

# TOWN OF HIGHGATE

## Selectboard Meeting

Thursday, September 19, 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 @ 7:00pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Highgate Selectboard Members** – Sharon Bousquet, Chair; Josh LaRocque, Vice-Chair (arrived @ 7:04pm); Bruce Butler; Richard Flint; Randy Connelly

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

**Public / Other** – Alice S. Cota; Merry Souza; Joseph Depatie; Chris Shephard; Keith Ploof; Lynn Billado - MVR; Leonard Stell - MVR; Lori Olds - MVR; Robert Clark – MVR; Tammy Brown; John Poulin; Steve LaFar; Richard J. Noel; Ty Choiniere; Brian Spears

#### **B. Public Comment(s)**

- Sue Cota reported that the State of VT was on Monument road last week and the area has been roped off for safety reasons.
- Chris Shepard was present with some public comments representing himself, not as a member of the school board. He was disappointed in the way the town handled the decision to not plow the school parking lot. He was clear, he was not referring to the decision they made, but the manner in which it was made. He was disappointed in comments made by board members. Sharon apologized if she offended anyone. Chris would have liked a Selectboard member to reach out to a board member on the Missisquoi Valley School District prior to the decision. Richard Flint noted that MVSD could have also come to the town. An RFP was issued for the plowing, but Chris feels they are at a disadvantage this late in the game. This change and many others are all part of ACT46. Chris pointed out that we don't need to like ACT46 but, unfortunately, we do need to live with it. Chris added that the Highgate School bond passed back in March and the parking lot will be fixed in the summer of 2020. The town could still bid on the plowing if they would like to. Richard Noel asked if legally the town can even bid on it.

#### **C. Missisquoi Valley Rescue (MVR) Update**

Leonard Stell, Lynn Billado, Lori Olds and Robert Clark were present from MVR. Lori and Robert left half-way through this update to respond to a call. Mr. Stell stated that things were going well. There were a few hiccups with new employees in the first few days of the contract. The highest call volume is statistically 10am – 6pm so they have a second truck staffed during those hours. This has minimized the need for mutual aid services. Things are working well with Middlebury Dispatching and MVR has no complaints on their side. Mr. Stell spoke to issues with different time clocks and how those issues have been resolved. Richard Flint would like to see more of an MVR

presence in the Town of Highgate during those peak hours mentioned above. Mr. Stell answered that it is 100% doable, especially during the peak hours of 10am – 6pm. They want their trucks mobile in the Highgate area. Newer members on MVRs crew need to familiarize themselves with our roads. In the next week or so we will see more of MVR in Highgate, according to Mr. Stell. Sharon had questions about the subscription drive mailing recently sent out. We have been getting calls at the town office but don't have any information and there was no phone number on the mailing to call and ask questions. Questions can be directed to 868-2352, which is a line answered 8am – 6pm, and voice mail is available after hours. As a non-profit entity, MVR is able to do these subscription drives and other agencies around the state also do them. Mr. Stell explained how some folks will benefit from paying the subscription amount of \$50.00 per household or \$75.00 per business. Paying this covers the time frame 9/1/19 – 8/31/20. The advantages to paying the subscription, according to the mailing are: 1) unlimited emergency transports 24 hours a day within MVRs coverage area, 2) non-emergency transports, when medically necessary, 3) subscription income helps to offset expenses to MVR and helps lower the tax rate, 4) the subscription fee and any additional donations are tax deductible, and 5) you will never receive a bill for any amount not covered by your insurance. Mr. Stell also noted that depending on what you carry for insurance coverage, the subscription might not be a good deal for you. It was clarified that if you do not pay the fee and sign up for the subscription it does not mean that you won't receive assistance in your time of need. MVR follows Medicare and Medicaid rules. Mr. Stell further noted that they will not take anyone to small claims court or hound them for payment, regardless if they pay the subscription or not. Three billing cycles will be sent (by law), and the bills will stop if you can not afford to pay it. Joe Depatie, HVFD Chief, was present. At the last Selectboard meeting Joe presented written statements from several HVFD members with concerns about a call following an ATV accident that involved MVR. Mr. Stell acknowledged the incident, noting he was not personally present at the call himself, and neither was Joe Depatie. MVR was reminded that HVFD members can not act as first responders when they are responding to a call as an HVFD member in HVFD gear and in HVFD vehicles. We had this issue previously with another HVFD member and we need to treat all people the same. Mr. Stell stated that the wait to administer patient care until certain HVFD members were present was purely an error on their part. He added that he was just made aware of this last week. Both MVR and HVFD would like to do some joint training soon to foster a cohesive working environment with no communication breakdowns. MVRs liability insurance is fairly encompassing, so anyone they ask to assist is covered. HVFD also hopes to work with Swanton Fire with regard to search and rescue. Swanton has a very unique and expensive drone they use out in the wilderness. Randy asked if MVR has forwarded the town any call reports – no, not yet. Lynn Billado was not aware the town wanted them. AmCare used to send us call reports on a regular basis. Randy also asked about GPS units and if MVR has them on their trucks. No, they do not, and Mr. Stell further explained that the other entity he is associated with in Swanton spends more time maintaining them than anything. Shelley asked if there is an estimate of what they write off each year in bills that go unpaid. No – they do not, and money is not budgeted to cover the costs of those bills that are not paid. MVR makes a surplus on the subscriptions that offsets what they ask the taxpayers for each year. In Swanton last year, they saved the taxpayers \$20,000.00 from subscriptions. Ty Choiniere asked questions about lift assists and how often they are calling HVFD to assist them. Since July, three times, and once was an error. The board thanked MVR for coming and for

