

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Planning Commission

July 21, 2015 @ 6pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Rick Trombley opened up the meeting @ 6:00pm.

Present were: Planning Commission Board Members; Rick Trombley, Woody Rouse, Luc Dupuis, Bruce Ryan *Absent – Larry Simmons*

Also present were: Heidi Britch-Valenta – Planning & Zoning Administrator; Wendi Dusablon – Clerk; Tom Racine; Amanda Holland – NPRC; Paulette Tatro

II. PUBLIC HEARING – VCDP PLANNING GRANT

There was no one present from the public for this hearing. Heidi gave a brief overview of the grant and the purpose of it. We applied for the ADA grant to hire an architect to guide us in the process of better using our space. Our upstairs is unfinished and currently just storage. We would need a lift to make use of the upstairs ADA compliant and accessible. This project could be lumped in with trying to relocate the highway department to another location and potentially move the public library into one of the wings here at the municipal building. This grant and study are addressing many issues noted in our town plan all at once.

III. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN / BUDGET / POLICIES

Amanda began by reviewing the lay out of the CIP budget and we will follow that discussion up with information on fiscal policies. Heidi asked about expenditures and what falls under cultural services (library). As a reminder, the 2013-2014 budget cycle was the 18-month period which is why the figures are high. The years 2008-2012 reflected in this draft, the town was on a calendar year cycle. We are now on a fiscal year cycle. Paulette had some questions regarding historical expenditures and the sports court at the arena. Amanda lead the group through the pages of the draft plan which included tables and definitions and answered questions along the way. Heidi clarified on table #1 that the landfill decommissioning reserve really has nothing to do with the landfill, it is the transfer station. Amanda noted that much of the data in this table was pulled from town reports. An appendix will be added to the finished document. Heidi asked where salaries are incorporated in this plan – those can be found under General Government. Table #3 shows the fluctuations in the tax rate from 2008-2012. One of the purposes of this CIP is to try and avoid large fluctuations in the tax rate. The section on capital projects by department was generated by meeting with department heads. A list of priorities was developed noting the project name, year of expected expenditure, total cost, funding source and any additional notes. Bruce Ryan had some questions on how some of these figures were arrived at. Some are solid estimates, and some are projections, depending on the project. Because they are estimates for budgeting purposes, none have been put out to bid yet. Any estimates on truck purchases are based on past purchases, but Amanda will look into adjusting for inflation costs. Heidi and Paulette added that with the arena roof replacement project, the town should also look at modifying the entry way at the arena. Tom further explained to Bruce the budgeting process and the need to put money aside in advance for anticipated needs. This CIP is not a solid spending plan, it is a long term projection to keep things on track. This plan puts numbers to items that are noted in the town plan. Many of the items in this plan could and will be paid for with grant money. Rick asked to have the numbers filled in for the bridge under the public works (highway) section, and also had some questions under cultural services. Heidi clarified that the B25 project is 95% paid for by the State of VT. There are also other projects listed on the draft payment allocations table that involve matching funds from the town. There are many potential funding mechanisms to

consider for our list of capital projects, they include; the general fund, transfer station revenues, general obligation bonds or notes, capital reserve funds, grants, the state revolving loan fund, donations and trade in values. In the future we could also consider user fees and impact fees. Fiscal policies for the CIP are based on knowledge of past spending and also future needs. Table X provided by Amanda indicates the ratio of capital expenditures to the total expenditures. These ratios can assist the PC and Selectboard with decisions regarding future capital expenditures. Tom spoke about debt and the need to decide how much short term and long term debt the town is willing to take on. Policy building will require that we put limits on this. Our auditing firm might have some recommendations for us, based on their work with other towns. Tom provided copies of the audit findings from our external audit in Sept. 2014. There was some discussion about internal control pieces that need to be implemented over time. VLCT has some model finance policies which can be helpful also. Tom would like to see this group tackle the following policies first; debt management, capital program, fund balance reserve and balanced budget. In Nov. 2014 we passed the arena bond vote, so we now have debt to manage, but no history to refer to. Amanda referred the group to the statute 24 VSA 1762 – *a municipality may not incur an indebtedness for public improvements which, with its previously contracted indebtedness, in the aggregate exceeds ten times the amount of the last grand list.* For reference purposes, in 2014 the total equalized grand list value for Highgate was \$342,221,078.00 Ten times this value would be \$3,422,210,780.00. Amanda is working on having conversations with other towns, she will share what she finds at our August meeting. Amanda has one last handout for this meeting, regarding evaluation criteria for our CIP. Next month we will talk more about fiscal policies and put together a timeline for working towards meeting with the Selectboard. This will be a new item for the public to review, so a joint meeting of the Planning Commission and Selectboard with a public hearing will be needed. Tom will also ask Ernie from NEMRC for recommendations, based on his prior experience with other towns of similar size. Tom would like to see draft policies in place prior to a public presentation. Paulette agrees, and would also like to see what thresholds other towns have put in place and how long those policies have been in place. Over time, policies may need to be modified. It is important for the executive and planning bodies to understand what it all means when you sell it to the public, because this CIP is a different way of thinking. We will need to show it is beneficial and necessary, and it is hard to know how it will be received. Paulette is looking to form a finance committee, which could be promoted through an insert in the tax mailing. This mailing could also include information about presenting the CIP to the public. The big question people will ask is; *how does this affect my taxes?* Tom will ask if amendments can be made from the floor when this is voted on, he will check with VLCT. Heidi wants to understand the mechanics better prior to town meeting. If we are discussing debt over more than one budget cycle, we need to know how this will work at an open meeting. Paulette noted that the column called “total cost” on the payment allocations table for 2017-2020 can be misleading. She would like any grants etc. to be reflected on this table as well, to make it more palatable and show the true costs to the town. The following timeline was formed to see this process through towards a public hearing: **August 18th** – PC meeting; **September 15th** – Selectboard will attend the PC meeting; **Oct. 1st** – public input session with PC and Selectboard at the Selectboard meeting.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Rick Trombley to approve the minutes from the Planning Commission meeting on June 16, 2015, as written. Motion was seconded by Bruce Ryan and Luc Dupuis – **APPROVED.**

V. OTHER BUSINESS

None

VI. UPCOMING EVENTS

July 23	7pm	Selectboard Mtg. with 2 nd Town Plan Hearing
July 28	6pm	VT Gas Public Information Session @ Highgate Elem.
July 30 – Aug 2		Franklin County Field Days
Aug 6	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.

Summer Sounds Concerts – all @ 7pm in the Highgate Municipal Park on the following dates (Sundays) – July 12, 19, 26 and August 9, 16, 23

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Rick Trombley to adjourn the meeting @ 8:20pm. Motion was seconded by Bruce Ryan – **APPROVED.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by:

_____, Clerk
Wendi Dusablon

Date

Minutes approved by:

_____, PC- Chair
Richard Trombley

Date