

Stowe Selectboard Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting

**Wednesday, January 14, 2026
5:30pm**

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



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

In-Person Attendees: Town Manager Charles Safford, Assistant Town Manager Will Fricke, Finance Director Cindy Fuller, Public Works Director Harry Shepard, Jed Lipsky, Sheri Baraw, Rich Scott, Becky Scott, Walter Frame, Mike Giorgio, Patrick Bilow, Robi Artman-Hodge (12)

Zoom Attendees: Marina Meerburg, Alexandra Horst, John Underwood, Huntley Armbruster, Mila Lonetto, Paul Sakash, Tom Hand, Adrienne Johnson, and four others (12)

Call to Order

Chair Paco Aumand called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Approval of the Agenda

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

Consent Agenda (Items A-1 through A-2)

1. January 8, 2026 Selectboard Minutes
2. Liquor Items

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

Public Hearing Regarding Local Option Tax Charter Change (Item B-1)

Mr. Aumand read the proposed charter amendments. He said the Selectboard had affordability and taxes as a major component of agenda this year and has sought alternative revenue sources. From that, requesting an additional 1% on the local option tax seemed like the best way to move forward. He added that there has been debate historically on the 1% meals rooms and alcohol tax passed in 2006, and before it was passed the Selectboard adopted a resolution stating that it would be used for capital projects. He said it no one Selectboard can bind a future Selectboard to how they use tax dollars to support the operating expenses of community.

Mr. Aumand read the final section of a resolution passed unanimously by the Selectboard on January 8, 2026:

WHEREAS, one Selectboard cannot bind a future Selectboards or voters, but there are several reasons to consider adopting additional Local Option Taxes which may include, but are not be limited to, reducing reliance on property taxes to fund municipal services and capital projects, supporting essential improvements to public infrastructure, such as road maintenance and flood mitigation projects, which benefit both residents and visitors; ensuring adequate funding for essential services like the fire department and rescue operations, including the transition to paid staff to maintain consistent, reliable service levels; and allocating funds for community priorities such as housing development and economic development initiatives.

Mr. Aumand added that the process is not just local; if voters approve it, it then has to be approved by the VT legislature. He said State Representative Jed Liskpy, who is in attendance, has already offered to introduce it as a bill.

Mr. Carlson said reducing reliance on property tax has been major tenant of this board regarding affordability, and when they had a meeting with their legislators in April, they asked the community to bring constructive ideas. He said this represents a constructive path forward to address some of the pain they feel on the property tax front.

Ms. Sabel Courtney noted that in the Stowe Reporter interview with Stowe's state senators, all three were generally in agreement about approving it.

Mr. Donza said he sees this as broadening and diversifying how revenue is collected and reducing reliance on property taxes. He added the Town approved a sales tax three years ago and it has generally been good and combatted a rise they otherwise would have seen in property taxes.

Ms. Gadbois said they can't keep coming back to same well of property tax, and there are a lot of visitors in a tourism community who use infrastructure and services. They can't just keep asking property owners to pay for everything.

Chair Aumand requested public comment.

Rich Scott asked if this would be revenue neutral and whether property taxes would go down. Mr. Safford said it would be up to future Selectboards and voters how much would reduce property taxes or create fiscal capacity for additional needs, wants, and desires. He said there are plenty of fiscal challenges and the challenges we face today may be different in a decade, so the article is left general. Mr. Donza said voters approve budgets and debt, and the Board can't unilaterally spend new revenue without asking the voters first. Mr. Aumand said it is fair to say this is a cost containment initiative, and Stowe is a vibrant community that needs to respond to ongoing infrastructure and public safety needs. Mr. Carlson said he doesn't know what the budget will be next year but they are estimating this as \$3 million in new revenue, and property taxes will be \$3m less than what it would otherwise have been.

Sheri Baraw Smith asked how much of the revenue stays with the state. Mr. Safford said the Town retains 0.75% of the 1% plus administrative fees, and 0.25% is redistributed. Mr. Carlson said the fact that the state retains some makes it easier for the legislature to approve, and the Town isn't in a position to collect it regardless.

Mila Lonetto said she wanted to voice her support for the proposal, and asked the Selectboard to explain the difference between the education portion of the tax bill and the town portion, and also if they Board plans to market this to the legislature. Mr. Aumand said they have discussed a plan to advocate for it, and Jed Lipsky is here, but they don't want to get ahead of the process and don't want to assume it's a done deal. Ms. Gadbois said this would be part of the municipal portion of people's tax bills.

Mr. Lipsky asked if they had received feedback from the business community. Mr. Aumand said he had not heard feedback yet. Mr. Carlson said he will take time until Town Meeting to get feedback from businesses. He added that they separated it into two articles and the votes may be different for the two components.

