

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Mtg. & Pre-Town Meeting Info Session

March 2, 2017 @ 7:00pm

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 Chris Yates, Chair @ 7:00pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members –Chris Yates, Chair; Sharon Bousquet, Vice-Chair; Randy Connelly; Josh LaRocque; Bruce Butler (arrived @ 7:06pm)

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta, Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche, Town Treasurer

Public / Other – Alice S. Cota; Sandra Stone; Jean Chevalier; John Patnode; Joyce LaFar; Steve LaFar; Keith Ploof; Karen Fortin; Jen Dusablon; Chris Uzell; Lynn Calderwood; Henry Rainville; Andy King; Eric Chevalier; Faith Brashear; Kyle Lothian; Sarah Chevalier; Richard J. Noel; Brian Rowell

B. Public Comments

None

C. 2017 Town Meeting Informational Session

Chris read aloud the town articles from the 2017 Town Meeting Warning, each was followed by questions and comments from the public.

Article #1 – To elect the following town officers

These are on Australian ballot. A Moderator for the ensuing year; One Town Agent for the term of one (1) year; One Selectboard Member for the term of two (2) years; One Selectboard Member for the term of two (2) years remaining on a three (3) year term; One Selectboard Member for a term of three (3) years; One Lister for the term of three (3) years; One Trustee of Trust Funds for a term of three (3) years; One Library Trustee for a term of five (5) years; One Cemetery Commissioner for a term of five (5) years.

There were no questions or comments.

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

There were no questions or comments.

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

It was noted that this was a petitioned article to be placed on the warning this year. Joyce LaFar asked if any funds were in escrow already. Karen Fortin was present and noted this is the first time they have asked for this and there will be a presentation on the library on Town Meeting Day. This is not part of the Capital Improvement Plan and for many reasons the library trustees feel they would like to either have a new facility or renovate what they have.

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

There was extensive discussion on this article which included questions about the septic, drainage and if there were any specific plans for this property. The Selectboard does not have specific plans for it, but there are several possibilities. The properties are in the center of our village, which is why they are appealing to be purchased by the town. Previous boards have tried to purchase the property as well. This board reached out to Keith Machia and there have been lengthy discussions. If the town purchases these properties and the fencing comes down, the board hopes the ideas for the future will come from the community. There were questions about the \$250,000 and where that comes from. The funds are in the General Fund checking account. We keep a comfortable reserve, which is one reason we don't borrow money in anticipation of taxes every year. The auditors feel our reserve balance is a good amount to have. The funds could be replenished by either the sale of our current library or by other means, such as the solar projects coming into town. It will be repaid, but not from taxes. Brian Rowell had further questions about what makes up that reserve fund – VELCO funds, Transfer Station funds, Swanton Village funds? Those are all revenue sources for the town, and they all go to the same place. Steve LaFar had questions about the way the article is written. The language came directly from the town attorney. Eric Chevalier asked about the negotiated price. We have signed a contract with Mr. Machia with two contingencies 1) an approved town meeting vote and 2) a phase one environmental study be done on the property at the sellers expense. Henry Rainville is for this article, and noted we need to look at other parcels the town already owns to see if we can part with them and get them back on the tax rolls. We will be able to enter into a Brownsfield program, if necessary, for clean up if we use the consultants from NRPC. Lynn Calderwood asked about the other articles further down the warning (#10, #11 & #12) and if the sale of those parcels would pay for the purchase price of article #4. No, they will not. If article #4 is approved it will be everyone working together, voters, Planning Commission and Selectboard to decide how to best use the site(s). Randy Connelly would like to see a committee put in place to guide the process.

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

Jen Dusablon was present from Franklin County Home Health, where she has been employed for twenty years. This was a petitioned article, due to the change in our appropriations policy. Jen felt that was a wise move on the town's part. In 2016 FCHH provided services to 90 Highgate residents and the cost of those services was \$355,000.00. They are asking for support from Highgate to continue helping people stay in their homes and feel safe, while getting the care they need. Jen was thanked for what FCHH does in the community.

Article #6 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$10,000 to be utilized for Franklin County Sheriff's Office directed investigations?

We have dealt with an increase of drug activity and property related crime in our community. The town would like to work with FCSO to curtail that behavior. Extra funds would be needed to support directed patrols without compromising our contracted hours. All communities are facing the same challenges we are. Our quality of life will suffer if we don't deal with it and try to stay ahead of it. Chris suggests that any funds that we use each year for these directed patrols, that we replenish the amount to keep funds available for this purpose. It was noted that FCSO offers a property watch service if you are going to be away from your property. This is a free service that they will check on your property while they are on patrol in Highgate. It was also noted that all of our FCSO patrol hours are not at night, but we do not publish the schedule for a reason. We currently have a three year contract with a one year extension with FCSO, so we are two years into a four year contract. The upcoming fiscal year contract costs \$62,142.00.

Article #7 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$252,667 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Capital Improvement Plan, with an estimated \$252,667 to be raised by taxes?

