

TOWN OF HIGHGATE
Planning Commission Mtg.
April 17, 2019 @ 6pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Luc Dupuis, Chair, opened up the meeting @ 6:02pm.

Present for this meeting were:

Planning Commission Board Members; Luc Dupuis – Chair; Tom Conley – Vice Chair; Ken Thompson; Bruce Ryan; Richard Noel (arrived @ 6:09pm)
Town of Highgate Staff: Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Administrator & Planner; Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk
Public / Other: Michael Kravetz; Taylor Newton – NRPC; Sharon Bousquet

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Bruce Ryan to approve the minutes from March 19, 2019, as written. The motion was seconded by Tom Conley – **APPROVED.**

III. NRPC – ECONOMIC DEV. DISCUSSION – TAYLOR NEWTON

Taylor Newton from NorthWest Regional Planning was present for this discussion. Heidi had printed out many documents with regard to forming an Economic Development Council / Board / Commission / Group, including a draft resolution which would go to the Selectboard when the PC was ready. There were also documents from Winooski and Enosburg. Highgate formerly had this type of board and Heidi did some research in town records today to have a better understanding of what they did. There was a Highgate Industrial Development Fund as well as a Highgate Community Development Fund. For several years loans were managed for home improvements (6% interest) and also for senior citizens loans were forgiven if they lived in the home for ten years. The Community Development Fund balance of \$161,000.00 was shifted into the capital investment plan which was our seed money when the CIP started in 2014. No bylaws were located for these former funds or boards. It seems we have a clean slate at this point to move forward as we wish. Taylor from NRPC has reviewed the draft resolution and in general found it to be reasonable. We need to make a decision on if we want to do this and what this group will work on. Michael Kravetz from the DRB was present. He would like to see a clear definition or mission statement of what is expected and to specify responsibilities as well as how much authority they would have. He also isn't thrilled about the town being involved in the banking business. Richard Noel had questions about funding for the projects this board would oversee. Grant funding would be a large part of it. The ED board would advise the Selectboard on economic development projects in town, that is how Sharon, Heidi and Luc see it. The big push is the development in the center of our town – the former Machia Property, now known as the Village Core Property. There are many projects happening in town, each with a steering committee, but no connections to other projects happening. Working in a vacuum means all are not informed on everything happening. The ED board would serve as the primary steering committee and prioritize projects. This board would be advisory only. Sharon doesn't see an ED board taking over for all the other committees. She sees grant funding opportunities on behalf of all groups as Heidi's job as our grant writer. Heidi commented on continuity and awareness of other issues providing ease for the grant writer in preparing a simplified path forward for all projects. There was discussion on who reports to who and chain of command. Taylor commented that Highgate has a lot going on, compared to other municipalities in Franklin County. There were questions on how many members an ED board should have, 5,7,9,11? Further discussion was had on the value of volunteers having continuity over several projects. There is really no right or wrong answer to how the town approaches this. Originally Heidi had hoped that the PC would pick up the tasks and we would not have to create another board. There is a lot of truth in what Sharon is saying about "another board" and adding more layers. Sharon asked the PC members about their board, what their tasks are and what they plan for. The PC works on the CIP yearly, zoning bylaws every five years or so, and the town plan, which is not due

to be updated until 2023. The PC also works on other projects as needed or as they come up. Luc fears that if the PC takes on ED projects they would be spread too thin, but is not opposed to trying a project. Richard asked about adding more PC members to handle the work. Heidi doesn't know if adding more members will solve the problem if the PC doesn't want to hear the issues. Heidi views the ED board as a hub and if sub-committees are needed that is something that can happen. Taylor commented that the PC would focus on larger and broader aspect of things, whereas the ED board could focus more on infrastructure type issues and redevelopment (more site based). Richard has concerns about volunteers being stretched to the max, as we already have people serving in multiple capacities. He feels people are "committed to death". NRPC will be offering a training opportunity, hopefully in June, focused on how to get volunteers and recruitment. Sharon would like to see appropriate growth in our town, within reason. She also feels any ED board formed should be very diverse and include a person from agriculture, a business owner, school representation, and non-profit representation. Michael had questions about incentives in our town and tactical vs. strategic approaches. Wendi asked Taylor what the ED is really called – a board / council / group / commission / etc. By statute it is called an Economic Development Advisory Commission. The PC would like to try a project, for example tax stabilization. Richard noted this has been tried in the past through the Selectboard. VLCT has information that lays out several instances that we could look at with regard to tax stabilization. Sharon pointed out that the group in Enosburg only meets quarterly. Our project list is very lengthy so meetings would be much more frequent. Enosburg is also structured differently, as a non-profit organization, separate from the town. The PC members were all in favor of taking on the tax stabilization project and seeing how that goes. The Village Core Master Plan Committee (VCMP) has taken on the water / waste water study project at the village core property. This VCMP project could easily go on for another five years or more. Taylor asked about staffing our committees, etc. and how that works here. Heidi envisions the VCMP being as important and involving as much work as the Airport Infrastructure Extension Committee. She also pointed out that once there are a few successes we become more resilient and focused. Sharon asked Taylor if having an ED Advisory Commission in place gives us more pull with grants or with the state. He can't say definitively, but it may make us look stronger on an application, but he isn't sure. Taylor suggested letting the PC move ahead with this first project and then decide how it went and if we will keep our current structure or move ahead with something different. Richard clarified the VCMP water / waste water project is just a feasibility study. Taylor suggested looking at what other waste water issues exist in our village during this study. He also urged us to get a ball park number on extending Swanton's water line further up Route 78 to our village. There are capacity issues with Swanton extending that far. Ken likes the idea of the PC working on this first project to test out the waters. Taylor recommended trying to wrap up the tax stabilization project by July or August if possible. The PC could also look at impact fees and we have the ability to create a TIF (tax increment financing) district as well. Funds coming in from the TIF district could be dedicated to improving infrastructure. There was discussion on the zoning bylaws and edits suggested by the DRB. We also need to make sure we are managing sprawl accordingly in the vicinity of the airport, as well as road access. There were questions about VT Gas expansion in Highgate. Heidi noted that other communities (Newport and Winooski, for example) that have offered to come and meet with us. There are also many consultants that would be interested in helping the town market themselves to businesses. Tax stabilization will be on the next PC agenda for May 21st as well as the bylaw review. Taylor looked at the list we have so far for edits to the bylaws. Most seemed simple enough, with the exception of looking at lot size by district.

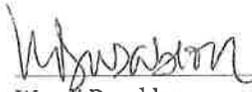
IV. VILLAGE CORE COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

The AARP grant was submitted to help with expenses for this celebration. Regardless if we receive the funding or not, we can still do some sort of event. VCMP has agreed to steer this and they will start meeting on May 2nd prior to Selectboard meetings at 6pm. Tentative date for the event is August 10th. We hope to have all departments and boards participating on this day. There was discussion on food trucks and if a caterer would be on site for beverages.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Bruce Ryan to adjourn the meeting @ 7:43pm. The motion was seconded by Tom Conley – **APPROVED.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by:


Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk
Wendi Dusablon

5/21/19
Date

Minutes approved by:


Planning Commission- Chair
Luc Dupuis

5/21/19
Date