

Stowe Town Plan

Adopted by the Stowe Selectboard
October 26, 2009

Stowe Community Vision

Stowe is a small New England resort town that exhibits a pride of place and sense of community characterized by a healthy natural environment including forested mountains, an agrarian landscape and historic compact village settlements; a tradition of hospitality; a respect for historic precedent; a dedication to protect and enhance its scenic resources by maintaining the unique context, scale and visual patterns that define the landscape; a vibrant recreation-based economy which maintains the town's historic character and traditional standard of quality; a strong community spirit reflective of the town's sense of security and diverse population; and a wealth of educational, cultural and social opportunities which sustain an enviable way of life.

The 2009 Stowe Town Plan was prepared by the Stowe Planning Commission and staff and partially funded with a Municipal Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

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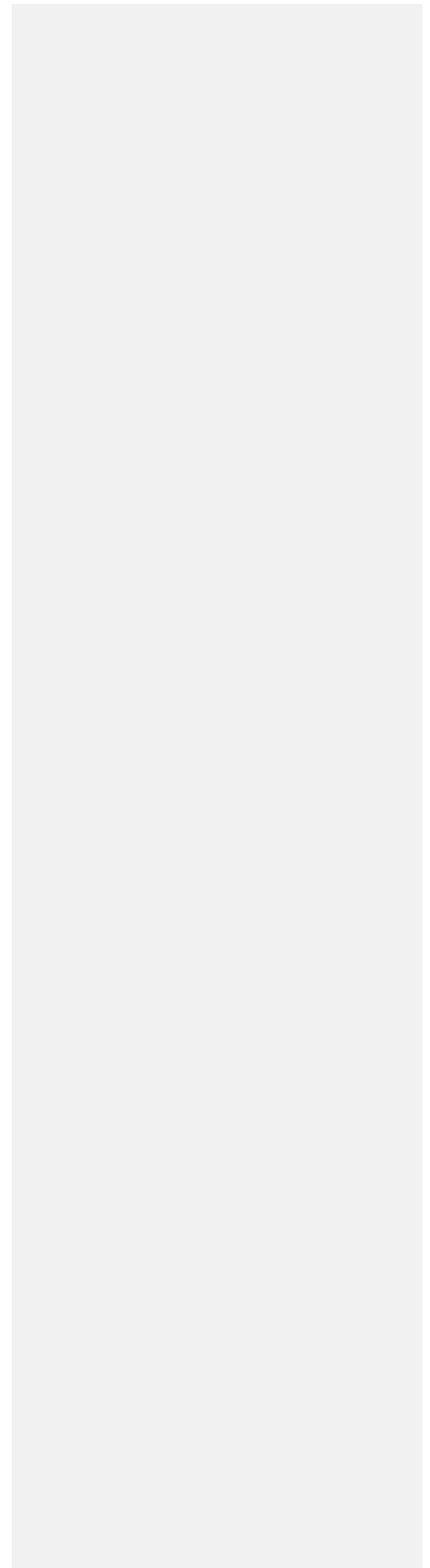
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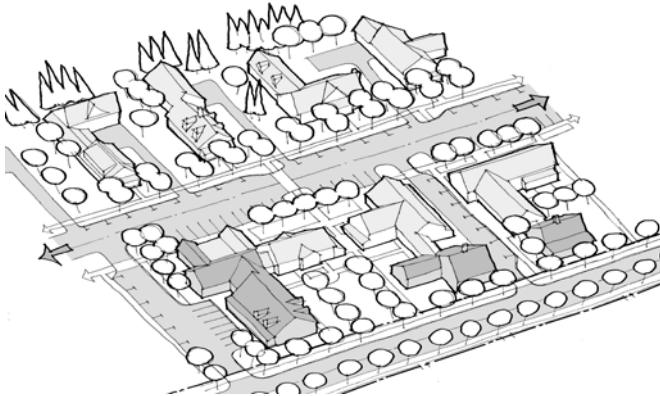
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Chapter 1: Stowe's Planning Process

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A. Introduction

The Town of Stowe has been actively engaged in planning for growth since well before the adoption its first Town Plan in 1964. The people of Stowe have long valued the town's scenic, rural and historic character. Stowe is widely recognized as an example of a popular resort destination that has managed to maintain that character over time as the population has grown and the town has developed. This is in large part do to the Town's commitment to land use planning. Planning is a process that helps a community prepare for change, rather than react to it and gives it the opportunity to retain those values that make a place special and unique. The Stowe Town Plan builds upon Stowe's past planning efforts to manage growth, protect scenic, historic and natural resources, and maintain a vibrant economy.

