

**Stowe Selectboard, Liquor Commission & Water/Sewer Commission Meeting
Wednesday July 12, 2023**

Present:

Selectboard Members: William Adams, Lisa Hagerty, Nick Donza, Jo Sabel Courtney, Paco Aumand
In Person attendees: Harry Shepard, Jed Lipsky, Jeff Clark, Jill Anne, Heather Snyder, Sarah McShane,
Paul Sakash, Matt Lillis
There were 18 participants on Zoom.

Call to Order

Chair Lisa Hagerty called the meeting to order at 5:30pm. Chair Hagerty spoke to the recent flooding the State, and while thankful that Stowe was not hit hard, acknowledged that many neighboring towns were not so fortunate.

Approve the Agenda

On a motion by Mr. Billy Adams, seconded by Ms. Jo Sabel Courtney, the Board approved the Agenda with the addition of a Storm Update as Business Item B-1, shifting Town Plan Update to B-2 and Traffic Study Update to B-3.

Consent Agenda

1. Minutes of 6/28/23 & 7/5/23
2. Arts & Culture Council Charge Amendment (Student Representative)
3. Stowe Cider Pre-Treatment Grant Agreement
4. Liquor Consent Items

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

Storm Update

Town Manager Charles Safford provided an update on the Town of Stowe response to the recent storm that resulted in flooding across the State of Vermont. He thanked Chief Hull and the Emergency Management team for their assistance, as well as the Public Works, Stowe Electric and Parks Department crews who assisted with storm-related activities, keeping much of the Town open for operation throughout and following the heavy rains. It was noted that Stowe received 5" of rain in the Storm which closed Memorial Park, Moscow Road and the Stowe Recreation Path. Moscow Road had -also had a section of road that was closed due to water overtopping it. Public Works is assessing the culvert in Moscow as well as river embankment issues on Barrows Road as two areas where further action may need to be taken. It was noted that Stowe was in part resilient because of recent infrastructure improvements, including the Stagecoach Road Bridge and the addition of box culvert on Cemetery Road that added hydraulic capacity. The Emergency Operations Center was opened Monday proactively, and Sewer operators stayed on-site throughout the storm, including overnight, to monitor the ongoing situation. Chief Hull reminded the public that the best way to get up to date information during emergency situations is to look for Stowe Public Safety on Facebook.

The Town is currently assisting neighboring towns hit harder by the flooding, including loaning a sewer pump to Waterbury and providing potable water to Copley Hospital in Morrisville.

Mr. Jeff Clark of the Stowe Community Fund spoke to their efforts to support those who live and work in Stowe, including gap funding and transitional aid for those who may need assistance with housing, food, transportation and other needs. He urged anyone who lives or works in Stowe and is in need to assistance to reach out to the Stowe Community Fund through their website or by phone.

Ms. Courtney also noted that the Working Communities Challenge of Lamoille County is also assisting those in need following the flood.

Town Plan Update, Process & Timeline

Ms. Sarah McShane, Director of Planning and Zoning, provided an update on the Planning Commission work to update the Stowe Town Plan. She noted that the Plan must be updated every 8 years, and was last finalized in 2018, with an update due by the end of 2026. The Planning Commission will prepare the updates and present them to the Selectboard for their final approval.

Ms. McShane explained that Town Plans for municipalities in Vermont are a long-term framework for municipal decision making, setting broad policies and goals as determined by the Planning Commission and Selectboard. The Plan is used for land use regulation, including Zoning, Subdivision and Flood Hazard, as well as giving the Town deference in any hearings that go before the Public Utility Commission, such as telecom and energy projects.

She noted that the first Stowe Town Plan was published in 1964, and that referencing past Plans is helpful in framing how Stowe will plan to move forward in their 2026 Plan. She explained that the Planning Commission works with other municipal Boards & Commissions, as well as other relevant community organizations and regional planning to help develop sections of the Plan, including the Energy Committee, Stowe Land Trust, Lamoille County Planning Commission, Stowe Area Association and more.

