

# TOWN OF HIGHGATE

## Selectboard Mtg.

September 3, 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; Chris Yates, Vice-Chair; Diana O'Hara; Randy Connelly; Paulette Tatro

**Highgate Office Staff** – Wendi Dusablon - Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Admin; Shelley Laroche – Town Treasurer

**Public / Other** – Tim Smith - FDIDC; Gaston & Lise Gagner; Ben Lowell – Constable; Peter Endres, Aaron Snedlow & Liz Peyton – Ranger Solar; Mike & Sylvia Gagne; Fernand & Pat Gagne; Judy Morey; John O'Hara; Fran & Don Bessette; Norm Parent; Ray Dixon; Josh LaRocque; Linda Gagne; Steve Bushey; David Gagne; Steve Beyor; Andy King; Daniel Lussier; Claude & Barbara Chevalier; Dustin Circe; Casey Boucher; Patrick Boucher; Sharon Stafford; Denis Boucher, Gemma Boucher; Sharon Bousquet; Raymond Laroche; Catherine Dimitruk – NRPC; Bill Rowell; Brian Rowell; Henry Rainville; Nicholas Scott; RJ & Dawn Fournier; Ty Choiniere; Brian Spears; Ryan Maskell.

#### **B. Public Comments**

- Josh LaRocque spoke on behalf of the MAHA Facilities Board looking for an idea of what the plan is for next year. MAHA recently signed a one year lease for the arena, and as a group they want to start planning. Ty Choiniere added that it's hard to discuss the future when they don't know what that means. The board is up for another lease, they feel it is a good working relationship and good things are happening on the town level and on the MAHA side of things. They would be interested in a longer lease if it is agreeable. Randy Connelly asked for an update on the arena construction project. Josh gave an update; the well is in and they hit good water, 60 gallons per minute. The floor is poured and looks great, the electrical is finishing up and the boards will be in within a few weeks. Everything is on schedule and the ice should be in by the first week in October, hopefully. Josh went on to say that the facility looks amazing and people won't recognize it when they walk in. The work that is being done with the amount of money we have to work with (approximately one million dollars), this community should be proud. Custom Ice is here from Ontario and will be on site until we are up and running. Steve Bushey added that the next meeting with the contractor and construction committee will be on Sept. 17<sup>th</sup> @ 4:30pm @ the arena.
- Brian Spears was present and was also present with Ty two weeks ago. He asked the board about moving benches and a picnic table from the municipal park to the falls park. The board at that time did not want to move anything from the municipal park, and instead was going to seek out donations and pricing. Chris got pricing, which was steep, based on shipping costs for concrete benches and tables. The board does not want to strip the municipal park of what is there. Jeff was able to get two benches donated, which were pressure washed and repaired by the public works crew. There are currently two benches in the Highgate Falls park, we are now just looking for the donation of a picnic table. Brian added that he has been watching on the weekends and doesn't see all the tables and benches being utilized in the municipal park, he doesn't understand why they can't relocate some of them. The municipal park is highly utilized by cyclists, concert goers and many people eat lunch in that park. The board will continue to look for a donation of a picnic table.

