

TOWN OF HIGHGATE Selectboard

December 4, 2014 @ 7pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated.

A. Executive Session @ 6pm – Employee Evaluations

B. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order by Andy King, Vice Chair (acting chair) @ 7:00pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members-Andy King, Vice-Chair; Diana O'Hara; Chris Yates; Luke Choiniere; Jeff Towle, Chair - arrived @ 7:55pm.

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Admin; Tom Racine – Town Treasurer

Public / Other – Ben Lowell (Constable), Bruce Ryan, Connie Janes Beyor (Highgate School Board), Joel Clark (Swanton Selectboard), Crystal Lampman (MVR), Leonard Stell (MVR), Paul Rocheleau (MVR), Michelle Monroe (St. Albans Messenger), James Guilmette (Swanton Selectboard), Danny Billado (Swanton Selectboard), Lynn Billado (MVR), David Jescavage (Swanton Town Administrator), Laurie Rossi (MVR).

C. Traffic Ordinance Amendment B-25 weight restriction

A motion was made at the last meeting to accept the amendment and adopt it. This is a required hearing and opportunity for the public to comment.

Andy read aloud from the Traffic Ordinance Amendment regarding the weight restriction on B25 on Machia Road (see below). There were no comments from the public on this topic.

On November 20, 2014, pursuant to the provisions of 24 VSA, Sections 1971 and 2291, the Town of Highgate Selectboard has adopted an amendment to its Traffic Ordinance for the Town of Highgate. The full text of the amendment is listed below and is available for review at the Town Administrator's office @ 2996 VT Route 78 in Highgate Center, Vermont.

Highgate Traffic Ordinance Amendment VI

This ordinance is hereby amended to include agricultural vehicles in the weight limitation for the Machia Road Bridge, B-25:

In response to serious safety concerns identified in a State of Vermont Bridge Inspection of B-25, the Machia Road Bridge is posted at a weight limit of 5 tons or 10,000 lbs. Due to the potential for further damage to the bridge and/or persons using the bridge by heavy loads, this weight restriction is applicable to all vehicles including agricultural vehicles. Violations of this weight restriction are punishable by law. Fines will be calculated in accordance with Title 23 schedule of fines.

*Highgate Selectboard – Andrew King, Diana O'Hara, Jeff Towle, Chris Yates
Comment on this amendment is invited at the December 4th Selectboard meeting at the municipal office at 7:00pm.*

This amendment will become effective sixty (60) days after the approval of the Selectboard unless five (5) percent of the voters petition the Selectboard of the Town Clerk within forty four (44) days for a vote on the question of disapproving the amendment. Questions regarding this ordinance may be directed to the Town Administrator, Heidi Britch-Valenta, at 868-4697 x203 or hbvalenta@comcast.net.

D. Missisquoi Valley Rescue (MVR) budget discussion with Swanton

Andy welcomed everyone to the meeting and to this discussion regarding the MVR budget. There was representation from the Town of Swanton and MVR (see listing above under section B). A budget printout was distributed at the meeting, but had not been seen by anyone prior. The biggest increase can be seen in the dispatching line item. Mr. Stell and Ms. Rossi pointed out that with regard to the line items they could control, costs were down. With regard to items out of their control (dispatching and workmans comp insurance), costs were up. Andy King and Joel Clark had some questions regarding what the indications were as to why dispatching fees have risen so dramatically. Dan Billado noted that it is a pet peeve of his, and he would like some explanation on how they calculate the expenses associated with