This plan contains all of the elements required by Vermont statute, which include: future land use, transportation, utilities and public facilities, natural resources, scenic and historic preservation, education, energy and housing.

The first four chapters provide the background and context that form the basis of the Stowe Town Plan. Chapter 5 is the actual plan, containing the Town's goals, policies and implementation tasks.

B. Purpose of the Town Plan

The purpose of the Town Plan is to reflect the Town's vision and goals for the future and to serve as a guide for growth and development. In Vermont, a municipal plan is primarily a guidance document and not a regulatory document. The exception is that for development projects requiring a Vermont Act 250 Land Use Permit, the Act 250 District Commission reviews the plan to determine if the proposed project is in compliance with

the plan. The primary regulatory tools for implementing the Town Plan are the Town's zoning and subdivision regulations. A municipal plan is required in order to adopt zoning regulations, a capital improvement program or impact fees and is required for eligibility for various state grant programs.

C. Public Participation in the Planning Process

Town planning in Stowe has matured over the years, and town residents expect considerable access to the Town's deliberative processes. The Planning Commission continues to seek public involvement on matters related to the Town's future. In the spring of 2008, a direct mail survey was distributed to residents and second-home owners soliciting their opinions on critical issues facing the town. Other efforts to identify public opinion include surveys regularly distributed at March Town Meetings, and frequent public meetings and hearings.

Since the 2003 Stowe Town Plan was adopted, the Town has conducted a number of planning-related activities, all of which involved many public meetings. These activities have informed the development of the 2009 Town Plan and include:

- 2003 Stowe Village Parking Study
- 2003 Build-out Analysis and Cost of Community Services Study
- 2004 Route 100 Access Management Plan
- 2004 Update of Stowe Village Historic District
- 2005 5-year Capital Improvement Plan
- 2005 Mayo Farm Management Plan
- 2005 Stowe 10-Year Recreation Plan
- 2005 Stowe Village Center designated
- 2006 Update of State Historic Sites Survey for the town
- 2006 Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Improvement Plan
- 2007 West Branch River Corridor Management Plan
- 2007 Stowe Village Vibrancy Project
- 2008 Green Mountain Byway (Rte. 100) Corridor Plan
- 2008 listing of Moscow Village in the National Register of Historic Places

In June 2008, the Planning Commission completed the first comprehensive review and revision of the Stowe Zoning Regulations. This was a three-year process that involved dozens of public meetings, as well as public hearings by the Planning Commission and Selectboard. The purpose of the revisions was to:

- Bring the regulations into conformance with the Stowe Town Plan;
- Bring the regulations into conformance with revisions to state statutes concerning zoning;
- Make the document more user-friendly
- Update definitions
- Adopt current State of Vermont recommended model ordinance for Flood Hazard Area.
- Adopt a Fluvial Erosion Hazard Overlay District along the West Branch River to control development in erosion-prone areas along the river.

- Streamline the permitting process by increasing the authority of the Zoning Administrator in order to reduce the number of applications requiring DRB review;
- Provide for an additional zoning enforcement option that would authorize the Zoning Administrator to write tickets for zoning violations, to be enforced by the Judicial Bureau.
- Review and update the zoning district boundaries.

D. 2008 Community Survey

The community survey that was distributed in the spring of 2008 was by design, very similar to the Critical Issues Survey that the Town conducted in 1998. The Planning Commission wanted to compare the two surveys to see how people’s perceptions may or may not have changed over the past ten years. Surveys were distributed to both residents and second homeowners and the results were compared. Below are some of the highlights of the 2008 survey. The full survey results appear as Appendix A.

Stowe’s greatest assets:

1998 Survey	2008 Residents	2008 2 nd Home	
77%	95%	97%	Scenic beauty
52%	84%	82%	Recreational opportunities
25%	77%	68%	Traditional village center
27%	77%	72%	Quiet lifestyle
28%	76%	61%	Personal/family safety

As important as scenic beauty was to those surveyed in 1998, it seems to have gained in recognition as Stowe’s greatest asset. Appreciation for Stowe’s recreational opportunities, traditional village center, quiet lifestyle and personal/family safety, has also increased over the past ten years.

