

**Stowe Selectboard, Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting  
Monday January 9, 2023**

Present:

Selectboard Members: William Adams, Jo Sabel Courtney, Nick Donza, Lisa Hagerty, Paco Aumand  
In Person attendees: Paul Sakash, Harry Shepard, Cindy Fuller, Francine Chittenden, Eric Chittenden,  
Kathy Demars, Elise McKenna, James Lockridge, Heather Hobart, Shelia Goss, Leigh Pelletier, Robert  
Chase, Kerrie Lohr, Lynn Paparella, Carrie Simmons  
There were 12 participants on Zoom

**Call to Order**

Chair Billy Adams called the meeting to order at 5:34pm.

**Approve the Agenda**

On a motion by Ms. Jo Sabel Courtney, seconded by Ms. Lisa Hagerty, the Board approved the agenda with the addition of two Liquor Consent Items.

**Consent Agenda**

1. 12/27/22 Selectboard Minutes
2. Draft Annual Meeting Warning
3. Liquor Consent Items

On a motion by Ms. Courtney, seconded by Ms. Hagerty, the Board approved the Consent Agenda with the two additional Liquor Consent Items.

**Social Services Requests**

The Town of Stowe has received requests for increased appropriations from two Social Service agencies for FY'24. These agencies were asked to come to the meeting to discuss their programs, services provided and reason for increased request. Chair Adams noted that the Board would hear testimony tonight and would render decisions on funding for the FY'24 budget at their January 18<sup>th</sup> special meeting.

Lamoille Restorative Center currently receives \$1,250 in funding from the Town of Stowe, and has requested \$3,000 in FY'24, a 140% increase. Heather Hobart, Executive Director, explained that the Restorative Center has been working since 1979 to serve the community using restorative justice principles. They currently run 11 programs, with 17 staff members and 25+ volunteers that served 883 people last year, 10% of which came from Stowe. These programs include youth services (employment, transitions out of foster care, school engagement) as well as diversion programs, and programs that focus on substance use and mental health. Ms. Hobart noted that Stowe had the most substance use charges per capita of any towns in the county, which includes underage drinking and marijuana use. She noted that the increased request was to help offset increasing costs in staffing (attracting and retaining employees) and offset a cut in funding from DCF last year. She explained she had asked four other towns for increased funding as well, but was not aware previously of the 20% cap on increases listed as a guideline in the Town of Stowe Appropriation Policy.

Lamoille Home Health Agency currently receives \$12,942 in funding from the Town of Stowe, and has requested \$15,669 in FY'24, a 21% increase. Kathy Demars, Executive Director, described her agency which conducted over 46,000 home visits across the county in 2022, with 6,500 of those in Stowe. This includes nursing, physical therapy, social work, hospice and prenatal care. She also noted that they provide hospice care for those traveling to Stowe for their final days. They have 95 employees and 45 volunteers to provide care to patients, which never stopped during the pandemic. She noted her request

has historically been based on a calculation of \$3 per person based on the US Census numbers, and with the increase in population from the 2010 census to the 2020 census, this caused the increased request. She uses this same calculation to all towns in Lamoille County. She also noted that inflation costs and Medicare cuts make this funding critically important.

### **Economic & Community Services Requests**

The Town of Stowe has received requests for new or increased appropriations from ten non-profits that provide Economic Development or Community Services for FY'24 budget. These agencies were asked to come to the meeting to discuss their programs, services provided and reason for increased request. Chair Adams noted that the Board would hear testimony tonight and would render decisions on funding for the FY'24 budget at their January 19<sup>th</sup> special meeting.

Big Heavy World is a non-profit organization based out of Burlington that focuses on Vermont-made music and musicians, and has not received funding from Stowe in the past. They have requested \$250 in funding in FY'24 for their all-volunteer based program. Executive Director James Lockridge explained that they have a number of diverse projects related to music ranging from a history museum and podcast to music festivals and band directory. He noted that Stowe musicians, inclusive of all genres and abilities, will benefit from having these programs, as well as any youth that might be interested in the music industry.

Friends of Waterbury Reservoir is a non-profit organization run mostly by volunteers with some seasonal paid staff that assists the State of Vermont at the Waterbury Reservoir. They have previously received \$500 in funding from the Town and have requested \$1,000 in FY'24, a 100% increase. Eric Chittenden, representing the 9-member Board of Directors, spoke to the increase being used to fund additional greeters for the Invasive Species monitoring program. They currently pay someone for 1 8-hour shift per week seasonally, and would like to increase that. This program is not financially supported by the State.

