

Municipal Corner – Budget

OVERHEAD UTILITY VIRTUAL RIBBON CUTTING: At the start of the Selectboard's November 23rd meeting there will be a virtual ribbon cutting to recognize the completion of the removal of overhead utilities and poles on Main Street, the culmination of two years of major construction in our downtown. The meeting starts at 5:30pm and can be accessed electronically at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81897824430>.

This investment in Stowe's Downtown will leave a lasting visual impact for generations to come and help maintain our community center's vitality. This is a project that has been actively talked about for decades but was always put on the back burner. However, when the State indicated they were going to pave Stowe's Class 1 Highways, as well as the Town's project to replace the deteriorating sidewalks, it was now or never. There were a number of advocates for the project, including Stowe Vibrancy and Friends of Stowe Village, but it was ultimately a decision made by the taxpayers, with this project being funded by Local Option Tax income.

This was a very complex project to design and it could not have been accomplished in a timely manner without Stowe's Public Works Director/Engineer, Harry Shepard. Through the public bid process, the contract was awarded to Dale E. Percy, Inc with Gould Electric as a prime subcontractor for the electrical conduit work. Both of these companies are local businesses based in Stowe, and the project benefited greatly from their knowledge of the lay of the land and their commitment to their community. Also, the project could not have been done without the cooperation of local utilities Stowe Electric and Stowe Cable. Many municipal employees were also involved in the project, including Assistant Town Engineer Chris Jolly who oversaw much of the day to day operations, Water Superintendent Joe Donati who assisted with operations, including night work oversight, and Abby Earle who served as Public Information Officer for the project, providing weekly updates and fielding questions. Finally, the leadership of the Stowe Selectboard was invaluable by recognizing and expressing to voters the importance of Main Street to the community's identity and economic vitality.

Annual Meeting & Budget Development: In recognition of the pandemic and the need to avoid large gatherings in indoor spaces, the Vermont Legislature has granted Selectboards the authority to warn all items as Australian Paper ballot – including those that would normally be approved at our Annual Meeting by voice vote. While it will provide all voters an opportunity to vote on the operating budget and the amount to be raised in taxes, there will not be an opportunity to amend or discuss the budget at the Annual Meeting. . As a result, we have published the budget development schedule to the town website and encourage participation and engagement in this budget process in order to have your voice heard.

The proposed FY'22 (7/1/21 – 6/30/22) General Fund Operating Budget and Capital Plan will be delivered to the Selectboard at their 12/28/20 meeting. At their 1/4/21 meeting, the Selectboard is scheduled to hear from non-profits requesting new or increased appropriations. At their 1/19/21 meeting, they will deliberate on the Budget and Capital Plan. Finally, at their 1/25/21 meeting they will hold a public hearing on the proposed Budget and Capital Plan. After the hearing they will adopt the Budget, Capital Plan, and Warning to be voted on by Australian Ballot. Again, we publish this schedule to encourage you to listen in on the whole process.

The Selectboard has indicated their goal to keep taxes in check during this difficult economic time for many. We will attempt to build a budget that minimizes or avoids a tax increase without any major cuts to services. They have indicated that this is not the year to advance any major capital projects other than to meet existing commitments such as local matches for bridge replacement projects and emergency projects where life and property are at risk. This is in recognition of the economic stress the pandemic has caused and its corresponding impact to reduce Local Option Tax receipts and non-property tax revenue.

The Era of the Big Capital Project: Over the last decade, the Town of Stowe has taken on three multi-million-dollar capital projects (Public Safety Building, Stowe Arena, and the Main Street Overhead Utility / Class 1 Sidewalk Project). With the reduction of Local Option Taxes this year, we don't have the capacity utilize these funds for anything beyond our existing committed debt service and the town is drawing down on its unallocated reserves.

Our near term and medium-term focus has turned to our significant infrastructure obligations and to comply with State storm water mandates, including meeting three-acre permit requires for Memorial Park/Stowe Arena and the WWTF/Highway Garage. These projects will take significant planning efforts and the cost is yet to be determined. The Town also needs to replace its 29-year-old aerial ladder truck which is estimated to cost approximately \$1 million. For the foreseeable future, the projects the Town undertakes will likely be less exciting than those we are completing – but equally important to our town's smooth operations and compliance with any state mandates.

Zoning Regulations Update: The Stowe Planning Commission is in the process of considering changes to the Stowe Zoning Regulations, which they will recommend to the Selectboard for adoption. The current round of updates is focused on implementing recommendations of the 2018 Stowe Town Plan and addressing issues that have come up through the development review process. If you have changes you would like the Town to consider then please email Tom Jackman at tjackman@stowevt.gov and he can schedule a time to present your request to the Planning Commission electronically.

Thank You: I would like to thank Paul Sakash for his tireless efforts picking up roadside litter. I would also like to recognize Dick Johanneson, who is retiring from the Stowe Free Library Board of Trustees after 25 years of service, he also served as the treasurer for most of his tenure. I would like to thank Doug Veliko, who served as a member of Stowe Mountain Rescue for 29 years, including several years as chief. Finally, I would like to recognize the passing of Dave Demeritt. David was a member of the Stowe Selectboard and long-time member of the Stowe Fire Department. His service station was where the Village green is located on the corner of Park and Main Streets. It is the combined efforts of our municipal employees and our volunteer members of the several boards, commissions, and public safety organizations that provide our community with its services and character.