

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Meeting

Thursday, November 7, 2019 @ 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 @7:00pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members – Sharon Bousquet, Chair; Joshua LaRocque, Vice-Chair; Bruce Butler; Richard Flint *absent* – *Randy Connelly*

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche – Town Treasurer & DTC;

Public / Other – Woody Rouse; Alice S. Cota; Jane Lazorchak – VT Fish & Wildlife; Lynn Billado – MVR; Josh Ramsdell – MVR; Ty Choiniere; Jeff & Tiffanie Towle; Michael Casella – Casella Waste Management; Leonard Stell – MVR; Toni Mikula – VT Fish & Wildlife

B. Public Comment(s)

- Sue Cota has been told that dumping is still occurring on Hempyard Road.
- Sue also thanked Heidi Britch-Valenta, Sharon Bousquet and Joe Depatie for calling to check in on her and on Monument Road with regard to potential flooding last week. Sue reported that pieces of the riverbank were seen going down the river, but they were not from their section of the bank. Sharon sent thoughts and prayers to those who did suffer damage and loss during last weeks storm and flooding.

C. Vermont Fish & Wildlife

Toni Mikula and Jane Lazorchak were present from VT Fish & Wildlife. Copies were shared about the property located at 1701 Fortin Road – the Estate of Arlene Derosia, 124 acres. They are here to do their due diligence and are obligated by statute to notify towns of a possible acquisition. They will never move forward without the support of the Selectboard. VT Fish & Wildlife own the Rock River Wildlife Management Area. Recently there has been a lot of attention on water quality and they have received new funding through Senator Leahy's office to focus acquisition efforts on projects with water quality benefits and restoration benefits. These are federal funds being used to acquire the Derosia property. The appraisal came in significantly lower than the asking price. The barn and mobile home currently on the property will be moved to another property. In 2016 the way new acquisitions are valued by the state has changed. The state will pay the same municipal taxes that the Derosia family was paying to the town. Every five years that amount will go up, based on average growth of municipal taxes state-wide. If the transaction is supported by the town, they hope to close in the next few months. Bruce had questions about management of the entire Rock River area and long-range management plans. He sees this area and others as being ignored. Toni and Jane are here to hear these concerns and appreciate the comments. Ty Choiniere asked about the

upper portion of the property and the future there. Sugaring will not continue there and there will be a public process on habitat management. Sharon Bousquet took the opportunity to ask them if they would be interested in a town owned parcel of land "Cherry Hill" 11.4 acres located off Rock River (Rheume Road). The parcel is currently bordered on either side by land owned by the State of Vermont. Funding for the Derosia property can't be applied to another property, but funds from duck stamps may be possible to use. Motion by Richard Flint to support this acquisition. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**. Toni had prepared a letter for the board to sign, which Sharon read aloud. It was noted that the property taxes are delinquent on this property and will need to be settled at closing. The amount has changed now to include penalty and interest.

D. MVR Update

Josh Ramsdell, Lynn Billado and Leonard Stell were present from Missisquoi Valley Rescue. Lynn provided the board with some documentation covering July 1 – November 1. Since they were here last, an ambulance has been in town and the hours are being logged at their bay. They have two crews during the day, so they have the ability to roam and serve more effectively. Richard thanked MVR for being here with HVFD on Halloween night. The kids really enjoyed it. MVR has participated in many community events in Swanton and will be more involved in Highgate as they are informed of things happening. Mr. Stell noted that MVR has trained 40+ high school students and certified them in CPR at no cost to the school or students. In February they will offer three or four classes of hands only CPR and will work with HVFD to host a class here in Highgate – again at no cost. Wendi is happy to share information on events on our social media pages, website and digital board. Ty asked about having MVR at the arena for Milton High School games, as they will be back in Highgate for home ice. MVR is not required to be there, as schools have athletic trainers now, but if they can be there they will. MVR won't be going to basketball games and are waiting to hear from John Lumsden at MVU if they will be needed at the rink. MVR is open to it but still waiting to hear. Ty will forward the Milton High School game schedule to Josh Ramsdell. Sharon asked about the call log and the calls in the 20-minute range. It was noted that in the month of July they had new people that got lost with the GPS and also that sometimes the police department has them on "stand-by" so they are not on scene. In the future they will highlight those calls for clarification purposes. It was also noted that out of 114 calls they held their response times to the 10-minute mark, on average. With winter weather coming call times will likely lengthen. The board thanked MVR for the update and we will see them back for another quarterly update in three months.

E. Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche

- There were some late additions to the check warrant from the library, arena and tax refunds for over payments (most were late homestead filing credits coming through). Motion by Josh LaRocque to sign the check warrants. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**.
- Taxes were due last Friday, and we ended the year with a higher balance due than usual. It was a weird year, people that normally were not late were late and some people seemed confused about the due date of Nov. 1st. As of close of business 11/1/19 the delinquent amount was \$263,556.00. Of that, \$44,000.00 has already come in. Last year, for comparison purposes, we ended with \$204,000.00 due at close of business on the due date. Shelley has already begun putting the tax sale list

together and got information to the attorney. There are 21 parcels that owe multiple years at this point. Sue Cota highly recommends the payment plan. Shelley added that more and more folks are getting on payment plans to avoid having to pay everything all at once.

- Shelley handed out hard copies of the budget and it is also now in the drop box.

F. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon

- Motion by Richard Flint to approve the minutes from *October 16, 2019*, as written. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**.
- Wendi had prepared a draft of the 2020 meeting schedule for approval. The meetings will be held the first and third Thursdays of each month, with the exception of July and December having only one meeting each. There was discussion, as there is every year, about moving the start time of the Selectboard meetings to begin earlier. Motion by Richard Flint to move the start time for Town of Highgate Selectboard meetings to begin at 6:30pm beginning in 2020. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED Yes (3) – Sharon, Richard & Josh / No (1) – Bruce**.
- Secretary of State Jim Condos is currently traveling the state for his fifth biennial Transparency Tour. The closest meeting to us is at St. Albans Town Hall located at 579 Lake Road in St. Albans on Nov. 21st from 6-8pm. Topics covered will include Vermont's Transparency Laws, Vermont's Public Records Act, and Open Meeting Law.
- From the Listers Office Wendi presented an Errors & Omissions Certificate PVR-4261-E. It was explained that parcel 0011035117 (6 acres in Highgate / some also in Swanton), located on Monument Road was transferred to US Fish & Wildlife back on 10/3/18. The form indicates that the deed was interpreted by the listers office as a covenant / right of way instead of a sale. The property was not transferred in our system, and a tax bill was generated in the name of the previous owners. When the tax bill was received by the sellers was when they called and spoke to Wendi and the error was realized. By statute, the listers may correct obvious errors in the grand list with the approval of the Selectboard before December 31st each year (32 VSA 4261). Motion by Bruce Butler to sign the Errors & Omissions Certificate for the listers office. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.
- Wendi let the board know the front ramp is very slippery already with the first snowfall. Butch agrees we need to look into something for the wooden portion of the ramp. Sue Cota would like this to be addressed soon.

G. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta

- Better Roads Application – Josh reiterated that Butch and the Public Works Department want to back off on grants so they can get caught up on other routine maintenance issues, such as tree cutting. Josh feels things are being neglected because of grant projects. Butch and the crew are feeling overwhelmed. The board would like Butch at the next meeting to figure out what we have time for and what we have planned in the future. There was discussion on using town personnel and equipment as our match for grants and if that is always necessary. Jeff Towle asked if we can still apply for grants without using our crew for help. Mill Hill, for example, we did contract with Goodhue but we still used our trucks. We told the taxpayers at town meeting that we would be working to get caught up and we didn't get to it as

much as we should have. Sharon added that we have to show the State of VT that we are making progress on water quality issues. If we cut back on grants will this put us in a detrimental situation with the state? Heidi doesn't believe so. Ty would like to see us apply for grants only for things that we need to have done, like tree cutting and shoulder work.

- Machia Road Weight Limit - we have an engineer's statement that it would be beneficial to keep the weight limit down on Machia Road due to the bank issues. There was discussion on the bridge weight limit and how that was written into our ordinance. Josh would like to see it posted. This is a very gray area, but we can proceed with it and it doesn't hurt to have a weight limit to keep some trucks off the road. There was also discussion on agricultural vehicles and how that is not enforceable. Richard feels the trucks traveling that road are primarily ag vehicles and it is not fair to ticket some trucks and not others. There is a preliminary design in the packet for the Machia Road repair. It is ready to go to AOT for their review process which will take several months.
- FEMA Transfer Station Slide – there has been no decision made yet on this grant. More information is available in the packet on what it would cost (estimate) to build a new sand shed vs. repair the slope behind it. Heidi has been working with Randy Reed, former AOT engineer. Estimate to rebuild would be \$833,000.00 vs. our match to fix the slope behind the sand shed \$228,000.00. There are AOT grants available to rebuild but we would need to prove a water quality concern and the maximum amount is \$300,000.00. The bid from GW Tatro to repair the prior fix (drainage pipe is dislodged) came in at \$12,500.00. GW Tatro has said this is an easy fix, but in a tough spot. Funds were put aside in the CIP for this stabilization project, so we have \$50,000.00 right now. Sharon wants to apply for the FEMA grant for both areas at the transfer station, and if it is decided not to do the sand shed section of the project, we would not accept the money. There was discussion about Casella helping out. Michael Casella should arrive soon to this meeting. Bruce asked Shelley about bonds. Motion by Josh LaRocque to apply for FEMA funding for all the slide locations at the transfer station and to scale back when the time comes, if need be. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**.

