

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Mtg.

March 3, 2016 @ 7pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated.

A. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order by outgoing Chair Jeff Towle @ 7:02pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members - Jeff Towle – outgoing Chair; Chris Yates, Vice-Chair; Paulette Tatro; Randy Connelly; Joshua LaRocque – newly elected Selectboard member on 3/1/16

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon - Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche – Town Treasurer

Public / Other – Eric & Sarah Chevalier; Ben Lowell – Constable; Denise Smith – FNLC; MacKenzie Smith; Richard J. Noel; Michelle Monroe – St. Albans Messenger; Henry Rainville

B. Reorganization of the Selectboard

Jeff announced he would now take nominations for the Chair of the Selectboard.

Motion by Paulette Tatro to nominate Chris Yates as the Chair. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. Jeff then asked for nominations for Vice-Chair of the Selectboard. Motion by Randy Connelly to nominate Paulette Tatro as the Vice-Chair. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**. Chris thanked Jeff for his years of service to our town.

C. Public Comment

Ben Lowell was approached by a taxpayer at town meeting and asked if the town could research purchasing pole mounted feedback signs regarding speed in the village. It was suggested we get three of them, one for each end of Route 78 as you enter / exit the village and one on the Gore Road by the school. Chris noted that in the safety audit there was a recommendation for this as well. Route 78 being a state highway, we will have to work with VTrans, and the Gore Road is a town road, we can look into that.

D. FNLC Water Quality Update – Denise Smith

Denise introduced herself for those who are not familiar with her or Friends of Northern Lake Champlain, she is their executive director. The organization was started 14 years ago around the Missisquoi Bay and their goal is to work with government officials and municipalities to implement clean water action. She gave some background on ACT64 and H35. The water quality act is funded through taxes and sunsets in the third year. The secretaries of the agencies making up the clean water board are still working on how to allocate the money to different agencies and FNLC is engaged in those meetings. FNLC is pushing the envelope to make sure that everyone is accountable with regard to water quality issues, and there has been some push back because of the expense it creates. One goal is to make sure there is funding that comes with the directives to make sure that Lake Champlain will recover from the excessive pollution. Paulette asked some questions with regard to what is considered adequate funding. FNLC completed storm water reports for 11 communities in our area. The Missisquoi Basin Plan is being developed and a series of public meetings will be coming up. NRPC has a new role with regard to water quality and a new commission has been established, which Richard Noel is involved in and he has attended on behalf of Highgate. FNLC is concentrating on education, outreach, advocacy and implementation. This includes reaching out to teachers and local schools. FNLC has a full time AmeriCorps member that is also doing great things for their organization. They work with farmers and complete mini run off reports and then try to match or pair up resources for them. Rock River and Pike River both flow into the Missisquoi Bay. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is contracting with

FNLC to help farmer's access resources and serve as case managers so farmers will know where to apply for funding. The price of milk right now is making it challenging to come up with the 25% match required. Chris asked for an update on the Shipyard Road project here in Highgate. The town and landowners in that area are excited about it. FNLC applied for a grant on that project through the watershed program, and Denise will follow up on it. Heidi added that we can also use the Better Back Roads program which has expanded the categories for grant funding. Heidi also added that the reporting done for Highgate as part of the sensitive slopes overlay district contains a lot of information that the town has already found to be very useful. Richard Noel commented that the Rock River project is very important because it goes right down the spine of our town. Josh LaRocque also noted that there are test huts on agricultural properties in that area. Testing should be done before it enters Quebec and also when it returns to the U.S. so we know exactly how much phosphorus, if any, Canada is adding to our water ways. All agreed it would be good to know how much pollution is coming in from Canada and the Lake Champlain Basin Program might have some of that data. Henry Rainville asked about tile drainage and how testing works regarding meadow land vs. corn field land. Josh asked how expensive the filters are if farmers are interested, to which Denise responded that what they used in their testing was expensive partly because they provided all the monitoring of them. The board thanked Denise for her information and updates this evening.

