

# TOWN OF HIGHGATE

## Planning Commission

November 17, 2015 @ 6pm

### Approved Minutes

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

#### I. CALL TO ORDER

Woody Rouse opened up the meeting @ 6:02pm.

Present for this meeting were:

**Planning Commission Board Members;** Woody Rouse; Luc Dupuis; Larry Simmons *absent – Bruce Ryan & recent resignation – Rick Trombley*

**Town of Highgate staff:** Heidi Britch-Valenta – Planning & Zoning Administrator; Wendi Dusablon – Clerk;

**Public / Other:** Shawn Neill; Amanda Holland – NorthWest Regional Planning Commission; Betsy Fournier – Rise VT; Paulette Tatro – Highgate Selectboard; David Blackmore – VTrans; Steve Beyor – State Representative; Jim Cota – VTrans; Connie Janes Beyor – Highgate Elementary School Board; Barbara Chevalier – Sidewalk Committee; Kellie Uzell; Evangeline Larocque; Amy Brewer – Northwestern Medical Center; Maren Hill – Safe Routes to School; Richard J. Noel; David Desorcie; Andy King – Public Works Director

#### II. \*SIDEWALK UPDATE \*ROUTE 78 STUDY \*SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL \*RISE VT \*MASTER PEDESTRIAN PLAN \*VTRANS

Heidi wanted to get everyone together and have a lively discussion focused on sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure within our village. She gave some background on efforts in the past, noting there was a lot of literature on the table for people to view. The Lamkin Street sidewalk study should go to construction in 2016. A previous attempt to get sidewalks in on Gore Road was met with opposition from landowners. Heidi introduced everyone that was present from various agencies, all collaborating on this effort. The most urgent issue at hand is creating a crosswalk for the day care children (Methodist Church location) to cross safely over to the school. Creating a crosswalk will benefit more than just the day care staff and children. A large map was available for everyone to view and brain storm short term quick fixes as well as improvements that could be longer term goals. Maren Hill (SRTS) was here a few weeks ago to look at the area in question regarding a potential crosswalk. She works with school and communities on issues to help develop infrastructure plans. Maren noted that student locator maps are helpful in planning, and mentioned walking school buses as a way to encourage walking to school. In municipalities where there are no sidewalks or few sidewalks, students do not learn how to walk or bike to school safely, which sounds funny, but is really the case. Another issue at our school is the parking lot and the circulation of traffic. Maren can provide technical assistance but they do not provide funds. Extra points can be earned on grant applications as well. Maren noted that Amy Brewer (NMC) has been very helpful with other communities in our area. Reference was made to Swanton and their bike path, which is very impressive and inspiring. Amy stated that the 1-mile path in Swanton was completed (unpaved) for under \$30,000.00 with lots of community support. Betsy Fournier (Rise VT) works with towns and communities on wellness and how to promote healthy lifestyles. Betsy was part of the Mark Fenton visit back in October. Rise VT has worked with the Swanton Public Library as well as Ty Choiniere with the Highgate Parks & Recreation Committee on signage for the walking path. The Selectboard has approved the signage, which will include inspirational quotes and other markers along the route. Amy Brewer (NMC) added to the conversation, also reflecting on the Mark Fenton visit and work sessions. The bonus from that is he comes to the community and then gives great perspectives and ideas on enhancing our area. The work session had us looking at ways to improve the village of Highgate with regard to pedestrian infrastructure and safety issues. There is a clear link between health issues and areas where walkability and

