TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Town Meeting Minutes
March 1, 2016

A. Call to Order & Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 10:00am by Patrick McGovern, Town Moderator.
Highgate Selectboard Members: Jeff Towle - Chair; Christopher Yates – Vice Chair; Paulette Tatro; Randall Connelly; Diana O'Hara
Highgate Staff: Heidi Britch-Valenta - Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche - Town Treasurer; Wendi Dusablon - Town Clerk; Patrick McGovern - Town Moderator

B. Moment of silence & Pledge of Allegiance

Pat McGovern asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a moment of silence.

C. Town Report Dedication Presentation

Paulette Tatro presented the 2015 Town of Highgate Town Report Dedication to *Stephen W. Bushey*. Steve stepped forward and Paulette read aloud from the dedication plaque. Steve has a long history of service and volunteer work in and around the Town of Highgate.

TOWN OF HIGHGATE
TOWN REPORT DEDICATION
2015

Stephen W. Bushey

The 2015 Town of Highgate Town Report is proudly dedicated to Stephen W. Bushey. Born in South Hampton, NY on November 22, 1959, Steve is the son of Bernard (Wayne) and Aleta (Cooper) Bushey. The Bushey family settled in Highgate in the early 1960's, and we are very fortunate that they did! Right from the start, Steve was very active within his school and greater community, participating in youth and high school sports including hockey, baseball and soccer at Missisquoi Valley Union High School where he graduated in 1977.

Following graduation, Steve joined the United States Air Force in March 1978. His Air Force career took him to many locations within the U.S. including Colorado, Arizona, Maine, Virginia and North Dakota. He also served outside of the U.S. at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam. Chief Bushey received an Associates Degree in Aircraft Armament Systems Technology from the Community College of the Air Force in 1986. Then continuing his education, in 1996 he received a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration from St. Leo's College. His military awards include four Meritorious Service Medals, two Air Force Commendation Medals and the Air Force Achievement Medal.

Returning to Highgate in 1999, Steve and his family have made this their home ever since. He began his post military career with IBM, retiring in 2015. Steve's many successes in life are due, in large part, to his family and their unwavering support. He is married to Linda, who is from Perth-Andover, New Brunswick, Canada. They have one son, Brent, and a granddaughter, Rylee. Brent is also in the USAF, serving as a flight engineer on a UH-1N helicopter.

Steve's passion for his community has shown brightly on many levels. He has involved himself, as well as his family on many occasions, in several aspects of town government and volunteer efforts including: Selectboard, Planning Commission, Highgate Sports Arena Renovation & Fundraising Committees, Operation Happiness, Justice of the Peace, Solid Waste Management Committee, as well as being an avid supporter and volunteer at the Highgate Public Library. Steve has always been a solid contributor in all aspects within the Town of Highgate and the greater Franklin County region. Thank you, Stephen W. Bushey, for all you have done both personally and professionally for the Town of Highgate VT.

D. Vermont House of Representatives

Chuck Pearce and Steve Beyor were both present. It was approved by the body for them to speak, Steve is a resident of Highgate and Chuck is a resident of Richford. Chuck recognized there are big issues in Montpelier including a $30 million dollar gap in the budget. Cuts and raising revenues are proposed to fill the gap. Chuck discussed the proposal for $1 million dollars in funding for college savings plans to ensure that all Vermont children will receive $250.00 to start a college savings plan. There is also $9.9 million proposed to be added to the budget for the Department of Children & Families to address the growth in case load, which is a direct result of the opiate addiction in Vermont. This funds 35 new positions and other expenditures, including two new attorney positions and positions at the states attorney's office. Chuck addressed ACT46 and elaborated on that bill. He noted that 12 of the 13 Franklin County delegates voted against ACT46 last year. With regard to health care, many people are looking at the pros and cons of the federal health exchange. More info will follow on this topic. This past week the senate passed the marijuana legalization bill 17-12 and it will now be going before three committees in the house. Speaking with others, Chuck doesn't think there is enough support for the bill, but we will have to wait and see what happens. All members of the Franklin County delegation are on record as opposed to this bill. Steve Beyor then spoke with regard to Fish & Wildlife and the Modern Resources Board. Steve spoke about some new bills, one of which clarifies how required agricultural practices (RAPs) will be put in place to assist farmers who apply for loans. Hunting licenses will go up by $1.00 and there will be changes to the confiscation rule if someone is caught taking a deer with a light on their vehicle. Your gun and whatever else was used in the commission of that crime can be confiscated and sold. The money will go into the F&W fund. If

you shoot a robot deer you will also be charged with replacement or repair of that decoy. Cost estimates are $2,500.00 to repair and $3,500.00 to replace. Steve also spoke about the marijuana bill. Statistics show that drugs have contributed to more deaths than alcohol in Vermont in 2015. Personally, Steve can't see why we would want to go down this road. Just to start the program, the state would need to borrow money. With regard to ACT46, Steve feels there are too many things in that bill that are not understood. Pat McGovern opened up the floor for questions. Mark (Zeb) Maskell asked if ACT46 will be forced down our throats, or do we get to vote on it? We will be voting on it at some point, along with other towns in our district. Swanton would have 3 reps, Highgate 2 reps and Franklin 1 rep. Steve feels ACT46 could be devastating to towns like Franklin, because ultimately that school could close and we all lose local control. Franklin is and should be proud of their school. Zeb said when MVU was formed, it was with equal representation from each sending town. Chuck added that they were in Richford the previous evening and there are a lot of questions there also. We will have a new Governor coming in, and who knows if that person will be for or against ACT46. John O'Hara asked if the increase in F&W licenses would be for just Vermont residents, or for non-residents also. Steve believes the increases will be across the board. Lynn Calderwood noted that there are YouTube videos available to see the highlights of the press conference regarding ACT46. Ryan Gerrity did not feel the marijuana bill was being given a fair representation, and stated it has been proven to be much less dangerous than alcohol itself. Steve spoke to that and with regard to impairment in general. Passing this bill will put law enforcement in a tough situation. Ryan added that he knows many people that use marijuana and felt that to characterize it in this manner was not accurate. Ryan feels there are benefits to legalizing marijuana. Steve responded by referencing an increase in childhood deaths in the state of Colorado because children are ingesting edibles. David Rouse stated that last he knew the state could not override a federal law.

E. Review of Articles

Article #1 – To elect the following town officers:
Motion by Henry Rainville, seconded by Scott Martin.
These are all on Australian ballot and Pat McGovern read them aloud.