dispatching. Dan has requested that Mr. Taylor and Ms. Dunn attend a Swanton meeting, but they have not. Dan stated that not too many years ago we were paying \$7,000.00 for dispatching, now we pay \$70,000.00 for the same amount of calls. Right now there is no competition for dispatch, but down the road, in the near future that could change. Andy asked if there had been any upgrades to equipment. Ms. Lampman said that yes, they have had a whole new radio system installed. Dan stated it is the Selectboards job to see that the town gets the biggest bang for their buck, and with dispatch we aren't. Mr. Stell said they are currently testing dispatch through Lamoille County. It is possible that we can find dispatching services at a cheaper rate. Mr. Stell has spoken to the Swanton Fire Chief about this, and would need to also communicate with the Highgate Fire Chief. For right now, we are kind of held hostage. We need dispatch to get the calls out. MVR is also facing changes with healthcare reimbursements. Medicare and Medicaid pay less now than they did previously, which means MVR needs more community support. Some Medicaid calls that require advanced life support, MVR actually loses money based on what they are reimbursed for. Community support keeps MVR in business. Andy feels it would be prudent for all towns to be involved in this dispatch circle and to engage in a collaborative effort and see it through so it does not fall on the shoulders of just Swanton. It is a necessary component of public safety. Mr. Stell also noted that a few years back, MVR came to both Swanton and Highgate to purchase expensive equipment for the truck. Highgate wanted to discuss it further. It went on the ballot in Swanton, but went no further in Highgate. MVR is looking to see if this can be brought back up for Town Meeting 2015 in Highgate. Lynn Billado stated the total amount was \$40,000.00 which was to be split 65% Swanton and 35% Highgate. The equipment purchased included Auto Pulses and EKG machines, which have proved invaluable with regard to cardiac patients. With regard to MVR heavy rescue, Mr. Stell stated that the equipment is currently up for sale for \$50,000.00. There is very limited staff trained to use the equipment and it is sitting idle in a barn. Andy asked what this means as far as heavy rescue capability in our community. Swanton's newest fire truck is set up as a fire / rescue. They purchased some equipment from St. Albans town, and they are looking to add a \$30,000.00 line item this year for more tools to put on the truck. Dan Billado stated that if MVR sells off the heavy rescue equipment, Swanton Fire is capable of doing extrication, and will be even more capable if they add more equipment if it passes on the ballot. Franklin also has a heavy rescue, as does Enosburg and St. Albans Town. Joel Clark had some questions with regard to the line of credit line item on the MVR hand outs and the information that was blacked out. Laurie Rossi answered that when they first switched to getting community support there was a fairly heavy reserve. In discussions with the town, rather than keep a large reserve and still ask for community support, they slowly used up those reserves. They kept a much tighter amount of money, but there are times that a large amount of money needs to go out. They have a line of credit that they draw on, it's an in and out thing. They do have a balance now of roughly \$90,000.00 and there are a variety of reasons for that. Joel doesn't see any line item where they are paying it down, Laurie explained where to find it in the handout and answered Joel's questions. With a line of credit, you should keep your cash balance at zero. They still have two more months to go in this budget cycle, but right now there is a surplus of \$30,000.00 and they want to use that to pay down the line of credit. Dan asked if the sale of the heavy rescue equipment would also be used to pay down any long term debt, Mr. Stell said that is the thought. Andy noted that Highgate has some things to discuss concerning the line item for town meeting day 2015. He feels that mutual aid is a reliable and effective tool in our community. Dan clarified, the overall budget increase for MVR is 4%, of which will be split 65% Swanton / 35% Highgate – yes. Dan stated that on behalf of the town of Swanton, that MVR does a great job, to which Andy agreed. Tom Racine added that Highgate drafted a contractual agreement a few years ago. The

MVR costs are built into the budget, we don't have a separate line item for MVR. It is at the discretion of the Highgate board how they want to build it into the budget. In Swanton it is a line item on the ballot. Andy doesn't see any need to change the way Highgate identifies MVR as part of our budget, but it is always up for discussion. Andy thanked Swanton and MVR for being here.

** Andy recommended putting off performance reviews until Jeff Towle could be present. Jeff is our Chair, as well as the Road Commissioner. Heidi will make the phone calls to the highway crew and we will move on in the agenda to the Town Treasurer.

F. Town Treasurer – Tom Racine

1. Pay bills

There were no questions. The new tires are on the one ton truck.