the calm sensible conversation, but mostly for taking care of our residents. The stats will be forwarded to Heidi and MVR will come back in October for a quarterly update.

**D. Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche**

- There was conversation on the total cost of the grader repair and Shelley also noted an error on the invoice for the mirrors in the arena bathrooms, which has been voided. Motion by Randy Connelly to sign the check warrants. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.
- Our old laptop we use with the overhead projector is tired and not functioning well. It is at least 9-10 years old. We have a quote from Matt Bouchard for \$985.00 to replace it and \$250.00 labor. Motion by Randy Connelly to approve this purchase. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**.
- FY2019-20 property tax bills were brought to the post office late this afternoon and will go out tomorrow, Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>. The due date is Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> by 4:30pm.

**E. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon**

- Richard Flint would like to have some discussion in executive session before approving the minutes from the last meeting. Motion by Josh LaRocque to approve the minutes from September 5, 2019, as written. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **FAILED**. Approval of these minutes will be tabled until after their discussion in executive session.

**F. Administrator Items – Heidi Britch-Valenta**

- Heidi has not heard back from GW Tatro yet on the damage to the drainage system at the transfer station from an earlier project. The pipe needs to be reconnected, but the location of the pipe is in a treacherous spot. Casella is happy to help us with some sort of construction but wants to also see a design.
- There was discussion on if a weight restriction on Machia Road is needed with regard to repairing the bank. Jim Cota said enforcement would not be through DMV it would be through local law enforcement. Bruce questioned the possibility of making that area a one lane road. Heidi will work on finding a representative from the district to come in and talk to us about this. We need to consider plowing season as well. Heidi is not sure we could regulate agricultural activity on that road.
- Insulation RFP – it was highly recommended by the roofers to add insulation to the upper floor / attic before winter to avoid ice jams in the valleys. The RFP has been written by Arnold & Scangas. There was discussion on different ways these areas could and should be insulated. Motion by Josh LaRocque to approve the RFP as presented. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.
- MPG Resolution & Letter of Support – the Village Core Master Plan Committee (VCMP) is in the process of a wastewater study on the former Machia Property (nka: Village Core Property). Heidi is asking for the Selectboard to sign a resolution and also a letter of support for the study. We have \$30,000.00 already for the study to see what solutions are possible on that property and for our village area in general. Richard Flint had questions about this project and why it was necessary. He is receiving a lot of comments / complaints from the public about this project and what it means to them. The property consists of the former Machia Estate, the former town garage site and the small piece the school district just gave us. The study will look specifically at this area but will also look at the entire official designated village. There were questions about the official village designation area. Heidi will have a