1) A Moderator for the ensuing year
2) One Town Agent for the term of one (1) year
3) One Delinquent Tax Collector for the term of one (1) year
4) One Selectboard member for the term of two (2) years
5) One Selectboard member for the term of three (3) years
6) One Town Clerk for the term of three (3) years
7) One Lister for the term of three (3) years
8) One Town Treasurer for the term of three (3) years
9) One trustee of Trust Funds for the term of three (3) years
10) One Library Trustee for the term of five (5) years
11) One Cemetery Commissioner for the term of (5) years

There were no questions or comments. Article #1 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Article #2 – To receive and act on the reports of the town officers for the past year.
Motion by Richard Noel, seconded by Henry Rainville.
There were no questions or comments. Article #2 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Recess Town Meeting and enter the Highgate Town School District Meeting to transact the following business:
Motion by Scott Martin, seconded by Heather Larivee.

Article # 1 – To elect from the legal voters of said Town the following officers:
Motion by Henry Rainville, seconded by Heather Larivee. Pat read the following aloud;

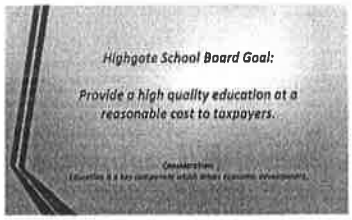
1) One Moderator for the ensuing year
   - Motion by Connie Beyor to nominate Pat McGovern, seconded by David Roddy. There were no other nominees, by voice vote – **PASSED.**
2) One School Director for the term of three (3) years
   - Motion by Richard Flint to nominate Chris Shepard, seconded by Zeb Maskell. There were no other nominees, by voice vote – **PASSED.**
3) One School Director for the term of two (2) years
   - Motion by Richard Flint to nominate David Roddy, seconded by Zeb Maskell. There were no other nominees, by voice vote – **PASSED.**

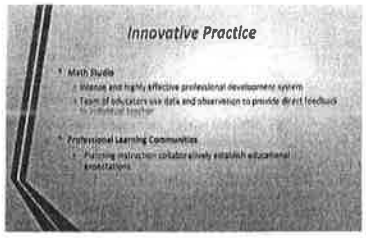
Article #2 – To act upon the reports of the School Directors.
Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Heather Larivee, seconded by Scott Martin. There were no questions or comments. Article #2 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

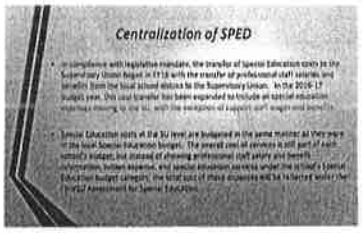
Article #3 – Will the voters of the Highgate Town School District authorize the School Directors to borrow money to pay current expenditures in anticipation of taxes and to sign notes for that purpose?
Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Steve Bushey. Richard Noel asked if the school board had to borrow any money in this current school year – yes. Zeb asked if there will be a budget presentation – yes, that is part of the next warned article. There were no other questions or comments. Article #3 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

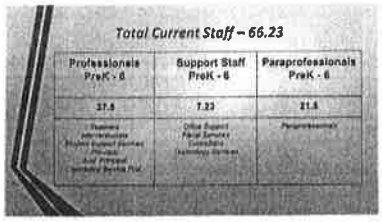
Article #4 – Shall the voters of the Highgate Town School District approve the School Directors to expend $4,982,640, which is the amount the School Directors have determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of $12,643 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 5.1% LOWER than spending for the current year.

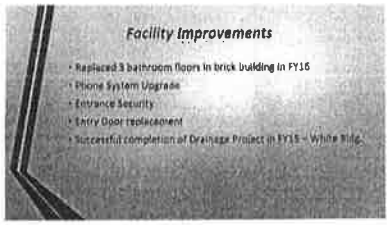
Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Scott Martin. The Highgate School Directors had a power point presentation to share regarding the school budget.

