

TOWN OF IPSWICH  
Finance Committee  
Meeting of January 31, 2018  
Town Hall, 25 Green Street  
Meeting Room A

With a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:33.

Finance Committee members present: Chair Janice Clements Skelton, Tammy Jones, Chris Doucette, Rob White, Michael Schaaf, Michael Dougherty, Jamie Fay, and Kevin Murphy

Not Present: Walter Hartford

Also present: Alyson von der Esch, Sarah Johnson, Colleen Fermon, James Bone, Glenn Gibbs, Ethan Parsons, Alicia Gailen, Hannah Wilbur, Beth O'Conner

Kevin Murphy arrived at 7:45.

**1. Citizens Queries – Janice Clements Skelton**

- No citizens queries.

**2. Acceptance of Finance Committee Minutes – Janice Clements Skelton**

- 1/29/19
  - Moving approval to next week.

**-----Municipal Budget Hearings -----**

**3. Public Health—Colleen Fermon**

Colleen Fermon, director of the Department of Public Health, presented the goals and budget for the department. Colleen began by explaining the responsibilities of the department, and provided a pie chart to show how time is spent within the department. Most of Colleen's time is spent on Title 5, food, and housing. She also focuses on pools, beaches, and emergency planning. The Public Health Department consists of the director, a full-time admin assistant, a public health nurse (5 hours a week), and a health inspector. Colleen then discussed this current fiscal year's accomplishments, which included complying with a risk based inspection schedule for food establishments, as well as vaccinating 110 employees at the employee flu clinic. The board also successfully followed up on all reported diseases, although due to the increase in reported diseases, the Public Health Nurse has gone over on hours. The board also evaluated tobacco regulations to bring regulations in line with the state's, and is looking to join in the Cape Anne Tobacco Policy Plan. The tobacco sales age will be raised to 21, the definition of tobacco products will now include e-cigarettes, and the sale of flavored tobacco products will be limited to adult-only establishments.

One of the goals for the department is to continue to train food establishments on the 2013 food code and new regulations. Training for operators will be offered in March, and this will include training on terminology changes and additional requirements. Next, the department would like to review the recombinant DNA regulation, which limits experiments at the High School and New England Biolabs. The goal of this review is to see if this limit should still be included in the regulation. Colleen noted that she does not think the department needs to be looking into this any longer since this is deemed no to low risk. Jamie asked for an email from Colleen when this is brought up so one of the Finance Committee members can be present. The last goal for the department is to complete compliance checks and signage checks for tobacco establishments under the new state regulation. Education will be offered on new regulations so that establishments will be given the tools they need to be successful.

The budget for the department was then discussed. This year there are two significant changes. First, the department is proposing to expand the Health Inspector's hours from 21 hours per year to 5.4 hours per week. The funding for this increase would come from Food Revolving Fund, as well as from savings the department would gain from not having to hire as many consultants. This would be a minimal cost savings to the department, but more importantly would allow for continuity of operations, as someone would be in the office to continue every day operations when Colleen is out. A discussion ensued with the Finance Committee over the effectiveness of this transition. Jamie asked what the Health Inspector's qualifications are as well as the hourly rate. He expressed concerns that this contractor makes a similar hourly rate as Colleen, and also expressed concerns that this position will grow and then become more expensive than hiring consultants. Colleen answered that this individual is a Certified Health Officer and has 25 years of

experience working in public health. She also mentioned that Mr. Marino had wanted to move away from using contractors as they are getting more expensive. Michael Dougherty asked how much the average contractor charges, it is typically between \$60 and \$65 an hour, although sometimes it can be as low as \$45 an hour. Janice voiced her concern that this may be a short-term savings, but eventually if this position grows this person will soon become eligible for benefits and retirement, on top earning \$43 per hour. Colleen clarified that this individual does not have interest in gaining more hours, and that the greater benefit to this proposal is having someone in the office that knows what's going on. Janice also asked if position would completely eliminate the need for contractors in the budget, which it does not. Janice also expressed concerns over the pay rate, and noted that typically there is a 25% delta between employees and contractors. Janice asked to see the backup analysis from Tony so they can see what has been spent over the last three years as compared with how this will affect the budget. Colleen said she will provide the analysis and supporting documents. Jamie explained that the reason they originally went to outside contracting was because the economy affected the need, for example when the economy is doing well, more houses are being built, more contractors will be needed to test the soil. The revolving fund would be used for this because if the money wasn't needed, it didn't have to be spent. Colleen said the only revolving funds are housing and food. Since they are very general, they can be used in different ways based on the need.

