

Arts and Cultural Resources

Our community has a rich history of supporting arts, culture, and special events, dating back to the establishment of its first public library in 1829. For generations, arts and culture have not only enriched the lives of residents but also played a vital role in the town's economy. Stowe's first winter carnival in 1923 attracted over 2,000 spectators, paving the way for the town's transformation into a vibrant, four-season destination. Arts, culture, and special events remain central to Stowe's identity, attracting visitors and fostering community pride. The town is home to a vibrant arts community, supported by local organizations that showcase artists from Stowe, across the nation, and around the world, while offering educational programs and opportunities for creative expression across multiple disciplines. These efforts are bolstered by the Town of Stowe, local businesses, nonprofits, and dedicated volunteers. Together, they sustain Stowe's dynamic cultural scene, ensuring that residents and visitors alike continue to enjoy the town's creativity and rich traditions.

Stowe Theatre Guild & Akeley Memorial Building

The Akeley Memorial Building, built as a war memorial in 1902, was once the home of the Stowe Free Library (as reorganized in 1866). The second floor contained a ticket office, gentlemen's and ladies' coat rooms at either end of the corridor, an auditorium with space for 472 opera chairs, a stage with scenery designed by David Richards of Boston, and four dressing rooms. The second floor now houses, along with town office space, the Stowe Theatre Guild. Town-funded building improvements were made in the 1990s to accommodate Guild productions. In return, the Guild provided the main stage curtains, window drapes, comfortable seating for the audience, sound and lighting equipment, and the air conditioning system. Since its first season in 1995 in this historic space, the volunteer-based Guild has been producing four to five shows from summer to fall, which are attended by over 6,000 residents and visitors each year. Productions were temporarily paused in 2024 to allow for essential air conditioning upgrades, and the theater will remain unoccupied until the improvements are completed.

Town of Stowe's Cultural Campus

The Helen Day Memorial Building, a striking Greek Revival structure, was originally built as a school in 1863. In 1981, it was renovated and restored through a bequest from Helen Day Montanari, whose trust stipulated that the building be used as an art center and a library. Today, the Stowe Free Library occupies the entire first floor, while the upper level is home to The Current.

The Current

The Current (formally Helen Day Art Center) was established in 1981 to fulfill the bequest left to the Town of Stowe by Helen Day Montanari. The Current is a nonprofit center for contemporary art and an important community resource, bringing big art and ideas to our small town through exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives. Admission-free exhibitions with internationally-renowned and regional artists are accompanied by a robust interpretive learning program including lectures, panels, and film screenings, all free to the public. The Current also offers high-quality arts education for all ages, with year-round classes, camps, workshops, and interactive programs. Committed to fostering an inclusive, diverse, and respectful culture, The Current operates on the

principle that meaningful art experiences should be accessible to everyone, regardless of age, class, race, ability, or geography.

Stowe Free Library

Libraries have been a long-standing cultural entity of our community. Initially funded through private contributions, the Stowe Free Library became Vermont's first municipally funded library in 1866, following a state law that permitted town appropriations. What began with just 51 donated books and a \$100 budget has grown into a thriving institution with over 35,000 holdings, including books, DVDs, audio materials, and digital resources. The library also provides access to community meeting rooms, statewide resource sharing through Inter-Library Loan, free technology classes, and free programming for children and adults. Public computers, Wi-Fi access, e-readers, and museum and park passes are also available. The seven-member Library Board of Trustees, appointed by the Town of Stowe Selectboard, sets library policy in accordance with the Stowe Town charter. The Town of Stowe Library Department, with other Town employees and a contingent of local and civic-minded volunteers, work to provide services and community space to nearly 70,000 visitors each year. The Friends of the Stowe Free Library, a supporting 501(c)3, conducts many fundraising efforts to supplement the municipal funding of the library and support additional community programs.

Stowe Historical Society

The Stowe Historical Society, founded in 1956, plays a vital role in documenting and maintaining our community's rich history. The Society curates small exhibits in the Akeley Memorial Building and operates the restored 1825 Bloody Brook Schoolhouse, located next to the Helen Day Memorial Building in Stowe's Cultural Campus. In 2007, Stowe voters approved funding to assist in relocating and restoring the historic West Branch Schoolhouse (formerly St. John's Episcopal Church) for use by the Historical Society. Today, the organization relies on membership dues, town appropriations, and publication sales to sustain its efforts.

The Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum

Since 1988, the Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum, a Vermont 501(c)(3) non-profit, has been dedicated to collecting, preserving and celebrating the rich history of skiing and riding in Vermont. The heritage of downhill and cross-country skiing and the birth of snowboarding come to life at the Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum and Hall of Fame in Stowe. In the 1818 Old Town Hall, the museum houses a collection of skis, snowboards, boots, bindings, memorabilia, art, photographs, and library and archive material – more than 10,000 items chronicling the evolution of winter sports in Vermont. Sit in the lifts, see the first skis, check out early snowboards, watch films and interviews on interactive screens, and test your knowledge of "lost" ski areas. The Museum annually hosts the Stowe Mountain Film Festival, Hall of Fame Induction, Vermont Antique Alpine and Nordic Ski Races, and the Epic Summer Event mountain bike and trail run.

Private Arts Organizations

In addition, Stowe is home to several private galleries that highlight fine art, photography, sculpture, and crafts. These galleries showcase diverse collections that attract both art

enthusiasts and collectors. These galleries not only exhibit and sell artwork but also help foster a thriving arts scene in our community.

