

TOWN OF IPSWICH  
Finance Committee Minutes  
Tri-Board Meeting  
March 21, 2023 at 7:30 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 Saturday, March 21, 2023, 7:30 AM at Town Hall, 25 Green Street.

Finance Committee members present: Michael Dougherty (Chair), Emilie Smith, Walter Hartford, Ken Swenson, Joseph Bourque, Rob White, Robert Chambers, Jamie Fay, Michael Schaaf

Select Board members present: William Whitmore (Chair), Sarah Player (Vice Chair), Linda Alexson  
Not Present: Kerry Mackin

School Committee members present: Kate Eliot (Chair), Emilie Cannon, (Vice Chair), Greg Stevens, Jeff Poirier, Pavica Kneedler, Jennifer Donahue, Dianna Freehan

Also Present: Stephen Crane (Town Manager), Sarah Johnson (Finance Director), Dr. Blake (Superintendent), Tom Markham

### **1. Welcome – Michael Dougherty**

- Michael Dougherty welcomed everyone to the meeting and went over the agenda.
- Sarah Player said the 3A task force is having their first meeting at 6:30 to learn about the MBTA Zoning.
- The Select Board be voting on the warrant April 10<sup>th</sup>, the School Committee is April 6<sup>th</sup>. The Finance Committee will decide on a date so they can have their meeting after the other boards.

### **2. Citizens Queries – Michael Dougherty**

- Becky Slawson, President of the Ipswich Educators Association (IEP), invited the boards to the 2023 Tiger Tour to visit the classrooms in the Ipswich Public Schools. This will take place from April 24<sup>th</sup>-April 28<sup>th</sup>. Michael asked if they need to do them all the same day or can it be flexible. Becky said they made it a full week so they can be as flexible with everyone's schedules as possible.
- Alicia Thomas, teacher at Winthrop Elementary and Vice President of the IEP, spoke in support of Dr. Blake's request for the roofs. Alicia discussed the multiple cracks, leaks, disconnected lights due to leaks, trash bags laid over speakers and lights, trash bags lining the walls to keep water off of student work, and buckets on the floor to collect water. Students and educators are experiencing headaches and breathing issues in areas where mold and open ceilings are visible. Alicia said the roofs are in dire need of replacement and asked for the tri-board's support in this request.
- Lauren Gouzie, 1 Fordham Rd, third grade teacher at Winthrop, said she wholeheartedly supports Dr. Blake's request for funding for the roofs. If this happened in any other public facility, this would not stand. This is not just one pot catching some leaks, this is multiple industrial sized trash cans filling up with brown water in a matter of hours. Lauren read a letter from a fellow teacher, Elise Kibry, who could not attend. Elise is a special education teacher in Winthrop. Elise's letter outlined the difficulty the leaks have presented for her special education classroom and urged the board to support the request for new roofs.
- Laurel Wolfrum, 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Winthrop, said she has had a leak in her classroom for years. This year the leak has grown from a small area to a brown spot across the ceiling. The ceiling tiles have been removed so they didn't collapse, which exposed a crack in the ceiling and a huge leak with a row of buckets in the middle of the

room. All of the desks are pushed out to the side to avoid getting wet which has impacted how they use their space. They used to use the hallways to spread out but no longer can because there are now buckets and leaks are all over the hallways. The leaking is also very distracting. Laura asked for the support of the tri-board for this funding.

- Julie McDougall, School Psychologist at Doyon, brought a sample of the murky brown water that comes out of the roofs so everyone could see. Julie said she has a leak that comes and goes and this is very distracting when she is giving standardized testing for students with learning disabilities. The special education suite is also used as a calming area for students when needed. Those moments are already present a stressful situation, and additionally staff are having to navigate around buckets while escorting a student or while a student is dysregulated. They also hold IEP meetings with parents, attorneys, and advocates in these rooms and parents are having to navigate around buckets and are potentially getting dripped on during meetings. This does not look good from an appearance standpoint or a legal standpoint. Julie also said this can't be healthy for the staff and students to be breathing.

### **3. Energy Savings Cooperative (ESCO) Presentation – Stephen Crane**

Stephen gave a background on the ESCO presentation and commended the work that the Climate Resiliency Committee, the former Climate Manager, and the Facilities Department has done. The team has put in lot of time and effort to get the proposals out and to review those proposals and make a recommendation to the town. Stephen said he thinks this is a really good opportunity for the town to consume less energy and potentially save money in the future.

