

TOWN OF IPSWICH
MASSACHUSETTS

Ipswich Shellfish Advisory Committee to the Select Board
August 4, 2020
Meeting Minutes

A special meeting of the Shellfish Advisory Committee to the Select Board was held on Thursday, August 4, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. Members participated remotely utilizing Zoom in accordance with the Governor's March 12 Order suspending provisions of Open Meeting Law and to promote public health and social distancing.

Members present were Chairperson Linda Alexson, Brenda Turner, Sandi Corning, Peter Soffron, and Wayne Castonguay. Also, Chief Nikas and Constable LaPreste were present. Marie Rodgers, Recording Secretary arrived 8:10 p.m. Not attending were members Charlie Surpitski and Nishan Mootafian.

Citizen queries: There were none.

Rowley aquaculture project

Ms. Alexson invited the applicants of the Rowley Aquaculture Farm for an informational presentation. She clarified it is an informational presentation only and public comment would not be taken.

Brenden Doyle CEO, and Dylan Comb, Marine Biologist, of the Great March Shellfish Company introduced themselves, and a third member of the company, who was not present James Barry O'Connell. They presented a PowerPoint presentation on the shellfish aquaculture project, located on the Rowley side of the Ipswich River in the marsh, within his property boundaries. The proposal is to raise both oysters and clams.

After the presentation, members asked questions about interference with the food supply for the wild species.

Brenden Doyle answered there would be very little chance of impact due to the size of this small farm. Dylan Comb concurred, and indicated oysters and clams evolve together and there's plenty of plankton floating around and is continually replenished.

Further discussion was held concerning water quality testing. Mr. Doyle indicated that there will be testing on site, but as they are a private company they will not be published, but they will share it.

Concerning approvals pending; the Town of Rowley has issued a conditional permit and certifications and approvals are still pending from DMF, Environmental Protection Agency, Coastal Zone Management, Army Corp of Engineering as well as the Rowley Conservation Commission all prior to the start of farming operations.

The Committee was asked to consider helping, by providing a location for overwintering stock from December through April; when everything is dormant. The Rowley Harbor Master doesn't want the location in front of the camp used. But, he was okay with a spot on the Ipswich side, across from the camp. Also, a location at mouth of third creek. DMF will need to approve the overwintering site and that involves public hearings. Also, public input and a vote from the Select Board would be required.

Discussion continued; it takes three years for oysters to grow to harvest. Only native species of seaweed will used and only in locations suitable, such as large open spaces. Daily maintenance of nets and gear are proposed and will be required to prevent

nets from getting buried and gear dislodged. Rowley conditioned the approval with a bond requirement providing for the cleanup of any escaped gear. They intend to be responsible and clean up, even in Ipswich.

Constable LaPreste was asked about impacts on the clams, flats or moorings in that area; he said there are clam flats directly across, but from everything he's heard, there's no impact to that flat. All seed will come from a Massachusetts and DMF approved source; Salem State is currently only viable producer of soft shell clam seed.

Mr. Doyle indicated that they are willing to contribute to the trapping of green crab and will continue in the battle to eradicate green crabs and the Asian shore crab.

The presentation ended and there were no more questions or comments. Mr. Doyle thanked the board and invited any further questions or concerns to be sent to Ms. Alexson. Members of the Committee and Ms. Alexson expressed thanks as well.

Constable Report

Constable LaPreste reported during the months of May and June, 18,600 pounds of green crabs were trapped, at the cost of \$7,440.

\$5000 came from FY20 town appropriations. Up to \$12,000 from the Enhancement Fund was allocated and \$2,440 was spent and the balance will go back into the enhancement Fund.

Green crab trapping started up in July 1st - 3,500 pounds of green crabs were trapped. Numbers are down, he's not sure if that's good news or bad; it remains to be seen.

Late June he went out with DMF and collected Neoplasia sample; results are not back yet. DMF wanted samples from an inch to a half inch. He went to Fox Creek and there were lots of half inch. He's observed populations looked very healthy; no signs of die off from Neoplasia.

Commercial permit survey results

Ms. Alexson reported 49 surveys were returned, many with insightful responses. She explained the development of the spreadsheet she created, with a separate work sheet for every question. Additional comments were listed in a separate comments section; some comments were about the operation of the Shellfish Department, which is outside the scope of the Committee. Those comments were forwarded to appropriate staff and not included in this spreadsheet. The spreadsheet will be used as an informational tool for future discussions and will be referred to from time to time.

Review temporary 300-lb. commercial harvest limit

The temporary limit of 300 pounds expires at the end of September. Ms. Turner voiced her support to stay with the 300 pound harvest limit. Mr. Castonguay would like more information on the status of the resource from the Constable.

Discussion ensued with the Constable speaking to the average harvest, factoring in conditions on any given day. He opined that over the course of a year, there are few opportunities to damage the resource. The trend of the average price of clams has gone up and has continued; the harvest weight does not dictate the market. He spoke to the resource on N7 not as good as N4, which has been a better area for some time; he feels the reason is because of the green crab trapping focused there.

Discussion continued regarding the regulations discussion in a physical public meeting rather than the virtual remote meetings. Mr. Castonguay noted increased concerns coming up for resource, new federal regulations changing waste water treatment plants and pollution.

Mr. Soffron spoke to managing of shellfish and focus on weight limit is not the only option and he listed many options to control and management the resource. He cited a newsletter published by NOAA with information for boards like the Shellfish Advisory Committee to manage resources. He cited the percentages of decline of soft shell clams since 1980 in surrounding states. Ipswich is the exception. The bust and boom cycles are not the result of human harvesting, but predators like the green crabs. Sandi Corning voiced her support to stay with 300 pound harvest limit.

MOTION:

Ms. Turner moved to recommend to the Select Board to continue the weight limit of 300 pounds. Mr. Soffron seconded. Mr. Castonguay suggested to amend the motion by adding for one year and expire 9/30/2021. Mr. Soffron seconded. The motion passed with a roll call vote. Corning, yes; Turner, yes; Castonguay, yes; Soffron, yes and Alexson, yes.

Mr. Soffron continued to share his report on NOAA; ocean warming and predators, not overfishing as the causes of decline of the soft shell clams

Proposed updates to regulations was tabled

Out-of-town Veterans fee:

Ms. Alexson explained the Select Board discussed the fee waiver for Mr. Damato and it was not granted. He may get a non-resident Veteran recreational permit for \$40. If the regulations change to mirror the Over-70 resident permit fee, he may request a refund of the \$30. DMF contacted Ms. Alexson about this issue and agreed that this is a gray area. A conference call is scheduled for next week between DMF and the Town, and she will have more information at the next meeting.

Old Business

Ms. Alexson received an email from DMF responding to the letter asking about the State issuing bed certificates. She forwarded the e-mail to the committee members for their information.

Next Meeting – September 15, 2020 @ 7:00 p.m. via Zoom Video Conference.

Adjourn – Ms. Turner moved, Mr. Soffron seconded and it was unanimously voted via roll call to adjourn at 9:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
~Marie Rodgers

These minutes were approve on September 15, 2020.

Pursuant to the 'Open Meeting Law' the approval of these minutes by the Board constitutes a certification of the date, time and place of the meeting; the members present or absent; the findings made and actions taken. Any other description of statements made by any person, or the summary of the discussion on any matter, is included for the purpose of context only, and no certification, express or implied, is made by the Board as to the completeness or accuracy of such statements.