

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Special Selectboard Mtg.

January 5, 2015 @ 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 Jeff Towle, Chair @ 7:00pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members- Jeff Towle, Chair; Andy King, Vice-Chair; Chris Yates

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon - Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Admin; Tom Racine – Town Treasurer

Public / Other – Henry Rainville, Brian Spears, Don Gilbert, Paulette Tatro, Kim Gates, Ty Choiniere, Liza Comiskey, Steve Bushey (arrived @ 8pm)

B. Budget discussion

• Recreation Department

Ashley LaRocque from MAHA sent some financials to Tom. Tom prepared some scenarios with the arena being town operated vs. MAHA Facilities Board operated. Paulette hand delivered letters on 12/19/14 to our surrounding towns Selectboards with regard to allocations in support of the Highgate Arena project. Liza and Ty were present from the Parks & Recreation Committee. They have a meeting tomorrow night and will discuss a budget number for this upcoming cycle. Liza doesn't anticipate it being a huge number. They have no money right now and are limping along and making it work. Ty asked who currently pays for mowing of the fields – the town does. Heidi asked what are the biggest questions that need clarification for budgeting purposes. The question of hiring someone full time / part time / or not at all right now as an employee of the town to manage the arena is a priority. Kim has some ideas, and also noted that the year 2015 will involve a construction season from May – July (tentatively) at the arena. This will impact the indoor turf season for this year only. Kim also expressed the need to pay zamboni drivers for an extra 10 hours per week. Andy asked if the arena could be run virtually the same as it is now, with some added hours as needed or required to make it run smoothly. Paulette is concerned if the building is not leased by MAHA then where will the volunteers come from. Liza would like to see things roll along as they have been, at least for this first year. Once the arena is up and running with a new ice system we could take a look at a potential full time manager in the next budget cycle. Ty pointed out that hiring somebody new will require guidance from the MAHA facilities board. That person, in an ideal situation, would be the “go to person” year round for recreation in town. This would include the arena, fields, and all recreational programming. Henry added that if we continue to lease the building, the lease agreement could be structured in a way to show the taxpayers that the arena has not cost the town a lot of money. We all knew the arena had some issues, and the product (the arena) will now be up to today's standards and the lease agreement should reflect that. The vested people should run the business. Chris asked the MAHA folks if they feel the current set up is working. Don Gilbert feels the system in place works well. MAHA had not planned on walking away as soon as the project went through. Don does not disagree that the current lease to MAHA is on the low side, which was put in place based

on what we had. The potential numbers Tom has presented tonight are basically to cover the monthly lease amount and payment to Swanton Village for electricity. Tom is suggesting to have a lease figure instead of a monthly lease amount, an electric bill and a few other things. Tom is in favor of just one number. Henry asked for clarification on VT gas usage and where it can be found on the handouts. Paulette had some questions for Tom regarding the \$25,000.00 for debt payment and how it ties into the brochure that was mailed out to taxpayers prior to the vote in November. Kim had questions about programming run through the public library. Liza noted that the library board of trustees is not willing to pass these programs over the recreation department. These programs were in place prior to the parks and recreation committee being formed (yoga, yoga tots, girls on the run, cross country, little dribblers, etc.). Our library has become known for out of the box thinking. Liza would like all sign ups and registration for programming to go through recreation, but she will still facilitate her original programs. The parks and recreation committee thinks there is a lot of potential here that is not being met. Jeff added that any person they would hire full time for recreation would run the recreation offerings through the town working with the library, parks and recreation as well as other people and organizations in town. Paulette added that the concerns Ty is expressing should be all laid out in the job description. It is her hope that it is not somebody who is totally green to this area with no knowledge or experience. We have seen that that does not work. Paulette sees no reason to work anyone in to the equation until at least January 2016, to which Chris agreed. Chris would like to see a business plan on how the arena will sustain itself. Chris also might be way off, but he got a vibe from the architect that we might not have enough money for the project. We are in the process of hiring a construction manager, so we will know more in the near future. Kim will have some more numbers for the board by Thursday, as they are having a meeting on Wednesday. The one line item that will change is payroll. Paulette pointed out that benefits will need to be considered in what a new employee would earn. Ty asked if a new well is included in this project. A new well was recommended. The board asked Don about rates for ice time. Currently MAHA and MVU pay \$155.00 per hour and Milton and St. Albans pay \$160.00 per hour. They have discussed going to \$170.00 as an incremental jump for next year, but no rates have been set. Heidi asked if they would be opposed to going higher. Ty asked if it makes more sense to sell more ice and utilize the facility, rather than raise fees. He noted that programs have been added such as broom ball and more sessions of stick and puck, which is great. St. Albans charges in the area of \$210.00 per hour for ice time at Collins Perley, possibly more. Paulette noted that if rates go up, Highgate families will be paying, and Highgate families are already paying. She noted that 150+ people come through the door for public skating. Andy noted it is important to identify what our end game looks like. The Selectboard won't manage the arena. If we end up with a manager, he or she will report to the board and work in conjunction with MAHA and the parks and recreation committee. If MAHA continues to lease and take care of ice time, could / should there be a lease for just that six months of ice time? Jeff said the challenge for the recreation manager will be facility rental and pursuing new programs. This would be heavily assisted by parks and recreation, little league, MAHA and others. Jeff would like to see a recreation trustee board also. Liza noted that she is not interested in adding any new recreational programs under the library, just what she is currently doing. Brian asked if the manager would also be running the zamboni and performing maintenance. He feels it is important that he or she be a working manager. MAHA currently pays out 70-80 hours per week for someone to be there, this is in addition to all the volunteer hours. Tom noted that the likelihood of the arena ever being totally self-sustaining is slim to none. But, it is of great value to our