2. 2015 budget schedule update

Tom spoke to the auditors and he should be getting the adjusting entries tomorrow, which is going to impact the close of the previous fiscal year so we can carry forward those adjusted balances. They are going to likely want to schedule time with the board to go over the audit. There may be other options besides the bond bank for borrowing the funds for the arena project. Merchants Bank has sent Tom some info. Tom has been working on the highway budget, he sees no issues, but needs clarification on the personnel side. The one ton and the Mack are very close to the time they need to be rotated out. We are budgeting through June 2016. Steve Ploof would like to include some work on the Hanna Road from Kevin Spears to the Hanna Farm (shoulder work and replace a culvert) and also a project on the Morey Road for the next budget cycle. Tom met with Lucie Fortin about the library and he is likely to meet with Liza next week. Dan Desorcie asked if we were moving forward with purchasing a fire truck. That is likely going to be the next focus. Tom was at the parks & recreation committee meeting last night. That department will require some thought, as there are different directions the board can choose to go in. Continuing with MAHA is favorable to Tom and will help with transition and buys us some time. Tom would like to be close to finalizing most figures by the end of December. We have scheduled separate meetings for budgeting in the past, and Tom sees that happening again this year. The funding for the arena project is separate from operations, and the sidewalks need to be considered at some point in 2015 or 2016. The B25 project is a little further out in 2017 or 2018. Tom would like to do a lot of leg work prior to the next board meeting on December 18th. Tom had some handouts with regard to salaries and employee benefits. All departments will likely follow the same format.

3. Tax bills due December 15th
We have \$620,000.00 left to collect on the second billing. Over all, combined with the two tax billings we had to collect \$5.9 million, and we have collected \$5.3 million. **December 15th is the due date, by 5pm.**

F. Town Clerk – Wendi Dusablon

1. Minutes

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the minutes from November 20, 2014 as written. Motion was seconded by Diana O'Hara – **APPROVED**.
Motion by Chris Yates to accept the minutes from November 24, 2014 as written. Motion was seconded by Andy King – **APPROVED**.

2. Dog licensing fees for 2015

Motion by Chris Yates to set the dog licensing fees for 2015 at the same rates used in 2014.

<i>On or before April 1, 2015</i>	<i>spau/neutral \$12</i>	<i>not spau/not neutered \$16</i>
<i>After April 1, 2015</i>	<i>spau/neutral \$18</i>	<i>not spau/not neutered \$22</i>

Motion was seconded by Luke Choiniere – **APPROVED.**

Ben Lowell (Constable) was present and noted that he and the ACO would like to start issuing municipal tickets much earlier next year for unlicensed dogs, by May 1st, which is 30 days after the deadline to register your dogs.

Jeff Towle arrived to the meeting @ 7:55pm.

G. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta

1. NRPC contract

This is ready for Jeff's signature.

2. BGS grant contract

This is for \$25,000.00 to be used at the arena and is from the Dept. of Buildings and General Services. They will be hosting a ceremony on December 16th at the State House in Montpelier, so we should have representation there. Heidi is not opposed to attending. Chris feels that Heidi did the grant work so she should attend. Heidi and Kim Gates did the grant work together. Heidi will follow up with HART and MAHA and see if anyone else wants to go.

3. Misc.

- Heidi received a document from Steve Roy with Wiemann-Lamphere regarding the RFP for a construction manager on the arena project. If the board will take a look at it, we can get the wheels in motion for that. We need to get the ad out, it is suggested we start the process very soon. Two weeks to advertise, two weeks to hire, so please push this up on your priority list. Kim thought it looked great, Heidi thinks it looks right on target.
- Heidi forwarded the plan for the park and ride to GMTA and AOT. AOT did a site visit and they have some concerns. They want to flip the design and limit it to one way traffic. They don't want to see anyone stopping on the western end and blocking traffic. They would like to see one entrance on the eastern side and exit on the western end. Rob Hall is going to work something up and get back to us. He wanted to discuss the dry hydrant also. He wanted to know if it was feasible to drill under Route 78 and put a head over on this side, so we could use that whole area over at Frog Pond for community parking. If we applied for a grant that would be a legitimate expense to bore under Route 78 and have an access point. Andy doesn't know if that is feasible with a dry hydrant. That is a vital water source, and the ease of access makes it vital to the fire department.
- Tom put together a list of appropriations. Some are town related, and some are third party.

