

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Mtg.

May 19, 2016 @ 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 Chair Chris Yates @ 7:01pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members – Chris Yates, Chair; Randy Connelly; Josh LaRocque; Sharon Bousquet; Paulette Tatro, Vice Chair (arrived @ 8:02pm)

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta, Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche, Town Treasurer (arrived @ 8:20pm)

Public / Other – Janice Smith; Lori Olds; Sue Cota; Jean Chevalier; Mary Roy; Matt Roy; Amanda Davis; Joshua Aldrich; Michelle Raymo; Lori Choiniere; Vivian Brow; Daniel Nadeau; Allan Brow; George Greenwood; Eric Chevalier; Sarah Chevalier; Richard Trombley; Ray Many; Debbie Roberts; Nancy Oliver; Eric Bessette; Greg Lamoreux (County Courier); Michelle Monroe (St. Albans Messenger); Debbie Rouse; David Rouse; Nicole Lowell; Roland Gagne; Chuck Pearce; Steve Beyor; Richard Gagne; Kim Flint; Danny Billado; Skyler Messier; Tammy Rowell; Brian Rowell; Richard Laroche; Martha Zweeres Derosia; Harold Derosia; Joseph Depatie; James Maskell; Claude Chevalier; Michelle Douglas; Brian Douglas; Jacques Rainville; Kelly Rainville; Dustin Tanner; Steve Ploof; Keith Ploof

B. Public Comment

Chris Yates began by stating that Paulette Tatro is not present tonight. She is in Fairfield receiving recognition at the 2016 Vermont Public Service Awards Banquet for 20+ years of service to our town. He congratulated her and thanked her for her dedication and service. Paulette also wrote a memo to the board and residents of Highgate, which Chris read aloud and can be seen below. Chris echoed what Paulette said 100% and added that the board has talked about rescinding the vote and the three that could rescind it have decided they will not do that. Josh Aldrich asked if Paulette had signed the AmCare contract – no, she did not, only the chair signed it. Chris reread from the memo to clarify what Paulette had written. Mary Roy had comments about a board member wearing a hat during the meeting and use of cell phones.

Date: May 16, 2016
To: The Highgate Selectboard
Residents of Highgate
From: Paulette Tatro
Re: My AMCARE Vote

The Highgate Selectboard has the responsibility to ensure that the best care possible is available to treat Highgate residents when they have a medical emergency. The vote by the Highgate Selectboard to change rescue services was a very well thought-out and difficult decision as it is a highly emotional issue for many people.

The following items were considered as part of the review process -

1. Trained personnel on site with the ambulance at all times.
2. More highly trained personnel. (Paramedic vs EMT)
3. Multiple ambulances available and staffed at all times.
4. Ambulances located at multiple sites to accommodate different areas of Highgate.
5. Often comparable response times, especially at night as personnel are actually on site.
6. Least important factor, minimal cost savings to Highgate taxpayers.
7. Expectation that eventually AMCARE would establish a facility centrally in Highgate.

I voted in favor of signing a contract for services with AMCARE. I believed it was the correct decision at the time my vote was cast and I still do. The town's three year contract with AMCARE which will begin on July 1, 2016.

