

TOWN OF HIGHGATE Selectboard Meeting

Thursday, August 20, 2020 @ 6:30pm
@ Highgate Sports Arena

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated

Join Zoom Meeting from your computer
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/96636431042>
Or by phone – Free Conference Call
Dial in # 425-436-6365 Access code 188557

A. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

The in-person Selectboard meeting / video conference call / phone conference call meeting was called to order by Sharon Bousquet, Chair @ 6:34pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, changes to open meeting law allowed for this meeting to take place in various ways. The meeting was held at the Highgate Sports Arena for proper physical distancing for those who wanted to attend in-person. Zoom video or conference call was also available.

Highgate Selectboard Members – Sharon Bousquet - Chair; Bruce Butler – Vice Chair; Richard Flint; Kyle Lothian; Vern Brosky III

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche – Treasurer & Delinquent Tax Collector

Community Members / Others Participating – Kellie Uzell; Merry Souza; Butch Brosseau; Alice S. Cota; Krisy & Lucas Tatro; Randall Connelly; Ty Choiniere; Richard Noel; Joseph Depatie; Shaun Coleman (Zoom video); Sean Kio (Zoom video); John Bruzzi – VSP (conference call)

B. Public Comment(s)

- Sue Cota reminded everyone to please walk around their properties and check for hornets. Sue also said the State is still working towards repairing the bank on Monument Road this year.
- Krisy and Lucas Tatro were present as well as Randy Connelly. Krisy is the athletic director and physical education teacher at Highgate Elementary School. She received an email recently from the Recreation Commission that the 5/6 grade soccer teams at the Highgate School would not be allowed to use the fields at the arena complex. The Tatros, and also Mr. Connelly, felt that the decision was preemptive and that a discussion should have taken place first. Mrs. Tatro feels that this is taking opportunities away from the children in a time when a lot of things have been taken away already. Ty Choiniere, Chair of the Recreation Commission, stated that the decision was made based on overuse of the fields over the past several months. He also noted that there are other fields that can be used. There was discussion on the location of the fields in question. It was decided to warn a special meeting of the Selectboard and the Recreation Commission along with invited guests to take place at the Highgate Sports Arena on Monday, August 24th @ 6:30pm. This meeting will

be open to the public and warned as such. Sharon will be running late and Vern cannot make this meeting on 8/24.

C. Vermont State Police Update

John Bruzzi from VSP participated by conference call. It is noted for the record that it was difficult to hear everything Mr. Bruzzi was saying. There was discussion on what happens when a resident calls 911 and how that works. Kellie Uzell had questions for him regarding recent incidents in Highgate where VSP did not show up and there was no follow up. He will look into this for Kellie. He did note that the call regarding four people entering the Machia property house was responded to between 1-2am when they were finished with another incident on Carter Hill Rd. Community involvement was stressed with regard to all issues we are facing in our community and in others. ATV issues are everywhere, particularly now with people being bored during the COVID-19 pandemic. Troopers can be contacted via email also – firstname.lastname@vermont.gov is the format to be used. The board thanked John and VSP for all they do in our community and appreciated the update.

D. NRPC – Communications Union District (CUD)

Shaun Coleman and Sean Kio participated via Zoom for this discussion. Shaun and Sean gave some background on why CUDs have been started throughout VT. The Governor signed H.958 to allow municipalities to form a CUD by a vote of the governing body at a regular open meeting during the state of emergency. This is in an effort to bring high-quality, high-speed and reliable internet access to communities in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. There is no direct cost to taxpayers. The funds used are not tax based, they are revenue based. There was discussion on how internet access is so important in this time of remote learning, remote working, and telehealth appointments. It is possible that space will be required on our tower here in Highgate. Motion by Kyle Lothian for Highgate to join the Communications Union District. The motion was seconded by Vern Brosky III – **APPROVED**. Highgate will need to nominate a representative to attend the meetings, which are being held weekly on Wednesdays at 4:30pm.

E. Public Works Department – Butch Brosseau

- Paving is complete along with the shoulder work. Pike did a nice job for us on the paving and it looks great!
- They will be trucking winter sand soon, as well as doing some more ditching and tree work. We have plenty of sand for this upcoming winter season but will have to budget for more sand or excavate more from our site. Heidi will pursue further info with ACT250 on what permitting is required and if we will be allowed to excavate more sand on the town owned property.
- Richard Flint praised the public works department for the great job they do.
- Rollo Road project bids: Butch Brosseau, Richard Noel and Richard Flint presented the bids received for the Rollo Road project. We have a grant for \$14,760.00 and there are stormwater matching funds in the CIP. If the town decides not to move forward with this large project (over 1600' of road) we can reduce the scope of work. Heidi met with Richard, Richard and Butch to open the bids after the deadline but prior to this Selectboard meeting. The bids were as follows: Avery Excavating \$66,614.00; Beulac Excavating / Palmer Construction \$64,150.00; Dirt Tech \$59,491.96; Doug Rollo Excavating \$38,551.89; Gillilan & Sons Excavating

