

TOWN OF HIGHGATE SELECTBOARD MEETING

Thursday, March 1, 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 @ 7:06pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members – Sharon Bousquet, Chair; Josh LaRocque, Vice-Chair (arrived @ 7:10pm); Bruce Butler; Steve LaFar; Randy Connelly

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

Public / Other – Richard Trombley; Lynn Billado – MVR; Josh Ramsdell – MVR; Leonard Stell – MVR; George Greenwood; Sandra Stone; Richard Flint; Alice S. Cota; Jean Chevalier; Ben Lowell; Kellie Uzell; Andy King; Kyle Lothian; Henry Rainville; Kelly Rainville; Ty Choiniere; Lynn Calderwood; Ricki Calderwood; Amy Nolan-Bouchard; Ernie Bouchard Jr.; Merry Souza; Richard Souza; Josh Aldrich; Michelle Raymo; Eric Chevalier; Sarah Chevalier; Lori Olds

B. Public Comment(s)

- George Greenwood asked about the mud that is accumulating by the sidewalk on Lamkin Street. He stated it is dangerous and should be addressed.
- Richard Flint expressed frustration that this meeting was being held at the same time as MVU's budget presentation. He would like to see people work together on scheduling. He is on his way to the MVU meeting to tell them the same thing. Sharon let Richard know that this is a regularly scheduled meeting for us and the schedule is put together far in advance. Our board has no way of knowing what other boards are planning, and vice-versa.

C. Ambulance Provider Informational Session

Both services, MVR and AmCare, were invited to attend tonight. Mr. Krul from AmCare has respectfully declined the invitation. He hopes that their work in the community speaks for itself and feels that coming to this meeting is bad for his business. He has received emails and there have been posts on social media that are very negative in nature. He wants our business but does not want to be further heckled as he has been in the past. Sharon asked that everyone remain polite and professional this evening and that we come as friends and leave as friends. Sharon read aloud from the court order and settlement agreement between Missisquoi Valley Rescue (MVR) and the Town of Highgate. The town paid MVR \$28,500.00 as part of the settlement, \$21,000.00 of which were funds owed to MVR, which was a town error by a prior treasurer from an improperly recorded check. The rest was interest and money towards MVR's legal expenses. The town issued MVR this check in the amount of \$28,500.00 on December 15, 2017. Another part of the settlement is that the town warn an article on town meeting day, March 6, 2018, which is article #10 on the warning and reads as follows:

Shall the Town of Highgate contract with Missisquoi Valley Rescue for all ambulance services under a contract identical to the one to be to be circulated at Town Meeting Day, with such services beginning on July 1, 2019? If we vote YES to this, it means that MVR will have a three year contract with us beginning on July 1, 2019. If we vote NO to this, it means that the following year when the contract comes up it will go out to bid and any service would be able to participate in the bid process. The settlement also states that the Highgate Selectboard members are free to have their own personal opinions, just like anyone else. At town meeting, all registered voters are on the same playing field, and we all get just one vote. If article #10 is approved, the town agrees that it will be binding and the town will enter into a contract with MVR effective 7/1/19 for three years. Sharon also wanted to clear up a rumor out there that MVR was not invited to this meeting. Sharon spoke to both Lynn Billado and Leonard (Joey) Stell back in January during the flooding and asked them to come. She had not finalized the details until recently when we knew the location of the meeting. Below is data from 2016 and 2018 for both services.