Yours Respectfully,
Paulette Tatro

C. **Concerned Citizens of Highgate – Sue Cota**

At the 5/5/16 meeting the board asked to be forwarded info ahead of time regarding this agenda item so they could be prepared. No information was received prior to this meeting. The time frame for this agenda item was limited to 10 minutes, to which Sue Cota disagreed with the time frame given. Sue asked who initiated the decision to look into another ambulance service. At the 4/6/16 public meeting Paulette Tatro said that Chris Yates brought it to the board a year ago. Skyler Messier asked about Jeff Towle, who was the chair of the board at that time, and if it was him who initiated this whole mess. Jean Chevalier asked if this was put out to bid, Chris said both services were contacted. Jean questioned the process and referred to the emails that were released as part of the public records request. Chris noted that he did speak with both, and that Joey Stell told him that the numbers are their numbers and there was nothing they could do. Jean feels that MVR was not given the same opportunity as AmCare. Jean also asked again why they did not bring this issue to the people when they had the authority to do so, she wonders what the board is afraid of. Jean asked the same questions of Randy Connelly. The conversation was becoming very heated and Heidi stated the crowd was becoming an angry mob. Eric Bessette wanted to be heard, and it was clarified he is also a chair of this committee. Eric Bessette asked again why Chris answers all the questions, to which Josh LaRocque answered it is because they are directing the questions to Chris in particular. Eric also asked about any vendetta that Chris has against anyone associated with MVR or AmCare or any of their associates. Chris stated that if they are hearing that in the community, then they are hearing lies. He is the type of person that forgives people and he doesn't have an issue with anyone or anyone in this room. George Greenwood called Chris a liar. Heidi stated to George that his comment was uncalled for, to which Jean Chevalier told Heidi she was just a clerk and could not speak and that she was not a resident. Heidi would like this meeting to move forward in an orderly fashion. Jean asked if anyone other than Chris spoke to the town lawyer prior to the AmCare contract being signed. Randy did not recall doing so, and Josh and Sharon are both very new to the board. Jean also asked if the board talked to the town attorney about rescinding the vote and the validity of the contract if it was rescinded – none have. Sharon noted that she has asked for information regarding communication with the lawyer and has yet to receive it but would like to review the information. Josh Aldrich stated that both of our current state reps are here tonight, Steve Beyor and Chuck Pearce, and he has not seen them at any other meetings regarding this topic. Tammy Rowell spoke, noting that she had known Chris for years and she is not here to stick up for him, but that he was appointed by the voters and needs to represent us. That being said, he is in a difficult position. Her husband was on the board for 18 years, and he never made a decision alone, and she does not believe that Chris has either. The rest of the board needs to have more comment, not having it all fall on Chris. Tammy feels it is ok to disagree, but we need to be respectful. Tammy feels the board did not represent the town but they feel they did the right thing. We need to move forward and not divide the town. She spoke emotionally about her experiences over the years with MVR, adding that being a Christian we have to forgive and we do make mistakes. If this board feels they did make a mistake, they need to right it. David Rouse spoke about the \$21,000.00 difference per year in the contract price and how the town is preparing to install a lighted message board that he feels we don't need. Skyler Messier thanked Tammy for what she said and spoke to personal experiences with MVR and thanked the members for their service. Skyler also made some personal attacks against Chris' family, to which Chris stated that those personal attacks have no business in this community. Allan Brow, from the back of the room, said they are sick of Mr. Yates. Skyler questioned why Ben Lowell, constable, was carrying a gun and asked if he was properly trained. Steve Beyor, one of our state representatives for Franklin-5, spoke that he has always been happy with MVR, but also noted that saving money is a good thing and people would complain no matter which way the board went. Steve and Chuck are here to listen, and Steve further pointed out that we elected this board and gave them permission to vote on these things, and what's done is done. Allan Brow asked if you can impeach a Selectboard member. Jean said no, the only way to have them removed from the board is if they are declared insane and a judge commits them. Chuck Pearce, our other state representative from Franklin-5, is not a Highgate resident, he resides in Richford. They have not been at previous meetings because they were in session and in Montpelier. They can try to help us with issues at the state level. Chris let Steve and Chuck know that there is something they can help