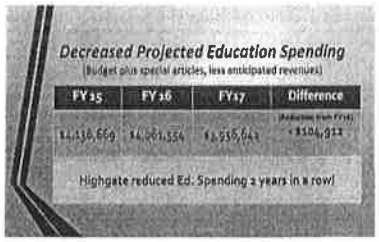


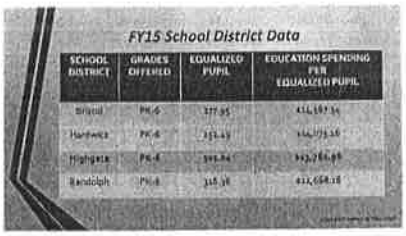


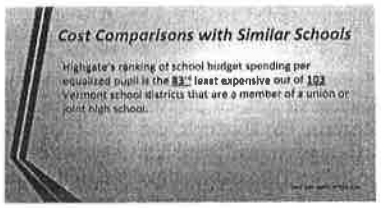


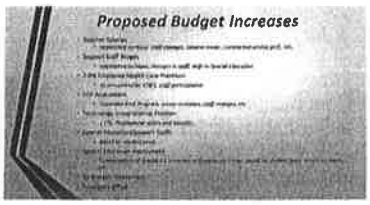


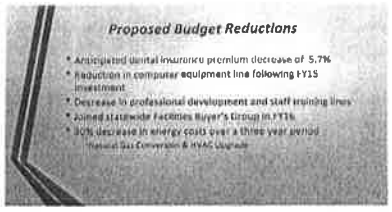


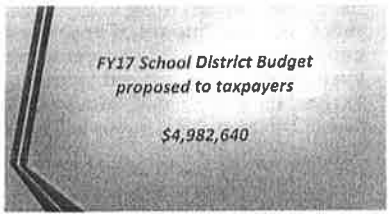


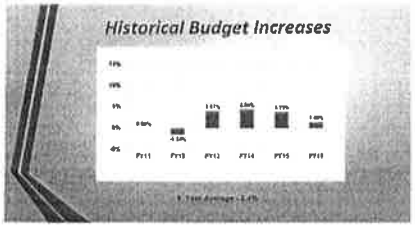


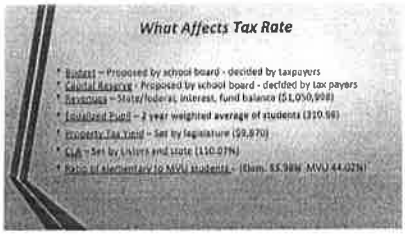


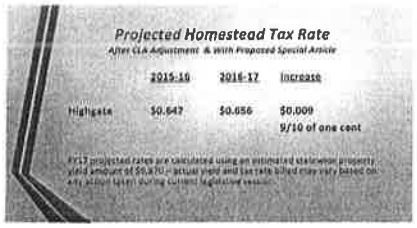


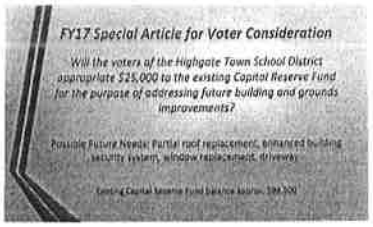


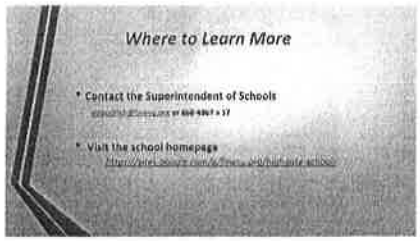


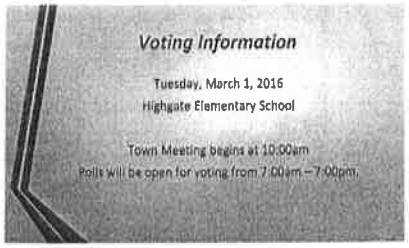












Following the power point presentation Pat McGovern, Moderator, opened it up for questions from the audience. The voters authorized permission for non-Highgate residents to speak, including Highgate Elementary School Administrators, Pat Hartnett and Karen Casavant, as well as FNWSU employees, Winton Goodrich – Superintendent and Lora McAllister – Asst. Business Manager. Pat Hartnett, Principal, noted that we have an amazing school board here in Highgate and they are great to work with. Mr. Hartnett also elaborated on the new position included in the budget, Technology Integrationist. This position requires a specific endorsement and will help provide opportunities for all of the children. Connie Beyor introduced the school board

(David Roddy, Nola Gilbert, Chad Larivee and Richard Flint), the administration (Pat Hartnett and Karen Casavant) and the FNWSU staff (Winton Goodrich and Lora McAllister) who were present. Connie thanked Chad for serving this last year on the board. Zeb clarified with the moderator how many questions and what is the time limit – 2 questions per person, per article and no more than ten minutes. Zeb asked if Highgate is still an identified school – yes, we are, and so isn't 99% of all VT schools. There are no longer any NECAP scores, they have been replaced with the SBAC test, which is given in the spring of the year and for our first round, our kids did pretty well. Phil Ladue asked about NECAP scores and how we compare in the state, because this is affecting his property taxes. He knows the numbers, he looked them up before he came here, he wants to know if our school board knows the numbers. Winton Goodrich spoke to new federal legislation from the No Child Left Behind Act to the Every Student Succeeds Act. We don't know what the measures will be in the future. The state board of education is working with schools on how to measure and assess to see if schools are meeting compliance issues centered around state standards. The NECAP and SBAC are just a few tools that have been used to measure student success. Zeb asked for the school board's and also Mr. Goodrich's opinion on ACT46. Pat McGovern reminded Zeb that we are discussing the budget and that ACT46 is not germane to this article. It can be discussed under other business. David Rouse had questions about the budget and how it is affected or if it is affected by ACT46. ACT46 is about consolidating school districts and does not affect this budget cycle. Zeb asked about common core and if that is being used in our school – yes, it is. Zeb hears that common core is not a good thing and wanted to hear more. Connie elaborated some on this, stating that VT standards and common core have some similarities. Common core is more rigorous and has become somewhat of a political football. Teachers have taken time to readdress their lesson plans to address common core standards. Mr. Ladue had questions about the 9/10th of 1% slide and if that is per hundred or thousand. Connie directed the group to page 96 of the town report. Katie Davis asked why the Highgate School budget is not voted on by ballot like the MVU budget. That would need to be a warned article and cannot be discussed today. Mr. LaBrie asked to move the question to a vote. There was a show of seven or more hands to request a paper ballot vote. Pat reread the article aloud. Article #4 by paper ballot vote 97 YES / 54 NO – **PASSED.**

Article #5 – Will the voters of the Highgate School District appropriate $25,000.00 to the Capital Reserve Fund for the purpose of addressing future building and grounds improvements?

Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Scott Martin, seconded by Shirley Fecteau. Lynn Calderwood wanted to know what was currently in that fund. Richard Flint responded that the account has almost $100,000.00 and was previously used for drainage work. The plan going forward is to work on the parking lot and replace windows in the main building. The roof is in good shape, with the exception of some work to be done in the valleys. There is also some floor work to be done. Ed Lambert asked about the savings from the conversion to natural gas. Pat reminded him that the questions need to be germane to the article. Lynn asked if we had any outstanding loans – no, we do not, all are paid off. Henry Rainville expressed concern about making sure funds are labeled for what they will be used for. It was also asked if the board will let the voters know what they are spending it on, or will it be spent and they will tell the voters afterwards. Richard confirmed that the funds will only be used on the building, or as mentioned about grounds, like the parking lot. We can't keep accumulating it, we have to use it within five years. Henry doesn't like the term "have to use it", but has no problem if they "need to use it", to which Richard replied "we will need to use it". Connie noted that these funds were also used for the loading dock doors in the past. Paulette Tatro asked a question about a date listed on page 87 of the town report, and if that date was a typo. Yes, it is, the date should be July 1, 2014, not July 1, 2015. There were no other questions or comments. Pat reread the article aloud. Article #5 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Article #6 – To transact any other business legally authorized to be transacted, considered appropriate and necessary when met.

Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Heather Larivee, seconded by Scott Martin. Zeb asked if we poll the audience and get a majority ruling he would like to ask more than two questions on the floor. Motion by Zeb Maskell to move to no more than five (5) questions per person, per article from the floor today. The motion was seconded by David Rouse. Pat reiterated that this motion would only be for the remainder of the school portion of this meeting. It would need to be done again for the town portion. This motion to amend Robert's Rules to no more than five (5) questions per person, per article by voice vote was inconclusive. By a count of hands – 91 YES, there was no need to count the NO's – **PASSED.** Zeb then asked Mr. Goodrich to speak about ACT46 and his opinion. Scott Martin asked about the capital reserve fund we just voted on, and if ACT46 passes will that money become one pot of money and be decided on by one group of people on how it will be spent? Yes, that is correct, we would pool our facility costs and our bonded indebtedness. Zeb asked if it is constitutionally legal to force tax payers into voting for something they don't want to vote on. Mr. Goodrich explained that ACT46 gives us an opportunity to decide whether we want to do business together or not. Currently, the state of Vermont has the authority to make it happen. The "honey" in all of this, is that there is tax savings if we merge. If we wait and we don't have that tax savings, we will be at the will of the state board of education. Mr. Monahan asked about the tax savings for Highgate with all of this. Mr. Goodrich responded that the study will identify what the reality will be for each of the towns in our district. Lynn Calderwood commented that it is being made to sound like .08 cents savings is big, but when they raise taxes it's not a big deal. She questions whether this bill is worth it. There is conflict on what we are hearing, some say we will save money, some say we