H. Casella – Michael Casella

Michael Casella was present for this discussion. Things are going well at Casella's Highgate site but there are always challenges. He had a construction company look at the lay of the land and he has also seen the GeoDesign documents. It does look like a very extensive plan to repair some of the areas. He would like to get more information on the borings and some of the samples taken. There was discussion on if the entire landfill could be moved. There was also discussion on Casella taking over ownership of the property. Casella would be interested in taking over, that is the business they are in and they own other landfills as well. Michael doesn't see moving the entire landfill facility as feasible. He explained that the pits are concrete enforced with steel that are not meant to be moved. Jeff Towle asked about the current agreement we have with Casella. We have six years left on the contract. Jeff also asked about the \$250 per ton amount to the town and if that has changed or gone up at all. This is a town asset and Jeff wants to make sure we are doing the best we can for our residents. Michael Casella will stay and join the board for executive session.

I. Selectboard Items

- Motion by Richard Flint to sign the close out letter with regard to the health order at 14 Arthur Drive. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**
- Motion by Josh LaRocque to approve and sign the Memorandum of Understanding with St. Albans Police Department to add communications equipment on the new tower outside of the fire department. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**
- Insulation Bids - We received two sealed bids for the insulation work on the second floor and in the attic of the Municipal Building. Bid #1 – Kilbury Construction with installation to be completed by Cliff Parah \$19,650.00 with an add alternate but no price was specified. Bid #2 – Millbrook Building & Remodeling \$39,500.00 with two add alternates a) add \$5,350.00 and b) add \$12,350.00. Richard wants to further discuss this in executive session. Josh recommends sending both bids to the architect to review them for compliance with the RFP.
- Platt Road - Jeff & Tiffanie Towle, year-round residents of Platt Road, were present. Heidi added two pieces of correspondence that we received from Platt Road property owners to the packets. These came in after the letter from the town was issued and sent to all Platt Road property owners. The letter indicated that this was at the request of one family and that if the solution did not suit others that maybe they would work out something amongst themselves. The Towle’s are ok with what Josh and Butch came up with for a solution, which is what has been done for the last 17 years the Towle’s have lived there. Jeff noted that the Browns put up a snow fence, which did not last and just yesterday they put up another structure in the right of way that will not last either. The snow removal policy states things can’t be in the right of way. Jeff further stated that it was not the town or anyone working for the town that did this that started this entire dialogue about snow on Platt Road. Jeff also clarified that he does not have a plow driver, his wife removes their snow with a shovel. Jeff sees people that fish go in there and drop plows all the time, so it was not the town that caused the issues. The Towles are happy with the town and how Platt Road has been plowed. All that has changed is new property owners putting things within the right of way of the road. There are only four homes on Platt Road that are year-round residents. There are twenty homes / camps total. Jeff appreciates the feedback from the neighbors and asked Josh to read aloud the correspondence from Mr. Busier (110 Platt Road) and from Mr. & Mrs. McKenna (124 Platt Road). Butch and the crew plan to come up to Platt Road to make sure everyone is on the same page. Sharon appreciates that the Towles as well as the other neighbors know that the town is doing the best we can.

J. Upcoming Events

Nov. 11		Veterans Day – OFFICES CLOSED
Nov. 12	5:30pm	Welcome Center Mtg. – was cancelled due to weather
Nov. 14	6pm	DRB Mtg.
Nov. 18	5:30pm	Recreation Comm. Mtg.
Nov. 19	6pm	Planning Comm. Mtg.
Nov. 21	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
Nov. 28+29		Thanksgiving Holiday – OFFICES CLOSED

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit the regular meeting @ 8:33pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.**

K. Executive Session

Motion by Josh LaRocque to enter into executive session @ 8:34pm with Heidi Britch-Valenta and Michael Casella for contracts, legal and personnel, where premature general public knowledge would place the town and or the individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Richard Flint to exit executive session @ 9:30pm. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**

L. Adjournment

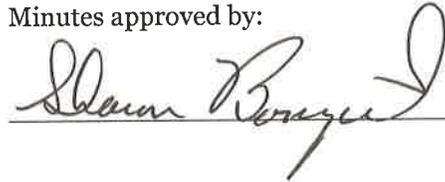
Motion by Sharon Bousquet to adjourn the meeting @ 9:30pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by:



Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes approved by:



Sharon Bousquet – Chair, Highgate Selectboard