map of the village designation for the board at the next meeting. She provided further information on what the study will entail. Richard expressed frustration and did not feel his questions were being clearly answered. He also noted that Highgate is not St. Albans City and we need to realize that right now. He would like to have a speaker come to the town from a town more our size. Sharon and Heidi both felt that they learned something from the St. Albans City presentation at the PC meeting on Sept. 17<sup>th</sup>. Sharon also believes in personal responsibility and educating yourself on things happening in our town. Josh clarified this study is to see if it is feasible to pursue wastewater in our village – yes. If the village core property were to be sold, it would be more appealing if there is a system or a design in place. We will get more bang for our buck on that property if we sell it. Richard feels strongly that we are spending all of our “bang”. Richard was not in favor of purchasing that property in the first place, and he still isn’t in favor of owning it. It was clarified that we do not have a match for the \$30,000.00 grant. Heidi also clarified what has been put into the property so far. Keith Ploof also asked for information on village designation area. Heidi pointed out that by going through this study, we will be getting more information from someone far more knowledgeable on the topic than anyone in this room. She also thanked Dominic Cloud, St. Albans City Manager, for his presentation at the PC meeting a few days ago. The PC has plans for more speakers to come as well. Richard fears small businesses in our town will be pushed out due to development. Sharon apologized to the City of St. Albans if they feel insulted by any comments made at this meeting. She also apologized to the Town of Swanton about comments made at a previous meeting. Motion by Randy Connelly to sign the letter of support and the planning grant. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED 4 YES** (Sharon, Josh, Randy, Bruce) / **1 NO** (Richard).

#### **G. Selectboard Items**

- Lister Position – Wendi let the Selectboard know that we did not receive any additional letters of interest for the lister position by close of business today. We still have just the two interested persons - Samantha Derosia and Richard Wilkens. Interviews will be set up with them both on Monday, Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> beginning at 7pm. Randy asked if this was normal protocol to interview the interested persons. Richard Noel asked if the interviews were open to the public – no, they will be in executive session under personnel.
- Thak Blvd – Josh did not make it to the site but has visited it previously and feels it is too narrow and Sharon agrees. Bruce asked if the road and cul-de-sac meet the criteria. The criteria appears to have been met at that time, but not by today's standards. This has been brought to the DRB and they think the same thing. Motion by Josh LaRocque to *deny* the application to take over Thak Blvd. as a town road because it does not meet today's standards. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED 4 YES** (Sharon, Josh, Randy, Bruce) / **1 NO** (Richard).
- Richard Noel stated he attended a TAC meeting recently and there will be a lot happening at the airport property in the next few years. There is a separate wastewater and water study going on to see about bringing those services from Swanton to the airport. The town has not invested any funds into this study and Heidi's hours have served as our matching funds and other parties covered the balance. Richard Noel also noted a sidewalk will be going from McDonalds in Swanton up to MVU. The sidewalk will not be in any part of Highgate so we will not have to maintain it.