biking systems are not in place. There is a health crisis in the United States and skimping on pedestrian facilities is damaging to our communities, which is a very powerful way to look at this. Amy also touched on grant opportunities that are available to help communities reach their goals. Amanda Holland (NRPC) added to the conversation other grant opportunities available that could help with planning, not construction. The town of Vergennes has benefitted from such grants and info is available on their town website. Betsy added that Rise VT has mini grants available for smaller items such as signage and bike racks, as examples. Jim Cota (VTrans) is a good technical resource for all towns, and can help with grants or line you up with the right people. District 8 in St. Albans has 35 towns in their region, so it is a busy place. The State of Vermont plows Route 78 so traffic calming islands are concerning to them as towns develop. Highgate is going a great job moving forward with pedestrian friendly and traffic calming infrastructure, but VTrans knows that all of this will make it harder to plow through Highgate on Route 78. Some towns have taken over a portion of the state highway as a Class 1 road. If Highgate goes this route, and takes over the center island sector hub of the village, this is a way to get more control over things, such as how many crosswalks can be added, etc. Dave Blackmore (VTrans) is the district administrator for the NW Region of Vermont, which the counties of Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, Chittenden, Addison and parts of Washington County. This territory includes 3 cities and 70+ towns. VTrans is tasked with maintaining state highways and when people start talking about putting things on a state highway they get concerned, so everyone needs to work together. Dave understands why we want traffic slowed down, and there is a way to get there. More towns are looking more strongly at owning a portion of a state road that runs through their town as a Class 1 road. The state currently reimburses \$11,000.00 per mile to those towns that chose this option. The state is not looking to give up roads, so if it stays a state highway they want to provide resources within their agency to help us and work together. There have been some success stories with crosswalks, and some not so successful. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) can be used to help implement plans. There was some discussion around MOUs being used for examples like on street parking and specialized curbing. There was also discussion on sidewalks and drainage issues with regard to state roads, there is much to think about. Jim will send someone from their office, probably Tyler, to help with design criteria with regard to crosswalks. Having Class 1 status will give the town more control. Jim added that if we consider a Class 1 highway, it would be a shared class of road. We would maintain the road and every 15 years or so the state comes in with state funds and rebuilds the roadway (paving, etc.), with the town having a small match. The process to request Class 1 status needs to be approved by the legislature. It starts with a written request to Dave Blackmore, to which they would attach a letter of support and forward it up through the ranks where it would be looked at for approval. Ty Choiniere asked about road maintenance standards. Jim Cota referenced state statute Chapter 19 § 1111 permitted use of the right-of-way. Richard Noel asked how it would work – the state would pick up their plow and drop it again once they reached the opposite end of the Class 1 portion – yes. The town will never own the road we would be taking responsibility for that section of roadway, state paving programs etc. would still apply. Jim recommends we talk with Swanton and Enosburgh, who have both gone through this process and ask why they chose the Class 1 option. Enosburgh wanted to incorporate on street parking. Landscaping plans are also a concern for VTrans, Dave is dealing with this a lot in Chittenden County, with trees being too close to the road. He also noted that when Shelburne Road was reconstructed they installed trees in the islands, which required drainage plans. The drainage plans were so effective the trees weren't retaining enough water and were dying, so they had to install sprinkler systems. The choice to become a Class 1 road is a responsibility and \$11,000.00 is not a lot of money, but it's something. In most cases, the town trucks are already driving through town, so there is no extra trip necessary. Andy King asked about road markings and if the state would maintain the stripes on a Class 1 road – no. Dave noted that most of the time when the state does a full blown paving project, permanent markings go down, which would continue. The town would need to touch up and refresh as needed. Every day sign replacement would be the responsibility of the town. Andy asked about the permit process and if taking over a Class 1 roadway forgives the permit process at the state level and brings it to the town level – yes. Jim has been asked to approach BFA in St. Albans and ask that their lighted sign stop advertising off site events. So technically, he can dip into a Class 1 town

