

Stowe Selectboard Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

5:30pm

Akeley Memorial Building

67 Main Street

Stowe, Vermont



Selectboard Members: Paco Aumand, Ethan Carlson, Jo Sabel Courtney, Nick Donza, Beth Gadbois

In-Person Attendees: Town Manager Charles Safford, Assistant Town Manager Will Fricke, Finance Director Cindy Fuller, Public Works Director Harry Shepard, EMS Chief Scott Brinkman, Mila Lonetto, Josi Kytile, Jill Boardman, Lisa Hagerty, Chip Dillon, Barb Puddicombe, Heather Snyder, Terrie Wehse, Patrick Bilow, and three others (18)

Zoom Attendees: Rick Brigham, Gil Helmken, Paul Sakash, Leo Clark, Leigh Pelletier, Dale Porter, Lee Cherry, Rich Scott, Judy Aronow, Elise McKenna, (10)

Call to Order

Selectboard Vice Chair Aumand called the meeting to order at 5:30pm. He welcomed Ms. Gadbois to the Selectboard.

Election of Officers

Mr. Safford requested nominations for Selectboard Chair.

Mr. Carlson welcomed Ms. Gadbois to the Selectboard. He recognized Billy Adams' service on the Selectboard.

Mr. Carlson moved to elect Paco Aumand as Selectboard Chair. Ms. Gadbois seconded.

Mr. Donza said it has not served the Selectboard well in the past to have an automatically rotating chair, and he is supporting Mr. Aumand not because it's his turn but because he is the right person at this time.

Mr. Aumand explained that the process of rotating the chair – someone is elected to the three-year term, move into the Vice Chair position in their second year, and the Chair in their third year. He said it is not a written policy and is just the historical practice of the Board, and is designed to prevent someone perceiving they have any more power than other Board members. He said the role of the Chair is to be a facilitator in the meeting and move the agenda along, and to assist the Manager in creating the agenda.

Ms. Sabel Courtney said she learned a lot from Billy Adams even though they disagreed on contentious issues. She added that Mr. Aumand has credibility from his previous service on the DRB and in the VT Department of Public Safety.

Motion carried (5-0).

Ms. Sabel Courtney moved to elect Ethan Carlson as Selectboard Vice Chair. Mr. Donza seconded.

Mr. Aumand said he welcomes Mr. Carlson's participation as Vice Chair and intends to share the role of Chair as necessary.

Motion carried (5-0).

Ms. Sabel Courtney moved to elect Assistant Town Manager Will Fricke as Selectboard Clerk. Mr. Carlson seconded.

Motion carried (5-0).

Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Donza requested to pull the Rec Path Bid Award from the consent agenda.

Ms. Sabel Courtney moved to approve the agenda as amended. Mr. Carlson seconded. Motion carried (5-0).

Consent Agenda (Items B-1 through B-7)

1. Selectboard Minutes – February 26, 2025
2. Designated Newspaper for Legal Ads
3. ~~Bid Award Rec Path Reconstruction~~ (Added as Item C-4)
4. Local Emergency Management Plan Annual Adoption
5. Burt Springs Lot Tree Tapping Contract
6. Stonybrook Water-Sewer Abatement Request
7. Liquor Items

Ms. Sabel Courtney moved to approve the consent agenda as amended. Mr. Donza seconded. Motion carried (5-0).

Cliff Thompson Public Service Award (Item C-1)

Scott Brinkman, Stowe EMS Chief, was present to present the Cliff Thompson Public Service Award. He noted the award is typically awarded at Town Meeting but the recipient was not able to attend.

Mr. Brinkman continued:

“Stowe Fire and Rescue would like to recognize Gilbert Helmken as this year’s Cliff Thompson award recipient. Gil has served as a volunteer Emergency Medical Technician in Stowe for many years. He first joined Stowe Rescue in January 1982 and volunteered on a weekly reoccurring EMS shift until 2019. Over these 37 years, he also served as a member of the Board of Directors of Stowe Rescue Squad, Inc., helping to shape the organization into the one we know today.

