

Stowe Selectboard Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting

Wednesday, January 8, 2025

**Akeley Memorial Building
67 Main Street
Stowe, Vermont**



Selectboard Members Present: Billy Adams, Paco Aumand, Jo Sabel Courtney, Nick Donza, Ethan Carlson

In-Person Attendees: Town Manager Charles Safford, Assistant Town Manager Will Fricke, Public Works Director Harry Shepard, Parks and Recreation Director Matt Frazee, Finance Director Cindy Fuller, Interim Clerk Susan Moeck, Beth Gadbois, Mila Lonetto, Josie Kytle, McKee Macdonald, Bob Davison, Brett Loomis, Rebecca & Rob Foregger

Zoom Attendees: Assistant Town Manager Will Fricke, Rich Scott, Connect Stowe, Deb Drinkwater, Jill Boardman, Jane Annello, Heather Snyder, Lisa Hagerty, Paul Sakash

Call to Order

Selectboard Chair Adams called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Approval of the Agenda

Chair Adams requested a motion to approve the Agenda as presented.

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

Consent Agenda (Items A-1 through A-4)

1. December 23, 2024 Selectboard Minutes
2. Housing Consultant Contract and Capital Appropriation
3. Stowe Ethics Commission Municipal Liaison
4. Liquor Licenses – Stowe Thai Cuisine

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

Housing Task Force Quarterly Report

McKee Macdonald provided information with the Selectboard on the Housing Task Force 2nd Quarterly Report and the Task Force's progress including discussions with various state and local organizations and the Town's Public Works Director. In November, the Task Force reviewed housing consultant RFP submissions and was unanimous in their decision to recommend Community Scale as the housing consultant who would best serve the Town's needs. The Board thanked the Task Force for their report and continuing efforts.

Introduction of Interim Police Chief

Mr. Safford introduced Francis Gonyaw as the Interim Police Chief following the retirement of Chief Don Hull. Francis grew up in Stowe and served in the Colchester Police Department for 34 years, retiring as a Sergeant last year, and has been a part-time officer in Stowe Police Department since 1988. Chair Adams welcomed Interim Chief Gonyaw.

Stowe Electric Bond Vote – VELCO Equity Purchase

Mr. Safford explained that at the March 2024 Annual Meeting the voters approved the following article by Australian ballot: **“Shall the voters authorize the issuance of general obligation notes or bonds of the Town from time to time during the period from June 2024 through December 2028, in an aggregate amount not to exceed Three Million and 00/100 Dollars (\$3,000,000.00), payable primarily from the net revenues of the Stowe Electric Department to fund the acquisition by Stowe Electric Department of equity shares of Vt. Transco LLC (the “Project”)?”**

He said unfortunately, due to the unique warning requirements for bond votes, the warning was not published as required for the consecutive three weeks prior to 2024 Annual Meeting. The Town has been instructed by counsel to re-warn the article by Australian Ballot. Mr. Safford said it is recommended that the vote be included at this year’s Annual Meeting, He will inform the public that this is a re-vote of the same article passed last year.

Mr. Aumand moved to instruct staff to include the aforementioned ballot article on the March 2025 Town Meeting Australian Ballot Warning. Mr. Carlson seconded. Motion carried (5-0).

Discussion on Potentially Warning Public Questions to be Considered by Australian Ballot

Mr. Safford said at the previous meeting the Selectboard requested time to be set aside to discuss if the Selectboard wanted to hold a floor vote with the following question: “Shall the Town of Stowe vote on all public questions by Australian Ballot.” It was the consensus of the Selectboard to hold a floor vote to ask the voters to see what they desired to do. Mr. Safford indicated that Town Meeting would follow the 8 am School District meeting.

Draft Annual Meeting Warning Review

Mr. Safford explained that time had been set aside for the Selectboard to review the draft Annual Meeting warning to decide what if any changes you may desire. He said the questions include electing the moderator, election of various officers, the General Fund budget and the Stowe Electric bond vote question. He said noticeably absent was any capital project approval since those funds have already been raised - and reserve funds are within the control of the local legislative body by State law. He added the only capital projects required to be approved by the voters would be any long-term debt where there is borrowing.

Mr. Donza asked when and how the voters can be asked for their input/vote for Memorial Park plans to get a sense if they want the Selectboard to proceed to the next phase of project development. Mr. Safford said during the capital budget development process and/or that discussion could take place at any time or on the floor at Town Meeting during other business. It’s just would not be a legal question that is binding. There was discussion about tagging this topic and other topics at Town Meeting. Mr. Safford said the Town could informally let the voters know that these types of topics may be discussed at Town Meeting during other business.