The CIP includes \$10,000 for municipal roof repairs; \$40,000.00 towards purchasing a new fire truck; \$60,000.00 to repair the fire department floor; \$12,667.00 towards a new mower; \$80,000.00 for ADA modifications at the municipal building; and \$50,000.00 to (hopefully) complete our town's financial responsibility for the replacement of the Machia Road bridge. There were questions on the roof and what the issue are. The problems are in the valleys with the initial installation being done incorrectly. The installer is no longer in business. The fire truck to be replaced is a 1988 and it is an issue of reliability. The NFPA regulates a cycle of 30 years that a truck can be run. This is our front line pumper. There was lengthy discussion and opinions on the fire department floor. Tim Hardy, structural engineer was here in February to discuss the results of what he found and observed. \$60,000.00 was put in the CIP for a full replacement of the floor, which Mr. Hardy does not feel is necessary. The RFP has not yet been issued and we will not have firm numbers on the fix prior to the vote at on March 7th. We need to fix this properly, as the fire department will be located in the same place for a number of years to come. The road mower is a 1974 model. This would not be used to maintain sidewalks in the future. This is actually a tractor that does not include a mower, so the wording should be changed on the spreadsheet. The Planning Commission will be present at Town Meeting to discuss the CIP as well as ADA modifications. These include the entrances (front and back) as well as the restrooms. This \$50,000.00 for the Machia Road bridge should be the final amount for our town portion. The rest is already set aside. That replacement will hopefully begin in April 2018. The state is working on purchasing the Ron Machia property on the corner (apartment building) as part of this project.

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

Shelley confirmed that the General Fund is down \$13,925.00 from last year's article. There were no questions or comments on article #8.

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

Shelley confirmed that the Highway Fund is up \$1,835.00 from last year's article. Brian had questions about replacing equipment, that is included in the CIP. There are no trucks to replace this year. Brian had questions on how much money the transfer station generated this past year. Those funds go into the General Fund and are shown on page 49 of the town report, \$59,615.48. Andy King added that some towns contract out the mowing services and find it economical. Lynn Calderwood expressed concern about contamination between towns of poisonous wild parsnip. It is very dangerous, especially for children. Richard Noel stated if you mow it early enough you can eliminate it.

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

This is a swampy property and Jean Chevalier wants voters to be aware we won't make big bucks on this. John Patnode asked about appraisals on the property. We have lister card information, which is public record. This property is only accessible from the river. Sharon added that she was part of the committee that chose these three properties to vote on this year. They were chosen from the overall list of town parcels and we will see how the voters feel about selling them. These properties are not of great use to the town.

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

This property is located up behind Frog Pond and wraps around the Dufresne property. Mr. Dufresne is one person who could benefit from owning this, or Mr. Russo that owns the restaurant. There are power lines that run through

there also. There are no dollar amounts attached to these parcels if we decide to sell them. Mr. Dufresne is looking to increase his acreage to put in a third home.

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

This property will likely only be of use to either the Catholic cemetery or the property owner on the other side.

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

Anything budget related would not be moved, just public questions that require a yes / no answer. This would not include any articles pertaining to the school side of the warning.

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

This is a slight change, giving four additional days to taxpayers. We have historically had a due date of October 27th, but from an accounting standpoint the 1st or 15th of the month makes much more sense.

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

If all articles pass as written, the town tax rate would be .3308 (last year was .2562). Henry would like to see a safeguard for future purchases that it goes back to the voters again before purchasing. He feels voters are being taken out of the picture. Shelley noted that funds not spent in the CIP stay there until the voters decide where it should go. Bruce Butler commented that he does not believe the CIP is an authorization to expend funds. Brian disagrees, noting that a truck was purchased without voter approval. We have a policy in place with regard to the CIP. Shelley is not sure if that policy includes what Henry is asking about. Andy commented that a town that has a CIP in place demonstrates that they are looking to manage their money. Chris pointed out that the school has a reserve fund, and there are no safe guards in place for that. We currently pay interest on the arena bond 2.5% (Shelley will double check), but had we set aside funds in prior years we would not have had to borrow. That is the purpose of a CIP. Richard Noel asked how much one cent on the tax rate generates – on our current grand list \$39,331.69. It was also noted that the education rate is what really drive the tax rate. Richard Noel spoke emotionally about his love for this town and his appreciation for those that step up to serve on the Selectboard, past and present. Much of what the board does goes unappreciated and they are often just a dartboard. He stated that we need to look forward while maintaining our agricultural base. We need to make some improvements, and he feels our village looks "kind of doggy". Richard's final comment was that he wants to change our town to *Highgate* instead of *Bitchgate*.

That concluded the 2017 Pre-Town Meeting Informational Session. The Selectboard then moved on to the regular Selectboard meeting.

D. Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche

1. Check warrants

There were no questions on the check warrants.

E. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon

1. Minutes from Feb. 16th

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the minutes from *February 16, 2017*, as written. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED.**

2. Town Meeting Day Updates

Tuesday, March 7th @ 10am – polls will be open 7am – 7pm for Australian ballot voting. We are all set with election workers. Absentee ballots and

town reports are available any time. HVFD and auxiliary will be hosting lunch for \$7.00 per person in the cafeteria.