with. We are all mandated to have health insurance, and if these providers would cover 100% of ambulatory care, towns would not have to contract with an ambulatory provider and people could get service from the ambulance closest to them. The state is putting this board, and all boards, in a bad position. Steve and Chuck, if reelected, would be happy to look into that. Sue Cota asked all the board members again if they have ever had to use the services of a rescue squad. Chris – no; Randy – yes, he was involved in an accident in Sheldon when he was 18 but does not know who transported him as he was not conscious; Josh – yes, his infant son was transported to Burlington by MVR and the service was fine; Sharon – yes, she was treated by MVR while a member of the HVFD and she was treated very well. Sue again reiterated her concern about response times and feels her town is being destroyed by two or three people. Eric Bessette pointed out that he does not believe that AmCare is moved into the Sheldon building yet and asked Randy how he felt about waiting for a response if a child was hurt at the ballfield. Randy does not want to play the game of “what ifs”. Eric also spoke to his personal experience with his daughter in the town of Richford. Steve Ploof spoke about his experiences over the years with MVR, all were favorable, and he is concerned about response times also. Brian Rowell asked if anyone negotiated with MVR. Chris replied that the board tried to. Chris met with Chief Stell and he said the numbers are what they are. Janice Smith asked if MVR had the same opportunity to ask the town what number they were looking for. Brian also asked if AmCare knew MVR’s bid. MVR’s numbers are in the town report every year, so it is public record what we pay MVR. Jean again asked the board to rescind the vote. Chris and Randy said no, and Paulette said no in her written response read earlier in this meeting. Jacques Rainville expressed frustration over the ambulance decision and added that we have recently acquired a dump that will also cost us money. Kelly Rainville had comments about the contract with AmCare and if it was a good idea to have a 180 day notice before we can break the contract. She questioned how our attorney could have found that to be reasonable. She brought up issues at town meeting and how ambulatory services with MVR used to be a separate article, and is now part of the general fund, as well as the CIP being shot down by \$400,000.00. She feels the board should have backed off and rethought this all. Mr. Lothian brought up on April 6th that maybe the town could be split between both providers. These are all things that have cost the board the trust of the Highgate citizens. Kelly would like the board to look at finding ways to break the contract that does not obligate us to pay AmCare and if we can’t the next three years of the board getting anything out of the voters is going to be impossible. She is sure the board has excellent ideas, but feels they shot themselves in the foot and that the general fund budget will go down because people are just ticked off! Janice stated that no one is questioning the care from AmCare or MVR and noted that paramedic intercepts are seldom. Janice acknowledged the board has a difficult job, but would like to see the contract rescinded and they could sign for a year with AmCare and see how that goes. Nancy Oliver spoke emotionally about her son, and how even MVR could not get there in time to save him, so she too is concerned about response times. Chris spoke to the need for a first responder team in Highgate and how our residents would benefit from that. Eric Bessette asked who would pay for that and that we have that in town now, we have first responders that live in Highgate. We have that service now with MVR and it doesn’t cost us extra. Lori Choiniere spoke to when her husband was on the board and the issue of first responders came up. At that time the board wanted nothing to do with it, and wanted to know what has changed since then. Chris was not on the board at that time. David Rouse said the fire department tried to purchase heavy rescue and they were shot down. Sharon hears what people are saying and she is taking notes. She wants more answers like everyone else and is very sorry for those who have suffered losses. She doesn’t know what can be done, if anything, but she is willing to look, ask questions and talk to anyone as a person. As a Selectboard member she will continue to ask questions. Sharon also noted that there are people in support of AmCare and it is not just a one sided issue, and she will listen to those people as well. Josh also added that he is listening. This process was 95% done when he joined the board on March 1st and 100% of it was done when Sharon came aboard in mid-April. Sue Cota asked, due to the conflict of interest and emerging affliction with AmCare by Mr. Yates and Mr. Connelly, they are formally asking that they resign their seats immediately, as their respect for them is gone. Randy asked her to clarify what conflict of interest he has – Sue was referring to Chris. Chris answered no and Randy also declined to resign his seat. Tammy Rowell thinks it is good that people are involved and asking for change. She added that we are not a large city with lots of money coming in and pointed out that maybe everyone needs to start coming to

more meetings, adding that she does not agree that we need a digital message board. Tammy also noted that Chris has helped bring money into the recreational fields and a lot of work has been done and it looks very nice there. However, we have a storage building that is falling down and there are many important things to consider with the taxpayers money. Tammy pointed out that it is the same people that volunteer their time that serve on these boards, help out in the community and coach (as examples). Lori Olds wanted to note that first responders can't go anywhere without an ambulance. The board needs to move on with the rest of the agenda and this discussion came to a close. Ray Many approached the board as people were leaving and said he feels people would pay the extra money to keep MVR here in Highgate. Chris pointed out to Mr. Many that it was not just about the money. Mr. Many has concerns about response times and asked where they would be responding from. Chris hopes AmCare will have a facility in Highgate at some point.

