

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

Present:

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

In Person attendees: McKee Macdonald, Carolyn Loeb, Paul Sakash, Pall Spera, Alison Karosas, Loren & Matthew Polk, Kelley Spear, Elise McKenna, Diann Percy

There were 17 participants on Zoom.

Call to Order

Chair Lisa Hagerty called the meeting to order at 5:30pm. She noted that Selectboard Member Ms. Jo Sabel Courtney was absent as she was recovering from a hip fracture and that the board wished her their best in recovery.

Approve the Agenda

Mr. Paul Sakash requested that Consent Agenda Item A-6, Mayo Farm Barn Repairs Bid Award, be pulled from the Consent Agenda for discussion.

On a motion by Mr. Nick Donza, seconded by Mr. William Adams, the Board approved the Agenda with Consent Agenda Item A-6 moved to Business Item B-4, the addition of Consent Agenda Item A-9, Vermont Flood Relief Benefit Concert Special Event Application, and one additional item to Consent Agenda Item A-8, Liquor Consent Agenda. Mr. Paco Aumand opposed.

Consent Agenda

1. Minutes of 9/13/23
2. Conservation Commission Student Representative
3. Halloween Municipal Activities including Road Closures
4. Current & Delinquent Tax Collection Policy Amendments
5. Stowe Land Trust Shutesville Hill Land Conservation Letter of Support
6. PULLED
7. Water & Sewer Allocations
 - a. 876 Mountain Road
 - b. 109 Main Street
 - c. 541 South Main Street
8. Liquor Consent Items
9. Vermont Flood Relief Benefit Concert Special Event Permit

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

Police Coverage & Staffing

Town Manager Charles Safford presented the Selectboard with a memo from Police Chief Hull regarding current staffing and scheduling for the police department. It was noted that the department is budgeted for 14 full-time positions, including the Chief, but as of October 1, 2023 there will be 10 full-time officers with one additional officer in the Police Academy. It was also noted that since the memo was written, one of those 10 officers was injured in an off-duty injury, and it expected to be out for an extended period of time.

Mr. Safford indicated that previously the Selectboard has been notified that the Chief is allowing supervisors to take a police vehicle home when short staffed and has indicated that this may need to be extended to other officers being put on call and taking home a vehicle if there is only one officer on duty or if there is a gap in coverage with no on-duty officers at the station. Chief Hull has indicated that this

would be in rare instances and only occur in the early morning hours. He noted that his officers have been flexible and working to accommodate these staffing shortages as much as possible. He is also using part-time officers as much as possible for coverage, but there has been a reduction in the number of part-time officers as well. Chief Hull also reported that he has spoken to the Lamoille County Sheriff and Morrisville Police Chief as they are also facing staffing shortages and are staffing with only one officer on shifts as well and are not able to help with routine calls, but would be available for mutual aid in the event of emergencies. It was noted that on-call officers would be a distance of anywhere from 20 minutes to 1 hour away.

Mr. Safford also noted that the Town is working to increase its advertising efforts for full-time officers and is looking at what other agencies are doing for incentives -to attract certified officers.

No action was taken at this time. Chief Hull will authorize officers to take home vehicles as needed and be on-call as discussed and will update the Board as status levels change.

Special Events Discussion

The Selectboard indicated during their goal setting session on 4/10/23 that they would like to discuss special event permitting. The Special Events Ordinance was last updated in 2017.- With the current staffing shortages in the police department it can be difficult to ensure proper police coverage for special events. Chief Hull indicated that some events, such road races, can require 5 to 6 officers which he cannot provide at this time. A number of events have requested approval for permits for next year, and Chief Hull indicated that he is not -in a position to commit to providing police services with the current staffing levels. Chief Hull also indicated that there are three major events remaining in 2023, and that while it is challenging, he does believe he will be able to staff these events.

Mr. Safford provided a number of potential options for the Selectboard to consider for amendments to the Special Events Ordinance, including discontinue, grandfather or cap the number of existing road races or other events that have a large impact on traffic and/or police services, limit events that require road closures, have blackout dates during busy holidays or other heavy traffic times, or cap the size of events. He did explain that any restrictions would require a rational basis for distinguishing between events, and that does not violate any fundamental rights, and that events should be assessed fairly and equally under like circumstances.

