

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Approved Town Meeting Minutes March 6, 2018

A. Call to Order & Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 10:06am by Kyle Lothian, Town Moderator.

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

Highgate School Board Members: Connie Beyor – Chair; Nola Gilbert – Vice-Chair; Chris Shepard; David Roddy; Richard Flint

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

David Roddy, Navy Veteran, led the Pledge of Allegiance. Kyle Lothian then asked for a moment of silence for our fellow residents we have lost and all those that sacrifice for us.

C. Miscellaneous Information from the Moderator

- Highgate Volunteer Fire Department will be hosting and serving lunch for \$7.00 per person.
- There will be three questions per person, per article. There were no objections to this.
- Anyone that is not a Highgate registered voter and wishes to register today, same day voter registration is available at the check-in table. Please note, there will be no voter registrations taking place in the middle of a paper ballot vote, so please make sure you are added to the checklist prior to any paper ballots being called for.
- We will maintain a respectful atmosphere today. Please be kind to one another and no personal attacks will be allowed. If you are called out of order more than twice, you will be asked to leave.
- There will be no campaigning of any kind inside the polling place. This includes any campaign materials or clothing of any kind.
- We have three young ladies present to run the microphones. Please wait for a cordless microphone.
- Town Report Dedication – Sharon Bousquet read aloud from the plaque and presented it to Real and Marie-Claire Laroche.

2017 TOWN OF HIGHGATE TOWN REPORT DEDICATION REAL & MARIE-CLAIRE LAROCHE



Real Joseph Laroche and Marie-Claire Cecile Godin were married on May 2, 1964. They raised their four sons on the family farm on Durkee Road, which still remains in the family to this day. Their family has grown to include daughters-in-law, grandchildren and great-grandchildren that they all love very dearly. For over 30 years Real & Marie-Claire safely transported Highgate students to and from school as bus drivers and also for several years operated Meme & Pepe's Snack Bar at the Highgate Sports Arena. Their famous french fries and other delicious goodies have satisfied many hearty appetites! When they were not transporting or feeding us, you may have seen one or both of them involved with the Highgate Historical Society or at local farmers markets. Their contributions are many, and are deeply appreciated by us all.

Thank you Real & Marie-Claire!



We appreciate you both
for making Highgate an
even better place to live,
work, learn & play!



D. Legislative Updates

Steve Beyor was present, Chuck Pearce was not able to be in attendance. Steve gave some updates on education funding, clean water, gun legislation and ACT250. He will be heading to do an update in Franklin but will be back in Highgate later today if anyone has questions for him, he will be around.

E. Review of Articles

Article #1 – To elect the following town officers

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Henry Rainville. Kyle Lothian, moderator, read this list aloud. These are all being voted on today by Australian ballot at the polls 7am – 7pm.

- 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 (2) years;
- 4) One Selectboard Member for the term of three (3) years;
- 5) One Lister for the term of three (3) years;
- 6) One Trustee of Trust Funds for the term of two (2) years remaining on a three (3) year term;
- 7) One Trustee of Trust Funds for the term of three (3) years;
- 8) One Library Trustee for the term of four (4) years remaining on a five (5) year term;
- 9) One Library Trustee for the term of five (5) years;
- 10) One Cemetery Commissioner for the term of five (5) years;

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

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

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Scott Martin. There was no discussion. Article #2 by voice vote – **PASSED**.

RECESS TOWN MEETING AND ENTER TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING TO TRANSACT THE FOLLOWING BUSINESS:

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

David Rouse asked for clarification on who is leaving the board. The two year seat is David Roddy's current seat. The three year seat is Nola Gilbert's current seat. The two years remaining on a three year term is Connie Beyor's current seat.

1) One Moderator for the ensuing year;

Motion by Connie Beyor to nominate Kyle Lothian. The motion was seconded by David Roddy. There were no other nominations. By voice vote – **PASSED**.

2) One School Director for the term of two (2) years;

Motion by David Roddy to nominate Steven Scott. The motion was seconded by Chris Shephard. There were no other nominations. By voice vote – **PASSED**.

3) One School Director for the term of Three (3) years;

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to nominate Lisa Wells. The motion was seconded by Richard Wilkens. Motion by Richard Flint to nominate Rick Haney. The motion was seconded by Nancy Flint. There were no other nominations. Both nominees spoke before this went to a vote. Lisa has a lengthy background and experience as a school board director both at MVU and formerly in Bolton. She has served on the VT School Association Board, has chaired policy committees and has been a lead negotiator. Rick retired twenty years ago from farming and is currently a manager for a traffic control company. He has never been much into politics and considers himself to be old school. Rick believes we are spending too much money. There was a show of hands to move this vote to a paper ballot. By paper ballot vote the results were: total votes cast 137 – **LISA WELLS 87 / RICK HANEY 43 / SPOILED 7**. The three year School Board Director's seat goes to Lisa Wells.

4) One School Director for the term of two (2) years remaining on a three (3) year term;

Motion by Zeb Maskell to nominate Ryan Young. The motion was seconded by Nancy Flint. There were no other nominations. By voice vote – **PASSED**.