**Town of Highgate Ambulatory
Service Provider Public Discussion
2018**



MVR	Amcare
\$86,281.80	\$86,281.80
Current Mutual Aid Provider	Current Primary Care Provider
Located in Swanton	Located in St. Albans, Sheldon and 1 staffed unit in Highgate 7 days a week
Provides 24/7 coverage. 2 staffed ambulances Mon-Fri 6am-6pm, 1 staffed ambulance at night	Provides 24/7 coverage. 4 staffed ambulances 7 days week, 3 staffed units and 1 on-call at night.
Mobile coverage during the day, stationary coverage at night	Mobile coverage during the day, 1 ambulance stationed in Highgate during the day. Stationary coverage at night
Staff- 2 Paramedics 8 Advanced EMT 7 EMT 1 EMR 4 CPR/Driver	Staff- 12 Paramedics 19 Advanced EMTs 8 EMTs
Availability of 2 ambulances, 2 staffed units weekdays, 1 staffed weeknights and weekends, 1 paramedic per shift	Availability of 6 ambulances, 4 staffed units weekdays, 3 units staffed weeknights and weekends, multiple Paramedic Units
Community event and contact sports coverage included at no charge	Community event and contact sports coverage included at no charge
Average response time 8 minutes to the majority of Highgate. Several minutes longer for East Highgate	Average response times to all of Highgate 11 minutes
3 year contract with 2% increase annually	3 year contract with 2% increase annually

2016
Town of Highgate Ambulatory
Service Provider Public Discussion



M.V.R.	Amcare
\$100,800	\$81,305
Current Primary Service Provider Station located in Swanton	Current Mutual Aid Service Provider Stations in Sheldon and St Albans
Provides 24x7 coverage. 1 Staffed ambulance Monday thru Friday 5am-6pm. On Call coverage for the remainder via paid duty crews	Provides 24x7 coverage. 3 Staffed ambulances all hours day and night
Stationary Coverage: Crew wait for calls at the station (M-F 6am-6pm)	Mobile Coverage: Crews on the road moving around the service areas during the daytime hours. Stationary Coverage: Nighttime hours only
Certification Level up to Advanced EMT	Certification Level: up to Paramedic
Availability of 7 Ambulances, when staffing allows	Availability of 6 Ambulances, 4 Staffed units weekdays, 3 Staffed units weeknights and weekends Multiple Paramedic Units
Community Events Coverage at no charge. Contact sports coverage at the High school level is paid for by the school.	Community Event Coverage at no charge including all contact sports at the High school level
Average response times 2013 to date: Highgate Center 7.94 Min., Highgate Springs 6.08 Min. Highgate Falls and East Highgate response time were not provided	Last Year's Average response time when providing mutual aid in Highgate was 30.8 minutes from St Albans
Year to Year Contract: 10 year average increase 10% per year	3 year Contract with a guaranteed 2% increase per year. Offered up to a 10 year term.

April 6th 7:00pm

Highgate Elementary School Library

Lynn Billado – President of MVR, Josh Ramsdell – Vice President of MVR and Leonard Stell – Director of MVR were present with a brief presentation and to answer questions. Kelly Rainville had questions about the settlement and if anything else was part of the law suit. Sharon answered that initially there were other disagreements with the town, including alleged open meeting law violations and public records request violations, that were dismissed by the court. Ms. Billado stated that MVR was truly looking to be whole on the money situation and that the biggest point was that it was not fair to the voters here in Highgate that they did not have a say. Sharon clarified that the court ruled on 7/18/17 in the town's favor on four counts – breach of contract, breach of good faith / fair dealing, public records requests and open meeting law violations. Those counts were all dropped prior to mediation. Mediation was meant to stop the “back and forth” and to come to an agreement that best suited our town. This board is not the same board from 2016. There were more questions on the comparison sheets from 2016 and 2018 including how many towns each service covers, how many ambulances each has and populations involved. Both services do transports to UVM and some to further locations, such as Brattleboro. Ms. Billado pointed out that three MVR members recently relocated and now live in Swanton. Amy Nolan-Bouchard asked about paramedic certification and the difference that makes. Mr. Stell replied that MVR has two paramedic certified members, but honestly, paramedic level care is only required 1% of the time. MVR also has one member currently training and they hope to add even

