry weather and wet weather sampling on the outfalls. They have about 90% of GPS work done on structures in the area. They are also doing culvert inspections and checking out town facilities to make sure they are up to standard. He said he thinks they are doing well and are above most towns. Jamie said at this point it seems like it's just making sure they know their systems. Rick said no updates unless they find something that needs updating. Joe asked where the culvert will be, Rick said almost at the town line past Turner Hill. Joe also asked about sidewalks on Topsfield Road and said there is a lot of foot traffic. Rick said those sidewalks were re-done, Joe said he wondered about extending them further. Rick said he will check it out.

As far as forestry, Rick said they are planting 15 trees from Ipswich First Bank, they want to use the iPads to keep a better job tracking which trees have been taken down and planted, they will also continue downtown planting on Market Street, and they will complete a Tree Health Survey for the entire town. They also work with Electric Light to cut back branches around power lines. Permanent wages increases were a part of the contract. Jamie asked if they are able to hang on to their employees. Rick said yes. They also have the floater position. Mike asked how many total employees. Rick said they have 2 full-time employees plus the floater. Michael S. asked if we could plant more trees if we wanted to. Rick said he works with Shade Tree Beautification and they are always looking for new areas to plant. They are now considering planting on private properties and they would also maintain the trees. The budget has gone up the last few years which has been helpful. Tim asked why they can't plant where bigger trees have been removed. Rick said because the root structures are still in place there for many years.

## **7. DPW Snow & Ice – R. Clarke**

Rick said the budget is pretty much the same each year. They are through about 47% of the budget for this year and they have about \$250,000 left in the budget. The first few storms lasted a long time so they had to salt a lot. The cost of salt is a lot so Rick said he was nervous for a little while but since there hasn't been much snow he's feeling better about it. Mike asked where we get the salt and sand from. Rick said they send out a bid every year and local salt distributors bid on it, they always take the two lowest bids. They have two salt sheds now because a few years ago they ran out of salt and they were paying people overtime to drive back and forth to get salt. Mike asked what happens with the leftover funds. Rick said it goes back into the general fund. They might use it for equipment repairs. Mike also asked what percentage of roads the town is responsible for vs. the state. Rick said we have 114 lane miles in town. The only portion that the state does is Rt. 1, 133, and 1A. Mike also asked how the trucks are. Rick said they have some maintenance that needs to be done but they are doing okay.

## **8. DPW Sanitation Contract – R. Clarke**

They are on year 3 of a 5-year contract with JRM. Last year it was \$729,750 annually for all of the hauling and recycling. This year it is jumping up to \$766,237 annually. The disposal company was charging \$72.50 per ton and this year it is \$74.60 per ton. They just received a grant for \$18,000 for the next three years to help pay off those costs and to pay the salary of the recycling coordinator. The composting program is about \$108 per person, they pay \$13 per

household so each household pays \$95 per year. The program is growing every year and they did about 200 tons last year which would have cost the town \$1,500.

Jamie asked if we are saving money on the composting program, why are we charging people. Rick said it still costs money to have the contractor pick up the compost and dump it. Jamie said if the town could pay half of it with the savings and households could pay half, it would encourage more people to use the program. Jamie said he thinks they should take another look at it to make sure they are doing it the right way. People are doing this because they care about the cause, not to save the town money. Jamie and Mike said this seems like something they would want to incentivize people to do since we are saving money on trash. Jamie asked if any other towns are mandating compost. Rick said Hamilton mandates compost and it is part of the cost. They also only get trash pick-up every other week.

Mike asked about how the other neighboring communities handle trash and what is Ipswich looking at after this contract is up. Rick said Gloucester is already at pay as you throw, and he thinks this is where we are headed. The prices are through the roof, especially with the recycling. China and India aren't taking recycling anymore so it's now cheaper to throw things away than to recycle. A lot of people contaminate recycling by not washing out their containers before they recycle them, which then makes an entire load contaminated. People need education to know what they can recycle and how. JRM will take it no matter what because they are being pressured to finish within a certain time frame. Rick said he thinks people in town need to be educated on how to recycle properly, starting with the schools to teach kids how to do it. Rick said he go a bill last month that was for \$7,000 for contaminated recycling. Rick said he thinks that JRM isn't doing a good job of ticketing. They should be leaving things that cannot be recycled so people don't continue to do it. Rick wants to put cameras on the truck so that when they don't pick up someone's recycling they can know why. Michael S. said maybe we should spend some money to do some education, Rick said the grant they just received will help with this.

Michael S. also asked about the trends that were reported about the solid waste tonnage increase and the recycling decrease. Rick said part of it is that recyclable packing is lighter than it used to be. Rick said the trash tonnage has decreased and has been decreasing. Rick said they still average about 40% it's just a difference in weight for recycling. For trash people are doing a better job of composting, recycling, and reducing waste. Jamie asked why we aren't mandating dual-stream recycling, Rick said he thinks they are looking into this. A discussion ensued about recycling and the costs associated with this. Michael D. said based off of this discussion, it seems like the action item should be that the waste management company needs to get on board with ticketing so that people can understand what they are doing wrong.

#### **9. DPW Solid Waste Transfer Station – R. Clarke**

Jamie asked why the overtime went up so much, Rick said union contracts went up. Sarah said it was up a little more last year but it was in the Recycling Enterprise Fund so you can't see it. Rick said he will look into it. Rick said things are going well, they built two new sheds for their employees. The sheds have been very clean and the members of the Finance Committee said it seems to be going well.

#### **10. DPW Recycling Enterprise Fund – R. Clarke**

Rick said they make money on overflow bags. Last year they made around \$60,000 and this year they will exceed that. Rick said he usually sees the recycling, trash, and compost budget all as one.

#### **11. New/ Other Business – Michael Dougherty**

Joe said early voting is now available. Mike said the next meeting is Thursday February 27<sup>th</sup>.

#### **12. Adjournment – Michael Dougherty**

- Motion to adjourn made by Michael S. seconded by Chris.  
→Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 8-0

Respectfully Submitted By  
Alyson von der Esch  
3-9-20