

Municipal Corner – June

Retirement: Linda Kelly, Assistant Finance Manager, has announced her retirement. Her last day of work will be June 14th. She is a CPA and has worked for the Town on a part-time basis for fourteen years. Linda is an unsung hero. When the Town transitioned finance managers, she helped keep things going. Please join me in thanking Linda for her contribution to the Town of Stowe.

Town Pit: Stowe has been fortunate to own its own sand and gravel pit. The town uses approximately 10,000 cubic yards of each of sand and gravel in the annual maintenance of its 20 miles of gravel roads. At the current private purchase prices for each, ownership of this supply saves the town upwards of \$225,000 per year. The supply is estimated to last us another 5 to 10 years and we have been watching carefully for options to mitigate this upcoming budget issue.

A 3.5 acre parcel abutting the existing sand and gravel pit recently became available (2409 Nebraska Valley Road). The Selectboard found it prudent to purchase this extended supply of sand and gravel and entered into a Purchase & Sales Agreement for \$299,900. The Selectboard will use the General Fund Unallocated reserves to make the purchase.

The purchase of this property is estimated to provide the Town another 15 +/- years of sand and gravel. At an estimated savings per year of \$200,000 this \$300,000 investment is paid for in 1.5 years. Over a ten year period, the savings is estimated to be over \$2 million dollars. The Selectboard is confident that this was a sound decision for the future benefit of the town.

Street Sweeping: The demands on the Public Works, Highway and Parks Departments continues to grow exponentially. It is an increasingly difficult challenge to try to maintain a level tax rate while meeting growing expectations. An example of this is the demand for greater street sweeping to control dust, make it safer for cyclist, and manage sediment runoff. All understandable. With this being said, when I arrived eleven years ago the road crew used a broom on a skid steer to sweep roads in the village once per year. Now, there seems to be an increasing interest by some in the community to purchase a street sweeper and sweep the streets more often, and to include the maintenance of the state roads that run through the town, but are technically the responsibility of the Vermont Agency of Transportation. For the purposes of discussion and analysis, street sweepers cost \$200,000 +/-, require an operator and are expensive to maintain. Along with the potential cost of a street sweeper, the Town also has fire and highway equipment that may need to be replaced sooner than anticipated to improve the reliability and reduce maintenance cost.

Lawn Damage: The municipality receives requests to fix damaged lawns and/or remove the winter sand resulting from our winter public roads maintenance. In providing the required maintenance during adverse weather conditions, the Town operates very heavy equipment and must carry sufficient supplies to cover the route. While we have skilled truck drivers, it is inevitable that there is going to be some damage to lawns and that some of the road sand will not stay on the roadway. It is the Town's policy to fix lawn damage only in very limited circumstances where the damage is particularly severe. This happens most frequently within the village sidewalk area. It has not been our policy to make minor repairs all over town as we don't have the personnel or resources to do so. If we are doing repairs, we are not grading roads and other necessary task to maintain public roads. In most circumstances we expect that private property owners will take care of this type of ongoing winter wear and tear.

Roller-mounted Grader: If you see a contraption behind one of the Town's graders with some tires on it, it's a roller-mounted grader. It compacts freshly graded gravel road surfaces simultaneously with our grading operations. The intent is to reduce sediment transport off freshly graded road surfaces and improve the longevity of grading efforts. It cost \$40,000 with half of the money coming from an Ecosystems Restoration Grant and the other half coming from the FY'18 Highway Operating Budget. This is part of the State and Town's increasing efforts to reduce sediment runoff into streams.

FY'19 Water & Sewer Budget Public Hearing: The Selectboard will be holding a public hearing on the FY'19 Water & Sewer Budgets and Rate Schedule at their 6/25/18 meeting. The water rate is proposed to decrease by 3% and the sewer rate is proposed to increase by 3%. Major capital projects include automating the meters and backup electrical generation for the main water plant and primary water pumping stations. During the October wind storm they were without power, limiting our ability to provide water to the system if we were without power for an extended period of time. Between a redundant well we are installing and back-up generation, it will make our system more reliable. The Selectboard is also proposing to undertake a rate study, which may possibly lead to a new rate structure.