more so they will be covered 24/7 with paramedics. Currently they are covered five days per week 6am – 6pm with paramedics. Mr. Stell stated that if an ambulance needs a medic he can leave his post with the police department to do an intercept, he has that agreement with Swanton PD. Lynn Calderwood asked about the importance of local people living here and their knowledge of our town and our roads. Ms. Billado answered that MVR has a very high employee retention rate and they all have a high knowledge of this area. She also stated that AmCare has a lot of turnover and employ people that are not from this area. Mr. Stell did comment that with GPS it does make it easier for services to cover unfamiliar ground. Randy feels this was a small issue early on with AmCare, but it is not any more. They are a mobile service and have taken the time to familiarize themselves with our town. Ms. Calderwood felt it was important that MVR also knows the people, not just the roads. Josh LaRocque sees that both ways. Sue Cota spoke to her experience with both services and response times. Randy cautioned the conversation with response times, noting he had response time logs from early 2016 for MVR that averaged 12 minutes. Steve LaFar added that this board is listening to the people and their own personal opinions have nothing to do with it. Steve feels that a yes vote on article #10 locks us into a contract that we have no way to negotiate with. If we vote no, folks will have a say in 2019, the difference being there will be a bidding process and the ability to negotiate a good contract for our town and taxpayers. Jean Chevalier commented that in 2019 it could be a different board with different feelings on this topic. She feels the people have been burned already. Sharon added that this board has been burnt by the public as well, and it goes both ways. The conversation also included the need for questions like these to be on Australian ballot. Article #3 on this year's warning is asking if we want to move public questions to the ballot. Moving public questions to the ballot would not affect anything on the school side, and would still leave the CIP, General Fund and Highway Fund budgets on the floor. We have tried this twice before and it has been tabled, not voted down. We need to stop tabling this issue. Kyle Lothian spoke to the last meeting on Feb. 15th. He has never called out MVR personnel period – and could care less about which service we contract with, as long as it's a good service! Kyle was fired up at the last meeting and took some time recently to sit with Mr. Stell and ask some questions. Kyle apologized to Josh Ramsdell for anything he said that may have been unfair. He is happy to speak with Mr. Ramsdell afterwards. Kyle still does not agree with the article in the Messenger. Kyle further stated that two years ago the Selectboard was under attack and that was totally unfair. He does not like or approve of the public attacks, or the nonsense on social media. The Selectboard at that time had every right by statute to do what they did. He would have done it differently, but they did nothing wrong. He, too, pointed out that by voting yes to article #10 we are taking away the rights of everyone. Mr. Stell was under the impression, when he spoke to Kyle, that if we vote no that MVR would not be able to bid – and that is not at all true. Kyle appreciates the job that all our town officials do. He would love to see issues like this move to Australian ballot, but our process has to change to make that happen. Kyle is as much an MVR fan as he is an AmCare fan. Josh LaRocque pointed out that our town is very spread out, so response times to different parts of town will vary no matter what service we use. Kyle used to be an EMT, so he totally understands. There was more discussion on the Australian ballot article. It won't change anything for this year, but if we pass it, public questions would move to the ballot at our next town meeting or special town meeting. Jean asked about splitting the town in half, for our town to be served by both services. Mr. Ramsdell is a supporter of the closest ambulance responding. Mr. Stell said this is done all over the state of Vermont. Kelly Rainville stated she plans to vote yes on article #10 because she feels this is her only chance to have a say on this topic. Ty Choiniere asked how MVR

