

Municipal Corner

COVID 19: We are all getting tired of the pandemic, but now is not the time to let down our guard. School has just reopened, and the weather will push us towards more indoor activity. As Fall comes upon us, we can help reduce the spread of COVID 19 by continuing to follow recommended best practices: Wear a mask, wash hands, socially distance, and stay home if sick. Together, these actions help keep us physically healthy and economically moving in the right direction.

Policies and Procedures and Transparency: If you are interested in what local ordinances exist and don't exist, in Stowe – you can check out the list on the Town website. Ordinances are local laws that regulate public behavior and typically carry civil fines for non-compliance. Examples of these include traffic, special events and animal control ordinances. Recently, Staff added to the website all policies adopted by the Selectboard and procedures issued by management. Policies are generally adopted to provide broad guidance to management and other municipal employees in carrying out the business of the town. Examples of these are personnel, ethics, and purchasing policies. Procedures provide more specific direction on how to effectuate policies. All of these may now be found on the town's municipal website (www.townofstovevt.org) under "documents."

In addition, the Stowe Police Department has recently updated its website in order to provide public access to all general orders issued by the Chief of Police to all officers. While I'm sure we are not the first to do this, we are certainly on the leading edge of making the General Orders easily accessible. The General Orders is a foundational document for operations within any police department, providing officers with the information necessary to act decisively, consistently and legally. They provide guidelines, rules and regulations, and mandatory procedures to officers in carrying out their duties. These include the use of force, fair and impartial policing and emergency vehicle operation, among the many. A link to the Stowe Police Department website may be found on the Town's website under "town departments."

Political Candidate Signage: Please remember that political candidate signage is not permitted on municipal property or in the public right-of-way. The public right-of-way is typically 25 feet from the center line of the road. Political candidate signs are allowed on private property, with the property owner's permission, provided they do not exceed twelve (12) square feet in size.

Municipal Capital Fund: Stowe's Capital Fund is the source of funds for Stowe's capital projects, which are one-time projects over \$10,000 on a *pay-as-you-go* financing plan. The Capital Fund's major funding source is the one percent tax on rooms, meals, and alcohol (aka local option tax). Prior to the pandemic, this tax was projected to raise \$1 million in revenue for the 2020 budget year. About \$500,000 of that revenue has been earmarked by the voters to pay for debt obligations and any revenue over the debt obligation serves as revenue for the capital fund to pay for new projects. Not surprisingly, the economic slowdown has caused a significant reduction in local option tax revenues and we are currently anticipating only being able to pay for existing debt obligations until the economy turns around.

At the same time, the Town is required to comply with laws established by other levels of government and to take care of public infrastructure. The following are the capital projects that remain on the horizon that will either need to be paid for out of the Capital Fund or through long-term debt. These include:

Stormwater 3 Acre Permit Compliance: All land areas with 3-acres or more of impervious surface area are required to treat stormwater prior to being discharged into the public waters of the State of Vermont. The municipality has two sites (Memorial Park/Stowe Arena and the Wastewater Treatment Facility/Highway Garage). The voters previously appropriated \$40,000 for preliminary engineering to determine how to come into permit compliance and to estimate the costs of doing so.

Nebraska Valley Bridge Replacements: Bridge #51 (Rhodes Br.) and #48 are scheduled to be replaced in the next couple of years. They will receive 90% federal/state funding but require a 10% local match which is estimated at \$320,000 in total.

Stagecoach Road Bridge: The culverted crossing of Moss Glenn Brook needs to be replaced and a new bridge is required. The project has 80% State and Federal funding with a 20% Town match currently estimated at \$200,000.

Fire Aerial Ladder Truck: The aerial ladder truck is 29 years old and is estimated to cost \$1 million dollars to replace. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends the replacement of aerial ladders every 25 years. When the Equipment Reserve Fund was created this piece of equipment was not included due to the cost being over \$500,000. It was anticipated that this large piece of equipment would have to be bonded and paid for overtime.

Emergencies: Major storms that cause streambank erosion and public infrastructure damage are becoming the expected rather than the unexpected. Repairs from major storms are generally 75% financed by FEMA – leaving 25% of the costs to State and local governments. Outside of a major event covered by FEMA, the Town is responsible for 100% of reparative costs. The Town is aware of two areas of significant streambank erosion that are starting to undermine public infrastructure. For these and other emergencies it is important for the Town to carry unallocated reserves as a way of budgeting for these events.

As always, I, as your town manager, all department heads and the Selectboard are trying to balance the best interests of the community with the financial capacity of the Town. However, this year is particularly challenging. While we have fared well in the area of health with the pandemic, our resort-dependent economy has taken a strong hit. Trust that we are working hard, looking carefully at how best to meet the community's essential needs and will continue to keep you informed to the best of our ability. We will continue to get through this by working together.