

**Stowe Selectboard, Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting
Monday November 28, 2022**

Present:

Selectboard Members: William Adams, Jo Sabel Courtney, Nick Donza, Lisa Hagerty, Paco Aumand (via Zoom)

In Person attendees: Paul Wohlberg, Jared Anello, Brad M, Jed Lipsky, Larry Lackey, Katie Rubin, Jonathan Thereault, Paul Sakash, Stace Edwards, Alan Kovacs, Jackie Pratt, David Jaqua, Bobby Murphy, Peter Penndorf, Robert Marks, Cindy Fuller

There were 16 participants on Zoom

Call to Order

Chair Billy Adams called the meeting to order at 5:04pm.

Approve the Agenda

On a motion by Ms. Jo Sabel Courtney, seconded by Ms. Lisa Hagerty the Board approved the agenda as presented.

Executive Session

On a motion by Ms. Lisa Hagerty, seconded by Ms. Courtney, the Board went into Executive Session to discuss personnel.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 5:34pm.

Consent Agenda

1. 10/24/22 Selectboard Minutes
2. Village Green Interfaith Holiday Display
3. Traditional Christmas in Stowe Special Event Application
4. River Bend Apartments Grant Agreement Resolution
5. Water/Sewer Allocation: 144 Main Street
6. Water/Sewer Allocation: 629 Sylvan Park Road
7. Water Allocation: 40 Sanborn Road
8. Water/Sewer Allocation: 1899 Mountain Road
9. Public Safety Communication System Enhancement Grant
10. IBEW Agreement & Personnel Rules Amendment – Sick Leave
11. Liquor Consent Items

On a motion by Mr. Paco Aumand, seconded by Ms. Hagerty, the Board approved the Consent Agenda as presented.

Introduction of Jackie Pratt, Stowe Electric Department General Manager

Jackie Pratt, the new Stowe Electric Department General Manager, was present to introduce herself to the Board. She noted she has been on the job 7-8 weeks and is just getting immersed in all the projects and topics ongoing. She said she is open to any questions anyone may have, they can feel free to reach out to her. The Selectboard welcomed her to the community.

Sexual Harassment Policy Update

Town of Stowe Personnel Attorney Kerin Stackpole and Human Resources Director Charleen McFarlane presented proposed revisions to the Town of Stowe Sexual Harassment Policy, following discussion and suggestions from the Selectboard in the past. Ms. Stackpole and Ms. McFarlane also noted that there

would be two separate policies – one for employees and one for volunteers, although the language in both is fairly consistent. Ms. Stackpole noted that much of the language was incorporated from the Vermont Attorney General language- and reflects Supreme Court decisions. She noted that much of what was added to the policy was to provide clarity on the types of behaviors that are clearly prohibited, with specific examples. Ms. Becky Gonyea, Executive Director of the Clarina Howard Nichols Center, provided some written suggestions on changes, which the Board went over with Ms. Stackpole. Ms. Stackpole noted that some of the proposed changes by Ms. Gonyea went beyond the law, but that was acceptable for the policy to be stricter than law if the Selectboard so chose. There was discussion regarding the phrase “if it is known or should be known that the recipient does not welcome such behavior,” which Ms. Gonyea suggested removing from two places in the policy. Ms. Stackpole stated that she would prefer the language remain as actions being unwelcome is a requirement of the law currently. The Board also discussed the section of the policy which stated that substantiated claims may be subject to disciplinary action, which some felt did not sound strong enough. Ms. Stackpole noted that sometimes counseling or education can resolve issues without discipline. Mr. Aumand suggested changing it to “shall result in training, coaching or disciplinary action...”

The Board also discussed a request from Ms. Sarah Henshaw to ensure the policy is reviewed annually and training provided Mr. Safford indicated that it can be a challenge because of the 24/7/365 nature of our municipal operations to get all the employees together. Ms. Stackpole -suggested that maybe we do a group in-person training but in future years it can be on-line or some other training that keeps it in the forefront of employee’s minds.

Ms. Stackpole indicated that she would take the suggestions and comments from tonight’s meeting and incorporate them into a future draft.

Local Sales & Use Tax

Town Manager - Safford followed up on a discussion the Selectboard had in September relating to the implementation of a one percent local option sales tax. Mr. Safford began the conversation by noting that the reality is that due to inflationary pressures, increased demands for services and declining volunteerism, the Town of Stowe FY’24 municipal budget is currently looking at 14% increase, with a 12% or higher property tax increase. Implementing a local option sales tax is anticipated to raise approximately \$700,000, which could then be put into the general fund budget to offset some of the increase in taxes.

