

Local Governance

Local municipal government in Vermont plays a special and important role in the everyday lives of residents and visitors by providing essential services, maintaining public infrastructure, and helping to shape the character and future of the community. Municipal governments are also responsible for a wide range of services—including road maintenance, emergency response, land use planning, water and sewer systems, recreation, public health and safety, elections, collecting property taxes, and managing budgets. What makes municipal government in Vermont truly unique is the strong tradition of local control and direct citizen participation. Through Town Meeting, elected boards, and appointed volunteer committees, residents have meaningful opportunities to influence local policy and decisions. This local involvement promotes participation, responsiveness, and a strong sense of shared community responsibility.

The Town of Stowe depends on the dedication of over ninety elected and appointed volunteers to support local services and guide local governance. Throughout the community engagement process for this plan, residents consistently expressed appreciation for the high-quality services, facilities, and infrastructure that support Stowe's exceptional quality of life. From elected and appointed officials to the Town Manager, municipal staff, and engaged community members, every member of the community plays a part in keeping Stowe a vibrant, welcoming, and resilient place to live and visit. This chapter outlines the structure and financing of our municipal government and our individual and collective responsibilities we all carry in shaping Stowe's future.

Municipal Government

After over a century as separate entities, the Town and Village of Stowe merged in 1996 following voter approval, dissolving the Village as a distinct legal and geographic municipal corporation. Today, the Town of Stowe provides a full range of municipal services, including police and rescue services, fire and rescue services, road maintenance, recreation programs, library services, and water and sanitary services (within designated areas).

The five-member elected Selectboard serves as the legislative body of the Town. Its responsibilities include enacting ordinances, adopting policies to guide local government administration, authorizing all Town expenditures, approving the general fund budget for voter consideration at Town Meeting, and setting the tax rate. The Selectboard is also the Water and Sewer Commission, Liquor Commission, and Cannabis Control Commission, appoints a Town Manager, appoints members of various municipal boards and commissions, and accepts public infrastructure and classifies town highways.

On November 6, 2006, Stowe voters adopted the Council-Manager form of government, replacing the Selectboard-Town Meeting form of government. This change was made to promote more professional and efficient local governance by separating administrative

functions from policy-making responsibilities. Under the Council-Manager system, the Selectboard serves as the Town's legislative body. It is responsible for setting policy, approving budgets, enacting local laws, and guiding long-term planning and community priorities. The Selectboard appoints a Town Manager to be the Town's Chief Executive Officer. The Town Manager is appointed based on their executive, administrative, and professional qualifications rather than political affiliation, and cannot be a candidate for or simultaneously hold an elective office within the Town, nor can they be employed by the Town in any capacity except as Town Manager.

The Town Manager oversees the day-to-day operations of the municipal government, hires and manages staff (excluding the Stowe Electric Department), prepares and administers the annual budget, enforces ordinances, provides policy advice to the Selectboard, and ensures the delivery of public services in a professional manner. The Manager may not hold or seek elective office in the Town, nor participate in political party activities. This form of government ensures a clear division of responsibilities: the Town Manager handles administration, while the Selectboard focuses on policy and governance, creating a more streamlined and accountable system.

Additional elected municipal positions include:

Town Moderator. Elected to serve a one-year term, the Town Moderator is the municipal official who presides over Annual Town Meeting, and in some cases, other special Town meetings.

Listers. Consisting of three members, the Board of Listers direct and review the work of the Town Appraiser and is responsible for the Town's Grand List of approximately 4,500 parcels. The Board also hears grievance hearings.

Justices of the Peace (JPs). JPs have a variety of responsibilities, primarily related to elections, tax appeals, marriages, administering oaths, and acting as magistrates. JPs are also members of the Board of Civil Authority (BCA), which plays a crucial role in local elections and tax assessments.

In addition to elected positions, residents can actively contribute to their community by serving on municipal boards or commissions. Appointed by the Selectboard, municipal boards and commissions play an important role in local governance, serving in both advisory and quasi-judicial capacities. While the Development Review Board serves in an independent quasi-judicial role, many of the other boards and commissions study specific policy areas that affect the community and make recommendations to the Selectboard. For example, the Recreation Commission might advise on recreation programs and facilities, while the Conservation Commission might advise on the management of town-owned conserved properties.