Ms. Elise McKenna, Board Chair of Stowe Vibrancy, stated that they currently run 4 major events in Stowe, and are a Downtown Designated Organization with a philosophy of bringing community vitality to Stowe Village through events and business support. In the past, Stowe Vibrancy has run many additional events, but have reduced it to the four major events due to staffing and police coverage concerns. She stated that the organization wants to balance the importance of events with the community wants and needs, and that they are currently working with businesses in the village to assess what is right for the community that Stowe Vibrancy can provide. The results of this needs assessment will be shared with the Selectboard following the event on November 6th with village businesses. Mr. Donza noted that he felt the current roster of events was great and adds a lot to the community. He did indicate that he saw a distinction between community events and for-profit events. Mr. Zach Burgmann of Stowe Area Association stated that his organization sees a huge value in events, and that overall visits in 2023 have been declining from the post-pandemic boom in 2021 & 2022. He suggested supporting events that generate visitation during slower times of the year. Mr. Matt Gray, who organizes two road races in Stowe, noted that attendance for their runs has declined to a number around 600-800 people, and that while they understand the challenges of road closures, this is something they have faced in other towns throughout New England, and that his organization strives to be respectful to the community and have a positive impact. He did note that suggestions to relocate road races to trails or less-traveled roads would not work for his organization, however when designing courses, they do look to minimize traffic impacts whenever possible and was open to working with Chief Hull on ways to reduce the impacts on the Stowe

Police Department such as utilizing outside resources. Mr. Adams stated that he felt there needed to be more input from the community on if special events are being seen as a burden on the community and suggested looking at black-out dates such as on Indigenous Peoples Day. Mr. Aumand suggested that the Selectboard take a more active role in reviewing Special Event Permits and looking at the criteria required before approval. Mr. McKee Macdonald, Stowe Area Association president, asked if organizations could take on the burden of providing their own security and traffic control. Chief Hull indicated that he was not aware of any private organizations that can provide traffic control at intersections but would meet with Mr. Gray and otherwise explore potential ways to potentially reduce the number of certified police officers.

No action was taken at this time with the understanding that Stowe Vibrancy is assessing their events and Mr. Gray would further discuss with Chief Hull potential options for reducing the number of certified officers required to accommodate road races. -

Short-Term Rentals: Realtor's Perspective

In continuing their discussions regarding Short Term Rentals in Stowe, the Selectboard invited local realtors Pall Spera and McKee Macdonald to discuss their thoughts and concerns with the Board. Mr. Spera indicated that he does not feel there should be a limit on STRs, but rather there should be reasonable standards to control neighbor concerns. Mr. Macdonald indicated that he supports the Vermont Short Term Alliance Common Sense Steps that were previously presented to the Selectboard. Ms. Diann Percy asked the realtors if they have seen a turnover of Long-Term Rentals being converted to STRs. Mr. Spera responded that there is a general lack of Long-Term Rentals in Stowe, however he doesn't see many being converted. Rather, he stated that people want to use their properties but use STR to offset overhead costs of owning a home in Stowe. Mr. Mcdonald agreed with Mr. Spera that the lack of Long-Term Rentals and affordable housing in Stowe was an issue that pre-dated STRs. He further suggested that the Town look at zoning regulations to promote growth in housing in certain areas in town, such as the Upper Mountain Road Zoning District. Mr. Adams asked about the impact of STRs on the Stowe housing market. Mr. Mcdonald stated that Stowe has been primarily a second home market for a long time, and that he doesn't see much impact from STRs. He did note that the lack of broadband internet has been more impactful on sales as people are looking for places they can work remotely. Mr. Spera stated that he has had some people ask if there are restrictions on STRs before purchasing properties. He also suggested the Town look at carving out space for housing when conserving lands.

No action was taken at this time.

Short-Term Rentals: Municipalities with Registrations

The Selectboard invited representatives from two Vermont Municipalities that have enacted STR registries to discuss their experiences. Mr. Andrew Strniste, Rutland City Planning & Zoning Administrator, and Mr. Jim Haff, Killington Interim Zoning Administrator were at the meeting to discuss with the Selectboard.