- The Selectboard approved the communications tower at the last meeting. Motion by Josh LaRocque to sign the contract with Burlington Communications. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. Motion by Josh LaRocque to sign the contract for Anchor Foundations for \$1,590.00 to pour the concrete pad for the communications tower. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**. The public works department would like to locate their equipment on the tower also and their equipment is in bad shape. Motion by Josh LaRocque to replace the public works antennae in the amount of \$1,190.00 and place it on the new tower. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**.
- Platt Road – this is a continuation from the discussion on Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>. Tammy Brown and John Poulin were present. Butch Brosseau was not present at this meeting, but Josh did go visit the site with Butch this morning. They discussed two options with regard to winter plowing on Platt Road to avoid the snow ending up in the Brown/Poulin driveway. One is to place it by the fence just past them on the left. By moving the fence they could make it wide enough to push the snow straight ahead past their property. The other option is by the camp below them. We will probably never know who piled the snow on their property, but our town crew said it was not them. The fencing on the Brown/Poulin property was damaged last year and the town crew is not responsible for that also. We did have a sub driver for a few weeks last winter or it could have been a privately hired driver or someone ice fishing. We need to have a clear protocol on Platt Road (drop the wing here, pick up the wing here, put the snow here). The only other avenue we could take is to turn Platt Road into a private road where the town doesn't go there at all. The drifts on that road prevent the town trucks from backing down Platt Road and plowing the snow in the other direction. Tammy asked about reimbursement for their fence. We aren't sure who did the damage, and we may never know. A letter or phone call will go out to Tammy and John with the solution the town has decided on.
- FEMA Grant Application / GeoDesign Repair Design – Bruce Butler feels it is prudent to go forward with the grant application with the caveat that if we are successful in obtaining funding that we give it great deliberation before we accept the funds. Motion by Josh LaRocque to apply for the FEMA grant to address landslides at the transfer station. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly. There was lengthy discussion on what exactly are we applying for, as there are a few locations to consider. The town will be responsible for 25% of the entire project. Sharon stated that we have assets in our town (land) that we could consider selling to offset some of the costs associated with these expensive repairs. There was discussion on selling the transfer station property to Casella. Ty Choiniere asked the board if they would consider moving the sand shed. Josh would like to see more realistic numbers and an actual RFP regarding the costs associated with a complete failure. Motion by Josh LaRocque to amend his earlier motion to fix all the high-risk areas noted in red on the map. A lengthy discussion followed. Shelley will check with VLCT to see if we would be covered if the sand shed was affected by these slides. It was noted there is already a crack in the foundation at the sand shed. If we apply for funding to repair all the impacted areas at the transfer station, we would need to accept the funds for all the areas, not just some. There is no way to know if and when a failure would take place. Josh LaRocque amended his motion again to include just the landfill location, not the sand shed. Ty agrees it would be cheaper to just build a new sand shed then to repair the bank there. Randy added that the property would have more resale value if it was repaired. Keith Ploof stated no one will buy it knowing the

issues we have, so we might as well fix them. Heidi will invite a representative from Emergency Management to come and speak with the board. Bruce would like to explore moving everything. Bruce is in favor of applying for a FEMA grant for all of area E on the map. Josh's earlier motions and amendments were still on the table, which he rescinded. All agreed that further conversations need to take place and more information is needed. Richard Flint doesn't want this topic to die, we need to bring it back at the next meeting on Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>. Motion by Josh LaRocque to apply for a FEMA grant for a full fix of the landfill property. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **FAILED**. Motion by Richard Flint to *table* this topic until Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.

**H. Upcoming Events**

Sept. 20		Tax bills being mailed out
Sept. 23	6pm	Selectboard Exec. Session - personnel
Sept. 30	7pm	Selectboard Exec. Session – lister interviews
Oct. 3	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
Oct. 6	10-2	HVFD Open House @ Fire Station'
Oct. 10	6pm	DRB Mtg.
Oct. 14		Indigenous Peoples' Day – Town Offices are CLOSED
Oct. 15	6pm	Planning Commission Mtg.
Nov. 1	by 4:30pm	TAX BILLS ARE DUE

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit the regular meeting @ 9:25pm. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**.

**I. Executive Session**

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to enter into executive session @ 9:26pm with Heidi Britch-Valenta, Ty Choiniere and Brian Spears to discuss personnel, contracts and legal, where premature general public knowledge would place the town and/or individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

Ty Choiniere and Brian Spears exited executive session @ 9:45pm.

Motion by Josh LaRocque to exit executive session @ 10:40pm. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED**.

**J. Adjournment**

Motion by Josh LaRocque to adjourn the meeting @ 10:41pm. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED**.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:

Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes approved by:

Sharon Bousquet – Chair, Highgate Selectboard