Mr. Safford explained that currently the State of Vermont has a 6% sales tax, and that they have allowed some towns disproportionately affected by Act 60 to implement a one percent local option taxes, both on Rooms, Meals and Alcohol and on Sales. Currently the Town of Stowe collects only the Rooms, Meals and Alcohol tax, which is used to fund debt service on the Stowe Arena and undergrounding of the Main Street power lines, and for capital projects (one-time projects over \$200,000). To implement a local option sales tax, the voters would be asked to approve it at Town Meeting in March. The tax would go into effect within 90 days of being approved by the voters and would be administered by the State, who would collect the 1%, and return 0.7% to the Town, while 0.3% would be redistributed throughout the State.

It was discussed that this sales tax would be used specifically for offsetting money to be raised by taxes. IT was noted that applying ARPA funding to reduce taxes would not be a good idea as it is one-time money and would not be available in future years when demand would still be there. Mr. Larry Lackey noted that having a local option sales tax shifts some of the cost burden of providing municipal services on to visitors to Stowe, which often use municipal services. It was discussed that many necessities are exempted from the sales tax.

There were concerns raised regarding the complexity of determining how to apply a local option sales tax, based on where delivery of services actually occurs. Mr. Chip Percy noted he felt this would lead to inaccuracy in the proposed numbers, an increase for work on the part of local businesses and more

complicated that a straight property tax to audit and maintain. Mr. Safford noted there are currently 20 Vermont municipalities with a local sales tax and it would be collected by the State with the money being remitted to municipality. It was also questioned if the money would be better used for workforce housing rather than offsetting taxes, however Mr. Safford noted that workforce housing and how the Town can support that is a much larger discussion. He did indicate that the Planning Commission is looking at Stowe's zoning in our designated growth centers to see how they might accommodate more housing through greater densities and heights. Also, the Town has supported affordable housing projects by being a pass through agent for Federal/State money to non-profit affordable housing agencies. Mr. Safford indicated that he would work with legal counsel to determine how best to word the question on the Town Meeting warning to assure that if approved, any local option sales tax collected would go to the general fund to reduce the amount that needs to be raised to support the budget through property taxes.

On a motion by Mr. Paco Aumand, seconded by Mr. Nick Donza, the Board instructed the Town Manager to include an article on the Annual Meeting Warning to ask the voters to approve a 1% local sales & use tax, with the understanding that the Manager will work on the language with legal counsel subject to future approval by the Selectboard.

Homestead Education Property Tax vs Income Tax

The Selectboard requested time to discuss the concept of moving from a School Homestead Education Tax to an Income Tax which was recommended by the Vermont Tax Structure Commission and is being further evaluated by a State legislative committee. It was noted that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns legislative platform also includes supporting an education finance system that reduces the education homestead property tax ensuring that Vermonters can stay in their homes. Washington County State Senator Anne Cummings joined the meeting to discuss the potential reform to the education tax system. She noted that a recent tax study commissioned by the Vermont Legislature recommended moving in this direction it is complex and there are still unanswered questions, so it is not likely to occur near term.

Manager's Report

Mr. Safford reported that Stowe Electric Department has submitted a Certificate of Public Good for their Wilkins Substation Upgrade. He also reported that 1st quarter Local Option Taxes came in at \$417,588 which is in line with last year and what was budgeted. He then reported that the Stowe Wastewater Plant has had a breakdown in their centrifuge resulting in not being able to dewater. Nearby towns have been assisting in the meantime, although it involved trucking non-dewatered residuals and paying for services. The centrifuge has been sent to Philadelphia for repair and it is estimated that it will cost \$68,000 to repair, which will be paid out of the wastewater utility fund. They are hoping the centrifuge will be back on line by the end of December.

Bobby Murphy, Vice President and General Manager of Stowe Mountain Resort gave an opening season overview. He reported that they are hoping for a return to a normal ski year after several seasons impacted in various ways by the COVID pandemic. There will be no requirements for face coverings, vaccination checks or reservations this year. Staffing is on track for a full season. He noted that the new chair lift is expected to be in use by mid-December, and an ADA complaint ramp for Mansfield Base Lodge has been installed. He also noted that recently SMR has donated \$25,000 to Lamoille Family Center and \$25,000 to Lamoille Community House.

Mr. Murphy discussed lift ticket limitations, noting that they will prioritize pass holders by limiting the number of window/one day tickets issued. This year also will be the first year for paid parking on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays before 2pm, as well as holiday weeks. Mr. Murphy explained how the

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new system will work utilizing a mobile app for payment or kiosks. A few residents expressed their displeasure at the new paid parking system and requested a reservation system instead.

On a motion by Ms. Hagerty, seconded by Mr. Donza, the Board went into Executive Session to discuss personnel at 9:42pm.

The Board came out of executive session at 9:54pm.

On a motion by Ms. Hagerty, seconded by Ms. Courtney, the Board appointed Jared Anello to the Stowe Recreation Commission to fill a vacant term effective immediately through April 30, 2023.

There being no further business, Chair Adams adjourned the meeting at 9:56pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Abigail Sweetser.