can contract with us for \$86,281.80 now but back in 2016 it was \$100,800.00? Ms. Billado stated that they have cut their crews from three people to two people and have cut overtime. They also sold their housing quarters and are refurbishing the bay for sleeping quarters instead. When MVR lost the town of Highgate they had to take a very close look at their budget and cut costs everywhere. Mr. Ramsdell pointed out that they also switched dispatching services and now use Middlebury Regional EMS. Ty added that Highgate is currently working with St. Albans Central Dispatch to add them to our cell tower to increase communication capabilities. This will not be a benefit if the town goes back to MVR, but will still be a benefit to our local fire department if we stay with St. Albans for dispatching services. Andy King has been a Selectboard member also, so he sees this from both sides of the table. He stated that by statute you can't put a contract out to public vote, only an advisory vote. The Selectboard has the authority to decide on contracts. Ty asked if the current board will be sending a letter to AmCare with regard to the automatic renewal part of our contract. Yes, that letter will be going out regardless if article #10 passes or not. Ms. Calderwood asked for more information on dispatching services and how those were previously incorporated into the costs with MVR. That was a very confusing set up that will never happen again. Ty Choiniere stated he plans to vote no to article #10 because he trusts the Selectboard with everything else, and he trusts them with this as well. The Selectboard needs to have the ability to negotiate a contract on our behalf, and to not do so is just crazy. Motion by Josh LaRocque to send the letter to AmCare regarding non-renewal of our current contract regardless of the outcome of the vote on March 6th. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED**. The letter was already prepared and was signed. Josh LaRocque asked about making a motion with regard to having an advisory vote in the future for selecting an ambulance service. The board decided to confer with the town's attorney and we can discuss this more at the next meeting. Motion by Josh LaRocque to look into this and further discuss on March 15th. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED**. Josh LaRocque is here to earn the trust of the residents and taxpayers. Sue Cota said she will be voting yes to article #10 and will continue to vote in favor of MVR. Sharon said both services offer excellent care and thanked both for their service now, previously, in the future and at all times. Ty asked about coverage for contact sports at the arena. MVR previously had a contract with MVU for this and was paid \$2,800.00 in FY14 in addition to the contract with Highgate. Ty asked if MVR has a staffed unit during evening hours – yes. He also asked if MVR were to receive the Highgate contract if they would provide coverage at the arena and other contact sporting events. Both Mr. Ramsdell and Ms. Billado said yes, they will and they always have. Ty's point was that MVR was being paid to be there in addition to being paid by the town. MVU now has an athletic trainer now that is required to be present. Ambulance provider service is secondary to the athletic trainer being on site. Ms. Billado said they would be there either way, and they do it on their own time. Ty added that AmCare currently covers the contact sports for free. Mr. Ramsdell spoke to the field days event every summer in Highgate. MVR has a dedicated unit on site for the event which is several days long. Randy asked if MVR would have a unit in Highgate 14 hours per day, as we currently have with AmCare. Kelly Rainville doesn't feel we need it. Sue Cota commented that AmCare "hides" at the airport. Mr. Stell doesn't feel that keeping a unit at the airport would make a difference logistically. They are only a few miles down the road from there. This doesn't mean they could not staff a truck in Highgate 12 hours per day. Ms. Billado doesn't feel putting their employees in an idling truck for 12 – 14 hours per day is a good situation. Mr. Stell said if they did, they would want to make arrangements with Highgate to have their employees moving around. Steve LaFar asked if there is opportunity for MVR to buy land and build a shop in Highgate. Kelly

Rainville noted we have a town owned parcel right in the center of town that should be considered. Mr. Stell answered that building here would raise their costs and doesn't know if that is realistic as far as the numbers go. Randy asked if MVR's 8 minute response times include East Highgate. Times to East Highgate are obviously going to be longer. Mr. Ramsdell pointed out that their reporting software goes by zip code. Kyle Lothian spoke to the wound there is in our community over this topic and some feel it won't ever heal if MVR doesn't come back. Kyle also pointed out that AmCare doesn't just "sit" in their trucks for 12 – 14 hours per day in Highgate, and they don't "hide" anywhere, and we all know that. As long as people continue to throw pot shots and put their own twist on this, the wound will never heal. Some people just need to suck it up and move on – plain and simple. MVR should have a right to bid on the next contract, but all the nonsense has to end. It is trivial and we are all adults that have to knock off the petty crap. Lori Olds is an EMT with MVR and said that their crew members are all friends with AmCare and that they all work together. AmCare is doing their job. Ms. Billado again brought up that in 2016 the voters voiced their opinion and were not listened to. Kyle doesn't necessarily disagree, but faith has to be given to this board, these are five fair people. HEAL THE WOUND was the message Kyle was trying to get across. Randy asked MVR if the town of Swanton puts their ambulatory care out to bid. No, they do not. The budget for MVR in Swanton is put on Australian ballot for approval by the voters. There is no bidding process in Swanton. Kelly Rainville thanked MVR and the Highgate Selectboard for putting this meeting together. The Selectboard thanked MVR for coming and also thanked AmCare for the care they are currently providing.

