

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Site Visit Notes

**Special Mtg to Visit Properties on Monument Drive,
Tanglewood Drive and Route 7
March 2, 2013 @ 9:00am**

Selectboard Members Present_ Brian Rowell, Luke Choiniere

Staff Present- Heidi Britch- Valenta, Town Administrator

Interested Persons: Brian Martin, Shane Libbey, Beth Libbey, Shawn Guilmette, Ray, Dixon, Jeff Coon, Cheryl Messier, Vern Brosky II, Frederick A. Bloniarz, Joseph M. Greenia, Vern Brosky III, Steve Beyor, John Vanslette, Bret McCuin, Clint Gray- VT Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, Michelle Monroe- St. Albans, Messenger, WPTZ, Fox 44.

The meeting began at 9:00am at the Town Offices. The board explained that because there was a quorum of the board present, this site visit must be treated like a Selectboard meeting and must remain open to the public. The group would proceed together to the sites and the board would not limit who would attend. Brian Rowell asked who wanted the board to visit their site. The following people agreed to a site visit at their property:

Cheryl Messier

Shane and Beth Libbey

Brian Martin

Michael Vanslette- authorized by Shane and Beth Libbey

The group left the office at 9:15am and proceeded to the following sites.

Messier Site- 641 Route 7- The group visited the Messier's Bed and Breakfast on Route 7. The back of the property abuts land on Monument Road where there are back yard ranges. The group viewed two holes in a concrete silo and one in a roof that were believed by the owner to be gun holes from errant shots from Monument Road. There was debate on this issue. The presence of snow made it difficult to see the hole on the roof.

Libbey Site- 344 Monument Road- the group visited the property owned by Shane and Beth Libbey. Shane discussed the boundaries of his property and adjoining land owned by Michael Vanslette and Brian Martin. Shane led the group through the woods along the outline of his boundary. He explained that he doesn't shoot on his property but uses the range at Vanslette's property.

Vanslette- 314 Monument Road- Libbey led the group to the area where the Vanslette's backyard range was located between Libbey and Martin's property. The shooting area and backstop were examined.

Gagne Site – 144 Jedware Circle- Vern Brosky led the group to the home of Allen and Linda Gagne to view what was believed by the owners to be shotgun damage to the side of their home. After evaluating the site, it was commonly agreed by the group that this was more likely damage caused in a previous installation of a satellite dish. The Gagne's were not home.

The group then returned to the Town Office for a summary from Clint Gray and discussion.

Gray started the conversation by reiterating that there will be a non-binding advisory vote on Town Meeting Day on this issue. This is intended to give the Selectboard a view of the opinion of the public on this issue but no ordinance will result from the vote. Following Town Meeting the Selectboard will decide what the next steps will be.

Gray referenced two pertinent sections of statute- VSA 2295 and VSA 2291.

VSA 2291 – enumeration of powers grants power to towns to regulate firearms-

VSA 2295- limitations to regulate hunting

Gray outlined details of previous cases of accidental shootings in Vermont that resulted in convictions and jail time. He emphasized that all shooters are responsible for their shots but range owners are responsible for all shots at their range. This exposes landowners to criminal or civil damages.

Gray stated that the Messier site was inconclusive for him and he was unable to gather enough evidence to know if the holes in the silo were caused by bullets. He did say that based on all the details that were gathered he could not say confidently that they were not bullet holes.

Gray stated that he was confident the damage to the Gagne home was not caused by bullets but rather by a previous installation of a satellite dish.

Gray stated that there was more that the range owners could do to improve safety at their site and noted that backstops could be higher.

There were comments on the Swanton-Highgate Gun Club on Frontage Road.

Overcrowding was stated to be an issue which sometimes made it impossible to get in. Gray suggested using other gun clubs in the area and said he travels 14 miles to use the gun club of his choice.

Gray declined to comment on his opinion of a need in Highgate for an ordinance. He stated that the Town must come to that decision on its own but added that safety, noise and hours of shooting are all things to consider. He noted that being a “good neighbor” is also an important part of this decision.

Gray offered to provide further information to any landowners on the individual safety of their situation if they wish to contact him. He also offered to provide information to the Gun Clubs in the area if they would like to have a site visit.

Brian Rowell adjourned the meeting at 11:45.

Respectfully submitted by:

_____ Heidi Britch-Valenta, Town Administrator

Minutes approved by:

_____ Selectboard Member