\$33,862.00; Goodhue Excavating \$32,970.00; Kings Trucking & Construction \$44,450.00. Richard Noel recommended doing the whole project and if need be the voters can replenish that line item at town meeting in the CIP. It was also noted that this project addresses three sites listed on the road inventory list. Motion by Richard Flint to contract with Goodhue Excavating in the amount of \$32,950.00 and to use the grant in the amount of \$14,760.00 with the remainder to come from the CIP line item for stormwater matching funds. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**. Goodhue will be able to complete the project by the October 15th deadline.

F. HVFD Update – Chief, Joe Depatie

- HVFD has been attending many more calls than normal, noting an increase in vehicle accidents.
- Some older members of the department are still nervous about COVID-19. They are meeting on Monday nights, but keeping the meetings short at one hour maximum. Masks, temperature checks, vehicle sanitizing and keeping things clean is being taken very seriously. Liza applied for a grant for HVFD to access more personal protective equipment (PPE).
- The trucks are doing alright. E2 had a ground wire issue that was dealt with. The new truck, according to Dan Desorcie, will be here sometime in November.
- HVFD is revising their bylaws and a draft was sent to the Selectboard to review, as well as to the town attorney for review. Joe would like to continue this conversation in executive for personnel issues.
- Joe was not aware the town had a solid waste and burning ordinance. Sharon asked HVFD as well as any other town employee or volunteer to not put themselves in danger when dealing with calls and difficult and / or unsafe situations.

G. Recreation Update

Ty Choiniere was present for this update.

- Ty would like to have an executive session discussion with the board at the end of Monday night's meeting to discuss personnel. This will be after the public portion of the meeting discussed earlier during public comment.
- Five bids were received for the yearly contract for HVAC service maintenance at the arena: Climate Systems Inc \$980.00; New England Air Systems #1,770.00; Vermont Mechanical \$1,800.00; Vermont Heating & Ventilating \$2,152.00; Control Technologies \$2,976.00. The Recreation Commission would like to recommend CSI. Motion by Richard Flint to approve the recommendation of Climate Systems Inc. (CSI). The motion was seconded by Kyle Lothian – **APPROVED**. Ty will notify CSI of the board's decision.
- Ty will notify the Recreation Commission of the public meeting on Monday at 6:30pm with an executive session to follow regarding personnel.

H. Health Officer – Merry Souza

2020 has been a busy and challenging year. Merry Souza, Health Officer, and her husband Richard, Deputy Health Officer, have been very busy dealing with landlord / tenant issues, composting issues (new law took effect on 7/1/20), dog bites, illegal burns, and more. Merry noted that the compost law is so new that nobody knows how to deal with it. It is suggested that towns develop their own policies or ordinances. Merry

continues to work on trash issues at specific properties in town. Sharon advised Merry and her husband to not go to any properties that they do not feel safe. No situation is worth their safety, referring to a situation in the village last year where Merry was threatened. Merry noted that David Murrish with the State of VT has also visited some of these properties. Kyle recommended some fire boots for Merry to protect her on the site visits. Joe Depatie can help out with this. There was discussion on structures being taken down without proper state permits. There is an education and outreach officer with NWSWD should be able to help us get more info out to our residents. Merry works with Wendi a lot to get information and appreciates her timely responses. The board thanked Merry and Richard Souza for the job they do and how well they are doing it!

I. Treasurer – Shelley Laroche

- Motion by Bruce Butler to approve the check warrants. The motion was seconded by Vern Brosky III – **APPROVED.**
- Tax sale letters went out to those who are not on a payment plan or not communicating with Shelley. The letters seem to be working!
- An additional \$4,092.31 has been collected since her last delinquent tax update.
- Motion by Bruce Butler to approve the tax rates for 2020-2021 as follows:
Total Homestead Rate \$1.7604 (town 0.3714 / school 1.3890)
Total Non-Homestead Rate \$1.9537 (town 0.3714 / school 1.5823)
 The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED.** For comparison purposes the rates for 2019-2020 were \$1.7173 and \$1.8711.