community, so we will want to minimize the impact to the taxpayer. It was agreed that the first step is not to hire a manger, as there is nothing yet in existence to manage. If MAHA is interested in renewing the lease until 2016, the lease will change. Late spring and summer 2015 will be construction on the inside. Outside activities will not be impacted. Henry asked Don if he feels that MAHA is willing to lease again in the foreseeable future. Don feels the answer is yes. Henry noted that history has shown that the Town of Highgate has not served the arena or the recreation department well in the past. The issue being that the board is constantly changing, so continuity is very difficult. Henry is in favor of leasing it out, because the town has not done a good job of owning it. Chris has concerns about if and when volunteering stops or slows down. Steve Bushey shares this concern, but agrees that things are running well now so why try and force a management structure. If thing should ever start to fall apart with MAHA we would need to grab the reigns and deal with it. Steve isn't sure how a manager would benefit the town. Our end goal for many years has been to get the facility in use. Ty thinks that volunteers come and go and that hiring somebody would work. Heidi added that volunteers do come and go, but Liza and Ty through parks and recreation are drumming up more volunteers that will serve to what MAHA can't do. The MAHA contract expires in July 2015. If it is to be renewed, what would the terms be? That is the first step in moving forward. Jeff asked Tom about the debt service for the bond. In year two it is \$98,000.00 and gradually goes down from there. Jeff agreed that the arena is not projected to be a money making facility, but we should do our best to have control over losing money. This budget cycle we are working on is July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016. In the next cycle we will have a much better picture. Andy asked if we decide to hire a manager mid-cycle in January 2016, where will that money come from, and can it be built into the MAHA lease? Chris asked if we lease it back to MAHA for a year, what is the incentive for MAHA to increase revenue? Henry replied that we would need to put the lease agreement high enough to cover costs. Henry is not opposed to giving money to recreation, but he is opposed to it costing us what it has in the past and have an undervalued product. Chris noted that the town would still be leasing MAHA a "pig", it is just a pig which we have added to the life of and have taken the risk of failure away by replacement of the ice system. Paulette feels that 1.5 or 2 years of what we are currently doing at the arena is the best scenario. Henry seconds that, and feels it would give the board time to see how things are going in a years time. On or before March 2016 we will know where we are at and how best to move forward. Chris would like to see the parks and recreation committee and the MAHA facilities board become one entity. Kim has concerns with that and people becoming burned out. Karen Gagne-Fortin is a very valuable asset to the parks and recreation committee, and she is very closely tied with the arena and MAHA as well. She has the knowledge and can help us work through the process. Ty added that many activities that could happen at the arena have nothing to do with sports (concerts, flea markets, car shows, farmers markets, etc). Liza agrees, and feels that the two committees / boards can limp along and make it work and buy some time. Henry said we could still budget some money for a manger and end up not using it, which could be explained at town meeting. Steve Bushey agreed, as did Kim Gates. She feels it's a good safety net to have. Liza also had questions about using Highgate Parks & Recreation on paperwork or does she have to continue using Highgate Public Library as a sponsor. Currently she is putting all these programs through her Highgate Fit Kids program. Tom said the concern is that no money had been budgeted for parks and recreation, and then there was also insurance and background checks to deal with. The library already had access to these things, so until we had some footing the programs could be run through the public library.