Gilbert was a volunteer on the Mt. Mansfield Ski Patrol (MMSP) for more than two decades. Amongst all this volunteering Gil also became a registered nurse and worked in the Emergency Room at the University of Vermont Medical Center (UVMHC) until his retirement in 2017. Even after his retirement Gil is occasionally spotted in the emergency department at Copley Hospital, turning over the rooms and cleaning/preparing for the next patient.

Gil is not the only member of his family that has served this community, Gil’s late wife, Paula Helmken was not only a member of the Rescue Squad, but also a long-time contributor to the Stowe Weekend of Hope. Also, Gilbert and Paula’s son Merritt and daughter Lee were contributors to Stowe Rescue Squad as EMT’s as well.

If you think of the name Helmken you should think of service above self, take care of others, be kind; it is with this spirit of community and giving that we present to Gil the Cliff Thompson Award.”

FY24 Audit (Item C-2)

Mr. Safford noted there were no recommendations or findings from the auditors in the audit. He noted that he has been a municipal manager for 36 years and has had the same audit firm at each municipality he has worked for, but has never seen an audit report with no findings or recommendations.

Rick Brigham of Sullivan Powers & CO., P.C. presented the FY24 Audit to the Selectboard. He said the Town of Stowe has once again achieved an unqualified opinion.

Mr. Carlson moved to accept the audit report as presented. Ms. Sabel Courtney seconded. Motion carried (5-0).

FY25 Budget Status (Item C-3)

Mr. Safford noted they are about two thirds of the way through the fiscal year. Once they get through the winter they try to give the Board an idea of where things are headed. He said they are projecting a surplus of about \$387,000 for FY25. In the past surplus has often been used to add to the Spring paving schedule if the Selectboard is inclined to do so.

Ms. Sabel Courtney asked what benefit changes are. Mr. Safford said it is generally employees who move between healthcare plans. Ms. Fuller said they budget based on status quo. The police department in particular is getting younger and as a result there are less officers on the more expensive family plan.

Ms. Sabel Courtney asked for clarification on the Short-Term Rental surplus. Mr. Fricke is projecting more registration revenue than the cost of the registration software.

Mr. Carlson asked what the cost of the healthcare plans is to the Town. Ms. Fuller said the single plan is about \$12,000 annually, the two-person plan is about \$25,000, and the family plan is about \$36,000. When they have new positions, they budget for the family plan in order to be conservative.

Mr. Carlson asked what the surplus was last year. Mr. Safford said it was about \$1 million largely due to higher than anticipated revenue from the new local option sales tax and interest revenue.

Mr. Donza asked about the financial impacts from flooding. Ms. Fuller said about \$2.3 million is in a separate FEMA claim fund and is not currently impacting the General Fund, but overtime and fuel usage that would have been part of the operating budget is currently impacting the general fund, which is expected to be recovered in the claim process.

Mr. Donza asked what would happen to the surplus if it was not used for paving. Mr. Safford said it would go into undesignated surplus. He added there is likely to be significant budget pressure in FY27 due to updating the equipment fund, and the Housing Report may recommend some funding for affordable housing come from the municipality.

Chair Aumand said he will ask the Board if they need more information or if they want to hear from the public before a motion is made. Mr. Carlson said he would like to hear about other possibilities or considerations.

Paul Sakash asked if the paving on Nebraska Valley Road could wait until the gravel pit is exhausted. Mr. Shepard said the paving will not last long enough. He explained how it would be paved.

Mr. Sakash asked why interest revenue is higher, and if it because of higher interest rates. Mr. Safford said they have an annual RFQ for interest rates from banks. They try to be conservative with estimated revenues and not overbudget or be overly optimistic because rates can fluctuate. Ms. Fuller said last year they budgeted 3% but got 3.5%, and this year they budgeted 3.5 but are getting 4.9%. The Town holds state education tax dollars for six months before sending it to the state.

