

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Mtg.

December 17, 2015 @ 7pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated.

A. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order by Jeff Towle, Chair @ 7:00pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members- Jeff Towle, Chair; Chris Yates, Vice-Chair; Paulette Tatro; Diana O'Hara; Randy Connelly

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon - Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche – Town Treasurer

Public / Other – Andy King – Public Works Director; Clarence Miller; Alice (Sue) Cota; Henry Rainville; Duane Tremblay; Chris Uzell; Kellie Uzell; Lynn Billado; Brian Benoit; Lori Olds; Sarah Chevalier; Eric Chevalier; Ed Daniel; Leonard Stell; Keith Ploof; Josh Ramsdell; Crystal Lampman; Paul Rocheleau; Ashley Chevalier; Richard Noel; David Desorcie

B. Public Comment

None

C. Missisquoi Valley Rescue – Chief Leonard Stell

Chief Stell was present as well as several others representing MVR. Chief Stell passed out information to the board and began with some history of MVR. They have been serving the communities of Swanton and Highgate since 1976. They were totally staffed with volunteers until the late 1990's they moved to being partially paid and partially volunteer. Currently, the majority of their staff are paid. They are licensed at the Advanced EMT level providing two advanced life support trucks. They are also currently in the process for licensing at the paramedic level. MVR provides 24/7 primary EMS coverage to Highgate and Swanton as well as coverage at MVU sporting events when needed. MVU now has an athletic trainer, so they do not require MVR as often, but they can be on stand by for events in the community. MVR works with the NW Technical Center regarding their public safety program and they mentor MVU students who are cadets in the EMS field. MVR also has been involved with the drivers education program for a few years, teaching a crash safety course. All of these are just a few of a long list of highlighted areas of focus that MVR is involved in. Chief Stell added that they have also been actively involved in giving hands on CPR training. In 2014 they trained approximately 500 people in our community in CPR. To date in 2015, they have responded to 155 calls in Highgate. He presented the board with various statistics and graphs but did not have final stats for 2015, as their year end is not until Dec. 31st. Jeff asked if they track when they cover for other EMS agencies as mutual aid – yes, they do, but he does not have that data with him tonight. Chief Stell noted that approximately 2-3% of their call volume is regarding mutual aid. For our annual report, they will supply all the data, including mutual aid. Paulette asked about the reporting that indicates the Highgate Center and Highgate Springs region, and asked what about Highgate Falls and East Highgate. Chief Stell replied that it all goes by zip code, so they have to go back in and geographically track and make changes. Paulette noted that East Highgate residents have a Franklin zip code, 05457. Chief Stell agreed that some data could have been missed on the report. For their 2016 budget, MVR is requesting \$126,000.00 which is level funded from last year. Broken down with dispatching it equals \$35.64 per capita and without dispatching \$29.8 per capita. They are looking to add a second day crew in January or February, which will make two certified crews covering the two towns during the day. MVR will be replacing one of their ambulances in 2016, and this is figured into the budget. Their ambulances are currently 5 and 15 years old, respectively, with the 15 year old model to be replaced in 2016. Their overall budget for 2016 is roughly \$8,000.00

