

**Stowe Selectboard, Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting
Wednesday June 28, 2023**

Present:

Selectboard Members: William Adams, Lisa Hagerty, Nick Donza, Jo Sabel Courtney

In Person attendees: Liz Soper, Ethan Carlson, Loren Polk, Scott Reeves, Paul Sakash, Alison Karosas, Willie Noyes, Deb Longe, Walter Frame, Alison Beckwith

There were 27 participants on Zoom.

Call to Order

Chair Lisa Hagerty called the meeting to order at 5:00pm.

Approve the Agenda

On a motion by Ms. Jo Sabel Courtney, seconded by Mr. Nick Donza, the Board approved the Agenda with the addition of Consent Agenda item A-9, Transfer to Capital Fund.

Executive Session

On a motion by Mr. Billy Adams, seconded by Mr. Donza, the Board went into Executive Session at 5:02pm to discuss Personnel.

On a motion by Mr. Donza, seconded by Mr. Adams, the Board came out of Executive Session at 5:23pm.

On a motion by Mr. Adams, seconded by Mr. Donza, the Board appointed Julia Biedermann as the Student Representative to the Stowe Energy Committee for a one-year term.

On a motion by Mr. Adams, seconded by Ms. Courtney, the Board approved the IBEW MOU regarding reimbursement requiring an employee to reimburse the Town \$5,000 if the Town pays for their CDL license and training and they leave employment within two years.

Consent Agenda

1. 6/14/23 Selectboard Meeting
2. Capital Project Closeouts
3. Energy Committee Survey & Banner
4. Akeley Building Closure
5. Water & Sewer Allocation – 3343 Mountain Road
6. Lease Agreement with Grey Media Group for Tenancy in the WCAX Building for Stowe Public Safety Communications Equipment
7. Special Event Applications – Spruce Peak Village
8. Liquor Consent Items
9. Transfer to Capital Fund

On a motion by Ms. Courtney, seconded by Mr. Adams, the Board approved the Consent Agenda as presented.

Introduction of Loren Polk, Library Director

Town Manager Mr. Charles Safford introduced the new Library Director, Loren Polk. Ms. Polk comes to the Town of Stowe from the Aldrich Library in Barre. Ms. Polk thanked the Board for inviting her in, and encouraged those in attendance to get a library card and come visit the Stowe Free Library, as reading has many proven health benefits!

Proposed FY'24 Water & Wastewater Budgets, Capital Projects & Rate Schedule

Chair Hagerty opened the public hearing at 5:38pm. The Board discussed the proposed FY'24 Water & Wastewater Budgets, Capital Projects & Rate schedule at their June 14, 2023 meeting. There were no further comments from the Board or the public.

On a motion by Ms. Courtney, seconded by Mr. Adams, the Board approved the FY'24 Water & Sewer Budgets and Rate Schedule effective 7/1/23.

Web-Based Short-Term Rental Registration Presentation

The Selectboard continues to learn more about Short Term Rentals as part of the discussion on what, if any, regulation or registry they may want to adopt to address STRs in Stowe. At this session, Samantha White from Granicus provided an overview of their host compliance software to give the Board a sense of the capabilities of such a service. It was noted that the Town has not committed to anything with any companies at this time, this demonstration was done for free for informational purposes only. If the Town did decide to do a registry through an online vendor there would be a Request for Proposals process for selection of vendor unless waived by the Selectboard.

Ms. White gave her demonstration, noting that Granicus works with government agencies, including a few towns in Vermont, to address STR challenges through a host compliance online registry. She noted that the main goal is to inform and educate STR owners of their obligation to comply with whatever requirements the Town may include in an ordinance. The service Granicus provides includes pulling STR data from more than 70 STR rental platforms online, matching those with local addresses in the Grand List, and generating a list of STRs. Granicus did a review in May on the number of STRs in Stowe, noting that they found 1,684 listings, with 1,250 of those being unique rental units, as some units may be listed on multiple sites. It was noted that a number of those units may be hospitality units in hotels that would not be truly classified as a STR, but the number is not currently available. Ms. White did indicate that the Town could narrow its search for STRs by excluding units in traditional hospitality locations, choosing to focus on residential STRs instead. Ms. White explained that once the STRs are identified and matched with an owner's address, letters are then sent to the owners explaining the Town Ordinance and online registration process, allowing them to get into compliance voluntarily. She noted that the Town can customize the tone and tenor of the letters sent out, but that Granicus does specify each letter to the specific listing they have identified, so they are not generic letters going out to all residents.