3. Catering Approval List - 2017

This is a list of caterers from prior years that submit catering permit requests to the town for events that involve serving alcohol. The board approves Wendi signing off on these requests throughout the year, as they are time sensitive and she only sees the board twice per month. Chris read aloud from the list which includes: Boyden Valley Winery; Saxtons River Distillery; Stonebrook dba: Dairy Center (Lise Gates); JW Ryans Pub, Inc.; American Flatbread Company; McKees Pub; Yebba Inc. dba: The Abbey Restaurant & Pub; Jeffs Maine Seafood; Twiggs VT, LLC. Motion by Chris Yates to authorize the Town Clerk to sign the catering permit requests for those listed. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED.**

4. Rabies Clinic – March 18th

Saturday, March 18th from 10am – noon at the Highgate fire station. We will vaccinate several hundred animals and license almost as many. We have licensed 225 dogs so far this year, last year we licensed 850, so we have quite a ways yet to go!

5. 2017 Liquor License Renewals – Joey’s Jct.

Motion by Chris Yates to enter into the liquor control board @ 8:45pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.** Motion by Chris Yates to sign the renewals for Joey’s Junction one 1st class permit and one outside consumption permit. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.** Motion by Chris Yates to re-enter the regular Selectboard meeting @ 8:47pm. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED.**

6. Appointed Positions

Letters of interest are due by March 14th for anyone interested in being appointed to a position on the list. The list from last meeting was amended to include the Finance Committee and Parks & Recreation Committee. The full list is below.

Date of postings: Feb. 23, 2017 – UPDATED LIST

The Town of Highgate Selectboard will be accepting letters of interest with regard to the following list of appointed positions. Interested Highgate residents should submit their letter of interest to Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk, by 4:30pm on Tuesday, March 14, 2017. Appointments will be made at the regularly scheduled Selectboard meeting on Thursday, March 16th.

Please contact Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk, with any questions, 868-4697 x201 or w.dusablon@highgatevt.org

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|---|--------------------|
| • <i>Delinquent Tax Collector</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Tree Warden</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Animal Control Officer</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Asst. Animal Control Officer</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Deputy Health Officer</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>NorthWest Regional Planning Comm. Rep.</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>NorthWest Regional Planning Comm. Rep.</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Transportation Advisory Committee Rep.</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Clean Water Advisory Committee</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>NorthWest Solid Waste District Rep.</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Finance Committee</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Parks & Recreation Committee</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Parks & Recreation Committee</i> | <i>1 year term</i> |
| • <i>Development Review Board</i> | <i>3 year term</i> |
| • <i>Development Review Board</i> | <i>3 year term</i> |
| • <i>Planning Commission</i> | <i>3 year term</i> |

more information on these positions can be found at <https://www.secc.state.vt.us/> or <http://www.mrpcvt.com/>

F. Town Administrator Items – Heidi Britch-Valenta

1. Rise VT Grant Application

The Parks & Rec. Committee expressed interest in using the \$3,000.00 remaining grant funds for a shuffleboard court. Heidi got some estimates and the concrete alone 60' x 6' would be close to \$3,000.00. She is not sure if that is the right fit. Rise VT's goal is to get people up and moving in their community. There was discussion on how to use these grant funds, and a lot of interest was expressed in improving the walking path around the school and arena complex.

2. Sidewalk Committee Rep.

The Planning Commission has agreed to be the driving force behind the steering committee that will drive the Lamkin Street sidewalk project. This project will hopefully begin next construction season. Sharon would like to be the representative from the Selectboard on this committee.

3. Misc.

- Heidi noted that Swanton Village will have some equipment for sale in the near future that we may be interested in to maintain sidewalks. Joyce LaFar had questions about town liability associated with the sidewalk project. There was also some discussion on sharing equipment with the school, which was originally the thought, but the school no longer feels that is an option. Franklin still shares their sidewalk equipment with the school. There was further discussion on this topic, which included homeowners maintaining the section in front of their homes. This is done in larger cities where everyone has sidewalks in front of their home, which is not the case here.

G. Selectboard Items

1. FireProTec Proposal for Upgrades

There are still remaining questions, so this is not finalized.

2. Misc.

- Josh updated the board on the White Tails Unlimited banquet to be held at the arena facility in September. There were questions about a small smoking section outside. The building is a non-smoking facility, inside and out, per our town ordinance. We need to look at the ordinance to see if it allows the board to make a decision involving individual events on town property. If not, we may need to amend the ordinance for this type of situation.

H. Upcoming Events

March 7	10am	Town Meeting @ Highgate Elem. Polls open 7am-7pm for voting!
March 9	6pm	DRB Mtg.
March 16	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
March 18	10-12	Rabies Clinic @ HVFD
March 21	6pm	Planning Comm. Mtg.

I. Executive Session

Motion by Chris Yates to enter into executive session @ 9:08pm for contract and legal discussions, where premature general public knowledge would place the town or the individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED.** Motion by Chris Yates to exit executive session @ 9:47pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.**

J. Adjournment

Motion by Chris Yates to adjourn the meeting @ 9:48pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by,

_____ Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by,

_____ Christopher Yates - Chair, Highgate Selectboard