

# TOWN OF HIGHGATE TOWN MEETING MINUTES Tuesday, March 5, 2024 @ 9:00am

@ Highgate Elementary School

## APPROVED MINUTES

*This floor meeting was also recorded by NorthWest Access TV and the full video can be found on our YouTube playlist here:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMzyEK6o65k&list=PLrBf\\_FpjKbweXICDn4i1IKwbcJpvFZWZK&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMzyEK6o65k&list=PLrBf_FpjKbweXICDn4i1IKwbcJpvFZWZK&index=1)

### A. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance / Dedications / Floor Meeting Info.

Town Meeting 2024 was called to order by Phillip Ladue, Moderator, at 9:02am, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Phil introduced himself, as well as the Selectboard Members. There were also five JPs present to assist throughout the floor meeting: John Ferland, Claude Chevalier, Bruce Gagne, Dennis Nolan and Patty Rainville.

**Highgate Selectboard Members** – Richard Flint, Chair; Vern Brosky III, Vice-Chair; Merry Souza; Scott Martin; Kyle Lothian

**Highgate Office Staff** – Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk; Sharon Bousquet, Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche, Town Treasurer + DTC

Phil asked for a moment of silence to recognize and honor Bruce Ryan and Charles Nye, both have passed.

This years Town Report Dedication is a little different – it is a “Thank You for your Town Service” page, dedicated to Aimee Reynolds (lister), Peter St. Germain (lister), Butch Brosseau (public works), and Bruce Ryan (planning commission).

FRA-5 Rep. Wayne Laroche was not yet present to give his update so Phil moved on to the ground rules we will follow for this meeting:

- Roberts Rules are the basic rules of order for this meeting.
- All motions and remarks should be addressed to the Moderator.
- Articles must be moved, seconded and restated by the Chair before debate may begin. Articles may be amended and amended once with voting to proceed from the last proposal of the amendment in reverse order of the sequence of the proposal.
- Debate may be cut off by a motion and 2/3 vote.
- The role of the Moderator is to explain procedural questions. No voter should hesitate to ask questions to understand what is being voted on.
- Voters should stand up, state their name, and speak in a loud clear voice. Isabelle and Shelley will be coming around with microphones, please wait for a microphone.
- A voter will not be recognized a second time on a particular article until all those who wish to speak on an issue the first time are given the chance. You will be given a second chance to speak, if necessary, once all others have had their first opportunity.
- Cell phones should be turned off or muted. If you must use your cell phone, please excuse yourself from the floor as to not be disruptive to the proceedings.
- If you are not a Highgate registered voter, but are a Highgate resident, same day voter registration is available at the check in table. Please make sure you are a registered voter, as there will not be any voter registration taking place in the middle of the floor meeting or during any paper ballot votes. Non-Highgate residents that were present were asked to identify themselves. They cannot vote today, or speak on any issue unless approved.
- This a campaign free zone, no campaigning of any kind is allowed inside the polling place. This includes materials of any kind, or any campaign related articles of clothing.

**B. Town Meeting Day Warning**

Phil Ladue read aloud through the Town Meeting Day Warning. Articles #1 - #3 are on the ballot and Articles #4 - #13 are on the floor.

**Article #1**

**(on the ballot)**

**To elect the following town officers:**

- a) One Cemetery Commissioner for a term of five (5) years
- b) One Library Trustee for a term of one (1) year remaining on a five (5) year term
- c) One Library Trustee for a term of five (5) years
- d) One Lister for a term of one (1) year remaining on a three (3) year term
- e) One Lister for a term of two (2) years remaining on a three (3) year term
- f) One Lister for a term of three (3) years
- g) One Moderator for the ensuing year
- h) One Selectboard Member for a term of one (1) year remaining on a two (2) year term
- i) One Selectboard Member for a term of one (1) year remaining on a three (3) year term
- j) One Selectboard Member for a term of two (2) years remaining on a three (3) year term
- k) One Selectboard Member for a term of three (3) years

**Article #2**

**(on the ballot)**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize cannabis retailers in the Town of Highgate, pursuant to 7 V.S.A. § 863?** Brent Reader was present to speak on this article, as he had petitioned the Selectboard to have it appear on the ballot to be voted on. With the exception of his time in the military he has always lived in Highgate. Due to health challenges he needs to be his own boss and would like to open up a retail cannabis dispensary in Highgate. By law it has to be voted on via Australian ballot by the municipality to move forward. Brent explained how the process works, the revenue stream it creates and wanted to address any fears and concerns before people headed over to the polls. Dispensaries are not all cannabis products, he would like to have CBD products for pain and inflammation, as well as edibles and pet products – a full range of items. He is not looking to create an atmosphere of partying or a lifestyle that does not already exist here. **(following voting at the polls, this article was defeated 274 yes / 320 no)**

**Article #3**

**(on the ballot)**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the elimination of the Office of Lister and replace it with a professionally qualified assessor appointed by the selectboard who shall have the same powers, discharge the same duties, proceed in the discharge thereof in the same manner, and be subject to the same liabilities as are prescribed for listers or the board of listers under the provisions of Title 32?** Both of our current listers are stepping down. The jobs are part-time and are more busy in certain times of the year than others. The jobs were posted and we had no interest. An RFP was published to see if we could find an outside assessing firm to work with us to cover the same duties as the listers office. We did get a bid from a gentleman out of Waitsfield that works with other towns, one being Fletcher here in Franklin County. The Selectboard has accepted his bid, pending a positive vote on the ballot today, required by statute. There was discussion on keeping the jobs local and not having outside people assessing our properties. It was mentioned to make the listers a full-time job with benefits to see if we could find the right person or persons locally. The listers office requires skills and knowledge on the many duties, it's nothing that someone would just come right in and know how to do. That is why we posted the jobs months ago, with the hope of having someone cross-train with Aimee and Pete before they left. That did not happen. Which led us to where we are today. It was asked what will happen if the article fails.

