

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Approved Town Meeting Minutes

March 7, 2017

A. Call to Order & Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 10:00am by Kyle Lothian, Town Moderator.

Highgate Selectboard Members: Christopher Yates – Chair; Sharon Bousquet – Vice-Chair; Randall Connelly; Joshua LaRocque; Bruce Butler

Highgate Staff: Heidi Britch-Valenta - Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche - Town Treasurer; Wendi Dusablon - Town Clerk; Kyle Lothian - Moderator

B. Pledge of Allegiance & Moment of Silence

Kyle Lothian asked everyone to please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a moment of silence.

C. Miscellaneous Information from the Moderator

- Kyle asked if anyone present was not a Highgate registered voter to please raise their hand and identify themselves. Same day voter registration is now available. Any interested persons should report to the check-in table to register to vote.
- There will be two questions, per person, per article. Please state your name and direct your questions to the moderator. The moderator will then direct the question to the proper person(s) for answers. Please come to the microphone in the aisle. If you are unable to do so, a cordless microphone will be brought to you.
- Lunch will be available to purchase and is being hosted by the Highgate Volunteer Fire Department for \$7.00 per person – chicken n biscuits, coleslaw, carrot cake and a drink.
- This is Kyle's first time moderating at Town Meeting. He stated he will undoubtedly make some mistakes, and he will do his very best.

D. Town Report Dedication Presentation

Chris Yates read aloud from the 2016 Town of Highgate Town Report Dedication to Shirley Fecteau and presented the plaque to her family that was present. Shirley and her husband are currently in Arizona.



E. Review of Articles

Article #1 – To elect the following town officers:

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Jeff Towle.
These are all on Australian ballot and Kyle Lothian read them aloud.

- 1) A Moderator for the ensuing year;
- 2) One Town Agent for the term of one (1) year;
- 3) One Selectboard Member for the term of two (2) years;
- 4) One Selectboard Member for a term of two (2) years remaining on a three (3) year term;
- 5) One Selectboard Member for the term of three (3) years;
- 6) One Lister for the term of three (3) years;
- 7) One Trustee of Trust Funds for the term of three (3) years;
- 8) One Library Trustee for the term of five (5) years;
- 9) One Cemetery Commissioner for the term of five (5) years;

Article #1 by voice vote – **PASSED**.

Motion by Zeb Maskell to change the number of questions per person, per article, to at least five questions. The motion was seconded by David Rouse. By voice vote - **INCONCLUSIVE**. By a show of hands – **FAILED**. It will remain at two questions, per person, per article.

Article #2 – To receive and act on the reports of the town officers for the past year.

Motion by Henry Rainville, seconded by Richard Flint.

On page 48 of the town report there is a misprint. At the end of the page it should read “ending balance 12/31/2016”, not 2015. Kyle reread article #2 aloud. Article #2 by voice vote – **PASSED**.

Recess Town Meeting and enter the Highgate Town School District Meeting to transact the following business:

Article #1 – To elect from the legal voters of said Town the following officers:

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

Article #2 – To act upon the reports of the School Directors.

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Henry Rainville.

Connie Beyor noted there is a correction on page 87 of the town report. The second column should be labeled “June 30, 2016”, not 2015. Kyle reread article #2 aloud. 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 Scott Martin, seconded by Henry Rainville. Kyle reread article #3 aloud. Article #3 by voice vote – **PASSED**.

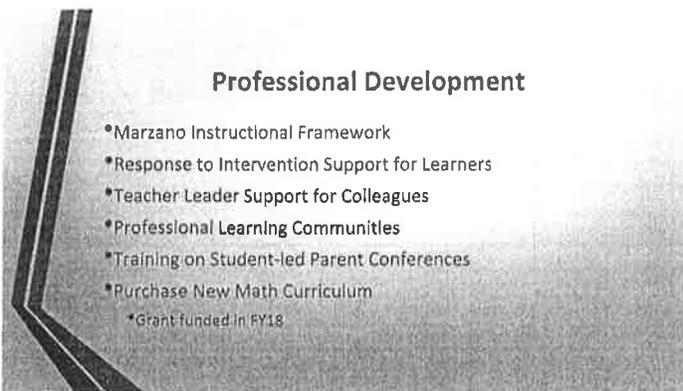
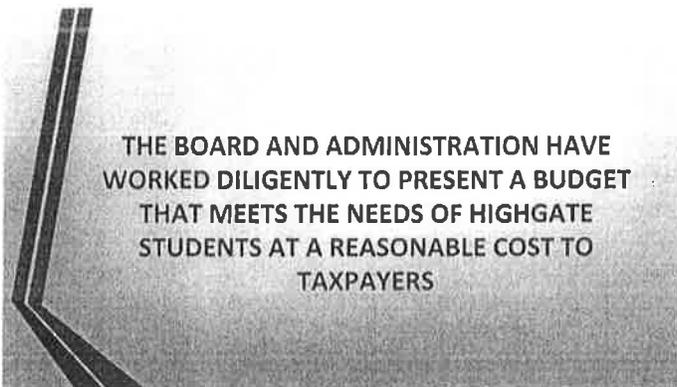
Vermont House of Representatives

Motion by Chris Yates to allow Chuck Pearce to speak, as he is not a Highgate resident. The motion was seconded by Zeb Maskell - by voice vote – **PASSED**. Chuck noted that nothing of significance has passed yet. The governor will not allow anything to pass that will raise taxes or fees. He gave a brief update on ACT46, noting that many school districts are having problems with it. Steve Beyor did not have a lot to report either but did touch on a few topics. The committee has been spinning their wheels for several weeks on how to raise money for the water fund. He also gave an update on ACT248 and energy siting. With regard to Fish & Wildlife, there will be some changes on age requirements and fees for lifetime licenses for senior citizens. The cost will be \$60.00 at age 66. Zeb had some questions with regard to school districts using money for building repairs. Chuck is not sure, he is not a lawyer. Beth Lockerby would like to see Vermont find other ways to fund education, other than through property taxes. Chuck added that there is a bill in the house to change the way education is funded to income based instead of property based.