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

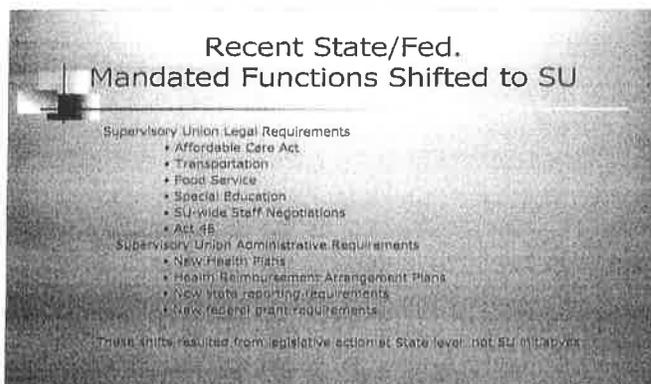
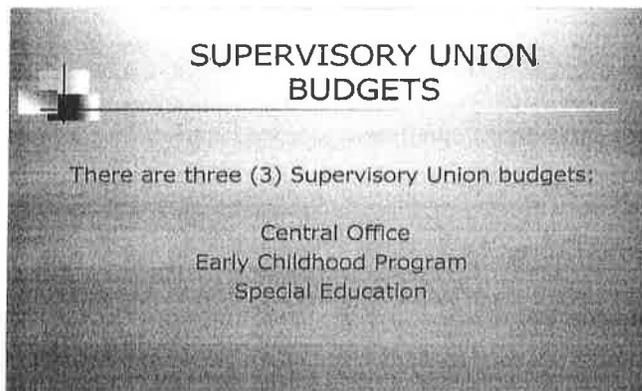
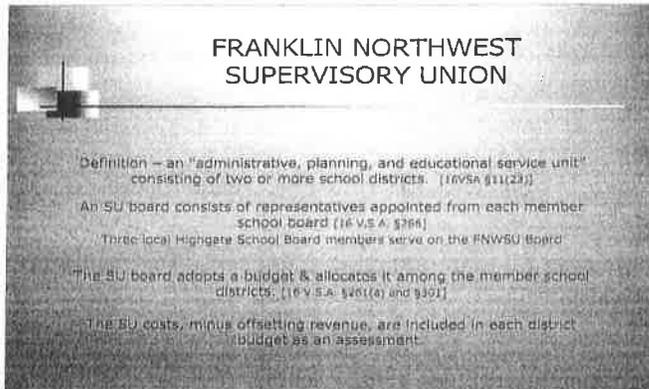
Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Ryan Young. There was no discussion. Article #2 by voice vote – **PASSED**.

Article #3 – Will the voters of the Highgate Town School District authorize the School Directors to borrow money in anticipation of taxes?

Motion by Chris Yates, seconded by Beth Shepard. Phil Ladue had questions about why we would need to borrow in anticipation of taxes and what happened to the money that was already there. Connie Beyor explained that they always do their best to not use their right to borrow in anticipation of taxes, but in cases of emergency it is needed. Article #3 by voice vote – **PASSED**.

Article #4 – Shall the voters of the Highgate School District approve the School Directors to expend \$5,125,240, 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 \$13,757 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is .37% higher than spending for the current year.

Motion by Chris Yates, seconded by Ty Choiniere to open the article and also to give permission for the Principal (Patrick Hartnett), Superintendent (Winton Goodrich) and Business Manager (Lora McAllister) to speak, as none of them are Highgate residents, by voice vote – **PASSED**. Nola Gilbert, School Board Director, shared a power point presentation on the Supervisory Union budget as well as the Highgate School budget, which was followed by questions / comments / concerns.



CENTRAL OFFICE BUDGET

FY19 Budget = \$1,478,958
Total Net Amount Assessed = \$1,354,700
Highgate's Net Assessment = \$190,267 (15%)

This budget provides the services of: Superintendent, Curriculum & Grant Coordination, Technology Coordination, Human Resources, Business Management, Bookkeeping, and Data Support.

Assessment based on Average Daily Student Members (ADM)

Central Office Cost Drivers

Cost Drivers:

- Salary increases for FY19 average 2.5%
- Health Insurance premium increase 10.1%
- Increased employee participation in health insurance

Other Budget Factors:

- Change in independent audit firm increased cost
- Increase cost for snow removal & sanding of SU office parking lot
- Transfer of local school bookkeeping expense
- (offsetting reduction in local fiscal services costs in majority of local budgets)

Early Childhood Program Budget

FY19 Budget = \$1,483,501
Total Net Amount Assessed = \$976,157
Highgate Net Assessment = \$260,357 (26%)

This budget provides the services of: ECP Administration & Clerical support, Preschool Teachers & paraprofessionals, Speech Services, Special Education.

Early Childhood Cost Drivers

- Teacher salaries & benefits as negotiated locally through SU-wide staff negotiation process
- Health Insurance premium increase 10.1%
- Increased paraprofessional support impacting wages & insurance eligibility
- Increased student participation in Preschool Tuition Voucher payment process

ACT 155 legislation expanded requirement to provide preschool opportunity to all 3-4 year old children, for a minimum of 10 hours/week. Same legislation also required SU to pay approx. \$3,200 tuition per student to eligible childcare providers.

Special Education Budget

Administration Budget Component
 FY19 Budget = \$530,219
 Total Net Amount Assessed = \$245,954
 Highgate Net Assessment = \$32,078 [13%]

This budget provides the services of: Special Education Administration & Clerical support, Adapted Curriculum & Occupational Therapy Services.
(Curriculum & OT services are grant funded positions)

Assessment based on Special Education Child Count

Transfer of Special Education Expenses

As mandated by state law, the transfer of Special Education costs to the FNWSU began in the 2015-16 school year, with the transfer of professional staff salaries and benefits.

In the 2016-17 school year, all Special Education expenses, with the exception of support staff, was moved to the SU. This includes student tuition, special education services, supplies and equipment.

Costs at the SU level are budgeted in the same manner as they were in the local Special Education budget.

The State reimburses approximately 56% of special education expenditures back to the district so that the full impact of increased costs are not totally funded by local taxes.

Special Education Budgets -School Based

FY19 Budget Total = \$5,709,197
 Total Net Amount Assessed = \$2,138,031

These budgets provide funding for SU-wide teachers, school psychologists, and speech therapists. Also includes student tuition and transportation to/from alternative placements, as well as supplies & equipment needs.

