

Municipal Corner – Annual Meeting

Annual Meeting: The Stowe School District’s public informational hearing will start at 8:00 AM on Tuesday, March 5th in the Stowe High School Auditorium with the Town’s Annual Meeting following immediately thereafter. Australian ballot voting for the Town will be from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM in the Stowe High School Gymnasium. The Town’s public informational meeting for Annual Meeting will be held on February 28th at 5:30pm at the Akeley Memorial Building.

Annual Meeting floor voting will include the General Fund Budget Approval and the amount to be raised in taxes. The net budget is proposed to increase from \$11,384,231 in FY’24 to \$11,688,242 in FY’25, an increase of \$304,0111 or 2.67%. It is a status quo budget maintaining existing levels of service but recognizing wage pressure due to a tight labor market.

Capital projects will also be considered at the Annual Meeting on the floor. Proposed projects for FY’25 include Memorial Room Audio Video System Improvements (\$20,000), Moscow Village Flashing Speed Signs (\$20,000), Recreation Path Reconstruction – Town Farm Lane to Cape Cod Road (\$480,000), Akeley Building HVAC Replacement (\$485,000), Emergency Management Building Generator (\$300,000).

The Annual Meeting will also include a floor vote on whether the electorate desires to shift the approval of the budget and all other public questions from a floor vote at Annual Meeting to the Australian ballot (paper ballot). Currently, the voters only utilize Australian Ballot for the election of officers and approval of long-term debt.

Australian ballot articles include the election of officers, which includes the election of two Selectboard positions, a Lister, and Town Moderator. It also includes the following article: “Shall the voters authorize the issuance of general obligation notes or bonds of the Town from time to time during the period from June 2024 through December 2028, in an aggregate amount not to exceed Three Million and 00/100 Dollars (\$3,000,000.00), Payable primarily from the net revenues of Stowe Electric Department, to fund the acquisition by Stowe Electric Department of equity shares of Vt. Transco LLC (the Project)”?

Questions regarding the Stowe Electric Department (SED) bond article may be directed to Jackie Pratt, SED General Manager at (802) 253-7215 or jpratt@stoweelectric.com. Questions regarding the Town General Fund Budget and proposed capital projects may be addressed to Charles Safford, Stowe Town Manager, at (802) 253-7350 or csafford@stowevt.gov. The Annual Report is currently available on the Town’s website at www.townofstowevt.org/annual-town-report. Also, hard copies will be available for pick-up at the Akeley Building (Town Hall), Stowe Free Library, Public Safety Building, Stowe Parks & Recreation Building, Stowe Arena, and Stowe Historical Society. They will also be available at the Annual Meeting.

Absentee ballots for Australian ballot may be requested by emailing the Town Clerk’s Office at townclerk@stowevt.gov, by visiting <https://mvp.vermont.gov>, or by stopping by the Clerk’s Office to pick one up. They may be dropped off at the Clerk’s Office, **received** via mail, or placed in the drop box in front of the Akeley building prior to election day (by March 4th). Please be aware that the Town Clerk’s office closes at noon on Tuesday, March 4th. If returning your ballot by mail, please allow at least 7 - 10 days for mail delivery to ensure it is delivered on time.

Short-term Rental Registry Ordinance: The Selectboard’s special meeting on Thursday, February 29th at 5:30 PM in the Akeley Building Memorial Room will be a public hearing on the proposed Short-term Rental Registry Ordinance and potential final adoption. Vermont statute 24 VSA § 2291 (29) authorizes municipalities to regulate Short-term Rentals (STR’s). It states, “For the purpose of promoting the public health, safety, welfare, and convenience, a town, city, or incorporated village shall have the following powers: To regulate by means of an ordinance or bylaw the operation of short-term rentals within the municipality, provided that the ordinance or bylaw does not adversely impact the availability of long-term rental housing.”

The current draft of the STR Ordinance would require all STR’s to register. The definition of STR is in accordance with Vermont Law. Short-Term Rental property “means any lease or rental of residential real property, including a furnished house, condominium, or other dwelling room or self-contained Dwelling Unit, or a portion thereof, to transient, traveling, or vacationing public for a period of fewer than 30 consecutive days and for more than 14 days per calendar year, but specifically excluding commercial lodging establishments such as hotels, motels, inns and bed and breakfast.”

It would also require the owners of all STR properties to ensure that the Stowe Fire Department has year-round 24-hour access to the STR through a Fire Department approved lock box or other reasonable means of providing immediate access authorized by the Fire Department. In addition, all STR properties shall have a Designated Responsible Person, who may be the STR Owner, who is available and authorized to respond to emergency situations and other issues related to the STR when the property is being rented or leased as an STR. The designated Responsible Person shall respond within 45 minutes of notification by a Stowe Firefighter or Police Officer regarding any issue or problem involving a Short-Term Rental when the property is being rented or leased as an STR.