D. Fire Department Updates – Joe Depatie

Joe was looking for an update on the fire department floor. We have spoken to an architect regarding the ADA study who has reached out to an engineer. The floor will likely have to be cut out to diagnose the issue. A RFP will have to be issued for the needed repairs. Trucks will have to be relocated during the work, and it would have to be done during warmer weather. We have an estimate of \$1,500.00 to do the RFP, be present for the concrete removal, issue the specs for the compaction, issue the tests involved with compaction and supervise the pouring and complete tests involved with the concrete. The board thinks the \$1,500.00 is money well spent and an insurance policy. David Rouse would like to see bids limited to people in town. The electrical work in the fire department is done and the rest of the lockers will be put in next Monday night. A few new members have applied to join the department. Memorial Day BBQ is Monday, May 30th starting at 11am and they will serve until 1pm for \$10.00 per person. The parade will be at 1pm and the HVFD auction will follow. There are no advanced tickets for the BBQ. Joe will be working with Shelley on any last minute things as we near the end of this year's budget cycle. Radios have been updated to a higher frequency and everything seems to be working well. There are still some difficulties with communication with central dispatch. Radio North will be working on that issue. Chris asked if we had a memorandum of understanding for the cell tower yet – no, we don't, so we need to get that drafted. The funeral for Mr. LaPierre from Georgia was very well attended by 450 people from many different departments from all over. Joe has gotten an estimate for video cameras as part of the loss prevention grant. We have had some issues and he feels cameras are now necessary. He is working with Black Dog and they can put in a card entry system also if we would like. Chris has concerns about firefighters forgetting their cards for access, so a key pad entry is an option also, with each person having their own code. Josh noted they are considering the same things at the arena as well. Joe has concerns about the safety and security of files in the office also. He will talk with Wendi about storing files in the town vault – either upstairs or downstairs. We can make space in either vault. The boat will be going in for service soon and Joe wants to pursue having certified operators. This is a river boat, not an open water boat. Joe will check with Kevin Lothian at Boat Headquarters about trainings and Chris suggested checking with the VSP auxiliary or local game wardens. The coast guard will train, but only using their equipment, not ours, and they are harder to get. Mrs. Fontaine's lawn has been repaired from the damages done in December at the Noel fire. She was very pleased and it was the right thing to do. The dry hydrant at Richard Noel's property is a go, Chris will be working on that paperwork. They discussed other possible locations in town that Joe would like to pursue for dry hydrants in the future.

E. Town Clerk – Wendi Dusablon

1. Minutes from May 5th

Motion by Chris Yates to approve the minutes from May 5, 2016, as corrected. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.**

2. RFP for electronic message board

The draft RFP is in the drop box for review. We are attempting to get more information regarding connections and will then run it by Steve Roy afterwards.

F. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta

1. Class I Town Highways resource document

This is in the drop box for review. It was forwarded by AOT regarding the pros and cons of ownership of the town taking over a section of Route 78. They will be here on July 7th.

