

**Stowe Selectboard, Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting
Monday March 27, 2023**

Present:

Selectboard Members: William Adams, Jo Sabel Courtney, Nick Donza, Lisa Hagerty, Paco Aumand
In Person attendees: Brian Hamor, Jed Lipsky, Willie Noyes, Deb Longe, Weston Noyes, Barbara Baraw, Jeff Jackson, Heidi Scheuermann, Suzie Grimes, Chris Grimes, Marina Meerburg, Jay Wallace, Julie Marks, Bob Puddicombe, Colin Moffatt, Susan Connerty
There were 40 participants on Zoom

Call to Order

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

Approve the Agenda

On a motion by Mr. Billy Adams, seconded by Ms. Jo Sabel Courtney, the Board approved the agenda as presented.

Consent Agenda

1. Selectboard Minutes 3/13/23
2. Annual Local Emergency Management Plan
3. Liquor Consent Items
4. Farmers Contract Approval

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

Working Communities Challenge Equity Grant Letter of Support

Emily Rosenbaum, Initiative Director of Working Communities Challenge, and Greg Stefanski, Director of Lamoille Health Collaborative, joined the meeting to discuss their work for a Lamoille Equity Team that would focus on cross-organization, county-wide equity work. The group is applying for a \$10,000 grant through the Vermont Community Fund to offset some of the costs of engaging The Creative Discourse Group for equity assessments, coaching & consultation, and a community equity summit in fall 2023. They have requested a letter of support from the Town of Stowe Selectboard for this grant. The Selectboard noted that they adopted a Town of Stowe Declaration of Inclusion in April 2022 and this project will further this work throughout the larger community.

On a motion by Mr. Adams, seconded by Mr. Paco Aumand, the Board approved and signed the letter of support for the Working Communities Challenge Equity Grant.

Working Communities Challenge – Short Term Rentals Survey Results

Ms. Rosenbaum, Initiative Director of Working Communities Challenge, presented the results of a recent online survey on Short Term Rentals in Lamoille County. This survey was an effort of the Working Communities Challenge Housing Group, and was focused on understanding the data, challenges and thoughts regarding housing and Short Term Rentals in Lamoille County. Ms. Rosenbaum reported that there were a total of 573 responses to the survey, with 307 of those reporting that they lived in Stowe. It was discussed that while this was not a scientific or statistically significant response, it does give a good indication as to the temperature of the Town for STRs. Ms. Rosenbaum went through the survey results, noting that data from HousingData.org shows that the number of STRs in Lamoille County and Stowe have increased significantly from 2018 to 2023. Stowe is the main driver for STRs in Lamoille County. Of those who completed the survey, 74% stated that they see rental costs and availability as a challenge

to our community, and 83% see a shortage of Long Term housing, with 67% attributing some of that shortage to STRs.

However, it was important to note that the majority of those who responded to the survey stating that they owned a STR only owned 1-2 units and use the income to offset costs of living. Ms. Rosenbaum pointed out that this is important to remember when thinking about STR regulations, as it can be an important source of income for many in the community. She also noted that while most respondents to the survey indicated they wanted something done about STRs, there was no clear consensus on what that is.

Working Communities Challenge recommends that the Town of Stowe hold a series of community forums to discuss Short Term Rentals and any possible regulations. WCC has offered to facilitate these forums, as well as suggesting an anonymous, online forum for submitting comments.

The Selectboard discussed the survey results and the importance of using them as a starting point for more community discussion on the issues and concerns relating to STRs and what, if any, regulations the Town might want to consider. Mr. Adams noted that Stowe has been a community with many second homeowners who rented out their homes when they were away for many decades, however the changing landscape with STRs are a cause of challenges in the community. Ms. Hagerty discussed the need for more information related to how many STRs had been primary residences prior to being converted. She also noted a community concern about nuisances, such as noise and parking issues, and needing a local person to contact when issues arise. It was noted that sometimes when a Public Safety Agency responds to a STR location they are not able to contact an owner or local management company which causes additional logistical issues. It was noted that these community conversations need to focus on who Stowe is as a community and what they want to do to control issues related to STRs without harming those who are community members and also own/operate STRs.

Community members spoke to concerns about nuisances with STRs, such as the number of people advertised to occupy units (i.e. 14 people for a 4 bedroom home) and the impacts of that, such as parking, sewer, etc. There were many comments regarding the impact of absentee owners who are not available to respond to issues and complaints about STR renters.

Ms. Julie Marks of the Vermont Short Term Rental Alliance, stated that Air BNB and VRBO, the two most popular STR websites, pay taxes directly to the State on behalf of property owners so there is no ability to breakdown what revenues are from specific towns. However her organization has done some data analysis and indicated that Stowe generated approximately \$68 million in revenue from STRs in 2022, and that statewide the State collected approximately \$48M in taxes from 14,000 units. Ms. Marks also noted that the current State regulations on STRs is fairly limited, requiring a self-attestation on health and safety protocols for units, but they are not filed with the State and only required to be posted in the unit, but there is no regulation to ensure this occurs. She noted many towns in Vermont are now adopting local registration requirements to address concerns about STRs.