Article #4 – Shall the voters of the Highgate Town School District approve the School Directors to expend \$5,065,091, 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 \$13,982 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 9.9% higher than spending for the current year.

Motion by Chris Yates, seconded by Zeb Maskell. The school board has prepared a presentation on their proposed budget. Connie Beyor introduced the school board members, which include herself, David Roddy, Richard Flint, Nola Gilbert and Chris Shepard. She also introduced the

Principal of Highgate Elementary – Patrick Hartnett, FNWSU Superintendent – Winton Goodrich, and FNWSU Business Manager – Lora McAllister. Motion by Chris Yates to allow Winton, Lora and Pat to speak, as none of them are Highgate residents. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – by voice vote – **PASSED**. Below is the presentation shown to the voters, with questions being addressed along the way as well as at the conclusion of the presentation.



Total Current Staff – 73.65 FTE

Professionals PreK - 6	Support Staff PreK - 6	Paraprofessionals PreK - 6
39.4	11	23.25
Teachers Interventionists Student Support Services Principal Asst. Principal Contracted Service Prof.	Office Support Facel Services Custodians Technology Services PBIS Specialist	Paraprofessionals

Facility Improvements

- Replaced two classroom floors
 - Removed carpet and vinyl floor tiles
 - Completed safety testing
- Updating floor finish in three rooms
- Temporary roof valley repair
- New kitchen dishwasher (partial grant support)
- Septic repair

Projected Education Spending

(Budget plus special articles, less anticipated revenues)

	FY15	FY16	FY 17	FY18
Ed Spending	\$4,156,669	\$4,061,554	\$3,958,643	\$4,508,920
Ed Spending /Eq. Pupil	\$13,762	\$13,324	\$12,723	\$13,982

FY17 School District Data

SCHOOL DISTRICT	GRADES OFFERED	EQUALIZED PUPIL	EDUCATION SPENDING PER EQUALIZED PUPIL
Bristol	PK-6	286.74	\$14,739
Cambridge	PK-6	336.31	\$13,816
Newport City	PK-6	329.66	\$13,420
Randolph	K-6	306.96	\$13,384
Highgate	PK-6	310.98	\$12,723

Cited from Agency of Education

Cost Comparisons with Similar Schools

Highgate's ranking of school budget spending per equalized pupil is the **77th least expensive** out of **88** Vermont school districts that are a member of a joint union high school.

Budget Considerations

- Teacher Salaries
 - Currently negotiating wages and benefits for FY18
- Support Staff Wages
 - Currently negotiating wages and benefits for FY18
- Employee Health Care Premium
 - New plans being initiated state wide, Contributions under negotiations, Announced by VSBIT, Staff participation changes
- Assessments
 - ECP - Expanded PreK Program, salary increases, staff changes, etc.
 - Special Education - increase in students needing services and level of services
- Social and emotional needs of students

Proposed Budget Increases

- 2 Classroom Teachers
- Half-time Home School Coordinator
- Lunch Room Monitors
- Out of District Placements - Special Education
- Math Curriculum

Proposed Budget Reductions

- Anticipated dental insurance premium decrease of 0-3%
- Decrease in supply, equipment and purchased service lines as possible
- Reduced equipment, supplies and materials using State Facilities Buyer's Group

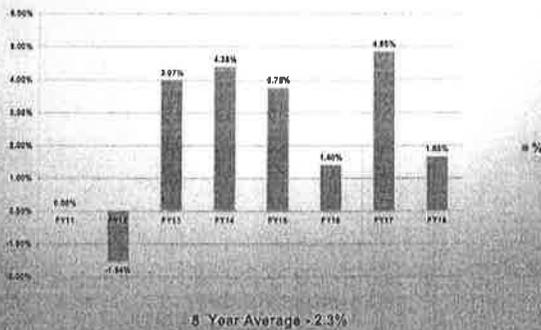
Proposed Budget Reductions

- Potentially reduced electricity bills following solar field installation FY18
- Reduced energy costs resulting from Natural Gas Conversion & HVAC Upgrade

FY18 School District Budget proposed to taxpayers

\$5,065,091

Historical Budget Increases



What Affects Tax Rate

- **Budget** – Proposed by school board - decided by taxpayers
- **Capital Reserve** – As proposed by school board - decided by tax payers
- **Revenues** – State/federal, interest, fund balance (\$556,171)
- **Equalized Pupil** – 2 year weighted average of students (322.47)
- **Property Tax Yield** – Set by legislature (\$10,076)
- **CLA** – Set by Listers and state (108.47%)
- **Ratio of elementary to MVU students** - (Elem: 57.64% MVU 42.36%)

Projected Homestead Tax Rate

After CLA Adjustment & With Proposed Special Article

	<u>2016-17</u>	<u>2017-18</u>	<u>Increase</u>
Highgate	\$0.666	\$0.737	\$0.071 <i>(7.1 cents)</i>

FY18 projected rates are calculated using an estimated statewide property yield amount of \$10,076 – actual yield and tax rate billed will vary based on any action taken during current legislative session.

The School Board, Administration, and Staff continue to do our best to be responsible stewards of our children's education and taxpayer's dollars.

We appreciate your help and support.

Thank you!

School Board Members

Connie Janes Beyor, Chair – 868-3371 (Term ends 2017)

Nola Gilbert, Vice Chair – 868-2130 (Term ends 2018)

Richard Flint – 868-2652 (Term ends 2017)

David Roddy – 868-2540 (Term ends 2018)

Chris Shepard – 868-3984 (Term ends 2019)

