

# TOWN OF HIGHGATE

## Selectboard Mtg.

January 8, 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; Andy King, Vice-Chair; Chris Yates; Diana O'Hara; Luke Choiniere

**Highgate Office Staff** – Wendi Dusablon - Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Admin; Tom Racine – Town Treasurer

**Public / Other** – Ben Lowell – Constable; Paulette Tatro; Hank Lambert – Franklin County Home Health

#### **B. Public Comments**

Hank Lambert was present from Home Health of Franklin County. He is a member of the board and they appreciate our support. Hank is also a hospice volunteer. He left some literature with Heidi to hand out to our board. Chris asked if he had any data as to how many residents in Highgate benefit from their services. In 2014 they served 88 Highgate residents and for those residents there was over 3,800 home visits in 2014. Town support is very important to them and goes a long way. Jeff thanked him for the job they do.

#### **C. VDCBG – ADA modifications grant**

This is a publically warned hearing and is a requirement to apply for an ADA grant. The grant would assist with some modifications to the municipal building and utilize the upstairs to serve all factions of the public. This would allow us to shift office space around and make upgrades and repairs to bathrooms and offices. The listers office needs more space, and looking into this issue created a domino effect as to what is really needed. This is a planning grant that would provide funds to hire an architect to assist us with how to best utilize the property. The grant amount would be \$10,000.00 and the anticipated costs for planning are around \$12,000.00 at the most. Part of the grant application process is we need to have one warned public hearing, which is tonight. It is unclear if we can get into the first round of the grant, which had a December deadline. If we can, we should have a decision by February. If not, we will have to wait until later in the year for the next round.

#### **D. Highway Department – Steve Ploof**

##### **1. ROW waiver, St. Armand Road**

This is regarding the property of Diane & Gerald Laroche on St. Armand Road. Andy, Chris and Jeff have all driven by and looked at it. Jeff has no issues. Chris thinks we won't have to ditch there because them putting in a mound system is going to create its own ditch. Steve's only concern is if we ever need to widen the road. Luke asked how much this would restrict us. Chris feels if we had to widen the road, we would still be ok. Motion by Chris Yates to approve the right of way waiver on St. Armand Road for the Laroche property. Motion was seconded by Andy King – **APPROVED.**

## **2. Rainville drainage issue**

We put in a DI when we put the pipe across the road, it is a 15" piece of solid plastic culvert. Jacques wanted to put in his drainage down through and tiled into it. The silt had to have leaked in when he put the tile in. Andy thought he was daylighting the tile down the road. He has one that goes straight through to the other culvert. He cut a hole in our DI. What needs to happen is uncover it and put some fabric and stone in there. We will also need to clean out the culvert again. We can't disturb it now while the ground is frozen. Andy thought he was going to daylight all his drainage down at the next culvert. Chris asked if he had permission to cut into the DI. He mentioned to Steve he was going to do it, but they were not there when it happened. Steve has called the house but has not spoken to Jacques. Wendi noted that he has come in twice, but Steve was not here either time. Jeff asked Steve to get in touch with him and let him know this will be addressed in the spring. Diana asked who is going to pay for the cleaning of the culvert. Somebody will have to pay. If we clean it now it will just fill up again.

## **3. Misc.**

Steve noted that we are getting close to half way on sand in the sand shed, but we are still doing pretty well. Chris asked if Steve had ordered the new oil drain pan. Steve talked to Tom and also asked Tom about a few other items (6' step ladder, battery operated grease gun and a 22 ton hydraulic jack). Tom has not yet placed the order for the oil drain pan.

## **E. Treasurer – Tom Racine**

### **1. Pay bills**

Andy had questions about the invoice for the light, and which truck it was associated with. Tom produced the invoice, which was for Engine 2. Diana had one question about the MVR amount.

### **2. Delinquent tax collection policy**

The board does not have to approve this, but they should support it, which they did at the last meeting. Our delinquent penalty is still 8%. Some towns are looking at reducing the penalty or having the penalty be on a graduated schedule. Jeff asked if most people with delinquent taxes are willing to work with Tom. Yes, the majority do. A lot of them are recurring and a number of them are in a position where it will be a chore to get out of the situation they are in. The next tax sale will likely be heavy. Once we get through April for people to receive their tax returns, Tom will be looking to have another tax sale in May or June. Jeff asked Tom if he felt it was beneficial having tax collection taking place in the office. Yes, Tom definitely agrees that it is helpful. Anyone inquiring is getting real time information. Taxpayers find it helpful also and convenient to be able to come here.