The second change in the budget is the Public Health Nurse pay. The Public Health Nurse currently works 5 hours per week but is getting backlogged due to the increase in flu cases and tick-borne diseases. In 2016, there were 119 cases. The past two years, however, there has been over 200 cases each year. For every case, the Public Health Nurse is required to fill out a form, ascertain pertinent background information, and file this information in the state database. Next year, Colleen would like to provide the Public Health Nurse with enough hours. Michael Schaff asked if they have analyzed the rate of vaccination and the cases of influenza. Colleen said she did not, but the numbers that they vaccinate stay steady every year.

#### **4. Code Enforcement – J. Bone**

The accomplishments, goals, and budget for the Building Department were presented by James Bone, Ipswich's new Building Inspector. The Building Department provides public safety and enhances property value through code enforcement and through effective by-laws. They help to make buildings safer, more durable, and more energy efficient. James presented the organization chart which showcased the positions within the department and the hours each position works. He also informed FinCom about what he has done since he started in October. Highlights include getting acclimated with the online permitting system, working with the software company to make it more user friendly, improving the website, and getting rid of the old paper filing system. These improvements have made it easier for people to understand code explanations and permitting instructions, and has significantly reduced the time it takes to receive a permit. Goals will be to upload old paper permit documents with the dates and addresses attached so they can be easily pulled up when needed. Janice asked if James could partner with the high school for students to do community service to help scan the documents. James also talked to Council on Aging to see if some tech savvy seniors would like to help to work off some of their taxes. Janice encouraged James to ask Tony to put this on the "add back" list at Bean Counting.

This past year the Building Department issued 2,160 permits, which translates to over 4,000 inspections<sup>1</sup>. This number has been consistent over the past three years, and processing each permit is time consuming, on top of the other services the department provides. Recently someone was out with the flu and someone went on vacation. Being short-staffed was very difficult and people are now having to wait longer for permits. James would like to add a part time employee to provide additional support so the department can function properly, this position would cost \$5,000. He also noted that this department brings in \$550,000 per year, and runs on \$225,000 per year. Tony asked James to forgo this due to the tight budget this year.

Michael Schaff asked if there is anything else that can be done to make the office more efficient and reduce the workload. James thinks that reducing the paper system and eliminating duplication of effort will help a lot. James would also like to provide the inspectors with tablets so that they no longer have to print schedules and permits. Jamie asked how James can make sure to keep the database updated. James said it is updated on an annual basis. Robert asked how people walking into the office will notice changes. James answered that the process of filling out the forms will be faster, and inter-departmental approvals are happening much faster now as well. It's much more efficient now and much smoother. Alicia Gailen, Conservation Agent, spoke about how wonderful it has been working with the Building Department since James started, and that the process he is talking about has made such a difference. She thanked him and

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<sup>1</sup> This number was subsequently corrected by email and is much lower.

said “keep up the good work”.

## **5. Planning Board – Planning Board Chair Glenn Gibbs, Ethan Parsons**

Glenn Gibbs, Director of Planning, and Ethan Parsons, Senior Planner, presented the achievements, goals, and budget for the Planning Board. The board works with a lot of different boards and is responsible for a range of activities relating to land use, economic development, historical commission, and conservation of land. Glenn also gave an overview of the organization employees, and hours worked.

This past year, accomplishments included working on the Kozeneski property as well as designing and beginning work on the Riverwalk extension, which will be completed by the end of May. The board also made some additional tweaks to the bi-law involving residential apartments and mix use buildings. Both of which have already lead to new applicants and will continue to be beneficial to the town. Lastly, the board completed the Hammond Street parking study, and then moved on to a larger downtown parking study. The task force will be meeting with this information to start forming clear recommendations to the Town Manager and Select Board.

Goals for the year include updating the Open Space and Recreation Plan, completing phase one of the Community Development Update, and possibly securing an investment of a 100,000 square ft. industrial space that will provide significant job creation. Lastly the department would like to partner with housing advocates to establish a community land trust, which could either be regional, or local to Ipswich. Jamie asked if the town has a goal for how many affordable housing units we want in Ipswich and whether a Land Trust was part of housing plan for the Town. Glenn said they have a housing production plan, which provides limited incentives for communities to use 40B development, and identifies locations where affordable housing could be and that the Land Trust was not part of any plan.

