

TOWN OF IPSWICH
Finance Committee Minutes
Tuesday August 8, 2023 at 7:30pm
Ipswich Town Hall, Meeting Room A
25 Green St. Ipswich, MA

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:35pm.

Finance Committee members present: Walter Hartford, Emilie Smith, Rob White, Jamie Fay, Michael Schaaf, Leah Crespi

Finance Committee members not present: Ken Swenson, Joe Bourque

Also Present: Sarah Johnson

1. Citizens Queries – J. Fay

- none

2. FinCom Feoffees Appointments – S. Johnson/ J. Fay

Larry Seidler, Treasurer of the Feoffees, said this past year they gave \$1.1M to the schools, and they give approximately \$1M to the schools each year. The schools determine how to spend the money, the Feoffees are only responsible for managing the investment. The trust value was a little over \$37, 572,000. When the trust was first established, the schools were getting around \$20k per year. Because the trust is doing so well, they are now getting \$1M per year. Jamie said they are doing a great job with the trust. The trust value increased 3.7% the first quarter, and 1.5% the second quarter. Walter and Rob asked for a non-filtered report so they can see what is actually there. Walter asked the Feoffees to send the reports their way so they can verify the money is there.

- Motion to reappoint Nat Pulsifier and Mark Evans to the Feoffees made by Emilie, seconded by Rob

→ *Motion passed unanimously 6-0*

3. Planning Board Articles (Gibbs, Conboy, Moorad) – J. Fay

Glenn Gibbs introduced Brendan Conboy as the new Planning Board Director. Jamie asked Brendan what the first big things are that he will accomplish in the first year. Brendan said they will move forward with the Public Safety Building and the 3A mandate from the state, and will make progress on zoning amendments. Glenn went over the zoning changes. He said the first step is for the Planning Board to vote on potential changes to be added to the Warrant, which they have already done. They also met with the Select Board, and the Select Board sent the Warrant back to the Planning Board for a Public Hearing. The first Public Hearing is Thursday the 10th and there will be another on the 31st. The Select Board will vote on the Warrant on September 5th.

Jim Bone, Ipswich Building Inspector, introduced the first change, which has to do with a provision of the bylaw that allows the building inspector some authority to bypass the usual procedure to nonconforming structures. This is two changes within one amendment and the goal is to give the abutter some say. Jamie said our overall goal was to reduce the number of things going to the ZBA and this does the opposite. Jim said in this instance, yes. But this would really only effect 3 or 4 cases per year. Jamie asked if this applies when building a fence outside of the setbacks. Jim said being outside of the setbacks does not change the height of fences allowed. Jamie asked how many of these they have encountered over the past few years, where the fences are too high. Jim said about 8-10. Brendan said a lot of communities have a maximum fence height. Jamie said it would make sense to have a limit. Saying that every fence that is over 7 ft. requires a building permit seems like a lot. Jamie suggested they set a height limit that is reasonable so that the ZBA doesn't have to deal with this.

The second change has to do with diversifying housing types that are available in the community. One of the primary ways the town has accomplished this in the past has been allowing accessory apartments. Over the years they have increased the applicability of that because it has been so successful. This has been for single family houses to add an additional unit with restrictions in size. The new guidelines will allow for two bedrooms, instead of limiting it to just one. Jamie asked if this is allowable in any zoning district, Glenn said yes, any residential zoning district. They are also considering adding some language about short term rentals to make it so that Air BnB cannot be used in Ipswich because it lowers the housing stock availability in town. However, allowing short term rentals brings in business to the town and helps the homeowner financially. Because there are benefits to both sides, Brendan said he would be in favor of looking at this holistically from both sides and making this a larger conversation before moving forward with this.

Lastly, there is a change regarding drive-throughs. Currently drive-throughs are allowed after site plan review but they are prohibited when associated with fast food restaurants. There is not a specific definition of “drive through” and it is also not listed in the table of uses. One piece of this is clearing that up, putting in a definition of what a drive thorough is and putting it in the use table. Last year they had planned to completely prohibit drive-throughs. Instead of an outright prohibition, the Board is planning to allow drive-throughs in the Commercial District but the business will have to go through a special permit. Jamie asked what a commercial facility means, Glen said a bank. Jamie asked if “commercial” is defined in the Zoning Bylaw, Glenn said no but if you look at the use table, there is a commercial heading and the types of uses that fall within that are retail establishments, consumer service establishments, and professional offices. There is a prohibition on formula fast food.

4. Government Study Committee Article (Champion) – E. Smith

Emilie explained that last April the GSC went before the Select Board in anticipation of the potential warrant article/ citizens petition. The Select Board gave the GSC the go ahead to make a report at the Annual Town Meeting in May. They also charged the GSC with revisiting the Bylaw regarding how things are nominated to the GSC. They have taken a first draft at revising the article and are here tonight to review the article and get feedback. Gary Champion, 3 Palomino Way, Chair of GSC, said he submitted a copy to everyone and he went over the changes. A lot of the changes are clarifications. One major change is regarding the duties of the GSC, and states that the GSC will continue to function even if not given a task from the Select Board. It was the understanding of the previous Select Board that the GSC would not continue to operate unless assigned a task, but that is not the case. Emilie said they have a committee that is willing to meet, even in the absence of topics. The topics are assigned with full knowledge and awareness, or the committee finds something they think is worth investing their time in, but then has to come back to the Select Board and Town Meeting for approval and edits. Jamie asked where that is written out, Emilie said it isn't specifically written out, and perhaps they can add a sentence. Jamie said he thinks the GSC has an important role in town but he doesn't think they should have the ability to make recommendations unless they have been asked to look into something by the Select Board or by Town Meeting.