Town of Highgate, VT			
2020-2021			
Tax Rates			
<u>HOMESTEAD</u>		<u>NON-HOMESTEAD</u>	
<i>Education</i>	1.3890	<i>Education</i>	1.5823
<i>General Fund</i>	0.1107	<i>General Fund</i>	0.1107
<i>Highway Fund</i>	0.1639	<i>Highway Fund</i>	0.1639
<i>Capital Fund</i>	0.0923	<i>Capital Fund</i>	0.0923
<i>Town Mtg. Article #4</i>	0.0018	<i>Town Mtg. Article #4</i>	0.0018
<i>Veterans Exemptions</i>	0.0027	<i>Veterans Exemptions</i>	0.0027
TOTAL HOMESTEAD		TOTAL NON-HOMESTEAD	
TAX RATE	1.7604	TAX RATE	1.9537

2020 2021 tax rates approved by the Highgate Selectboard on August 20, 2020
 Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) = 102.89%
 last updated December 23, 2019

J. Town Clerk – Wendi Dusablon

- Motion by Richard Flint to approve the site visit minutes from August 6, 2020 and the regular meeting minutes from August 6, 2020 – both as written. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**.
- The State Primary Election on August 11th was very busy – with a total of 610 Highgate voters casting their ballots. 393 of those were via absentee, 217 at the polls. For comparison purposes, in 2018 only 385 people voted total in the State Primary Election. So those white post cards sent out about absentee voting had a positive impact. For the November General Election, ALL ACTIVE VOTERS on the State of VT checklist will receive an absentee ballot towards the end of September / beginning of October. Polls will still be open in Highgate on Nov. 3rd at Highgate Arena from 7am – 7pm for those who wish to vote in person. If you show up to vote, please either bring your ballot with you, or you will be asked to sign an affidavit regarding what happened to the ballot that was sent by mail.
- The part-time position in the listers office is posted until Friday, August 28th. Please submit your letter of interest by that date.
- The part-time Zoning Administrator position closes tomorrow, Friday, August 21st.
- Sharon reminded everyone to please be polite and make an appointment at the town offices. Please DO NOT pound on the front door demanding to be seen or heard. The staff at the office is more than accommodating and wants to help everyone, so please call ahead, 868-5002.

K. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta

- We have three AOT grant applications still pending with AOT since early Spring.
- The stormwater grant that funds the Machia Road slide project will be opening up. We are desperately short on that project, so Heidi will be watching for that and will put an application before the board.
- The Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) is open and has gone through several concepts. The VCMP is in a better position to apply for a different planning grant with more funding. The Rec. Commission is not in a position to take on a project right now. Heidi would like to apply for the MPG to cover the balance of what the PC & DRB need to look at economic development strategies. This was already partially funded with a USDA grant. There is a 10% match and we can use the USDA grant as our match. Motion by Bruce Butler to apply for the MPG to be used for this purpose. The motion was seconded by Vern Brosky III – **APPROVED**. Heidi has consultant proposals to discuss with the board in executive session under contract negotiations.

L. Selectboard Items

- The posting date has passed regarding the Cherry Hill property being sold to Fish & Wildlife. The deed is with F&W and they want to sign it first. There will be a resolution for our board which should be available by the next meeting.
- Sharon stated that F&W will be doing a treatment for sea lamprey and a schedule has been posted for our area for the week of Sept. 28th. During the days leading up to and following the treatment, the water in the advisory areas cannot be used for drinking, domestic use, fishing, swimming, irrigation or livestock watering.
- There was discussion about securing the buildings on the VCMP property (former Machia property).

M. Upcoming Events

Selectboard / Recreation Mtg.	6:30pm	August 24	Arena
VCMP Mtg.	6pm	August 25	Town Offices
Selectboard Mtg.	6:30pm	September 3	Arena
Recreation Comm. Mtg.	5:30pm	September 8	Arena
DRB Mtg.	6pm	September 10	Town Offices

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit the regular Selectboard meeting @ 8:48pm. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED.**

N. Executive Session

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to enter into executive session @ 8:48pm with Joe Depatie and Heidi Britch-Valenta to discuss personnel, contracts and legal, where premature general public knowledge would place the town and/or the individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Bruce Butler to exit executive session @ 10:15pm. The motion was seconded by Kyle Lothian – **APPROVED.**

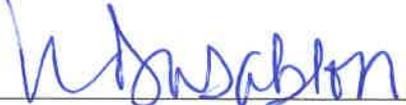
Motion by Bruce Butler to request \$25,000.00 from Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation (FCIDC) towards the Airport Infrastructure Project. The motion was seconded by Vern Brosky III – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Bruce Butler to seek agreements with Aldrich & Elliott (A&E) and Economic & Policy Resources (EPR) for up to \$5,000.00 each. The motion was seconded by Vern Brosky III – **APPROVED.**

O. Adjournment

Motion by Richard Flint to adjourn the meeting @ 10:22pm. The motion was seconded by Kyle Lothian – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by:

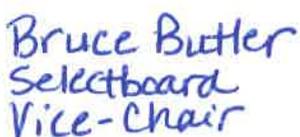


Wendi Dusablon
Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes Approved by:



Sharon Bousquet
Selectboard Chair


Bruce Butler
Selectboard
Vice-Chair