Mr. Strniste indicated that Rutland was a more urban environment with different challenges than Stowe, with only approximately 40-80 STRs. Rutland uses a registry through GovOS, a third-party company that has been helping to identify and register STRs in the community. He stated that having tangible numbers has been helpful with seeing the impact of STRs on the landscape of the community. He noted that the biggest issues in Rutland related to STRs has been related to parking and capacity limits, which GovOS has been helping to identify through reviews of listings. They are currently developing a STR ordinance for better enforcement, but currently the registry is through the Zoning Department which can be cumbersome for enforcement. He noted that GovOS provides a prepared violation letter and that the municipality provides enforcement, however the burden on staffing for them has been minimal.

Mr. Haff spoke -regarding his experiences in Killington, noting that their goal was not to limit STRs but rather ensure health and safety concerns were being met. He stated that Killington currently has approximately 780 registered STRs, and that this number has required 2 full-time employees during the set-up period, approximately 6-8 months, but that currently they have one employee dedicating 20-25 hours per week to the registry. Killington also uses GovOS for their registry. They also require a local contact that cannot be out of State. He noted that their registration costs are based on the number of bedrooms ranging from \$250-\$600 annually. They have used the revenue from the registration fee to offset the cost of the registry as well as support their fire department. Mr. Haff noted that a majority of the calls for their fire department were related to STRs, so they felt it was appropriate to use the funding for a Fire Chief and A-EMT.

- It was also asked why they chose to regulate only STR and not Long-Term and seasonal rentals. Mr. Safford noted that Towns in Vermont only have statutory authority to regulate STRs through ordinance and it is not clear they have authority to regulate long term or seasonal housing unless they assumed regulations of building codes from the State..

The Board thanked Mr. Strnstine and Mr. Haff for speaking with them.

No action was taken at this time.

Mayo Farm Barn Repairs Bid Award

The Town is currently working with its insurance company, VLCT, to repair damage to the Mayo Farm Barn that occurred during a wind event in December 2022. The Town received one bid for \$79,000 with an add alternate to include sliding barn doors on the structure to protect the building from future wind damage for an additional \$7,500. The base bid amount will be covered by VLCT, less the Town's deductible of \$2,500. The Add Alternate will be paid for out of the Unallocated Capital Reserves.

On a motion by Mr. Adams, seconded by Mr. Aumand, the Board approved the award of the Mayo Farm Barn Repairs, including the Add Alternate, to Kilroy's Construction and appropriated \$20,000 from the Town's Unallocated Capital Reserves to cover the cost of the Add Alternate, provide electric service and contingency and authorized the Town Manager to sign the Agreement on behalf of the Town.

Manager's Report

Mr. Safford provided a letter from Stowe Area Association regarding Short-Term Rentals, noting that it states in part that "SAA is in alignment with the state-wide organization Vermont Short Term Rental Alliance standards for responsible housing..."

Mr. Safford provided the job ad for Assistant Town Manager to replace the Executive Assistant position with one of greater responsibilities to reflect the growing demands on the Manager and the organization.

Mr. Safford provided an email from Jackie Pratt, SED General Manager, indicating that they will be transitioning to a new billing system on 10/2/23 and that online payments will be unavailable from 9/21-10/2.

Mr. Safford provided a flier regarding an energy forum.

Mr. Safford provided an email from Police Chief Hull indicating that all Level III officers are Emergency Medical Responder Certified and are able to assist as first responders during medical calls.

Selectboard Meeting 9/27/23

Mr. Safford also let the Selectboard know that he has been asked to speak to the Morrisville Selectboard regarding the City/Town Manager form of government. He said his discussion would be factual and not advocating for any particular form of municipal government.

On a motion Mr. Aumand, seconded by Mr. Adams, the Board went into Executive Session to discuss legal, contracts and real estate at 9:03pm.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:38pm.

There being no further business, Chair Hagerty adjourned the meeting at 9:38pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Abigail Bourgeois.

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