highway and ask, by statute. The town would be responsible to police encroachments within the right of way. It will be important to take care of any issues right away. Andy asked, to be clear, as far as winter maintenance, if the state is using brine, the town would not have to and that the town would use its own materials – yes. It was noted that the state does not maintain sidewalks. Heidi rolled out a large aerial map of the village district for everyone to look at and discuss the issue of a crosswalk for pedestrians to safely cross and get over to the elementary school. Kellie Uzell asked why we are expanding sidewalks in town if the walking path we have now is not maintained properly. Annual work has been done on the walking path to keep it viable. Maren Hill pointed out the area on the map we are looking at to install a crosswalk from the school to the day care at the Methodist Church. Larry Simmons asked about the Lamkin Street study and why the sidewalk project there ends at the Catholic Church – it is a matter of funding. Lamkin Street is a very high density area with the most potential for further development. The goal was to link Lamkin Street to the village. There was discussion about crossing through private property and the implementation of a crossing guard and the pros and cons of both options. There was also discussion about creating a zone vs. a crossing point in the area of the school. Questions also arose about drainage associated with the addition of crosswalks and / or sidewalks. It was agreed that involving private property for people to cross through is not the best idea, due to liability reasons and also because it will not just be for the day care children, it would be for the general public to use. Amy Brewer added that community involvement and beautification by the community is needed and she can help make it happen by supplying food and other things for community members willing to assist. The flashing crosswalks in St. Albans came about through grants and donations. They are expensive to implement, but she can also help with that. Larry would like to see additional lighting added to the area of any crosswalk that is decided upon. Amanda Holland noted that we could engage local business owners in discussions and potentially have some of their access points closed off to see how they feel about that. Katelyn from Local Motion would be another key person to engage on that topic. Jim stated that a clear zone with a curb is about 3' off the road, and without a curb is 7', which varies depending on the speed being traveled. There was discussion on speed limits and the current speed limit of 35mph in the village area of Route 78. Speed studies are available through Regional Planning. It was decided that a crosswalk in the area of the Highgate Historical Society over towards the veterinarian's office, Paws For Thought, would be a good location with some tweaking, lighting and proper signage. This would give the safest place to cross on Gore Road and accomplish the goal of safely getting children and the general public across Gore Road towards the school and arena facilities.

### III. OTHER BUSINESS

- **CIP update** – We have had two public hearings on the Capital Improvement Plan. Once the Selectboard makes a motion, Amanda at NRPC can insert the final date and it will be finalized.
- **Planning Commission members** – Rick Tremblay has submitted a letter of resignation from the Planning Commission. This will change how the board will function going forward. Heidi has been making calls to people to see who would like to try a stint on the PC and hopefully enjoy it enough to stay onboard. Barbara Chevalier has submitted a letter of interest, which will be presented to the Selectboard on Thursday. The Planning Commission is a board of 7 members at its max. As of late, we have managed to maintain a board of 5 members, tonight we only have 3 members present, which is a not a quorum of the original board. Larry is wondering who set the board at 7 members, and can that be changed? Especially with the formation of the Finance Committee, it will be increasingly difficult to keep 7 members on the PC at all times. Based on what Larry has read, he believes the PC can be anywhere from 3-9 members, and is that a Selectboard decision? Heidi will check on the procedure and what we would need to do to change it. The Selectboard would likely make a change based on the recommendation of the PC. Since we are not a quorum tonight this is casual conversation to find out how to move forward. We should gather several interested nominees for the PC so we can really prepare for the future. The PC can be restructured at the December meeting.
- **Finance Committee members** – We still need a PC member to serve on this committee. Currently we have 4 members; Shelley (treasurer),

Heidi (administrator), Paulette (Selectboard) and Ron Nye (general public).  
The next Finance Committee meeting will be Tuesday, Dec. 1 @ 6pm here  
at the municipal building.

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes from October 20, 2015 will be reviewed at the next PC meeting, to  
be held on December 15, 2015.

**V. UPCOMING EVENTS**

Nov. 19	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
Nov. 20	3pm	Municipal Offices closing early @ 3pm
Nov. 26 & 27		Municipal Offices closed for Thanksgiving holiday
Dec. 4, 5, 12		Polar Express – sponsored by Highgate Public Library
Dec. 3	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
Dec. 10	6pm	DRB Mtg.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Woody Rouse to adjourn the meeting @ 8:22pm. The motion was  
seconded by Larry Simmons – **APPROVED**.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Minutes approved by:

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date