Lamoille County Conservation District Executive Director Peter Danforth noted that their agency has received \$500 in funding in the past, and has requested \$700 in FY'24. He explained the organization provides youth conservation programming and watershed consulting. He indicated that he asked for the increase because he has been working with the Town of Stowe on Stormwater planning and IDing places that need to be addressed. He currently has a staff of 3 and received most of their funding from grants.

Lamoille Housing Partnership has requested a 20% increase in funding for FY'24, from the current funding of \$6,000 to \$7,200. Kerrie Lohr, Advancement and Communications Director, explained that their organization helps provide affordable housing throughout Lamoille County, and recently opened up 9 units at the Riverbend Apartments on Maple Street in Stowe, as well as having units on Pucker Street and Sylvan Woods. She indicated that demand for affordable housing is growing rapidly, with pre-pandemic wait lists around 250 families now in 2022 hitting 496, nearly double the demand. The requesting funding will be used to help break ground on future housing projects.

Protect Our Wildlife is a Stowe-based all volunteer non-profit that is requesting \$5,000 in new funding from the Town of Stowe in FY'24. President and Co-Founder Brenna Galdenzi explained that her request is specifically to fund efforts to minimize bear-human conflicts in Stowe, a project they have been working with the Stowe Conservation Commission on. With garbage being the main attractant, this organization would use the funding to assist businesses with efforts to bear-proof their dumpsters. Some funding would also be used to run an educational campaign on how to minimize bear attractants. This pilot program and request for funding is supported by the Conservation Commission.

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Stowe American Legion currently receives \$350 in funding from the Town of Stowe for the purchase of flags to go on the graves of veterans. Robert Chase, representing the Legion Post #64, stated that the American Legion currently places approximately 525 flags on cemeteries in Stowe and costs have risen, causing the Legion to have to supplement, with their only source of income coming from rent of their building. The costs have now hit \$924 for the flags, so the Legion is requesting \$700 from the Town of Stowe. It was noted that volunteers place all of the flags on the graves in the spring and they are removed and properly destroyed in the fall. Chair Adams suggested that rather than being subject to the appropriations process, this funding should come from the Cemetery budget.

It was the consensus of the Board to earmark \$1,000 in the Stowe Cemetery budget for funding of flags for the Stowe American Legion.

Stowe Area Association Executive Director Carrie Simmons has requested a 20% increase in funding, from \$20,000 to \$24,000 in FY'24. The Association has been operating for 78 years as a driver of tourism and economic activity in Stowe, and Ms. Simmons noted that this increase would help to continue to support their work, which includes welcoming and assisting new and existing businesses in Stowe, the Visitors Center on Main Street, and the GoStowe website and social media accounts.

Stowe Community Fund is a relatively new non-profit in Stowe, with Board Member Leigh Pelletier explaining that they began at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic as a subsidiary of Stowe Vibrancy to provide emergency assistance to those impacted by the pandemic. They have since been established as their own 501C3 organization with the goal of improving the quality of life for those who live and work in Stowe. They provide flexible support such as fundraising, grocery and utility assistance to those in crisis, holiday gift cards and meals assistance to those in need, and summer camp grants. The Fund has requested \$2,000 in new funding from the Town of Stowe in FY'24, which will be used to build their foundation and establish themselves as a permanent asset in the Town.

Stowe Jazz Festival is a non-profit, free, music event that occurs annually in Stowe. After taking a year off from funding following two years of not holding the event due to the pandemic, Stowe Jazz Festival has requested \$2,000 in funding, an increase over past funding of \$1,200, for FY'24. Sarah Henshaw, who works with Stowe Jazz Festival on grant writing, described the event as bringing in 126 musicians across 7 venues in Stowe, with over 3,000 people attending. She said they have future plans to focus on educational events around the festivals as well. She noted that over 80% of the budget for the festival goes directly to the artists, lodging, meals and equipment rentals.

Stowe Performing Arts Executive Director Lynn Paparella explained that her organization has increased their request from \$2,400 to \$3,000 in FY'24 as a result of rising costs in the music industry. She noted that her organization historically put on music programs in Stowe such as Music in the Meadow, Noon Music in May and educational programs in the schools. They have recently decided to end the Gazebo Concerts series due to declining attendance, but will use that time and money to increase the number of offerings in other programs. This year they are planning to increase the Music in the Meadow concerts from 3 to 5.

