

January 2020 Municipal Corner

FY'21 General Fund Operating Budget & Capital Plan: The Stowe Selectboard will hold a public hearing at their January 27th meeting to hear from the public on the proposed FY'21 General Fund Operating Budget and Capital Plan. The meeting will start at 5:30pm in the Akeley Building Memorial Room. The proposed operating budget represents a net increase of 4.13% and a projected tax increase of 2.58%.

The proposed budget adds \$165,000 to the highway stormwater line item for a total of \$235,000 to help address the mandates in the municipal roads general permit to control sediment runoff from public roads into the public waters of the State. This will involve improving ditches on the side of gravel roads and implementing other best management practices. To meet the increased workload, the budget proposes to add a Public Works Assistant Engineer and a Buildings & Grounds Director. Between new stormwater regulations and other infrastructure obligations we need more help ensuring Stowe's roads, buildings and grounds are properly maintained.

The State has adopted a municipal roads general permit (MRGP) that will require municipalities to control sediment run-off from roads into the public waters of the State of Vermont. The Town of Stowe currently maintains 95 miles of municipal roads of which 48 miles have been determined to be hydrologically connected requiring stormwater system upgrades. High priority segments (16 miles) need to be brought into compliance by 12/31/25 the estimated construction cost is \$230,000 per year over the next five years. Additionally, the Town will need to bring the remainder into compliance over the next 16 years. In all, the preliminary construction cost estimate to meet MRGP requirements is estimated to cost \$4 million dollars. This does not include the cost of future storm water permit requirements for any parcel with 3 or more acres of impervious surface area. Memorial Park / Stowe Arena and the Highway Garage / Wastewater Treatment Facility are both on the draft list of parcels that will need to treat stormwater from these impervious surfaces. In addition to an already overburdening workload for Public Works, municipalities are facing much greater regulatory requirements and it is going to take more resources to meet them.

In addition to roads and stormwater permit requirements, the Town of Stowe owns approximately 2,500 acres of land and also owns a number of new multi-million-dollar buildings as well as a number of irreplaceable historic buildings that have on-going maintenance requirements. Excluding the assets of the Stowe Electric Department, Town owned buildings are currently assessed at \$21 million dollars. The maintenance of buildings is a secondary responsibility of public works and various department heads. For example, the EMS Chief is responsible for the \$7.2 million-dollar Public Safety Facility. While his efforts are appreciated, this takes time away from his core responsibilities and doesn't give the Town's investment in this facility the attention it requires. The proposed budget also recognizes that through attrition a position was eliminated at the Recreation Department in the current fiscal year, so there is a net addition of one full-time equivalent position proposed in the FY'21 budget.

There is also a number of capital projects that are under consideration for funding: Removal and replacement of the dry sprinkler system in the Akeley Building (\$65,000), Foundation Stabilization of Cemetery Road Bridge (\$95,000), Public Safety Facility Camera System Replacement (\$69,000), Depot Street Reconstruction Preliminary Engineering (\$50,000), Ash Tree Right-of-Way Inventory (\$11,000), 3 Acre Rule Stormwater Preliminary Engineering (\$40,000), Nebraska Valley Road Bridge 48 Replacement Preliminary Engineering (\$20,000), and Fire, EMS & Mtn. Rescue Radio Replacement (\$155,000).

Questions can be answered at the public hearing. If you are not able to attend the public hearing, but have questions you may email me at csafford@stovevt.gov, call me at 253-7350 or stop by the town offices to visit with me.

Annual Meeting Survey: The Town is in the process of preparing its Annual Meeting Survey to gauge community opinion. If you have questions you would like the Selectboard to consider asking on the survey, please send me an email at csafford@stovevt.gov.