won't. Mr. Goodrich also pointed out that "small" schools are considered to be 35-50 students. The schools in our district are all larger than that. The study will look at the challenges and benefits and see if it works for us. If there is merit to move forward, it will come back to the voters to ultimately decide. Duane Tremblay asked about representation on the board if ACT46 goes through. If Highgate's population grows, the representation would be adjusted. Richard Noel asked if students would continue to attend their current school – yes. It was noted that Vermont student population has dropped by 20,000 since 1997 and by 2040 it will drop by another 20,000. Back in the 1800's there were over 1,100 schools in Vermont. Supervisory unions were created and then union schools were created, which is when MVU came along in 1970. Zeb feels if we approve ACT46 that Highgate will lose equal representation at MVU. Mr. Goodrich disagreed and explained why. Ultimately, tax payers will have the final say. Lynn Calderwood asked how this will affect students. We will still have what we have now. We will still have teachers, principals, and adjustments will be made as population increases or decreases. The reality is that we will have consistent policies and employment criteria in all schools that are part of that merger. Chris Yates asked why nobody is lobbying for us to get credit as a consolidated school district, referring back to when MVU was formed. Connie Beyor added to that, stating that we saved a lot of money and made more opportunities available to students by merging to form MVU. We get no credit for that consolidation. We are the 7th largest supervisory union in Vermont, and all that being said, Connie has a hard time with it. David Roddy noted that the final decision for Highgate to enter into a consolidated district as part of ACT46 will be by a public vote. David feels that if we do it will be a nightmare. David Rouse added some questions regarding the capital reserve fund. Ty Choiniere stated there would no longer be a Highgate Elementary School Board, there will be one school board for the entire union. Ty also noted that the articles of agreement can be amended. Pat reread the article aloud. Article #6 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Motion by Scott Martin to adjourn from the school district meeting @ 12:12pm and break for lunch. Lunch is being served in the cafeteria by the PTKO for $7.00 per person – baked ziti, salad, desert and a drink. The motion was seconded by Zeb Maskell – **APPROVED.**
Pat McGovern asked everyone to be back in 45 minutes (@ 1:00) to continue with the remainder of the meeting.

Motion by Pat McGovern to enter back into the town portion of the meeting @ 1:00pm.

Article #3 – Shall the voters designate the Town of Highgate as a Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) District to enable participating property owners to access funding for eligible energy efficiency and renewable energy projects and then pay back the cost as a regular municipal assessment on that property owner's property tax or other municipal bill as provided by 24 VSA Chapter 87 (section 3261 et seq.) and authorize the Selectboard to enter into an agreement with Vermont Energy Investment Corporation d/b/a Efficiency Vermont to operate the PACE program, including the processing of all applications and regular billing?
Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Scott Martin, seconded by Henry Rainville. Chris Yates explained what the PACE program is all about. Loans have to be on owner occupied residences. Pete Roach asked how the clerk feels about this and the additional work it will cause the town. Chris answered, stating that the billing is done through Opportunities Credit Union and the only time the town gets involved is if the owner goes delinquent. No one in the PACE program has gone delinquent yet. The town would recoup fees associated with any delinquencies, should this occur. Mark Kelley from Efficiency Vermont has presented twice for us, once at a Selectboard Meeting and most recently at the Town Meeting informational session on Feb. 4th. PACE is an avenue for people to obtain financing to make energy efficient upgrades to their home. Steve Bushey asked if this becomes a burden can the town opt out and dissolve the PACE district? That question has not come up previously, but the board will find out. Duane Tremblay asked if small scale wind or solar projects add value to your property. This is a question for the listers, but Chris would have to think the answer is yes. David Rouse would like an answer on the opt out before we vote on this. Henry Rainville is not for or against this, but he has seen the previous presentations and this program is optional. We are voting to give the Selectboard the authority to sign us up. If we sign up, it does not mean we have to use it. Scott Martin had some questions regarding setbacks and the involvement of the Development Review Board. Henry asked to hear the Selectboard's view of this program. Chris thinks it's an avenue for people that want to invest in energy efficiency and don't have the means or a clear path to do it. Jeff echoed what Chris said, Diana has no problem with it, Randy generally agrees with it and Paulette supports it as long as our concerns are favorably answered. Steve LaFar wants to know how this will affect the town dump that we were so gifted to receive. That topic is not germane to this article, but can be brought up under other business. Claudine Deslandes stated that Opportunities Credit Union typically deals with lower income situations and wanted to know if this program applies to just low income or to everyone. This program is very generous and does have income thresholds. Chris read from the chart regarding income and interest rates. Mr. Monahan asked about liability to the town – there is none. Richard Noel asked about the interest rates available on these loans. They are based on income sensitivity and the percentage of value of the property vs. the amount borrowed. Pat reread the article aloud. Article #3 by voice vote – was inconclusive. By show of hands 65 YES, there was no need to count the NO's – **PASSED.**

Article #4 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the Town of Highgate Selectboard to appoint a Collector of Delinquent Taxes pursuant to 17 VSA 2651d?

Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Zeb Maskell and Henry Rainville. Sue Cota asked what has been collected in delinquent taxes since the book was printed. Shelley Laroche said through February 18th $25,934.85 has been collected. More has come in since then but she was on vacation so it has not been calculated. Zeb asked if the board would be appointing Shelley as the DTC. Chris answered that this article gives the town that ability. Shelley is on the ballot as well for DTC and from his limited time on the board and seeing both Tom and Shelley act as both treasurer and DTC, it works very well having it in house where people have easy accessibility and regular hours they can count on. Ty asked how they would handle it if the treasurer opted not to be the DTC. Jeff said letters of interest would then be accepted for the position. This is a legislative act now giving towns the option to appoint vs. elect their DTC. Henry sees the DTC position as a process of town government, so it makes sense to have it in house as another function of the treasurer. Zeb likes having the ability to choose, not having the Selectboard choose for him. David Rouse would like it to stay on the ballot for people to vote. John O'Hara commented that he sees this as a way for the board to have oversite. So many towns and organizations are having problems these days, so oversite is needed and is good. We have been fortunate with our elected DTCs, but other towns, no so much. The Selectboard deals with the treasurer, clerk and administrator on a regular basis, so having it in house is more convenient for everyone. John O'Hara asked if a change would be considered to have the treasurer appointed by the board as well, for the same reason – oversite. Chris said that is not something the board can act on now, and we are not a charter town. We will need to wait for the legislature to pass another bill if town treasurers can also become an appointed position. Pat reread the article. Article #4 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Article #5 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate $1,422,488 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the General Fund, with an estimated $854,638 ($412,639 General Fund / $441,999 Capital Improvement Plan) to be raised by taxes?

Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Scott Martin & Zeb Maskell. Zeb asked for some clarification on the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The body was asked to grant permission for Heidi Britch-Valenta, Town Administrator, to speak as she is not a resident of Highgate. Motion by Scott Martin, seconded by Clarence Miller – **APPROVED.** Heidi began by saying that the CIP is a planning document and she is glad to see good turnout today to discuss this document. There is a handout on the front table regarding the CIP and there is a table in the town report. The capital budget was initiated a few years ago with a planning grant and the Planning Commission has been carrying the ball on this and keeping the project moving forward. The aim is to level out funding and protect our assets with the most information possible for decision making. What is in front of the voters today is a tool developed with input from various departments and assistance from NRPC. The chart contains a list of things we own, their expected life and replacement costs and contains information for the next six years. This is what you could call a flush budget and is describing all that we own and the best case scenario. This process brought to the top a list of most pressing needs and now we look at what we can shoulder over the next six years. The overall goal is to keep Highgate in a very good position and not with a lot of debt. We currently do not carry a heavy debt burden, just the arena bond that was approved in Nov. 2014. This plan makes it so when you come to town meeting you know what you have already put aside and also what else you own that might be ready to fail. It gives the ability to pace decisions and respond to other needs without spikes in the tax rate. That all being said, the process is for the taxpayers to look at this as a guiding document and decide if we can afford the items outlined at the rate that has been put on paper. This is the first year for us and the voters are in the driver's seat to approve the budget as they see fit. Henry Rainville stated that it's nice to see where your capital investments are and what they are being used for but we already have funds set aside for things like the Machia Road bridge and a fire truck. There were questions about trade in values, but those would not be known until we got much closer to the time to trade. Much of the CIP is a projection. Zeb wanted to know what was wrong with the old way of doing things, where we presented an article. The CIP gives you a better overall view of the total needs. Scott Bessette asked if the CIP is a yes / no vote or can be adjusted by line item or individual piece of equipment – it can be adjusted. Scott asked about prioritization and if that had been done. The column for 2017 is what we are looking at today $441,999.00 and that is what we are asking for you to look at today to be set aside, it can be amended. Scott Bessette then asked if the sole authority for the CIP belongs to the Selectboard or the voters? The voters have to approve it as they see fit, whatever that may look like is up to the voters. Henry does not think the Selectboard did themselves any favors with the way they approached this process. He feels there would be more support if it was not already included in the tax rate. He also feels the board has put themselves in a position to be defensive and he wishes they had done otherwise. Don Bessette stated that history has shown that we have purchased trucks as an article to the voters and they have said yes or no, and then we move forward, and the same is true for the fire department. Joe Rainville made reference to 1961 and a motion made regarding purchases over $5,000.00 being approved by the voters. History has shown that the voters of this town want a say. Chris elaborated on the truck purchases in the fall of 2015. The voters had approved putting money aside to purchase a highway truck. An opportunity came along to replace one truck with two trucks, and we spent less money than what was in the fund. That decision, to Chris, was a function of the Selectboard. Zeb stated that in the past we have always gone with a tandem truck. He feels a tandem is more feasible to do routes for sanding so we don't have to

reload and a tandem is worth more at resale. The general feeling is that the board cut the voters out of having any feedback on this issue. There are plenty of Highgate residents that can provide valuable feedback and they feel that has been taken away. Jenny Ploof asked about funds set aside for ambulatory services. On page 52 of the town report, it is broken down between ambulatory services and dispatching services. There is more than enough money in those line items to cover whomever we go with, we are currently in a contract until June 30 with MVR. Tammy Rowell directed the conversation back to the truck purchases. Tammy asked if the power to purchase shifts to the Selectboard if they feel it's appropriate. She feels that they forgot about the voters when they purchased these two trucks and noted that in the past it was approved with an article. She noted that the rules can't be changed half way through, adding that she can't do that in her own business. Chris replied that it is his understanding that it is a function of the Selectboard to make purchases that have been approved by the voters. He added that we were faced with major repairs on both the one ton dump truck and the tandem axle truck. It was either put substantial money into fixing them or trade when the opportunity became available. Both were in stock, there were no specs or getting in line to order, we were able to get a good trade in on our two trucks and replace them and only use what was in the fund that was already set aside. Bill Rowell expressed frustration, stating that we bought "two half trucks" and traded a perfectly good truck. He then noted that we have good infrastructure in Highgate that supports us without raising taxes. Bill continued by saying the board "ran off" two good members of the road crew and that people in our town are "ticked off". He cautioned the board to notify the tax payers of what they are doing in making decisions instead of "hanging them", that is his complaint. Paulette Tatro stated she is new to the board and asked Henry Rainville and Brian Rowell for some clarity on truck purchases. They believe the last highway truck purchase was four years ago. Paulette has gone through the town reports back to and including 2010 (she had them in front of her) and nowhere does she find one article that deals with the highway department other than asking for money to set aside in a reserve fund. Henry only has 2014 in front of him but his recollection is that the board goes to the town when they want a new truck and the money is moved from the transfer station fund. Henry further stated that they had always asked the voters if it was ok to purchase a truck and four or five years ago they were turned down and were asked to wait another year. Paulette replied that there was not a specific truck mentioned as any part of any article. Scott Bessette commented that in the CIP he sees a lot of money being asked for regarding equipment, buildings and infrastructure. Scott further commented that the Tarte Road is an example of infrastructure that has failing culverts. He feels that the residents of Tarte Road are being treated like second rate citizens because they have limited access to their property. Chris answered that the two culverts on Tarte Road were inspected in the late fall and that the culverts have failed. Chris isn't looking back, he is looking forward. Hydraulic studies have been completed and emergency grant funding has been applied for. We see a huge need to inventory all of our roads, culverts and guardrails. We need one place to go to for all the data to see when things were last inspected. Scott asked why the gravel budget and chloride budget have fallen and feels we all want new toys but are neglecting our roads. Chris clarified that when the budget was put together there was a stockpile of gravel, which is why that line item was lowered. Chris will have to look into the chloride issue. Peter Tinella asked the board if it is their position that once the voters approve putting money aside that they do not need to come back to the voters, they can just go ahead and purchase. Chris said that is a fair assessment, the voters have already voted to put the money there. Steve LaFar spoke up, stating that everyone is here for a reason. The board should not take it personal, everyone being here is a good thing. He feels maybe not quite enough research was done on the truck purchases. He is a business man and the truck purchases to him don't make much sense. Henry asked Chris if by saying the money was there, was it in the transfer station fund or set aside in a reserve? Money had already been transferred to the truck replacement fund, so the purchases did not happen directly from the transfer station fund. Tammy Rowell asked if it would be legal for the voters to make a motion stating that the Selectboard would need to come back to the voters before purchasing another truck. Pat McGovern replied that that was not a warned article. The voters today have the ability to amend the numbers on this particular proposed budget, that is what we are talking about now. Brian Rowell reiterated that years ago (1961) there was a motion made by Raymond Nolan that any purchases over $5,000.00 needed to go before voters, so he does not see why another motion would be necessary today. Joe Rainville continued on this topic, stating that his father was on the board at that time and he had purchased a truck without going to the voters, so that is why the $5,000.00 went into effect. David Rouse commented that any purchases of highway trucks or fire trucks should be separate and feels that the way everything is set up now line items are disappearing. David further stated that today we are voting on five dictators and a general fund only. Lynn Calderwood had some questions on the arena roof. We voted no a while back on further supporting the arena, should we assume we will always pay for the arena even though it was voted down a few years ago? The board replied that the columns for the arena are due to the construction and renovations that were funded by the bond vote. There is a small area set aside in the 2017 budget for the arena to cover municipal expenditures. The building itself is leased out to MAHA. Lynn asked if other towns are helping out with the arena. Last year Franklin and Sheldon approved appropriations to help offset some costs. Paulette also spoke to our funding sources for the arena project. The bond was $990,000.00, HUD grant $196,000.00, $25,000.00 state grant, $10,800.00 in Freon we sold, and $3,600.00 grant for the water cooler system. That is the pool of money that was used to fund that renovation. Janice Ploof had questions regarding the CIP and if it all passes would everything on the list be done, or will the voters not know. Chris verified that any funds set aside will be for those particular projects and thanked everyone for baring with the board through this process, it's new to us all. Every year we will vote to adopt a new capital plan, so

