



**Stowe Energy Committee
April 25, 2024**

Present:

In Person: Catherine Crawley, Marina Meerburg, Cap Chenoweth, Andrew Rianhard
Via zoom: Elizabeth Soper, Robi Artman-Hodge
Absent: Julia Biedermann

Attendees

Assistant Town Manager Will Fricke, Assistant Public Works Director Chris Jolly, Parks and Recreation Director Matt Frazee, Stowe Electric Regulatory Compliance Manager Michael Lazorchak

Call to Order

Energy Committee Chair Catherine Crawley called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Review & Approve Minutes

Cap Chenoweth requested that the type of camera that detects heat be corrected from Lidar to FLIR. Marina Meerburg moved to approve the March minutes with that change. Robi Artman-Hodge seconded. All were in favor.

Energy Projects

Chris Jolly gave an overview of the energy audits done on the Ski Museum and the Akeley Buildings. He said that the initial observations from ski museum blower door test is that envelope is in good shape. At the Akeley Building, the walls are fine solely because of thickness. The attic and windows are problematic with respect to leakage. It will be 2-3 months before official results are available and he will provide copies of the report to the Energy Committee. For the HVAC project, there is not much space outside for siting the propane tank. The location of the current oil tank is underground in front of Akeley, which is likely the only feasible space available. The inspector said that the stone construction of the building reduces the risk of the propane tank location, and that they will grant a waiver. The Town will move forward with design of propane system.

Catherine Crawley asked Chris Jolly if the \$4,000 mini grant from the MERP program could be applied to converting the theater lighting to LED. Jolly said it is not supposed to go towards “construction,” but rather information gathering/sharing. He added that the lights are owned by the theater guild and the Town would need to show a return on investment with regards to reducing utility cost in order to pay to replace the lighting. Additionally each light costs about \$1200-\$1500 each, and there are 60-70 lights in the theater. Crawley said next year they may be able to help the Theater Guild apply for a Cultural Facilities Grant from the Vermont Arts Council for this purpose. She also asked Jolly what the Town would do with the MERP Implementation Grant if the Town got it. Jolly said they will take input from the Energy Committee on what to use it for, and options may include installing geothermal at the Ski Museum or improvements to the Akeley envelope.

Elizabeth Soper asked about the Theater Guild agreement with the Town for the use of the Town Hall Theater. Jolly explained that the Theater Guild has a lease where they pay the Town one dollar per year, which covers the use of the space and the utilities. The Theater Guild installed the air conditioning system that is failing currently – at some point, likely in the early 90s, the Town took it over. Robi Artman-Hodge asked about the length of the lease, and suggested that the Town could attempt to negotiate it in a manner as to encourage them to apply for grants to pay to replace the lighting. Jolly said they are renewed for 3-5 years, but are not long term. He added that the Theater Guild is limited in resources.

Electric Mowers

Matt Frazee said they got confirmation of another 72-inch e-mower coming out, but it does not meet their specifications as it is rear discharge only. They are back to their initial inclination to recommend the equipment fund be amended to purchase a gas 72-inch mower and an electric 60-inch mower, rather than an electric 72-inch mower and a gas 54-inch mower. Cap Chenoweth asked if not having bagging is a deal breaker. Frazee said they do not utilize them on a day-to-day basis, but rather for specific purposes. They are used in early spring and in the fall for cleanup, and when grass is growing at a peak rate to keep up with the mowing, particularly on athletic fields. Once they get caught up in the spring they are not used, and they can double cut grass and fan out the fields. They only utilize bagging with the 72 inch mowers, which makes 60-inch e-mowers more viable at this time.

Chenoweth said that the e-mowers have higher power and higher tip speed, and asked why they cannot be used in a heavy-duty environment. Frazee said that they are on board with what they are trying to do, but the biggest problem with the with the e-mowers besides the bagging is that there's just not a ton of data yet because they're still fairly new. Based on what's available for the current technology, they feel the most important thing is to get one of these machines in the fleet and to start really putting it to use on a daily basis. He added that the Parks Department doesn't have an enormous staff, so efficiency, performance and production is important to take into the equation. They want to make sure they give their staff the right tools to get the job done and put them in a position to be successful.

