

TOWN OF HIGHGATE SELECTBOARD MEETING

Thursday, January 18, 2018 @ 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 @ 7:08pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members – Sharon Bousquet, Chair; Josh LaRocque, Vice-Chair; Bruce Butler; Steve LaFar *absent* – *Randy Connelly*

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

Public / Other – Alice S. Cota; David Rouse; Woody Rouse; Ty Choiniere; Ryan Maskell; Jay Denault; James Jewett; Amy Nolan Bouchard; Henry Rainville; Jeff Towle; Elaine Ezerins

B. Public Comment(s)

- Sue Cota wanted to personally thank everyone on behalf of the Monument Road residents. There was significant flooding this past weekend due to ice jams and everyone that participated in helping was outstanding. Everyone was very professional and residents felt taken care of. She is grateful for the additional lighting installed on her road so she can keep a close eye on the river, noting we are not done with this yet. Sharon is grateful that Sue and her daughter are ok, as well as all other residents affected by this. We live in an amazing community where neighbor looks out for neighbor and we help one another. There is a long list of people that helped out over the weekend – HVFD members, AmCare, M&C Transport, My-T-Fine Restaurant, Heidi Britch-Valenta, Wendi Dusablon, Sharon Bousquet, Vonnie Lamotte (ACO), Town of Franklin, Town of Sheldon, Stowe Rescue, VT Emergency Management, The National Guard, NorthWest Regional Planning; the LaPans, Highgate Public Works, and many more. Resources are available at the Swanton Complex Friday, January 19th 9am – 5pm and Saturday, January 20th 9am – 1pm.
- Ty Choiniere wanted to clarify something from the last meeting as far as rescue services being available at the arena facility. Ty is a member of the Arena Facilities Board and the Parks & Rec. Committee. Ty has personally reached out to AmCare and will be sending weekly schedules of all events at the arena ages 12 and over. He added that in 2015 the VT Principals Assoc. passed a new law that states all high school contact sports have to have an athletic trainer on site. If an ambulance is on site, they are to provide secondary support to that trainer. AmCare is informed of the schedule now and he will continue to send weekly updates so they are given a fair shot. Prior to 2015 MVU had a contract with MVR on top of the contract that the town had with them.

- David Rouse said the sidewalks on Lamkin Street are accumulating water in a low spot by the church.
- Jay Denault from Franklin was present to speak about some recent events that have transpired. He spoke at length about his disappointment. For nearly two years he has been involved with the ACT46 study meetings. An exceptional proposal, in his opinion, was developed. There was limited editing to be done and the deadline to be submitted to the state was December 26th. Mr. Denault inquired with Mr. Goodrich, Franklin NorthWest Superintendent, on December 21st regarding what he was planning to submit to the state by the December 26th deadline. He did not get any answers. He did finally receive an email from Mr. Goodrich on December 27th stating that he had missed the deadline to submit the proposal. We are now in a different process. The Secretary of Education can decide if she wants to review it, ask for more info, or reject it. The Legislature is the only body that can grant an extension. Mr. Denault does not accept the excuse of it being late. There are plenty of resources in his office that it should have been submitted in a timely fashion. Sharon asked Mr. Denault what his town of Franklin is doing now. Mr. Denault noted that there were compliance issues found at the SU during an audit. He spoke to issues with the SU interfering with the Franklin Town Treasurer to perform her statutory duties, who also serves as the town's school treasurer. He is glad to report that a resolution was found and that there is no contract between the school district and the Franklin Town Treasurer. His point being, this is yet another strategy to consolidate services at the central office and it is very disheartening. There was further discussion on what a merger would mean to schools in Franklin and Highgate. The Town of Swanton would see a savings but at the expense of other towns. Mr. Denault feels we have a Superintendent that is working against us. Mr. Goodrich is a registered lobbyist. He did not come here to be our Superintendent, he came here to merge our district. It was also pointed out that the SU office budget is a very large part of what makes up our tax base and we don't get to vote on it. In Franklin there will be a warned article with regard to this and Mr. Denault read aloud from the petition "*Shall the legal voters of the Franklin Town School District be presented the Franklin NorthWest Supervisory Union budget for each ensuing year to be voted on separately*". There are no laws saying this petition can or cannot be submitted. This is a large budget with no accountability to the voters. David Roddy has served on the Highgate School Board for 27 years and finds the situation very frustrating. He added that state mandates usually come with no funding. James Jewett, who was present with Mr. Denault, stated that when Mr. Goodrich was asked why we can't vote on the SU budget, the answer was because it is not a municipality. More and more funds are being moved to the SU budget, which appears to be a sacred cow that we can't vote on. The fact that we don't vote on this is taxation without representation. Ty commented that he attended an ACT46 meeting two years ago and made these same comments. We can't even see the superintendent's salary from the info that they present. Ty also feels that our superintendent supports a merger even if he isn't saying it and thanked Mr. Denault for his research. Motion by Josh LaRocque to add an article to our Town Meeting Warning to mirror the article being voted on in Franklin. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED**. Note: the conversation leading up to this vote was quite lengthy and can be seen in its entirety by watching the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4vSQkUyueI&list=PLrBf_FpjKbweXICDn4iIKwbcJpvFZWZK or by following the link on our website www.highgatevt.org.