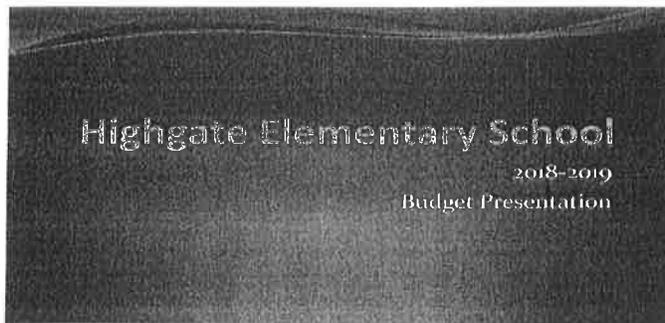
Local budget line items now show \$0 and expenses are reflected within the SU Special Education assessments to schools.

Highgate Special Ed Budget Total = \$623,588
 Highgate Net Assessment = \$252,968 [12%]

When Special Ed. Moved to SU, offset Highgate budget line items

Zeb expressed frustration and concern over the Supervisory Union (SU) budget. With more and more items being moved over to the SU, we have no say. There was lengthy discussion on the special education budget and the number of children that receive services, whether they be on an IEP (44 +/-) or receive speech and language services (50 +/-). It was noted that we also have students that are currently in a placement out of the district. Mrs. Deslandes wanted to fully understand what it costs to education a special education student and how students qualify for services. Nola explained the three gateway s of learning, but added that she is not a special educator and is not an expert on the topic. Angela Carr spoke as a parent of a child that receives services and that it does not mean there is something "wrong" with the child. She went on to state that the process to qualify a student is very lengthy and that while she does have some issues with the school, their special education program is strong and makes a difference. Zeb appreciates the information on the SU budget but would still like to see more transparency. Dianne Laroche asked about the study done with regard to ACT46 and towns voting not to merge. Our report has been submitted to the state, but we still don't know what will happen.

There will be more contact with the Agency of Education in June or July about the approval (or not) of our alternative governance structure. Norm McAllister commented on best practices and how over the last several years we have seen more and more items moved from the local budgets to the SU budget. He feels we have consolidated local control already. Sharon Bousquet, Highgate Selectboard Chair, added that part of the Selectboard's job is to follow the money. The Selectboard did question whether the SU budget could be voted on and whether state statutes do or do not allow it. This question is being taken up in the Town of Franklin today. This may determine what happens for us all. People are asking questions and want transparency. Sharon agrees with Mr. McAllister that we deserve answers. Nola added that we, as taxpayers and voters, do have a say because we elect school board reps who have representation on the SU board. To say that we have no say is just not true. Mr. McAllister had other questions, including how much money we are saving by moving things to the SU budget. The new accounting firm looks at best practices throughout the state. Ty Choiniere commented that best practice is a recommendation, not a requirement. Ty also asked for clarification, if we vote down the school budget today, are we also voting down the SU budget, or are those numbers hard numbers? The SU budget would not change with a no vote today. To change it, start attending SU meetings, school board meetings, get involved with local board members and find out what the SU is doing. John Patnode asked about reimbursement from the state and federal government and where those funds go. Lora McAllister pointed out that only Highgate special education costs are the burden of Highgate taxpayers. Ryan Maskell asked about the bookkeeping staff salaries and an increase of \$200,000.00. It was noted that all local budgets saw a reduction because funds were all moved to the SU level. Ryan also asked if the deadline for the ACT46 report was missed. The date was set for Dec. 26th and ours was filed on Dec. 27th. The extra day did not affect anything. We have since refiled it once more with additional info. Henry Rainville asked for clarification on how to change the SU budget process – contact your board members! Minutes are published online and are posted at the town offices. Nola added that unfunded mandates by the state and federal government are expensive. SU board meetings are open meetings and are typically held the first Wednesday of each month and rotate school locations alphabetically, with few exceptions. The next meeting will be March 21st in Highgate at 6:30pm. The Highgate School Board meets the second Thursday of each month, with the exception of June and July. Henry asked the school board for their opinion on voting Australian ballot. Connie feels more people can vote, however, the opportunity for discussion such as the one we are having now and questions comes from keeping the vote on the floor. Connie pointed out that very few people attended their informational session on the budget. Having the right to vote comes with responsibility to understand what you are voting on. There was a request and a second to move the question. Kyle pointed out that with a 2/3 majority the discussion will stop and we will move on to the next presentation, by voice vote – **FAILED**, so we will continue. Chris Yates asked for the Highgate School Board to present their budget.



The board and administration have worked diligently to present a budget that meets the needs of Highgate Students at a reasonable cost to taxpayers.

Professional Development

- Marzano Instructional Framework
- Response to Intervention Support for Learners(MTSS)
- Teacher Leader Support for Colleagues (*Instructional Coaches*)
- Professional Learning Communities (PLC)
- Restorative Circles
- Videotape supported supervision and evaluation
- Paraeducator training

Total Current Staff- 83.8 FTE

Professionals PreK - 6	Support Staff PreK-6	Paraprofessional PreK - 6
43.8	8	32
Teachers Interventionists Student Support Services Principal Asst. Principal Contracted Service Prof.	Office Support Fiscal Services Custodians Technology Services PBIS Specialist	Paraprofessionals Behavioral Intervention (BI)

Plant Operation Improvements

- Remodel two offices into 1 classroom in 4th grade wing
- Parking lot grant
- Replaced a portion of fence on side of white building
- Solar Net Metering online Dec. 2017

Up Coming Projects

- Magnetic door closure system
- Remodel of front office windows and doors
- Repair of roof valleys (*Capital Reserve funded*)

Projected Education Spending

(budget plus special articles, less anticipated Revenues)

	FY 15	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19
Ed Spending	\$4,056,669	\$4,061,554	\$3,950,643	\$4,422,769	\$4,511,300
Ed Spending /Eq. Pupil	\$13,762	\$13,324	\$12,723	\$13,706	\$13,757

Budget Considerations

- Employee Health Care Premium
New plans began on Jan. 1 2018 state wide, 80/20 contribution, with HRA contributions of 12%, 12%, 76%
- Technology
 - New Chromebook lease
 - Networking and infrastructure improvement

FY18 School District Budget proposed to taxpayers

\$5,125,240

What effects the tax rate?