### **FY'24 Budget Deliberations**

Town Manager Charles Safford presented the Board with three budgeting scenarios based off of feedback from the December 27<sup>th</sup> meeting. Scenario 1 was based on decisions of the Selectboard at their 12/27/22 meeting instructing the Manager to move the two full time firefighter positions to begin on January 1, 2024, and move \$30,000 out of the Cultural Campus budget for repairs that will be funded out of the Capital Fund. This scenario would be a 13.314% increase in the budget, and an 11.09% property tax

increase, unless the Local Option Sales Tax is approved by voters, in which case the property tax increase would be reduced to 4.74%.

Scenario 2 incorporates the changes in Scenario 1 and also used undesignated surplus to reduce the amount of money to be raised by taxes. This scenario would increase the transfer of undesignated surplus from \$167,000 to \$350,000. This would leave 2.37 months of cash flow in undesignated reserves as supported by the auditors but would also reduce the budget increase to 11.62% with the tax rate increase being 9.43% without the Local Option Sales Tax, but would be a 3% property tax increase if the Sales Tax is approved. The downside of using the undesignated fund balance to lower property taxes is that its availability is not assured in the future which could create future budget/property tax pressure.

Scenario 3 incorporates both the changes in Scenarios 1 & 2 but also would include a one-time bolster to the Equipment Fund of \$815,000 from the undesignated surplus. This would reduce the undesignated surplus to 1.49 months of cash flow, however it would also eliminate a future liability as the Equipment Fund is expected to run in the negative within a few years due to inflation pressures and loss of the municipal discounts. The use of undesignated fund balance for this purpose would be considered one time spending.

The Board discussed concerns about the police budget, noting that the addition of one full time officer does not mean a reduction in overtime, as Mr. Safford noted this is to meet demands for services, not to reduce overtime. They also discussed the increase in the Chief of Police salary as he took on the Emergency Management role after the departure of the full time Fire Chief. They asked for a breakdown of what portion of the increase in the budget was already committed but unbudgeted in the current fiscal year and what was related to the upcoming cost of living increase. The Board also discussed COLA increases as included in the union agreements and personnel rules, as well as step increases which the Town offers every 2 years to recognize longevity.

The Board discussed the Fire Department chief position and if that should be hired prior to or after the planned study of the EMS/Fire Department structures. Mr. Safford asked for flexibility on when to hire the fire chief saying the study may impact the qualifications and how thus how we advertise for the position as it will look at organizational structure options, including the potential of the EMS and Fire Departments should merge. Mr. Donza suggested increasing volunteer pay from \$18 to \$20/hour, and asked how that would impact the overall budget. Mr. Safford indicated that \$18 is the minimum in Fire, EMS, and Stowe Mountain Rescue so if the Board considered it, they should be consistent across the emergency services. Also, for EMS providers the \$18 is for EMTs and AMETs and Paramedics receive higher pay. Raising the minimum may also cause these rates to increase if you wanted to maintain the spread between rates based on certifications levels.

The Board also discussed the requested increase for a third FTE in the Planning and Zoning department. Mr. Safford noted that historically there had been a third person to help with administrative duties and greeting people on the third floor of the Akeley Building, but it had been cut and now was needed again due to growing demands.

Finally, the Board discussed concerns that the Highway paving budget may not be enough to properly fix Barrows Road, although Public Works Director Harry Shepard indicated that he felt the issue is not so much structural but the need for additional thickness of paving. It was noted that the Town may apply for paving grants to try to increase the funding available for this project.

### **Manager's Report**

Mr. Safford provided the Board with the 2022 Equalization Study Results from the Vermont Department of Taxes, noting that the Common Level of Appraisal is at 66.59% and Coefficient of Dispersion is at

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22%, both of which would trigger a reappraisal which the Town is currently undertaking. The Town Appraiser will review and evaluate if the Town should appeal, which it has until January 26<sup>th</sup> to do.

Mr. Safford also provided the Board testimony that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns recently provided to the Income Based Tax Study Committee.

On a motion by Mr. Paco Aumand, seconded by Ms. Courtney, the Board went into Executive Session at 9:18pm to discuss legal and personnel issues.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:45pm.

There being no further business, Chair Adams adjourned the meeting at 9:46pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Abigail Bourgeois.