2. NBRC grant opportunity

This grant is through the Northern Borders Regional Commission. The arena construction committee is looking to apply for a grant to help cover the costs of ventilation work. This is a 50/50 grant and we would use what is left in our fundraising account. We are also looking at bleacher bids, so what is left and how everything ranks we still are not sure. Heidi is looking for approval to move forward. We are using pricing from a previous study to update and improve the air quality in the bathrooms and locker rooms at the arena facility. We put out an RFP but did not get any bids so we don't have any hard numbers. Heidi will see if we qualify and what we can get and she has an appointment with Greta Brunswick this coming week. If we fall short on the match we can see if MAHA will chip in or, worst case, we can scale the project back. The grant is due in the middle of June and we would know by August/September. Paulette would like to include the entry way of the arena into this project (as well as the ventilation) and we would have the winter months to get something together for 2017 if we are awarded grant funds. The entry way has always been a safety issue. Motion by Josh LaRocque to authorize Heidi to pursue the NBRC 2016 Economic and Infrastructure Development Investment Program Grant. The motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.**

3. Misc.

- There is an application in the packet from MAHA for a storage container to be placed behind the arena. This will be temporary storage for equipment because storage was lost inside during the 2015 renovation project. Karen Fortin has been storing items in her garage, which is a less than ideal situation. The container will be placed behind the arena where the mound of stone is. The stone will be used as a base for the container. It was emphasized that this is a storage container, not a storage building. MAHA has submitted the permit as the applicant, the town has to sign off as the owner. Motion by Josh LaRocque to sign off on the permit for the storage container for MAHA. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED.**
- A copy of the water permit for the arena is also in the packet, which is the final thing we have to do. We are online and the final step is to dig outside when we know where the connections are to the old well and terminate the outside connections. The state wants them abandoned. The permit came with a letter stating that we will be billed annually for the permit fee.
- Safe Routes to School has put together a travel plan for our community. Jen Gagne, school nurse, and others have worked hard on this and it will be a useful document for further grant applications.
- Heidi has put together a committee schedule, attempting to merge a few different things happening. The June Planning Commission meeting will be the first look at all the feedback from departments regarding the CIP. The July Planning Commission meeting will be further work on the CIP and the Finance Committee will also attend. The Finance Committee will come to the Selectboard in August to interface with the board and get some feedback. The hope is to have a formal presentation by the open house scheduled for Sept. 20th. The feedback from the open house will help us move forward to create a presentation that will have more input than just the Selectboard.
- Plans from RSG from the sidewalk study are in the packet also. David Desorcie had some concerns with the striping proposal. The crosswalk on the Gore Road is already approved. We are still working on a crosswalk across Route 78 in the area between the Steinhour Café building and Flat Iron Park.
- We were contacted by a gentleman regarding Saxes Monument and the need for it to be cleaned. Heidi contacted Charlie Nye for his thoughts. Charlie will connect with him over the weekend at the Historical Society lawn sale.
- The audit contract with Sullivan and Powers is here for the audit this fall. We have budgeted for this. It is a very lengthy document that the board has not had a chance to read thoroughly. The amount indicated is

\$18,400.00, compared to \$18,000.00 in 2015. Shelley noted that most towns stick with the same auditor for three years for consistency purposes and so they get a feel for what is happening in a particular town. Paulette noted that from last year's audit there were several issues, some have been dealt with already, and some are being worked on by the Finance Committee. This will be back on the agenda for June 2nd.

G. Town Treasurer – Shelley Laroche

1. Check warrants

Josh had some questions on the Weimann Lamphere billing and the way Shelley had entered it in the description on the warrant. Chris asked about the line item for general legal matters, which included a \$435.00 bill related to the public records request. This billing covers through April 30th, so there will likely be another billing to come on this public records request. Sharon noted she is amazed at what we spend on legal fees. Sharon asked if we pay FCSO monthly – yes, we do, and they send us an invoice. Shelley noted that MVR does not invoice us, she pays them the first check run of the month. The invoice for PNH was related to the Elwood case. Sharon had one last question about the George Wood invoice in the amount of \$0.00, it should be \$12.00 and Shelley will fix that.

2. Misc.

- Shelley is still waiting to hear back from the last printing company in Barre with an estimate for printing our town reports.