Where to Learn More

- Contact the Superintendent of Schools

wgoodrich@fnwsu.org or 868-4967 x 17

- Visit the school homepage

<https://sites.google.com/a/fnwsu.org/highgate-school/>

Voting Information

Tuesday, March 7, ~~2016~~ 2017

Highgate Elementary School

Town Meeting begins at 10:00am

Polls will be open for voting from 7:00am – 7:00pm

Pat Hartnett responded to several questions regarding the math curriculum. For the past 5+ years, Highgate has worked towards meeting goals associated with common core. Our math scores are not where we would like them to be, and in fact dropped some last year. Math grant funding has made trying a new program possible. Scott Martin had questions about the grant. Kyle reminded everyone to please use the microphone when asking questions. Lynn Calderwood asked if the teachers were in agreement that the change to this new program was the right choice. Mr. Hartnett confirmed that there was representation from all grade levels involved in the decision. Lisa Wells asked if the program was tried and true to be successful and also asked if there was a cost associated with it each year. There are fees each year. There is no text book, but there are consumables which will need to be purchased. The nearest school to us that is also rural and using this program is in New Hampshire. Chris Clodgo asked if there was a backup plan. Mike Maskell was concerned about investing into an unproven program. After lengthy discussion on this, Zeb asked if we could move on, as there is much more to this presentation we had not heard yet. There was discussion on the proposed position of Home/School Coordinator. This position is already in place in Sheldon and Swanton. This position works to bridge the responsibilities between school and families to take care of educational as well as social / emotional needs. This will bridge the gap for families that need it the most. Maurice Parah feels this is an added cost that will interfere with families or make families feel targeted. Paulette Unwin asked if this position would be working after hours to accommodate working parents. Pat expects this position to be a very unstructured schedule. There was further discussion on regular classroom teacher schedules as well as parent / teacher conferences and the need for teachers to be flexible and accommodating. Jean Chevalier asked if this new position is in place of the assistant principal position. There is no cohesive answer to what the reorganization may or may not be at this point, but Mr. Hartnett stated the HSC is not in place of the assistant principal. Connie clarified that this budget includes two new teachers. Our student/ teacher ratio is 15:38,

dental insurance premiums have decreased and our electricity bills are expected to go down due to net metering solar projects coming to town. David Rouse asked about lunch room monitors and why teachers are not doing that. Richard Wilkens asked about the overall budget increase from last year, which is 1.65% or \$82,451.00 over last year. Lora McAllister wanted everyone to understand that money from the federal government as well as some from the state has been netted out of the budget. This was not a choice, but mandated by the state, as to how the budget is presented. Connie noted that we can all do better, the board, superintendent, principal, community members, parents – all of us. Education today is a tough job, but working together the children from Highgate can derive the benefits. Zeb Maskell expressed frustration and asked if anyone could give an honest answer as far as what is going on at the school with the budget, assistant principal position and suggested there was a hidden agenda. Connie replied that there is NO hidden agenda and she would not support that at all. The board was late to realize the extent that many of our children are coming to school and not having the best opportunities to learn. Catching up is tough and expensive. There are some things, like personnel issues, that just can't be discussed, and Connie won't be that person that does that. Zeb pointed out that the Highgate Elementary School has been identified for many years. Zeb had further questions on identified schools in our community and throughout the state. Winton Goodrich, FNWSU Superintendent, addressed these questions. Lynn Calderwood would like to see line graphs used instead of bar graphs with regard to projected education spending and per pupil spending. Shelley Laroche clarified that the 1,700 number that keeps being brought up is not the number of taxpayers we have. That is the number of envelopes that were stuffed for tax bills last summer. Lora McAllister spoke to Lynn's questions about graphing and the language of the article is the way the state mandates it. It is very confusing. Lora wanted everyone to know that the most important things to pay attention to are the net education spending and the equalized per pupil spending. Those are the numbers of what really drive the tax rate. Eric Chevalier asked for clarification on student enrollment numbers vs. staff numbers. He estimated 80 staff to 300 students. It was clarified the staff is 73.65, not 80. Motion by Scott Martin to move the question, the motion was seconded by Alice (Sue) Cota – by voice vote – **PASSED**. Kyle Lothian, moderator, reread the article aloud. Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Steve LaFar to move to a paper ballot vote – by voice vote – **PASSED**. Article #4 by paper ballot (187 votes total) 113 NO / 74 YES – **FAILED**. There was discussion on whether we should break for lunch or keep going with this article and leave with a budget today. The alternative is to reconvene and have another floor meeting and vote on another day. Once we move forward we cannot go back to this article. The school board will respect the will of the voters either way. There was a motion made from the floor and seconded to break for lunch – by voice vote – **FAILED**. The board will need some time to figure this out. Zeb asked if the voters could come up with a figure. There was some discussion on the process moving forward. Henry Rainville and Steve LaFar, among others, would like to see this resolved today. Kyle did not see any other option than to take a recess and give the board some time to come up with a number. There was a question from the floor by Jean Chevalier asking if a motion was needed to go into a recess. Kyle replied that he did not believe so based on what he learned at the moderator training. Zeb believes the budget can be amended from the floor, and Kyle agrees, but they need a recess to figure it out and proceed correctly. The town attorney was contacted and Kyle explained how the process was going to move forward. Any person who voted "no" on the original vote needs to make a motion to have article #4 reconsidered. Once it is on the floor, the amount can be amended at that time. Motion by Zeb Maskell to reconsider article #4, seconded by Chris Yates – by voice vote – **PASSED**. Motion by Zeb Maskell to level fund from last year's school budget in the amount of \$4,982,640.00, a difference of roughly \$82,000.00. Lora McAllister wanted to clarify the motion and explained that level funding from last year is not an apples to apples comparison, basically. They are two different kinds of budgets. The original budget amount already shows revenue netted out because it is received at the supervisory union (SU) level. She wanted to be clear about that. Marc Bessette had more questions about this process. Marcia Brown feels that, as a senior citizen, the budgets are driving older folks out of town. Melanie Thompson asked what would be cut from the budget if it is reduced by \$82,000.00? Lisa Wells asked how much revenue is part of the \$82,000.00 difference. Lora explained what is outlined on page 89 of the town report. Dianne Laroche had questions about the education technologist position, referring to page 91 of the town report. Scott Bessette asked to clarify if a \$443,000.00 increase is the cost to educate Highgate kids this year. He wanted only a yes or no answer from the school board. Scott did not feel the budget was represented in this way. Zeb asked to verify that the separate issue being voted on Australian ballot today to repair the parking lot is not included in this budget proposal – that is correct, it is separate. Sharon Bousquet asked if there is an additional reserve fund of \$190,000.00 and if that money is available to offset this budget. Lora replied that the unreserved fund balance, as listed in the town report on page 87, is \$315,967.00. Winton Goodrich responded that there is no "slush" fund that people are not aware of, and by law they are not allowed to do that. Deb Farris asked about behavior management in the school and figures associated with that. Pat Hartnett answered that behavior is becoming increasingly challenging. He further stated that the more money we spend here, and if we get it right, it is less money than we would spend down the road on out of the district placement of students. Ashton Banyea commented on this topic and holding everyone, including families, accountable. Pat agreed, noting that building stronger students now we will see the benefits in our community later. Claudine Deslandes asked about utilizing volunteers and senior citizens in our community. Brandi Maskell had comments / concerns about the PBIS protocol and if it is necessary to have both PBIS and BCBA in our school to deal with behaviors. Zeb thought the comments about single parents was discriminative. There is a motion on the floor to amend article #4. Motion by Chris Yates to move that motion, seconded by Tim Gingras – by voice vote – **PASSED**.