Beth Greenblatt from ESCO gave a presentation explaining the goal of the company and how it will work with the town. ESCO is an energy management solutions firm. Their focus covers broad areas of energy as it pertains to energy efficiency and energy management, renewable and clean energy strategies, and traditional energy procurement and commodity advisory support services. Beth discussed the goals put forth by Ipswich and the Climate Resiliency Committee and went over the way comprehensive EMS work with the towns and the state. Energy Management Services is a paradigm shift in how you would approach energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions. It is a comprehensive look which allows you to step back and look at all of the facilities and buildings and identify the universe of opportunity that needs to be addressed, and which can be addressed over time. Under this approach the team would work with the firm to create and optimize a portfolio to meet constraints that the town puts on the product. This enables the town to look at long term or significant capital investments and leverage the simple paybacks of those investments against investments that may have shorter paybacks. There are three phases of the performance contract including due diligence, construction, and performance. The due diligence phase is a comprehensive investment that provides a detailed report including scope, price and cost/benefit analysis. The town will receive a fully scoped document with pricing and savings, and a protocol for how they will evaluate the savings on an annual basis. The next phase, the construction phase, is after the design phase is completed. The energy services company will undertake all construction, commissioning, and close out services. The performance phase includes optional maintenance support services and conducting of annual measurement and verification, detailing savings achievements. Beth also went over the progress to date and the recommendations for next steps.

Michael Dougherty asked if this company does an energy audit and if they help procure the materials needed for whatever building projects the town decides to do. Beth said that is correct, it is a full turn key coordinator. They design, build, and deliver to the town a fully finished project. Michael also asked what happens if they only do one major capital improvement project in a 20-year period. Beth said typically municipalities that are supported by investor owned utilities have an aggressive desire to put money out in the marketplace. They typically do small individual projects. This service would create a more comprehensive plan to group everything into one project, and then perhaps it is implemented in phases. Michael Dougherty also asked why the Climate Resiliency Manager wouldn't be able to handle this. Beth said typically the types of energy audits Michael is referring to are based on budget numbers, not construction numbers, and they are not based on fully detailed scopes. This is an investment grade analysis and study that allows you to take it to the bank, which is very different than a high-level audit.

William Whitmore asked if the group that does the design and project management also builds the building. Beth said they sub that out to the trades. William asked how this will work with Green Community grants. Beth said it is a

great compliance mechanism to meet the required 15% savings in one swoop. You can also use grants to offset projects. Green Communities and NORESKO do not conflict, they work together. Emilie asked how many Green Communities NORESKO is currently working with, Beth said she isn't sure but she can find the answer. Emilie asked if communities typically re-up their contracts. Beth said under the statute, you can only contract for a 20-year period.

Walter Hartford asked why a town would want to sign up for a 20-year contract given how quickly things can change. Beth said all the 20 years does is protects the investment for 20 years. It is a contract that obligates NORESKO to guarantee the savings that were promised. Walter also asked about a commitment of staffing. Beth said in her experience it is helpful to have someone that can facilitate walk throughs and answer questions and point them in the right direction. There doesn't need to be a full-time position dedicated to this. NORESKO will have a project manager to take charge but they will need someone from the town to report to. Ken asked if Jon Blair was involved in any of this. Beth said yes, he has been very involved.

William said if they do an IGA, the company comes and provides an audit, shows where the improvements are, how much it will cost, how much the town will save. If we don't get the savings that they say we are going to save, they will provide that to us. Beth said they are required to provide the savings they project. William said they can physically see and predict the cost savings before it even plays out.

Michael asked what the \$60k is. Beth said if there is a comprehensive project that is provided but the town doesn't move forward with it, they have to pay the \$60k. If they move forward with the project, that cost is wrapped into the total. Linda asked what it would cost the town for those services if someone else did it, Beth said probably \$120k.

#### **4. FY 2024 Town Capital Plan Presentation/Discussion and FY 2024 School Capital Plan Presentation/Discussion – Stephen Crane**

Stephen gave an overview of the project list on the town side and said the Capital Plan is in the binder that was distributed. They are looking at about \$1.7M in town capital projects. The annual Capital Plan is largely funded in Free Cash and there is a small amount of raise and appropriate. The Facilities Needs Assessment is a comprehensive document that backs up the need for some of the capital projects.

Michael Dougherty asked about the moneys set aside for the County St. Bridge, Stephen said it is just for design, not for construction costs. Michael asked about the police cruisers line item. It is for two vehicles. Michael said it seems like they are lacking in Green Communities money, it is only about \$35k this year. Stephen said we have gotten a lot of money in the last few years but it won't stay that way every year. Chris Rais said they were anticipating applying for the full \$500k for the geothermal work but since that has slowed down they are going to apply for other projects. Michael asked if we are continuing along in our goal of electrifying the fleet. Chris said it's up to the directors of the departments and as long as they do their due diligence, this will continue.

