

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Meeting

Thursday, December 5, 2019 @ 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 Sharon Bousquet, Chair @7:02pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members – Sharon Bousquet - Chair; Joshua LaRocque – Vice-Chair; Bruce Butler; Randy Connelly *absent – Richard Flint*

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Admin. & Grant Admin.; Shelley Laroche – Treasurer & DTC (arrived @ 8:05pm)

Public / Other – Alice (Sue) Cota; Woody Rouse; April St. Francis; Corey Parent; Laz Scangas; Ty Choiniere; Randy Brock

B. Public Comment(s)

- Sue Cota reminded folks that shirts left over from the community celebration are still available to purchase for \$10.00 each.

C. Update from Franklin County Senators – Corey Parent & Randy Brock

Senator Corey Parent was present for this update and Senator Randy Brock arrived soon afterwards as well. Water quality was discussed, and Senator Parent noted the progress that is being made. Farmers have a lot of work ahead of them and the State is trying to support them because farmers are not making any money with the price of milk being low. There were questions about spreading manure and how the model we follow is date certain. Injection is becoming more and more common, but the equipment is expensive. Education spending is projected to be up 6% and we need to do something about that! The teacher pension program is still very underfunded. Senator Parent and Senator Brock are very interested in hearing what Highgate needs and how they can help. There was discussion on broadband coverage in the State of Vermont. Cell coverage here in Highgate is lacking, at best. The State has hired someone to work with rural communities to expand broadband. Heidi noted that Senator Parent has also taken a strong lead on the Welcome Center project as you cross the border into Vermont. Tim Smith with FCIDC is also working on this project. The new highway in Canada will be complete in 2021 or 2022 and will create traffic flow directly to the Highgate border crossing. It would be beneficial to catch travelers at a Welcome Center here and promote Franklin County. Currently the first Welcome Center is in Georgia as people are nearing Chittenden County. Proficiency based grading is a big topic in education lately also. Student enrollment in Vermont continues to decline, but costs continue to rise. Creating good paying jobs is needed to have people stay in Vermont. Global warming was discussed, as well as a possible gasoline tax to combat this issue. Senator Brock arrived at 7:20pm and added to the conversation. He touched on issues such as

unemployment rates. Vermont currently has the lowest unemployment rate in the country. Anyone who wants a job can get one. The problem is in terms of the cost of living here in Vermont. He also noted that our student population has declined by 30,000 over the last several decades. Senator Brock also agreed we need to fight the proposed 6% education hike. Property taxes and the climate initiative are the biggest threats to affordability and rural Vermont will be hit hard with both. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and paid family leave are popular topics, but where is the money coming from? The State spends a lot of money on job training programs but needs to do a better job of informing job seekers. Bruce had questions about broadband coverage, noting it has been discussed and promised since the Douglas administration. Senator Brock spoke about a bill that was passed allowing communities to come together to get fiber optics to homes. There is a fund to borrow from at low interest rates and selling subscriptions is how members communities pay it back. Bruce would like to see our community pursue this. Both Senators are willing to facilitate them coming to a meeting and further discuss the possibilities. Health care costs are a concern for everyone. There was discussion on how Medicaid and Medicare affect the big picture, as well as a lack of price transparency in the health care industry. Sharon asked that they be very cautious about unfunded mandates to towns and communities. Bruce made them both aware of the landslide issues we are dealing with (Machia Road and Transfer Station) and the price tags associated with the projects. Heidi added some additional information about these projects and Sue Cota noted the Monument Road bank as another location to be concerned about. There are legislative breakfast events coming up in Franklin County – all begin at 8am: January 13 @ Swanton Village Complex; February 10 @ St. Albans City Hall; March 16 @ Enosburgh Falls High School; April 13 @ BFA Fairfax. The board thanked Senator Parent and Senator Brock for being here for this update.

D. NorthWest Solid Waste District – Rep. April St. Francis

April St. Francis is our representative for the Town of Highgate at NWSWD. She is here to talk trash! The board meets seven times per year. There are nineteen member towns in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties (with the exception of Fairfax). The main site is in Georgia VT, but there are five drop off sites total. ACT148 which is the universal recycling and composting act is in its final stages. Effective July 1, 2020 food scraps will no longer be allowed in the landfill. As a member of the district it gets us outreach education, hazardous waste events and other components. A composting class was held at the Highgate Arena and a school wide assembly was also held for the children. All schools in Franklin County are now composting. NWSWD had a booth at Franklin County Field Days. Barry Domina is the NWSWD enforcement officer and he has been very helpful with illegal burning and dumping issues. April is enjoying the position and is learning more every day. The board thanked April for being here for this update and talking trash with us. 😊

E. ADA Modification Grant Close-Out Hearing

Laz Scangas, architect, was present with an overview of the ADA project. This close-out hearing is a requirement of the grant. Two handicapped parking spaces (one out front, one out back) were added, both bathrooms were made handicapped accessible, several doorways were widened, a door was removed in Heidi's office and replaced with a window (not ADA requirement, but much needed), a ramp was added out front, and the front entryway was reconfigured and made larger. Our building is now compliant.