### **3. Appropriations policy**

Heidi forwarded a model policy or handed one out on Monday night to the board members. The board has decided to not make any changes to appropriations for this budget, but a policy is needed moving forward. Paulette Tatro had some questions about the sizeable number of appropriations. She was particularly interested in the Swanton Teen Center. Is there data to show how many residents of Highgate are using the center with the \$6,000.00 that we contribute annually? Do we get enough detail on an annual basis to validate this? Andy agrees, this is why we need a policy. There is not enough flow of information other than "hey can we do what we did last year". This is a rather new addition to the list, and we have paid out this amount twice. Dr. Chip was here prior to this going to the voters and there was also someone present at Town Meeting that year. She would like to see more information obtained prior to us paying it again this year. Chris would like to see stats on how this appropriation will benefit Highgate residents. Tom will try and get more information from the teen center. Tom did contact counsel regarding some of the do's and don'ts regarding appropriations and there is also statute related to this issue to consider.

Chris asked if the board has the authorization to pull an appropriation out and put it on the warning as an article to discuss again. Tom believes that the board has that authority. Paulette referred to the article in the Messenger a while back regarding all the programs offered at the teen center. She hopes that Highgate kids are taking advantage of the facility.

**4. Misc.**

Dick Souza stopped by and wanted to discuss the fire department trucks more. Tom told him he would get more specifics and get back to him. Dick Souza is looking for clarification on the process to put it out to bid (mini pumper). The van panels won't be taken off until they get to the point that we purchase something to replace it. Chris stated that you can only strip a limited amount off a fire truck and still view it as viable. If the items we strip off can't be used for something else, it doesn't make sense to do that. Andy has a few things, both contractual and personnel related, that link into this discussion for executive session.

**F. Town Clerk – Wendi Dusablon**

**1. Minutes**

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the minutes from December 17, 2014 as written. Motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Andy King to accept the minutes from December 18, 2014 as amended. Motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED**.

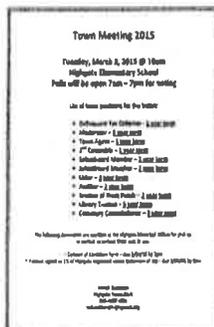
**2. Dog registration flyer**

Motion by Chris Yates to approve the dog registration and rabies clinic flyer. Motion was seconded by Diana O'Hara – **APPROVED**. These will be going in the mail on Friday, January 9<sup>th</sup> to all current licensed dog owners and those that we know have dogs and are yet to license them. The rabies clinic will be Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup> from 10-noon at the fire station.



**3. Town Meeting Info & Articles**

- Petitions and consent of candidate forms are available to anyone interested in having their name on the ballot at town meeting for the following town positions (listed below). Paperwork is due to Wendi by **January 26<sup>th</sup> @ 5pm** and require 1% of registered voter signatures (approximately 20). Also, petitions for articles to be added to the town warning are due by **January 20<sup>th</sup> @ 5pm** and require 5% of registered voter signatures (approximately 100).



- Town meeting articles – \*teen center appropriation, \*general fund, \*highway fund, \*library, \*floor voting vs. Australian ballot voting (town articles), \*constable elected vs. appointed, and \*elimination of town auditor positions. The articles regarding the constable and auditors would have to be on Australian ballot, per statute. Andy agrees we should move forward with the appropriation article if necessary. Tom provided the board with a complete list of appropriations. Tom will also follow up with Brian Monahan, town counsel. Luke had some questions about the town constable article and why. With regard to the auditor position(s), there is not much interest. Steve Scott will not be running again and Ron Nye has experienced some health issues. Tom will double check and see if the board has the authority make the decision about using outside auditors or if it needs to be voted on by ballot. Regarding the article to discuss floor voting vs. Australian ballot articles, this would include all town officers, budgets and public questions moving to Australian ballot. The town and school are separate. Chris brought this up last year, but fell short on signatures due to getting a late start. He feels it warrants a discussion. Many people come to vote, but can't stay for the whole day and vote on every article from the floor. Australian ballot gives more people a chance to vote on their own time throughout the day 7am-7pm. Diana feels that budgets should be voted on via Australian ballot. Luke thinks a change could not hurt, even though it has been done from the floor for years. Andy added that you have a certain amount of people that attend the long standing tradition of town meeting. The ballot is more efficient to access the voters, but its an appropriate question to ask given that some people feel very strongly about town meeting. Jeff said if we put it on as an article it would be decided on as a board, and the school board would have to choose to put it on their section or someone would have to petition them to do so. Jeff feels that town meeting works and he likes the dialogue that comes from it. He does understand the issues that others bring up. Paulette had some comments and spoke about MVU when it went from an annual meeting to an Australian ballot vote. These days you are lucky to get 10 people to show up for a budget meeting prior to an Australian ballot vote. This means lots of people are voting on something without the information or having asked questions. Town meeting offers the opportunity to ask questions and be informed. Paulette feels this would be another step in the New England tradition of town meeting going away. Jeff thanked Paulette for her comments.