E. National Wildlife Federation – Ross Saxton

1. Rail oil letter

Ross was not present, but Denise Smith stayed to relay what information she had and was able to share. There is a lot of attention on this issue due to the increase in traffic along the rail lines. Originating in the North Dakota tar sands, then traveling to Montreal and back down into the Albany NY area and then on to Europe, there is concern about the potential for a disaster with oil spills. The rail cars that the oil is transported in have very thin walls, and are referred to as Pepsi cans on wheels. Josh added that there are lots of other toxic chemicals that are transported by trains, like chlorine, that would also be very harmful if spilled. It was noted that the railways in our area are now all welded rail. Richard Noel commented that what happened in Lac-Megantic, Quebec was human error and having only one man on the train was a mistake. Denise stated that the question is, if we have a spill of that magnitude in our area, what will the response be? Do we have the capacity in our region to handle this type of disaster? Chris asked why there is no suggestion for a different type of rail car to be used. It was also stated that if we take oil off the rail and move it to trucks out of Montreal, those trucks will be far higher in number and they will be using our roads to get there. They are going to move their product one way or another. Josh did point out that the train going through Alburgh and West Swanton does go very slow because of that bridge and it does not start gaining speed again until it is outside of Swanton. But, regardless, any spills would affect us greatly. NY towns are very concerned about this, and we share the same body of water, Lake Champlain, so we too are concerned.

F. Town Treasurer – Shelley Laroche

1. Check warrants

There were no questions on the check warrants.

2. Other & Town Meeting recap

Shelley will print out expenditures and get them to the board. She will also calculate the tax rate based on what was approved at town meeting on March 1st. Shelley will also be calling VLCT to see if the CIP needs to be warned as part of the general fund and looking into town records regarding the spending limit of \$5,000.00 from back in the 1960's. Richard Noel believes this to be true, but not realistic for 2016. Paulette asked about the intent of that motion back in the 1960's. Richard said the board had bought a truck without taxpayer approval so the residents came up with the rule of \$5,000.00 for highway equipment, that is what Richard understands. Chris asked if it was a warned article or something that was come up with on that day, and Chris also asked where the funds came from. Was there a reserve fund back then, or were funds allocated and used to buy a truck? Randy asked if that resulted in an actual policy that would have been carried forward. Richard noted that this was all understood when he was on the Selectboard. Jeff Towle added to the conversation, stating that the town does have a purchasing policy in effect

today that was put into effect a few years ago. The \$5,000.00 figure for today is not valid. A number could be utilized for today, but not that one. Chris would like to see something in the policy regarding purchasing equipment vs. replacing equipment. Another question was asked, what if in the middle of a plowing season something happens and it is not fixable? Richard suggested leasing or renting until the board can come back to the voters, noting it is not the law, but the way the town has operated for 50-60 years. Henry added he feels that it's more part of the process, and that the town wants to be involved. Henry feels that the board received some grief at town meeting because people didn't feel they had a say. Chris added that the voters already voted to put the money aside, and that money is put aside every year. Chris asked for clarification, is the message to vote to put the money aside (which we already do), and then to vote on how to expend the money? Richard and Henry commented that the town has voted over the years to put money in a fund for replacement of a highway truck, singular not plural. It was noted by the board that we replaced two highway trucks with two highway trucks. Chris is open to what the voters want the board to do. If they want to vote to put money into a capital reserve fund to be set aside and then vote again to expend the funds, we need to look at it for the whole capital budget, not just for the highway department. It should all be put into a policy and move forward so everyone will know what is expected. Chris does not have any problem doing it this way, but we need to look at the whole picture. Randy asked if purchases should be held off until town meeting, or warn items as needed. Richard feels that if due diligence is done, then people will show up. Randy also noted that we had public hearings on the CIP and people did not show up. Henry added that if it involves major culture change, the board needs to find out how to reach the people. Eric Chevalier commented that we need to make sure our equipment has outlived its usefulness before replacing it. Chris spoke to the new FLEETIO software the public works department is now using and how it tracks fuel usage and mileage among other things. Paulette asked Richard and Henry for clarification on this discussion. It is her understanding that even though the board had the authority to purchase the vehicles, that it is not wise for the board to do that in the future even though they had the authority to do so. Henry and Richard agreed. They agree the board had the authority and they do not even question the purchases. The voters are their allies and Henry knew the board would get beaten on at town meeting. The CIP should have been brought before the voters and get them engaged. If the CIP had been presented without a price tag, people would have contributed useful information. Now it is being shut down because people are angry. Chris also feels it was an information overload. There was a lot of information presented, we took our first swing at it, and it was a miss. Paulette was disappointed that no one asked any questions about the rest of the budget / general fund. Other departments were not given the opportunity for discussion, the public library for example. Henry is in favor of a CIP, it shows we need to look forward, he just asked we not put a price tag on it before we engage the community. Richard feels the timing was bad, being on the back end of the rink project to ask for another \$400,000.00 just didn't work. Chris used the arena project as an example of the need for a CIP. We knew ten years ago that we needed to put money into the facility. Had we put aside \$100,000.00 a year for ten years, we would not have had to borrow for the project and have the bond vote. Jeff noted that revenues to the town from Casella are down 2/3 because people are recycling.

