

May 2 - Municipal Corner

**Julie Picket:** I would like to acknowledge and express appreciation for Julie Picket's service to the children of Stowe. She is retiring after 32 years as the Assistant Library Director / Children's Librarian. She has been a great advocate for children's services. Throughout her career, she has served as the President of the Vermont Library Association's Children and Young Adult Librarian's Section as a member of the Department of Libraries' Services Advisory Committee, and as President of the Friends of the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award. She has been very active with two of the three Vermont children's book awards: The Red Clover Award and the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award. She has also been a selected participant in the Vermont Early Literacy Initiative provided by the Department of Libraries and the Vermont Center for the Book. Julie has been an exemplary role model for youth librarians throughout the state and has positively influenced the youth of Stowe.

**Flashing Head Lights:** We have all seen people do it and may have done it ourselves. Flashing your headlights to warn on-coming drivers of a police officer running radar or presence up ahead. The police enforce speed limits for public safety purposes, many times based on request from your fellow citizens to try to get people to comply with the speed limit. People come from all over the world to enjoy the beauty of Stowe. Slow down, be safe and enjoy the scenery.

**Speed Limits:** Municipalities often receive requests to lower speed limits. The Selectboard is not free to set a speed limit at any speed. Speed limits can only be changed after a traffic and engineering study and a public hearing process. An analysis will typically start with a speed study to see how fast motorists are currently traveling and the accident history. The engineer will also look to see if there is anything else that should be taken into consideration, such as sight lines and the amount of pedestrian activity.

Revisiting the speed limit can have the opposite effect. If a speed study demonstrates that motorists are traveling safely at a higher rate of speed and there are no unique circumstances, such as a high number of pedestrian activity within the corridor, then the speed limit may be set at the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed (85% of motorists are traveling at or below that speed and 15% are traveling over and above that speed).

Roads are meant to carry motorist and non-motorized persons reasonably safely. It is important for commerce and convenience to be able to move products and people on our public roads. However, people also want to be able to safely enjoy their neighborhoods and it is recognized the faster someone is going the longer it takes them to stop. Finding the right balance for a Selectboard can be a challenge. While it is not an exact science, there is a science behind setting a speed limit and it shouldn't be set too low based on political pressure. According to the Vermont Local Roads Program, *Setting Speed Limits – A Guide for Vermont Towns*, "Towns sometimes tend to set speed limits too low. This merely creates more speeders, since the majority of motorists drive at speeds they perceive to be safe. To effectively enforce the law, the public must believe the law is reasonable. The random installation of signs and speed limits can be detrimental to safety by breeding disrespect for all speed limits" At the other end of the spectrum, if speed limits that are set too high it can create a hazard for both motorists and others that may be using the road.

Please remember that speed limits are supposed to be the maximum, not the minimum. People should be neighborly and avoid speeding, especially in neighborhoods and village centers.

**MUTCD:** By state law, all municipalities are required to follow the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. This document provides for uniform regulatory signs and provides guidance on their placement. The intent is that no matter where you are driving, you have common signage that is universally recognizable.

In order to install a regulatory sign, it is required to be *warranted*. This requires an engineer to do a traffic study using the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. It has guidelines that establishes when it is appropriate to do so and when it is not. Again, while it is not an exact science, it is a science that is intended to give motorist a sense of predictability regardless of what municipality they are driving through.

When driving on a road, you should have an intuitive sense of the pace you should be traveling and when to stop. If there are a concentration of housing and / or significant amounts of pedestrians, you should already have a sense it is time to slow down and the signs should be confirming it. If you are on a narrow dirt road with a limited sight lines (visibility) it is time to slow down. If you are on a large straight away outside of a community center it may be o.k. to increase your speed in accordance with the established speed limit and you may not have to stop often.

**Road Crew Challenges:** Ideas on their own, they may seem simple to take care of; but it may not be as easy when you have to take other factors into consideration. Let's take the road crew maintaining gravel roads as an example. The Town has had a ten-person road crew, a number that has not increased in over a decade. Since that time the State has implemented increased storm water regulations that take an increased amount of time to implement by stone lining ditches and improving drainage. The intent of these regulations is to help prevent sediment from running into the public waters for water quality reasons. At the same time, Stowe has a number of *designated scenic roads* that pre-date modern storm water regulations. These are roads with restrictions that are meant to preserve their scenic rural feel which is important to our quality of life and tourism economy. These roads are often narrow, tree-lined roads that provide limited opportunity to provide adequate drainage, which can lead to erosion of the road and corresponding sediment run-off. The road crew is faced with the requirements of stormwater regulations while trying to maintain their scenic nature. Both are laudable goals and it is possible to balance the two, but it takes time and resources to do so. They are increasing being asked to improve standards on a number of fronts often while trying to recocile competing goals without necessarily being provided more personnel or funding.

**Please be Civil:** In the era of trolls on Facebook it has become far too common to disparage people including municipal employees. However, unlike Facebook, we are not some distant faceless person, we are your friends and neighbors trying to serve you. It's more than appropriate to ask questions and question us, but please do so in a civil manner.