The most important issues facing the Town of Stowe Today:

1998 Survey	2008 Residents	2008 2 nd Home	
70%	92%	85%	State property tax reform
70%	89%	89%	Preserving Stowe’s landscape and protecting remaining open spaces
51%	81%	84%	Maintaining Stowe’s economic vitality
51%	81%	81%	Controlling development
44%	81%	75%	Maintaining Stowe Village as the town’s social, cultural and commercial center

Stowe’s state education tax burden has emerged as one of the Town’s most important issues for both residents and second homeowners who responded to the survey. Nearly as

important to both groups is preserving Stowe's landscape and protecting remaining open spaces. The most significant increase in importance over the past ten years is the issue of maintaining Stowe Village as the town's social, cultural and commercial center.

The most important strategies for improving Stowe:

1998 Survey	2008 Residents	2008 2nd Home	
59%	79%	85%	Preserve additional open space to maintain the rural landscape
17%	66%	49%	Develop state-of-the-art telecommunications network in Town of Stowe
28%	61%	54%	Attract additional special events (such as tennis tournaments / British Invasion)
40%	52%	54%	Develop conference/performing arts center to attract visitors during non-peak periods

Preserving additional open space to maintain the rural landscape emerged in the survey as the number one strategy for improving Stowe. Developing state-of-the-art telecommunications network has obviously become much more important to survey responders than it was in 1998.

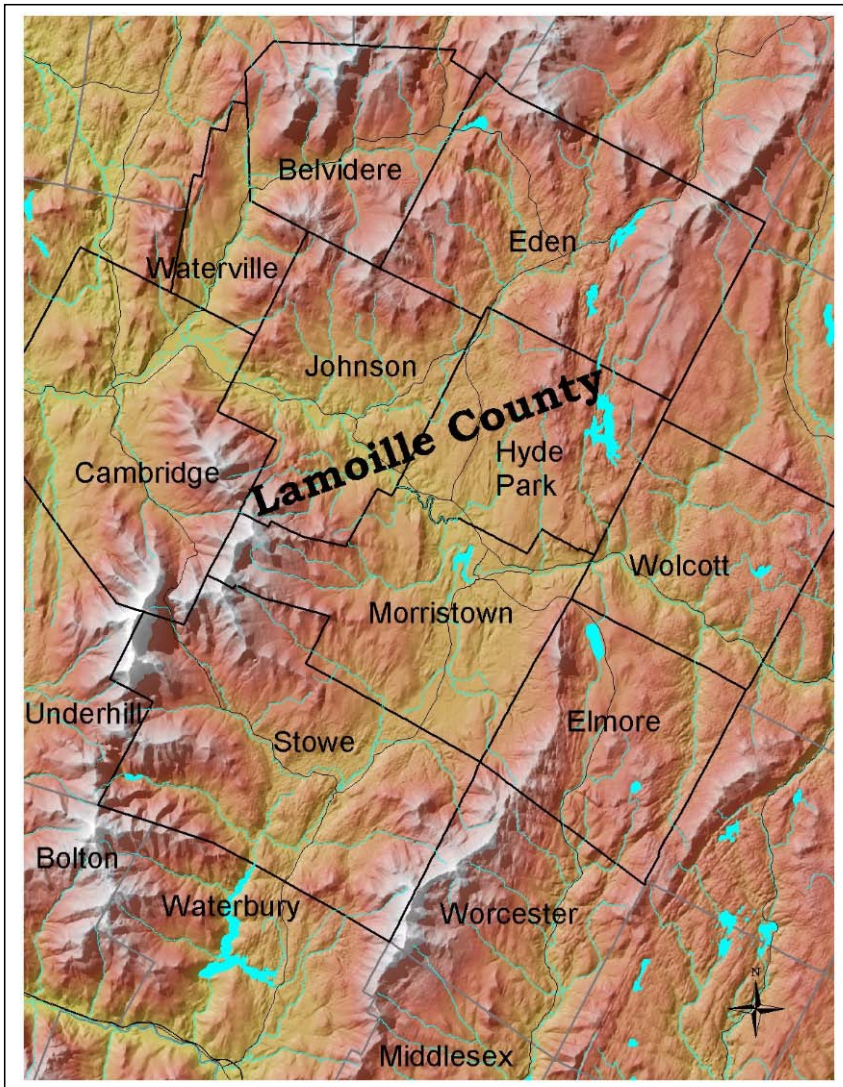
E. Compatibility with the Region

The Town of Stowe shares a boundary with six towns and two neighboring counties. Its mountainous terrain and well-defined transportation corridors limit Stowe's interaction with most of the neighboring towns. Interaction is focused to the north (Morristown and neighboring Lamoille County towns) and to the south (Waterbury, where major transportation links to Route I-89 are located). Stowe's efforts to coordinate its planning goals with those of neighboring towns and the region have therefore primarily been directed to the north and south.