G. Town Clerk – Wendi Dusablon

1. Minutes

Motion by Chris Yates to approve the minutes from February 10, 2016 as written. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Chris Yates to approve the minutes from February 18, 2016 as written. The motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED.**

2. Hockeyville update

Just 8 days left to nominate the Highgate Sports Arena at www.krafthockeyville.com. Wendi noted that as of this evening, we had 653 nominations out of a total of 5,997, which is 10.9% of the overall numbers. As far as Wendi can tell we are in the lead, but we are judged on passion, spirit, dedication to hockey, creativity and originality. **KEEP NOMINATING THROUGH MARCH 11th!**

3. Town Meeting Day Results - recap

- Highgate Elementary School budget passed (by paper vote) 97-54.
- School board members elected (from the floor by voice vote) were – Chris Shepard to a 3 year term and David Roddy to a 2 year term.
- On the town side, the voters approved (by hand count) Highgate to be designated as a PACE district.
- The voters passed (by voice vote) the article to have the Delinquent Tax Collector be appointed by the Selectboard.
- The General Fund passed (by voice vote), as amended. The approved amount was \$1,022,488.00, with an estimated \$454,638.00 (\$412,639.00 General Fund / \$41,999.00 CIP) to be raised by taxes.
- The Highway Fund budget passed (by hand count) 67-25 as warned \$722,089.00 with an estimated \$571,389.00 to be raised by taxes.
- The voters passed the article (by voice vote) to set the final date of payment for FY2017 property taxes to be Thursday, Oct. 27, 2016 by 5pm and postmarks will no longer be accepted. This change of no longer accepting postmarks will be clearly indicated on both the tax bill itself and the return tear off portion of the bill.
- Activity at the polls: We had three ballots; Town (salmon in color), MVU (yellow in color) and Presidential Primary (white in color). There were no races on the town ballot this year, results as follows; A total of **746** Highgate residents came out to vote at the polls on March 1, 2016.

Lister	3 year term	Aimee Reynolds	663
Cemetery Commissioner	5 year term	Kevin Spears	690
Delinquent Tax Collector	1 year term	Shelley Laroche	680
Library Trustee	5 year term	Rebecca Howrigan	664
Selectboard Member	2 year term	Joshua LaRocque	626
Town Clerk	3 year term	Wendi Dusablon	698
Town Treasurer	3 year term	Shelley Laroche	671
Trustee of Trust Funds	3 year term	Clarence Miller	675

The open seat for the 3 year Selectboard seat, Mark “Zeb” Maskell, Sr. received enough write in votes (20), and we are still waiting to see if he will accept the position. Zeb, where are you we are trying to reach you! ☺

Pat McGovern also received enough write in votes (37) for the ensuing year as moderator.

On the MVU ballot, the school budget passed by approximately 140 votes, the football article failed, and Richard Flint was successful in the race for the Highgate seat on the MVU school board.

On the presidential primary ballots: Democratic ballot: Hillary Clinton – 52; Bernie Sanders – 360. Republican ballot: Jeb Bush – 6; Ben Carson – 9; Chris Christie – 1; Ted Cruz – 29; Carly Fiorina – 2; John Kasich – 64; Rand Paul – 3; Marco Rubio – 65; Rick Santorum – 1; Donald Trump – 142.

It was a very busy day, and we had great help at the polls and after the polls closed. Thank you to everyone for making it go as smoothly as possible!