C. Public Works Department – Patrick Loyer

This past weekend was pretty intense with flooding issues and an issue with a truck on Rollo Road. The road softened up and essentially ripped the plow off the truck. The plow is in bad shape, but the truck only required a radiator hose, thankfully! Pat has a quote from Tenco for a new plow \$7,600.00, which is in stock in Barre. We could also put a frame on an old one for \$2,600.00 and wait 4-6 weeks. Shelley has initiated an insurance claim. We will wait for the adjuster to come out before we decide to purchase anything. We have a loaner plow from Franklin that is getting the job done. Franklin also suffered a similar incident on the same day. Waugh Farm Road is also under 5-6' of ice. Mr. Cheney lives down there and they were able to punch a hole in the ice so he could at least get in and out. It will be some time before they can get through all the ice using a loader and backhoe. For now the road is closed. Monument Road is opened up so residents can get in and out. The sand pile is taking a beating, with only about ¼ left. Pat has not seen any abuse for personal use, it has just been a very busy winter so far. He purchased new plow blades for Nick's truck yesterday. Pat would like to see a line item for plow parts in his budget. There was discussion on purchases over \$1,000.00 and the board wanting to see quotes prior to purchases over this amount. Motion by Sharon Bousquet for the Public Works Department to share quotes with the Selectboard that are in excess of \$1,000.00 for their approval prior to purchasing. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler with the amendment that special Selectboard meetings can be held if necessary – **APPROVED**. We don't want to hold up the process, but want to be mindful of taxpayer dollars at the same time. Jeff Towle asked about the town's purchasing policy. It states \$5,000.00 before bids are necessary. Bruce asked if we need to start using the sand from the Frontage Road property. Pat will need the combination first. Our salt budget is also taking a beating. Sharon commended the Public Works Department. They have had long days and long nights on the roads keeping the rest of us safe. She asked people to have kindness and patience. We do not have a bare roads policy, nor do we replace mailboxes. Pat's vacation request has been approved and Gary will be filling in when he is away Jan. 31 – Feb. 10.

D. Town Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche

Shelley was not present but had prepared the check warrants for this meeting. There were no questions on the check warrants.

E. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon

1. Minutes

- Motion by Josh LaRocque to approve the minutes from *January 4, 2018*, as written. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED**.
- Motion by Steve LaFar to approve the minutes from *January 10, 2018*, as written. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.
- Motion by Steve LaFar to approve the minutes from *January 17, 2018*, as written. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

2. Town Meetings Updates

The deadline was today at 5pm for petitions for warned articles. The deadline for consent forms and petitions for elected offices to be voted on by Australian ballot is Monday, January 29 by 5pm. We have ten positions to be voted on this year and the list can be found on our website or FaceBook page, as well as posted around town.

3. 2018 Liquor License Renewal – Jolley Associates

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit the regular meeting and enter into the liquor control board @ 8:15pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.** Motion by Josh LaRocque to sign and approve the renewal application for Jolley Associates. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED.** Motion by Sharon to exit the liquor control board and enter back into the regular meeting @ 8:17pm. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED.** Ty asked if there are any violations if the town is notified. Yes, we are notified in writing and Wendi would share that with the board.

4. Town Reports

Today was the deadline for warned articles, so a draft of the town report is at the printers. We should have books by the first part of February, well in advance of the statutory requirement.

F. Administrative Items – Heidi Britch-Valenta

1. Field Days Letter

Motion by Josh LaRocque to approve the letter of support for racing events at Franklin County Field Days. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED.**

2. MNWR Mutual Aid Agreement

Ken Sturm from the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge stopped by. He was away when the flooding occurred last weekend, but noted we have a mutual aid agreement with them that has expired. He brought a new one by, and it is valid for five years. He has the authorization to renew it with us if we so wish. This is an offer to use their employees and labor in the event of a storm. Motion by Josh LaRocque to approve the mutual aid agreement with the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**

3. Energy Committee Mtg.

The new energy plan was adopted by the Planning Commission and Selectboard already to be added to the town plan. It is now up for review by the NorthWest Regional Planning Commission's Energy Committee on January 29th. If approved it will then go before NRPC on January 31st.

4. Open House – February 20th

The Planning Commission will be hosting an open house event on February 20th from 5-7pm. Light refreshments will be served. All boards and committees are welcome and encouraged to attend and set up a table with information to share.

G. Selectboard Items

1. ATV Ordinance

Copies are available of the draft ordinance here tonight as well as various locations around town and on our website. The next Selectboard meeting (Feb. 1) will also be a public hearing on the proposed ordinance. Today, Danny Hale from VASA added some comments to consider. Residents can send feedback or comments to Sharon by email sbousquet@highgatevt.org, or most people already know where to find her at work.