**C. Ranger Solar presentation – proposed solar projects on privately owned land in the Town of Highgate**

Peter Endres, Aaron Snedlow and Liz Peyton were present on behalf of Ranger Solar. Peter handed the presentation over to Aaron, who is the director of permitting for Ranger Solar. There are presently two projects planned in the town of Highgate. In the near term, there is a 20 megawatt project planned, off St. Armand Road. Ranger is looking for input from the town. The land is currently under lease. Environmental studies and visual impact assessments have been done. A layout design will be done and their intent is to file a 45-day notification to the town and NRPC for review. After that they will move forward with a petition to the PSB for a certificate of public good. Solar has benefits for VT and for the Town of Highgate. Ranger pursues larger projects so they can build and operate them without subsidies. They are able to sell power at a voided cost, the same rate that traditional power is purchased at. Once they have a better idea of what this project will look like, they will come back to the board and open it up for discussion. Sharon Bousquet asked how many acres are being targeted for this first project – 100-120 acres, which is on both sides of St. Armand Road. Ranger has reached out to most of the abutters for the 20mw project to offer up individual landscaping plans if they feel there will be an impact and need screening. Ray Dixon asked if it would be visible from the road – yes, portions will be. He also asked if they will be able to match the price of the power we get from Canada – no, but it will be close. Ranger feels it is a better use of the land to do a larger project in the St. Armand Road location. Jeff asked if they take into consideration what zoning district the property is located in. In this case, it is in our village district. Part of the filing is looking at orderly development, and they are aware of the zoning districts in Highgate. Mr. Dixon also asked about how the project would be taxed. It would be taxed in two ways, at the state level and local level. They estimate that on this project alone, over a 30 year time frame, it will generate over \$3 million in tax revenue to the town. Ray Laroche asked about a time frame on the larger proposed project. That will take longer to permit, and Ranger will begin petitioning for that larger project as soon as next spring / summer. Ranger will do their due diligence, but they do not have an exact time frame. Diana asked if the larger project would be all in one area. No, because much of the area is in conservation, which prohibits solar development, it will be more spread out. Claude Chevalier asked why they are considering a location so close to the village for the 20mw project. Aaron answered that they look at substations around the state that meet the criteria, and then look at adjacent lands around those substations. We have two suitable substations just down the road on Route 78. Don Bessette asked how much acreage they look for, to which Aaron answered it differs and he could speak to Mr. Bessette afterwards to address more questions. Josh LaRocque noted that Highgate uses maybe 3mw of power with the arena in full operation, so 20mw is a lot of power! The potential larger project is 200mw. Andy King asked about the future and the 30 year plans. He compared it to his first cell phone to the phone he has now. Aaron added that part of the lease agreement(s) include restoring the land to preexisting conditions and funds are typically bonded for this purpose. Solar development impact is different than the impacts from typical development and they are easily removed from the landscape. Mike Gagne asked if the panels are toxic. Aaron is not aware of what is in the panels, but knows that they are sealed. Mike asked the Selectboard to make sure their t's are crossed and i's dotted with this process. Mike works with computer chips so he knows it could be expensive for the town if things aren't decommissioned properly. Jeff asked how these proposed projects compare, size wise, to the rest of Vermont. Currently, the largest projects in Vermont are in the 4ms – 5mw range. Chris asked how Ranger goes about getting approval for a 20mw project, to which Aaron replied that there is no cap on project size through the PSB. Claude Chevalier asked about effects on utilities. Solar produces energy when the load is greatest, during the day. Claude also asked who they would be feeding into – the substation here, which is VELCO. There are also proposed projects planned in the town of Sheldon, and Ranger is working throughout VT, NH, ME and CT. Paulette asked if they have any projects up and running in VT currently – no, but they are working on many. Their projects use the same technologies as existing fixed panel projects, just on a different scale. Josh asked about the size of the solar project in Sheldon near the mill – it is 2mw. Ty Choiniere thinks it's an eye sore and huge. Ray Laroche asked if they will be using fixed or moving panels – fixed. Diana asked if all land is leased – yes. She also asked what happens if the property owner dies – the lease generally follows the property. Ty commented that he grew up here and continues to live here and raise