5 minutes recess: the majority of the public left the meeting @ 8:40pm with the exception of Rick Trombley, Henry Rainville, Eric Chevalier, Sarah Chevalier and Ben Lowell.

D. Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche

Shelley is on vacation again ☺ and there were no questions on the warrant she prepared for this meeting.

E. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon

1. Minutes from Feb. 15th

Motion by Bruce Butler to approve the minutes from *February 15, 2018*, as written. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED.**

2. Town Meeting Updates

Absentee ballots are available. They need to be returned to Wendi by 7pm on March 6th in order to be counted. Town Reports are still available to pick up and we will have plenty available to Town Meeting also. Lunch will be served by HVFD for \$7 per person. It should prove to be a very long and busy day on Tuesday! Thank you to the Highgate JPs and poll workers that have signed up to help out ☺.

3. 2018 Liquor License Renewal Application – Martin's General Store

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit the regular meeting and enter into the liquor control board @ 8:48pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.** Motion by Josh LaRocque to approve the 2018 renewal application for Martin's General Store. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED.** Motion by Steve LaFar to enter back into the regular Selectboard meeting @ 8:50pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.**

4. Appointed Positions – Letters of Interest

We have some letters of interest already but there are still some appointed positions to be filled. Wendi will prepare a list and publish it. Appointments will be made at the March 15th meeting.

5. On Behalf of the Highgate Listers Office

Aimee Reynolds and Peter St. Germain have signed off on this yearly form stating we are under no appeals or suits through the lister's office. Motion by Randy Connelly to also sign this form. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.**

F. Administrator Items – Heidi Britch-Valenta

1. Project / Grant Update

The Machia Road Bridge (B25) project has been out to bid and the deadline has passed for the residents in the apartment building to vacate. Tomorrow morning is the site visit for the Machia Road slide repair to stabilize the area. The AOT grant cycle just opened up so the town can make some decisions on applying for a Class II paving grant or applying for a larger project. There are smaller grants for other projects as well. Motion by Josh LaRocque for Heidi to work with Pat Loyer and Jim Smith on designs and ideas for the AOT grant cycle. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED.** We have been awarded the \$75,000.00 grant for the ADA modifications at the municipal building. Heidi will be attending a workshop next Friday with regard to this. We will have funds to bring back to the taxpayers to be reallocated, but not until after this project is complete and we have the full picture. We will have the extra \$14,000.00 from the HVFD floor project and the \$10,000.00 from the sidewalk project to bring back to the voters this year at town meeting. We have the name of the contractor doing the roof work at the school. We will connect with them to see if they are interested in working on the municipal roof as well. Henry Rainville doesn't think \$10,000.00 we have set aside will cover the work, based on what he heard at the school meeting. Henry also wants to make sure contractors for the Machia Road bank stabilization project are aware of the drainage system already in place there. Josh will be at the site visit and will make sure they are aware. The CIP is always amendable if the taxpayers feel we need more funds set aside for the roof project.

2. Memorandum of Understanding

MVU is putting together a draft memo of understanding and we have maps. Steve feels Mr. Goodrich was making comments at the press conference last week that were premature. Heidi confirmed that she and Mr. Goodrich did not personally discuss anything that day. Eric Chevalier would like the town to sell this land, which is located on Frontage Rd. A conversation on this will be scheduled for a meeting at a later date. Ty said that Mr. Goodrich asked him for information on the needs of Parks & Rec. to incorporate some info into the memorandum as well and he wanted the board to be aware.

3. Dispatching Sub-Lease

This came in today and will be forwarded to SBA. Hopefully soon St. Albans Central Dispatch will be able to start moving their equipment over to our cell tower.

4. Regional Recreation Initiative

March 14th @ 5:30pm at the Swanton Village Complex. They will be holding quarterly meetings and will rotate to different towns. Ty would like Highgate to host the next one, the Selectboard agreed.