Good question – somebody here better be prepared to step up and take the job or we are up the creek (so-to-speak). The discussion ended, as this is a ballot vote, and we will have to wait until after 7pm to see how this further unfolds. **(following voting at the polls, this article passed 317 yes / 261 no)**

**THE REMAINDER OF THE ARTICLES #4 - #13 WERE FROM THE FLOOR**

**Article #4**

**To receive and act on the reports of the town officers for the past year.** Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Keith Machia. There was no discussion on this article. **ARTICLE #4 BY VOICE VOTE – PASSED.**

**Article #5**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate set the final date of payment for FY2024/2025 property taxes to be Thursday, October 31, 2024, with payments to be received in the town office by 4:00pm?** Motion by Claude Chevalier, seconded by Jack Pelkey. There was no discussion on this article. **ARTICLE #5 BY VOICE VOTE – PASSED.**

**Article #6**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate vote all public questions and budgets by Australian ballot?** Motion by Henry Rainville, seconded by Zeb Maskell. There was extensive conversation on this topic by several residents present, on both sides of the issue. Dan Fortin asked why this keeps coming back up – and the answer is because no decision has been made, the topic has been tabled, which means we are required to bring it back up. Dan Fortin acknowledged that we need to make a decision, and confirmed it was him that tabled the topic a couple of times. The goal is for more voter participation and 150 people here today is about 6% of our checklist. Last year we had 62 people on the floor, about 3% of our checklist. Richard Noel wants to see more participation, noting that too many people do not have a say with these floor meetings. Zeb Maskell wanted to know why the next two articles 7+8 are not on the ballot to get more input. Wendi explained we are a town that votes public questions and budgets from the floor. The two questions on the ballot today are driven by statute. Zeb doesn't want to see TMD go away but does see the numbers are dwindling. Richard Flint wants to see more people involved early in the process, up to and including voting. If the gathering piece is what people are trying to save, we can do that, just differently than we do today. Lynn Calderwood asked what happens when budgets fail via ballot. Just like the school we revise and revote. Clarence Miller would like to see informational meetings on the morning of voting, Dianne Laroche liked that suggestion. Jacques Rainville would like to see informational meetings before the town reports are printed. That already happens – at Selectboard meetings twice per month. Keith Machia spoke about the importance of TMD but also the difficulties with getting to the floor meeting to have your vote heard. There is a lot of information out there if you want to find it, you can. For those here today to just say “to heck with everyone else” is not right. We need to move into the age we are living in. Keith's comments were met with applause. Kyle Lothian asked if sharing information and a meal the night before would work, or maybe the weekend before? Rebecca Manning spoke to poorly attended informational meetings and doesn't see how having them the night before or the weekend before will change that. She finds great value in TMD and they way we do things now. Gerard Labrie has been attending TMD for 57 years and stated the older generation has commitment, the young generations don't want to get involved. He doesn't want to see TMD changed at all. He feels if you are concerned about your taxes or anything else you will find a way to be here. When the school portion went away that is when things really changed. Mr. Labrie's comments were also met with applause from those in agreement. Heather Cota spoke to employers not all supporting the need to attend town meeting and people need to work. Brandi Maskell, as a parent of young kids, would like to see weekend meetings prior to voting. Paul de la Bruere spoke about tradition and losing it forever. Jacques Rainville asked about mailings, calls, or any other way to get the word out. This year we mailed out postcards about the wastewater article to share information. Aside from knocking on doors, the