his family because it is rural and agricultural. Now we have a cell tower in view of our elementary school students, do we want a solar field that they also have to look at every day? Josh is all for solar, but feels that 20mw location is not the right place. Going from 0-20mw isn't easing into it, its jumping in hard. Ray Laroche asked how many panels would be used for the 20mw project – thousands. Catherine from NRPC spoke, noting that the town and NRPC are in the same set of circumstances. The PSB looks at a lot of criteria. Where they differ is ACT250 requires the project to be in conformance with a local plan and regional plan. The PSB section 248 requires due consideration to those plans. The town and NRPC would have to ask for intervening status before the PSB will consider evidence as well as other documents from other parties. They use all this to come to a determination. The town and NRPC would have party status as much as an abutter, but we would need to request it. Aaron stated that Ranger's intention is to provide the town with information throughout the project. Ty feels the town should be in the decision, not in the know. Ranger is happy to communicate as much or as little as the town wants. Tonight this room is full of people, and bits of communication or miscommunication get out there, which is why this room is full. Ranger intends to speak to every abutter for both projects, the short term is the 20mw project on St. Armand Road. Henry Rainville asked about making it a more even amount of energy use. There is a potential for battery storage projects, but Aaron can't speak to that. Sharon asked if VELCO is willing to work with Ranger – yes, Ranger has been in close contact with them. Linda Gagne inquired if they did not acquire a proposed amount of acres to lease, would they scale down a project or walk away – it is unlikely they would walk away after spending time and energy on a proposal. Ranger would like the support of the town and they want to do the projects here. Jeff asked what makes Highgate attractive to them – it is part inter connection and part land use commercial / agricultural. It is beautiful here, to which everyone agreed, and from an environmental standpoint, there is less of an impact if they use land that is already being utilized or cleared. Claude asked about maintenance on the panels – they have full time employees and part of their job would be cleaning the panels. They use local contractors when they can. Fran Bessette asked if solar panels produce EMFs like cell towers do – not that Aaron is aware of, and the electrical current in the panels is relatively low, less than that in the transmission wires that pass through town. David Gagne is an abutting neighbor, and he asked about the time frame on the first project. Ranger's intent is to file a 45 day notification to the town and to NRPC this month and then prepare and submit a petition in November or December. The goal for construction on the 20mw project is sometime in 2016. Jeff asked about the larger project and the time line to be approved for tax credits. Aaron noted that the economics of both projects work with or without tax credits. Heidi asked for some background information on their company, Ranger Solar. Aaron has been an environmental scientist for 10+ years and has worked all over the US and Canada. He has also worked for a private consultation company. Ranger was formed 6 months ago, specifically to target utility projects in New England. The two top executives of the company were formerly affiliated with Pioneer Green Energy, where they developed many large projects. They have a track record of renewable energy and permitting. Jeff asked if the PSB looks at projects differently if they work with a municipality vs. a private land owner – Aaron can't speak to that. Lise Gagner, also an abutting land owner, asked if any research has been done on solar panels and the effects of temperature. The panels are dark to absorb energy from the sun, they are not reflective and do not heat up. The micro climate around the panels would make a difference. Grass grows under the panels, they will look into whether or not it's slightly warmer or cooler. Heidi asked about landscaping and their strategy surrounding a project. Ranger contracts with TJ Boyle with regard to landscaping. Boyle makes recommendations to Ranger as part of the petition to the PSB for potential mitigation screening. They will be talking to abutters and offering landscaping plans if they feel they want it for their property. Sylvia Gagne asked for clarification, would the landscaping be on the inside or outside of the fencing – most likely on the outside of the fence. Paulette asked about the height of the fence. The fencing will depend on insurance requirements and can be black in color to blend in. Paulette also inquired about the height of the panels. The foundations are small and driven into the ground. The perimeters are 3-10' to 4-12' depending on the pitch. They are placed 10-12' apart, depending on the topography. Heidi asked to clarify, the 20mw project is entirely in the village on St. Armand Road? Aaron stated yes, it all falls on the village map, but some of it falls outside the village designation. It is all contiguous land for this first project. Steve Beyor asked about if the panels will be stationary

or moveable and how efficient they are – they will be stationary. The moveable panels can be more efficient in smaller arrays but the foundations are larger so there are costs associated, which does not make economic sense for Ranger. Claude asked about the overall dollar amount of the project – it will be up to a \$29 million dollar project, which is a substantial investment in this community and in Vermont. David Gagne had some concerns regarding resale values of surrounding properties. Ranger is researching this, there may be some recommendations from the PSB to change aspects of the project. David went on to say that the town had two opportunities to buy that lot or trade it for the school lot. He feels that the board members need to look way ahead. Chris added that this project would be locking that parcel(s) of land down for 30 years. Paulette asked about noise – the only noise is from the transformer, which is smaller than what is at the substation. Noise studies will be done to comply with Vermont standards, to the extent possible. Paulette noted that they find this parcel attractive due to its proximity to the substation, what distance is considered close enough? Aaron replied it is a case by case basis. There were more questions about overhead lines vs. underground lines, those as well are a case by case basis, whatever fits in with the aesthetics. Fernand Gagne had questions about the tax revenue to the town, and if that had been set. It is estimated that over \$3 million in taxes will be generated to the town of Highgate over a 30 year period on the 20mw project alone. Ranger is more than willing to work with the town to benefit Highgate in other ways, not just tax revenue. Jeff asked for other questions before we moved on with the remainder of the agenda. Jeff thanked everyone for coming and showing respect.

#### **D. Town Treasurer – Shelley Laroche**

##### **1. Pay bills**

Paulette had questions about the Xerox invoices.