Michael said it seems like maybe it would be an issue with the GSC setting their own agenda. He asked if there was some way they could have the committee submit a list of suggestions to the Select Board. This way we could tap into the initiatives of the GSC but also get suggestions form the Select Board. Gary said they want this to be a collaborative, respective, productive relationship. We have witnessed how it has been in recent years and we can't just say it won't happen again. There have been in the past Select Board members that want this Committee shut down. We need to make sure that doesn't happen. Emilie said the annual report is a commitment and they can make suggestions there, but in the interest of keeping momentum, could they also submit a list of topics other times as well. Emilie said she hopes that they will continue to build positive collaborative relationships with the Select Board, and hopefully at some point in the future when the Select Board needs help with something, they'll think of the GSC. Jamie asked if they have met with the Select Board about this language yet, Gary said he sent it to them and asked if they had any questions but they didn't have any questions or discussion.

5. End of Year revenue/expenditure report (S. Johnson) – R. White

Sarah Johnson, Finance Director, said she forwarded the end of year quarterly report and walked the Finance Committee through the report. Originally, the revenue was estimated conservatively so the budgets were more restricted. The revenues came in significantly higher. We are now at \$2.3M over in revenue. Sarah provided a breakdown of local

receipts by category. Jamie said we underestimated revenues by \$2.3M and underspent the budget by \$800k. That's about \$3.7M over, including the \$600k from Free Cash.

Jamie said we have a lot of money that we aren't spending and in a way that's not a good thing. Sarah said they didn't know they would have extra and they wanted to have a buffer. Rob asked about General Government Expenses, which are up 26% over a 2-year period. He asked what created that kind of pop. Sarah said Tony Marino held his salary in 2022 and in 2023 he was due a bump. When we hired Stephen, his salary was a lot higher. They also created the Assistant Town Manager position. The Climate Resiliency Manager salary is also new. Jamie asked if we could get water and sewer reports as well in the quarterly reports. Emilie asked if they could also look at Terri's reports.

Rob asked Sarah what the conversation was like with the rating organization advisor regarding the credit rating. Sarah said they asked 30 questions. They wanted to know a lot about the audit, upcoming projects, revenue, new growth, and expenditures. Rob asked what they said about the Public Safety Building. Sarah said they asked about it, when it would be done, and when we anticipated we would be borrowing for it. Sarah told them she knew they would need another \$20M around December when we would start construction but that she didn't want to borrow in August and have to pay for the interest. They instead borrowed \$4M which will get us to February and will then borrow the rest in February. The auditor thought that was a great idea.

6. Committee reports – J. Fay

- Michael said the Commissioners and the ELD Subcommittee met jointly last Wednesday night to discuss the transition. Together we decided to make an interim appointment of Dylan Lewellyn as the Interim Manager at the ELD. The subcommittee will be meeting again tomorrow night to discuss the transition as well as the next steps to appoint a permanent manager. The Commissioners were going to meet again to also discuss the next steps for a permanent manager. The ELD has important matters to address so a smooth transition is important.
- Leah said she isn't sure how to join the Payne Grant Committee and hasn't been able to find anything online. Rob said he'll send her the information he has.
- The Public Safety Facilities Committee has been very active. They are on the meeting agendas at every meeting for the Conservation Commission, Planning Board, and Zoning Board of Appeals.

7. New/Old Business – W. Hartford

- There will be a Tri-board meeting on 9/26.
- Jamie had a meeting with the chairs of the School Committee and Select Board. They would like to hear what the Finance Committees priorities are for the year. They are inviting the Superintendent of the Whittier School to learn about what the parameters are of that project and the process of that. We would be responsible for 10% of the capital cost and we have 4% of the students.
- Jamie needs a volunteer to prepare the Special Town Meeting Fincom report. Emilie said she will do it. Rob told Emilie she can ask for the documents from Michael D. from last year.
- Approval of minutes- June 20 and July 11
 - Motion to approve the minutes of June 20, 2023, made by Rob seconded by Emilie.
→ *Motion passed unanimously, 6-0*
 - Motion to approve the minutes of July 11, 2023, made by Michael, seconded by Emilie.
→ *Motion passed unanimously, 6-0*

- Leah said she has been reading the State Published FinCom Handbook and in 1993, the State determined how regional schools are funded. Leah asked if Ipswich has been operating on a plan prior to 1993, and perhaps we would do better if we operate under a newer plan created by the state. Jamie said **from** what he understands, for capital projects, there needs to be a vote to approve a major capital expenditure. There are two ways of doing so, one is to have a vote in every town in the district. The other is to do a district wide vote so that there would be an election in every town in the district at the same time on the same day.
- Michael asked about the 3A task force and said they haven't met since last spring. Michael said they can put it on the Tri-Board agenda.

8. Adjourn – W. Hartford

- Motion to adjourn made by Michael, seconded by Emilie

→ *Motion passed unanimously, 6-0*

Respectfully Submitted By
Alyson von der Esch
8-19-23