

IPSWICH SELECT BOARD
Meeting of Tuesday, April 21, 2020
Remote Meeting Via Zoom Video Conference

Pursuant to Open Meeting Law M.G.L. Chapter 30A, §§ 18-25, written notice posted by the Town Clerk and delivered to all Board members, a meeting of the Select Board was held on Tuesday, April 21, 2020 via Zoom Conference Call.

Board Members present: William Whitmore, Chair; Linda Alexson, Vice Chair; Dr. Tammy Jones; Kerry Mackin; Nishan Mootafian

Also present: Anthony Marino, Town Manager; Eileen Page, Recording Secretary

Abbreviations used: FY21, Fiscal Year 2021; FY20, Fiscal Year 2020

With a quorum present, Mr. Whitmore called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

Welcome/Announcements

COVID-19

All Massachusetts schools are to remain closed for the remainder of the school year.

All Town events are postponed until further notice. Several Boards and Committees will be meeting virtually.

Town Hall will remain operational but closed to the public until May 4.

DONATION ACCEPTANCE: JOHN MARK RUDKIN CHARITABLE FOUNDATION VIA ALLSOP DESIGN, INC TO THE IPSWICH POLICE DEPARTMENT AND IPSWICH FIRE DEPARTMENT

The John Mark Rudkin Charitable Foundation has made donations of \$500 each to the Ipswich Police and Fire Departments to be used for the purchase of personal protective equipment.

Vote: Ms. Mackin moved to accept \$500 to the Police Department and \$500 to the Fire Department, and Ms. Alexson seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.

Ms. Alexson publicly thanked groups in town that have been donating meals and supplies to first responders, and individuals who have been making face masks.

Citizen Queries

None.

FY21 Budget Review: Electric Light Department

Jon Blair (Electric Light Manager) addressed the Board to present the proposed FY21 Electric Light Department budget. The department employees 21 employees, and oversees the business office, shared between the Electric, Water and Wastewater departments. The department serves residential and commercial electric customers, over 100 solar panel customers, and the wind turbine on Town Farm Road. In FY20, liabilities to the department were made up of 41% squirrel-caused damage, 23% equipment failure, 16% tree damage, 8% bird-caused damage, 4% wind damage, 3% motor vehicle accident damage, and 5% unknown/other. The average customer will experience one outage per year, lasting less than one hour.

The proposed FY21 budget is \$17 million, with 2/3 of funding dedicated to purchasing power.

Ms. Mackin stated that she would like to see Ipswich move away from nuclear power. Ms. Mackin asked if there has been any progress on turning the landfill into a solar farm. Mr. Marino responded that there have been preliminary discussions, but no formal meetings.

Ms. Alexson asked for an update on Wind 2. Mr. Blair stated that the Subcommittee had discussed the issue at length, and has recently been informed that the owners of Wind 2 are currently in arbitration with the hardware manufacturer. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, arbitration has been delayed. Mr. Blair expects an update by the end of the calendar year, but stated that without a settlement, it is unlikely that the owners will have the funds to remove the tower. He noted that Ipswich's legal expenses to date are under \$20,000.

Ms. Mackin stated that New England Biolabs has expressed interest in replacing Wind 2.

Mr. Whitmore noted that many communities are beginning to invest in offshore wind power, and asked if there is any opportunity for Ipswich to participate. Mr. Blair responded that he believes that the costs will come down over the next decade, and Ipswich will have an opportunity to buy in.

PUBLIC HEARING: Electric Rate Hearing (1 of 2)

“Residents of the Town of Ipswich, please note that the Select Board, as Electric Light Commissioners, will hold public hearings on Tuesday, April 21, 2020 at 8:00 PM and Monday, May 4, 2020 at 7:20 PM in Meeting Room A of Town Hall to consider and act on electric rate changes under the Provisions of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 164, Section 58 and Bylaws IV and VI for the purpose of adjusting all classes of rates.” -Electric Light Commissioners, William D. Whitmore, Chair

Vote: Mr. Mootafian moved to open the Public Hearing, and Ms. Alexson seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.

Mr. Blair proposed increasing the electric base rate from \$0.044 per kilowatt hour to \$0.048 per kilowatt hour, and reducing the Purchase Power Fuel Adjustment from \$0.103/kWH to \$0.099/kWH, resulting in a net rate of \$0.1470/kWH, the same as FY20. The next public hearing on the matter will be held on May 4, 2020 at 7:20 PM.

There were no public comments.

Vote: Mr. Mootafian moved to close the Public Hearing, and Ms. Alexson seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.

Discuss/Vote Ipswich Water Rates

WATER RATES

Vicki Halmen (Water and Wastewater Director) stated that when the matter of deferring seasonal water rates in an effort to offset financial hardships of COVID-19 on residents, the objectives considered were to 1) offer short-term rate relief, 2) protect public water supply, 3) manage the administrative load, and 4) preserve incentive to conserve water in the summer. It was noted that the departments are 100% self-sustaining.