every year we will have the chance to adjust the numbers as we go. Jeff Towle went on the record as stating he would never be part of purchasing a truck without approval. He believes this is all part of the process and they are trying to get involvement from taxpayers and they are being heard loud and clear. Mary Roy asked if article #5 is approved, will the Selectboard do whatever they want with the money. She further stated they were voted in and they can also be voted out. Pete Roach asked what all of this means to the bottom line on the tax rate. Jeff thanked everyone for the dialogue on this topic, the CIP is an aggressive number which can be amended to zero but we still need to look at what we will need to run the town for the next 5-7 years. Jeff reminded everyone that this is a five person board and there are opinions on everything. The board is asking how much do the taxpayers want to spend. Shelley responded to the tax rate question, stating that our current rate is .2366 and if everything passes today the municipal rate will be .3656. Shelley went on to share projected tax rates from surrounding towns if all budgets pass today as presented;

Sheldon .4703 Swanton .3790 Highgate .3656 Franklin .2607

Ty Choiniere asked about phase one of the arena project and if we came in under budget. Paulette verified, yes we did finish on time and under budget by approximately $75,000.00 - $100,000.00. Ryan Maskell was thanked for all his volunteer work we did at the arena. There were so many volunteers, donations and in-kind donations that all made sure we finished on time and used our funds wisely. The last funding source we go to is the loan (bond) which was approved by the voters in November 2014. MAHA was also thanked for their great work and contributions to the building, including new doors. Another large contributor was Chevalier Well Drilling, they drilled the new well at no cost to the town. These are all examples that came to the forefront of the arena renovation project in 2015. Lori Olds spoke regarding ambulatory services and that the purpose of town meeting is for the voters to have a say, not what the Selectboard wants. She continued, saying that the town of Highgate voters want a say in who comes to their house regarding emergency services. She feels the town should vote on MVR or AmCare and its not just about saving a few dollars. Sue Cota also would like to stay with MVR. Sue also asked if the town of Highgate is still contributing $6,000.00 to the Swanton Teen Center – no, we are not. Norm Campagna wanted to make a motion to lower the entire budget to $100,000.00 so that is all the board would have to spend. Pat McGovern would not allow that motion. Nancy Flint asked why the board has decided that AmCare might be better than MVR. Chris replied it's not about one being better than the other. It's a big line item in our budget every year, so the board went out for proposals from both. It isn't just a simple dollar amount, it's a life safety question with so many aspects that need to be looked at. This is an ongoing contract negotiation and there will be another public hearing before a decision is made. Mrs. Flint wanted to be sure it would be brought to the people before a change or a decision was made and Chris said it would be. David Rouse asked why the CIP was not a separate line item and why it was included with the general fund. If it were separate, this discussion would have been done 45 minutes ago. Zeb would like to make a motion that from now on our Selectboard does not make a purchase unless they come to the voters for approval like it was before. Peter Tinella agreed and wanted to second the motion, but Pat reminded them that this issue is not a warned article. He also reminded them the numbers can be amended but no motions can be made on issues that were not warned. Mary Roy feels that the board is not listening to them and asked how the board was going to replace the money they spent on the trucks. Shelley invited everyone to get involved, noting there is a newly formed finance committee that is in the process of writing policies for the town. Their next meeting is March 21st @ 5:30pm and all are welcome to attend. Shelley also said that Joe Rainville has been in the office and they have not found the minutes from the town meeting in 1961 where this motion about $5,000.00 was made. They are not included in the town report for that year or the following year. Katie Davis asked about the library and possible relocation. Chris replied that nothing is set in stone on relocation yet, but talks are in the works with a neighboring land owner to possibly purchase property. Our current library is a small space and the need is dire. As the library relocation process moves forward it will be planned out, presented to the voters and voted on. The library trustees should be the driving force behind this, as they know what they need to accommodate their programs. Mike Lambert spoke up regarding the $5,000.00 spending limit, stating that the amount is unrealistic for 2016 compared to 1961. There is now a motion on the floor to move the question or table it, but we have to take care of what is on the floor already. There is so much to talk about regarding the CIP, and Heidi believes that some people have hit their five question limit. She cautioned everyone that in their motions they should not tie the hands of the elected officials, as everyone will feel that impact. The hours put into the decisions were not frivolous by any means and they are not accelerating the rate of replacing vehicles or changing the way the town spends money. Another benefit of the CIP is that, through the finance committee, it can be determined if impact fees should be imposed on new developments. In the past when voting on articles, it has not been said to the voters that we need to invest money elsewhere. It is a big responsibility, and Heidi referred back to the school board discussion and budget. The voters earlier gave an allocation to the school board and trusted in the government, noting that frugality does have a cost. Heidi feels the board deserves thanks for the job they do and people should continue to give input. Henry Rainville wanted to bring this conversation to an end, adding that he thinks putting a value to this for this year taxes with nobody knowing how this truly affects them does not work. The average person that is not here today doesn't know what their tax bill will look like. Delinquent taxes are already high, and this CIP will only add to that. Henry feels this should have been given to the voters without a tax liability for this year and people are angry. He agrees with some of this, but adding .13 cents to the tax rate? He would like to see documentation that we need a new town garage or a new roof at the municipal building. The voters need to feel like part of the process. Motion by Henry Rainville to amend the CIP and