over last year, but they were able to save some money in the salary line item so there was no overall increase to either town. Some of the Selectboard members were missing various documents from the packets that Chief Stell provided. Some of the documents were sent to Heidi in advance of the meeting, so Heidi provided them. Chris asked what the \$8,000.00 increase was regarding, Chief Stell did not have that information in front of him. Major increases are usually in training and medical supplies. They have many trainings planned for 2016 and several members will be relicensing. Chief Stell noted that insurance rates have gone up, medical supplies never go down, and vehicle maintenance slightly increased. Paulette asked where in the budget do they show where they obtained the funds to purchase the new ambulance. Chief Stell noted it comes from community support and billings that are done. They have been paying on a line of credit that had been taken out prior to him coming in. They also sold a heavy rescue vehicle to the town of Sheldon. The new ambulance purchase will be a seven year lease. Paulette asked about the balance sheet, and she would like to see what MVR has for outstanding obligations. This is an important piece of information that is missing from these documents. Chief Stell indicated in the 2014 annual report the line of credit was indicated. Jeff had some questions about the line of credit also. Chief Stell stated that it spiraled and got out of hand, but the issue has been rectified. There is approximately \$22,000.00 - \$23,000.00 left on the line of credit as of now. MVR will not be drawing on it for the new ambulance. The lease will be for seven years, with a purchase at the end for \$1.00, with a very reasonable interest rate of 1.75%. Jeff had questions about the workers compensation line item. MVR is looking at other companies to see if that can be lowered. Paulette asked about the communications line item. Chief Stell noted they have received a grant to upgrade equipment, so they have only budgeted \$5,000.00. The grant is not shown because it was acquired after budgeting, so it will show on their year end statement. Jeff had questions regarding professional services, which is made up of dispatching fees, billings fees and miscellaneous legal fees. Most dispatching fees hit during the month of December. MVR uses Revenue Solutions for their billing. They have been doing EMS billing for decades and are contracted by 2/3 of the ambulance services in VT. The fees are reasonable, and for \$22,000.00 MVR could not hire an employee to do the work in house. Heidi asked about dispatching fees and Chris asked why they don't just take the dispatching fees out. Chief Stell would love to. Chris noted that the way it works just doesn't make any sense. It would be far more efficient for municipalities to pay the dispatching bills directly. Chris asked Chief Stell if MVR would provide coverage at school events, and if there would be a separate charge. Currently, the school pays the EMT to stand by. If they provide an ambulance they don't charge extra. Chris also had questions regarding MVR staff upgrading their certifications to the paramedic level. Some MVR staff are already paramedics and MVR is not looking to supply 24/7 paramedic services. The number of calls that require that extra paramedic service is negligible. They have an agreement with AmCare to assist with those calls that require those services. Chief Stell added that the majority (98%) of their calls can be handled fine, without intercept. Their crews are all trained to identify which patients will benefit and which will not. MVR is not looking for a huge jump in pay scale for the paramedic level. Paulette asked about the document regarding estimated response times from 3070 VT Route 105 in Sheldon (AmCare) and 120 First Street in Swanton (MVR). That sheet was put together by an MVR member based on Google maps from those two locations. The times indicated are not emergency response times, just normal driving times, EMS could shave minutes off depending on the roads used and driving conditions. Paulette asked if the response times presented are assuming that there are personnel at the location. MVR is staffed 6am-6pm at 120 First Street in Swanton, during the night hours they are not. Chief Stell stated it is policy for staff to be at the station and a truck moving within 4-5 minutes. Paulette noted, for night time calls from 120 First Street in Swanton we would need to add on that response time for an accurate comparison. Crystal Lampman added that this is an accurate comparison for day time calls, but night time would be different. This comparison is a day time comparison, we cannot consider this an apples to apples for night time coverage. Chris asked if MVR has an internal goal for response times. Chief Stell replied that a truck at night time has to be on the road in less than 5 minutes. Chris reworded his question and asked what their average response time would be and what their maximum response time goal would be. Chief Stell replied that they cover such a rural area that they don't have one. Chief Stell feels the important time is response time, the rest of the call is all based on distance. Chris also asked about the night time quarters and how they would handle the issue of a train going

