



Stowe Selectboard, Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting Wednesday December 27, 2023

Present:

Selectboard Members: Lisa Hagerty, William Adams, Nick Donza, Paco Aumand

Jo Sabel Courtney was absent.

In-person attendees:

Town Manager Charles Safford, Assistant Town Manager Will Fricke, Public Works Director Harry Shepard, Parks & Recreation Director Matthew Frazee, Finance Director Cindy Fuller, Director of Information Technology Jonathan Thereault, Town Clerk Penny Davis, Police Chief Donald Hull, Dave King, Dave Rodgers, Laura Hamilton, John Aberth, Bob Galvin, Rich Scott, Bob Sachem, Tim Meehan, Tiffany Donza, Jed Lipsky, Breena Galdenzi, Bev Soychak

Nine attended via Zoom.

Call to Order

Selectboard Chair Lisa Hagerty called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Approval of the Agenda

On a motion by Mr. Billy Adams, seconded by Mr. Nick Donza, the Board approved the agenda as presented.

Consent Agenda

1. 12/13/23 Selectboard Minutes
2. Errors & Omissions
3. Trapp Lodge Special Event Applications
4. Liquor Consent Items

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

FY'25 Draft General & Capital Funds Presentation

Mr. Charles Safford presented the FY25 draft General & Capital Fund budget. He reviewed the letter of transmittal with the Selectboard to highlight major changes between the current FY'24 budget and the proposed FY'25 budget. He reiterated that no budget adjustments need to be made at this meeting, and that time will be set aside at the 1/10/24 meeting for the Selectboard to deliberate. A public hearing is scheduled for the 1/24/24 meeting, after which final adjustments may be made before the Annual Meeting Warning is adopted.

The CPI-U for October was 2.7% and the Grand List is projected to grow by 3.0%. The anticipated growth in the grand list is \$725,141, which provides \$350,751 in anticipated new tax revenue. A penny on the tax rate raises approximately \$248,965. The FY' 25 Budget as proposed represents a net budget increase of \$302,812 (+ 2.66%). The proposed budget is projected to increase the municipal tax rate \$.0125 or (+2.65%).

The proposed operating budget reflects a status quo budget with no new services or major initiatives. It incorporates \$300,000 in administrative contingency primarily due to upcoming labor negotiations. The low unemployment rate and demand for certain employee positions by competing employers has increased, driving up labor cost.

Mr. Safford noted that the undesignated surplus is \$1,641,837 based on the FY'23 audited financials. This represents 9.8% of the proposed FY'25 operating budget. Two months of cash flow equals \$1,800,000. The Selectboard asked for the history of the undesignated surplus and Mr. Safford said he would follow up with that information. He stated that if the Selectboard thinks there is sufficient undesignated surplus, he recommends redirecting it to one-time spending, such as budgeting to transfer additional money to the Equipment Fund, which is projected to go negative by \$580,000 in FY'28.

Mr. Aumand noted that the current fiscal year budget is tracking slightly above a linear annual burn rate. Mr. Safford noted that how the annual budget looks month to month can change based on many factors, including when the Town pays for certain things, and has no reason to think at this time that the Town will go over budget in the current fiscal year.

Mr. Safford proceeded to brief the Selectboard on the FY25 budgets for each department, whether there were significant changes from the previous fiscal year, and if so, the factors driving those changes. He then outlined proposed capital projects for FY25 and FY26; Moscow Village flashing speed signals to help reduce speed through Moscow Village, the reconstruction of a deteriorated section of Rec Path from Town Farm Lane to Cape Cod Road, Akeley Building HVAC replacement, an emergency generator for the Stowe High School due to it serving as the Town's Emergency Shelter, and preliminary design and permitting for improvements to Memorial Park and a new recreation building. Mr. Donza asked if it was feasible for the Akeley Building HVAC replacement to be reduced in scope. Mr. Shepard indicated that it could. Mr. Safford indicated that there may be a CO issue with large groups in the summer if the air conditioning system isn't replaced and the existing boilers are reaching the end of their useful life.

No action was taken at this time.

Beaver Trapping

Mr. Safford began by providing an overview of the beaver issues in Stowe that lead to the Selectboard adopting Stowe's Beaver Management Guidelines at the Selectboard's 6/10/2019 meeting. It states that the Town should attempt non-lethal approaches to conflict management first, but when those means fail, the Town may implement a population management strategy which could include trapping.

Since adopting the guidelines, there has been considerable beaver activity in and around Memorial Park and the Mayo Farm in the following locations: Between Depot and Pond Streets which is private property (The private property owner has been open to the Town trapping to manage the beaver population.), adjacent to the Parks Building, between the Rec Path & Quiet Path and between Mayo Field A & B. Mr. Shepard clarified for the Board that the activity adjacent to the Parks Building is new. He also stated that the Town's hydraulic capacity in that area has gotten worse; that infrastructure is being adversely impacted by the extent with which the habitat has evolved.

Non-lethal measures the Town has pursued include working with Vermont Fish & Wildlife to install a beaver deceiver between Pond & Depot Streets. Parks also removed a reoccurring dam adjacent to the tennis courts but could not keep up with it sufficiently along with their other duties resulting in portions of the tennis courts flooding at times.