Options discussed by the Subcommittee were:

1. Apply rates as approved in March, but waive interest on unpaid balances, and lien unpaid balances
2. Continue charging residential customers the winter rate for the next 2-3 months
3. Charge all customers the FY20 base rate for the next 2-3 months
4. Charge all customers the FY21 base rate for the next 2-3 months

The Water Subcommittee unanimously voted to recommend deferring the implementation of seasonal summer rate for two months and applying the FY21 base rate, resulting in a deficit of \$262,000.

Dr. Jones asked if the department had seen a spike in usage over the last 4-5 weeks. Ms. Halmen responded that they had not seen a dramatic uptick, but would continue to monitor usage levels.

Ms. Mackin stated that if the change in rates is made, the Lynch Well project may have to be delayed.

Mr. Marino added that he and Ms. Halmen had discussed implementing seasonal water rates on May 1 as planned, and then switching back to a base rate for June and July to ensure that FY20 would close without a deficit.

Vote: Ms. Mackin moved to adopt the recommendation of the Water Subcommittee to implement the FY21 base rate for the months of May and June, and have the Water Commissioners examine how to recoup revenue lost by the delay of the implementation of a seasonal rate structure. Dr. Jones seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.

WATER RESTRICTIONS

The Board decided to discuss implementing water restrictions at the May 4 meeting.

Discuss FY21 Budget Adjustments Due to COVID-19 Pandemic

Sarah Johnson (Finance Director) reported financial hardships that may impact the Town in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

POTENTIAL DEFICITS IN LOCAL RECEIPTS

The Town anticipates a \$300,000 drop in revenue from local receipts. This is influenced by auto manufacturers shutting down, affecting excise tax on new cars, and lower meals tax as restaurants are closed or restricted to takeout meals only. There was a 30% interest drop in March, and the Town anticipates a 50% drop in April.

POTENTIAL REDUCTION OF STATE AID

There is potential for a 5% reduction in the expected state aid. Ipswich anticipates receiving \$6 million annually; a 5% decrease would bring state aid down about \$300,000.

BUDGET OPTIONS

Budget adjustments for FY21 could include the use of stabilization or education stabilization funds, the use of any available free cash, or the reduction of the budget by cutting expenses, reorganization, and/or layoffs.

Approval of Minutes

- a. April 6, 2020

Vote: Ms. Alexson moved to approve the April 6, 2020 minutes, and Mr. Mootafian seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.

Town Manager Report

COVID-19

Town Elections have been tentatively rescheduled for June 23. The signature deadline for candidates has been extended to May 5.

Firefighters and Police Officers who had quarantined after exposure to COVID-19 have been reported to be symptom-free and tested negative. They will be back to work on April 22.

NEW HIRES

Mary Lou Ireland has been hired as the Chief Assessor following the retirement of Robin Nolan. Ms. Ireland was previously the Chief Assessor in Chelsea.

GIS MAPPING

Interns from Salem State University are currently working remotely on GIS mapping.

New Business

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Mr. Marino, Mr. Whitmore, Janice Clements-Skelton (Finance Committee, Chair), Barry Hopping (School Committee, Chair) and Tom Murphy (Town Moderator) met to discuss the logistics of holding Annual Town Meeting amidst social distancing guidelines. The matter will be discussed at the Select Board's May 4 meeting.

PROPERTY TAXES

Ms. Alexson noted that state legislators recently approved municipalities to extend property tax deadlines. Mr. Marino responded that he had discussed the possibility with Ms. Johnson, but it was determined that the banks would still hold payments for 30 days, significantly impacting the Town's cash flow. He stated that the Town has resolved to help homeowners struggling to pay in other ways, such as establishing payment plans and waiving past due interest fees. He noted that so far, only one resident has raised concerns about paying their taxes on time.

COUNCIL ON AGING

Mr. Marino reported that meals are being delivered daily to 100 Ipswich seniors by volunteers and Town staff. He noted that several businesses in town have donated food and supplies, and the YMCA has been delivering meals to seniors several nights a week.

SMALL BUSINESSES

Mr. Marino and Ethan Parsons (Director of Planning and Development) have applied for a \$50,000 grant that will provide cash relief to local businesses impacted by COVID-19.

Mr. Mootafian noted that Ipswich currently has a no drive-through ordinance in place per the Planning Board, and suggested that allowing drive-through service may help some businesses stay open during times like these. He stated that he will be reaching out to Mr. Parsons to discuss the process for allowing businesses to open a drive-through, noting that it would ultimately require a vote at Town Meeting.

Old Business

None.

Miscellaneous and Correspondence

Mr. Whitmore reported that the Select Board has received several emails about pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

Vote: Ms. Alexson moved to adjourn, and Dr. Jones seconded. The motion carried unanimously via roll call.

The Select Board adjourned at 10:08 PM.

*Respectfully submitted by Eileen G. Page
04.22.2020*