through and preventing them from responding in a timely manner. It has never happened, but could happen, and would be no different than if a train was blocking them from getting to the scene of a call. Lynn Billado noted that there are other crew members that live on the other side of the tracks and those that can go just go. All others will meet on the scene. Crystal added that there are no night crews that the entire crew stays at quarters. Paulette had a question to ask, and asked the same question of AmCare a few nights ago – has MVR even been sued? Not to Chief Stell's knowledge. Chris asked if Highgate were to start a first responder crew, would MVR sponsor them – yes, MVR would. Lori Olds is a Highgate Springs resident and was present. She responds to calls in Highgate as a first responder. Chris asked Chief Stell why Highgate and Swanton are paying so much per capita compared to other towns in our area. We are paying \$29.00 per capita and other towns are in the \$22.00 per capita range. Crystal pointed out that she talked to Judy Dunne today and got some numbers regarding dispatching fees. Chris is not referring to dispatching fees, and he doesn't want to pay MVR all year long for dispatching fees for MVR to cut us a check back, it's like loaning money to MVR. Chief Stell confirmed that the \$29.00 figure per capita does not include one cent of dispatching fees, and Chris is looking for a reason why that figure is so high. Chief Stell explained that the service territory is small and that billings are based on call volume and fixed fees. Jeff commented that the last time they met with MVR there was an issue of OT and wanted to know if that issue had been more controlled. Lynn answered that there was a lot of OT then, but now there are more members so they are able to spread it out. There are more schoolings happening now also, so more members will be coming on board as well, further shaving down the OT issue. Randy asked for clarification on the issue of EMTs at sporting events. The schools ask for the presence of an EMT and the school pays that person directly. There is no additional charge for an ambulance. Lynn added that only twice so far this year has the MVU athletic director asked to have an EMT from MVR on scene, and MVU paid that person cash. An ambulance can't be dedicated there and not be able to leave if needed. Paulette asked why there is a stipend involved to the EMTs, to which it was noted that this person gives up their personal time off to cover the event, so MVU pays them. Duane Tremblay spoke that he has had very good experiences with MVR when he needed them. He has had not so good experiences in other parts of VT, he gave an example in Randolph. Duane also feels it's a huge plus that first responders can often times arrive before an ambulance does. Ashley Chevalier added that the first responders are most likely not even on call, but respond because they care about the residents of Highgate and Swanton. Crystal has also responded to assist crews for MVR and AmCare when she was not on duty. Sue Cota spoke to an event nearly two years ago when she lost her husband in an accident on their property. MVR was there for her and she hopes the board will consider keeping them as our EMS provider. Henry Rainville asked questions so he could more understand mutual aid. He was interested in numbers on how often they support others vs. how often MVR is supported. MVR is mandated to have mutual aid agreements with neighboring towns. VT is not resource rich with emergency response vehicles, so it's a give and take. The mutual aid numbers will be included in their end of year reporting. It becomes a wash, and it's a very low percentage. Crystal pointed out that there are times a mutual aid call does not require the ambulance to go out, they instead take their personal vehicles for intercept. Clarence Miller had questions about medical supply costs and if the bill for medical supplies are charges to those who use them – yes. Chief Stell gave epi pens as an example, they cost MVR \$760.00 for two, yet they are reimbursed by Medicaid only approximately \$50.00 each. They do not get dollar for dollar back. Brian Benoit pointed out that outdated items are constantly having to be restocked. Henry asked that back to 2009 when they went to a fully paid staff, what has the average yearly increase been? Chief Stell did not have that information but Lynn noted that the biggest increases in costs have always been things out of their control such as fuel prices and insurance. Their payroll has basically stayed the same. She noted big increases coming starting in 2017 regarding Obamacare. MVR is a non-profit, not a business. Jeff asked, as a non-profit, if they would be required to go with Obamacare in two years. Lynn spoke about the line of credit and why they required it. There were some things taken out of the line of credit that should not have been, such as auto pulses. MVR has worked hard to get out of debt and get back on track, yet still level fund. The line of credit was at \$97,000.00 last year and is now down to \$20,000.00. Paulette commented that their reporting isn't really conveying what MVR is spending. Paulette also noted in the 2010-2011 town report the call volume was 72% day calls and 26% night calls, so that particular year there were a lot of night