Other community members present discussed the impact of zoning regulations on limiting the number of housing in towns like Stowe as a cause for the lack of housing. Ms. Heidi Scheuermann also spoke to the lack of support for Long Term Rental owners, who are often stuck with non-paying tenants that must be legally evicted, cause damage to the home, etc. She said the Return on Investment for LTRs is just not there now. She also indicated that the Town might consider incentives for LTRs such as reducing up front water & sewer connection costs.

The Board discussed having a registration of STRs that would allow for more data collection for better decision making, as well as increase public safety by requiring a local contact for all STRs. They thanked Ms. Rosenbaum and the Working Community Challenge team for their work on collecting the data via the survey. This is something they will consider when setting priorities for the upcoming year.

Housing Diversity

Ms. Mila Lonetto presented to the Selectboard a report from the Community Housing Working Group related to housing diversity in Stowe. She noted that while she is Chair of the Planning Commission in

Stowe, she was speaking tonight not on behalf of the Planning Commission but rather as someone who has come together with others in the community to look at housing issues in Stowe and what might be done to address them. Ms. Lonetto indicated that while STRs are something they looked at, it is only a small part of the overall housing picture in Stowe. The main housing concerns in Stowe are developing workforce & affordable housing. She noted that Stowe currently has designated growth zones in the village, lower village, and Mountain Road village, but that the Town is overall limited by its highway and water & sewer infrastructure. She noted that the problem can't be solved by "building our way out of it" but rather use a combination of developing new units and transitioning existing housing stock to long-term housing. The group has presented a number of suggested ways to address the housing challenges in Stowe and suggested looking at doing as many small changes as possible to move the trends. These suggestions included looking at land use regulations such as parking, density, dimensional standards and conservation easements; looking at Town-Owned properties to evaluate for potential partnership projects with housing groups; expanding public transit and infrastructure to support affordable housing; regulatory options for Short Term Rentals; and incentives for both development of long term housing and for conversion of STRs into long term housing. The group further broke these goals down into tasks, processes and who would be best suited to address them.

It was discussed that while they don't know an exact number of the overall housing needs, it is clear that building affordable housing in Stowe is difficult with the high land values as well as construction costs. It was also noted that models such as Sylvan Woods which promotes affordable home ownership over rentals, is the ideal model. It was also noted that the Planning Commission is currently working with a consultant to address areas of the Zoning Regulations that may be changed to promote more development of affordable and working-class housing. There were also suggestions to look at options such as deed restrictions, and see what other Towns in similar situations as Stowe have done.

The Selectboard thanked the Working Group for their efforts and suggestions and will consider what initiatives they would like to look at when discussing their priorities for the upcoming year.

Manager's Report

Mr. Safford provided the Board with an update on the EPA regulations regarding PFAS, which is now proposed to have a maximum level of 4.0 parts per trillion. Currently the Stowe Village Green water supply has been measuring levels of 2.2 to 3.8 ppt. Public Works will continue to monitor both the evolving regulations and the levels in our water supply. It was also discussed that at this time the Edson Hill water supply is not measuring any PFAS, and that the current system allows for some mixing of water from the two supplies.

Mr. Safford also provided the Board with the February 2023 financials for the General Fund Operating Budget as well as Water and Sewer funds. He noted that overall the budget is tracking well and should come in on-line. However, it was discovered that there was a \$126,000 error in the calculation of the police wagers, which will also impact FY'24 at an estimated amount of \$146,000 and will need to be corrected in FY'25 budgeting. Mr. Safford indicated staff will come up with a plan to make up the anticipated shortfall.

Mr. Safford also indicated that Public Works is preparing to put out paving bids, and that they have re-evaluated the paving needs following the winter and are now suggesting that the Town pave Thomas Lane above Depot Street as planned, but also include as much of Mansfield View Road as possible. They also suggest an add alternate of paving the River Road Bridge, which will require a waterproof membrane replacement. It was noted that some drainage work has already been completed on Mansfield View Road, but if bids are favorable for additional work they may have to address some drainage on that road, which can be completed by the highway department.

Public Works Director Harry Shepard also provided an update on the West Hill Road intersection project, noting that we have been told delivery of the signal equipment should occur by Memorial Day 2023 and that should be installed soon after being received.

Selectboard Meeting 3/27/23

Mr. Sebastian Sweatman spoke to the Board about his concerns regarding the Vail development of a parking area on Harlow Hill, which was denied by the DRB but is currently in the appeals process. He expressed concerns about the Town entering into mediation with Vail. At this time the Town and Selectboard could not comment as it is an ongoing legal matter.

On a motion by Mr. Aumand, seconded by Ms. Courtney, the Board went into Executive Session at 8:45pm to discuss personnel and legal matters.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:40pm.

There being no further business, Chair Hagerty adjourned the meeting at 9:40pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Abigail Bourgeois.