All municipal boards and commissions are supported by a municipal staff person for the purposes of warning the meeting and taking minutes, but also to advise the board in their decision-making and assist them with gathering data and information. The Town Manager is an ex-officio member of all Town Boards and Commissions but does not vote.

Arts & Culture Council (10 members). The Arts & Culture Council promotes Stowe as a vibrant arts and culture destination and advocates for the interests of local arts organizations—both nonprofit and for-profit—while fostering collaboration with schools, businesses, municipal departments, and the wider community. It also advises the Selectboard on opportunities to integrate arts into town planning and other facets of municipal government.

Cemetery Commission (7 members). The Cemetery Commission is responsible for overseeing the Town's seven cemeteries, administering cemetery regulations, maintaining records, and planning for future cemetery needs.

Conservation Commission (7 members). The Conservation Commission advises the Selectboard and Planning Commission on the Town's natural resources and is responsible for stewarding and managing town-owned conserved properties.

Development Review Board (DRB) (7 members + Alternates). The DRB is a quasi-judicial body charged with administering the Town's zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations. The DRB also hears appeals of Zoning Administrator decisions.

Energy Committee (7 members). The Energy Committee advises the Selectboard, Planning Commission, and Town Manager on energy policy and works to promote energy efficiency, conservation, renewable energy, and emissions reduction. It engages residents, businesses, and visitors through education and outreach, raises awareness of energy issues, and builds support for sustainable practices.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) (5-9 members). The HPC performs design review for exterior alterations, demolition, and relocation of historic buildings and for any development within the Stowe Historic Overlay District (SHOD). The HPC also advises the Selectboard on matters involving historic preservation and the treatment of municipally owned historic properties.

Library Trustees (7 members). The Library Board of Trustees is responsible for assessing library needs for the community, developing a plan of service, and evaluating library performance. The Board is the governing body of the library, carrying full responsibility for general policymaking and for securing funds to implement adopted policies.

Planning Commission (7 members + 2 non-voting members). The Planning Commission is advisory to the Selectboard and is responsible for both long-range planning functions and developing land use regulations. Responsibilities include preparing the Town Plan,

drafting land use and development regulations, and offering policy recommendations on matters related to Stowe's growth and development.

Recreation Commission (8 members). The Recreation Commission is advisory to the Selectboard and recommends facility development and use of the Town's recreational facilities including the Stowe Arena, Village and Moscow ball fields, Recreation Path and Quiet Path, David Gale Center and Mayo Fields.

Stowe Electric Utility Commission (3 members). The Stowe Electric Utility Commission is responsible for hiring the Stowe Electric Department General Manager, subject to a Selectboard veto, and provides policy guidance for the Stowe Electric Department.

Other appointments by the Selectboard include:

- Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District Supervisor
- Health Officer & Deputy Health Officer
- Constable
- Agent to Convey Real Estate
- Fence Viewers
- Tree Warden
- Town Fire Warden
- Appraiser for the Board of Listers
- Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC) Representatives
- LCPC Transportation Advisory Committee
- Lamoille FiberNet CUD Representative

Recognizing the unique insights and energy that young people bring to the community, many municipal boards and commissions include student representatives. These positions not only allow students to share fresh perspectives on local issues but also provide valuable opportunities to learn about the roles and responsibilities of municipal government—fostering civic engagement and a lasting interest in public service.

Municipal Departments

Municipal departments and employees are essential to the safety, well-being, and quality of life in Stowe. They provide important municipal services—from maintaining roads and infrastructure to delivering emergency response, water and sewer services, recreation, and public health and safety—that keep the community running smoothly for both residents and visitors.

The Town of Stowe operates twelve municipal departments, each responsible for key public services. The Town employs 71 full-time staff, 63 part-time employees (including police, fire, EMS, and Mountain Rescue), and 20 seasonal workers in parks and summer programs, making the municipality one of Stowe's significant local employers.

Majority of the administrative offices of municipal government are located in the Town Offices in the Akeley Memorial Building on Main Street. This prominent historic brick building was constructed in 1902 as a soldier's memorial, and in the past housed the post office, a jail, the Union Bank, and the Stowe Free Library. Today, it is home to the Town Manager's Office, Town Clerk, Finance Department, Planning & Zoning Department, Human Resources, Assessor's Office, Information Technology, and Department of Public Works.