4. Appointed positions

We have a lengthy list of appointed positions to fill. The board is asking for letters of interest by noon on March 15th so these positions can be filled by appointment at the next meeting on March 17th. The list is as follows:

Town Agent	1 year term
Tree Warden	1 year term
Town Service Officer	1 year term
Animal Control Officer	1 year term
Deputy Health Officer	1 year term
1 st Constable	2 year term
Zoning Admin.	3 year term
NorthWest Regional Planning Comm. Rep.	1 year term
NorthWest Regional Planning Comm. Rep.	1 year term
TAC Committee	1 year term
Development Review Board	3 year term
Development Review Board	3 year term
Planning Commission	3 year term
Planning Commission	3 year term

Ben Lowell asked the Selectboard to consider him for appointment as 1st Constable this evening because his elected term from 2014 is over and it was voted on last year to change this to an appointed position. If we wait two

weeks, we will be without Constable coverage until then. Motion by Chris Yates to appoint Ben Lowell to a 2-year term as 1st Constable for the Town of Highgate. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**. Richard Noel asked the town to please accept his verbal notification this evening that he would like to be reappointed to the TAC committee. It was so noted by the board.

5. 2016 Liquor License Renewal Application – Desorcie’s Market

Motion by Chris Yates to enter the local liquor control board @ 8:19pm. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Chris Yates to approve the application from Desorcie’s Market. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Chris Yates to exit the local liquor control board and enter back into the regular Selectboard meeting @ 8:22pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

H. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta

1. ADA Municipal Office Study update

An RFP was issued and we have received four proposals. A committee has been formed to go over the proposals on March 9th @ 5pm. The committee is made up of Heidi Britch-Valenta, Wendi Dusablon, Shelley Laroche, Andy King, Barb Chevalier (PC) and Larry Simmons (PC).

I. Selectboard Items

1. St. Armand Road Safety Audit

No action is required on this by the board. The draft can now be forwarded to AOT. Paulette asked about the timeline and next steps, Heidi will find out.

2. Street Light Agreement

Chris has been in touch with Andrew from Efficiency Vermont and we have been sent MOAs for VEC and Swanton Village. Swanton Village is eager to get started. Heidi noted that the MOA for Swanton Village will need to be resent to us, Chris will contact Andrew. The conversion with VEC is a longer payback, so if we want to do them together, the savings with Swanton Village could offset the change in the VEC area. We will realize the savings with Swanton Village in just a little over 1/2 a year by changing over the street lights to LED. The VEC area starts at Frontage Road out to Highgate Springs and their other service areas are in the East Highgate region. This is all approved with Efficiency VT and Chris shared some cost saving numbers. Currently we are paying \$14.48 per month per fixture with Swanton Village, and we have approximately 87 fixtures in town with Swanton Village. The switch to LED will bring that cost down to \$4.49 per month, per fixture. Chris noted that rates have dropped even more since then and they are now at \$3.25 per LED fixture. Once we realize the savings associated with the conversion (approximately 1/2 year) we can implement a street light policy and figure out where more lighting is needed and where more lighting makes sense. Motion by Chris Yates to allow Heidi to sign the MOA from Efficiency VT for Swanton Village Electric to change over from traditional street lights to LED street lights. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. Josh asked Heidi to send a copy to the board as well so they can see it before she signs it, which Heidi will do.

J. Other Business

None

K. Upcoming Events

March 7	6pm	Arena Construction Committee Mtg. – Phase II
March 9	5pm	ADA Study Committee Mtg.
March 10	6pm	DRB Mtg.
March 15	6pm	PC Mtg.
March 17	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
March 19	10am-noon	Dog & Cat Rabies Clinic @ HVFD
March 21 & 28	5:30	Finance Committee Mtgs.
April 1		Deadline to license your dogs – late fees after April 1st and fines after May 1st

L. Executive Session

Motion by Chris Yates for the Selectboard and Town Administrator to enter into executive session @ 8:35pm for personnel, real estate and legal matters where

premature public knowledge would put the town at a substantial disadvantage.
The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.
Motion by Chris Yates to exit executive session @ 9:58pm. The motion was
seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

M. Adjournment

Motion by Chris Yates to adjourn the meeting @ 10:00pm. The motion was
seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**.

Respectfully submitted by,

_____ Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by,

_____ Christopher Yates, Chair – Highgate Selectboard