Motion by Chris Yates to move article #4, seconded by Steve LaFar – by voice vote – **PASSED**. Motion by Scott Martin, seconded by Eric Chevalier to move to a paper ballot vote – by voice vote – **PASSED**. Matt Beyor spoke about going to school here in Highgate and also at MVU. He has his own children now and one of his daughters has special needs that were not able to be met here in Highgate, so she no longer attends school here. He feels her needs were not met because of nickel and diming the school budget and the town of Highgate let him down. Instead of moving to paper ballot, he would like to have a voice vote to see the faces of those that don't think our kids are worth the 7.1 cent difference we are voting on. Kyle Lothian reread the article as it now states: *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 \$13,727 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 7.9% higher than spending for the current year.* There was some discussion on what the differences from the original article mean to our taxes. Beth Ann Shepard asked if we vote this down and keep going, can we go back to this article? No, if we move forward we cannot go back to this article. Winton pointed out that 74% of Highgate residents receive some form of prebate (credit) on their tax bill, which is another factor to consider. We have a motion on the floor, and Kyle reread the article again. The voters then voted a second time by paper ballot on the amended school budget (above). Article #4 by paper ballot (175 votes total) 100 YES / 75 NO – **PASSED**.

Motion by Henry Rainville to recess for lunch for 30 minutes @ 1:34pm. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **PASSED**.

After the lunch break, Kyle Lothian clarified that he is, indeed, a Highgate resident and he resides on Thak Blvd. He was asked the question during the break.

Article #5 – To transact any other business legally authorized to be transacted, considered appropriate and necessary when met.

Motion by Chris Yates, seconded by Steve LaFar. David Rouse stated that we voted in previous years to appoint certain positions (Constable and Delinquent Tax Collector). There are currently laws trying to be passed with regard to this and he wants us to switch those positions back to being elected. It was pointed out to David that we are still in the school portion of the meeting. Zeb asked for more information on the parking lot project that is on the ballot. Chris Shepard also provided some feedback to voters. The black top needs to be ground off; regrade the parking lot pitch so the water flows to five new precast curb inlets / catch basins connected to reinforced concrete pipe storage; connect storage pipe to lift station (containing two alternating pumps) to send water to existing underground drainage system for the white building. The drainage system to the lift station will be gravity fed. Curbing will be added in selected locations along with new paving. This system is designed to handle a ten year storm event. There was concern expressed for residents on St. Armand Road and the extra water being sent in that direction. Roy Hango, engineer, assisted with the plans for this project. The board does not have a plan B if this bond vote does not pass. Our parking lot has been in disrepair for years, and it keeps getting worse. The school board can't send this out to bid until they have something to bid on if this passes. Mr. Monahan asked if there was an estimation of rainfall or snowmelt from the engineer that this proposed system can handle. The design is based around a once in ten year event. Steve Ploof asked about plans for maintaining the ditch on St. Armand Road over to Frog Pond where the water will eventually end up. He used to work for the town and the town repaired the ditch twice at taxpayer expense over a twenty year period. With the volume of water being sent in that direction, somebody will have to maintain it. Richard Flint thanked Terry Brace and the custodial staff for setting everything up and the school looks good! Angela Carr spoke about the Highgate Parent / Teacher / Kid Organization (PTKO). They are low on funding and appreciate any donations or fundraising ideas. There are handouts on each chair today with more information from the PTKO. She gave an overview of what the PTKO does at the school and in our community. Their next meeting is March 13th @ 6:30pm in the school library.

Motion by Zeb Maskell to enter back into Town Meeting, seconded by Henry Rainville – **PASSED**.

Article #3 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$50,000 to be held in escrow to be used for the Highgate Public Library building fund?

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Dan Fortin. There was a power point presentation by the library which was narrated by Karen Fortin, Chair of the Library Trustees. Karen introduced the trustees, librarian, Vista employee and other library staff members. The roof is in disrepair, which will cost between \$5,000.00 - \$10,000.00 to repair based on verbal estimates. Karen discussed grant funding and donations received as well as what the library budgets for. Things are changing and the location of the library may not be the best spot moving forward. Their space is very limited, thus limiting their programming. They have applied for a municipal planning grant to look at their current space vs. a new space and what the best alternative will be. Lisa Wells asked what the \$50,000.00 request is for and how long the feasibility study will take to be completed. Are we putting the cart before the horse because the study is not complete? There are fourteen tasks to be completed associated with the study, and they hope to have the list complete before town meeting next year. The study is already approved at the state level, they are just waiting on the library budget to be approved to pay for the town portion of the study. Motion by Zeb Maskell to move the question, seconded by Chris Shepard – **PASSED**.

Kyle reread the article aloud. Motion by Zeb Maskell to approve article #3, seconded by Steve LaFar – by voice vote - **PASSED**.

Article #4 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the Selectboard to utilize \$250,000 of General Fund reserves for the purchase price of the properties located at 14 St. Armand Road and 3119 VT Route 78 from the Ephraim Machia Estate, for the purposes of increasing employment, income, business and investment and to plan for the orderly growth of the Town in the face of increasing development pressures in the interests of public health, safety and welfare?