Performing arts are also an important part of Stowe's cultural landscape. The Spruce Peak Performing Arts Center, a privately funded nonprofit, presents concerts, theater, and film, expanding the community's access to world-class entertainment. Guided by a dedicated volunteer Board of Directors, the Center is committed to delivering high-quality performances and creating opportunities for cultural enrichment within our community and the surrounding region.

Beyond these galleries and organizations, numerous independent artists and artisans call Stowe home, contributing to our creative and dynamic community. Together, these artists and private arts organizations help sustain our reputation as a premier arts and cultural destination, offering residents and visitors access to a wide range of artistic experiences.

Special Events

In addition to year-round arts and cultural programming, the community hosts numerous special events that celebrate arts, culture, outdoor recreation, and local traditions. From seasonal festivals to athletic competitions and cultural gatherings, these events draw residents and visitors alike, contributing to a vibrant atmosphere and supporting economic vitality.

Popular annual events include:

Stowe Winter Carnival – A cherished tradition since 1923, featuring ice carving competitions, ski races, and family-friendly activities that celebrate Stowe's rich winter sports heritage.

Stowe Jazz Festival – A free, multi-day event that brings world-class jazz musicians to venues across town, creating a vibrant musical experience.

Old-Fashioned Fourth of July Celebration – A festive day filled with a patriotic parade, fireworks, and a variety of family-friendly activities.

British Invasion – One of North America's premier British car shows, attracting auto enthusiasts from across the country.

Art on Park – A summer series held on seven Friday evenings, where visitors can stroll down Park Street, enjoy live music, and explore works from local artists and artisan crafters while sampling food and beverages from local vendors.

Recreational Races & Outdoor Events – Including iconic competitions such as the Stowe Derby, the Race to the Top of Vermont, and various cycling and running events that highlight Stowe's stunning landscape.

Exposed Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition and Festival – The Current's annual outdoor sculpture exhibition, showcasing public art throughout town. Sculptures are sited on both public and private land throughout the village and at The Current. The free opening festival in the summer of every year features complimentary live music, food trucks, ice cream, and a walkabout with artist talks at each sculpture.

While special events bring economic benefits and enhance community vibrancy, they also present challenges such as increased traffic congestion, parking limitations, and added demands on public safety and infrastructure which can strain local resources. Managing noise, waste, and environmental impacts is essential to preserving our community's natural beauty and quality of life. To address these concerns, the Town established a Special Events Ordinance in 2017 to help regulate large gatherings and mitigate their side effects. In 2024, the Selectboard approved 19 special events. Finding the right balance between special events and community well-being is essential for maintaining our charm and livability. Thoughtful planning will ensure that our community remains a welcoming and sustainable destination where both residents and visitors can enjoy meaningful experiences year-round.

Arts and Culture

Goal: To actively promote local arts and culture, to the benefit of Stowe area residents, visitors, and businesses; and to continue to become the primary regional center and visitor destination for arts and culture in northern Vermont.

Policies

1. Support private initiatives that expand cultural events and facilities, and improve meeting, exhibit, and performance spaces within designated growth centers, including Stowe Village and Moscow Village, through the Town's Zoning Regulations.
2. Municipal facilities will be made available for special events, exhibits, and use by area arts organizations as appropriate, based on availability, capacity, and associated costs.
3. New space or facilities for the arts and special events should be developed as feasible, in relation to existing and projected demand, within designated growth centers.
4. The town will continue to support the Cultural Campus, Stowe Free Library, The Current, the Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum, the Stowe Theater Guild, Stowe Performing Arts, and the Stowe Historical Society, as well as celebrating all its cultural assets that make it a regional center and cultural destination for residents and visitors.
5. The construction or substantial renovation of public buildings, parks and public spaces, should be incorporated as part of the overall budget expenditure for public art under advisement of the Stowe Arts and Culture Council.
6. Stowe's cultural resources, including its historic sites, buildings, monuments, and public art, should be preserved and maintained for present and future Stowe residents; adaptive reuse of historic structures will be encouraged as appropriate under the Town's Zoning Regulations.
7. New public buildings should be sited, designed, and built to reflect their monumental place within, and long-term importance to the community.

Arts and Culture Tasks	Responsibility	Priority
1. Support the work of the Stowe Arts and Cultural Council to promote investment in local arts organizations.	Selectboard * Stowe Arts and Cultural Council	Short-term
2. Evaluate the capacity and improvement needs of municipal facilities, as part of the development of facility plans, for their use by area arts associations for special events and programs.	Selectboard	Short-term
3. Develop and deploy as part of its normal upgrading and maintenance programs, wayfinding identifiers and other physical and virtual efforts to help residents and visitors identify and locate Stowe's arts and cultural assets, emphasizing Stowe's unique attractiveness as an arts and culture destination.	*Stowe Arts and Cultural Council -- *Stowe Area Association -- *Stowe Vibrancy -- Planning Commission	Short-term to Mid-term
4. Support the Stowe Free Library's vision of being a vibrant community center and a portal to knowledge, opportunity, and diverse resources by continuing to invest in a well-trained staff, a relevant collection, and a functional and beautiful building.	Town Staff Selectboard Library Trustees	Ongoing
6. Support The Current's mission as a resource for the community, including a year-round outdoor sculpture exhibition and town land use for this purpose.	* The Current Selectboard Town staff	Ongoing
7. Review and consider amendments to the Special Events Ordinance to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Require large events to be held only at venues permitted to accommodate large groups. b) Prohibit large special events during peak holiday weekends to reduce travel impacts. c) Evaluate staffing and human resources needs to ensure adequate public safety support. 		