- Budget – Proposed by school board - decided by taxpayers (\$5,125,240)
- Revenues – State/federal, interest, fund balance (\$613,940)
- Equalized Pupil – 2 year weighted average of students (327.93)
- Property Tax Yield – Set by legislature (\$9,842)
- CLA – Set by Listers and state (108.29%)
- Ratio of elementary to MVU students - (Elem. 57.95 % MVU 42.05 %)

Equalized Pupil

- An Equalized pupil is determined using a 2 year weighted average, with adjustments for:
 - Pre-K or Early Education Essentials (EEE)
 - Secondary students (grades 7 to 12)
 - Students in economically deprived backgrounds
 - Students for whom English is not their primary language

Highgate Equalized Pupils = 327.93

Highgate Elementary: Spending per Pupil

FY 2019 Proposed Education Spending	\$4,511,300
Equalized Pupil Count	327.93
Education Spending per Equalized Pupil	\$13,757

FY17 Spending Comparison

Budget per Equalized Pupil:
(For School Districts that belong to a Union High School)
77th out of 88
88th being the LOWEST SPENDING

Education Spending per Equalized Pupil:
(State Rankings)
216th out of 266
266 being the LOWEST SPENDING

Partial Tax Calculation

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Homestead Tax=} \\ & (1.40 * 57.95\%) / 108.29 * (200,000 / 100) \\ & \quad \quad \quad \$1,498 \end{aligned}$$

This represents the Highgate Elementary School portion of the tax bill.

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

Connle Janes Beyor, Chair – 868-3371 (Term ends 2020)

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

Richard Flint – 868-2652 (Term ends 2019)

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/higate-school/>

Connie stated that the SU is not a municipality and does not have the ability to collect taxes. Becky Johnson added that best practices and savings are only part of the equation and that what is best for our students and our community are important as well. The capital reserve fund has \$113,000.00 in it currently and the estimated \$53,000.00 to repair the roof will come from there. Phil Connelly had questions about the parking lot and its current condition. It is dangerous and urgently needs to be fixed. Claude Chevalier asked about page 97 in the town report involving the transfer of speech/language services to the SU which saves us \$37,000.00 but there is an increase in the special education line item for the SU. Based on caseloads, a new special educator was added. These costs were moved to the SU a few years ago and what is shown is a continuation of that. Daniel Fortin made a motion to move the question, which was seconded by Chad Carr. By a 2/3 majority show of hands, the question was moved. Motion by Chris Yates to move to a paper ballot vote, which was seconded by Tim Gingras – by a show of at least seven hands this went to a paper ballot vote. Article #4 by paper ballot vote: total votes cast 140 – YES 90 / NO 48 / SPOILED 2 - PASSED.

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

Motion by Scott Martin, seconded by Chris Yates. David Rouse would like to see the school budget moved to after lunch for next year so more people are voting on it. David made a motion to move the school section of the warning to the afternoon and complete all town business first. There was discussion on who sets the warning. Historically the school has always gone first, therefore it should be a joint discussion between the town and school when next year's warning is being established. It will be taken under consideration by both boards. Mr. Rouse amended his motion for this to be an advisory vote opinion for the Selectboard and School Board to hear. The amended motion for this to be an advisory vote (opinion) was seconded by Chad Carr – by voice vote was inconclusive – by a show of hands **YES 52 / NO 31 – ADVISORY VOTE (OPINION) PASSED.** Connie Beyor wanted to thank some people – the after school program run by Joyce Ashton; the Tyler Place for recognizing improvement in educational excellence in grades four, five and six; M&C Transport for safely getting our children to school and back home; Highgate Public Works Department for plowing our roads and parking lot; and the great staff at Highgate Elementary School. Connie is stepping down from the school board with mixed emotions and thanked everyone for the honor and privilege to serve her community and appreciates the taxpayer's support of Highgate Elementary School with their hard earned dollars. Kyle made a motion to adjourn for lunch @ 1:02pm, the motion was seconded by Zeb Maskell. Kyle asked everyone to be back by 1:45pm.

LUNCH BREAK UNTIL 1:45pm

After lunch Richard Flint presented Connie Beyor and Nola Gilbert with plaques for their service to the school board. Their service is very much appreciated! David Roddy was not present at that moment but he will be honored before the end of the day for his 27 years of service. Kyle reminded everyone to direct any questions directly to him as we proceed with the rest of the warned articles.

**ADJOURN THE TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING AND
REENTER THE TOWN MEETING**

Article #3 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate vote all public questions by Australian ballot?