town gets a lot of information out there to share with our residents. Robo calls would not be successful, people tend to hang up. Mike Laroche has been a Highgate resident for 20 years and has family ties here much longer. He is active-duty military (27 years) and it is not so easy for our service men and women to be here. Half of his life he has not been home, and his only option to vote was absentee for whatever was on the ballot. The floor votes take away their right to vote on all things. There are strong opinions from the older generation to keep this floor meeting. Mike's question to that older generation: What will we do when you are gone? Your passion for town politics etc. won't be replaced by the younger generation, here is the chance to make changes and have a say about the future. Mike's comments were met with applause. Keith Machia respects both sides of this debate, but we are not 57 years ago, we are NOW, and we need to start a new tradition. We need to give all our residents and taxpayers the chance to vote and participate. Henry Rainville proposed an amendment to what Keith Machia had just said. Henry would like some kind of a guarantee that there will be a meeting / info session / TMD event in the days leading up to the vote (as mentioned earlier, Saturday) prior to ballot voting, if this passes. Henry would like to continue as we are, but feels he is in the minority. His amendment was confirmed as having a meeting / info session / TMD on Saturday, prior to Australian ballot voting on Tuesday. Emily Wimble attends college, and she is lucky her school provides them with TMD off so she could be here. She stated that TMD is not just about voting yes or no, it's about the platform of discussing important topics. If we call the info session a TMD she doesn't see how it will be any much different than what we are doing here today, but voting accessibility will be greatly expanded. Emily's comments were met with applause. Claude Chevalier asked us to look at history and remember when MVU used to be packed for their meeting. When that went to the ballot that went away, and that will happen here as well. It would be a loss for Highgate to eliminate a tradition that goes much deeper than money. Phil Ladue, Moderator, stated that this is a contentious issue, and he needs to keep the meeting moving. If seven voters are in favor of moving to paper ballot people can vote privately by paper ballot. Not everyone is comfortable with public speaking or voting aloud. Many more than seven voters stood up in support of voting via paper ballot on article #6. Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Elaine Nester to move to paper ballot on article #6. Back to Henry Rainville's amendment: Motion by Henry Rainville to hold a Saturday info session / TMD followed by Australian Ballot on Tuesday. The motion was seconded by Kermit Drown. Chris Shepard spoke that he was on the MVSD board when the merge took place and his only issue with Henry's amendment is tying us to an actual day, and asked it could be changed to "within five days of the vote" or maybe "to hold two informational meetings within a certain time frame". Ryan Maskell asked for clarification that any info meetings / TMD sessions leading up to ballot voting would be purely information, and no changes could be made at that point – correct! Things would be changed during the budget process before the budget is finalized and books are printed. Changes would need to be made by December or very early in December as part of budgeting. Robyn Klein spoke, as a new resident, and part of the "under 45 club". She moved here two years ago and immediately got involved and joined the Planning Commission. Today, households require two incomes, the housing market is crazy, and paying day care is like another mortgage payment. It isn't because they don't care. The burdens of today are much different than 25-50 years ago, and responsibilities are vastly different. Robyn's comments were met with applause. Pete Tinella does not want to see town meeting change. Alicia Kane asked about data on floor votes vs. ballot voting. Wendi has been the Town Clerk since 2011 and had prepared data back 10 years on the topic. 2023 62 on floor / 320 ballot; 2022 COVID 393 ballot; 2021 COVID 347 ballot; 2020 78 floor / 688 ballot (pres. primary year); 2019 94 floor / 280 ballot; 2018 137 floor / 374 ballot; 2017 187 floor / 459 ballot; 2016 151 floor / 746 ballot (pres. primary year); 2015 112 floor / 376 ballot; 2014 129 floor / 427 ballot; 2013 119 floor / 488 ballot. The numbers consistently show that voter participation is up substantially over the floor vote. Lynn Calderwood likes the idea of referring to the info session as TMD. She wants to see the community kept in the process as much as possible. As an example, today we discussed articles 2+3 that are on the ballot and that information presented is helpful for people to make a decision when they vote on the ballot. Dan Fortin finds it strange that people here are being asked to vote to stop having this meeting to benefit people that aren't

here. It doesn't make sense to him. Alice (Sue) Cota attends a lot of meetings, including Selectboard and Village Core. She encourages people to get involved and attend meetings either in person or via Zoom. Meeting minutes are available on our website, which is another good way to stay in the loop. Stacey Cauller is here today to vote YES on article #6. Her employer is not typical and allowed time off for this meeting. Many people work out of town and would love to vote on these issues. Not everyone can be sitting here at 9am on a Tuesday morning. Stacey's comments were met with applause. Paulette Unwin also spoke that her sister helped her out today to care for their mother so she could be here to vote yes on article #6 as well as some other topics today. She likes TMD but she now knows that not everyone can make it to vote from the floor. Zeb wants to move the question. David Rouse asked Wendi how much time and money are involved in revotes if articles fail on the ballot. Wendi stated she gets paid the same amount no matter how many hours she works, so the expenses associated with a revote are mostly minimal. Gerard Labrie made a motion to amend the article to keep town meeting as is, which was seconded by Peter Tinella. After some brief confusion and further discussion the amendment by Henry Rainville was up. Henry will rescind his motion if he has some guarantee that we will have some sort of meeting leading up to voting via ballot. Kyle Lothian responded that of course that can't be guaranteed, as the board changes constantly, but it would seem like a "no brainer" that a meeting / info session / TMD event would be held prior to voting. Motion by Henry Rainville to withdraw his amendment. The motion to withdraw was seconded by David Rouse – **PASSED**. The discussion then went to Mr. Labrie's amendment to keep town meeting as it is, which is the same thing as the wording we started with, just in the opposite manner. We can discuss in article #13 the details of an info session / TMD session. Mr. Labrie argued some, about his amendment and how this should work. Henry Rainville explained clearly to Mr. Labrie that his amendment and the article as written mean the same thing. Motion by Gerard Labrie to rescind his motion. The motion was seconded by several in the room – **PASSED**. It was decided earlier that this will go to paper ballot vote. Wendi spoke that she will set up quickly for the paper ballot vote, please form a single line to check in, get your ballot, vote, and check out with Shelley. If you are not able to get up, please let us know and someone will bring you a ballot. Phil Ladue, Moderator, repeated the article – ARTICLE #6 – Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate vote all public questions and budgets by Australian ballot? He reiterated several times that a YES vote on article #6 would mean you are in favor of Australian ballot and a NO vote means you are in favor of keeping the floor vote. Phil then read the article aloud again. **ARTICLE #6 RESULTS BY PAPER BALLOT VOTE, AS TABULATED BY THE HIGHGATE JPs PRESENT AT THIS FLOOR MEETING (Claude, Dennis, Patty, John & Bruce). TOTAL NUMBER OF PAPER BALLOTS CAST 148 BROKEN DOWN AS 79 YES / 69 NO. ARTICLE #6 PASSED.**

During the paper ballot process Mr. Wayne Laroche, FRA-5 Rep. had arrived and gave an update followed by some questions and comments. Lisa Hango was not able to attend but had prepared a write-up that was available to pick up and had been posted on our social media pages ahead of Town Meeting Day.

