

Town of Stowe: Arts and Culture Commission
Wednesday, October 9, 2024, 9 am.

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting was called to order at 9 am.

Approval of May meeting minutes.

Present: Rachel Moore, Loren Polk, Aimee Green, Seth Soloway, Don Jones, Loren Polk, Marty Fried, Beth Liberman,

Visitors: Tanya Kateri, president Stowe Theater Guild, president of Friends of Stowe Free Library , and board member Stowe Vibrancy, Charles Safford, Stowe Town Manager, and visitors in the audience gallery (unnamed)

Following Don and Beth's research, Rachel asked Charles to present and respond to questions to see if a percentage for the arts or staffing would be possible to help town develop and focus on arts and culture. Charles response's below.

- Stowe provides 3% for the arts. Town has been supportive, gives appropriations to non-profits if they apply
- Provides space to Ski Museum, Historical Society, The Current, and Theater Guild all "rent" public buildings for \$1 a year
- 17% of budget is maintenance of cultural spaces and public land (Charles is including sports and recreation in this)
- Vail is very different. Vermont municipalities are a subdivision of the state so only have limited authority on revenue which is functionally controlled by the state, and as such most is retained for the state. Municipal corporations are constrained regarding raising funds
 - Principally, property tax which is reliable and stable but \$70 million raised this year, \$40 million will go to the state for equality in education
 - 1% rooms and meals and alcohol tax and 1% sales tax - jointly raises about \$2.6 million; Stowe receives .7 of 1% and this is capped. Stowe is second in the state behind Burlington in revenue raised but the majority goes to the state. In 2024 state received over \$17M, town received \$1.3M
 - Vail is a home rule state so they can raise whatever revenue they'd like.
 - With that authority they raise much more taxes than Stowe at the local level affording much more expansive municipal services
 - Stowe is 72 square miles, roughly 36 s.m. of that is residential; Vail is 4.6 s.m. with roughly the same year-round population
 - Vail has over 200 full time employees to provide the gamut of Municipal Services, Stowe has 74
- Town of Stowe provides grants
 - Selectboard provides appropriations to non-profits (copy of policy provided); consideration given during development of the budget

- Funds are given without parameters: town is neither required by state statute nor does it have the capacity to manage the grants once funds are dispersed.
- Perception is that there is a robust commitment to the culture of the arts.

Don: research was offered to show what others were doing. Encouraging to see that Stowe does support the arts. Charge from the council to represent and advocate for the arts, to seek collaboration, etc, but not a sense of *how* that is to be accomplished, no clear “power of the purse”, nor specific structure or responsibility connected to something tangible that then encourages more support.

Charles: selectboard controls budget and how it's spent, but they can give SACC a direct appropriation that can be administered through the municipal staff person. Currently \$2K a year. If there is a special project, there are two options:

1. Operating budget: SACC could have an operating appropriation to support operational needs, supporting and defending what those are
2. If one-time project over \$10K involving property plan or equipment, that could be part of capital program (sculpture, other capital asset that would not be depreciated), considered in budget process

+Being a municipal entity has pros and cons, but it does provide structure.

Hope that this committee would build strength to existing cultural entities, venues, and schools.

Arts Week promotes the arts, visibility -- arts fosters awareness of shared humanity, dignity, respect.

Recognition that SACC already makes a difference.

Deadline: Charles advances recommendations to appropriations in December.

Loren: Budget goes to buying domains, maintaining website, and creating and printing promotional materials. One domain host and others redirect.

A conversation ensued as to why we maintain a website (history) and whether that should continue or be folded into the town website.

Rachel pointed out that the calendar with links to organizations could not exist on town calendar, Don explained that we have a link to the Stowe Vibrancy calendar and orgs are encouraged to populate that. Other options were discussed.

Question: Is there representation at the state level to quantify the value of arts and culture investments brings to municipalities?

If it were quantified, could make the case that investing in the arts increases satisfaction, property value, other metrics.

Discussion ensued

Vermont Arts Council receives NEA (federal) funding, and that they are a granting organization.

Charles participates in council of towns and cities where policy platforms are developed and sometimes there are discussions with the state determining which body is responsible for things, lobbies for more taxing capacity. Whose role and how is it provided for?

Question: How is this related to the new town plan, infrastructure plan? How can arts be incorporated?

Answer: Sarah would be the person to speak with and yes, there is a process there. Would need to defend the request.

There is a capital policy on the website for tangible asset. Anyone can ask (cannot be operating expenditures or an event).

Question: There are some models where new building projects are required to dedicate a percentage of funding for public arts to be situated in the building, around the building or in the town.

Answer: Town has invited artistic community to weigh in on design, such as discussion of Moscow traffic speed project. Artistic and aesthetic elements are chosen to maintain the look of historic downtown. Example of the popularity of the "faux" covered bridge project.

Clarification: Yes, our objectives are to advise and participate in the integration of arts and culture in town planning decisions, but the question refers to private developers donating a percentage to the arts. Impact fee. Could that work in Stowe?

Charles response: not experienced in that area, has not seen that in Vermont but historic districts do something similar? Perhaps someone could research this? Impact fees in VT are highly regulated, typically related to new capacity (gave example of Essex Junction school). He can provide a copy of statutes. Can also check with legal counsel.

Loren gave an example of parks program that Charles felt Stowe is not a rapid-growth community but worth exploring through zoning permit requirements. Power in Vermont is in the Vermont general assembly.

Discussion ensued about Vermont municipalities that are good examples. Montpelier before the flood and Burlington, which pays BCA (a part of the municipality) for public art throughout the city: park, festivals, music, exhibits. Brattleboro an example of the situation like Stowe, a committee that's been around for a long time that hasn't been able to do much.

Carrie raised the question of whether there's a way to leverage the education part of our mission, to explore environmental and social issues through integration, to secure funding: Charles indicated that this is possible, even as individual organizations or as a collaborative project. Gave example of conservation's Bear Aware project. Could be something that is awareness of art, education about art. Selectboard has some funds available for non-profits but there is competition for this. Operating budget about \$16M but that goes to public works, police, fire, etc.

Charles confirmed that SACC could collaborate with another entity on a project, expanding reach and potential for securing funding.

Last five minutes hard to understand - dealt with issues related to flood projects, money has been appropriated but engineers and contractors hard to find and competing priorities.