Motion by Claude Chevalier, seconded by Henry Rainville. Jean Chevalier stated that at the informational session last week the Selectboard had no set ideas for this property and that it is all about the location. She is disturbed about the \$250,000.00 in general fund reserves, adding that we have issues like leaky roofs, mold, and a crumbling fire department floor to deal with. There is another article asking for \$252,000.00 in the CIP to address some of these issues and we should not purchase another property the town does not need. We are also not ADA compliant at the municipal building. We have funds to do these things and we are not using it. Jean feels the town should vote no on this article, we don't need it and it's too costly. She also added that we could have paid the additional \$20,000.00 to keep MVR. Motion by Zeb Maskell to table article #4, seconded by David Tremblay – by voice vote – **INCONCLUSIVE**. By a show of hands, the motion to table article #4 – **FAILED**. Chris Yates explained that the \$250,000.00 amount was negotiated with the land owner / executor of the estate, Keith Machia. We did our due diligence and had an appraisal done on the property. In conversations with past Selectboard members, it was noted that Mr. Ephraim Machia was offered three times this amount in the past for the properties and the offer was turned down. Mike Lambert expressed concern about the environmental impact on the property from past use and any liability the town would assume. Part of the purchase agreement is a phase one environmental assessment to be completed by an NRPC approved consultant and paid for by the seller. Claude Chevalier recalls that the fence around the property was put up as part of a dispute despite the town and has been there for many years. This could be an opportunity to get rid of the fence and have control over what happens there. He feels the town is wise to purchase it. It is a prime location and the town could build there possibly, or resell it. The property was referred to as an "eyesore" in our village. Becky Johnson had questions about the acreage – 1.3 acres which abuts land already owned by the town. There are no plans to demolish structures or not to. The vision is to remove the fence and let the vision come from Highgate residents. Everything is on the table if the town can control it. The current house is not on a historical registry. Keith Machia confirmed this and said his father did not place it on a registry because he did not want the control in someone else's hands. The house is 200 years old, so is it historical – yes. Is it on a registry – no. Chris Clodgo asked about options to back out, depending on results of the testing. Maurice Parah commented that the town can't afford to buy all the properties in town that don't look great. Zeb stated that there are fuel tanks in the ground there. Richard Noel wants people to look further than the length of their nose. This is a piece of the puzzle to clean up our village, noting there are programs to help clean it up if needed. Beth Ann Shepard asked if the post office is located on that property – no. Lisa Wells spoke to the wording of the article, which was provided by the town attorney. Mike Maskell asked if the price is firm – yes, contingent on a positive vote and testing. Melanie Thompson agrees this is a good move for the town, adding that the real estate market is coming back. Matt Beyor pointed out that this could improve property values of surrounding properties as well as add tax revenue, depending on what ends up being there. Debbie Rouse commented that we just voted down a school budget by \$82,000.00, yet will pay \$250,00.00 for this and we should be ashamed of ourselves. Lori Choiniere had questions about the septic system there. There are currently two septic systems there, one for the house and one for the café. The soils there are good draining soils. Keith Machia replied that the systems are fully legal and working and they do not drain onto other properties. With regard to tanks being in the ground, Keith stated that Zeb doesn't know that, and neither does Keith. If there are tanks in the ground, that will be mitigated, but to make a statement like that is misleading. Henry Rainville apologized to Keith Machia for the property being referred to as an "eyesore". Henry feels this is a useful piece of property and he is not one for owning more town property. David Rouse would like to keep some history in town and not tear it all down. The land that the café sits on is already owned by the town and there is a lease. Keith clarified that the corner house property has no lease, only the small piece under the restaurant. The corner house property was fully owned by his father, and he paid cash back in 1968. Keith spoke of his father's legacy in town. He had a personality for sure, and he was a good worker – no one can dispute that. The fence was installed because of historical issues between his father and the fathers of the town. The people of the town today are not those same people and nobody wants that fence to come down more than Keith does. The right of eminent domain does not apply here and misinformation is not a good thing. Faith Brashear thinks this would be a good location for a new library and community center. Claudine Deslandes had questions about the assessed value of the properties. Going by memory, Chris believes the house is \$185,000.00 and café \$30,000.00, but he was not sure. Lynn Calderwood wanted to clarify that any decisions would go before the voters. Chris Yates hopes that the people in this room will bring their ideas to the Selectboard, Planning Commission or committee that is developed to make plans for this location. Tammy Rowell reiterated that everything should go before the townspeople, everyone, not just those that come to a meeting. Chris pointed out that we vote from the floor and article #13 further down the warning is to move public questions to the ballot. If that passes, we would be able to vote things like this on a ballot. Motion by Dan Fortin to move the question, seconded by Claude Chevalier – by voice vote – **PASSED**. Kyle reread article #4 aloud, by voice vote – **PASSED**. Debbie Rouse wanted to challenge the outcome of the voice vote. Kyle did not allow

it, noting it was a clear voice vote on article #4 and we were moving on to article #5. He is not intentionally trying to overlook anyone who may have their hand up.

Article #5 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate the sum of \$7,424 for home health services provided by Franklin County Home Health Agency, Inc.?
 Motion by Henry Rainville, seconded by David Roddy. This was a petitioned article and Jennifer Dusablon was present. She has been an employee at FCHH for twenty years. Last year they served 89 Highgate residents and the town support makes a big difference. Article #5 by voice vote – **PASSED**.

Article #6 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$10,000 to be utilized for Franklin County Sheriff's Office directed investigations?
 Motion by Scott Martin, seconded by Henry Rainville. Richard Wilkens stated that FCSO has no detectives, so who will be doing the work? He further clarified that FCSO only has nine deputies. Chris clarified that by funding directed patrols, we are not compromising our contracted hours. Zeb asked if VSP ever responds. If the incident occurs during FCSO contracted hours, they are the ones to respond. David Rouse commented on using reserve money and this article would not be necessary. Lisa Wells would like more police presence in town and FCSO does not provide that for us. We are in a shared contract with the Town of Sheldon, currently. Paulette Unwin expressed concern for speeding issues on Lamkin Street. It was advised to notify law enforcement of the issues, if they don't know they can't help. They are willing to change patrols around if they are alerted to situations in our town. Article #6 by voice vote – **INCONCLUSIVE**. Article #6 by a show of hands (counted by JPs) 56 YES / 49 NO – **PASSED**.