**Article #7**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate give approval for the village wastewater construction, and authorize general fund expenditures, up to Two-Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$200,000), to be paid towards the total project cost of Four Million Dollars (\$4,000,000)?** Motion by Chris Shepard, seconded by Robyn Klein. Zeb Maskell understands the town wanting and needing to grow but feels there is no guarantee people will sign up to jump on this system and that it will only benefit the center of town. Chris Shepard is on the VCMP committee and feels it will benefit the town with tax revenue that will come in. Businesses in the center of town, as well as some residents that have already expressed interest. Jacques Rainville doesn't feel this is the right system and that it will fail and cost us money. He wants it done right the first time and wants RL Vallee and Jolley to pay for it. Jacques's comments were met with some applause. Richard Noel noted that some of these comments are

incorrect and that in 5-6 years Highgate will have any investment in this project come back to them through charges to hook up to the system and property taxes. Richard also stated if we don't move ahead to develop the VCMP property we should just turn it into another park. Jim Wetherby added statements that the housing proposed will not be for just Highgate residents and that the wastewater system is in his backyard. Dianne Laroche asked for more information on the exact location (sand pit / former Wright property / Lamkin Street / across from cemetery, in the back). She also asked about maintenance costs, which Chris Shepard explained will be minimal and most can be done by our public works crew. Sharon added to the conversation that the property off Lamkin Street is 18 acres and will be a traditional leach field system. She further stated that the state will not allow us to move ahead with anything that would endanger our residents, current water / wastewater systems, or interfere with quality of life. Mr. Wetherby has met with three engineers at the property to address his concerns and questions. Sharon explained the system is a drip irrigation system, basically a large leach field, similar to what we have at our homes. It takes the water (not the solids) from the septic on site and brings it to a sand based area. Studies we have done show that without a wastewater system we will not be able to develop the VCMP (former Machia) property. We can't have the leach field in site, due to space issues and nearby wells / septic being too close. We have done many studies, worked with many engineers, and had to obtain many permits, all as part of this process. Selling property to Cathedral Square for senior housing is the next article. Sharon noted that their recent facility in South Hero pays \$47,000.00 annually in property taxes to the town of South Hero. Maintenance on the system will be supported by costs for people to be on the system. David Rouse feels that if we are voting on \$200,000.00 with this article, the sale price of the property (next article) should be the same – so there are no costs to the taxpayers. Rebecca Manning wants to focus on the ww system article and we will move on to the sale next. Rebecca elaborated some on the ww system starting out smaller, but we moved to a larger scale based on interest in the village. Grants were found to make this happen. Based on moving to the larger scale system it's not "free free free" as we were told in the beginning. But for \$200,000.00 (max) we will not find a better deal anywhere or ever again. Dan Fortin asked if a water system has been discussed for the VCMP property. At this time the plan is to tie into the arena well, which has more than enough capacity. Paulette Unwin had questions about maintenance, comparing it to the sidewalk, which she feels is poorly maintained, never cleared, and often under water. Sharon explained this is a closed system and maintenance is minimal and can be performed by our PWD crew and required inspections etc. would need to be done by qualified professionals. Costs will be covered by those who use the system. Richard Smith asked how many people have a filter on their septic tank, because if you don't you can't hook up to this system. Jim Wetherby wanted to know why water isn't being sent over to Lamkin Street – not fair. Rebecca Manning replied to his comments that if his well was contaminated, or anyone's for that matter, he would be able to sue, but that is why so much leg work is being done to ensure everything is done correctly. Mr. Wetherby stated it's easier to ask for forgiveness. Tammy Rowell asked about the proposed senior housing facility being three stories. Phil Ladue reminded her that is the next article. Motion by Zeb Maskell to move the question to paper ballot. The motion was seconded by Kevin Spears. More than seven people stood in support of moving to paper ballot – **PASSED**. Phil re-read the article aloud again as people were moving to paper ballot vote. Following the paper ballot vote, Phil re-read the article aloud along with the results: **ARTICLE #7 BY PAPER BALLOT VOTE, AS TABULATED BY THE HIGHGATE JPs PRESENT AT THIS FLOOR MEETING (Claude, Dennis, Patty, John & Bruce). TOTAL NUMBER OF PAPER BALLOTS CAST 152 BROKEN DOWN AS 100 YES / 52 NO. ARTICLE #7 PASSED.**