Michael Schaff said the town is a Green Community and we made certain commitments to that. He said he doesn't think it's the responsibility of the department heads to move forward with the electric vehicles. The ELD also put forward a study of EV's and Michael asked if they have used that study. Chris said he is not involved in managing every vehicle but he manages the fleet. Stephen said it is the responsibility of the department heads because they are the ones that decide if the vehicles can be electrified. Michael said the golf cart and the pick-up truck could have been electric. Michael also said he wants to make sure this is considered with heating and cooling as well. Chris said when he has the opportunities within the price range he will always do it. Stephen also said they always do their due diligence when they switch vehicles. There is no electric truck that plows a road. Stephen said he believes in electrifying the fleet, the vehicles just aren't there yet.

Rob White asked if the Green Communities grants could pay for the roofs. Chris said not unless they were green roofs which they aren't, and we are also behind the ball. Jamie asked if they apply for Green Communities money or if it is a reimbursement plan, Chris said they submit the projects to them and then they give the yes or no to the projects. Jamie expressed his support for the Capital Budget and said we are doing things we set out to do. We are getting ahead of projects. Rob also asked when they will switch to laptops vs desktops. Stephen said he agrees laptops are easier. They

couldn't make the switch before because they were using desktop-based MUNIS, they are now moving to cloud based MUNIS. Rob asked about the \$350k for the Country Street Bridge and asked if it was a requirement and what DOT will pay for. Stephen said DOT doesn't do design. They would bid and manage construction.

Emilie asked about school facilities and the wind turbine gear box. Joe asked about the roof replacement line item. It was the only roof replacement needed for facilities in the 5-year plan. Ken asked why the schools' roofs were not taken care of before now. Chris said they have been patching it while they were waiting for the town to decide what they were going to do with the schools. Chris also said the insurance company recently deemed the high school roof and the Winthrop roof only at cash value, so if there was a catastrophic failure they would not get the insurance money for it.

Michael Schaff presented an idea to fund a study from Free Cash of the Public Safety Dispatch System. Right now, the town is spending \$525k annually to fund the Public Safety Dispatch in town and we have seen that we have substantial capital outlays. William said this was a controversial item and it wasn't on any agendas. Michael Schaff said it is a request for free cash. William said they cannot talk about pulling money out of free cash without it being on the agenda, and with the School Committee here and it doesn't even pertain to them. William recommended we wait and talk about this another time. Dr. Blake said having complaints lodged against the School Committee for having agenda items that were not discussed, he would be very careful since this was not noted in the agenda. Michael Dougherty said he suggested we do a bi-board meeting about this, but Michael's concern was that in order for us to get money for this, it would have to come out of free cash which would be a capital request. That is why Michael Schaff thought it would be appropriate to talk about this in capital plan discussion. Michael Dougherty said with that being said, given the current consensus, perhaps they should wait for a future discussion. William asked if they want to add this to the current Capital Plan. Stephen said he thinks this is a noteworthy thing to study, but in terms of process it would be a change to the warrant which would have a downstream effect to other warrant articles. Stephen said he doesn't see a way to change the 2023 warrant without having ripple consequences. He thinks it is a good topic for discussion, it's just too late. Michael Dougherty suggested they schedule a future discussion on this. Michael Schaff said he would like this appropriated in this year so they can carry out the study within the first 6 months of the fiscal year. William said it would be up to Stephen if they want it to go in the capital budget and up to the Select Board if it goes in the warrant, so the Board would need to talk about that. William said he is not saying he's against having the discussion, he is just nervous about having the discussion right now. Joe echoed Michael's comments that this is worthy of a discussion and it was swept to the side 18 months ago without a conversation. We have a lot coming up in the town and we can't be narrow sighted. We need to look at different opportunities and moving forward we need to be creative.

## **5. FY 2024 Debt Exclusion Override Requests – Dr. Blake**

Dr. Blake said Chris came to them a number of months ago regarding the two roofs at the elementary schools and that we need to do something significant for the next 5-7 years while the community sorts out what they want to do about the schools. They got estimates for a modified roof replacement as well as a roof overlay. The Doyon School would be \$993k, the Winthrop school would be \$550k. These are the prices they were given but it has not been put out to bid. They also got pricing for replacing the section of the high school roof. One option was \$420k and the metal option was well over \$1M. The debt exclusion is to provide the funding for these much-needed projects.