Article #7 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$252,667 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Capital Improvement Plan, with an estimated \$252,667 to be raised by taxes?
 Motion by Scott Martin, seconded by Karen Fortin. Richard Wilkens, Chair of the Planning Commission was present to answer questions, as well as the rest of the Highgate Planning Commission members. Rich does not consider anything in the CIP to be "fluff". The CIP items are mostly fixes (roof, floor, for example) or legal issues (ADA modifications). He referred everyone to page 43 of the town report to look at the spreadsheet, below.

DEPARTMENTAL Capital Projects & Assets	Total Gross Cost of Project	Available Funding			Annual Payments to be Raised by Taxes							Total Net Cost to Town	
		Capital Reserve	Grant/Other	Reserve*	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Anticipated Future Funds Available for Purposes		
Municipal Complex													
Municipal Complex Roof Repair	\$ 10,000					\$ 10,000							\$ 10,000
TOTAL MUNICIPAL COMPLEX	\$ 10,000					\$ 10,000							\$ 10,000
Parks & Recreation Department													
Parks & Recreation Department													
TOTAL PARKS & REC													
Highgate Public Library													
Highgate Public Library													
TOTAL HIGHLGATE PUBLIC LIBRARY													
Fire Department													
Fire Department	\$ 500,000	\$ 187,145		\$ 312,855	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 40,000
Fire Department Floor	\$ 80,000			\$ 80,000									\$ 80,000
Personal Protection Gear	\$ 30,000	\$ 30,000											\$ 30,000
TOTAL FIRE DEPARTMENT	\$ 610,000	\$ 217,145	\$ 30,000	\$ 412,855	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 150,000
Public Works & Highway													
Public Works & Highway	\$ 40,000			\$ 40,000									\$ 40,000
1974 Massey Ferguson Road Mower	\$ 40,000			\$ 40,000									\$ 40,000
1991 Caterpillar 1200 Grader	\$ 100,000			\$ 100,000									\$ 100,000
2001 John Deere 444H Loader	\$ 100,000			\$ 100,000									\$ 100,000
2004 John Deere 4100 Backhoe	\$ 150,000			\$ 150,000									\$ 150,000
2012 International 7602 Pumper Truck	\$ 225,000			\$ 225,000									\$ 225,000
2014 Western Star 4900 Tandem Truck	\$ 240,000			\$ 240,000									\$ 240,000
2013 Ford F350 Compact Dump Trk Pkw/Land	\$ 85,000			\$ 85,000									\$ 85,000
2016 International 7400 Single Axle Truck	\$ 160,000			\$ 160,000									\$ 160,000
Equipment Trailer	\$ 30,000			\$ 30,000									\$ 30,000
TOTAL PUBLIC WORKS & HIGHWAY	\$ 1,440,000			\$ 1,440,000									\$ 1,440,000
TOTAL TOWN PROJECTS	\$ 2,060,000	\$ 217,145	\$ 30,000	\$ 1,812,855	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 252,667
Town Departmental Projects													
Library Relocation	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 200,000	\$ 770,000									\$ 1,000,000
Municipal Complex ADA Modifications	\$ 275,000	\$ 75,000		\$ 200,000									\$ 275,000
Replacement of Bridge (B3)	\$ 4,950,000	\$ 275,845	\$ 4,702,155										\$ 4,950,000
Software Project*	\$ 43,998			\$ 43,998									\$ 43,998
Transfer Student Support Stabilization*	\$ 227,048	\$ 7,062	\$ 170,015	\$ 50,031									\$ 227,048
Matching Funds for Future Grants													
TOTAL TOWN DEPARTMENTAL PROJECTS	\$ 5,496,946	\$ 352,905	\$ 4,972,165	\$ 244,031									\$ 5,496,946
TOTAL TOWN PROJECTS	\$ 7,556,946	\$ 570,050	\$ 5,244,260	\$ 488,066	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 12,667	\$ 265,334

An open house event was held in November to have people see some of the repairs needed. The CIP includes \$10,000.00 to repair the municipal roof (leaks in valleys); \$40,000.00 towards a new fire truck; \$60,000.00 to repair the fire department floor; \$80,000.00 to make ADA modifications to the municipal building (entrances, bathrooms); \$12,667.00 towards replacing the 1974 mower; \$50,000.00 towards town's portion of the Machia Road bridge replacement. Rich Wilkens answered questions, noting that the funds for ADA modifications do not include any grant funding we could apply for. These CIP items are not "feel good items" like the library, these are necessary items that need repair. Zeb asked where the \$80,000.00 figure for ADA comes from. We had a feasibility study done and worked with an architect on this project. He provided us with an overall plan, or a bare bones plan of ADA modifications, which is what is being put before the voters today. The ADA modifications are for the front entrance, the back