H. Public Comment

None

I. Selectboard items

1. 2015 meeting schedule

Motion by Chris Yates to approve the monthly meeting schedule for 2015 for the Highgate Selectboard. Motion was seconded by Diana O'Hara – **APPROVED.**

2. Education funding reform resolution

Connie Beyor was present from the Highgate School Board. The local school board has not had an extended conversation about this topic. They have had time constraints and they have lots of questions. On December 3rd there was a district FNWSU meeting. Connie had hoped to speak with other Highgate board members there, but they were not present. It is on their agenda for next week. She finds it hard to support something if we don't know the effects, for example, if the education tax rate is set and it is not enough money to cover what is budgeted across the state, where does the state find the money? Connie is unsure of the rationale for this. If you say you approve of it, is it a pressure point for the legislature? If it morphed into something else and not knowing the ramifications for our kids, Connie has concerns. Jeff asked Connie if she was interested in speaking to our local representatives, to which Connie said yes, of course. She noted that it was mandated for 2015 to offer preschool to 3 & 4 year olds. Looking at our potential population of 3 & 4 year olds, we would not have enough placement for approximately 80 children. Part of this bill was that if a preschooler wanted to attend a certified preschool in another town, they would be allowed to, and that the residence town would send \$3,000.00. For 80 children that is a lot of money. We don't know how many of those 80 are from Highgate. The governor has since delayed the implementation of this program until 2016. Our district does more than other districts in our state for preschool. Not knowing the ramifications of the resolution gives us pause. She brings up the other issue as an example to be cautious. Jeff clarified that this resolution is for current K-12. Tom isn't that engaged but thinks that information was sent to all towns. On the VLCT website there is video footage available from the meeting in August held in South Burlington. The outcome of the November election indicates it is an issue of high priority. Connie noted we are already paying for preschool here, so this resolution is really for preK – 12. Jeff looks forward to hearing back from the Highgate School Board. Jeff feels its important to hear from the school boards on capping at 2015 levels for the next two years. Andy views it as more of a statement that we recognize expenses are growing faster than we can handle and we want the legislature to recognize the immense burden and have a conversation about it. Connie invited the board to their meeting on December 11th @ 6:15pm in the Highgate Elementary School Library. Anyone that witnessed the election in November and doesn't think that funding of education is a high priority must live in the land of Oz.

3. Laroche setback issue – St. Armand Road

We have received a letter from Cross Consulting regarding the Laroche Farm on St. Armand Road. They are requesting a letter from the town stating that the town will never ditch the road. Heidi had a copy of a larger plan. Steve Ploof said if the road was ever upgraded or widened it would be in the right of way. They are required to have a certain footage of setback, per Heidi. Heidi stated the concern is to a leaching field or swale, the leaching field has to be a certain distance from a roadway swale or drainage ditch. Chris asked Steve where the property is located, which is on St. Armand Road just prior to the Rollo Road on the opposite side of the road. There was recently a barn fire there. Andy finds it curious that there are no measurements on this plan. Heidi will request further information from the engineer and ask that they flag the site.

J. Upcoming events

Dec. 15	Taxes due	by 5pm
Dec. 11	DRB Mtg.	@ 6pm
Dec. 16	Planning Comm. Mtg. (cell tower hearing)	@ 6pm
Dec. 18	Selectboard Mtg.	@ 7pm

K. Executive Session

Motion by Andy King to enter into executive session @ 8:25pm to discuss employee performance reviews, a dog issue and a personnel issue. Motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Jeff Towle to exit executive session @ 10:15pm. Motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

L. Adjournment

Motion by Diana O'Hara to adjourn the meeting @ 10:20pm. Motion was seconded by Andy King – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by:

Andy King, Vice-Chair - Highgate Selectboard