Mr. Lipsky said when there is a bill that deals with fiscal issues there is a fiscal note, and it should note whether the tax is progressive or regressive. Mr. Safford said property tax and consumption tax can generally be considered regressive, but the Meals, Rooms, and Alcohol tax is applied to luxury items generally. The sales tax has a lot of essentials exempted. They have information on exemptions on their website. That is not to say the legislature could not remove exemptions, but those elements make a regressive tax more progressive.

Mr. Donza said that it is important to get input from the business community, but it is also important to look at all the community does for businesses. He said the Town pays for Stowe Area Association's portion of the shuttle, and pays for the public bathrooms at the visitor center and the depot building. He added that the Town also paid to underground the main street utility lines so tourists could get better pictures, the Rec Path is mostly used by tourists, and it can be assumed that Stowe Mountain Rescue mostly saves visitors. He said a lot is put on this municipality by the business community and this gets to a more balanced split of what we need.

Mr. Lipsky noted that the state transportation fund is in the red. Mr. Aumand recalled the Town paying to repave Maple Street in 2025 as an example of the needs in the community. Mr. Safford noted that by state law, the state is supposed to repave Class 1 Highways, but that timeline keeps getting pushed back and the Town finds itself in a position to have to come in and do it. VLCT has tried to make it known that municipalities also face fiscal stress and increasingly have to pick up the cost for legislative mandates by the state and feds.

Marina Meerburg said she owns a small tour business in town and is fine with paying extra LOT. The infrastructure quality in town affects their tours.

Walter Frame asked about the process for approving local option taxes. Mr. Safford explained that state statute only permits a municipality to vote a 1% sales tax. If the municipality wants greater taxing authority, then it needs to vote to amend its charter and have it also approved by the Vermont Legislature.

Paul Sakash said that if this goes through, LOT would make up nearly a third of the Town budget. He said the money shouldn't end up in a reserve fund and would want it to go towards reducing property taxes. Mr. Donza said right now the money would go into the general fund. Mr. Safford said the Selectboard would decide how much would go into reserves to carry over. It is prudent to carry two months cash flow and they were lucky to have it in 2024 with the flooding, which they are still waiting on reimbursement for.

Ms. Baraw Smith asked if they would lose the 1% they have already if the legislature doesn't approve the charter amendment. Mr. Safford said they would default to status quo, but the legislature could do anything they wanted.

Chair Aumand closed the public hearing at 6:20pm.

Mr. Safford noted to Mr. Lipsky that the Town would likely not be opposed to the legislature giving all Towns the authority for additional local option taxes. Mr. Donza added that other ski Towns like Vail, Colorado have hundreds of employees to collect sales taxes themselves. Mr. Lipsky said he is cautiously optimistic there will a lot of support in the legislature. Ms. Gadbois said they do so much as a Town, but it costs money, and a world class experience in Stowe generates money for the state.

FY'27 General Fund Operating & Capital Budget Deliberations (Item B-2, B-3)

Ms. Gadbois said she thinks this is a very responsible budget. Mr. Aumand said staff did a great job putting it together.

Mr. Aumand asked what the Board what they want to do regarding appropriations. He said he is not necessarily supportive of an increase over 20% for the farmers market or jazz festival. Ms. Gadbois said she isn't in favor of over 20% for anyone. Mr. Carlson said that despite the policy there are some smaller appropriations where he would rather go over 20% and some larger ones where he would go under 20%. Mr. Safford said it is entirely within the Board's discretion.

Ms. Sabel Courtney moved to increase appropriations for VT Foundation for Recovery, River Arts Vermont, Stowe Performing Arts, Stowe Farmers Market, Stowe Jazz Festival, Stowe Trails Partnership by 20%, and to not increase the appropriation for Stowe Area Association. Mr. Carlson seconded. Motion carried (4-0). Ms. Gadbois abstained.

Ms. Gadbois moved to approve the capital fund projects as presented. Ms. Sabel Courtney seconded. Motion carried (5-0).

Draft Annual Meeting Warning Review

The Selectboard discussed the draft warning. Ms. Sabel Courtney noted that Selectboard members are BCA members and can help with elections. Mr. Donza said he wanted to utilize the public to be heard section. The Selectboard noted minor administrative corrections to the warning. No formal action was taken.

Manager's Report (Item C-1)

Mr. Donza asked about the shelter generator. Mr. Shepard said they have contracted for it but it about a year lead time.

Ms. Sabel Courtney noted that this year is the 25th anniversary of 9/11 and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Ms. Gadbois moved to change the February 25th meeting to February 24th. Ms. Sabel Courtney seconded. Motion carried 5-0).

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

No public comment.

Executive Session

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

The Selectboard entered executive session at 6:58pm and left at 7:08pm.

Mr. Carlon moved to appoint John Underwood to the Energy Committee as the student representative. Ms. Gadbois seconded. Motion carried (5-0).

Adjournment

The Selectboard adjourned at 7:09pm.

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>