

## Municipal Corner – FY'23 General Fund Budget & Capital Plan

The proposed FY'23 General Fund Budget and Capital Plan may be viewed on the Town's website at [www.townofstovevt.org](http://www.townofstovevt.org). The budget will be deliberated at the Selectboard's 1/10/22 and 1/24/22 meetings. The 1/24/22 meeting will include a public hearing after which the Selectboard will adopt a budget and capital plan for voter consideration at the Annual Town Meeting.

The budget as proposed by the Town Manager represents a net budget increase of \$873,753 (+8.80%). The proposed budget is projected to increase the municipal tax rate by \$.0245 or 5.65%. The budget recognizes wage pressures that all employers are facing to retain and attract qualified employees. It also reflects the emerging demands on the municipality to provide municipal services to a growing resident, second home, and visitor population. Finally, it continues to recognize the challenge of maintaining sufficient volunteer emergency force levels to meet increasing service demands.

New positions incorporated into the proposed operating budget includes a Human Resources Director. Stowe has 60 full-time employees, numerous seasonal and per diem employees, as well as Fire and Mountain Rescue volunteers. The intent of the HR Director position is to ensure an on-going focus in this area throughout the organization (e.g., training; best practices with hiring, evaluations, corrective actions; keeping policies up to date; and helping to resolve employee issues). This will enhance Stowe as an attractive place to work thereby helping with employee recruitment and retention. It will also help with employer liability.

The budget includes added fiscal capacity for two full-time equivalent fire firefighters to augment the full-time Fire Chief. This will help provide surety of service, which is going to be an issue not just in this fiscal year's budget but in future fiscal years as well. The Town of Stowe is fortunate to have dedicated volunteers, but it can be a challenge to respond to the increasing number of calls especially during the workday. In addition to protecting lives, the Town of Stowe must have capacity to protect the property for one of the highest grand lists in Vermont. Municipal government provides a number of optional services, but fire services is not one of them and no other level of government is going to step in to perform this essential public safety function.

Outside of the proposed General Fund Operating Budget, I recommended to the Selectboard that they place an article on the Australian ballot warning asking for voter approval to redirect the remaining bond proceeds of \$1.25 million from the Main Street Overhead Utility/Sidewalk project to purchase a new aerial ladder truck. The new ladder truck would have an onboard pump. If approved, it would replace the existing aerial ladder truck which is thirty years old. The size, complexity and risk of the buildings constructed in Stowe have significantly changed over time. We are now dealing with multiple buildings that are more than 100,000 sq/ft, and over 60 feet high, with the potential of hundreds of people inside. An aerial ladder truck allows our firefighters to reach heights safely and quickly to perform a rescue or suppress a fire.

Stowe's Capital Budget is a separate fund that uses pay-as-you-go spending to pay for one-time projects over \$10,000 that can occur in a single year or phased in over a multi-year period. The projects include the following:

Nebraska Valley Bridges #48 and #51 (\$432,000). The Town is responsible for providing the 10% local match and the replacement of these bridges are scheduled for the 2023 construction season.

Highway Garage Roof (\$75,000). To replace the deteriorated highway garage roof on the east side.

Ricketson Farm Conservation (\$200,000). Municipal contribution to the Stowe Land Trust's purchase of a conservation easement. For more information, visit [www.stowelandtrust.org](http://www.stowelandtrust.org).

Luce Hill Road Bridge – Assessment and Scoping Study (\$45,000). Independent engineering review to document existing structural and environmental conditions of concern and conceptual level alternatives analysis for future bridge replacement. This is required to advance possible State / Federal support in replacing the bridge.

Moscow Road / Village Reconstruction Phase 1 (\$85,000). Preliminary engineering and permitting for proposed Moscow Road reconstruction through Moscow Village from the Moscow Road bridge to Moscow Fields. Planning phase shall include evaluation of alternatives to implement traffic calming measures, curbing and consideration of shoulder widths to enhance pedestrian and bike safety. Sidewalks and buried utilities are not included with the anticipated scope of work.

Memorial Park Master Plan Update (\$85,000). Update of Memorial Park Master Plan for consideration of the 2021 Rec Commission Report requesting a new 5,000 sf Rec Center, reconstructed tennis/pickleball and basketball court facilities with a pavilion/shelter. Master planning will evaluate alternatives given site restrictions and storm water regulations.

Town Building Security Cameras (\$70,000). Install exterior security cameras on historic and occupied municipally-owned buildings (Akeley, Helen Day Art Center Building, Stowe Arena, Parks Garage and Highway Garage). The security cameras would be networked to the Stowe Police Department.

Public Safety Building Access control System Upgrade / Replacement (\$64,288). The existing access control system relies on outdated technology that does not provide an adequate level of security. The existing systems has also experienced repeated equipment failures.

Please contact me if you have any questions at [csafford@stowevt.gov](mailto:csafford@stowevt.gov), 253-7350 or stop by my office at 67 Main Street (Town Hall).