##### **2. Misc.**

- We now have a debit / credit card reader at the counter. There was no charge to set it up, only the one time cost of the card reader. This is a valuable tool and gives people another option to pay. The convenience fee is passed on to the customer (\$3.00 or 2.45% whichever is greater). Taxpayers can also pay their tax bills online using this service by logging onto our website at [www.highgatevt.org](http://www.highgatevt.org) and following the link.
- Our annual audit will be Sept. 14, 15, 16. Shelley has a good handle on it since she spent another full day with Amber from NEMRC.
- Heidi added that Butch Fecteau did a beautiful job on the frames for the conference room, which are already on display on the walls.
- Heidi added a quick update on the arena project and what has been spent.
- We have received the \$196,000.00 HUD funds.

#### **E. Public Works Director – Andy King**

##### **1. Updates**

The new International truck came in today and is on site. We have a new proposed logo for the sides of the vehicles. A few changes to the International include; a great deal on a light bar saved us \$400.00, added a third camera to monitor the wing and updated the plow lights as well. Paulette asked about the locations of the cameras, a fourth location is wired up so the cameras can be moved. Likely in the winter time a camera will be moved to the bed to see the level of material in the bed and there is a camera that looks down on the hopper itself. The one ton should be here next week. We have ordered our own light bar for that also. Chris wanted to talk about radio communication on the entire fleet. The roadside mower and pay loader are not in radio communication with the town. Chris recommends two new radios in the new vehicles and putting the older radios in the mower and pay loader. A ballpark figure for two new radios, installed, is \$1,000.00 each. This is a safety issue, all agreed. Andy will get another quote from Kenwood. Either Kenwood or Motorola will do the job and do it well. Jeff wants to see both proposals, but is all for it happening. The truck purchases are well within the capital reserve, but we are close to using what is left in reserve. Andy doesn't expect a lot of repair, so we could draw from that. The Morey Road culvert repair will take place over a long weekend. That portion of road will be closed from 7am on 9/25/15 through 7am on 9/28/15. This will allow the bus to get through on Friday morning, and it is only a half day of school that day, so the bus run will only be inconvenienced for the bus run on Friday in the early afternoon. Marshall Ploof was involved in the discussion, so they are aware and alternate routes have been planned. A flyer has been circulated already and Andy has

signs for use on the road. Work schedules will be adjusted to minimize over time, if any. The public works department will resume full five day work weeks on October 1<sup>st</sup>. The park and ride is mostly striped, waiting on the final approval and permit from AOT for the entrance and exit. We will need to do a small section of temporary curbing to prevent people from driving out the front parking spots. Andy has prices for those pinned sections. Chris suggested using the curbing sections here in the municipal park for concerts after we are done with them at the park and ride. Motion by Chris Yates to purchase 80' of 8" curbing from Camp Precast for \$700.00. The motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED**. Swanton Village will be providing an estimate to improve the lighting at the park and ride, and we have new signage also for the park and ride. Chris wants any new lighting at the park and ride to be taken into consideration with Efficiency VT. The lighting being proposed is being used in Swanton in the vicinity of Grand Avenue and Bushey Street. The dry hydrant area will be clearly marked as well. Salt will be delivered next week from Cargill for \$89.70 per ton. They will be drawing sand from M&T next week also. All are under budget, per Andy's estimate. The reserve sand is growing grass, so we will use that and the remainder outside will be used for the Morey Rd. project. We got a good price from Pike on paving, \$70.20 per ton. It is a touch over budget, but with the trucking credit and the reduced cost for repair of the new vehicles, we should easily be able to make up the \$12,000.00 difference. We don't have a time frame yet for paving. Roadside mowing is complete and we have gotten good feedback from residents. The town is looking great. They still need to decommission the test wells at the transfer station. Grading is 75% complete, they are hoping for a little rain to help with that process, it is pretty dusty right now. Chloride was put down last week in a few trouble spots. The town offices will all be closed on Monday, September 7<sup>th</sup> for Labor Day. Patrick Loyer will be starting on Tuesday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, he has experience and knowledge to add to the department. The fire department is having work done by Radio North, Andy will try and coordinate and mitigate costs with them. Diana asked about the Hanna Road guard rails. Paulette is concerned about that area as well. Andy will look into it, he is familiar with the spot. Andy got a quote to seal cracks in the blacktop and it was about 10 times more than he expected. He is waiting on estimates back from two other firms. Andy spoke with Doug Rollo about keeping things thawed out this winter here at the town offices and over at the library. We have had recurring issues with frozen pipes over the last few winters. The sand shed roof leaks in every bay. Andy will speak with Henry Rainville. Goodhue Excavation is proposing we use jersey barriers to accomplish the Morey Road project. Goodhue has agreed to repurchase them from the town at the conclusion of the project. This allows us to use the barriers for the culvert project and then use them as temporary guard rails. Goodhue will purchase them from the town at the same price we paid. Motion by Chris Yates to purchase six 10' jersey barriers at a cost of \$2,340.00. The motion was seconded by Diana O'Hara – **APPROVED**. That amount of money will be taken off the grant.

