

Municipal Corner – March

Stowe Antique Car Show: The Town of Stowe has been fortunate to have the Stowe Antique Car Show choose to make the Town its home for 60 years. As challenging as the traffic could be at times, I and many others enjoyed going to the show and watching the parade.

The Selectboard did consider buying the property where the car show has been held at Nichols Field. Part of the challenge for the Town is that it was being sold through a public auction. Participation in the public auction would have required the Town to bid on the property and commit to buying it without advanced voter approval. It should also be understood that the property is conserved through a conservation easement that is limited to one event per year.

The Town did try to work with the parties to see if there is anything we could reasonably do outside of purchasing the property to keep the show in Stowe. I talked to the new property owner and his agent about the importance of the event to the community. I also met with the Stowe Antique Car Show's Board of Directors to see if any other sites in the Town could potentially host the show, such as at the Mayo Farm Events Field. We all recognized that it would be a challenge to do so due to its smaller size. We discussed the idea of closing down Weeks Hill Road and/or Mayo Farm Road to try to accommodate the parking, but in the end the Stowe Antique Car Show did not request the idea be brought to the Selectboard for their consideration.

At no time was the Town of Stowe government asked to contribute money or otherwise told directly what it might take to keep the show in Stowe outside of the Stowe Antique Car Show being able to come to terms with the property owner. The Town was not privy to what each party was requesting of the other or what would be acceptable terms to either party. At the end of the day it was a private negotiation.

Our destination resort Town has many unique challenges from typical town governance. One challenge for the Town is if and when it would or should contribute financially to keep an event in the community. The Town of Stowe has not to date contributed to specific events, but the voters could consider approving discretionary money in our Economic Development and Community Services appropriation process. Any local non-profit can request a municipal appropriation for Selectboard and voter approval. The question becomes where do you start and stop? Should we set a policy for community appropriations or should we listen to them on a case by case basis? The Selectboard will be discussing that this year with input from the community. Check our website for the Selectboard Agendas if you are interested in that discussion.

Thank you to the Stowe Antique Classic Car Show for being in Stowe for 60 years. Although the car show may not be held in Stowe in 2018, we hope we will still see antique cars around Stowe during the show and will strive to always ensure visitors feel welcome.

Stowe Fire & Rescue Departments: The Stowe Reporter recently reported that the Town of Stowe is exploring the merger of the Fire & Rescue Departments. While the Town may choose to do so in the future, it is not actively pursuing this at this time. The Selectboard did create an inter-departmental task force to explore ways the community could better support our volunteers

to maintain the ones we have and encourage others to join. The Fire Department has also expressed a desire for full-time administrative assistance to take some of the burden off from the volunteer officers. As instructed by the Selectboard, I am exploring how best to do this with the Stowe Fire Chief and Officers. It will be part of future budget discussions. Moving from an all-volunteer department to a paid / volunteer department will be an adjustment for the Fire Department and in the judgement of all those involved it appeared prudent to try to obtain help for them and allow them to make this adjustment prior to trying to merge with the Stowe Department of Emergency Medical Services who have already made the transition to a paid / volunteer fire department.

Elections: The Town recently held elections for various local offices. To my knowledge, nothing intentionally was done wrong and no laws were broken. I have no reason to believe that anyone volunteers with anything other than community service and civic interest as their intent. With that being said, there is the law and then there is public perception of a conflict of interest. I intend to recommend to the new Clerk / Treasurer when hired and the head of the Board of Civil Authority that a policy discussion and proposal be developed regarding who should and should not be permitted to work at the polls.

As reported in the Stowe Reporter, there were some blue ballots used in early voting that, unbeknownst to the Town, had not been tested by the company that provided the ballot counting machines. Once the issue was identified, the printing company changed them out for white paper ballots. The Interim Co-Clerk's tested the blue ballots and the machine read them accurately, so they were run through with the white ballots. Both Clerks are confident in the integrity of the vote count. Our State laws allow a losing candidate to request a recount within five days of the election and no candidate requested one.

In hindsight some things can be done differently. You will often hear me say around the municipal building "*it is only a mistake if you make it twice.*" Unless it was unethical or illegal, it is a learning experience. The Town of Stowe was fortunate to have a long-term Clerk with a great deal of experience. Stowe has been fortunate to have two Assistant Clerks that were willing to step up in her absence and have done an admirable job under the circumstances. I am grateful to them for doing so, as should be the community. With this being said, we will continually strive for improvement in the performance of our duties and the delivery of municipal services.

Polo Field Shelter: At Town Meeting this year, the voters rejected the \$109,000 recommended to partially fund the construction of an open pavilion type shelter at the Polo Fields. At previous Town Meetings, \$33,000 was appropriated and the size and location on the site of the shelter was approved. Among the concerns raised was that the shelter would not provide adequate lightning protection. According to the National Lightning Safety Institute, a small enclosed shelter equipped with a properly designed and installed lightning protection system *may* provide reasonable protection from direct lightning, however it should be viewed as the option of last resort. Refuges with much higher safety levels such as large buildings and fully enclosed vehicles should be sought instead when time permits. It should be understood that none of our municipal buildings or recreational facilities have lightning protection systems.

The Town evaluated an enclosed shelter and a lightning protection system. It was determined that an enclosed shelter for such a use would be considered a place of public occupancy requiring compliance with applicable Building and Fire Safety Code requirements, which are significant. The subject site also has no existing utilities which would be required for compliance. These were recognized as substantial increase in cost from what was originally envisioned. Accordingly and with public input, the Selectboard decided to pursue an open pavilion type shelter with a small equipment storage area similar to one recently built in Montpelier at the Elm Street Recreation Area (off from Rt. 12). That is what was developed for consideration at a Town Meeting. If the community wants to further pursue the idea of a shelter at this location, lightning protection can be added, but it should be understood that the Town cannot assure lightning protection. None of the Town's buildings have lightning protection, including our existing recreational facilities. The Stowe Recreation Commission is going to review the project and decide what, if anything, to recommend to the Selectboard regarding the future of this project. This meeting takes place at 5:00 pm on April 5th at the Stowe Arena and, like all of the meetings, is open for the public to attend.

Town Meeting: Thank you for all of you who came out to Town Meeting and for the Town Meeting Task Force for working to increase the number of voters attending. The Capital Project Survey Results are available on the Town of Stowe's website (www.townofstowevt.org).