

Municipal Corner – Council / Manager

Mask: Governor Scott has issued a new executive order, effective this Friday, August 1st. Stowe has had essentially the same order in place since the end of May. The Governor’s order requires people to “wear masks or cloth facial coverings over their nose and mouth any time they are in public spaces, indoors or outdoors, where they come in contact with others from outside their households, especially in congregate settings, and where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least six feet.” The order goes on to state, “Nothing in this Order or any other State health and safety guidance shall require the use of a mask or cloth facial covering when someone is engaged in strenuous exercise or activity, for anyone under the age of 2, any child or adult with a medical or developmental issue or challenge that is complicated or irritated by a facial covering, anyone with difficulty breathing or as further set forth in guidance issued by VDH. A person who declines to wear a mask or cloth face covering because of a medical or developmental issue or difficulty breathing, shall not be required to produce documentation or other evidence, verifying the condition.” If you are not in a position to wear a mask for health reasons and need to obtain municipal or other services including retail or dining, please advise the municipal government or business in advance so that they can reasonably try to accommodate you by offering curbside service, electronic service or through other available means.

Broadband: The Stowe Selectboard has agreed to participate in a study to understand the need and cost of building out broadband to adequately serve the residence, second homeowners, businesses, and visitors to Stowe. The study is being spearheaded by the Lamoille County Planning Commission. In order to understand the need they currently have an on-line survey that is available on the Town of Stowe website at (www.townofstovevt.org). Please take the time to fill out this survey. It’s an important part of the study.

Bears: There appears to be a lot more visible bear activity this year and people are expressing concern about potential bear/human interactions, including bears raiding trash receptacles and becoming, in general, more comfortable around humans – which is not a desired outcome. Once bears become comfortable around humans it is more likely that they will become a nuisance or a safety problem and eventually be put down. There is a lot of very helpful information on the Vermont Fish & Wildlife website regarding bears and the measures you can take to reduce bear/human conflict. You can find a quick link on the Town of Stowe website at (www.townofstovevt.org). This includes bringing in birdfeeders during the warm weather months and storing trash in a secure place and in a sturdy, covered container. Please do your part to educate yourself about these measures for public safety and to help keep bears wild. That being said, if you should encounter an aggressive bear, please contact Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department through their website at <https://anrweb.vt.gov/fwd/fw/wildlifebearreport.aspx>.

A reminder of how our town is governed and managed: The Town of Stowe operates under the Council/Manager/Annual Meeting form of government as approved by the voters and authorized by the Vermont General Assembly. At Annual Town Meeting the registered voters serve as the legislative body of the municipal corporation. They are charged with electing the Selectboard and the Listers, they adopt the General Fund Operating Budget and the amount to be raised in taxes, and any long-term debt.

Outside of Annual Town Meeting, the Stowe Selectboard is the legislative body of the municipality. As a body in public session they adopt local laws through the adoption of ordinances, adopt policies that guide the day-to-day administration of municipal government, appoint members of other municipal

bodies and the Town Manager, approve the payment of bills, adopt the Town Plan and Zoning By-laws, and warn articles for consideration at Annual Town Meeting. These articles include the annual operating budget and the amount to be raised by property taxes. In addition, they serve as the Water and Sewer Commissioners and perform many of the same functions for these public utilities, but they directly approve the operating budgets and rates charged to users.

The Town Manager is appointed by the Stowe Selectboard. He is the chief executive of the municipal corporation and is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the municipal government. As such he hires and discharges all municipal employees (except for the Electric Department which has its own management), serves as the purchasing agent for the municipal corporation, ensures that all ordinances and policies adopted by the Selectboard are carried out in a professional manner, prepares an annual budget and capital program for the Selectboard's consideration, and advises the Selectboard on public policy matters.

The Council / Manager form of government provides for representative government outside of Annual Town Meeting. The Selectboard as a body provides the vision, direction, and oversight. The Town Manager is apolitical and hired based on his/her professional administrative experience. In fact, according to Stowe's Town Charter, the Town Manager can't hold any elective office within the Town, organize any political party or serve as a member or a political party committee. Why is this important? It is because the Town Manager must be able to serve any Selectboard the voters may choose to elect. The responsibility of the Manager is to ensure the Selectboard has the facts and context they need so they can make informed policy decisions that advance the public interest. Once the decision is made it is the Manager's job to ensure that it is carried out in a professional manner. This form of government also helps to ensure that executive decisions such as personnel, purchasing and contracts are based solely on their merits.