Regional Coordination

To ensure that local planning programs and policies are coordinated with those of the region, Stowe is an active member of the Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC). Not only does the town's involvement with LCPC provide a regional context for planning, it provides a forum for addressing issues of regional concern. In the past, the town has participated in regional initiatives to address affordable housing, economic development, emergency management, Route 100 access management and natural resource protection. In drafting the town's goals, policies and implementation tasks set forth in Chapter 5, careful consideration was given to the Lamoille County Regional Plan as well as the municipal plans of surrounding towns. Through such consideration, compatibility with the regional plan has been assured.

In 2007, Stowe partnered with the Town of Waterbury to prepare the nomination of Route 100 through the two towns for designation as the “Green Mountain Byway” under the Vermont Scenic Byways Program. A corridor management plan was developed containing many recommendations for enhancements of the byway corridor to benefit the traveling public. The two towns will continue this partnership into the future to implement these recommendations.



F. Stowe's Land Use Regulations

Stowe's first permanent zoning and subdivision regulations were adopted in 1975 and have guided growth and development in town ever since. All land development in Stowe requires a local zoning permit. Some of more important tools in the regulations that have shaped development throughout the town include:

Planned Unit Development (PUD). This allows modifications in the dimensional requirements of the underlying zoning district (lot size, setbacks, etc.) to allow for clustering of units, flexibility of design and preservation of open space. This includes the Agricultural PRD, which preserves prime agricultural land. Stowe has 3 Agricultural-PRD's, two Ski-PUD's and two Resort PUD's. Each of the 2 Ski-PUD's (Stowe Mt. Resort and Trapp Family Lodge) contains well over 1,000 acres of permanently protected land.

Ridgeline and Hillside Overlay District (RHOD). The purpose of the RHOD is to protect the scenic and natural resources in areas of high elevation, steep slopes and visual sensitivity in a manner that allows for carefully designed, low-impact development. All development within the RHOD is reviewed to minimize visual and environmental impact.

Transferable Development Rights (TDR). In order to help concentrate development in targeted growth areas and limit development in sensitive natural or scenic areas, the TDR program allows the transfer of development rights from specific "sending zones" to "receiving zones". Although many communities in Vermont have a similar program, Stowe is one of very few that has actually seen it put into action.

Meadowland Overlay District (MOD). The purpose of the MOD is to protect open meadows, floodplains, wetland, and agricultural land along the Route 108 corridor through control of building location, site design and the transfer of development rights to appropriate "receiving zones".

Stowe Historic Overlay District (SHOD). The purpose of this design review district is to promote development in Stowe Village and the Lower Village that is aesthetically compatible with the existing historic character of these significant village areas, while allowing for flexibility in design and evolution of architectural styles. In addition, these regulations are intended to guide alterations to existing historic buildings throughout the Town of Stowe in such manner as to preserve their historic and architectural integrity.

Flood Hazard District. Development within the 100-year floodplain is carefully controlled to ensure that no increase in flood heights or velocity occurs, that buildings in the floodplain are protected against flood damage and that individuals are protected from buying land in the floodplain that may be unsuitable for development.

Fluvial Erosion Hazard Overlay District. The purpose of the Fluvial Erosion Hazard (FEH) Overlay District is to control development in identified erosion prone areas;

minimize property loss and damage due to erosion; prohibit land uses and development in fluvial erosion hazards areas that pose a danger to health and safety; and discourage the acquisition of property that is unsuited for the intended purposes due to erosion hazards.

Subdivision Regulations. All proposals for the subdivision of land are evaluated under a set of 14 planning and design standards to ensure that the proposed subdivision does not cause any undue adverse impacts on public health or safety, the environment, neighboring properties or the rural and historic character of the community.

Other Regulations. Stowe also regulates outdoor lighting, landscaping for commercial properties, development near watercourses, stormwater management, access on to town and state highways and outdoor displays of merchandise.

