



# Fairlee Newsletter

January 2024

Happy New Year! As we embark upon 2024, your Selectboard is excited to share project updates and provide a glimpse into the promising developments that lie ahead for our community.



## **SIDEWALKS UNVEILED**

Fairlee has taken a significant leap towards pedestrian safety with the near completion of new sidewalks stretching from Bridge Street to the Railroad Station. Remaining work involves signage and crosswalks.

This project, funded by a VTrans grant covering 85% of the cost, is a testament to the success of the Main Street to Morey/Better Connections program. The sidewalks enhance safety, fulfill the community's vision of calming traffic, and increase village walkability.

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## **STORMWATER SOLUTIONS**

As another outcome of the Better Connections program, the Town is actively working to eliminate stormwater lakes and ponds along two sections of Main Street.



The proposed rain gardens and containment features will address drainage concerns in six different parking lots. With the anticipation of a Phase II grant, construction is slated to commence in the spring of 2024.



## **PRIORITIZING SAFETY: POLICE PRESENCE AND TRAFFIC STUDIES**

As we prepare the budget, discussions around police presence in Fairlee have intensified, especially in light of Orange County Sheriff and Vermont State Police staffing shortages. Proposals include Chief Wayne Briggs working 40

hours per week. Additionally, the Lake Morey Foundation has requested a comprehensive traffic study on Lake Morey Road, aligning with our commitment to road safety for all.

## **SHORT-TERM RENTALS, BYLAWS, ORDINANCES, AND ADJUDICATION**

Understanding the enforcement mechanisms associated with land use bylaws and ordinances is an essential part of knowing how things work. Problems that can be swiftly addressed with warnings or tickets are typically targeted with ordinances. In contrast, issues that involve building locations or land use (ones that require a more thoughtful and comprehensive approach) are typically addressed through bylaws.

The Town's recent activity addressing short-term rentals (STRs as promoted by VRBO and Airbnb) is an important case study that illustrates the two different enforcement mechanisms.

To strike a balance between accommodating renters and preserving the housing market for potential homeowners, in July 2023 the Town voted in favor of updated Unified Development Bylaws (aka land use bylaws) that incorporated steps for short-term rental (STR) approval. The bylaws are a direct implementation of Fairlee's Town Plan. They influence long-term development, and often involve strategies or actions with lasting effects on our land and community. **Enforcement of land use bylaws, particularly in the case of zoning violations, relies on the Environmental Division of Superior Court. Adjudication is out of local hands and, in these matters, can take years.**

To simplify enforcement and as required by State Statutes, the Selectboard translated the Town-approved land use bylaws into ordinances. Ordinances are regulations. They make it easy to address straightforward violations with warnings or, if necessary, citations in the form of Judicial Bureau tickets (delivered by Fairlee's new Administrative Officer Wayne Briggs). **The tickets ensure local and timely adjudication and allow for swift resolution of violations.**

The Selectboard approved the ordinances having to do with short-term rentals after 14 months of community vetting (since October of 2022 through Planning Commission and Selectboard meetings, listserv announcements, legal notices, email blasts, website notifications, and public hearings.)

A petition presented to the Selectboard on December 18th seeks a re-vote on the ordinances, claiming that too few residents were involved or aware of their 14-month vetting. While the Selectboard welcomes community engagement, it is important to understand that a re-vote (which could rescind the Selectboard's approval of the short-term rental ordinances) would not dilute the Town's approval of the land use bylaws. **It would simply lengthen the timeframe and the ability of the**

Town to quickly address short-term rental violations.



### **SAMUEL MOREY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

The RISD School Board has indicated that it will work closely with Fairlee's Selectboard to understand how SMES could be used should the school be closed in the next few years. Such collaboration is essential to ensure that the building and property continue to be used for activities and programs that are valuable to community members.

### **LOOKING AHEAD: MUNICIPAL BUDGET**

We are diligently crafting next year's municipal budget. Striving for a conservative increase that retains valuable services, we invite you to share your thoughts and perspectives.

- Join us at the Public Budget Session on January 8 at 6 PM in the Grange Room at the Town Hall.
- Attend Selectboard and Planning Commission meetings.
- Check the Fairlee website for real-time updates.
- Reach out to Town Administrator Ryan Lockwood or Selectboard Members Lance Mills, Peter Berger, and Cathy McGrath to share your perspectives and concerns.

Your engagement is vital in shaping the future of Fairlee. Wishing you a

prosperous and joyful year ahead!

**Comments or questions?**

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