entrance, and the restrooms. The \$50,000.00 for the bridge should be our last installment for the town to meet its obligation towards the full replacement. The PC put together the plan, it's up to the voters now. Brian Rowell asked about transfer station funds and why those are not being used to replace some of the equipment. Shelley directed Brian to page 49 in the town report. This was also discussed at the informational session last week. The transfer station funds go into the general fund, as do all other revenues, to offset all general fund expenditures. There is no separate fund for the transfer station money. Brian said this was voted on a few years ago that the transfer station money would be set aside for the purchase of equipment that was needed. Shelley was not here then and is yet to find a fund sitting there called "transfer station funds" or "extra money". When Brian was on the board for eighteen years that money was set aside for the purpose of purchasing equipment. He does not believe it is legal to use the reserve funds in the general fund as a means to purchase the Machia property, because those transfer station funds should not have been rolled into the general fund. Shelley explained, that our last audit report showed we had an unassigned fund balance of \$305,156.00. The general rule of thumb for external auditors is we should have 10% of our balance as unassigned for operating costs, which would be \$100,000.00. The other \$205,000.00 did not grow over night. That question should be asked to prior Selectboard members and the prior town treasurer. We just voted on using \$250,000.00 of reserves to purchase the Machia property. Shelley again reiterated that the transfer station revenue is treated just like any other revenue in town by going in to the general fund to offset expenditures. She is unsure who was on the board when any changes took place, but it was prior to her time here. Rebecca Howrigan asked about the fire department floor and if \$60,000.00 was needed for the repair. We put out an RFP and hired Tim Hardy, engineer, to oversee the process when the floor was cut out. There was debris in the ground including glass, brick and timber that had rotted so the floor began to sink. The debris was from the prior structure on the site that was just thrown into the hole. The engineer feels confident to just fix the affected area will be far less expensive than \$60,000.00. Tim Hardy, engineer, has reported to the town that fixing the affected area only will work. Joe Depatie, Fire Chief, spoke to this issue. He does not want to put a band aid on the issue, he wants it fixed and fixed correctly. He would like to see the entire floor replaced. There are many events held at the fire station throughout the year. The department, as well as the community, deserves a decent fire station. Ty Choiniere asked about purchasing a new fire truck and what the needs are for the future. Joe Depatie would be comfortable if the voters would approve \$60,000.00 towards the floor repairs, and amend the amount towards a new truck. If there are funds left from the floor repair, those could come back before the voters next year to be reallocated towards a new truck, if that is what the voters decide. Rich again stressed that unused funds in the CIP go back to the voters the following year to be voted on how they are spent. Zeb asked questions about the transfer station funds, to which Chris Yates responded that those changes took place prior to him being on the board. Kyle questioned if that line of questioning is germane, because the board and treasurer have all stated they do not know the answers as to why it was merged into the general fund. Brian Rowell disagreed, stating that two years ago funds were spent on a truck without going to the voters, so the issue does pertain to this board. Georgette Johnson asked Shelley Rainville to stand up and be identified. Shelley Laroche stood up (her maiden name is Rainville). Joe spoke some on the purchase of a new pumper, likely in the next year or two. Preliminary estimates are in the \$325,000.00 range. Henry Rainville asked where the information on the municipal roof leak came from and that it has been leaking for ten years. He believes the town was notified of the issue about four years ago. Henry would like to amend the CIP that the year prior to expending funds it goes back to the voters. Chris replied that for this year they could amend the CIP, but he is really talking about a change to the CIP policy. The policy is what would need to be amended. Henry added that voters don't see the policies here at town meeting. Henry feels \$60,000.00 for the floor is excessive and that we don't need to replace the entire floor. Zeb wants the transfer station money separated back out. Heidi pointed out to Shelley since her reply to Mr. Rowell that back when we eliminated the internal auditor positions Mr. Racine (treasurer) made a presentation and pointed out that the way the transfer station funds were being appropriated was not legal. The transfer station money is what started the capital reserve fund, shown in the 2014 town report. The transfer station fund as we remember it started the capital reserve. In the 2014 town report on page 26 it is broken down what that account consisted of (highway truck, fire truck, bridge 25, sidewalk project match, FEMA hazardous mitigation match and landfill closure). Zeb wanted to see in our current book where the transfer station funds are shown, he was referred to page 46 and page 49 under Casella host fees. Ryan Maskell asked if the transfer station fees could automatically go towards the CIP each year. We would still need a warned article and vote at town meeting. Dianne Laroche asked about assets shown on page 46. Brian Rowell does not feel that Zeb's question was answered. Henry pointed out to Brian that the transfer station funds as well as the community development fund were used to create the capital fund. Brian understands that. He again stated that the transfer station funds were voted on to be used to replace equipment and that is not what happened. Brian does not care what fund they went in to, he cares that it was spent on something else. He is concerned that money being set aside today will have the same problem. Henry remembers the capital plan started when he was on the board. He was not in office when it was voted on to use transfer station money just for equipment. Brian said they always went to the voters before spending it. Eric Chevalier made a motion to amend the amount of the CIP to \$222,667.00, with \$30,000.00 being removed from the fire department floor line. This was seconded by John Patnode. Ryan Maskell commented that based on what the fire chief said, the money should be moved from the truck line, not the floor. If the entire \$60,000.00 isn't used it can be moved to be used towards a truck next year. Chris pointed out that we don't have to wait a full year to move funds around. A special vote could be warned and take place. Ryan agrees

with the amendment, but not from the floor. Eric Chevalier amended his motion to take \$30,000.00 from the CIP fire truck line. David Rouse wanted to amend the motion by \$40,000.00 and include that any unused funds go towards the truck. That can't happen, it would need to be voted on next year or at a special meeting. Lori Olds asked why we have not gotten estimates from local contractors. Chris replied that we have done that already. An RFP was issued with a mandatory site visit and then proposals were submitted. The hole that was dug was 20' x 24' and they went down 6', verified by Andy King. Chris clarified that the \$60,000.00 was to fix the floor without a known cause. The engineer has since given us a fix for the single bay area. The \$60,000.00 estimate was to fix the entire floor, not just the 20' x 24' area. Kyle recapped where we are on this article. We have a motion on the floor from Eric Chevalier to reduce the CIP by \$30,000.00 down to \$222,667.00 with the \$30,000.00 reduction coming from the fire truck line. The motion was seconded by Dan Fortin. Article #7 by voice vote – PASSED.

Article #8 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$975,448 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the General Fund, with an estimated \$398,714 to be raised by taxes?

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Claude Fortin. Shelly noted that the general fund is down \$13,925.00 from last year. Sue Cota had some comments and questions. Sharon and Bruce were not on the board when Mr. Yates made a motion to contract with AmCare. Kyle asked her where this was headed and questioned if it was germane to this article. Sue said this is about the general fund and is allowed. She further stated it was not a warned vote and therefore she feels the contract with AmCare is illegal. She asked if petitions would be thrown in the trash, or if this new board will listen to the voters. Sue said because the contract is not notarized she doesn't consider it legal, and how do we know it was really Mr. Yates signature on it. There is a pending lawsuit, so there will not be any discussion regarding ambulatory services today. Lynn Calderwood asked about the sign from last year and where it can be found in the town report – on page 53 under furniture, fixtures and equipment. This was discussed last year at the informational session, Henry Rainville asked about it, and it is noted in the minutes and on the video. Henry had some questions about the budget and why some things are in different places than we have historically seen them. Ty spoke about the parks & recreation budget. Henry also asked about trade in values on trucks and the diesel fuel line in the budget – these are in the highway fund. David Rouse asked about page 49 and what PILOT stands for – payment in lieu of taxes. Kyle reread article #8 aloud. Article #8 by voice vote – PASSED.