Town Manager's Office. The Town Manager is the Chief Executive Officer of the Town of Stowe and is responsible for the day-to-day administration of municipal government. Since 1986 the Selectboard's office has had at least two full-time municipal staff, including the Town Administrator or Town Manager and an Executive Assistant or the Assistant Town Manager.

Town Clerk & Treasurer. The Town Clerk & Treasurer Office is responsible for receiving and recording of all land and vital records, administering elections, receiving the payment of taxes and fees, the issuance of certified copies of birth, death and marriage certificates, and the issuance of civil marriage licenses and dog licenses. In addition to receiving, recording and issuing these documents, this office is responsible for the maintenance, indexing, and storage of all of these records as required by State law.

Assessor's Office. The Assessor's Office is responsible for establishing property values of all real property within the municipality. The department is responsible for the administration of all laws and regulations regarding property tax assessments.

Public Works Department. The Public Works Department is responsible for the Highway, Sewer and Water Departments, the development and implementation of capital projects and providing technical assistance to other departments.

Human Resources Department. The Human Resources (HR) Department is responsible for assisting the Town Manager and department heads with employee recruitment, onboarding, counselling, corrective action, training, and termination. HR also assists with benefits and assists the Town Manager with labor negotiations.

Information Technology (IT). The IT Department is responsible for managing technology infrastructure and services and advancing associated capital projects. The department handles everything from computer networks and hardware to software applications and cybersecurity.

Planning & Zoning Department. The Planning & Zoning Department manages comprehensive planning and land use permitting. The department processes development applications, issues zoning permits, guides applicants through the

development review process, and enforces local zoning and subdivision regulations. It also supports long-range planning efforts related to housing, transportation, conservation, and historic preservation.

Finance Department. The Finance Department supports all departments with the processing of payments for services and goods with vendors, paychecks for all town employees and volunteers, monthly financial reporting of expenditures and revenues, and the development of yearly budgets and the benefit administration for all employees. Finance also assists the Town Manager with labor negotiations.

While the administrative offices are housed in the Akeley Memorial Building, several other municipal departments are located at various sites throughout Stowe, including:

Electric Department. An enterprise division of the Town of Stowe, the Electric Department delivers clean, reliable, and affordable energy to local customers. In addition to power services, the department manages billing for the Town's Water and Sewer Departments.

Fire & Rescue Department. Formed through the merger of the Fire and EMS departments in 2024, the Fire & Rescue Department is dedicated to protecting life, property, and the environment through prevention, education, and emergency services. The department also provides mutual aid support to surrounding communities when needed.

Stowe Free Library. The Stowe Free Library is a hub for knowledge, discovery, and community engagement. Beyond lending books, it offers access to online resources, computers, internet, and a wide variety of community programs. Committed to lifelong learning and free access to information, the library fosters curiosity and connection for all.

Parks & Recreation Department. Comprising the Parks Division, Stowe Arena, and the David Gale Recreation Center, the Parks & Recreation Department maintains recreational facilities and offers a broad range of programs and events. Its mission is to enhance community well-being through accessible leisure opportunities.

Police Department. The Stowe Police Department provides essential public safety services, including patrol, investigation, and traffic enforcement. Officers respond to emergencies, maintain order during special events, and serve as the primary law enforcement presence for residents and visitors alike.

Public Works – Sewer Department. The Sewer Department ensures safe and efficient wastewater management for the community and operates, maintains, and repairs the Town's wastewater treatment plant and its 19-mile collection system, which includes three sanitary sewer pump stations.

Public Works – Water Department. The Water Department oversees the operation, maintenance, and repair of the Town’s water system, which includes two well sources, treatment works averaging 465,000 gallons daily, nine storage tanks, eleven pump stations, and eighteen miles of distribution lines. The department also supports five connected water systems with varying operational responsibilities.

Public Works – Highway Department. The Highway Department is responsible for maintaining and repairing nearly 100 miles of roads, 24 bridges, over 600 culverts, sidewalks, and municipal parking areas. Known for their versatility, department staff also support a range of other essential town operations.

Stowe Mountain Rescue. Stowe Mountain Rescue provides highly specialized technical rescue services for the Town of Stowe and surrounding areas. Their expertise includes backcountry rescue, swift water and flood response, and wilderness search operations.