reduce it by $400,000.00, the motion was seconded by Zeb Maskell. Shirley Fecteau asked what we are going to do with $41,999.00? Rebecca Howrigan asked how the remaining $41,999.00 was going to be allocated. Henry understands the board's struggle, he has been there, but he feels the $441,999.00 was a mistake, this is not the right time. Chris hopes that going forward the CIP would be level funded or decrease. Chris also used the arena as an example, we knew ten years ago that building needed work and if we had set aside $100,000.00 for the past ten years we would not have had to borrow and saved a lot of money in interest. He hates to look in the past, and wants to look to where we are going. Pat reminded everyone there is a motion on the floor to reduce the CIP by $400,000.00 down to $41,999.00. Brian Rowell wants the $41,999.00 to go into the capital fund. Shelley noted it needs to be earmarked for something specific. Paulette recommended $11,999.00 went towards the Carter Hill Road Safety study, leaving an even $30,000.00 left to allocate. Ryan Maskell had some suggestions for the $41,999.00, using it to cover the priority areas highlighted on the chart ($27,000.00) and whatever is left put towards a fire truck. Heidi pointed out that the planning commission and finance committee helped create a policy regarding how things would be prioritized. Grants are available for the fire department purchases, but not all the data is on the chart. Heidi also noted some issues with the highway department office and bathroom area that are a health and safety hazard. We currently have an ADA grant to study the building. Office space for our town employees is very limited and the upstairs of the building is currently not usable or ADA compliant. The fire department also has a back room that is not usable either. Henry was not willing to modify his motion to cut this in half, his motion stands at amending the CIP down $400,000.00 with the remaining $41,999.00 going towards the future purchase of a fire truck. Ty Choiniere made a motion to use $5,000.00 of the remainder to be used towards personal protective gear for the fire department, with the balance of $36,999.00 to be used towards the future purchase of a fire truck, this was seconded by Scott Martin. Henry accepted this amendment to his motion, by voice vote – **PASSED.** We now need to vote on the amendment to reduce the CIP by $400,000.00 and the article will now read: Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate $1,022,488 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the General Fund, with an estimated $454,638 ($412,639 General Fund / $41,999 CIP) to be raised by taxes? The motion on the floor now is to reduce the General Fund by $400,000.00 with a motion by Henry Rainville, seconded by Zeb Maskell, by voice vote – **PASSED.** David Rouse would like to make a motion to remove the CIP from the General Fund. We have not finished voting on this budget yet, and that would have to be a separate warned article for discussion. David also stated that they never voted to include the CIP as part of the General Fund to begin with, to which Mary Roy agreed. All of these things can be addressed under Article #8. David also asked about the fire department budget and why it went up. This includes stipends for the members, which is something new. Chris spoke to this issue, that we budgeted for stipends for a full roster of 24 members, which we don't have right now. The stipend is designed to help pay for gas and offset time away from their families during calls and trainings. The fire department bylaws were rewritten in 2015 and they include the stipend. David said he has been on the department for 18 years, lived here all his life and his family has lived on his land for generations. He does not feel he needs to be paid, he serves out of the goodness of his heart and to save people money. He is against the fire department being paid a stipend. Ty Choiniere asked if they are now considered town employees. Even as volunteers they are considered town employees because they are covered under insurance. The question was asked if you could terminate a volunteer – yes, you can. Pat then reread article #5 aloud as it stands right now: ***Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate $1,022,488 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the General Fund, with an estimated $454,638 ($412,639 General Fund / $41,999 CIP) to be raised by taxes?*** Article #5 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Article #6 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate $722,089 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Highway Fund, with an estimated $571,389 to be raised by taxes?

Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Scott Martin & Henry Rainville. Henry asked where in the town report does it show the trade in value and costs of the new trucks. Chris said that does not show, the trade in lowered the overall cost of what they had to pay. Henry is looking to see the money going in and out. Shelley further pointed out that it was part of this fiscal year which will be part of the 2016 audit and will show in the next town report. The expenditure will show in the truck fund line item, on page 54 at the top. Shelley will look into the issue brought up of listing the CIP separately and voting on it separately. Jenny Ploof asked why the highway department salaries are not broken down separately as they have been in the past. Under the direction of VLCT, because it comes from the same pool (payroll) she was asked to lump them together. Don Bessette asked if the highway employees are paid hourly or salary – two hourly / one salary. Henry said we need to better understand what we are voting on every year. He is not badgering anyone, but he would like to see some changes in the town report, as he is not understanding it. Joe Rainville mentioned a court order for the highway department regarding what they can spend their money on. He referred to a court case with Mr. Ray Dixon who brought the town to court years ago. Richard Noel stated that order was with regard to one certain road. Brian Rowell said there is concern over a small section of Shipyard Road that was paved. It was clarified that the paving took place because that is a school bus turn around location. Brian also asked about the public works director and the salary of $70,000.00. Chris explained that the highway department went through a transitional year in 2015. It was transitioned from a highway department to a public works department because they do much more than just plow the roads. Through the transition we had two employees decide to leave and we had to hire two new people. Cash Maskell asked if either of those former employees were getting paid