Mr. Safford said he would have a draft of the warning for the Board’s review at their next meeting to confirm, so that it will be ready for Selectboard final approval at a special meeting scheduled for 5:30 pm on 1/29/25.

Arena Fees

The Selectboard reviewed the Recreation Commission recommendation for proposed rates to raise ice rental rates to \$240 per hour for prime ice and \$185 per hour for non-prime ice and turf rental rate to \$170 per hour for prime turf and \$160 per hour for non-prime turf. Also proposed was to increase the Youth Resident Organization discount to \$40 per hour for ice rentals and \$35 per hour for turf rentals, effectively keeping rates

for Stowe schools and resident youth non-profit organizations the same as current. The hourly rental price increased, but also increased is the amount of the discount that youth - including schools – receive offsetting each other.

There was discussion regarding the Youth Resident Organization discount and how it would be beneficial to possibly increase the discount more for the schools and resident youth organizations.

On a motion by Mr. Aumand, seconded by Mr. Donza, the Board approved the proposed ice and turf rental rates for prime and non-prime times and change the Youth Resident Organization discount to \$50 per hour for ice rentals and \$45 per hour for turf rentals.

FY '26 General Fund and Capital Projects Budget Deliberations

Mr. Safford explained that the Selectboard needed to decide what if any changes they would like to make to the Social, Community & Economic appropriations. The Board decided to approve the following new and increased appropriations as follows:

Social Services	FY'25 Actual	FY'26 Request	Approved Amount	% Change
Lamoille County Mental Health	5,000	6,000	6,000	20.00%

Econ. Dev. and Community Serv.	FY'25 Actual	FY'26 Request	Approved Amount	% Change
IPD Rocks Foundation	-	2,000	1,000	100.00%-
Spruce Peaks Perf. Arts Center	1,000	20,000	1,200	20.00%
Stowe Farmers Market	1,000	2,000	1,200	20.00%
Stowe Jazz Festival	1,200	2,500	1,440	20.00%
The Current	15,000	20,000	18,000	20.00%

The Selectboard also instructed the Manager to increase the transfer to the Equipment Fund from \$550,000 to \$1,350,000, using \$800,000 of Undesignated Surplus Funds, no impact to tax rate. Mr. Safford noted this would not have an impact on the projected tax rate and would help cover the anticipated deficit in the Equipment Fund which was caused in part due to the loss of a municipal discount which has impacted vehicle prices by as much as 40%. He also indicated that he has tasked the Assistant Public Works Director to provide a comprehensive update of the Equipment Fund for the Selectboard's consideration this upcoming year. It is anticipated that this may cause additional funding requirements through an increase in the annual transfer and/or another one-time transfer. The additional funding may be caused by new vehicles now costing over \$10,000 requiring inclusion in the Equipment Fund and changes in life cycle assumptions.

Finally, the Selectboard instructed the Manager to earmark the entire Moscow Playground project in FY'26 which would increase it from \$10,000 to \$75,000.

Mr. Safford indicated that the Selectboard's 1/22/25 meeting would be a public hearing then the Selectboard would have time to further deliberate, so that the Selectboard can finalize the operating and capital budgets for adoption at a special meeting starting at 5:30 on 1/29/25.

Manager's Report

Mr. Safford reminded those in attendance about the upcoming **Lamoille Legislative Breakfast** at the Akeley Building on February 3, 2025 at 8:00am. Tickets are \$8. To register visit: <https://lamoilleconomy.org/breakfast/>

Mr. Safford reviewed the staff's compilation of historic Town and school budgets and tax rates from FY78 to FY25. The chart showed the municipal general fund budget, municipal property tax collected, Stowe school district general fund budget, and education property tax collected for each fiscal year.

Historic tax rates can be found on the Town website:

<https://www.stowevt.gov/Departments/Town-Clerk-Treasurer/Property-Taxes/Tax-Rates>

The Town has received the results of the **2024 Equalization Study**. This is the first study since the Townwide reappraisal. The calculated CLA is 105.77%. New in 2025 is the inclusion of a "Statewide Adjustment" variable in the education tax rate formula. For Stowe, this was calculated as 146.17%.

Passport Acceptance Event: The Town will be hosting a Passport Acceptance Event, run by the State Department / Vermont Passport Agency, at the Akeley Memorial Building from January 22 to January 25. Appointments are required, but walk-ins are welcome on January 23, 10:00am - 1:00pm.

Executive Session

Ms. Sabel Courtney moved to enter executive session to discuss personnel. Mr. Carlson seconded. Motion carried (5-0).

The Selectboard entered executive session at 8:35pm. The Selectboard left executive session at 8:50 pm.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Adams adjourned the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Notes

Minutes submitted by Susan Moeck.

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.townofstowevt.org/selectboardrecordings>