#### **G. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta**

##### **1. Hazard Mitigation Plan update**

The final copy has been approved by FEMA. It now needs to be approved by the Selectboard and we will then have a Hazard Mitigation Plan which makes us eligible to move forward on a few FEMA grants. Motion by Chris Yates to approve the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Plan. Motion was seconded by Andy King – **APPROVED**. We have been looking at and working on this for a year. It covers everything from natural disasters to maintaining structures and all potential hazards to the Town of Highgate, and how we plan to deal with them. Shaun Coleman did the lions share of the work with details provided by Heidi. There is a resolution that needs to be signed by the board also.

##### **2. Library update**

Liza could not be here tonight. She forwarded a good amount of information on library statistics for 2014, and its all great! She will be at the next meeting on January 22<sup>nd</sup> to present it to the board.

#### **H. Constable update – Ben Lowell**

Ben provided an email update to the board prior to tonight. He has seen an increase of activity at the former Roy's Housing property, which he is

watching. He made note of a truck that may be abandoned at the park & ride. It has no registration plates on it. He has contacted FCSO but has not heard the outcome. It is not on the public highway, but is on town property. Ben would like to deal with it before we get a significant amount of snow. With regard to the constable position possibly moving to an appointed position, he hopes that either way the board would approach him with any concerns. Ben still plans on being here to help in any way he can. Andy noted that the good job he has been doing has brought to light what an important position the constable has. Ben feels it makes sense to move it to an appointed position. He ran in 2014 because he knew it was vacant and much needed in our town.

**I. Selectboard items**

**1. Adoption of zoning bylaws**

Rick Trombley, PC & DRB Chair, is out of town. The board has had copies for a while and needed more time to finish reading the new proposed bylaws. Chris asked if the cell tower piece will change anything, or because the state regulates that piece, does the PC or DRB have any thoughts on that section? Heidi said it has not been discussed any further, other than the very few situations that it would be reviewed locally. It is a scenario that is hard to nail down, because we will so very infrequently utilize it. Motion by Andy King to accept the zoning bylaws as presented and written. Motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED.** This will now require two warned public hearings with the Selectboard. The first will likely be in February. It is quite a long arduous process but we are getting close to being done and then they will become final.

**2. Hazard Mitigation Plan**

This was discussed earlier under section G #1.

**3. Misc.**

- Fernand Gagne stopped by recently looking for a letter of support from the board with regard to the motorized vehicle races at Franklin County Field Days. Motion by Chris Yates to support the request by Fernand Gagne for motorized vehicle racing at Franklin County Field Days. Motion was seconded by Andy King – **APPROVED.** Heidi noted that this is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of field days in 2015, so they are hoping to have some special events going on.

**J. Upcoming events**

Jan. 12	5pm	Arena Construction Manager Committee Mtg.
Jan. 15		DRB Mtg. is <b>CANCELLED</b>
Jan. 16	3pm	Arena Construction Manager Interviews
Jan. 20	6pm	Planning Comm. Mtg.
Jan. 22	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
Jan. 23		Traffic Comm. Mtg in Montpelier (will be reviewing the Route 7 speed reduction request from intersection of Carter Hill to Martins Store)

**K. Executive Session**

Motion by Jeff Towle to enter executive session @ 8:09pm for contracts and personnel. Motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Andy King to exit executive session @ 8:55pm. Motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

**L. Adjournment**

Motion by Chris Yates to adjourn the meeting @ 8:58pm. Motion was seconded by Andy King – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by:

\_\_\_\_\_ Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_ Jeff Towle, Chair - Highgate Selectboard