Motion by Kelly Rainville that we actually discuss this article this year and not just table it. The motion was seconded by Ryan Maskell. Kelly is conflicted by this. She has concerns about the crowd growing older that attends town meeting. Dianne Laroche would hate to see town meeting go away. Chris Yates pointed out that moving only public questions to the ballot would leave everything on the school side from the floor, as well as the CIP, General Fund and Highway Fund on the town side. We would still be voting budgets from the floor to allow conversation and amendments. If this article passes, it will not affect anything happening today, it would take affect at the next Town Meeting or Special Town Meeting. Phil Ladue questions if moving the meeting to the evening or on a weekend would help attendance. Moving the meeting to a later time would keep us here until after midnight, our meetings tend to be long. Last year we started at 10am and went until 6pm. Heather Cota commented that many young people want to vote, and that polls are open 7-7 and everyone should have that right to vote. Henry Rainville compared this to when MVU moved to Australian ballot years ago. The theater used to be full for the floor meeting and vote, now hardly anyone goes to an informational meeting. Lori Olds noted that having informational meetings on the same night as others makes it hard also. Sharon agrees, and also noted that the Selectboard works with the Highgate School Board on these schedules, but that our info session on the ambulance services was already set before we knew it was also MVU's informational budget meeting as well. We will try to avoid any conflicts next year. Zeb feels if your town is important to you, you will get to town meeting. Zeb is not in favor of Australian ballot. Nancy Flint agrees with Zeb. Kelly would like to see all the informational meetings aired at a time that is convenient for people to see them. The town has our own YouTube channel so Selectboard meetings are available to watch any time, not just when they are aired on cable. Ty Choiniere said he was at the school info meeting and our Superintendent assured us that he was going to work with NW Access TV to offer the same services that the Town of Highgate does. Article #3 by voice vote – **FAILED.**

Article #4 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate set the final date of payment for FY2019 property taxes to be Thursday, November 1, 2018 with payments to be received in the town office by 5:00pm?

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Clarence Miller. Peter Tinella asked if the November 1st date causes any issues for the town – no. Mr. Ladue would prefer to have quarterly payments. Anyone can come see Shelley at any time to set up a payment plan if yearly does not work for them. We did try a number of years ago to move to two installments and that was voted down. Maurice Parah said he comes in and pays towards taxes whenever he has extra money and it works well for him. Becky Johnson spoke that she has struggled with paying once a year and Shelley is very receptive to making it work with a payment plan. Becky added that the town also puts out a lot of information on everything via social media, website and on their YouTube channel. Article #4 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Article #5 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$7,424 for home health services provided by Franklin County Home Health Agency, Inc.?

Motion by Claude Chevalier, seconded by Henry Rainville. This article and amount are the same as last year's request and this was a petitioned article. Courtney Bates was present from FCHH and gave some data on services they provide to Highgate residents, for example, in 2017 there were 3,175 visits to 83 Highgate residents providing home health services. These services include nursing care, physical therapy, speech services and occupational therapy. Diana O'Hara thanked them for the wonderful job they do. Mrs. Deslandes asked where their sources of payment come from to which Courtney responded they are funded through Medicaid, donations, fundraising, and town funding. Becky Johnson feels \$7,424 is a small amount of money to serve 83 members of our community. Article #5 by voice vote – **PASSED.**

Article #6 – Shall the voters of the town of Highgate appropriate \$50,000 to be held in escrow to be used for the Highgate Library & Community Center building fund?

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Claude Chevalier. Henry asked why this is not part of the CIP. Last year the library request was cut from the CIP so the trustees petitioned an article. This year they did the same thing. As a board, they wanted to stand on their own. Last year \$50,000 was approved and this year they are asking for another \$50,000 as a capital investment for a new library building at some point in time. Richard Flint noted that we have a lot going on and for this year he would like to table this request. Kelly Rainville asked about the timeline for a new library. Karen Fortin thinks it will be a 5-7 year timeline projection. The feasibility study that was completed told us the cost will be approximately \$2.1 million for a new building, but not necessarily all of that will be coming from the tax base. We can also apply for grants and other funding options. Mr. Ladue feels our current space serves our needs and we don't need a new library. Everything is going electronic and books are becoming a thing of the past. He also feels our library is more like a day care. Zeb totally disagrees with this. He has lived here for 50+ years and he knows there is much more that goes on in that building. He would like to see funds from property we currently have for sale go towards the library and community center's future. Rich Wilkens added to the conversation that with a bigger facility will also be the need for more staff, more maintenance, etc. and the budget will also go up. This is not just about building a new facility it's about maintaining it, heating it, security, insurance, and the list goes on. We just don't need a \$2.1 million dollar library. Lynn Calderwood asked about the roof repair. Rebecca Howrigan, Chair of the Library Trustee Board, responded that the library roof was repaired in 2017 but was not part of the \$50,000 request at town meeting last year. Those funds were put in escrow for the future of the library. Richard Noel commented that the \$2.1 million is just a proposal, not a given. Shelley clarified, per Richard's request, that .01 on the tax rate generates about \$39,000.00 based on the current grand list. Ty would like to amend this article. Chris Yates isn't sure we can, because it was petitioned. Kyle would like confirmation before anything is amended. Lisa Wells feels we have other things to prioritize before we hand out large amounts of money to the library. Becky Johnson urged people to invest in the library and support its growth and she commended the staff. Joe Depatie added that the new space would not just be a library it will also include a community center and he wanted to hear more info on it. Karen Fortin commented that rural libraries are becoming more and more like community centers, referring to a recent retreat the trustees attended. Libraries are also a safe haven for kids, giving them access to computers. Businesses use libraries to meet with employees, and social service agencies meet with clients. Maurice Parah feels we don't need a community center, noting that towns larger than us, like Fairfax, don't have one. Shelley Laroche reached out to Sarah Jarvis at VLCT. They instructed us to treat this article as we would any other article and that it can be amended. Mary Roy asked for clarification on how much is in the escrow account – just the \$50,000 from last year – yes. Andy King asked about any revenue sources that might be part of the new space. Rebecca said they are not that far into the process but would like to have a space to rent out for parties, baby showers etc., but also be able to offer the space free of charge to scout troops or 4H groups. Heather Cota would like to see more programs for kids and teens, but feels \$2.1 million is just too high. Motion by Ty Choiniere to amend this article down to \$25,000.00. The motion was seconded by Rich Wilkens. Sharon pointed out that earlier in the school budget presentation we saw how much money is spent on Pre-K. Our library does a fantastic job with those children and they reach out to community members of all ages. Keeping our children in safe places if important! Zeb Maskell made a motion to move the question, which was approved by voice vote of 2/3 majority. Kyle asked for a motion to approve the amendment. There was a motion and a second from the floor to approve the amendment down to \$25,000.00. Kyle read the article aloud now at the new amount of \$25,000.00. By a voice vote it was inconclusive – by a show of hands **YES 65 / NO 50 – PASSED.** Article #6 to approve \$25,000.00 to be held in escrow for the Highgate Library & Community Center building fund – **PASSED.**

Article #7 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$278,500 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Capital Improvement Plan, with an estimated \$278,500 to be raised by taxes?

