

# TOWN OF HIGHGATE

## Planning Commission

September 15, 2015 @ 6pm

joint meeting with the Highgate Selectboard

### Approved Minutes

*NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated.*

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Woody Rouse opened up the meeting @ 6:00pm.

Present for this meeting were:

Planning Commission board members; Woody Rouse, Luc Dupuis,

Bruce Ryan & Larry Simmons; *absent – Rick Trombley*

Selectboard members; Jeff Towle, Chris Yates & Paulette Tatro;

*absent -Randy Connelly & Diana O'Hara*

Also present were: Heidi Britch-Valenta – Planning & Zoning Administrator;

Wendi Dusablon – Clerk; Amanda Holland – NPRC; Joe Depatie - HVFD

**II. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN WITH THE HIGHGATE SELECTBOARD**

Amanda began with a review of what a capital budget is for the benefit of the Selectboard being present tonight. This budget procedure will be considering FY2017 as the starting point and the proposal is to plan ahead for a 6 year period. Amanda provided background and examples of what can be incorporated into a capital budget, and noted that we need to integrate our municipal plan into it. This creates a transparent budgetary process, and is a change from the way we budget and have made purchases in the past. These boards and the taxpayers will be able to see the broader picture for why money is being set aside as we look forward. Amanda also stressed the importance of maintaining the CIP. It needs to be updated annually and each year another year is tacked on. The town treasurer, Shelley Laroche, will be responsible for this task and submission to her each year by department heads will be by August 31<sup>st</sup>. The (to be formed) finance committee and planning commission both play a key role in the process by working together. The PC will conduct an annual review and assign prioritization for long range plans. The FC will ensure the best allocation to stabilize annual expenditures. The treasurer will then propose the CIP annually to the Selectboard by November 1<sup>st</sup>. It was noted that the CIP can be adopted annually prior to town meeting by the Selectboard by holding one or more public hearings. For this first round, it will be beneficial to have multiple public hearings as this is a brand new document. Our first hearing is set for Oct. 1, 2015 at the Selectboard meeting. Paulette noted it will be crucial to have the information within the capital plan for budgeting, even though it will not yet be adopted. Chris agreed and feels November 1<sup>st</sup> is plenty of time for them to get the information from the CIP to use for budgeting each year. It will be just one budget being voted on in March. Once the CIP is adopted, it should be displayed on the town's website. Heidi clarified, the CIP is annually adopted and a public hearing needs to be warned 15 days in advance – yes, there needs to be one or more public hearings annually. Amanda noted a few errors on her tables, and had brought corrected handouts for the boards to replace what she had sent in advance. It was noted that historically in our budgets, there have been big fluctuations, due to issues such as the Machia Road bridge and the 18 month cycle (municipal only) we had in 2013-2014 when we converted to a fiscal year. These issues should be footnoted under the tables. Paulette also wanted it noted under the tables that expenditures were not necessarily all funded by taxpayer dollars or by the town. Some examples were the sports court, dehumidification system and the tri-town study. Some people will zero in on how much the town commits financially to the arena facility and she doesn't want the tables to distort the facts on what was actually spent. Chris would like to leave the breakdowns there until that year falls off the time frame of the current CIP. Amanda clarified that sometimes budgets and actuals are different. The tables are reflecting actuals, based on town report data. Tax rate fluctuations are also

included in the plan. She noted a jump from 2007-2008, this was due to the town wide reappraisal. Larry asked for clarification on how many years we need to show. That is up to us. Bill Hall from VLCT recommends 6-10 years, as it will clearly show changes in spending and fluctuations are more visible. There is no mandated minimum time to track, and we don't want the charts to get out of control. Over time we could shrink the CIP down if we wanted, based on what the public needs and wants to see. Prioritizing projects should be laid out by department heads when they evaluate their needs. Questions were asked regarding inflation. Amanda used a flat rate of 4% inflation to her figures each year, or we could do a more compounding calculation, both will come out to the same end cost. Chris asked about incorporating trade in values, as this is a big unknown. Larry asked how other towns handle this. Amanda will prepare a power point presentation for the Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> public hearing. Larry asked about the bridge and if those calculations need to be tweaked for inflation, as the project is not set to happen until 2018. VTrans puts out the numbers based on the estimated year of construction, and contingency funds are often times built in. Amanda gave us some numbers for relocation of the town garage, based on other towns that have recently rebuilt or relocated their garages. Paulette asked about the fire department and if they will be looking to purchase anything beyond 2018 – yes. Amanda referred everyone to the capital asset inventory, appendix B for the fire department. Chris spoke to the useful life of fire department vehicles and he had some notes on replacement costs. He also had some updates to figures within the CIP regarding the HVFD. He noted that it is recommended that we have a second tanker for fire protection, but we don't have a place to store it. Because we don't have a hydrant system in town, two tankers are recommended. How do we work in adding another vehicle to the fleet, and can Highgate afford it? Paulette noted that mutual aid plays a role in cases such as this. Depending on how the ADA study comes back (planning grant) we will start talking about facilities such as the fire department. Chris also noted some updated numbers from Andy King and the Public Works Department. Chris also asked about video surveillance and if that goes into a CIP. Heidi noted that any video we currently have was obtained through a PACIF grant. If the town purchases land for recreational uses, would that be considered a capital expense and if we build a bandstand in the park, could that be incorporated also – yes on the land purchase and yes on the bandstand if it will be over \$5,000.00. Jeff asked about the shoreline bill and wastewater projects that are recommended in town, and if they are incorporated in this plan. There is text included under the water and sewer section. Jeff thinks this should definitely be talked about as Missisquoi Bay has been mandated to show an 82% improvement in phosphorus, which is a big number. When we have our road inventory that will identify those projects and we can then plug in the numbers. This will all happen in our next cycle. Chris asked about yearly paving, we budget yearly and spend it in the same operating cycle. Some towns incorporate paving into their CIPs, it is nice to plan upgrades or projects long term. In terms of transparency, it would be helpful to have paving projects laid out. Larry noted that historical data will ultimately help with impact fees. As far as funding sources, the town can use a variety, such as; transfer station revenue, general obligation bonds or notes, capital reserve funds, grants, state revolving loan funds, donations and trade in values. User fees and impact fees could be utilized in the future. Information on capital reserve balances as of April 2015 are included in the data. It was noted that we were able to utilize the funds to purchase two trucks instead of just one, and a year ahead of schedule. Larry added some more questions about trade ins and how it should be documented or planned for. It was noted that typically the highway trucks are on a 9 year rotation. The town of Highgate does not have a history of debt, the arena bond is the first. Chris noted that operating budgets should be as true to what we need as possible, because there will be no capital expenditures. These amounts will no longer be articles at town meeting. Currently when we calculate the tax rate, it incorporates the general fund, highway fund, library, town articles and local agreements. This all gets incorporated into one municipal rate. Chris asked if this would all be voted on separately from the general fund at town meeting – it could all be presented at the same time. Jeff noted this is a big change for a lot of people, as there won't be an article for each individual item. As long as we vote from the floor, amendments can still be made. Larry showed concern for the chart that reflects estimated tax rates and how that will be perceived. It was noted that the table prior to it provides the explanation. The tax rate table does not need to be part of the CIP, it is a snapshot of what the numbers mean and could be used more by the FC and PC as the CIP is developed each year.



Minutes respectfully submitted by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk  
Wendi Dusablon

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Minutes approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, PC- Vice Chair  
Woodbury Rouse Jr.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date