#### **Article #8**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate give approval for the Town to sell 1 +/- acres of land from the Village Core Property to Cathedral Square, a non-profit corporation, for the express purpose of developing Senior Housing, in the amount of One-Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000)?** Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Chris Shepard. Tammy Rowell referred to the Cassidy property and senior housing proposed

there several years ago. That was all approved but did not happen when the market changed in 2008. She also asked about Highgate becoming a sanctuary town because Cathedral Square is based out of Chittenden County. We can't foresee the future. Richard Flint spoke to the location being walkable to everything and close to stores / churches / school. Sharon stated we can not guarantee all Highgate residents will be living there that want to because they are funded with state and federal funds. The law requires that the units to open to everyone and then they go through an application / qualification process. The units will be mixed income, which Sharon explained. We will not be a sanctuary town. The hope is to keep our friends and family close by and in our community. Zeb is against this because we keep buying property and sell it for less. It was explained that this is only one lot on the VCMP property and there are still four others that can be sold. Zeb fails to see the benefits. His comments were met with applause. Rebecca Manning spoke to the purchase price question. We did purchase the Machia property for \$250,000.00. This one acre +/- lot we are asking for approval to sell for \$100,000.00. Paul de la Brueure feels like mixed messages are being sent with this proposal. Maurice Parah asked for clarification on first eligibility to move in. There have been several meetings about this topic. The waiting list is with Cathedral Square and you must contact them to be added to that list. So far about a dozen names have been added. It will be advertised more broadly as things move along. Dianne Laroche asked about Cathedral Square selling it and if it will always be senior housing. She does not agree with the location. Jeff Labelle asked about management of the building. He sees buildings like these where grandchildren end up living there and it becomes chaos. Sharon responded that they are the "gold standard" in senior housing and if you are not following rules you stand to be evicted. They give a damn about their residents and quality of life and want to see people succeed and remain independent in their senior years, if possible. This proposal adds to our grand list and tax base. Chris Shepard spoke more about the units: 30 total / 26 are one-bedroom / 4 are two-bedroom / common space / laundry room / green space / and more. He likes the idea of this being near the school for volunteer purposes and interaction. There are no guarantees it won't ever be sold but it will remain 55+ housing because of the funding to build it and rules associated with that. David Rouse asked if they could sell the lot for more money. He also asked why we didn't charge them \$200,000.00 which is the amount left to cover the ww project. Paulette Unwin asked who will pay for the subdivision process. Sharon doesn't know if it will be the town or Cathedral Square but said those costs are minimal either way. We are waiting for Barnard & Gervais to finish the survey. It was asked who set the \$100,000.00 price tag. That is what was proposed, and the town accepted it. Bruce Gagne asked about capacity on the ww system after the senior housing project. The entire capacity of the leach field is 20,000 - 30,000 gallons per day. The entire VCMP property will account for 6,500 gallons per day of that. So there is capacity for more people / businesses to join. Dianne Laroche asked if the former hotel / Machia house will be torn down. That is on a different lot and not part of this proposal at all. That is another vote for another time. The senior housing lot is more towards the back, closer to the school. Zeb wants to see that house torn down. If someone were to purchase that lot they could do what they want with that house. For today's purposes it is not part of the discussion. Philip Brosseau (Butch) asked if Cathedral Square could expand. 30 units doesn't seem like enough. It was noted that 30 units is a standard size that they like to build and maintain - referring to South Hero and St. Albans. Ryan Maskell asked about the well and when / why the arena well was chosen. Sharon spoke to that, noting that municipal water sources were looked at and the arena well yields 60 gallons per minute, which is awesome and there is ample capacity there. Nothing is a done deal, but that is the plan. Greg Farnham asked questions about how we will be guaranteed that the entire building will not be section 8 in the center of our town. Rebecca Manning explained how the rents work and it is based on income sensitivity. There is a great need for housing and senior housing in our state. We have done lots of studies / meetings / gotten input / testing and senior housing always rose to the top of the list. Motion by Gerard Labrie to move the question. The motion was seconded by Richard Noel - **PASSED. ARTICLE #8 BY VOICE VOTE - PASSED.**

*Zeb Maskell made a motion to adjourn for lunch, which was seconded by no one, so we kept going.*

**Article #9**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$5,000 to assist with moving expenses associated with the relocation of Franklin County Field Days?** Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Henry Rainville. No new site has been found yet, but the FCFD board continues to look at and explore options. Zeb asked what \$5k will do when you don't have a location? Keith Ploof confirmed that 2024 will be their last year at the current site (Franklin County State Airport in Highgate). The State is willing to help them move, but it will take a lot. It was noted that the average profit annually from FCFD is around \$20,000.00 and it is put right back into the event. This was not a petitioned article. Fernand Gagne circulated letters to all FC towns looking for \$5,000.00 to help them with the relocation. KC Frankenburger asked what happens to the \$5k if no suitable location is found. Richard Flint and Keith Ploof are FCFD board members, but did not have an answer to that. Will FCFD still collect the money if no site is found? FCFD owns the structures but not the land. Richard Noel spoke to the FAA being the big pusher behind the relocation noting they need the space if an aircraft has issues and needs to land. Even though FCFD is only a few days per year. Doesn't make any sense. Mike Patnode suggested that FCFD establish a donation box. Rebecca Manning asked for more information on who the board of directors are. Only Richard and Keith were present. No one else was present to answer questions. David Rouse said we are having a lot of discussion on \$5k so he made a motion to move it to a vote or he will amend it up to \$10k. The motion to move it to a vote was seconded by Kermit Drown – **PASSED**. Phil Ladue re-read the article aloud. **ARTICLE #9 BY VOICE VOTE – PASSED.**