There were questions about the ramp and why it was made with wood and not concrete. Laz replied that was more cost effective. The wood is very slippery, as has been noted in prior meetings. We have added carpet strips and a rubber mat, which have improved the situation. ADA is required by law, which is why the project was a priority. We received \$92,734.00 from the Vermont Community Development Fund for the ADA improvements and we also had \$50,000.00 in reserves that went towards the project. \$14,000.00 went towards the public works department office and bathroom to deal with asbestos and mold issues. That part of the project is nearly complete, with the exception of some electrical work. Residents can stop by to see the work that has been done. There was an inquiry if we had any capital funds left in reserve from this project – we do not, we used it all.

F. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon

- Minutes - Motion by Randy Connelly to approve the minutes from *November 21, 2019*, as written. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**.
- Holiday Schedule - The Highgate Town Clerk's Office Holiday Schedule will be as follows: Dec. 24 – closed @ noon; Dec. 25, 26, 27 – CLOSED; Dec. 31 – closed @ noon; Jan. 1 – CLOSED. Wendi noted that the town pays us for Dec. 25 and Jan. 1, and any additional time the office is closed we are using our paid time off.
- Town Meeting Day Info – Petitions for warned articles are due to Wendi by Jan. 16th @ 4:30pm with a minimum of 112 registered voter signatures. Petitions for elected offices for your name to appear on the ballot on Town Meeting Day are due to Wendi by Jan. 27th @ 5pm with a minimum of 22 registered voter signatures. The following positions will be on the ballot this year: Moderator (ensuing year); Selectboard 2 year term; Selectboard 3 year term; Lister 3 year term; Cemetery Commissioner 5 year term; Trustee of Trust Funds 3 year term; Library Trustee 5 year term. Absentee ballots for Town Meeting Day can be requested any time by contacting Wendi @ 868-5002 wdusablon@highgatevt.org or stop by the office. We won't have ballots until February, but you can request them at any time.
- Fire Department Elections – HVFD held their annual elections on Nov. 4, 2019. The positions up for election this year were Captain and 2nd Lieutenant. Motion by Josh LaRocque to accept the HVFD elections of Ralph Comiskey as Captain for a three year term and James Manning as 2nd Lieutenant for a two year term. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. These terms will be effective Jan. 1, 2020.
- Upcoming Events – Whoville in Highgate @ HLCC December 6 & 7; Santa Day @ HVFD Dec. 15 from 10am – 2pm; Skate with Santa (ages 8 and under) @ Highgate Sports Arena Dec. 20 6 – 7:15pm; Deck the Homes register by Dec. 16, judging to take place on Dec. 20.

G. Administrator Items – Heidi Britch-Valenta

- FEMA Application – Motion by Bruce Butler to sign the FEMA application. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.
- Better Back Roads Application – Butch met with Jim Smith and they decided to use this to fix what is known as site #10 on the storm water issue inventory – on the Rollo Road (Fortin Farm). This will involve a culvert upgrade, some ditching and they will try to remove some ledge to have more drainage flow. The total grant

project is \$51,254.27. Motion by Bruce Butler to approve this application. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.

- Machia Road Design Estimates – We currently have \$734,800.00 in grant funding with a match of \$183,700.00. The project came in higher, at \$1,319,098.00. We are eligible to apply for the same grant, we can't amend what we already received, we have to reapply. We are a good candidate to get the balance, but will have the same percentage of matching funds. This would mean an additional \$80,000.00 for our match. We have set aside \$50,000.00 already and it would be an estimated 3-5 years out. We are in good shape with the funds we already have set aside. A budgeting meeting has been warned for next week, December 10 @ 6pm. Motion by Josh LaRocque to pursue the stormwater grant. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.
- Machia Road Weight Limit – More information is in the Selectboard packet. The topic is now back in their court if they wish to pursue a weight limit on Machia Road. There was discussion on who is exempt and who would enforce this. Heidi will continue to get more information.
- Other Updates – The Village Core Master Plan committee (VCMP) selected Otter Creek Consulting for the water water study, which is funded by an ANR Planning Advance of \$30,000.00. The Otter Creek proposal came in \$3,000.00 higher than the grant. Extra funds will be available to us and the VCMP committee voted to move forward and wanted a robust proposal. Bruce commented that, to be clear, this is a loan, to be paid back if we move to construction. Woody spoke about ways to offset costs. Heidi noted that costs were added in, in case public works doesn't have the time to help with the project. The extra \$1,400.00 would not be utilized if public works can dig the hole. The loan would have to be paid back if we start construction and on what components we start construction on, or if we sell the property, we would build that into the sale. We would pay back proportionate to anything we construct. The ANR planning advance can be used as our match for this project. \$12,845.00 will cover the archeological study and outreach to gather information and to help us with presentations and gathering information for public presentations. Heidi is asking for signatures on both documents. Motion by Bruce Butler to hire Otter Creek Engineering for the VCMP wastewater feasibility study. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**. Randy had questions about how Otter Creek was chosen. The VCMP committee interviewed all four firms and ranked them. Motion by Randy Connelly to sign the contract for the \$12,845.00 award. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**. Motion by Randy Connelly for Heidi to also sign this document. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**. Heidi also gave an update on HAIS (Highgate Airport Infrastructure Study). The group is working with Aldrich & Elliott and also with Economic Policy Resources to look at waste water solutions at the airport and the economic advantages. There will be another meeting in January with HAIS with a 90% draft report and they would then like to do a joint presentation with the Swanton Village Trustees at our February 6 meeting. Our February 20 meeting will be our pre-Town Meeting Informational Session.

H. Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche

- Check Warrants – Motion by Randy Connelly to sign the check warrants. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

- Other Updates – Shelley has met with all departments and is putting things together for the budgeting session on Dec. 10. Tax collection has been steady and there are still a few people on the tax sale list. The attorneys will be doing title searches next week and we will move forward. Come in to set up a plan if you have not already! No date has been set for the tax sale. Shelley also reached out to the bond bank. If a land slide should occur, we would be eligible to apply. Also, if we received FEMA funds we could also apply to the bond bank for funding for our match, if needed.

I. Recreation Department Update

Ty Choiniere gave a brief recreation update. Milton High School is in their new locker room space and are very happy. Ty has spoken with the Milton High School Athletic Director as well as some players and things are going well. The board had a few questions about the Zamboni work. Josh asked about revenue trends and booked hours for ice time compared to last year. Ty and Mark Gilbert will both be going to the St. Albans Skating Association (SASA) board meeting on Sunday night. SASA is currently not renting as much ice time in Highgate, they are having to travel to Rouses Point. There was brief discussion about available ice time in Highgate, particularly on Saturday mornings. Ty will know more on Sunday night after the SASA meeting.

J. Selectboard Items

- Food Drive – Chief Taylor from SAPD has asked the Town of Highgate to participate in their annual food drive to benefit Martha’s Kitchen. Motion by Josh LaRocque to participate in the food drive and have a drop off station here at the Highgate Town Clerk’s Office. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**
- Other Business – Ty noted that petitions are out for Town Meeting, which brings up a topic he has brought up before. Both the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer positions are currently on the same three-year rotation and up for election at the same time. Ty is asking the Selectboard to consider a warned article to change one of the terms, for just one cycle, to a four-year term to get them staggered. The Selectboard can choose to add this to the warning, and if not, Ty is prepared to petition it to be placed on the warning. He feels it is important to get the terms staggered. It would be unlikely, but could happen, that both the clerk and treasurer could be voted out at the same time, which would put the town in a vulnerable place. The current clerk and treasurer act as each other’s assistants. Motion by Josh LaRocque for the position of town clerk to be placed as a four year term, one time only, on the ballot in 2022, in an effort to get the terms of Clerk and Treasurer staggered. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**

K. Upcoming Events

Dec. 6 + 7		Whooville in Highgate @ HLCC
Dec. 10	6pm	Selectboard Exec. Session – budgeting
Dec. 12	6pm	DRB Mtg. – CANCELLED no applications received by the deadline
Dec. 15	10am – 2pm	Santa Day @ HVFD
Dec. 17	6pm	Planning Commission Mtg.
Dec. 20		DECK THE HOMES – register by Dec. 16
Dec. 20	6-7:15pm	Skate with Santa @ Highgate Arena

Holiday Office Schedule: Dec. 24 – closed @ noon; Dec. 25, 26, 27 - CLOSED
Dec. 31 – closed @ noon; Jan. 1 – CLOSED

Note: Selectboard Meetings beginning January 2, 2020 will start @ 6:30pm

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit the regular Selectboard meeting @ 8:53pm. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.

L. Executive Session

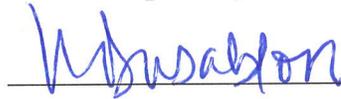
Motion by Sharon Bousquet to enter into executive session @ 8:53pm with Heidi Britch-Valenta and Ty Choiniere to discuss a personnel issue where premature general public knowledge would place the town and / or the individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit executive session @ 9:25pm. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**.

M. Adjournment

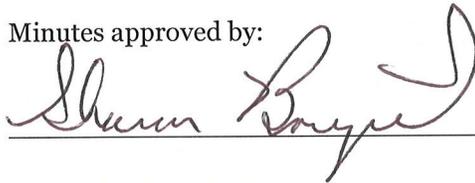
Motion by Sharon Bousquet to adjourn the meeting @ 9:25pm. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:



Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes approved by:



Sharon Bousquet – Chair, Highgate Selectboard