Community facilities, services, and public utilities are explained in further detail in **Chapter XX.**

Financing Municipal Government

Vermont is a Dillon’s Rule state, meaning local municipal governments only have the powers expressly granted to them by the state legislature. This legal framework limits the authorities of municipalities, particularly in matters such as taxation and zoning. Essentially, local municipal governments are limited to what the state explicitly allows them to do.

Municipal governments in Vermont primarily fund their General Fund operations through local property taxes local option taxes, and user fees. The property tax is the most significant revenue source, supporting general government services as well as public schools through the statewide education funding system. Municipalities may also generate revenue through user fees to support water, sewer, and electric utilities. **Figure XX** illustrates the portions of state and local taxes collected and those retained by the State of Vermont and the Town of Stowe.

In Vermont, property tax bills are made up of two main components:

1. Municipal taxes
2. State education taxes

While they appear together on the same bill, they serve different purposes and are governed by separate processes.

Municipal taxes are levied by the Town to fund local services such as road maintenance, police, fire and rescue, recreation, libraries, and general government operations. Each municipality sets its own municipal tax rate based on its annual budget, which in Stowe is approved by voters via Australian Ballot on Town Meeting Day.

Under the Town Charter, the Town Manager is responsible for preparing the annual municipal budget and delivering the proposed budget to the Selectboard for consideration before being advanced to the voters for approval. In collaboration with department heads, the Town Manager evaluates operational needs, reviews expenditures, and drafts a budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins on July 1st. The proposed budget is then presented to the Selectboard, which reviews, revises, and ultimately approves the budget to be presented to voters at Town Meeting, held the first Tuesday of March. Upon voter approval, the adopted municipal budget determines the amount to be raised in taxes. The Selectboard applies this to the Grand List to set the municipal tax rate.

The education portion of the property tax funds Vermont's public schools and is governed by the state's education funding system. The education tax rate is set by the state each year and varies by town depending on local school spending and student enrollment.

There are separate homestead and non-homestead education tax rates:

- Homestead rate applies to properties where the property owner has declared it to be their primary residence which they occupy for at least six months of the year.
- Non-homestead rate applies to any taxable property without a homestead declaration.

Homeowners who qualify based on income may receive a property tax credit for their homestead property, which reduces the amount owed on the education portion of the bill.

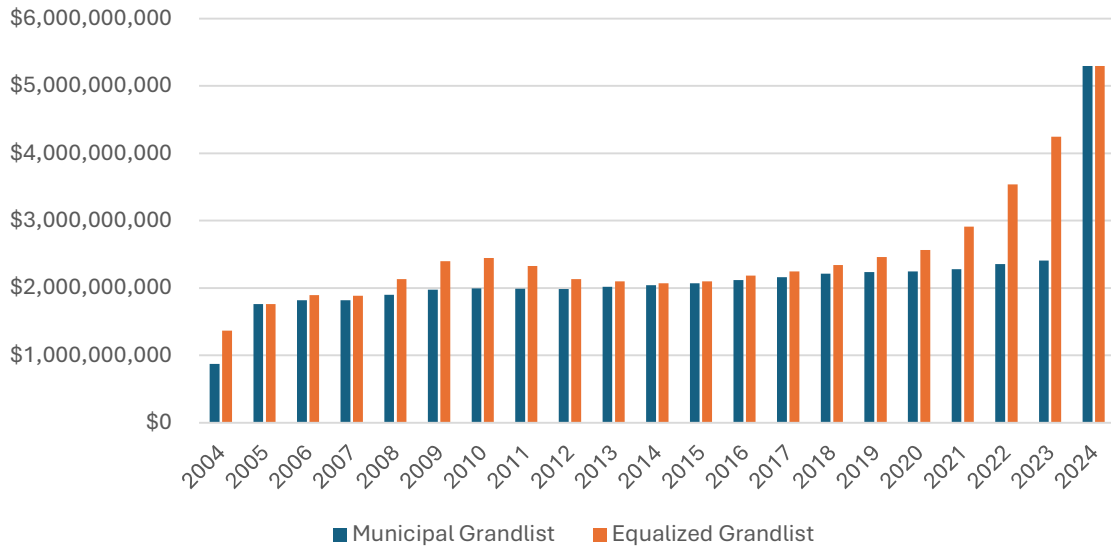
The Town of Stowe issues quarterly tax bills that combine:

- The municipal tax rate, set locally.
- The education tax rate, set by the state.