Motion by Chris Yates, seconded by David Roddy. This is not a new budget item. We have voted on the CIP for the last few years. Sharon explained how capital planning benefits our town. Luc Dupuis, Chair of the Planning Commission, went through the CIP chart, shown on page 44 of the town report. Following the 2019 column, you will see that the \$278,500 is made up of; \$10,000.00 storage building; \$15,000.00 replace roadside mower; \$20,000.00 towards replacement of a highway department truck; \$15,000.00 towards the replacement of the Machia Road bridge (B25); \$25,000.00 towards slope stabilization at the transfer station site; \$183,500.00 for the town's match to stabilize the Machia Road slope; and \$10,000.00 towards

the Machia property municipal planning grant. Barb Chevalier asked if we were under budget on other projects and those funds can come back to the voters to be reallocated. Yes, we were under budget \$14,250.00 on the HVFD floor and we were also under budget approximately \$10,000.00 on the sidewalk project. Motion by David Roddy for Heidi Britch-Valenta to speak, as she is not a Highgate resident. The motion was seconded by Chris Shepard – by voice vote – **PASSED**. Heidi confirmed the numbers and it was decided that the \$24,250.00 can be discussed at the end of the meeting under other business. David Rouse feels we really don't have funds left from the sidewalk project because it is always under water on Lamkin Street. Henry added some food for thought about the municipal building roof. It has been leaking for several years and is still not repaired. None of us would let our house roof leak for that long. He does not feel that the \$10,000.00 already set aside is nearly enough. Regardless, he feels the board should get the roof repaired and pay the bill. He asked our Selectboard to be our leaders, and to please lead. Motion by Ryan Maskell to move the question. The motion was seconded by Zeb Maskell. Article #7 by voice vote – **PASSED**.

Article #8 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$764,718 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Highway Fund, with an estimated \$555,651 to be raised by taxes?

Motion by Chris Yates, seconded by Henry Rainville. Chris thanked the Selectboard for attempting to level fund this year's budget but disagrees with how it was done. He believes we owe it to our employees to give them a cost of living increase. Motion by Chris Yates to make an amendment of \$5,645.00 to give a cost of living increase to the highway department employees. The motion was seconded by Andy King. This equates to an increase of just under 4%. Those in favor of amending the article to add \$5,645.00 by voice vote was inconclusive – by a show of hands YES 75 / NO 31 – the amendment **PASSED**. Sue Cota thanked the PWD for their hard work during the flooding and for adding additional lighting in her neighborhood. David Rouse wants to see the department go back to year round five day work weeks and would also like taxpayers to really look at what we are giving town employees for raises. Henry asked about sand and why we are spending so much less in the coming year. With the land donation on Frontage Road also came quite a lot of sand, which has been a huge savings for us. Peter Tinella would like to see the whole road sanded, not just down the middle. Josh LaRocque said they have turned up the spreader speed some but don't want all the material to end up in the ditch. As it melts, the material does make its way to the outside. Mr. Tinella said it has improved some, but is still not good. Mr. Parah had comments about Gore Road and Franklin Road. Josh LaRocque made note of the comments being made. The article has been amended to read *shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$770,363 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Highway Fund, with an estimated \$561,296 to be raised by taxes?* – by voice vote article #8 as amended – **PASSED**.

Article #9 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$1,022,590 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the General Fund, with an estimated \$467,050 to be raised by taxes?

Motion by Chris Yates, seconded by Chris Shepard. Chris Yates made a motion to also amend this budget to include a cost of living increase for all employees, including the library staff. The same percentage, 4%, would add \$7,710.00 to the numbers. The motion was seconded by Andy King. Kelly Rainville would like to make an amendment to this motion and lower it. Claude Chevalier asked for clarification in the town report on what makes up the general fund budget. Shelley referred him to the pages in the town report that show the general fund expenditures and revenues. Mr. Tinella asked when was the last time employees received a cost of living increase and how much it was – last year, and it was 4%. Henry asked if there had been any changes in health care costs. Yes, employees that use the health insurance had to absorb 8-10% increases in their premiums each of the last few years. The town contributes \$750.00 per month towards health care premiums. Chris Clodgo commented that we just guaranteed our public works department a 4% raise, but we aren't going to do the same for the rest? Mr. Tinella spoke that he has gone back and forth on this and said a lot of people are in the same boat, but we have a chance to make it right for our employees, so we should vote this through. Lynn Calderwood asked about those employees that do not take the health insurance. Those who do not take the insurance receive a buyout of \$4,800.00 per year. Lynn asked for clarification that the health insurance costs are only affecting half of the employees, not everyone – correct. David Rouse asked about projected raises already in the budget, using the town clerk's salary as an example. Mr. Rouse was looking at the wrong column. No raises were included in the budget as presented in the town report, as an example, the town clerk's salary as presented was only going up .25 cents for the year. Rich Wilkens urged people to be reasonable, because a raise had already been approved for other employees, and we need to treat them equally. Motion by Zeb Maskell to move the question and vote on the amendment – by voice vote – **PASSED**. John Patnode asked for a better of understanding of the "bad debt" listed on page 56 \$28,500.00. These were the funds due to and paid to MVR as part of the mediation and settlement from the lawsuit. Mr. Patnode did not feel like his questions were being answered. Sharon explained the issue and how we used to pay for dispatching fees in a very confusing way, which will never happen again. Mr. Patnode wanted to know where those funds went if they were part of a previous budget, back in 2011 – 2012. Mr. Patnode noted that last year the town decided to spend surplus funds on the Machia property purchase. Sharon went on to explain that the mistake with short paying MVR was due to an improperly recorded check by a previous treasurer. David Rouse asked about the changes to the town administrator section and the new grant administrator role. He had an issue with the new grant administrator job not being posted publically. David questioned if writing grants was part of the job that was already being done. Sharon answered that one person was