calls for MVR. Duane asked how many calls do they get that are not really necessary. An emergency is what someone calling perceives it to be, and MVR will not refuse transport. Lori Olds gave an example of someone who may need a lift assist, but not need to be transported. They need assistance, but may not necessarily be an emergency situation. Those type of calls cannot be billed, MVR has tried. There was some conversation regarding homeland security grants and how those funds go mostly to fire protection and law enforcement, not EMS services. It is not easy for any of these agencies to secure grant funding, but particularly EMS. Duane asked about the large training in July and if MVR will be going – no, Chief Stell does not know of anyone in this area that will be going. Chris asked about Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements going down and if that is a signal for them to not level fund. Chief Stell does not see ambulance reimbursement changing a lot, but next year they will reevaluate the numbers. Primary care physicians are being hit the hardest next year, which is why four Franklin County pediatricians are leaving. Chris Uzell asked if the fire department could assist MVR with applying for grants, it will depend on the wording of the grant. Chris wanted everyone to know that this is not a personal conversation, this is a board looking at this from a business standpoint. If it was a strict business decision we would just go with the lowest price, but you also have to look at service and the quality of service you are getting, which makes it tough. The board thanked everyone for being here and for being civil. Lynn asked for clarification on what Chris meant by “quality of service”, adding that paramedic skills are only used 5% of the time. Chris replied that it is a perception thing in the eyes of the Highgate taxpayer. Lynn added that in Swanton the cost for EMS is broken down and this year it was \$73.00 per household for EMS in Swanton. Highgate incorporates the EMS line item into the general fund. Lynn further stated that no matter what option Highgate chooses, it will be just a few dollars difference on your tax bill because we will require EMS services either way. Paulette feels that Lynn was missing the point. Due to the fact that EMS services is a very large expenditure, the board would not be doing justice to the taxpayers of Highgate to look within to make sure we aren’t missing something. Nobody said that we are changing. It was compared to when we purchase a new town truck, you need to compare apples to apples. This is part of our budget process to do right by the taxpayers in Highgate. Lori asked how EMS services are written in the town report. It used to be a separate warned article, which was changed back in 2013 and incorporated into the general fund as a line item. Chris Uzell asked who will be making the decision. This will be a Selectboard decision but it will be discussed more either at a special meeting or at town meeting. We are currently in a contract with MVR until June 30, 2016. Jeff added that it is difficult to be on their side of the table. Paulette concurred, that she is new to the board and she has learned a great deal by talking with AmCare and MVR. The board has also learned a great deal about dispatching fees when they invited Chief Gary Taylor and Judy Dunne to a meeting earlier this year. Jeff agrees with Lynn, dispatching fees are out of control. David Desorcie agreed, adding that they have a monopoly on it and we have to pay it. Chris would like to see us use our assets in town and try to offset those costs to benefit the Highgate taxpayers. Motion by Jeff Towle to enter into executive session with the Missisquoi Valley Rescue Board of Directors @ 8:15pm to discuss contracts, where premature public knowledge would put the town at a severe disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.** Motion by Chris Yates to exit executive session and enter back into the regular meeting @ 8:50pm. The motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED.**

D. Town Treasurer – Shelley Laroche

1. Pay bills

Shelley has processed all stipends for all the town boards. She is waiting on paperwork from just a few people. Chris asked if the Goodhue Excavation invoice was spot on, Andy said it was, and the credit came through for the jersey barriers. Andy is still working on the uniform situation with G&K.

2. Policies

Motion by Chris Yates to sign the Social Service Agency Appropriation Policy for the Town of Highgate. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.** Motion by Chris Yates to sign the Capital Program and Budget Policy for the Town of Highgate. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.** Jeff thanked all involved with the Finance Committee for putting these together. Paulette noted having Ron Nye on the FC was helpful, his work as a former town auditor was valuable in this process.

E. Town Clerk – Wendi Dusablon

1. Minutes

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the minutes from December 3, 2015, as amended. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the minutes from December 14, 2015, executive session, as written. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the minutes from December 14, 2015, meeting with AmCare, as written. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**.

2. Petitions for town meeting

Wendi reminded everyone that petitions and consent of candidate forms for elected offices are due by Jan. 25, 2016 @ 5pm, with a minimum of 20 registered voter signatures. She also reminded everyone that the petitions for warned articles are due by Jan. 14, 2016 @ 5pm, with a minimum of 100 registered voter signatures. Copies of all forms can be picked up at the office, or are accessible on the towns website www.highgatevt.org.

3. Arena donations

We have recently received two more generous donations to the arena renovation fund. Additional name plates for the plaque at the arena have been ordered for the bronze category for Richard & Marguerite Noel (\$1,000.00) and for Harrison Concrete Construction Company Inc. (\$2,000.00).

4. Liquor license renewal for 2016

Motion by Chris Yates to enter into the local control board @ 9:05pm. The motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED**. Motion by Chris Yates to approve the 2016 liquor license renewal application for Highgate Jolley. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. Motion by Chris Yates to exit the local control board and reenter the regular Selectboard meeting @ 9:07pm. The motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED**.

F. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta

1. Grant update

Heidi has created a grid with regard to all grants. The HUD grant is closed. Heidi has an update from FEMA emergency management to stabilize the transfer station property. We applied for funds to create a comprehensive plan, but we do not have one. They want one or two pages clearly stating the work to be done under the grant, along with some other criteria. Heidi feels it is prudent to proceed. It has been suggested we get some aerial maps of the location, which can be done with a drone. Motion by Diana O'Hara for Heidi to locate an engineering consultant / specialist to develop a plan and get this rolling. The motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED**.

