

# TOWN OF HIGHGATE

## Planning Commission

June 16, 2015 @ 6pm

### Approved Minutes

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

#### I. **CALL TO ORDER**

Rick Trombley opened up the meeting @ 6:05pm.  
Present were: Planning Commission Board Members; Rick Trombley, Woody Rouse, Luc Dupuis, Larry Simmons; Bruce Ryan  
Also present were: Heidi Britch-Valenta – Planning & Zoning Administrator;  
Wendi Dusablon – Clerk; Tom Racine – Town Treasurer

#### II. **TOWN PLAN & CAPITAL BUDGET**

- **Town Plan** – Amanda from NRPC has put together a memo for Rick to present at the Town Plan Hearings on July 9 & 23. These will be part of regular Selectboard meetings in July. Any members of the Planning Commission who can attend those public hearings are encouraged to do so. In their packets is a full draft of the Town Plan. This has been given to the Selectboard also for review in advance of the July hearings.
- **Capital Budget** – As a group, we need to look at financial policies and offer guidance for the capital budget. Rick, Heidi and Tom met with Amanda previously to determine what were the most significant projects and priorities per department. Whatever Capital Budget is developed would need to be approved by the voters. We have some town revenues coming in and we have the ability to bond and apply for grants. We could also wage a capital campaign, these are all options. It is required that we create model financial policies that will guide us through the process. Larry would like to see dollar amounts so we can get specific. If we are overly generic or general we won't have a plan to sell to the community. We kicked off this program with Bill Hall from VLCT last year. It might be a good time to invite him back and attempt to frame out what our policies would be and how we would like to see the town move forward. The Capital Budget can't include everyone's wish list – it needs to be the greatest needs for each department. Every department would submit a list and the Planning Commission will prioritize it. Aside from our operational expenses and highway budget, we need a thoughtful plan that shows we are growing at a certain rate. In the past, the Selectboard looks at what is going on for that particular upcoming year and they determine what they need to ask the voters for. The funds are set aside as reserve funds for specific needs to run the town. The Highgate Arena project was a special bond vote, approved in November 2014. We have also been putting money aside to replace Bridge 25 on Machia Road. We need rules to follow to be accountable to our voters. Money from the transfer station goes into a fund, and we ask the voters if they would approve moving funds from there to meet needs in other areas, such as purchasing a truck. The voters would rather have a smooth even funded plan. The first policy we should look at is how do we manage what we currently have. Larry would like to know what is currently in the reserve account. Tom confirmed there is over \$700,000.00, of which \$250,000.00 is already allocated for B25. We also use it for fire trucks, town trucks and more. Larry also asked about potential revenues from the proposed cell tower at the arena location. That money will be designated for the reserve fund and used as needed. Heidi noted that we have a big project at the transfer station to stabilize the banks and add drainage. We are obligated to keep \$35,000.00 in a fund in the event that Casella were to ever fold and there is clean up left to do. Larry added that once policies are in place, we could technically charge Casella impact fees and that \$35,000.00 fund could be built up by them, which could take some time, but is possible. We do receive a percentage of each tipping fee at the transfer station on a monthly basis. Tom is hopeful that

all funds go into one pool and the Planning Commission and Selectboard will decide where the money is going to go and is most needed. Larry expressed to Tom that the Planning Commission needs to know dollar amounts. We just purchased a new truck for the fire department, and a new highway truck will be next. We also have some grant matches. There will need to be another warned article at Town Meeting in 2016 to set aside more money for B25, we need \$320,000.00 by 2018. We need to get Bill Hall to come back with framework and an exact snapshot of what we have coming in and what goes out. We can then formulate a plan that will make good sense for us. Tom thinks that polices regarding debt management and budget policies are where we need to start first (#5 & #6 on the VLCT handouts provided). Tom would also like to see a finance committee formed to be involved in investment planning as well as budgeting. Heidi noted that we have moved to custodial care at the capped landfill, and we have to stabilize that area as part of the requirements. Tom will provide a list of what is in the reserve fund and how it is earmarked, as well as the cell tower information and what is projected to come in. We will also have debt payments on the arena every year and that number is bigger than we are used to seeing. Depending on how it goes, we will have to be conservative enough to be able to sustain multiple things without hammering on the tax rate, because the school already does a good job doing that for us. Larry feels that safety is more important than growth. Unless there are matching funds, that could shift priorities. The policy building will help us project long term debt, and Bill Hall can also assist with that. Short term debt won't be a problem, as long as its spread out. The Town of Highgate is somewhat unique in that we have had zero debt until the arena project was approved. We are fortunate to have the offsetting revenues that we do, and the town's tax rate is low, relatively speaking. We will need to prioritize well and spread things out as needed. Heidi will have Amanda look into having Bill Hall coming back to a near future PC meeting. Heidi will also ask Amanda for her vision on the remainder of this process. The PC will study policies 5 & 6 from the handout for the next meeting on July 21<sup>st</sup>. The PC had questions for Tom on the arena fundraising account and what the balance is - \$113,000.00. The debt payment for the arena project will be approximately \$100,000.00 for the next 15 years. There will also be ongoing needs at the arena, as this project does not in any way solve all our problems there. Tom will be leaving his position as treasurer soon, so we will have a new treasurer in place beginning on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Tom will be here to assist through the end of June. Tom clarified that yearly we receive about \$60,000.00 from Casella and \$370,000.00 from Swanton Village and this helps to reduce taxes. Revenues such as these, as well as the cell tower, we are fortunate to have. Decisions need to be made and policies in place on how much of these revenues should be transferred to the Capital Plan. We get a new highway truck every three years, and they are typically in use for nine years each.

### III. MINUTES

Motion by Rick Trombley to approve the minutes from May 28, 2015, as written. Motion was seconded by Luc Dupuis – **APPROVED**.

### IV. OTHER BUSINESS

- Heidi asked if anyone had a chance to review the Regional Plan documents she provided. Most have gotten at least half way through the document. The public input session is tomorrow night, June 17th, in Swanton and comments are welcome through the end of June.

### V. UPCOMING EVENTS

- June 18 7pm Selectboard Mtg.
- July 9 7pm Selectboard Mtg. with Town Plan Update Hearing
- July 16 6pm DRB Mtg.
- July 23 7pm Selectboard Mtg. with 2<sup>nd</sup> Town Plan Update Hearing

### VI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Rick Trombley to adjourn the meeting at 7:29pm. Motion was seconded by Woody Rouse – **APPROVED**.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Minutes approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, PC- Chair  
Richard Trombley

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date