In addition to the required elements of the Plan, she noted the Planning Commission may look at adding more information related to climate change, sustainable tourism, climate migration, DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion), Land Acknowledgement and more. They will be engaged in joint meetings with the Planning Commission.

The process for updating the Town Plan will begin by hiring a Community Engagement Consultant, an approved FY'24 Capital Expense, to help lead broad community discussions on how they see Stowe and where they want to see it in the next 8-10 years. The goal is to capture the community spirit and what "Makes Stowe, Stowe." It was suggested that the Planning Commission also work with Stowe students and schools. The engagement with the Consultant is expected to begin around March 2024, and will go for approximately one year. Based on the consultant's work, the Planning Commission will then begin to draft the Plan. They anticipate bringing draft plans to the Selectboard in early 2026 for adoption by the end of that year.

Ms. McShane noted this is a very exciting process for the Planning Commission, which meets on the first and third Mondays of each month both in person at the Akeley Memorial Building and via Zoom.

There was no action taken at this time.

Traffic Study Update

The Town of Stowe has engaged with Stantec to complete a Highway Capacity and Congestion Evaluation. The study will include studying traffic in the Winter, Summer and Fall seasons. They have completed their Winter assessment and prepared a draft report summarizing their findings to date. Mr. Adam Catherine, PE with Stantec, presented an overview of the report to the Selectboard.

Mr. Catherine explained that the study utilized location-based data collection, as well as drone footage and other traditional traffic monitoring to obtain their data. The study found that the number of vehicle trips ending at the top of the Mountain went down from 2022 to 2023, likely due to a variety of factors. They also found that the number of visitors in Stowe directly correlates to traffic times, with 3,000 vehicles going to the Mountain leading to 20 minute waits, 4,000 vehicles having 40 minute waits, and 5,000 having 60 minute or more waits. Mr. Matt Lillis, with Stowe Mountain Resort, spoke to the need to assess the weather conditions when looking at wait times as well, as they have found that the top 15 visit days in 2023 did not correlate to the top 15 traffic delay days.

The study assessed visitor trip origin, finding that the majority of visitors are originating from Boston, New York and Burlington areas. The study was not able to capture cross-border trips, but estimated that less than 3% of visitors are coming from Canada. The study also looked at destinations in Stowe that attracted the most traffic, which included the top of the Mountain, Stowe Village and the Mountain Road. The Study also looked at the use of “bypass routes” around the village. They found that use of these bypasses is being used more frequently, with use of West Hill Road for those travelling from the North increasing from 30% in 2019 to 62% in 2023, and use Moscow Road for those travelling from the South increasing from 65% in 2019 to 77% in 2023. It also estimated that approximately 30-35% of traffic flowing through Stowe Village is pass-through traffic. It was noted that looking at the local impacts of these alternate routes is important.

The Study then looked at key intersections and the impact that growth in traffic in Stowe would have on them. With 5-10% growth in traffic, a Luce Hill Road signal is recommended. At 15-20% growth, several intersections would have E or F LOS movements, and additional intersection improvements would be needed, including Moscow Road roundabout. -

Ms. Zoe Neadlander with VTrans cautioned that Stowe needs to manage their expectations, as most of Mountain Road is a State Highway and there are limited funds and many needs throughout the State. Mr. Catherine noted that the study found that while vehicular traffic to the Mountain was less in 2023 than 2022, ridership of the bus increased significantly in that same time. Stantec recommends that Stowe continue to capitalize on the increase in bus usage, while also promoting other non-vehicular ways to access the Mountain including pedestrian and bike usage. To support this, Stantec recommended adding to existing Mountain Road shoulders to make room for buses and bike lanes, as well as providing emergency vehicle access. They also recommended transit amenities such as bus stops/shelters, crosswalks and lighting at bus stops. They also suggested e-bike charging stations and increase in sidewalk networks. Ms. Marina Meerburg also suggested more connections between Mountain Road and the Recreation Path to encourage use of the existing path for bike and pedestrian transit. The Board discussed these recommendations, noting that adding a dedicated bus lane to Mountain Road would come at a very high price tag - with complications related to Right Of Way acquisition, flood plains, and the overall topography in the area. It was also noted that to support increased ridership of the bus, there will need to be increased parking available in other areas.

