

Municipal Corner December

Winter Parking Ban: Please remember that the winter parking ban runs from December 15th through April 15th of each year. No vehicles are permitted to park on public roads or in public parking lots overnight. This is to enable the road crew to maintain the roads. Cars illegally parked may be ticketed or towed.

FY'20 General Fund Operating Budget & Capital Plan: The proposed FY'20 General Fund and Capital Budget was presented to the Selectboard for their consideration. The operating budget represents a net budget increase of \$362,339 (3.95%). The increase is projected to increase the municipal tax rate \$.0.0121.

The budget maintains the existing levels of service while incorporating the newly approved debt service for the Class 1 Sidewalk (\$157,961) and Main Street Overhead Utility Projects (\$143,963). The debt for the sidewalks will be paid for with property taxes and the debt service for the overhead utility project will be paid for with local option taxes. The budget also includes money for a full-time fire chief (\$126,975 total compensation). The Assistant Finance Director retired and prior to hiring a new person for this position, it was reclassified from part-time to full-time, increasing the total compensation by \$41,685. In the current fiscal year, the Town budgeted \$433,110 for paving and the proposed budget for paving includes \$433,988. The plan is to pave West Hill Road from its intersection with Mayo Farm Road to the end of pavement at Percy Hill Road. Salaries were adjusted in accordance with the Town's union agreements by 2.3%, which is the October 2018 CPI-U.

The only proposed capital project is \$285,000 to reconstruct the Rec Path between Bridge 1 and Bridge 2 and armor the banks to avoid further erosion. The limited capital projects are due to Public Works already having a lot on its plate. It is also intended to help build up our capital reserves in order to address emergencies.

The Selectboard will deliberate on the budget at their 1/14/19 meeting and hold a public hearing at their 1/28/19 meeting. They are also scheduled to adopt the Annual Meeting Warning at that meeting.

Helen Day Memorial Building Update: Thank you to the Stowe Fire Department for their quick response to the sprinkler bursting in the attic. As bad as it is, their timely response help to prevent what could have been much worse. I got to the building at 6am and they were already there and had turned off the water. I don't know how many of you get up in the middle of the night, but it is not a lot of fun. They do it on a regular and on-going basis. If you see a firefighter, please let them know how much you appreciate it.

An emergency response contractor has been working to remove water damaged materials and dry out the building. Once complete, general contractor will be retained for the reconstruction. Major damage occurred on the main floor of the building in the area of the adult collection of the Library. The Library staff is busy inventorying the books to see what was lost for insurance purposes and will then work to rebuild the collection. They intend to offer some limited services (e.g. public access computers, magazines and newspapers) out of the Akeley Building Memorial Room and children's programming out of the Gale Recreation Center. We will let you know on the Stowe Free Library website (www.stowelibrary.org) when they are ready to provide these services. The Helen Day Art Center staff

has relocated to 151 Main Street and will be holding art classes at various locations. It is likely to be several months before we can open the Helen Day Art Center Building to the public.

Government: Local government has a rich tradition in New England. No place manifests it more than the direct democracy that occurs at Annual Town Meeting. With this being said, municipalities are subdivisions of the State. Municipalities are only permitted to do what State law authorizes and are required to perform certain functions. The State also only permits municipalities to raise certain taxes while reserving most taxing authority for itself.

As the Federal and State governments have stepped back in their scope and/or level of services, citizens are increasingly looking to local government to step up. However, local governments are struggling to fulfill the challenges of providing its existing services. An example of this is in the Public Safety divisions, where the need to replace public safety volunteers with paid employees, in addition to the increasing expectations and demands for training and technology.

Our democracy continues to debate what level of government is in the best position to serve them. Local government is the most accessible and where the rubber meets the road, so they are often in the best position to understand the need and community values. However, it can be a challenge to meet modern expectations at that scale both from an affordability and technical ability standpoint.

An example of this is the state mandates local legislative bodies appoint town health officers who respond to non-fire safety rental housing concerns to enforce state regulations. Many of these people are volunteers and some are paid, but it is part of their responsibilities that they may not have professional training in. "The Vermont Department of Health is charged with providing support to town health officers; however, despite the fact that there are 480 staff positions at the Department of Health, only 10 percent of one position is dedicated to supporting town health officers." Town Health Officers receive very little in the way of on-site assistance and financial support in carrying out their duties. When you call the State Department of Health for assistance, their response is often to tell you to talk to your municipal attorney on the local dime which means it is paid for with property taxes.

The advantage is that local government is closest to the people and has a local touch due to knowing the people they are serving. The challenge is the expectations and technical skills necessary to meet those challenges is continually growing (e.g. lead paint, mold). Low income housing advocates, the Vermont Legislature and the Vermont League of Cities & Towns continue to debate how best to provide these services. Should it be done by 250 municipalities or a state agency or a combination of both? This is just one example of the myriad of issues confronting citizens and their government.