

**Stowe Selectboard, Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting
Monday February 27, 2023**

Present:

Selectboard Members: William Adams, Jo Sabel Courtney, Nick Donza, Lisa Hagerty, Paco Aumand

In Person attendees: Leighton Detora, Cindy Fuller, Jed Lipsky, Harry Shepard

There were 12 participants on Zoom

Call to Order

Chair Billy Adams called the meeting to order at 5:31pm.

Approve the Agenda

On a motion by Mr. Paco Aumand, seconded by Ms. Jo Sabel Courtney, the Board approved the agenda, pulling item A-1 for discussion and pulling one Special Event Permit Application (Indigenous Peoples Day Rocks) from item A-2 for discussion.

Consent Agenda

1. PULLED
2. Special Event Applications
3. Highway Truck Bid Award
4. No Appeal or Suits Pending
5. Intervale Conservation Nursery Balsam Poplar Cutting Request
6. Depot Street Public Bathroom Lease Extension
7. Liquor Consent Items

On a motion by Ms. Lisa Hagerty, seconded by Mr. Aumand, the Board approved the Consent Agenda without item A-1 and with pulling the Indigenous Peoples Day Rocks Special Event Application from Item A-2.

Recreation Scholarship Policy Amendments

The Recreation Commission recommends that the Selectboard increase the annual individual limit award from \$500 to \$750 for those eligible for financial assistance through the Bunny Libby Scholarship Fund. In December the Selectboard approved raising the rates for the summer camp programs, so the intent is to raise this amount as well. Residents are awarded scholarships based on their household income and size. Mr. Nick Donza asked about exclusion of third party programming, such as horseback riding or other clubs. He asked if there were families who would like to participate in those programs but are unable because of financial reasons, and asked if the policy should be amended to allow for those programs. Mr. Matt Frazee, Director of Parks & Recreation, noted that there are other places families can reach out to for scholarship assistance, such as schools and churches, and that could be used for additional clubs. He also noted that they strive to include as much as possible in the base rate of programs like summer camps, including field trips on Fridays.

Indigenous Peoples Day Rocks Special Event Application

Chair Adams pulled this event from the Consent Agenda to discuss concerns that police coverage cannot be guaranteed for this event due to it occurring on an already very busy holiday weekend. Event organizer, Ms. Aimee Greene, noted that no alcohol is served at the event and that police coverage is mainly for traffic/parking which volunteers can handle if no police are available. It was noted that should an issue arise at the event police would go to the event, but can't be assured they would have an officer dedicated to that event. Chair Adams also spoke to concerns about the volume of amplified music and asked that the event organizer be on-site and prepared to be responsive to noise complaints. Ms. Greene

noted that amplified music generally went from 4pm until dark and indicated that someone will be on-site that can be responsive if complaints are received.

On a motion by Ms. Hagerty, seconded by Ms. Courtney, the Board approved the Recreation Scholarship Policy Amendments and the Indigenous Peoples Day Rocks Special Event Application, with the conditions discussed.

Annual Meeting Informational Meeting

Chair Adams opened up the Informational Meeting explaining that the Board would go through each article on the Annual Meeting Warning in order.

Article 1 – This Article asks voters to consider a 1% Local Option Sales Tax, with revenue being directed to the General Fund. This is an optional Local Option Sales Tax, in addition to the Rooms, Meals & Alcohol Tax that Stowe currently has. Stowe is one of several towns in the State to have the option of local taxes, and many other towns already assess a 1% Local Option Sales Tax in addition to the 6% Vermont State Sales Tax. Ms. Cindy Fuller, Finance Director, explained that this tax would apply to any purchases made in Stowe, or delivered in Stowe that is not statutorily exempt from sales taxes. This would include online purchases as well, if the delivery address is Stowe. There are exemptions for essentials, such as clothing, food, and residential utilities. She explained that the taxes would be collected by merchants and sent to the State along with all other sales tax, and the State would then give Stowe 70% of the 1% Sales Tax collected, with 30% being redistributed throughout the State via PILOT programs.