**Article #10**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$585,000 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Capital Improvement Plan, with an estimated \$485,000 to be raised by taxes?** Motion by Chris Shepard, seconded by Claude Chevalier. Zeb Maskell wants to hear from somebody as to why the CIP has gone up and down and what we are buying etc. The CIP grid is on page 39 of the town report – a total of \$585,000.00 to be offset with \$100,000.00 of ARPA funds. Kyle Lothian went line item by line item through the grid. The department totals are as follows: Parks & Rec. \$90,000.00; Library Relocation \$50,000.00; HVFD \$130,000.00; Public Works \$205,000.00; Around Town Projects \$110,000.00. Shelley Laroche explained that things in the CIP typically cost more than \$5k and take longer than one year to save up for. That can be infrastructure, vehicles, buildings, etc. Chris Shepard asked about the Machia Road slide project. Richard Flint provided a brief update that we are working with a new engineering firm and hope to have more answers soon. Claude Chevalier asked about the revenue vs. expenditures on page 55 of the town report. There were no further questions. Phil Ladue re-read the article aloud. **ARTICLE #10 BY VOICE VOTE – PASSED.**

**Article #11**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$1,060,134 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Highway Fund, with an estimated \$899,134 to be raised by taxes?** Motion by Claude Chevalier, seconded by Rebecca Manning. Claude asked what pages in the book he can find the highway fund, they are labeled as public works. Paving was the main question, we did not have any paving done in 2023 due to Pike being overbooked and the weather was terrible all year. We do approximately 1.5 miles per year, so both 2023 and 2024 paving will be done in June/July this year. Last years list was: St. Armand Road \$138,950.00 / Rainville Road \$55,929.00 / Durkee Road \$31,897.00 and Machia Road \$111,859.00. And the price never goes down. There were no further questions or discussion. Phil Ladue re-read the article aloud. **ARTICLE #11 BY VOICE VOTE – PASSED.**

**Article #12**

**Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$1,413,307 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the General Fund, with an estimated \$707,147 to be raised by taxes?**

Motion by Henry Rainville, seconded by Rebecca Manning. Zeb asked why the difference in the budget vs. what we need to raise in taxes. Henry asked about dispatching fees. MVR switched dispatching firms from Middlebury to St. Albans and we were given no warning, no choice, no conversation. We were told when it was done. We were not given the ability to make a decision on this. The new dispatch contract began January 1<sup>st</sup>. Zeb said we have always voted on MVR or AmCare or whomever. Zeb feels we should be able to void the contract and do what we want. Scott Martin explained the frustration and we have let MVR know our displeasure with the situation and the way it was handled. The board is extremely frustrated with MVR. Henry asked if our contract included dispatching fees. No, the contract did not include the dispatching fees we have always paid them on our own, but we have never had a say in who is used. We will learn from this experience with MVR and we need to remember it. Kyle Lothian added that we were shocked – basically they switched due to better service, knowing the area better, being on the same page as everyone else. Kyle feels there is an underlying story that we don't know and might never know. We will have a say in dispatching fees in the future. The dispatching contract was separate years ago, and when they switched to Middlebury we lost control of that, so when our last year with MVR is done the Selectboard will have opportunity to renegotiate all aspects of emergency services, including dispatching. We pay separately for dispatching for HVFD. Dispatching is included with our policing contract. So we pay three times for dispatching services in town. Woody asked if we can get MVR for breach of contract? The board believes no. Kyle said pretty much what we were told was to pay it and shut up. And to get legal involved on breach of contract would be pricy, but we will remember this next year. Lynn Calderwood asked about policing services. We will be contracting with Franklin County Sheriff's Office for 40 hours per week, which will start 7/1/24. Zeb asked about funds to offset the \$200,000.00 from the earlier article. Zeb wanted to make a motion to move the \$100k from the sale to Cathedral Square to the general fund to offset the costs in the general fund. All of this likely won't happen in the budget cycle reflected in the book, so we aren't going to mess with those numbers. There was a motion from the floor to move the vote. Phil re-read the article aloud.

**ARTICLE #12 BY VOICE VOTE – PASSED.**

**Article #13**

**To transact any other business legally authorized to be transacted, considered proper and necessary when met.**

Motion by Zeb Maskell, seconded by Dianne Laroche. Zeb again asked about the \$200,000.00 wastewater price tag and that affecting the general fund. Shelley pointed out that the \$100,000.00 purchase price for the land in article #8 will be offsetting that amount. Dianne Laroche wanted to confirm what kind of informational meeting we will be having next year prior to Australian ballot voting. Kyle Lothian said there will be an informational meeting but from the floor today (so far) we have not voted on when that will be. Dianne would like a promise (or something) that an informational session will take place. Richard Flint said that will definitely be happening, as it always has. Ryan Maskell suggested a motion to make that official under this article. There was discussion on the Saturday before TMD or maybe within 5-days of TMD to hold an info session. Vern Brosky III spoke on the topic, one issue that came up is that five days before TMD it would strictly be informational, and nothing could be changed. Those changes need to happen in December before the books are finalized. Five days prior would strictly be informational for Australian ballot voting. Chris Shepard spoke to the MVSD board and their transition and getting information out. They tried different things to get people to attend and participate. Then MVSD tried multiple info meetings and attendance was still low. What is working, to an extent, is more online informational short