being asked to do too much, so the zoning piece was taken out and a part time employee was hired. The board felt the grant writing piece was being done but not being covered as thoroughly as it should be. So the decision was made to split the jobs of TA / ZA and rework the official duties of both positions. Going to an outside company for grant writing was not feasible. Some grants have costs built in so that the person administering them can bring more funds back to the town than they are even being paid. Sharon used the sidewalk project as an example. We recently got word that we received the \$75,000.00 ADA grant and also a large grant to stabilize the Machia Road bank. Mr. Rouse's point is that the job should have been posted publicly for other to apply. Sharon feels this job requires special skills and the board discussed it at length many times. Keith Ploof asked about law suits the town was involved with and the outcomes / costs involved. MVR – several of the counts were dismissed and it became apparent it was only going to get more expensive so they pushed for mediation and MVR agreed. Article #10 is what came out of that mediation as well as paying the \$28,500.00. Our legal fees for MVR were approximately \$12,000.00. Law suits with Andy Leduc costs were approximately \$10,000.00. The Development Review Board was involved in a suit with Deso / Leduc at a cost of approximately \$10,000.00. And the Elwood property was a health order that is almost settled. The rest are all settled now. The town does not currently own the Elwood property on Lamkin Street, but should soon and then we will be able to sell it. David Roddy commented that Heidi has been very helpful to the school in looking for grants for the generator and the parking lot project. Mr. Patnode proposed an amendment to this article to remove \$21,000.00 from the bad debt line item and use money from surplus that we now have to pay for the bad debt. Shelley stated there is no surplus available that she is aware of. It was voted on last year to use it for the purchase of the Machia property. Motion by Henry Rainville to move the question, seconded by Rich Wilkens. The motion on the floor is to take \$21,000.00 from the "slush fund" and deduct \$21,000.00 from the general fund and take \$21,000.00 from the surplus that we don't have to repay it. By a voice vote – **FAILED**, the amendment was defeated. Motion by Eric Chevalier to move the article, which now reads *shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$1,030,300 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the General Fund, with an estimated \$474,760 to be raised by taxes?* By a voice vote article #9 as amended – **PASSED**.

Article #10 – Shall the Town of Highgate contract with Missisquoi Valley Rescue for all ambulance services under a contract identical to the one to be circulated at Town Meeting Day, with such services beginning on July 1, 2019?

Motion by Richard Flint, seconded by David Rouse. Sue Cota spoke and identified herself as the chairperson of the Highgate Concerned Citizens and she believes MVR deserves to come back to Highgate and serve our town. Skyler Messier also spoke, referring to an incident last week with her husband which MVR treated him and transported him because he refused to call AmCare. Heather Cota also spoke about her experience with both services and response times. Kelly Rainville attended the informational session last week on this as well. Kelly feels that today is the only day that taxpayer voices will be heard. If we vote no it will be back in the Selectboard's hands. She also feels their voices were ignored back in 2016 and feels that we are taking a risk every time AmCare is dispatched to a call because MVR could get there sooner. Sharon pointed out that for today's vote purposes, both dollar amounts with AmCare and MVR are proposed as the same. Both services have wonderful members and very dedicated people. There is a possibility that dispatching fees will be different, but we can't project if that will be the case. Angela Carr spoke regarding her parents who live on US Route 7. MVR is much closer and can respond faster than AmCare. Angela also runs a day care and she would prefer to have the closest service respond. Zeb painted a different picture of MVR. He has always been an MVR supporter, however, a few years ago he lost his mother to cancer. His mom was brought back from St. Albans with a home health care nurse and was transported by MVR. Zeb commented on the unprofessional behavior of MVR personnel and the home health nurse having to ask them for help with the patient. Zeb stated they do not deserve to be put up on a pedestal and should not have an exemption just because they filed a lawsuit and are not the "greatest thing since sliced bread". Lynn Calderwood thanked the board for trying to heal the wound in our community. The Selectboard let the voters know that a letter has already been sent to AmCare that we do not want to auto renew our contract. This would allow for an even playing field and bidding process if today's vote is no. David Rouse feels AmCare runs like a business. When they call for mutual aid they call their own back up instead of the closest service. He would also rather see MVR respond to his place of employment at the border crossing. David feels MVR can respond more quickly. Richard Noel asked for clarity on what a yes or no vote means. YES = we contract with MVR for three years starting 7/1/19 and NO = the ambulance contract for Highgate would go out to bid. Voting yes today means no bidding process. John Patnode added that a yes vote today means we are voting for the contract that is available to look at today, the Selectboard did not mention that part. Yes, the contract is available to look at today on the info table, and it was also available at the informational meeting last week. Kellie Uzell asked if at the end of the MVR contract, would the town then be able to vote Australian ballot? State statute states that the Selectboard has the authority to make decisions on all contracts. There was discussion on an advisory vote. Kelly Rainville again pointed out that she feels today is the only day the board has to listen to the voters opinion. Sharon disagreed because it is the job of the Selectboard to listen to the people. It is their job, but they are not legally constrained to do so. Zeb wanted to know if this article could be amended. No, it cannot be amended, because it is court ordered. The vote from 2016 is in the past – our job today is to vote on the article that is before us. Sharon asked that people vote with their heads and whatever happens we will work with them and be respectful. There was a motion to call the question, which by voice vote was found inconclusive, and by a show of hands **YES 72 – NO 41**, the question has been called.