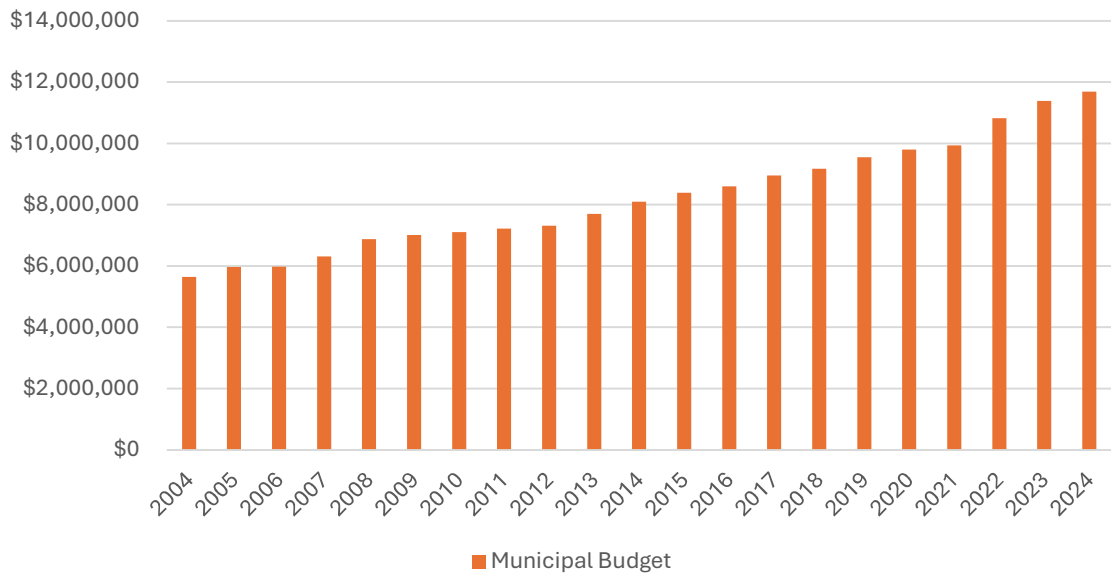
Both are applied to the property's assessed value, resulting in a single bill for the taxpayer.

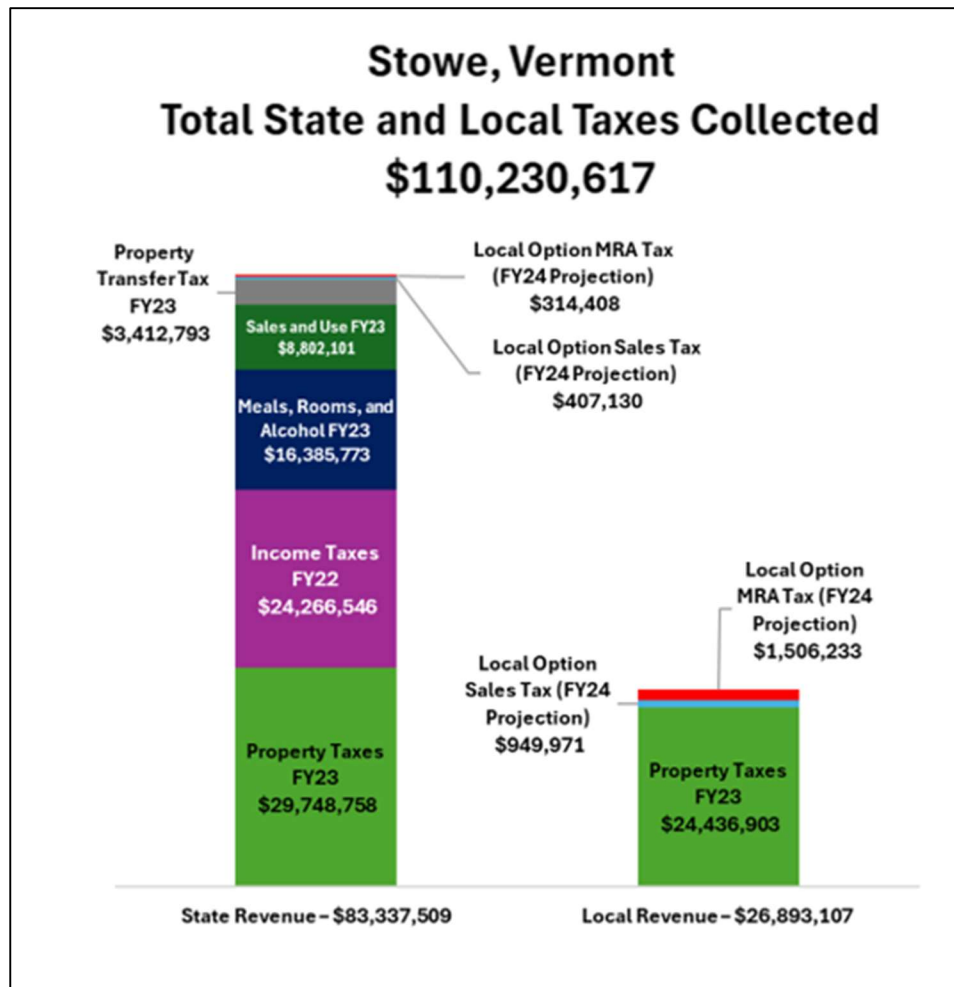
Stowe has long benefited from a relatively strong and stable local tax base, supported by growth in the grand list, and a history of public and private investment in the community. In 2024, the Town's equalized municipal Grand List was \$ 5,025,858,000, which ranked it third in the state of Vermont after Burlington and South Burlington.