H. Selectboard items

1. Salvage yard certificate of approved locations (COAL)

We have a total of three approved salvage yards in town and two of them belong to the Machias, located on St. Armand Road and Cook Road. In the past, these certificates have been approved for three years and last year we renewed the certificate for one year as there were issues they were working to correct. The location at 14 St. Armand Road currently has no real issues other than the state permit had the wrong address on it. The other location at 689 Cook Road has a confusing history to it. Heidi sat down with Keith and the listers last year. There was a mapping issue on our end and other questions that remained, but the board was comfortable signing off for one year and wanted to clear up final issues before this year's document was due. By no fault of their own, the Machias also had to deal with other issues over the past year so some of the items were not clarified, and none of them are major issues. It would be Heidi's recommendation to sign the certification for the Cook Road property with the understanding that as time allows they will work towards the last few issues being resolved. She feels it is important to document the issues, as the property is for sale. Chris walked the property at 14 St. Armand Road and noted it is being cleaned up, you can definitely see it. He has driven by the Cook Road location and they are moving items toward the front, making an effort to clean up and liquidate. Some items have been sold and not yet picked up. Chris is in full support of signing a one year extension for both properties. The steps that Keith Machia and his family have made to come into compliance do not go unnoticed. Heidi added that from a zoning perspective it is easier to do a once a year check. Chris's only question when talking to Keith is if the COALs are transferrable if they sell the property. Heidi noted that they are not. The paperwork would have to be all redone with the state and the town if the property comes under new ownership. There is a fee, per location, to the town of \$25.00. Heidi also added, for comparison, that there is another application in town going through the same process and they are addressing any issues. That application will be in front of the board in June. Motion by Chris Yates to sign a certificate of approved location for both 14 St. Armand Road and 689 Cook Road for Machia's Used Cars and Salvage. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED**.

2. Misc.

- Josh had an update for the board regarding VT Gas at the arena location. The MAHA facilities board did not come to a 100% decision, but they feel the town owns the kitchen equipment so the town should maintain it. They would like to split the cost to retrofit the burners to natural gas. This will be safer with no propane tanks outside and also more economical. Chris will reach out and see if VT Gas can do the conversion.
- Sharon has written a response letter to Kevin Spears regarding his complaint about the guard rails on Hanna Road. Paulette would like to see

some minor edits, Josh thinks it is well written. This letter is written by Sharon, coming from Sharon, as a member of the board. Motion by Chris Yates to approve Sharon signing the letter in response to Kevin Spears complaint regarding the guard rails on Hanna Road. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – by a voice vote of **4 Yes** (Chris, Randy, Josh, Sharon) to **1 No** (Paulette) – **APPROVED**.

- Heidi reminded the board that annually they should review the allocation to employees towards health insurance costs.
- MAHA will be on the next agenda regarding renewal of the arena lease.
- Heidi sent letters to a resident in East Highgate asking for some attention to issues by the road, one regular mail and one certified mail. Both came back as undeliverable. Paulette noted that the hay bales and fence have both been removed very recently.
- The new LED lights in the Swanton Village service area are getting great reviews and showing cost savings. We had to add more lights in East Highgate. We can now see the difference in the quality and quantity of light compared to the Co-Op. If the public works director deems a safety issue or additional need he can request more lighting around town.

I. Upcoming Events

May 30		MEMORIAL DAY IN HIGHGATE HVFD BBQ @ 11, PARADE @ 1, HVFD AUCTION TO FOLLOW
June 2	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
June 9	6pm	DRB Mtg.
June 16	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
June 21	6pm	Planning Comm. Mtg.
Sept. 20		OPEN HOUSE EVENT – info to follow ☺

J. Executive Session

Motion by Chris Yates for the Selectboard and Town Administrator to enter into executive session @ 9:40pm to discuss real estate and contracts where premature general public knowledge could place the town and the individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Paulette Tatro to exit executive session @ 10:25pm. The motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED**.

K. Adjournment

Motion by Paulette Tatro to adjourn the meeting @ 10:25pm. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.

Respectfully submitted by,

_____ Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by,

_____ Christopher Yates, Chair – Highgate Selectboard