



**Stowe Selectboard, Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting
Wednesday, March 13, 2024**

Present:

Selectboard Members: Billy Adams, Paco Aumand, Jo Sabel Courtney, Nick Donza, Ethan Carlson

Attendees:

Town Manager Charles Safford, Assistant Town Manager Will Fricke, Public Works Director Harry Shepard, Finance Director Cindy Fuller, Parks & Recreation Director Matt Frazee, Brett Loomis, Aimée Green, Carol Schaal, Carolyn Loeb

Via Zoom: Catherine Crawley, Andrew Rianhard, Rick Brigham, Gus Niewenhous. 22 attended via Zoom in total.

Call to Order

Selectboard Acting Vice Chair Adams called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Mr. Adams recognized former Selectboard Chair Lisa Hagerty for her 12 years of service to the Town of Stowe, saying that the community is very thankful for her service. He also congratulated and recognized newly elected Selectboard Member Ethan Carlson.

Approval of the Agenda

The Selectboard agreed to remove Items B4 and B7 from the Consent Agenda and move them to Business as items C1a and C1b.

On a motion by Ms. Courtney, seconded by Mr. Aumand, the Selectboard approved the agenda.

Election of Officers

On a motion by Mr. Aumand, seconded by Ms. Sabel Courtney, the Selectboard elected Billy Adams as Chair.

On a motion by Ms. Sabel Courtney, seconded by Mr. Carlson, the Selectboard elected Paco Aumand as Vice Chair.

On a motion by Mr. Donza, seconded by Mr. Aumand, the Selectboard elected Will Fricke as Clerk.

Consent Agenda

1. Designation of Newspaper for Legal Ads
2. February 28, 2024 Selectboard Minutes
3. February 29, 2024 Selectboard Minutes
- ~~4. Indigenous People Rocks Special Event Permit Amendment (Change in Location to the Helen Day Art Center)~~
5. Water / Sewer Allocation – Sylvan Park Road Unassigned Address
6. Special Event Application – 100 on 100 Relay
- ~~7. Equipment Fund Amendment – Electric Mower~~
8. Rec Path Parking Lot Sewer Replacement Bid Award
9. Liquor Items
10. Liquor Item - Ellison Estate Vineyard Special Event

On a motion by Mr. Aumand, seconded by Mr. Carlson, the Selectboard approved the Consent Agenda as amended.

Indigenous People Rocks Special Event Permit Amendment

Aimée Green of the Indigenous People Rocks Foundation requested to move the previously approved Indigenous People Rocks Special Event taking place on October 5, 2024 from the Mayo Farm to The Current/Helen Day Arts Center. Mr. Adams asked Ms. Green about their anticipated attendance. Ms. Green said the event has not drawn more than 125 people, so it made sense to move it to a smaller location. Last year it rained on their dates, so there was a scramble to find an indoor location; they used the Akeley theater. The Current's maximum occupancy is 175.

Ms. Sabel Courtney moved to approve the Indigenous People Rocks special event permit as amended. Mr. Carlson seconded. All were in favor.

Equipment Fund Amendment – Electric Mower

Mr. Safford said that the Selectboard, on the advice of the Energy Committee, had previously amended the equipment fund to purchase one 72-inch electric zero turn mower in FY25, and three in FY26. After testing and receiving feedback from vendors, the Parks Department is requesting the equipment fund be amended for FY25 from purchasing a 54-inch gas version and a 72-inch electric version, to purchasing a 60-inch electric and a 72-inch gas version. The net cost to the equipment fund is the same. We previously thought we had alignment with the Energy Committee based on the minutes from their February 22 meeting, but they requested it be pulled from the consent agenda for further discussion.

Mr. Donza pointed out that the electric versions are significantly more expensive up front than the gas versions and acknowledged that there could be cost savings down the road with maintenance. He noted that the equipment fund is facing a large projected deficit in FY28, and said that he wants to feel confident that the Parks Department believes that an electric zero turn will fulfill their needs. He pointed out that the Town had recently purchased an electric ballfield groomer that failed.

Mr. Frazee noted that they will purchase a 60-inch version rather than a 54-inch regardless of whether it is gas or electric. He said that Parks staff have tested all available models. Gas models have an advantage when it comes to mowing wet grass. Currently available 72-inch models do not have bagging capability, but there is a model that is coming out soon that purports to have that capability. There are more 60-inch electric models available, and they tested fairly well. The biggest issue is history of use, they are not comfortable purchasing brand new models due to a lack of use history. Mr. Donza reiterated that he is worried the Town is buying too soon, and again noted the price difference.

Catherine Crawley, Energy Committee Chair, said that there is one 72-inch model with bagging capability available now. Andrew Rianhard of the Energy Committee said that he has not yet tested that model, but he will be testing it at an event in May. He said that there are electric models that outperform gas models, and that issues mowing in wet grass may be specific to certain models.