The meeting materials included a letter from Tyler Brown, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department Wildlife Specialist with an evaluation of the sites and an explanation of where beaver baffles may and may not help management water levels in all locations including behind the Parks Shed and the identified areas at the Mayo Farm. His letter states, in part, "One option the town could consider is having a licensed trapper trap beavers during the regulated trapping season (4th Saturday in October – end of March)." In accordance with ANR Beaver Management BMP's a property owner may also remove beaver dams under two years old and may with the approval of ANR. Not all dams are readily reachable with equipment. There may be a risk to personnel when trying to remove them manually.

Ms. Hagerty asked Mr. Shepard if the flooding caused by beaver dams has worsened over the past decade. He stated that it has. Ms. Hagerty then requested clarification on when trapping stopped, and why. Mr. Safford stated that trapping was conducted by the Highway and Parks Departments until 2019, and that it is a legal tool for municipalities to utilize in beaver management. Mr. Shepard suggested the southeast quadrant of Memorial Park may be an area where beavers may not impact municipal infrastructure, but the area between Pond and Depot and the area next to the Parks Shed is impactful.

Mr. Aumand suggested issuing an RFP to find a certified and reputable firm to create a comprehensive beaver management plan, including a site visit of all areas known to have beavers by a wildlife biologist and a measured approach to trapping. Mr. Donza commented he is in favor

of moving trapping back to a staff level decision, as it was prior to 2019. Ms. Hagerty said she was in favor of a comprehensive beaver management plan.

Mr. Adams stated that he understands the adverse effects of trapping, but that the flooding caused by beaver dams in Memorial Park is an immediate and worsening problem. He said the Board needs to find a balance of what is acceptable in the community and apply different management techniques to different areas based on need. He also stated an issue faced is a lack of definable goals and acknowledged the need to increase hydraulic capacity in the wetlands adjacent to Depot Street. Mr. Adams stated the short-term goal is not to maintain the status quo, but to actively target a lower water level. Mr. Donza said he is in favor of trapping, and that trapping beavers could be more cost-effective than mitigation due to the risk of mitigation efforts continuing to be unsuccessful. Mr. Adams asked Mr. Shepard how often the Highways and Parks Departments attempt to break dams. Mr. Shepard stated that the Highways Department regularly attempts to reach dams with an excavator from Depot Street, and that the Parks Department attempts to break dams by hand near the tennis courts.

Mr. Adams moved to instruct the Town Manager to authorize trapping in Memorial Park, except the southeast quadrant, and, in consultation with Ampersand Properties, in wetlands adjacent to Depot Street for immediate relief of flooding. The motion also instructs the Town Manager to prepare an RFP for a Beaver Management Plan to determine sustainable flood control options, including non-lethal and lethal beaver management techniques. Mr. Donza seconded the motion. Mr. Aumand reiterates the absence of a clear goal with regards to trapping. Ms. Hagerty then called upon Mr. Shepard, who stated that the goal is to lower the water level in the wetlands adjacent to Depot Street by two feet from its current level on a sustainable basis. Mr. Shepard stated that a biologist sent by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) installed flow devices at the beaver dams that reduced the water level by one foot, but they could not reduce the water level further. Ms. Hagerty then called for public comment. Ms. Soyachak stated that the Selectboard should consider consulting with Skip Lisle to determine whether one of his devices could be effective in sufficiently reducing the water level without the need for trapping. Brenna Galdenzi from Protect our Wildlife indicated that they thought it would be prudent to see what Mr. Lisle might be able to practically do in this regard before their organization commits money to assist in managing the situation. Mr. Safford asked for the Selectboard to involve Public Works in any determinations regarding water level mitigation. Mr. Adams then moved to withdraw the motion, with Ms. Hagerty seconding.

Mr. Adams moved to instruct the Town Manager to consult with Skip Lisle, the Public Works Director, and Protect our Wildlife within 30 days to determine if the water level in the wetlands adjacent to Depot Street can be reduced by two feet on a sustainable basis with the use of additional beaver deceivers. If so, the Town Manager is authorized to order the devices installed. If reducing the water level by two feet is determined to not be feasible with the use of additional beaver deceivers, or if newly installed devices do not sufficiently reduce the water level, the Town Manager is instructed to authorize trapping, and to prepare a Request for Proposals for a Beaver Management Plan that would include a site visit by a consultant, a determination of the site's beaver carrying capacity, and a plan for non-lethal and lethal beaver management techniques that would reduce the water level by two feet on a sustainable basis. Mr. Donza seconded the motion.

Mr. Adams, Mr. Donza, and Ms. Hagerty voted in favor. Mr. Aumand voted against.

Town Manager's Report

Mr. Safford provided the Selectboard with a notice of the Lamoille County Final 2004-2025 Budget Meeting, to take place on January 16, 2024, as well as a draft of the budget. The total cost to the Town is 339,150, which is an increase of \$21,376, and represents 55% of the county budget revenues.

Mr. Safford provided the Selectboard with November YTD actuals for the FY23 General, Water, and Sewer funds.

Mr. Safford also provided the Selectboard with one Act 250 filing.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Hagerty adjourned the meeting at 8:54 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Will Fricke.

The video recording of the meeting is available on the town's website townofstowevt.org.