videos to share info. Motion by Dianne Laroche to hold an informational session / TMD within the five days prior to the first Tuesday in March. The motion was seconded by Kermit Drown. Discussion continued and Phil Ladue re-read the proposed motion aloud – **BY VOICE VOTE – PASSED**. Scott Martin was thanked for his time on the Selectboard. He is not seeking re-election and there is an open seat on the board. Motion by Emily Wimble to adopt a resolution to immediately ask for an immediate and permanent cease fire in Gaza and that the Federal Government cease funding to the Israelis. The motion was seconded by Beth Ann Shepard. Claude Chevalier noted that there is signage on the door to leave politics out of this meeting and he found it very disingenuous that this young lady would involve us in something we have no control over. Emily disagreed, stating that our federal tax dollars are funding this. There were questions on if we should even be discussing this. Phil looked up the information in the Moderator Handbook, Chapter 12, Page 47. In the mean-time Karen Gagne Fortin let everyone know that our MVU Lady TBird Hockey Team is in the DII State Championship game tonight at 6pm at Gutterson (UVM). The bus leaves at 3:30 if anyone wants to join the send off! Phil came back to the topic and it could be discussed and voted on. He re-read aloud the motion that was on the floor to adopt a resolution to immediately ask for an immediate and permanent cease fire in Gaza and that the Federal Government cease funding to the Israelis – **BY VOICE VOTE THE RESOLUTION FAILED**. Richard thanked Scott again for his service on the Selectboard and noted that Pete St. Germain had arrived later during the floor meeting. Those present thanked Pete for his years of service in the listers office.

Motion by Kermit Drown to adjourn Town Meeting Day 2024 @ 1:00pm. The motion was seconded by Henry Rainville – **BY VOICE VOTE PASSED**.

Respectfully submitted by:

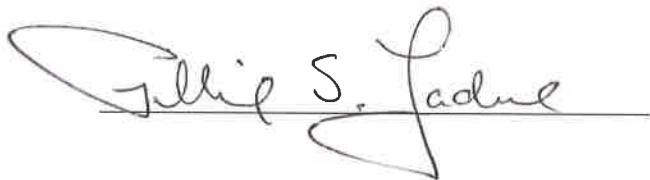


Wendi Dusablon  
Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes Approved by:



Richard Flint  
Selectboard Chair



Phillip Ladue  
Moderator

## 2024 Town Meeting Warning ~ Highgate Vermont

The legal voters of the Town of Highgate, Vermont, are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Highgate Elementary School Gymnasium in the Town of Highgate on Tuesday, March 5, 2024 between the hours of seven o'clock in the forenoon (7:00 am), at which time the polls will open, and seven o'clock in the evening (7:00 pm), at which time the polls will close, to vote by Australian ballot upon the following Articles of business:

**ARTICLE #1:** To elect the following town officers:

- a) One Cemetery Commissioner for a term of five (5) years
- b) One Library Trustee for a term of one (1) year remaining on a five (5) year term
- c) One Library Trustee for a term of five (5) years
- d) One Lister for a term of one (1) year remaining on a three (3) year term
- e) One Lister for a term of two (2) years remaining on a three (3) year term
- f) One Lister for a term of three (3) years
- g) One Moderator for the ensuing year
- h) One Selectboard Member for a term of one (1) year remaining on a two (2) year term
- i) One Selectboard Member for a term of one (1) year remaining on a three (3) year term
- j) One Selectboard Member for a term of two (2) years remaining on a three (3) year term
- k) One Selectboard Member for a term of three (3) years

**ARTICLE #2:** Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize cannabis retailers in the Town of Highgate, pursuant to 7 V.S.A. § 863?

**ARTICLE #3:** Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the elimination of the Office of Lister and replace it with a professionally qualified assessor appointed by the selectboard who shall have the same powers, discharge the same duties, proceed in the discharge thereof in the same manner, and be subject to the same liabilities as are prescribed for listers or the board of listers under the provisions of Title 32?

The legally qualified voters of the Town of Highgate, Vermont are hereby warned and notified to meet at the Highgate Elementary School Gymnasium on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, at 9:00 am to transact the following business:

**ARTICLE #4:** To receive and act on the reports of the town officers for the past year.

*Voice Vote - approved*

**ARTICLE #5:** Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate set the final date of payment for FY2024/2025 property taxes to be **Thursday, October 31, 2024**, with payments to be received in the town office by 4:00pm?

*Voice Vote - approved*

**ARTICLE #6:** Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate vote all public questions and budgets by Australian ballot?

*Paper ballot vote*

*79 yes - 69 no  
approved*

*Results*

ARTICLE #7:

Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate give approval for the village wastewater construction, and authorize general fund expenditures, up to Two-Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$200,000), to be paid towards the total project cost of Four Million Dollars (\$4,000,000)?

100 y/c  
52-no  
approved

paper ballot

ARTICLE #8:

Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate give approval for the Town to sell 1 +/- acres of land from the Village Core Property to Cathedral Square, a non-profit corporation, for the express purpose of developing Senior Housing, in the amount of One-Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000)?

Voice Vote - approved.

ARTICLE #9:

Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$5,000 to assist with moving expenses associated with the relocation of Franklin County Field Days?

Voice Vote - approved.

ARTICLE #10:

Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$585,000 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Capital Improvement Plan, with an estimated \$485,000 to be raised by taxes?

Voice Vote - approved.

ARTICLE #11:

Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$1,060,134 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Highway Fund, with an estimated \$899,134 to be raised by taxes?

Voice Vote - approved.

ARTICLE #12:

Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate appropriate \$1,413,307 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the General Fund, with an estimated \$707,147 to be raised by taxes?

Voice Vote - approved.

ARTICLE #13:

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

Voice Vote - approved.