Mr. Carlson asked when the Town needs to begin the process of purchasing the mower. Mr. Safford said they typically will put something out to bid now to have it for the start of the fiscal year unless the equipment to be replaced is defunct, in which case they would move sooner. Mr. Donza said that it doesn't sound like the mower to be replaced is defunct.

Mr. Donza moved to table the discussion until the Parks Department has had a chance to demo the new models assure the Selectboard that they are 100% confident that they will work. Mr. Safford said the Parks Department is relatively confident in the 60-inch and that there are several models that could be included in a competitive bid process; the 72-inch they are not confident in. Mr. Aumand seconded the motion, and asked if he would accept a friendly amendment to move forward with the 60-inch electric now, and wait on the 72-inch model decision. Mr. Donza said that if they do both, they would be way over budget. Mr. Donza withdrew his motion.

Brett Loomis said that he does not feel that a 60- or 72-inch electric mower would not be able to meet the demands of the Town. Mr. Donza said that holds a lot of weight for him. Mr. Adams said the Board may need to feel more confident in the 60-inch electric mower before making a decision.

Mr. Donza moved to table the discussion until the Parks Department has had a chance to demo the new models. Mr. Carlson seconded, and specified that he wants the Town to demo the new 72-inch version with bagging capability. Mr. Adams asked if the Town has the functionality or setup to have electric mowers. Mr. Safford said we can handle a couple of mowers, but the Parks Garage is not set up to have all electric equipment at this time. Mr. Donza said he wants to know how long it would take to charge each mower. Mr. Rianhard noted that there will be more new models at the May demo that have not yet been tested. Ms. Crawley noted that their previous analysis showed a 6-year payback in terms of cost.

On the motion to table the discussion, all were in favor.

FY'23 Audit Report

Rick Brigham of Sullivan Powers, the Town of Stowe's audit firm, joined to discuss the FY23 Audit. Mr. Safford noted that there were no findings, but there was one recommendation that was solved last year and it should be a non-issue. Mr. Brigham summarized the audit, saying that they gave an unqualified opinion, which is the best outcome to achieve.

Chair Adams thanked Mr. Brigham and his colleagues for their work, and commended Town staff, particularly Finance Director Cindy Fuller, for their efforts in working with the auditors.

No action was taken at this time.

Special Event Application – Alchemist Eclipse Event

Mr. Safford said that since this is a new event, it falls under regular business. Many visitors will be coming to Stowe for the Solar Eclipse, and it may be best to direct them to certain places rather than having them drive on the gravel roads.

There were no comments on the application.

Mr. Carlson expressed concern that the Town may be overrun that day. Mr. Safford said that staff have been preparing for it, and it could be similar to Indigenous People's Day weekend; the difference being that this falls during mud season. It is hard to predict how many people will be here. The Town will activate as many police officers and other personnel as there are available to meet public safety and highway needs. He noted that the Green Mountain Club is concerned about visitors trying to access trails that are closed or not ready for the season. The Town may put up "Resident Only" signs on roads that are not ready.

Ms. Sabel Courtney moved to approve the Alchemist Eclipse Viewing Event special event application. Mr. Carlson seconded. All were in favor.

Stowe Land Trust Conservation Letter of Support -Bouchard Farm Lot #5

Mr. Safford said that the Stowe Land Trust is requesting a letter of support for a land conservation project in Stowe. The project is 85 acres of highest priority forestland with an active sugarbush and recreational value to the Stowe community located off Brook Road. Their intent is to create a new multi-use recreational connector trail. They are not requesting town funds to acquire it.

Carolyn Loeb, Stowe Land Trust's Stewardship Director, said that the letter of support would be included in a grant application. Mr. Adams asked if it would be feasible to build housing on this particular lot. Ms. Loeb said that Stowe Land Trust evaluates all of their projects for housing and the possibility for affordable housing. On this lot, it would only be possible to build one house due to zoning restrictions and the fact of it being outside of the water and sewer districts. Lamoille Housing Partnership indicated they would not be interested in the lot for affordable housing.

Mr. Aumand moved to file a letter of support relative to this project as outlined and signed by the Town Manager. Ms. Sabel Courtney seconded. All were in favor.

Mayo Farm Field Rental Fees

Mr. Safford explained that a couple years ago the Selectboard asked the Recreation Commission and the Parks and Recreation Director to see if the Event Field fees should be adjusted. They completed a comparative analysis with other municipalities that have rent fields for large events and recommended the currently adopted fee structure. The organizers for the British Invasion have requested a 20% reduction in fees. The Recreation Commission minutes have been added as an addendum to the Selectboard Packet; they stated they were not in support of lowering the fees. He said that as a general rule, the Selectboard should reduce it across the board rather than just reducing it for one event, if they are inclined to do so. The total fiscal impact of doing so would be approximately a \$3000 reduction.

