

How Stowe Municipal Government Works

The Town of Stowe is a municipal corporation that is a sub-division of the State of Vermont. The Town is “a creature of the State.” As such it can be created, merged with another municipal corporation or dissolved by the State. For example, parts of the former Towns of Mansfield and Sterling were merged into the Town of Stowe. As an aside, this is one of the reasons Stowe has one of the largest land bases in Vermont. The typical Vermont municipality is around 40 square miles and Stowe is 72 square miles.

The State of Vermont must give the Town the authority to regulate something before it can do so. It can either do this through general state law applicable to all Vermont municipalities or Stowe’s Charter which is only applicable to the Town of Stowe.

The State also outlines the roles of various public bodies and officials. The Selectboard is the local legislative body and are the “decision makers.” They act as a body in open session at publicly warned meetings. Unless authorized by the Selectboard, no individual board member has authority to act on their own. As a board they adopt local ordinances (laws) and municipal policy, advance the general fund budget for voter consideration, and approve the expenditure of money. They also appoint members of various Town boards and commissions as well as the Town Manager.

The Town Manager is the Chief Executive Officer of the municipal corporation and is responsible to the Selectboard for the day-to-day administration of municipal government. Among other things, the Town Manager is responsible for hiring and overseeing all municipal employees, advises the Selectboard, ensures that local ordinances and policies adopted by the Selectboard are carried out in a professional manner, and prepares the annual budget for the Selectboard’s consideration.

The voters have the most important job of all. They vote to elect their representatives and approve long term debt by paper ballot in the voting booth. At Annual Meeting they approve the budget and the amount to be raised in taxes. In other words, at Annual Meeting the voters authorize the Selectboard to levy taxes in order for the municipal corporation to provide services required by law and any optional services that you desire.

One of the most important policy documents each year is the budget. It establishes the intended work product for the upcoming year. It covers everything from how much money is planned for paving to buying books. Although it is a general plan, just like your household budget, the Selectboard and the Town staff works at adhering to it unless an emergency or other unforeseen circumstance comes up during the year. While we use trends and other methods to understand what the spending requirements are likely to be each year, we can’t do so with pinpoint precision as things evolve during the year. An example of this is Hurricane Irene, which out of necessity changed the Town’s priorities in order to restore our damaged infrastructure. That is why the Selectboard has general spending authority.

The Selectboard holds a meeting the second and fourth Monday of every month starting at 5:30 pm at the Akeley Memorial Building on Main Street. If you have an item you would like on the

agenda, email or stop in to see me. The meeting agendas can be found in the legal section of the Stowe Reporter and on the Town's website (www.townofstovermont.org). You can provide written testimony to go into the Selectboard packet if you send it to the Town Manager in a timely manner. You can also attend the meetings and ask questions and/or provide your opinion for the Selectboard's consideration.

At Annual Meeting, voters have the opportunity to exercise direct democracy and be the "decision makers." It is up to the voters in attendance to adopt the budget, the amount to be raised in property taxes and any special articles that may come before the body for a floor vote. The Annual Town Meeting is always the first Tuesday in March, unless the voters approve a different date.

We are fortunate to live in a democracy that operates on a small scale where your voice and your vote can make a difference, but you must choose to participate.