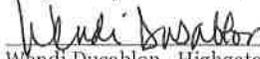
Motion by Ty Choiniere and seconded by George Greenwood to go to a paper ballot vote. Article #10 by paper ballot vote: total votes cast 135 – YES 77 / NO 58 - PASSED.

Article # 11 – To transact any other business legally authorized to be transacted, considered proper and necessary when met.

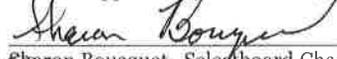
Motion by Chris Yates, seconded by Ryan Maskell. Richard Flint presented David Roddy with his plaque and thanked him for 27 years on the school board. Richard again thanked all three of them, David, Nola and Connie. Between the three of them there have been many meetings and hours spent together all doing great things for our town and school. Sharon would like to vote on the \$24,250.00 that is remaining in the CIP (sidewalk and HVFD floor projects). Henry Rainville would like these funds to be reallocated to fix the municipal building roof. There was a motion and a second from the floor to reallocate these funds towards the municipal roof, which by voice vote – **PASSED**. Jean Chevalier wanted to thank Sharon Bousquet and the Highgate Vol. Fire Department for their great work during the flooding. Liza Comiskey promoted the CPR course being offered through the library. A deposit is required which you will get back when you show up for the class, so it is essentially free. This first class is full but they will offer another one in the summer and hope to do more in the fall. Memorial Day is coming up and community members are always needed to help plan the festivities in town. HVFD is partnering with Swanton Fire and the Red Cross for an event on April 7th installing smoke detectors in homes. This is a free event also and you must register in advance. Ty Choiniere believes we jumped the gun on the last vote regarding the \$24,250.00. He feels that more discussion was needed and there was a lot of celebration and distractions going on. Mr. Tinella stated that no one challenged the chair on the last motion. Lisa Wells is challenging the chair. There was more discussion on the roof. We already have \$10,000.00 in reserve prior to today. David Rouse feels any left over money from the sidewalk project should stay with the sidewalks because of the water issue we are having there. It was noted that last year we approved \$80,000.00 for ADA modifications at the municipal building. We have since been notified that we have received a \$75,000.00 grant towards that project, so whatever is left can be reallocated at next town meeting. Henry would like to take half of what is left from the ADA project and put it towards the roof project this year. Rich Wilkens doesn't want to go into that ADA project money because we may or may not have the surplus, we just won't know until the actual project is done. Everything that we have at this point is based solely on estimates. We won't have firm numbers until things are put out to bid and when bills come in. Henry sees no point in doing the ADA renovations under a roof that is leaking. Henry also feels the board has the right to fix the roof no matter what it costs. We have had a lot of people look at the roof over the years, but have gotten no formal bids to do the work. Ty Choiniere would like to use \$1,000.00 to fix the concrete benches in the park before Memorial Day. Motion by Rich Wilkens to spend \$23,250.00 on the roof and \$1,000.00 to fix the benches. Henry would like \$40,000.00 from the ADA funds in addition to \$23,250.00 left from sidewalk and floor projects for the roof and \$1,000.00 for the benches. Keeping in mind the \$10,000.00 already set aside for the roof, that would be a grand total of \$73,250.00 for roof repairs and \$1,000.00 for fixing the benches. Motion by Henry Rainville to use the \$23,250.00 (overages sidewalk and floor) plus \$40,000.00 from the ADA project to go towards roof repairs, not a whole new roof, and \$1,000.00 to go towards repair of the cement park benches. The motion was seconded by Tim Gingras - by voice vote – **PASSED**. Sharon noted that last year we talked about when we use money from the CIP that we get approval from the voters. We have also applied for grant funding for a new fire truck in the amount of \$100,000.00. If approved, that amount plus what we have in reserve already is enough to purchase a new fire truck. Motion by Eric Chevalier for approval to proceed with the purchase of a new fire truck if the grant funds are received. The motion was seconded by Ryan Maskell. There was further discussion on this. Chris Yates asked to clarify, the board is asking permission to expend funds in the CIP for the fire truck, plus an additional \$100,000.00 if the grant is awarded – yes, that is what is being asked of the voters. Joe Depatie let everyone know our current truck is 30 years old so this is a truck we need, not just want. It is not extravagant in any way, but what we need as a department to serve the community well for many years to come. The motion on the floor is as follows: to allow the Selectboard to use the \$234,272.00 in the CIP that is tagged for a fire truck, if and hopefully when the \$100,000.00 grant funding is awarded and allow the Selectboard to move forward with the purchase of a fire truck – by voice vote – **PASSED**. Chris Yates asked the board to consider starting Town Meeting at 9am next year. The Selectboard was open to that option for 2019 Town Meeting.

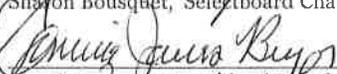
Motion by Chris Shepard to adjourn Town Meeting 2018 @ 5:12pm. The motion was seconded by Zeb Maskell (and everyone else) – by voice vote – **PASSED**.

Respectfully submitted by:


Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by:


Sharon Bousquet, Selectboard Chair


Connie James Beyor, School Board Chair


Kyle Lothian, Moderator