Gus Niewenhous, an organizer for the British Invasion, said that the event is not a registered non-profit, but they attempt to charge their registration fees at cost. Parking fees have been donated to a non-profit, which has been the American Cancer Society in recent years. He said that Stowe is a specific draw for British Invasion attendees, and that many of the attendees of the street party that follows are British Invasion attendees, who eat dinner at local restaurants following the event.

Ms. Sabel Courtney asked about the impact of the fee reduction on the British Invasion. Mr. Niewenhous said that the fees as currently adopted represent a 110% increase. Mr. Donza asked if there are ways for the British Invasion to generate the \$1,200 increase in fees, suggesting donations. He said while he personally loves the event, he is not inclined to reduce the fees. Mr. Niewenhous said that last year Stowe Vibrancy donated to cover the increase.

Mr. Donza asked if other events have asked for fee reductions. Mr. Safford said that some large events are not returning, but he cannot be certain whether it is related to the fees. Mr. Carlson suggested a fee reduction as a percentage of a donation to a local charity.

Mr. Aumand said it's not really about the money for the Town, rather it is a policy issue and extending an olive branch to events that come here. He said that he is willing to reduce the fees and change the policy and see how it goes. Mr. Adams suggested a 10% reduction. Mr. Niewenhous said that a difference between the British Invasion and most other events is that the British Invasion rents all of the fields. Mr. Safford said one of the challenges is getting the fields ready for school and other events, especially when there are large events and motor vehicles on them. He said if the Selectboard is inclined to entertain a fee reduction, the cleanest way to go about this is to have a uniform fee reduction.

Mr. Donza moved to reduce the fees by 20%, and find time to have a further discussion on crafting a better policy. Mr. Carlson seconded. Ms. Sabel Courtney asked Mr. Niewenhous if they sell sponsorships to local companies. He said they sell advertising in their program book; he said there is not a large contingent of local merchant support. He also emphasized that they typically announce the dates for their event in January or February; they are waiting for this decision to announce.

Mr. Adams said that, doing the math, it seems like it would be approximately \$3 extra per attendee to make up difference in the \$1200 field rental fee, and that he is not in favor of decreasing it.

Mr. Carlson asked for an amendment to Mr. Donza's motion to apply the reduction to events that utilize all three fields. Mr. Safford asked Mr. Frazee how many events that would apply to. Mr. Frazee said that multiple events left that utilize all three, but price wasn't a primary factor; organizers moving away or declining attendance were bigger factors. He said that it would apply to only one other event for 2024; it is a non-profit event and the discount is already applied.

Mr. Donza withdrew his motion. He said the fields are valuable assets and it takes a lot to maintain them, and the Town should be adequately compensated for that.

Mr. Carlson moved to reduce fees by 20% for 2024 for events that rent all three Mayo Farm fields. Ms. Sabel Courtney seconded. The Selectboard approved the motion with a 3-1-1 vote; Mr. Aumand, Mr. Carlson, and Ms. Sabel Courtney voted in favor. Mr. Adams voted against. Mr. Donza abstained.

Manager's Report

Mr. Safford provided the Selectboard with the Code of Ethics for the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). It guides ethical conduct for Town Managers, alongside local and state regulations, and job descriptions. He said that Mr. Fricke, who recently worked for ICMA, thought the Board may find it interesting. Violations of the ICMA Code of Ethics result in being barred from the professional association.

Mr. Safford asked the Selectboard about their thoughts on rescheduling the April 24 meeting, as Mr. Carlson will not be able to attend. Mr. Donza said he will also not be in attendance that week. Mr. Aumand and Ms. Sabel Courtney said they will not be in attendance for the April 10 meeting. Mr. Safford said that the April 24 meeting would be for interviewing candidates for Boards and Commissions; he suggested as an alternative having a meeting on Tuesday, April 30 instead. Mr. Adams said he would want confirmation that the Selectboard would not have a quorum before rescheduling. Mr. Safford said he will put it on the agenda for March 27. He suggested perhaps April 17 and April 30 as the April schedule. Ms. Sabel Courtney said she will also not be in town on April 17. Mr. Adams asked to revisit the discussion on the schedule on to March 27. Ms. Sabel Courtney suggested that members get in touch with Mr. Fricke about their schedules.

Executive Session

Mr. Aumand moved to find that premature public knowledge would clearly place the public body, or a person involved, at a substantial disadvantage. Ms. Sabel Courtney seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Mr. Aumand moved to enter executive session to receive legal advice. Mr. Carlson seconded the motion. All were in favor. The Selectboard entered executive session at 7:15pm.

On a motion by Mr. Adams, seconded by Ms. Sabel Courtney, the Selectboard left executive session at 8:30pm.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Adams adjourned the meeting at 8:30pm.