Lisa Hagerty asked if 15% cash flow in reserves is high, as the Town did not achieve that during her time on the Board. Mr. Safford said that the recommendation of the auditors used to be 10%, and now they say two months of cash flow. The undesignated surplus based on the FY'26 General Fund Budget is projected to equal 1.44 months of cash flow.

Mr. Donza said he looked at Nebraska Valley Road and is not sure it would hold up even if repaved. He asked if the pavement could be removed and if the road could just be graded as needed. Mr. Shepard said they plan a full depth reconstruction of the pavement in this case. The original pavement was too thin for the traffic. He added that for dust control and other reasons, paving it is important for having the gravel pit there, and the new paving will have a better life cycle. Mr. Safford added that this is part of the goal to get Nebraska Valley Road done over the years, and it was easy for the paving company to agree to add it to their scope because it is a long stretch of road versus a number of smaller road segments disbursed throughout the community. Mr. Safford added they don't have other items to spend blocks of money on this year.

Mr. Donza said if the paving needs to get done, we should do it, but he doesn't want to spend the surplus just because it's there.

Mr. Carlson said the road is in bad shape. He asked if the budget allocation would cover the culverts as well. Mr. Shepard said culverts are covered by a stormwater line item in the highway budget, and this money would just be for the paving.

Ms. Gadbois asked if Maple Street up to Shaws could be re-paved. Mr. Safford said the state is responsible for paving class 1 highways. The failed pavement on that section did not get the expected life cycle, and they are discussing it with VTrans. Mr. Shepard said a simple overlay would not work for that section.

Mr. Aumand said Nebraska Valley Road seems like a shovel ready project. He asked if there was a list of other shovel ready projects they could address funds to. Mr. Safford said they don't have a list. They could table it and bring an alternative, but timing is important if the paving company to complete it by June 30. Mr. Shepard said this is the most shovel ready project. Mr. Aumand said the community is looking to see things get done.

Mr. Carlson said that if there are surplus finds, the Memorial Park tennis courts could be addressed. Mr. Safford said they are different staff efforts and work products. Paving can be done relatively quickly, but it would be a lot on the highway department to do the courts if they were involved in addition to their road maintenance responsibilities. Mr. Carlson asked how much it would cost to contract out. Mr. Safford said in the range of \$250,000 – \$350,000. Mr. Shepard noted the project has scoping issues. Mr. Carlson asked what it would take to do a temporary five year fix. Mr. Shepard said anything would have to match the footprint, no lighting, and they would need to be careful about grading or creating any encroachment on the wetlands. Mr. Carlson asked if additional money could be allocated to the courts. Mr. Safford said the capital fund has an allocation for it already of \$175,000. It is also a separate fund from the operating budget currently under discussion. Mr. Carlson asked how to advance a discussion on the courts. Mr. Safford indicated he could warn it for a future meeting. It was the consensus of the Selectboard to do so.

Mr. Sakash asked if changes at the federal level are impacting the budget. Mr. Safford said the operating budget is not directly impacted but they are looking for significant reimbursements from FEMA. It is not a given it will be followed through on. Mr. Aumand asked if FEMA reimbursement would be a windfall at this point. Ms. Fuller said it would be only for labor, overtime and fuel, but about \$2.3 million is in a separate FEMA claim fund. Any extra would go to unallocated surplus.

Mr. Carlson moved to amend the FY25 paving schedule to include paving Nebraska Valley Road from the Town Gravel Pit to Falls Brook Road. Ms. Gadbois seconded.

Mr. Donza said he is leaning to not support the motion as there are so few houses served by the road. He said paving it won't do us much in the long term, and would rather hold onto the money and wait for a project that serves more people. Ms. Gadbois said it is a shovel ready project and the road would need to get done at some point. She said people in Nebraska Valley often get overlooked and have to deal with the truck traffic, so if their road can be made a little nicer so it is less loud, good, and it is something that needs to happen anyways.