Don noted that he and Brian are very familiar with the current ice making system at the arena, but it will take some on the job training and some time to become familiar with the new system. Jeff asked Don to go back to MAHA and get an affirmative that they want to remain on board with another leasing situation. Don thinks that rocking the boat at this stage of the game would not be good. Ty asked if parks and recreation will have money in the next budget cycle. Tom asked Ty to forward him info from their meeting tomorrow night, Jan. 6th, and yes, they will have money worked into the budget once Tom receives the information.

C. Arena Construction Project

Today, January 5th, was the deadline and we received 7 proposals for Construction Management Services. The next step is to look at the proposals and fill out an evaluation sheet for each submission. The committee should take into account how well they have responded to the questions in the RFP and what the confidence level is with each proposal. It was decided that the committee will consist of: Jeff Towle, Heidi Britch-Valenta, Paulette Tatro, Steve Bushey, Don Gilbert, Brian Spears and Henry Rainville. The hiring committee will meet on January 12th @ 5pm to go over the review sheets and those chosen to move forward for interviews will be scheduled for January 16th starting @ 3pm here at the Highgate Municipal Building.

D. Appropriations

It is Tom's understanding that if we wanted to make changes to existing yearly appropriations that it would have to go before the voters. Tom will forward the board a copy of the VLCT policy. We are currently at 4% and surrounding towns are at 2% or less. Andy would like to see the policy and continue the discussion at the January 8th Selectboard meeting. Heidi will put this back on the agenda.

E. Articles for Town Meeting

We need to start thinking more about this, and can also continue this discussion on January 8th. Topics to consider are; eliminating the internal auditor position(s), changing the constable position from elected to appointed, voting on everything via Australian ballot vs. floor voting and considering installments for property taxes. This will also be back on the agenda for January 8th.

F. Selectboard items

• **Highway door repair update**

The fire marshall was here today and approved that it is acceptable to eliminate the walk in door on the front of the highway department. The mason said it would be a maximum of \$400.00 more to do the work. This will be an insurance claim and we will have to pay the deductible.

• **Misc.**

Steve Ploof has requested that the Selectboard take another look at the culvert in front of Jacques Rainville's property. Jacques stopped in and said there are issues that the town needs to address.

G. Fire Department

Dick Souza stopped by this meeting following the regular Monday night fire department meeting. He said they have quotes on three trucks. Engine #3 is no longer in service. Chris asked him to pull the keys, which Dick will do tonight. He also noted that many people are uncomfortable driving the van. They are going to pull the side panels off and send them to Hodgdon's. The department has decided they would like to purchase the crew cab pick-up truck. They are prepared to pay for any extras on the pick-up out of their fundraising account. They will utilize what they can off the van and also see what can be marketed and those funds put back into the fundraising

account. Jeff would like them to get a number from Hodgdon's and Ray's on the side panels from the van. Dick stated the murals off the van will be used for the wall of the fire station and also on the fire pit in the park. The three quotes received on the pick-up are from Barrette's, Handy GMC and Heritage Ford. Jeff asked about the truck committee. Dick said there were eight fire department members present at tonights meeting. David Desorcie was not present, but Dick will stop by and talk to David tomorrow and make sure there are no objections. David Rouse was the one who pulled the quotes together to be presented.

H. Upcoming events

Jan. 8	Selectboard Mtg.	7pm
Jan. 15	DRB Mtg.	CANCELLED
Jan. 20	Planning Comm. Mtg.	6pm

I. Executive session

Motion by Chris Yates to enter into executive session for a legal matter / delinquent tax issue @ 9:58pm. Motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Jeff Towle to exit executive session @ 10:38pm. Motion was seconded by Andy King – **APPROVED.**

J. Adjournment

Motion by Jeff Towle to adjourn the meeting @ 10:40pm. Motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by:

_____ Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by:

_____ Jeff Towle, Chair - Highgate Selectboard