#### **F. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta**

##### **1. Updates**

The Riverview Lane homes are now gone. We have received receipts and bills from the contractor, so we are at the end of that grant. There have not been any changes to the access that Heidi is aware of.

#### **G. Town Clerk – Wendi Dusablon**

##### **1. Minutes**

Motion by Jeff Towle to accept the minutes from August 20, 2015, as amended. The motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED**. Paulette Tatro abstained from the vote, as she was not present on August 20<sup>th</sup>.

#### **H. Selectboard items**

##### **1. Updates**

Chris reached out to SBA regarding improving emergency communications with the cell tower. The footprint should be approved tomorrow. The footprint is the area inside the fencing surrounding the tower. It needs to be determined what equipment will be taking up space on the ground. Woodmen of the World will be donating a flagpole to the town. There is a wooden pole in flat iron park that is an option to be replaced. The arena site /

baseball fields is another possible location. Chris will let them know we are interested in the 35' pole with the 3'x5' American Flag, which has additional room for the state flag. Chris would also like to start researching a short term disability benefit for employees. We need to put this on the radar before budgeting season. If we move forward with this benefit, the policy will need to be updated and it will change how time off gets banked. This change would reduce banking and help with the audit process. Heidi added that the stipend for health insurance should also be reevaluated for budgeting.

**I. Other business**

Sharon Bousquet has concerns about the Jedware property. This is a hazardous waste site that was used for 30 years by Union Carbide. That property is not listed with EPA or Brownsfield. The board explained that the town did not choose to inherit the property. It was part of a bankruptcy, and we did not have a choice. We have applied to the state for the environmental limited liability program. The state had previously approached us to work with the owner and clean it up, and the town declined the offer. We now own it, and are looking at ways to clean it up. Putting solar on that property is one of the only options we now have. Sharon wants the town to be very careful where this goes, it scares her. Jeff added that we are not a super fund cleanup or a Brownsfield site, but we are looking for ways to make lemonade out of lemons, so stay tuned. Sharon wants everyone on the same page. Chris agrees, and clarified, the town did not look to take over this parcel, we are saddled with it and are looking to protect our residents.

**J. Upcoming events**

- Sept. 7 Labor Day – offices closed
- Sept. 10 6pm DRB Mtg.
- Sept. 15 6pm Planning Comm. w/ Selectboard – Capital Budget
- Sept. 16 6pm Arena Fundraising Committee Mtg.
- Sept. 17 7pm Selectboard Mtg.

Reminder: Morey Road partial road closure Sept. 25-28 as mentioned in the Public Works Department section.

Chris noted that the air pack seats have been removed out of the fire truck utility van. There are four seats and Chris would like to list them on a government bid site for 90 days and see if they can be sold to the highest bidder, if not, we have an offer from a resident in town to purchase them. Chris has seen them sell for \$100-\$125 each. Motion by Diana O'Hara to list the four air pack seats for 90 days and if they don't sell we will talk to the resident that made the offer. The motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED.**

The fire department floor repair is scheduled for October. The trucks can be brought back in the same day, except for the new utility truck, due to resurfacing the top of the floor.

**K. Executive session**

Motion by Jeff Towle to enter into executive session @ 8:50pm for contracts and a legal issue. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.**  
Motion by Diana O'Hara to exit executive session @ 9:40pm. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.**

**L. Adjournment**

Motion by Jeff Towle to adjourn the meeting @ 9:45pm. The motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by,

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Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by,

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Jeff Towle, Chair – Highgate Selectboard