Robi Artman-Hodge asked how many mowers the Parks Department currently has with bagging capability, and if it was possible to have one last an extra couple years and delay the replacement until there is more data on e-mowers. Frazee said they gave consideration to that, but they had four 72 inch mowers that were originally scheduled to be replaced in FY24, so they are already getting to the edge of their usable life cycle. Their plan was to push three of them to FY26 and replace one with an e-mower in FY25 to make sure it would meet their needs. By getting the 60 inch e-mower in FY25 instead, they will still get the data they need to make that decision. He added that they have six 72-inch mowers; so one was due to be replaced this year and three next year. In addition they have multiple 60, 54, and 48 inch

zero turns that need to be replaced eventually as well. Artman-Hodge asked if the 60 inch e-mower they want will have bagging capability. Frazee said it will not; it is not used in a way where they would need it, and by getting it without the bagger it keeps the total budgeted amount the same between the two new zero turns. He added that they will be doing more demonstrations to see which version and brand they would go with. He also said that another benefit of getting the electric 60 inch instead of the 72 inch is that the 60 inch would be used along the rec path, where a quieter mower would be more beneficial.

Andrew Rianhard noted that the demo event is on May 21, and he is hoping that Stihl/Greenworks brings their 60-inch e-mower. He said he will ask lots of questions and take photos/videos. He also said he would give feedback about the necessity of a bagger.

Frazee said the Parks Department demo'd the Greenworks 72-inch last year, which they did not like because of the suspension, and had a Toro 60-inch scheduled for demo but it caught on fire before it could be delivered. He said they demo'd a Gravely model that performed the best overall. David Danforth, Parks Superintendent, did an in-depth analysis and testing and demoing of each of these, and he has more specific information as to how each performed and what the pros and cons were. The most notable issue was the battery life only lasting for 8 hours under very mild conditions, and for most models you would need two batteries for a full day of mowing.

Cap Chenoweth asked if they actually mowed for 8 hours while testing. Frazee said they did; they had each mower for about a week at a time and used them for regular mowing. They are looking to get new models in within the next month to put them to the test again.

Andrew Rianhard asked if they could be charged during lunch. Frazee said that the Superintendent and the parks crew decide on when to take lunches early in the season, and they usually decide to each lunch in the trucks between jobs. They are not taking extended lunch breaks where they would be able to bring the mowers back to the shop to charge. Rianhard asked how long they are typically on the trailer in a day, and if they could be charged while on the trailer. Frazee said that the crew leaves the shop at 6am and when they get to their work site the mowers are typically not back on the trailer until they are heading back to the shop at the end of the day due to the workload. Riverbank Cemetery is 72 man-hours of mowing per week, the Polo Fields are 16, etc. The crews are typically at a site for a full day rather than jumping from site to site within the day.

Chair Crawley thanked Frazee and said it's really important that we keep moving in the right direction, so whatever we can do to assist with that, we'll do that. Frazee asked if the committee was alright with their plan to flip the e-mower from the 72 to the 60, and added that the important thing from their perspective was to get one in their fleet to have a history of use and learn how they perform over time and in various conditions, before they approach purchasing three in FY26.

Stowe Electric Update

Michael Lazorchak requested the Energy Committee Chair and Town Manager sign a letter of support for SED's application for grant funding from Northern Border Regional Commission Catalyst Program. Cap Chenoweth moved that the Chair sign the letter of support as written. Marina Meerburg second. All were in favor.

Chair Crawley said that the EV working group facilitated by Vermont Clean Cities and the Stowe Electric Department meets online on the fourth Friday of the month at 1pm. Andrew Rianhard and herself have been participating. The idea is to inform the work that Stowe Electric is doing on electric

vehicle charging, then to inform the Town Plan revision and create a roadmap for ownership and charging for electric vehicles. Vermont Clean Cities is looking to get further funding for that portion, and bring in additional stakeholders such as Drive Electric, the Lamoille County Planning Commission, etc.

The Energy Committee discussed EV charging station usage patterns in Stowe, noting that it is largely visitors using the charging stations. Lazorchak noted that the delta between adoption rates and charging data drives that conclusion.

Town Plan Discussion

Chair Crawley suggested to table the Town Plan discussion until the next meeting so they could have more time to discuss it. Will Fricke added that the Planning Director should be ready to come to their next meeting to discuss the Town Plan. The Committee agreed to table the discussion until May 23.

The Committee discussed tools that UVM researchers are developing that could help inform their Town Plan contribution.

Other Business

Chair Crawley said the Committee will need a new student representative as Julia's last month will be in May. She said one student has reached out with interest.

Robi Artman-Hodge asked for clarification on their new terms. Will Fricke said that rather than being 1-year terms, they now have 3-year terms, but they are staggered, so some end next year, and others end in 2026 and 2027. They can all be reappointed for 3 years after that.

Adjournment

There being no other business, Chair Crawley adjourned the meeting at 6:16pm.