G. Selectboard Items

**1. Dehumidifier Purchase – Facility Board Recommendation
Dehumidifier Loss Statement**

Josh would like to connect with Efficiency Vermont before the final recommendation is made. There is a twelve week wait time once the new unit is ordered. The rental

unit will be coming out around April 1st. The insurance company has received the bids and have given us an estimate of \$142,000.00 as an allowable amount, with the caveat that we not make a profit. Motion by Steve LaFar to sign the proof of loss form. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

2. Consultant Selection for Village Core Master Plan

The Machia Property Development Committee will be interviewing consultants on March 19th.

3. Correspondence

Members from HVFD took some time off from work to assist during the flooding in January. The board signed letters to two employers so the HVFD members can be compensated by their employers for this time away from work. Also, the board signed thank you letters from the open house event on Feb. 20th for the local businesses that donated food and/or drinks – Desorcie’s Market; Joey’s Junction; Highgate Jolley; Highgate Irving; Sweetie Pies. Sharon also thanked North West Solid Waste District, RiseVT, HVFD, Parks & Rec, VASA, Heidi, Wendi and all the various board members that attended and participated in the open house.

4. Misc.

- We are still looking for a health officer for the town. Jeff Towle has had to resign due to health reasons and we are looking for someone to fill that role. There is a yearly stipend for this position, which is not much, but something. We wish Jeff and Tiffanie the best and hope for a speedy recovery.
- HVFD is working with the town of Swanton and the Red Cross to help install smoke alarms for folks at no cost to them. The Red Cross is providing the training and there will be no hard wired installations. This is a free program to spread safety awareness into homes. The Red Cross provides a certificate of liability for the town. The date is set for April 7th and board approval is required. Motion by Bruce Butler to approve this request. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.
- Town Meeting is Tuesday, March 6th @ 10am. Polls are open 7am – 7pm for voting!
- The next ATV public hearing will be March 15th @ 7pm. This will be the last required hearing.
- Randy has received comments from residents about the sidewalk on Lamkin Street by the church being under water.
- Randy also asked about the radar feedback sign and why it is not working. Pat Loyer is working on this issue.
- Henry Rainville asked for clarification on article #3. This would leave the CIP, General Fund and Highway Fund on the floor if it passes. Ty commented on when MVU went to Australian ballot and how the theater used to be full and now hardly anyone goes to the info sessions for any of the school budgets. Ty would like to see some good discussion on this article and not have it tabled again. Henry acknowledged that the board did nothing legally wrong with the AmCare vote in 2016 but that people just didn’t like how it went down. Sharon wants everyone to concentrate on the positive – we have so much good happening in our town. As for article #10, that cannot be tabled, we have to leave town meeting with a decision.

H. Upcoming Events

Mar. 2	9am	Machia Rd. Slide Site Visit
Mar. 6	10am	Town Meeting Day – vote 7am-7pm
Mar. 6	6pm	Parks & Rec. Mtg.
Mar. 7	6:30pm	Library Trustee Mtg.
Mar. 8	6pm	DRB Mtg.
Mar. 12	4pm	Finance Comm. Mtg.
Mar. 15	7pm	Selectboard Mtg. & ATV Public Hearing
Mar. 24	10-noon	Rabies Clinic @ HVFD

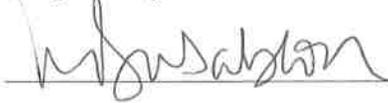
I. **Executive Session**

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit the regular meeting and enter into executive session @ 9:31pm to discuss personnel, contracts and legal, where premature general public knowledge would place the town and the individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED.** Motion by Josh LaRocque to exit executive session @ 10:18pm. The motion was seconded by Steve LaFar – **APPROVED.**

J. **Adjournment**

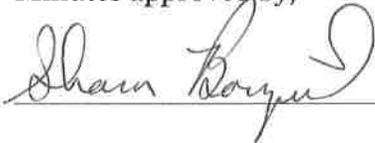
Motion by Sharon Bousquet to adjourn the meeting @ 10:19pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by,



Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk &
Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes approved by,



Sharon Bousquet - Chair, Highgate Selectboard