One challenge that the Planning Office faced this year was the limited administrative assistants. The board was hoping to increase these hours from 7 to 14, but they were not able to get this into the budget. They will continue to look for volunteer assistants and community service help. Another challenge is that the 15-year TIF commitment with New England Biolabs has ended, so the open space fund will no longer receive those payments of \$30,000 a year. Jamie asked if there is any potential that the \$30M expansion project would involve a TIF, and Glenn said yes.

Glenn then presented data from 2004-2019, which indicated that the department took in \$10.5M in grants within this time period. Expenses for running the department over this same 15-year time frame were only \$5M. Glenn also went over the personnel in the office and where funding comes from for each position. They have not managed to get support from the farming community to keep the farmer’s market afloat, so there will not be a farmer’s market this year. This frees up \$5,900 in the budget, which was the towns contribution to the farmer’s market. Lastly, this is Glenn’s last year as the Director, and applications for the position are now being reviewed. Jamie asked for clarification on the what each position in the department entails and how each position affects the budget.

Michael Schaff asked about the municipal vulnerability planning and climate change and asked if either of these would fall under the Planning Board. Glenn said the MVP workshop will be conducted by Ethan on Tuesday February 5<sup>th</sup>, the goal of which will be to identify priority projects and then seek funding. Ethan said the department would be supporting the Green Communities Initiative. Ethan also discussed the Community Rating System which has to do with flood insurance. Michael Schaff noted that FinCom would like to have a broad discussion about housing. Ethan said that over the last 4 years there has been around 30 affordable housing units, but it is difficult to incentivize smaller projects that are under 10 units. The requirement is 10% and this cannot be enforced on buildings with 10 units or under. The board will be making a presentation to the Select Board in March about affordable housing.

## **6. Conservation Commission – Glenn Gibbs; A. Gailen**

Alicia Gailen, Conservation Agent, gave an overview of the Conservation Commission as well as her job. Accomplishments of the department this past year include receiving a second CZM grant and match, which will allow the project to expand to be much more inclusive in storm water management. The department also increased local filing fees and increased inspector’s hours. Typically permits slow down during the winter, however they have not this year. Alicia’s job is managing permits for the Wetlands Protection Act, and although she is able to fulfill these responsibilities, she does not have a lot of time to spend with the public to answer questions and help with filing.

The long-term vision for the department is to protect natural resources and support economic development by being able to provide customer service. The department would also like to proactively reach out to homeowners with open permits to help them close these out, because if they decide to sell, they won’t be able to close with an open permit. Lastly, the department would like to be an integral part of the CRS program for climate change.

Jamie asked about the permit filing system and whether permits can be filed electronically. Alicia answered that permits are filed by file number and put into a book. Alicia has created a spreadsheet to show all of the information so it is

easily accessible. She would like to be able to have the spreadsheet online so realtors can use it as a tool and have the database online so people can look it up. She also mentioned that although she prefers to have everything electronic, some commission members still prefer to use paper. She noted that due to the nature of her work, there will always be a need for paper, although it has been decreased significantly. Jamie asked if the department uses an electronic software for forms, and Alicia said she doesn't have control of the forms because they are put forth by the state. Michael Schaff asked about construction monitoring and if there are ways that Alicia can receive reports from people that are already monitoring. Alicia said there has typically not been good communication between departments.

#### **7. Historical Commission – Glenn Gibbs**

Glenn presented the budget for the Historical Commission. The budget increased from \$2,400 to \$3,800. The archivist will be \$1,000, \$500 to print more walking brochures, \$300 for other expenses, \$2,100 for interpretive signs at the Riverwalk extension, the town wharf, and on Essex Street. Robert asked about the cemetery project and if it falls under this commission. The Historical Commission has been involved with this project but it also falls under Cemetery and Parks. Considering submitting a grant in April.

#### **8. Zoning Board of Appeals – Glenn Gibbs**

Glenn also discussed the Zoning Board of Appeals. This is an advisory group that provides advice for special permits and cite plan reviews for commercial projects. The budget is almost entirely the salary of the administrative assistant.