$70,000.00 per year – no, they were not. Through the search committee, which was made up of past and present Selectboard members, we went through a hiring process and that was what it cost us to hire in that person. Ty asked if $70,000.00 was an accurate number. Chris answered it is actually a base salary of $62,000.00 and then you have to factor in insurance and retirement benefits. Tammy Rowell spoke highly of the two employees who left their positions with the town, Steve Ploof and Mike Bockus, noting she has never heard a complaint about either one of them and that they are good men that her husband worked with during his 18 years on the Highgate Selectboard. She wants to know why they got done, noting this has nothing to do with the new employees that have since been hired. Pat McGovern stated we have to be very careful on personnel issues. Tammy agrees, but said this is a small town and she is concerned. She further stated that these people have worth and they deserve the respect now. Chris replied that he is not going to discuss personnel issues in an open session but if those two employees are here and want to, he can't stop them. Steve Ploof, former highway foreman, was present at town meeting, Mike Bockus was not. Steve spoke to the situation that he and Mike wanted to switch positions, making Mike the foreman. They were told that you can't just switch, that Steve would need to step down and Mike would have to apply for the foreman job and Steve would have to apply for the road crew job. Steve said he thought about it for a few weeks and just decided to get done. He gave his notice and got done the same day. Mike stayed on board and applied for the public works director position, but didn't get the position because he wasn't good enough (Steve Ploof's words). Shortly after that, Mike too gave his notice. Jeff thanked Steve for all his years of service to our town and said if Mike was present today he would say the same. Jeff also reiterated that he cannot discuss these things in open session. There were no further comments or questions on article #6. Pat reread the article aloud. Article #6 by voice vote – **PASSED.** Mary Roy took issue with the passage by voice vote, stating it wasn't very clear from where she was sitting. Pat asked for a show of hands – 67 YES / 25 NO – Article #6 by hand count – **PASSED.**

Article #7 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate set the final date of payment for the FY2017 property taxes to be Thursday, October 27, 2016 by 5:00pm and postmarks will no longer be accepted?
Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Nancy Flint & Ty Choiniere.
Jenny Ploof asked why post marks would no longer be accepted. Shelley explained that some people forgot and came in first thing the next morning and she had to explain to them that they just got hit with an 8% penalty and 1% interest. Several days later she goes to the post office and gets checks that people brought to the post office on the due date. The mail is slow so it buys them several days. It is also lots of extra work to reverse everything. She feels it is very unfair and would prefer to see everyone due at the same time, no exceptions with postmarks. David Rouse asked if we could stay open later than 5pm on the due date. Shelley stated that she and Wendi are very flexible with often opening early, staying open at lunch or shortened lunch and the day taxes are due, they do stay open later than normal already. If getting to the office doesn't work for your schedule, mail it in plenty of time, or we can debit your bank account free of charge if you provide that information. Credit card payments are now available in the office or online for taxes with a convenience fee of $3.00 or 2.45% whichever is greater. Rebecca Howrigan wanted to amend the article to take away the part about postmarks no longer being accepted, it was seconded by David Rouse. This amendment by voice vote – **FAILED.** Pat reread the article as originally written to no longer accept postmarks. Article #7 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Article #8 – To transact any other business legally authorized to be transacted, considered proper and necessary when met.
Pat read the article aloud. Motion by Scott Martin & Henry Rainville.
Steve LaFar asked about the Jedware property (former dump) that we have acquired and he thought it had been decided we would never take that back. Heidi gave some background information that the town was not aware until very late in the process that the town was acquiring the property through a bankruptcy settlement in Florida in lieu of back taxes. By the time we were aware there was no time to comment to the court. The town has applied to the Agency of Natural Resources Limited Liability Program which gives us access to the Brownsfield fund. They have $120,000.00 that can be given to the town for the assessment. The program will allow the town to be assessed for cleanup of the site. We are hopeful that we will not be required to complete the cleanup, which is a big unknown. When we get the assessment back, if they decide there will be minimal disturbance to put in solar arrays, the town can opt to pursue the cleanup and say that a percentage of income the town receives from the arrays could be dedicated to testing neighboring wells or clean up that needs to be done. Steve LaFar asked how many acres are included with the dump itself, Heidi said the entire property is close to forty acres. Sylvia Gagne asked about different solar properties in town, their status and locations. Currently, we have the following solar projects proposed for the town of Highgate: St. Armand Road, proposed as one 20MW project on two sites, roughly 100 acres; Ballard Road, proposed as one 4.95MW project on two sites, roughly 23 acres; Frontage Road there are three separate proposed sites, all located in former sand pits, each project proposed as 500kw, and each roughly 3 acres. All have filed their 45-day notices and two have applied for a permit with the PSB. Clarence asked if any of these sites are in current use. If any of them are, the developer would have to pay the penalty to withdraw from the program and they will be reassessed once the solar project is complete. Steve LaFar went back to the Jedware (dump) topic, stating he is nervous what it will cost us and asked if we can give it back. No, we can't give it back, but we are not obligated to move forward with the cleanup. If it's feasible, we will pursue it. Steve hopes if it is

declared a hazard and will cost us millions that they will let us leave it alone and not touch it. Involuntary acquisition means we will try to market it, so ANR allows you to do that. When the assessment comes back you are not on the hook to clean it up. Pete Roach asked if we are looking at legal action with the bankruptcy court for leaving us with a lemon super fund cleanup site without proper notification, and do we have any legal recourse. Heidi said there were difficulties with the bankruptcy. The town switched legal representation at the same time and the proceedings were happening in Florida. The bill for the town to oppose it would have been very hefty, and the outcome would have likely been the same. Bill Rowell asked why we have accepted it. Heidi answered that there were multiple levels to it, and there is the option to have the site generate revenue for the town. That started to out weight the other option of investing money to refuse it. Chris added that by the time we knew it was happening, the judge had already given it to us. Steve LaFar wants everyone to realize some of the consequences that could happen. If that landfill leaks, it will be a disaster. It was also noted that the town is trying to protect nearby landowners because they are also taxpayers. Henry Rainville wanted to thank the board, town employees and moderator for all that they do. Chris took this opportunity to thank Jeff Towle and Diana O'Hara who are leaving the board. Jeff served a total of six years on the board, and Diana two years on the board. We currently have an open seat that no one is running for. Chris encouraged people to attend meetings which are held the first and third Thursdays of each month @ 7pm. Wendi does a great job getting information out on the community board, FaceBook page, website and in various locations around town. Chris thanked everyone for their input today. Brian Rowell wanted to mention that this past fall we lost a long time town employee, Mr. Raymond Dixon, he served as our animal control officer for several decades and he will be missed. Pat reread the article aloud. Article #8 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Motion by Scott Martin to adjourn Town Meeting 2016 @ 3:38pm. The motion was seconded by Henry Rainville (and pretty much everyone!) – by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Respectfully submitted by:

_____Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk

Minutes approved by:

_____Jeff Towle, Selectboard Chair

_____ Patrick McGovern, Town Moderator