Mr. Carlson said River Road is also in bad shape, and it will be a community discussion in the future. Mr. Donza said if we saved this money, things like paving River Road would be more palatable. He noted Sterling Valley has gravel roads and it could be more fitting to reclaim Nebraska Valley Road rather than repave it. Mr. Carlson asked how much it would cost to reclaim. Mr. Shepard said he isn't prepared to answer that, but noted traveling to the gravel pit on a gravel road is not ideal. He said it is a very busy road when the Town is in flood response mode and would get extremely dusty. Ms. Gadbois noted putting municipal equipment on gravel roads more than is necessary could add most.

Motion carried (4-1). Mr. Aumand, Mr. Carlson, Ms. Sabel Courtney, and Ms. Gadbois voted in favor. Mr. Donza voted against.

Bid Award – Rec Path Reconstruction (Item C-4)

Mr. Donza noted that \$480,000 was budgeted for this project and the bid came in at \$307,000. He asked if that would create a surplus for the project. Mr. Shepard said it potentially would but if there are issues it could add cost.

Mr. Safford said they will have a list of outstanding capital projects for the next meeting. They have budgeted for an additional engineer in FY26 but it still takes a lot to onboard them and find them. Ideally they could hire a maintenance person as the Town has a civil engineer conducting building maintenance work at times. Mr. Donza said they need to look at what staff need; there is a lot coming at staff that the Board has tried to slow down, but we need to start to look at the future and look at how to take on what is coming rather than slowing it down. Mr. Safford said the ability to move projects is constrained not just by internal staffing capacity but also finding qualified contractors. He provided the Akeley HVAC project as an example.

Mr. Donza moved to approve the award of the Bid for the subject project to Boulder Excavation, LLC and authorize the Town Manager to sign the Agreement on behalf of the Town. Ms. Sabel Courtney seconded. Motion carried (5-0).

Manager's Report (Item C-1)

Chair Aumand noted they have important items on upcoming agendas. He asked other Board members to think about what they want in terms of wants and needs, what can be achieved in reality, and what they want to see in their term of office. He asked them to have their number one priority and see where consensus can be found and give staff direction to move on them. Mr. Safford said it is also important to consider the time it takes in terms of staff resources to implement projects.

Mr. Safford asked the Selectboard if they would be open to a joint Selectboard – School Board meeting on April 9 for the legislative delegation. The Board agreed. Ms. Sabel Courtney and Ms. Gadbois noted they have prior commitments on that date and will not be in attendance in person. Mr. Aumand said their points and questions should be noted on March 26 so they can be raised. Mr. Carlson said it should be ensured that the meeting with the legislative delegation is respectful.

Mr. Carlson said he will not be in attendance on April 23 for LCPC.

Mr. Aumand noted the April 10 LCPC regional joint selectboard meeting. He said is hoping for a discussion of the RT 100 corridor and traffic issues.

Mr. Safford noted RCT is considering removing the Morrisville Shopper bus stop at the Stowe Family Practice building on Mountain Road. It originally was going to cease on March 17, but after discussions RCT will study the route with that stop over the next few months and make a determination with more data.

Mr. Safford provided the official 2025 Town Meeting results, the Fire & Rescue Chief recruitment brochure, and February General, Water, and Wastewater Funds YTD Financials.

Mr. Safford noted the Akeley HVAC project only received one bid that did not qualify, and public works is now working on how to reapproach the project. He said the theatre will not be open for Summer 2025 and the Stowe Theater Guild has been notified.

Mr. Safford said the property owners of 300 Meadow Lane (Strawberry Hill Farm) are seeking a Certificate of Public Good from the Public Utilities commission to construct a 30kW net-metered solar array. According to SED they are aware of the project and there should not be any issue with interconnection.

Mr. Safford provided Act 250 notices and minutes to the Selectboard.

Public to be Heard - Non-Binding (Item C-2)

Ms. Hagerty complimented Chair Aumand on his comments about the upcoming Selectboard goals discussion.

Adjournment

Chair Aumand adjourned the meeting at 7:25pm.

Notes

Minutes submitted by Will Fricke.

The Selectboard of the Town of Stowe meets on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm.

A recording of this public meeting is available at: <https://www.stowevt.gov/Government/Selectboard>