#### **9. Open Space – Hannah Wilbur**

Hannah Wilbur, Open Space Manager, and Beth O'Conner, Open Space Steward, presented the goals, accomplishments, and budget for Open Space. The Open Space program is responsible for conserving the properties on the Open Space Bond list, managing over 500 acres of open space, and monitoring about 1,000 acres of privately owned land. Since the Open Space Bond was created, the program has protected over 891 acres of land in Ipswich, using \$10.9M from the Open Space Bond and \$10.9M from grants and other partners. Besides Hannah and Beth, there are 1.43 part-time employees and interns, and the department also shares a seasonal laborer with Parks and Cemeteries.

Accomplishments for this past year include making progress at the Pony Express property on Candlewood Road. The parking lot is in place and will lead to a spring 2019 opening. The department also is in beginning discussions with land owners for recreational trails along Linebrook Road, and also provisionally protected 70 acres of Open Space along Linebrook Road. They also reestablished a GIS steering group, which will meet on a quarterly basis to enhance GIS use in the town. Lastly, following the usual schedule, 6 of the conservation restrictions that the town holds over private property in town have been monitored and the reports have been drafted.

Challenges include increased cost and land value, as well as an issue with staffing for short-term/ lower pay positions. This past year the department did not have a dedicated person for the seasonal laborer position. The department is also facing more large-scale landscape challenges, such as dealing with invasive species management and issues with trail maintenance due to limited staffing and equipment.

Goals for the upcoming year are to maintain the current passive recreational accesses in town and to improve access by adding signage and parking lots. Additional goals will be to update the Open Space Recreation Plan for the annual meeting, with a specific section addressing climate change. The department will also strive to maintain and improve relationships with land owners with parcels on the open space bond list, and work with land owners on plans for conservation. They will also continue to monitor conservation restrictions put forth by the town and continue to foster relationships with those land owners. Lastly, Hannah is interested in updating the Open Space Bond List to include properties that are vulnerable to climate change.

Capital needs for stewardship work is funded mainly through Open Space Recreation and Water Supply Protection fund, which is also where the Open Space Budget comes from. Candlewood Road Athletic fields expenditures have come partly from the Open Space Bond, and partly through Cemeteries and Parks. Open Space land acquisition is funded through outside grants and the Open Space Bond. Long term vision in capital needs includes continuing to maintain current land holdings and recreational access, and planning for climate change adaptation including conservation of land that is vulnerable to climate change.

Hannah then presented the budget and gave an overview of where the funds come from for the fund. The fund has several sources of revenue including cell tower leases, Chapter 61, room tax, also some changes at the state level so short-term rentals will also be taxed. Lastly, a \$30,000 TIF amount from New England Biolabs will end in 2019. Janice asked Hannah to clarify what Chapter 61 is. It is a tax status if a land owner is actively using their land for farming or forestry.

This gives the land owner a tax break, and if they leave their property the town has right of first refusal. A discussion also ensued regarding Airbnb's and taxes. Only have to be taxed if over 2 weeks in a year, and typically in Ipswich Airbnb's only do 14nights.

This year the department decided to decrease the amount that is being put toward acquisition by \$9,000. Increased amount toward stewardship, about \$2,000. Overall, reduced budget by 4.33%. The Board also requested a benefits package to be removed and paid by the General Fund, but recently learned this may not be a possibility. With the loss of the TIF, the department is not bringing in enough money if this doesn't go through. Janice asked if there will be any acquisition of land in FY20. Hannah said she isn't sure.

Hannah then answered questions from FinCom. Janice asked if we could use the Open Space Bond fund to find a parcel to create a kayak and canoe launch. Hannah said this would have to be put on the Open Space Bond list, which would require a vote at Town Meeting. Michael Dougherty asked what partially protected land is. It is 80 acres of land that was restricted by Greenbelt, a portion of the property was restricted, and the remaining acreage of the property is not restricted. Michael Schaff asked about the permanent part time positions. Both are permanent part time.

#### **10. New/Other Business – J. Skelton**

- None
- Next meeting is Tuesday Feb 5<sup>th</sup> and will be looking at most of the Town Hall offices.

#### **11. Adjournment – Janice Clements Skelton**

- Motion to adjourn made by Robert and seconded by Kevin.  
→*Vote: Motion passed unanimously, 7-0*

Respectfully Submitted By  
Alyson von der Esch  
2.6.19