The Town estimated that this tax will raise between \$700,000 - \$900,000. If approved, Article 2 -may be amended to reduce the amount to be raised in Property Taxes by \$700,000, which will lower the Property Tax increase. It was discussed that any funds raised over \$700,000 would go into a “Rainy Day Fund” which could be reallocated by the Selectboard and voters in future fiscal years.- The amount the Town budgets for collection of this LOT can also be adjusted year to year, but it was felt that for the first year it was a good idea to start with less revenues anticipated. If approved by the voters, this tax would go into effect on July 1, 2023.

Article 2 -This Article asks the voters to approve the General Fund Budget of \$16,579,734, of which \$12,084,230 is to be raised by property taxes and \$4,495,504 is to be raised by other revenues. As noted above, if Article 1 passes, then this article -may be amended to lower the amount to be raised by property taxes to \$11,384,230 and the amount to be raised by other revenues will be raised to \$5,195,504. Mr. Leighton Detora asked that the Board consider including the breakdown of departmental budget spending in the warning as they had done in past years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Town Manager Charles Safford indicated that legal counsel cautioned against including that in the warning as it could give the Voters the -perception that they are voting on the budget by department, when in fact they are voting on the budget as a whole with the Selectboard having general spending authority. -The Board did discuss breaking out the departmental budget in a bigger font so it was easier to read. Mr. Safford also noted that it is important to look not just at departmental expenses but also at revenues, to get a full picture of the cost of a department to the taxpayers.

Mr. Jed Lipsky asked about the increases in the expenses at the Stowe Arena, which were explained as largely due to a large increase in electric rates, as well as the cost of living increase for staff.

Article 3 – This Article asks the voters to approve \$635,000 from the Capital Fund to be used for 7 projects. This includes: Stowe Town Plan Community Engagement, Bear-Proof Trash and Recycling Containers, Public Safety Communications System Enhancements, Townwide Web Platform

Consolidation, Town Clock Rehabilitation, Stormwater Catch Basin & Line, and Streambank Stabilization by Rec Path Bridge 1.

The Board discussed the projects, particularly the bear-proof containers, of which there will be 17 throughout the Town parks and recreation path. It was noted that the cost for the containers also includes installation of a cement pad on which the containers are bolted. The Town is trying to lead by example on reducing food attractants for bears.

The Board also discussed the Town Clock project, noting that the Town owns the clock despite its location in the church steeple, and has for over a century.

Article 4 – This Article asks voters to compensate the Selectboard, Listers and Moderator for their service. There was no comments on this article.

Article 5 – This Article asks voters to authorize the Selectboard to enter into contracts with owners, lessees and operators of “farmland” and “forestland” to maintain the valuation of such property in the Grant List. It was discussed that these farmers contracts can last up to 10 years, and are al alternate to the State’s Current Use program. The cost to the taxpayer for these contracts is currently approximately \$0.005 on the tax rate. It was noted that this article simply gives the Selectboard the authority to enter into the contracts for up to ten years, but the Selectboard has the authority to set the terms and costs. The Board discussed the differences between the Current Use Program, which also includes “open land”, and Farmers Contracts, noting that some farmers may find one advantageous over the other. It was noted that historically the rates were set for the duration of the ten-year contract, but it could be written so that there were incremental increases.

Article 6 – This Article is for discussion of the Town of Stowe Audit. There were no comments.

Manager’s Report

Mr. Safford provided information regarding the Rooms, Meals & Alcohol taxes collected in Stowe for the 2nd quarter of FY’23, noting that it is relatively consistent with the previous year, despite inflation. He noted this had been a trend for the last two quarters and could be a sign of the LOT leveling out.

Mr. Safford also showed a graph on property taxes raised in FY’22 and where those dollars were distributed (schools, state and Town).

Mr. Safford also noted a number of projects with impacts to the Town – T-Mobile has applied for a Certificate of Public Good for Telecommunications Facility at 29 Percy Hill Road, the Town has received notice of the subdivision of a property abutting a Town-owned property, and SED has advanced its hydroelectric damn FERC application.

On a motion by Ms. Hagerty, seconded by Ms. Courtney, the Board went into Executive Session at 7:51pm to discuss personnel, Legal and Real Estate.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 8:20pm.

There being no further business, Chair Adams adjourned the meeting at 8:21pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Abigail Bourgeois.