

**Stowe Selectboard, Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting
Wednesday August 23, 2023**

Present:

Selectboard Members: William Adams, Nick Donza, Jo Sabel Courtney, Paco Aumand

In Person attendees: Harry Shepard, Scott Brinkman, Scott Reeves, Paul Sakash

There were participants on Zoom.

Call to Order

Vice Chair Mr. William Adams called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Approve the Agenda

On a motion by Mr. Paco Aumand, seconded by Ms. Jo Sabel Courtney, the Board approved the Agenda with the addition of consent items A-6 Wastewater Treatment Plant Propane Tank Replacement, A-7 British Invasion Block Party Special Event Application and one additional liquor consent item.

Consent Agenda

1. Minutes of 8/9/23
2. Topnotch Consecutive Water System Agreement
3. Capital Plan Amendment: Highway Boiler Replacement
4. Water/Sewer Allocation: 512 Mountain Road
5. Liquor Consent Items
6. Wastewater Treatment Plant Propane Tank Replacement
7. British Invasion Block Party Special Event Application

On a motion by Mr. Aumand, seconded by Ms. Courtney, the Board approved the Consent Agenda with additional items A-6 and A-7, and one additional Liquor Consent Item.

EMS/Fire Consultant Study

Town Manager Mr. Charles Safford introduced the Study, noting that this was an -approved capital project to study the present and future demands on the EMS/Fire Departments including, but not limited to, identifying organizational structure options, staffing requirements and costs. He thanked the past and present EMS & Fire volunteers for their service, noting their importance to the Public Safety operations and demands in the Town of Stowe, as they are essential to meeting the demands for service. Mr. Safford then introduced Mr. Richard Buchanan, Senior Project Manager with AP Triton, who conducted the study on the EMS/Fire Departments to present the study findings and suggestions for moving forward. Mr. Buchanan noted that the Stowe EMS/Fire department was evaluated based on national standards for a community the size of Stowe as well as NFPA Fire Standards for both rural and urban areas. He explained that the study was conducted by a team of 7 people from around the country and included in-person interviews, reviews of service call data and financial analysis. He noted that the study looked at several aspects of service, including community risk, service demand, current performance, benchmarks and service delivery. Looking at community risk, he explained that although the population of Stowe looks small, the number of people served when accounting for tourism is much higher. He also noted the number of large, multi-million dollar properties and hotels with large numbers of guests are a high risk. He also noted that the large number of Short Term Rental properties in Stowe creates a higher risk due to the lack of knowledge about the property by renters. Looking at service demand, he noted that the majority of fire calls are false alarms, which can lead to volunteer burnout. For EMS, he noted that there are a lot of critical patients and injured patients treated in Stowe. He noted that based on call locations, the location of the Public Safety Facility is excellent, however in the future the Town may want to look at satellite location for surge capacity units closer to the ski resort at the top of the mountain. As far as

current performance, it was noted that currently the response time is not meeting standards. Mr. Buchanan noted that national benchmarks are 8 minutes, and currently response time is averaging 20 minutes. He indicated that dispatch data currently shows a 13 minute response time for dispatch, which is done through Lamoille County Sheriffs Office. More investigation is needed to determine if this is an accurate number. It was also noted that travel time is a variable that cannot be changed, so the focus should be on dispatch and time to get out the door. For staffing, Mr. Buchanan stated that for a fire call there is a minimum of 3 people to take a truck out of the station, and for a full structure fire a minimum of 10 people are needed. The current staffing does not meet this, however it is a common problem across many communities. He noted that specific benchmarks and performance standards for Stowe need to be evaluated and determined by the Selectboard based on the community needs, expectations and fiscal capacity.

Mr. Buchanan stated that he would recommend having the EMS and Fire departments merge under one administrative structure. This would include one full-time chief for EMS/Fire, and he suggested two full-time Battalion Chiefs that could run incidents and focus on the staff and volunteers. Mr. Buchanan stated that to meet national standards, the Town should increase the full time staff to have 3 - working at all times. This could also include utilizing volunteers that could staff at the station. It was discussed that not all volunteers are interested in cross-training between EMS and Fire, and that volunteers could still be specific to one department if they chose. He did suggest all volunteers receive basic EMT training and basic Firefighter training. He also suggested utilizing volunteers from other towns that may be interested in picking up shifts for Stowe. Having this staffing level in the building would allow for a 60 second "roll out the door" time to help improve response time overall. The proposed cost for this staffing model was - comparable to what the town already budgets, it is a matter of how the money is best utilized to provide surety of service.

The Board then discussed the study results, noting that the information from dispatch needed to be clarified further. Mr. Courtney stated that she was concerned with the large number of false alarm calls, and it was noted that the Town does have an alarm ordinance but it is limited in what they can do. Mr. Neil Van Dyke stated that the Town should focus on improving turnout time rather than dispatch or travel time, as turnout is the one aspect they can control. Fire Chief Mr. Scott Reeves stated that currently they wait for 3 people for each piece of equipment to "roll out," however even if the first 3 employees were to go out, they would still need volunteers to respond to take out other equipment like a tanker. Mr. Steven Berlin spoke to concerns that the proposed employee model would push out volunteers who commit to long shifts, it was then discussed that 24 hour shifts was a suggestion but no set staffing model had been adopted. Mr. Safford also noted that a change in shift hours would require negotiation with the labor unions that full time EMS employees currently fall under and volunteers may not necessarily need to work a 24 hour shift. Mr. Jed Lipsky spoke to a new law that may require municipalities to support public safety employees and volunteers beyond their time of service with insurance due to the hazards they are exposed to.

The Board indicated that they were open to hiring a unified EMS/Fire Chief and merging. Mr. Safford indicated that he would work with the Chiefs on a timeline for merger with the tentative goal of revising with the Selectboard at their 9/27/23 meeting. The Selectboard and Manager agreed that an important first step would be to hire an EMS Fire Chief. Mr. Safford indicated other steps would include developing an FY'25 EMS / Fire budget and to negotiating changes to labor contracts.

No action was taken at this time.

Manager's Report

Mr. Safford provided a Land Use Permit Administrative Amendment.

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Mr. Safford provided an update on the FY'23 Federal and State Grants received by the Town, noting that the Town received \$3,121 in Federal Grant Funds and \$55,889 in other grant sources.

Mr. Safford noted that the Town has an opportunity to do some tree removal near the Stowe Arena in conjunction with neighboring property owners. The trees, primarily white pine, the Town is considering removing have been marked. It is felt that the opportunity to work with the neighbors to remove potentially hazardous trees is a prudent move and would be funded out of the FY'24 Highway Operating Budget

On a motion by Ms. Courtney, seconded by Mr. Aumand, the Board went into Executive Session to discuss Legal and Personnel at 8:33pm.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:00pm.

There being no further business, Vice Chair Adams adjourned the meeting at 9:00pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Abigail Bourgeois.

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