Article #9 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$723,924 to meet the expenses and liability of the Highway Fund, with an estimated \$573,224 to be raised by taxes?

Motion by Claude Chevalier, seconded by Eric Chevalier. There were no other questions other than Henry's earlier one about diesel pricing. Right now pricing is good, but could go up. Kyle reread article #9 aloud. Article #9 by voice vote – PASSED.

Article #10 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the Selectboard to sell the Cherry Hill property located on Rheaume Road (parcel #0002009040 11.40 acres)?

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Eric Chevalier. Zeb made a motion that the funds from the next three articles are used to reduce taxes. Shelley said that will essentially happen. It will be revenue in the general fund to reduce the tax rate. Henry Rainville spearheaded this committee that looked at all properties currently owned by the town. This group met on January 3rd. A prior committee started the process back in 2013. The current committee decided on the next three articles to present to the voters this year as parcels the town could possibly part with. There are others that we could look at in the future. There are some town owned properties we need to keep, like the boat launch, railroad bed, Waugh Farm Road, Falls Park, Park and Ride, Brosseau Road land slide area and now the properties on Riverview Lane. This property is currently assessed by the town at \$40,700.00. There was some discussion on the value of the land and access to it. Deb Rouse would have liked to see these articles on the warning prior to article #4, but we can't go backwards. There were questions if these would be traditional sales or more like a tax sale process. Chris replied that they would look to a realtor. Mr. Monahan wanted clarification on the use of the funds generated – they will be used to reduce taxes as part of the general fund, which essentially would reduce the tax burden associated with article #4. After further discussion it was decided to add "to be sold at fair market value in an effort to reduce taxes" to the end of this article. Kyle reread article #10 aloud, *Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the Selectboard to sell the Cherry Hill property located on Rheaume Road (parcel #0002009040 11.40 acres), to be sold at fair market value in an effort to reduce taxes?* Article #10 by voice vote – PASSED.

Article #11 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the Selectboard to sell the Dalcourt property located on VT Route 78 (parcel #0020078283 4.20 acres)?

Motion by Ryan Maskell, seconded by Zeb Maskell. Henry gave some background on this article also. Richard Noel spoke about the power lines that run overhead and he does not believe it should be sold. Mike Lambert wondered if it was even developable. The property as a whole is probably not developable, but there would be interest from an adjoining landowner to use the additional acreage to convert his existing property. Ryan Maskell made a motion to add the same clause at the end as the previous article. Kyle reread the article aloud with the

amendment. Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the Selectboard to sell the Dalcourt property located on VT Route 78 (parcel #0020078283 4.20 acres), to be sold at fair market value in an effort to reduce taxes? Article #11 by voice vote – PASSED.

Article #12 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the Selectboard to sell the Lamkin Street property located next to the cemetery (parcel #0020005059 0.12 acres)?

Motion by Eric Chevalier, seconded by Zeb Maskell. David Rouse would like to donate this to the cemetery. Richard Noel pointed out that may be looked at as favoritism. There is an adjoining property owner on the opposite side that may benefit from it as well. Shawn Banyea believes that property was donated to the town by his grandmother to be used as parking for the cemetery. The town used to have a shed there also. This would need to be researched to see if there are any stipulations in the deed. Kyle reread article #12 aloud. Article #12 by voice vote – INCONCLUSIVE. Article #12 by a show of hands (counted by JPs) 51 NO / 47 YES – FAILED.

Article #13 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate vote all public questions by Australian ballot?

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Eric Chevalier. Approving this article would only move public questions to the ballot – those questions that require a yes / no answer. The CIP, general fund and highway fund would remain on the floor. This would also not affect anything to do with the school, just town yes / no articles. Motion by Dan Fortin to table article #13, seconded by Richard Flint. By voice vote, the motion to table this article – PASSED.

Article #14 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate set the final date of payment for the FY2018 property taxes to be Wednesday, November 1, 2017 with payments to be received in the town office by 5:00pm?

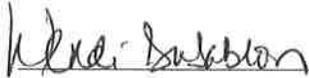
Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Henry Rainville. Ty asked for clarification why we are asking to change this date from October 27th to November 1st. It is strictly from an accounting and auditing standpoint. Richard Noel gave a history lesson, milk checks to farmers would come in on the 25th of the month, which is why our payment due date has been the 27th. Article #14 by voice vote – PASSED.

Article #15 – To transact any other business legally authorized to be transacted, considered proper and necessary when met.

Motion by Claude Chevalier, seconded by Zeb Maskell. Sue Cota had comments about the town clerk's office hours, specifically the lunch break. She would like to see the hours changed, even if only temporarily. Shelley spoke to this comment, noting that she was out of the office for twelve days in February with her broken ankle. Only Wendi or Shelley have access to the cash and register as well as the combination to the town vault. Paulette Unwin commented on the library hours of 9am-6pm three days per week, as well as Debbie Rouse on hours at the post office in Enosburg. Zeb Maskell wanted to discuss a different topic. Zeb made a motion for the Selectboard to replace our current Town Administrator. Chris Yates does not believe that is a legal motion to make. It is a personnel issue, and if Mr. Maskell has issues with the job performance of our current Town Administrator, he should contact a Selectboard member. This is not something that can or will be discussed in an open meeting. Michelle Douglas works in the human resources field. She commented that you have to follow a documentation process and that you can't just "willy nilly" discharge someone. The town would have to pay unemployment and could find themselves in a lawsuit as well. She advised it is not a good idea. Kyle reread article #15 aloud. Article #15 by voice vote – PASSED.

Motion by Claude Chevalier to adjourn Town Meeting 2017 @ 5:32pm. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – by voice vote – PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:



Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk

Minutes approved by:



Christopher Yates, Selectboard Chair



Kyle Lothian, Moderator



Connie Beyor, School Board Chair