Town of Stowe Grandlist 2004-2024



Municipal Budget 2004-2024





(Draft- Update with current information)

Because of the high grand list and low number of students, taxpayers in Stowe contribute the largest net payment to the state education fund of any municipality in Vermont. The table below shows the top ten municipalities in the state contributing to the education fund in FY 2025 and the change since FY 2015

Town	FY25	FY15	% Increase	\$ Increase
Stowe	\$41,598,457	\$19,479,912	114%	\$22,118,545
Ludlow	\$22,787,287	\$15,926,789	43%	\$6,860,498
Killington	\$16,778,033	\$8,885,669	89%	\$7,892,364
Dover	\$16,680,242	\$11,127,038	50%	\$5,553,204
Williston	\$16,564,958	\$3,232,106	413%	\$13,332,852
Stratton	\$14,342,385	\$11,477,312	25%	\$2,865,073
Woodstock	\$12,404,986	\$6,494,108	91%	\$5,910,878
Warren	\$11,762,237	\$6,103,886	93%	\$5,658,351
Winhall	\$10,384,837	\$8,280,241	25%	\$2,104,596
South Burlington	\$10,123,792	\$3,789,932	167%	\$6,333,860

The net payment represents the Town's education property tax liability to the State Treasury, after subtracting the property taxes required to fund the local school budget. In FY 2025, 77 out of 256 towns in Vermont contributed more property taxes to the state education fund than they received.

Stowe had a common level of appraisal ratio in FY'25 of 105.77. The following are the FY' 2025 property tax rates:

FY'2025 Property Tax Rates (p/\$100)	
Town General Fund Tax	\$0.2198
State and Local Education Taxes	\$1.1170
Voter Approved Tax Exemptions	\$0.0022
Total Homestead Tax Rate:	\$1.3390

Town General Fund Tax	\$0.2198
State and Local Education Taxes	\$1.1159
Voter Approved Tax Exemptions	\$0.0022
Total Non-Homestead Tax Rate	\$1.3379

Local Option Tax

Local Option Tax (LOT) is a way for municipalities in Vermont to raise additional revenue. A municipality may vote to levy the following 1% local option taxes in addition to state business taxes.

Local Option Sales Tax: 6% sales tax + 1% = 7% total tax

Local Option Meals Tax: 9% meals tax + 1% = 10% total tax

Local Option Alcoholic Beverage Tax: 10% alcohol tax + 1% = 11% total tax

Local Option Rooms Tax: 9% rooms tax + 1% = 10% total tax

The ability for the Town to collect a tax of this nature was borne out of the State's Act 60, the Equal Educational Opportunity Act, enacted in June 1997. In the process of creating statewide education funding, the state recognized the funding formula, which is primarily derived from property taxes, was going to have a disproportionate impact on some Vermont communities. As a result, they permitted these communities, of which Stowe is one, to collect revenues from an additional 1% tax on rooms, meals, and alcohol. The Town receives 70% of the 1% collected, with the other 30% being directed to the state PILOT fund. Additionally, the State permitted the same group of towns to collect an additional 1% Local Option Sales and Use Tax. At the March 2006 Annual Town Meeting, the Town adopted a 1% Local Options Tax on rooms, meals, and alcoholic beverages and at the Town Meeting in March 2023, Town voters approved the collection of the additional 1% Local Option Sales and Use Tax to be used to support the General Fund.