Ms. White then explained the online host compliance registry portal, noting that documents required by the Town could be uploaded on the registry, information can be pre-populated from the information identified in listings, and that the applicant will then be directed to the payment of a registration fee as determined by the Town. She noted Granicus would also offer rental activity monitoring and a 24/7 complaint hotline where neighbors, residents, etc. can report issues and incidents related to STRs. Once an issue is filed, Granicus will contact the person identified on the registry as a responsible party and will follow up with both the complainant to let them know the issue has been addressed as well as with the Town so they can do any follow up enforcement as they deem appropriate.

Ms. White noted that the implementation timeline for such a project can be approximately 24 weeks, and does require Town staff time to support.

Mr. Adams questioned if the program could look at both STRs and Long Term Rentals. Ms. White indicated that while that may be possible, this program is specifically designed for STRs.

A number of local realtors and property managers in Town spoke to the large number of STRs that are currently under professional management, and that much of the information required in a registry is already available through those companies. Mr. Scott Reeves, Stowe Interim Fire Chief, stated that currently the Town does not have access to that information and often leaves the fire department in difficult situations due to an inability to connect with a responsible party if and when issues arise at a STR. He said that the Fire Department is requesting two things of STRs – that they have safe access to

the property, including utility areas, and have a responsible party to contact when issues arise. Not having access to the property or contact information can cause delays for the fire volunteers as they try to gain access or find someone to assist them in resolving issues. He noted that a large difference between STRs and LTRs is that Long Term Rental tenants are generally familiar with the property and how to use heat systems, etc. as well as with their landlord or property management. STR visitors do not have the time to understand and build those relationships, so they often do not know how to use things like wood stoves properly or how to contact the property owner or responsible party if they have an issue or concern. Mr. Reeves noted that there has been an increase in the number of issues relating to STRs in the last two years, and as of January 2023, they have begun asking and tracking if the properties they visit are a STR property.

It was discussed that Granicus has provided a ballpark estimate of \$82,000 for the set up and maintenance of a STR registry for Stowe. Mr. Adams asked if that price was based on the number of compliance items required by a Town ordinance. - Ms. White -indicated much of the cost is related to the number of STRs and the address identification process.

Mr. Andrew Chmura asked what is done with the data collected through the registry process. Ms. White explained that the data collected belongs to the Town, and not to Granicus. They utilize cloud-based storage, but do not sell or otherwise distribute that data unless the Town chooses to do so for any reason. Ms. Allison Karusas, of Stowe Country Homes, which currently manages approximately 200 properties, stated that she felt this was good software but could readily supply the Town with the required information for the properties she manages, as well as stating that she currently performs safety inspections of the STRs she manages. Several other property management owners stated that they also collect this information and perform inspections. -They also indicated that some property owners may have concerns with privacy if they had to register their property, which is one reason they may choose to work through a property management company. It was also noted that fees can get onerous, and they encouraged lower registration fees to encourage compliance. Ms. Alison Beckwith stated that she felt rentals were on a decline and that the problem may “resolve itself” over time, but also noted that when restrictions are imposed on STRs it damages real estate values.

It was noted that Mr. Reeves and the State Fire Marshall are scheduled to attend the July 26th meeting of the Selectboard to continue discussions on STRs and the impact on public safety.

There was no action taken at this time.

Manager's Report

Mr. Safford reminded the Board of the special meeting scheduled for Wednesday July 5th at 7:30am to set the FY'24 tax rate. It was discussed that this is due to the timing of the receipt of State Tax Rates and the need to get tax bills out at least 30 days prior to the first tax due date.

Mr. Safford provided the annual Financial Management Questionnaire required by State Statute to be completed annual by the Town Treasurer to assure the Town's internal financial controls are sound.

Mr. Safford included a press release from Stowe Electric Department announcing they have received a National Energy Innovator Award.

Mr. Donza noted that the newly implemented Local Option Sales Tax goes into effect in Stowe on July 1, and asked about outreach to the business community Regarding this change. It was noted that the State was supposed to provide information to businesses on how to collect the tax, and that for many it is automatically included.

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Mr. Donza also requested that at a future Selectboard meeting the Board discuss the issue of beavers near the Stowe Elementary School/Memorial Park and the cost to the community of continuing to allow them to expand the wetlands in that area. Mr. Safford noted that town does not own the property, but would schedule it as a future agenda item.

There being no further business, Chair Hagerty adjourned the meeting at 7:50pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Abigail Bourgeois.

*Note: The video recording of the meeting is available on the town's website www.townofstowe.org