2. Upcoming Meetings

We need to set some dates for the town meeting informational session as well as time for the ambulance providers to come in for presentations. AmCare is hesitant to come, we already know their budgets and they have come in for regular updates as well. They are interested in our business and are a very professional service that provides quality care. They feel they may, yet again, become the object of attack and

that is not a comfortable situation to be in. We will reach out to them again. The dates for upcoming meetings were set as:

Thursday, February 1 st	ATV Ordinance Public Hearing & Selectboard Mtg.
Thursday, February 15 th	Town Meeting Info Session & abbreviated Selectboard Mtg.
Thursday, March 1 st	Ambulance Providers Presentations & abbreviated Selectboard Mtg. (alternative location possible due to space)
Tuesday, March 6 th	Town Meeting Day
Thursday, March 15 th	ATV Ordinance Public Hearing & Selectboard Mtg.

3. Recreation Director Position

As part of restructuring, the Arena Facilities Board and the Parks & Recreation Committee have come to the Selectboard for assistance. They are going to form a commission that is similar in structure to the library trustees. They are at capacity with volunteers and feel the time is right to hire a full time Recreation Director for our town. As part of this, the arena's finances as far as the facilities go will come back to the town, providing transparency and accountability. The commission is asking for a full time Recreation Director to be put at the arena for scheduling and programming to make full use of our facilities. The volunteers have done an exceptional job, but all work other jobs and the time has come to explore other options. We need central scheduling for all events and we need to maximize the potential for the arena building as well as all the fields. We are not doing the best job we could be doing, because no one has the time or resources to do it. The volunteers hate to see the building not being used as much as it could be. We rented out the facility this past fall for a banquet event which was a big success and they have already books for 2018. These are the types of things we need to see happening on a more regular basis in the off-ice season. The potential is huge! There was great discussion on the need for central scheduling so everyone has a place to go to and know what is happening with recreation in the Town of Highgate. There were questions from the audience on why this was a "decision" as part of the budget and not a warned article. It is still being voted on as part of the General Fund. The amount being asked for from the taxpayers in this budget is \$11,000.00. The rest is covered with arena revenues. There was discussion on the salary and benefits package, as well as part time help. This position will in no way impact anything that happens through the Highgate School. The current volunteers on the Arena Facilities Board will represent the trustees that this full time director will report to, all under the supervision of the Highgate Selectboard. The board was the missing piece last time we had a full time employee over there. David Rouse agrees, the arena should be run as a business, with everyone considered a customer, including MAHA. The commission will be entrusted to make this profitable enough to sustain the facilities and grounds as well as put money back in to support the facilities and programming. Ryan and Ty both agree, we won't make all kinds of money, but it will sustain itself. We are three years into a fifteen year bond at the arena. We need to make the best use of it, and that is what we feel we are doing. Additional time has been put on Wendi and Shelley dealing with bookkeeping and billing when the facilities board had some people leave. They have been happy to help out, as the arena is a town asset to us all. The current lease with MAHA runs through June 30, 2019. All revenues and expenditures will be in the town report and easily trackable

and transparent. Ty sees we have three options here: 1) continue as we are, doing ok, but not as efficient as we could be 2) come to the town and ask for a change or 3) walk away – which nobody wants to do. Henry feels the decision has been made because its already part of the budget. He asked if we had looked at other options, like leasing it to another entity. The board wanted to pursue this option before entertaining anything like that. Henry hopes this is successful but fears we will be right back where we were. Ty disagrees because having the trustee board in between will make all the difference. The checks and balances will all be in place. We want to expand programming for not only kids, but adults and seniors too. Jeff asked how they came up with the \$11,000.00 figure. The facilities board has already presented bylaws and a job description to the Selectboard. The salary will be set, with a commission piece for any new programming brought in that is above and beyond what we currently have now. Jeff is surprised we are just hearing about this and wonders why it was kept quiet. It has never been a secret, that is why it is being brought up tonight. And it's all part of the town report, in black and white. The next step is the proposal to the voters. This was never hidden, it was a slow process of could we, should we, and would we go forward. Sharon read aloud from the budget proposal in the town report that is now at the printers. There will be past year's financial reports available for the voters to see the pattern of expenses vs. revenues. Ty recently attended a county wide recreation meeting that was held in Enosburg last week. Both Ty and Ryan want to hear everyone's comments.

H. Upcoming Events

Feb. 1	7pm	ATV Ordinance Public Heaing & Selectboard Mtg.
Feb. 8	6pm	DRB Mtg.
Feb. 15	7pm	Town Meeting Info Session & short Selectboard Mtg.
Feb. 20	5-7pm	Open House
Mar. 1	7pm	Ambulance Provider Presentations & short Selectboard Mtg.
Mar. 6	10am	Town Meeting polls open 7am – 7pm for voting
Mar. 12	3pm	Finance Comm. Mtg.

I. Executive Session

None

J. Adjournment

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to adjourn the meeting @ 9:27pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by,



Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes approved by,



Sharon Bousquet – Chair, Highgate Selectboard