Through Selectboard policy monies received from -rooms, meals, and alcohol taxes are held in the General Fund Capital Reserve Fund and allocated to capital spending unless the voters have otherwise earmarked the money. Except for vehicles, the Capital Reserve Fund is used to acquire or construct large capital facilities or assets, other than those accounted for in enterprise or trust funds. The Capital Fund Policy outlines the adopted local process for capital planning.

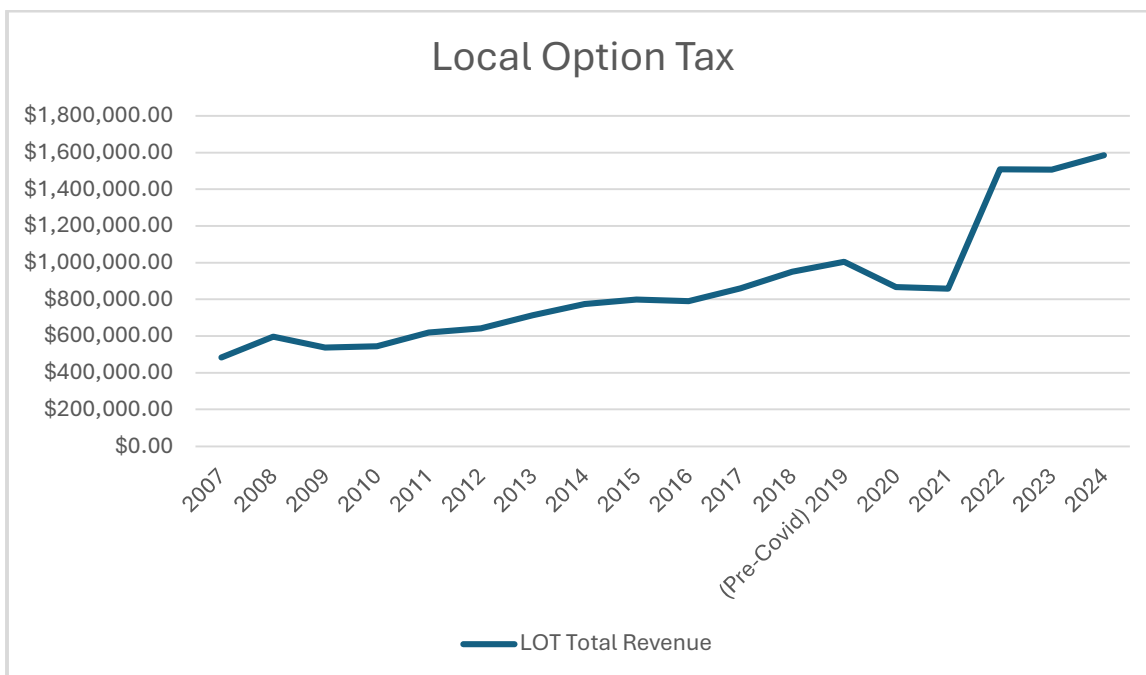


Figure X shows the steady increase in Local Option Tax revenue from \$483,700 in 2007 to \$1,586,501 in 2024. At the 2013 Annual Town Meeting, voters approved a measure to earmark \$350,000 per year from the LOT revenue to go towards the bond payment for the Stowe Arena. The bond payment for the Stowe Arena will be paid off in (insert year). Additionally, an estimated \$201,327 is applied for the annual debt payment for the overhead utility line project. Otherwise, LOT revenue is held in the Capital Reserve Fund and is used for capital projects. In 2024, the Capital Reserve Fund had \$1,859,554 of unallocated capital reserves. Each year, the Selectboard considers proposed and recommended capital projects as part of the municipal budget process.

Equipment Reserve Fund

In 2008, the town voted to establish an equipment reserve fund, so that each new piece of equipment would not have to be voted on separately at Town Meeting. The purpose of the reserve fund policy to acknowledge the importance of equipment in municipal operations and to plan for its replacement in a financially sustainable manner. Each year the Selectboard considers equipment replacement as part of the general fund budget process.