Michael Dougherty said it is clear this is needed. Dr. Blake said they are in the process of submitting two SOI's for the schools and if they get in right away, they would be looking at 6-7 years before opening the doors to a new building. Michael said they discussed the funding source at their meeting the other night. The need is clear but considering the current climate on rates and interest rates, and considering we have a lot of surplus in additional accounts for rainy days, they wondered if they should use some of their resources for funding.

Jamie Fay asked about how much this would cost if they bond 10 years, Sarah said they sent out debt schedules and one option would be to do a 5-year BAN and then make paydowns after the third year. They also have the option of a 1-year BAN and a permanent bond. Jamie asked, if they did a 5-year BAN what would the yields be? Sarah said right now yields are on an inverted curve so they estimate a 5% interest. That is why they suggested the bonding because it would be lower. Jamie asked what the Capital Stabilization Fund is at, Sarah said just over \$2M. Jamie explained that's why we want to look at this to see if there is another option for paying for this or reducing the cost. Stephen said in the grand scheme of debt exclusion, it's pretty small. You could finance it and then refinance or restructure the debt. Rob said we

could use stabilization or free cash, or we could ask the school if we could borrow the money and pay it back with interest. Rob White said they just want to find a way to self-finance this much needed project. William said the money for the school's stabilization fund was passed for the override but that is money that people thought would go to academics but is instead going to the roofs. He asked how they pay it back. Rob said they move money at Town Meeting. Walter said he thinks bridging our way into the funding could work well. Sarah Johnson said that is why they structured it the way they did. Sarah said she is not necessarily comfortable with borrowing money from the schools. Stephen also said when we go to borrow money, rating companies look at how much you have in reserves. We may not want to lower our reserves right before we borrow. Stephen said we don't have \$20M because some of that money is sequestered for some reserves. Walter said that no matter what they do, delaying financing is a good idea. Sarah Johnson said she has heard from multiple sources that they are hoping the rates will start to come down towards the end of summer. They aren't talking about doing this until the end of August.

Jamie asked if the middle school roof could wait two years, Chris said it's not covered under insurance so if there is any kind of catastrophic failure it won't be covered. William said he is a little shocked by this because this is the first time they have heard any of this. It is a big concept to borrow money from ourselves instead of borrowing when it's only a month away and they haven't heard anything about this. The warrant article is to approve borrowing for this. Dr. Blake said he isn't sure if they can legally borrow from the Stabilization Fund. Kate Elliot said this may be difficult to propose to the tax payers. Sarah Johnson said she would also wonder about the legality of it all and would want to talk to the financial advisor, legal, and the bond counsel just to see if we can legally borrow from those stabilization funds. Michael Dougherty said they just wanted to have this discussion to see if there were different funding sources. If not, the Finance Committee will still back this, they just wanted to bring it up as an idea. Stephen said he is concerned that if we present this to the town without a clear funding source, it may get voted down. He would recommend they go forward as planned and then after it is voted in, to revisit the funding and see if there are any alternatives. Pav said they have been working hard to get this done and she worries that changing the funding source will make it messy. Rob said since it is too complex to include the schools, we should focus on the municipal side and the Stabilization Fund as the source, maybe Free Cash. That way it is clearer.

William also said they have a lot of Stabilization but if they use it for this, it won't be used for something else. Something else will be reduced and people have to understand that they will pay for this in one way or another. Emilie Smith said we have a lot of big-ticket items coming up in the next 5 years and we don't want voter fatigue. If we can have a win on a smaller ticket item, that would help. Michael Schaff said this is the type of discussion that underscores the importance of reducing expenditures where we can.

## **7. Ballot Question Concerns – Michael Dougherty**

Michael said it is up to the School Committee to decide what tools to use in deciding and it's up to the Select Board to decide what goes on the ballot. The Finance Committee are concerned that the questions could cause future confusion. We don't want to get ourselves in a situation where one of the options gets chosen overwhelmingly and then we don't end up going with that option. Walter said they are thinking that cost should be included in the questions. Do they feel they will get enough good information with the ballot questions as they are stated or do we think this will give confusing results? Kate Elliot said they are just trying to get a pulse check on where they stand on the scenarios so that can guide the feasibility study. Michael Schaff said he would submit that most people would vote on cost, and that will be the primary consideration. Unless they are unaware of the cost, they will vote on educational policy. But that is probably not going to reflect what they would do if they don't know how much that is going to cost them. Kate said they are using this as a tool to listen to the community with the information they have now.

## **8. Adjourn – Michael Dougherty**

- The Select Board and the School Committee adjourned.
- Motion to adjourn the Finance Committee made by Emilie, seconded by Walter.

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 9-0*

Respectfully Submitted By  
Alyson von der Esch  
3-27-23