Dated at Highgate Center, Vermont this 18<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2024

Wendi Dusablon

Attest: Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Mery Souza

Mery Souza, Highgate Selectboard Member

Richard Flint

Richard Flint, Highgate Selectboard Chair

Scott F. Martin

Scott F. Martin, Highgate Selectboard Member

Vern Brosky III

Vern Brosky III, Highgate Selectboard Vice-Chair

Kyle L. Lathian

Kyle L. Lathian, Highgate Selectboard Member

Results

**OFFICIAL BALLOT  
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING  
HIGHGATE, VERMONT  
MARCH 5, 2024**

**INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS**

- Use BLACK Pen to fill in the oval. DO NOT USE PENCIL.
- To vote for a person whose name is printed on the ballot, fill in the oval to the right of the name of that person.
- To vote for a person whose name is not printed on the ballot, write the person's name in the blank space provided and fill in the oval to the right of the write-in line. Please use block letters and stay within the box provided for write-ins.
- Do not vote for more candidates than the "VOTE for NOT MORE THAN #" for an office.
- If you make a mistake, tear, or deface the ballot, return it to an election official and obtain another ballot. DO NOT ERASE.

<p><b>BOARD OF LISTERS</b> for a term of one year remaining on a three year term</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p>(Write-in) <u>23</u> <input type="radio"/></p>	<p><b>LIBRARY TRUSTEE</b> for a term of one year remaining on a five year term</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p><b>AMY RAINVILLE</b> <u>557</u> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>(Write-in) <u>2</u> <input type="radio"/></p>	<p><b>SELECTBOARD MEMBER</b> for a term of one year remaining on a two year term</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p><b>MERRY SOUZA</b> <u>499</u> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>(Write-in) <u>8</u> <input type="radio"/></p>
<p><b>BOARD OF LISTERS</b> for a term of two years remaining on a three year term</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p>(Write-in) <u>22</u> <input type="radio"/></p>	<p><b>LIBRARY TRUSTEE</b> for a term of five years</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p><b>CHELSEA PIGEON</b> <u>524</u> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>(Write-in) <u>1</u> <input type="radio"/></p>	<p><b>SELECTBOARD MEMBER</b> for a term of one year remaining on a three year term</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p><b>KYLE LOTHIAN</b> <u>561</u> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>(Write-in) <u>5</u> <input type="radio"/></p>
<p><b>BOARD OF LISTERS</b> for a term of three years</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p>(Write-in) <u>19</u> <input type="radio"/></p>	<p><b>MODERATOR</b> for the ensuing year</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p><b>PHILLIP S. LADUE</b> <u>527</u> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>(Write-in) <u>5</u> <input type="radio"/></p>	<p><b>SELECTBOARD MEMBER</b> for a term of two years remaining on a three year term</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p>(Write-in) <u>58</u> <input type="radio"/></p>
<p><b>CEMETERY COMMISSIONER</b> for a term of five years</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p><b>KEITH E. PLOOF</b> <u>544</u> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>(Write-in) <u>5</u> <input type="radio"/></p>	<p><b>SELECTBOARD MEMBER</b> for a term of three years</p> <p>Vote for not more than ONE</p> <p><b>VERNON BROSKY III</b> <u>471</u> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>(Write-in) <u>4</u> <input type="radio"/></p>	

**TOWN ARTICLES**

**Article #2:** Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize cannabis retailers in the Town of Highgate, pursuant to 7 V.S.A. § 863?

274 YES   
320 NO

**Article #3:** Shall the voters of the Town of Highgate authorize the elimination of the Office of Lister and replace it with a professionally qualified assessor appointed by the Selectboard, who shall have the same powers, discharge the same duties, proceed in the discharge thereof in the same manner, and be subject to the same liabilities as are prescribed for listers or the board of listers under the provisions of Title 32?

317 YES   
261 NO

REPUBLICAN PARTY  
OFFICIAL PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY BALLOT  
MARCH 5, 2024

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS

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- To vote for a person whose name is not printed on the ballot, write the person's name in the blank space provided and fill in the oval to the right of the write-in line. Please use block letters and stay within the box provided for write-ins.
- Do not vote for more candidates than the "VOTE for NOT MORE THAN #" for an office.
- If you make a mistake, tear, or deface the ballot, return it to an election official and obtain another ballot. DO NOT ERASE.

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Vote for not more than ONE

RYAN L. BINKLEY of Texas	3	<input type="radio"/>
CHRIS CHRISTIE of New Jersey	5	<input type="radio"/>
RON DESANTIS of Florida	7	<input type="radio"/>
NIKKI HALEY of South Carolina	131	<input type="radio"/>
VIVEK RAMASWAMY of Ohio	2	<input type="radio"/>
DONALD J. TRUMP of Florida	324	<input type="radio"/>
(Write-In)		<input type="radio"/>

Results

**DEMOCRATIC PARTY  
OFFICIAL PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY BALLOT  
MARCH 5, 2024**

**INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS**

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- To vote for a person whose name is not printed on the ballot, write the person's name in the blank space provided and fill in the oval to the right of the write-in line. Please use block letters and stay within the box provided for write-ins.
- Do not vote for more candidates than the "VOTE for NOT MORE THAN #" for an office.
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**FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES**

Vote for not more than ONE

JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR of Delaware	104	<input type="radio"/>
MARK STEWART GREENSTEIN of Connecticut	71	<input type="radio"/>
JASON MICHAEL PALMER of Maryland	4	<input type="radio"/>
DEAN PHILLIPS of Minnesota	14	<input type="radio"/>
CENK UYGUR of California	9	<input type="radio"/>
MARIANNE WILLIAMSON of Washington, DC		<input type="radio"/>
(Write-in)		<input type="radio"/>

**Results**