Mr. Seth Jensen with Lamoille County Planning Commission spoke to determining the number of workforce transportation vs visitors and taking into account that those are different transit needs with possibly different solutions. He also noted that Stowe, and the Mountain Road area in particular, is the largest employment area in the county and so investments in that area support those living in other surrounding towns who rely on Stowe for employment.

Stantec will continue to assess traffic in the Summer and Fall seasons, as well as assessing traffic impacts of major events in Stowe, and will update the draft report and recommendations based on those findings. A final report is anticipated in December 2023, although Stantec will continue with evaluations in the future, adjusting recommendations as necessary.

No action was taken at this time.

Manager’s Report

Mr. Safford provided preliminary financials for year-end of FY23, noting that it has not been finalized or audited at this time, but that all fund budgets appear that they will come in on-line.

Mr. Safford provided a Notice of Public Hearing for the Lamoille County Regional Plan on July 25th. He noted that both of Stowe’s representatives are on the Regional Plan Committee and that nothing major has been proposed relating to Stowe.

Mr. Safford provided a Development Review Board notice of Hearing related to the SED Cady Hill Storage Barn. The proposed project is “to construct a new, free standing, single story, slab on a cold grade storage utility barn. The barn will be 40’ x 120’ with a gable roof and is designed to emulate a rustic barn.”

Mr. Safford also provided an update on the air handling and air conditioning system in the Akeley Memorial Theatre. It is currently non-functional and has been deemed not repairable. The Town has notified Stowe Theatre Guild and let them know that at this time, the building is not in the position to occupy that space with large numbers of people due to the potential CO2 levels without air circulation. Ms. Cheryl Casey read a statement from Stowe Theatre Guild stating that while they did cancel their typical season of productions prior to this failure, they had hoped to do small-scale productions, which have now been cancelled. They thanked the Town for working with STG and encouraged the Town to complete the repairs as soon as possible as it is impacting their plans and ticket sales to support the organization. The Town has engaged with a mechanical engineer to assess a plan and cost for replacement.

Mr. Safford also noted that the boiler in the Highway Garage is no longer safe to operate and will require replacement before the winter season. This will require an amendment to the FY24 Capital Plan. When the replacement of the Akeley Theatre air handling system is done is up to the Selectboard, as it could be done through a Capital Plan amendment or could go to the voters as part of the FY25 Capital Plan. Mr. Adams stated that he would like to look at more formal cost estimates prior to making further decisions. Mr. Larry Lackey asked about the use of heat pumps in the Highway Garage rather than replacing the boiler. Public Works Director Mr. Harry Shepard indicated that there would be an assessed alternate to include heat pumps, however the building would also likely require supplemental heat from a traditional source if heat pumps were used, and there would be additional costs and time related to retrofitting the existing system. Mr. Nick Donza asked about the overall structure and location of the Highway Garage, which Mr. Shepard indicated is a steel-framed building still in very good shape, although there is some age-related deterioration on the envelope structure, the foundation is good and he felt the building worthy of repairs. The location is central to Stowe, and while not always ideal, particularly with its location near the river, finding an alternative location that would work would be challenging.

Mr. Aumand asked about the concern raised by the Cemetery Commission related to their secretarial support from the Town of Stowe. Mr. Safford explained that in the past, Barbara Allaire had provided staff support for the Commission, and when she passed away the responsibilities were moved to the Town Clerks Office, and that they do their best to support the Commission with their other workloads. There is no money in the budget for a stand-alone position to support the Cemetery Commission. Recently Donna Adams, chair of the Commission, met with Town Clerk Penny Davis to discuss what could be improved, and if they are not reasonably able to meet with commission’s needs, the Town may need to look at part time assistance in future budgets and weigh it against other budgetary needs during the budget development process .

On a motion Ms. Courtney, seconded by Mr. Aumand, the Board went into Executive Session to discuss legal matters at 8:51pm.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:30pm.

There being no further business, Chair Hagerty adjourned the meeting at 9:30pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Abigail Bourgeois.

Selectboard Meeting 7/12/23

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