2. Department update schedule

This was discussed at a prior meeting and the schedule was amended as per that discussion. Heidi will add emergency responders to the schedule in April and September.

3. Personnel policy review

This has been discussed a few times and is back in their packet. Chris asked Randy for any input on the social media sections, based on his experience. Technology use and privacy are included already and covers quite a bit of this. If the iPads are considered computers, those are also covered. Heidi will put this back before the board in January for signature.

4. Arena construction update

Heidi and Paulette attended the final construction meeting at the arena on Dec. 15th. Paulette gave an overview, stating that not all of the project ran through the architect and construction manager. Some items were in the best interest of the town to pay them directly. Shelley will get the list of all expenditures on the project so Paulette has the big picture. A few minor items still need to be resolved, such as: the dasher boards don't line up exact and smooth when the door shuts, the architect has made a note of it; folks that run the clock have to step onto the ice which should not happen; one minor electrical issue; a hairline crack in the concrete in the zamboni room, which will be monitored and photos have been taken. Heidi followed up with the insurance company on the hand held CO monitor. We will continue to monitor with this, as it is a multi-gas monitor. Heidi will forward the information to Don Gilbert. Paulette also noted that a binder and prints as well as a flash drive have been handed over to the town with regard to the plans of this project. They will remain here in the vault for safe keeping.

5. Gore Road crosswalk

There is a map in the packet with regard to the suggested placement of this crosswalk. It is just below the Highgate Jolley and will connect to the existing walking path. This spot seemed to be the safest and most logical location. Once approved by the board, they will get some signage and see if we can get some striping done this time of year. Safe Routes to School and VTrans have been involved in this process. Paulette wanted to verify there are no private property owners in that area of the suggested crosswalk location – no, there are not. Heidi has mentioned this to Charlie Nye (Highgate Historical Society), but has not formally done anything more than that yet. Everyone was invited to the PC meeting on Nov. 17th to comment and participate. This crosswalk will be approximately 75-80' from Route 78 on the Gore Road between the Highgate Historical Society over to the veterinarians office, Paws For Thought. Pedestrian signs will be necessary. Heidi and Andy went to a workshop on Dec. 10th in Essex regarding pedestrian facilities. Chris asked if VTrans needed to weigh in, no they do not, not any more than they already have. Motion by Chris Yates to approve the proposed location for a crosswalk on Gore Road. The motion was seconded by Diana O'Hara – **APPROVED.**

6. Misc.

- We had three solar projects presented at the PC meeting on December 15th. Two separate projects are on Frontage Road which are net metering projects on the Carroll Concrete Property and Stanislaw Sand Pit. The other project is on both sides of Ballard Road on property owned by Fernand & Patricia Gagne.
- Heidi has a document for signature regarding a development plan for the former landfill. This can be signed in executive session. Heidi noted we have been approved for funds through the Brownfield program.

G. Selectboard items

1. Resolution on PSB regulations

This is tabled until January.

2. Streetlight conversion estimate

VELCO is a long term pay back to switch the street lights, even with the Efficiency VT rebate included. With Swanton Village the cost per month drops significantly. Chris has some questions for Swanton Village now that he sees the numbers. This will also be tabled until January.

3. Brownsfield update / liability exemption application

This will be further discussed in executive session.

H. Other business

None

I. Upcoming Events

Dec. 20	4:30-5:30pm	Skate with Santa @ Highgate Sports Arena
Dec. 22	5pm	Budgeting meeting
Dec. 24, 25		Municipal Offices are CLOSED
Dec. 31		Municipal Offices CLOSING @ NOON
Jan. 1		Municipal Offices are CLOSED
Jan. 7	7:00pm	Selectboard Mtg.
Jan. 14	6:00pm	DRB Mtg.
Jan. 19	6:00pm	Planning Comm. Mtg.

J. Executive session

Motion by Jeff Towle to enter into executive session @ 9:34pm to discuss contract negotiations and personnel, where premature knowledge would put the town at a severe disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Randy Connelly to exit executive session @ 10:45pm. The motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Chris Yates to sign the Hazardous Waste Contamination and Cleanup Form; Exemption from Liability. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.**

K. Adjournment

Motion by Chris Yates to adjourn the meeting @ 10:47pm. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by,

Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by,

Jeff Towle, Chair – Highgate Selectboard