

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Meeting

Thursday, May 7, 2020 @ 6:30pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated

ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE

<https://zoom.us/j/96636431042?pwd=NTVQYUtPakQ4bEdPcE9zZlBS1BqZzo9>
Meeting ID: 966 3643 1042 & Password: 8x6WjN

ZOOM PHONE -One tap mobile

+13126266799,,96636431042#,,#,790651# US (Chicago)
+16465588656,,96636431042#,,#,790651# US (New York)

Dial by your location--+1 253 215 8782 US OR +1 301 715 8592 US LONG DISTANCE RATES APPLY

Meeting ID: 966 3643 1042 & Password: 790651

Find your local number: <https://zoom.us/j/96636431042?pwd=NTVQYUtPakQ4bEdPcE9zZlBS1BqZzo9>

OR FREE CONFERENCE CALL **

The public may participate by phone using the info below:

Dial in # 425-436-6365

Access code 188557

A. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

The video conference call / phone conference call meeting was called to order by Sharon Bousquet, Chair @6:40pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, changes to open meeting law allowed for this meeting to take place with no declared physical location. Everyone participated from their own location by video or phone.

Highgate Selectboard Members – Sharon Bousquet - Chair; Bruce Butler – Vice Chair; Richard Flint; Randy Connelly *absent* – *Kyle Lothian*

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

Community Members / Others Participating – Lisa Hango; Tim Smith; Dick Harper; Luc Dupuis; Evangeline LaRocque; Jim Harrison; Jeff Carr; Elisabeth Nance; Bethany Remmers; Wayne Elliott; Keith Ploof

B. Public Comment(s)

- Sue Cota let Heidi know that the State of VT has been to the site on Monument Road and confirmed they have the funding to make the repairs to the bank. They are advertising for the work to be done and it should be completed this construction season.

C. Summer Sounds – Dick Harper

Dick's recommendation for the 2020 Highgate Summer Sounds Concert Series is to cancel the concerts. There was discussion on the allocation from the town. Shelley has their \$3,000.00 appropriation check on her desk that was approved by the voters. She will hang onto it and they will figure it out and look forward to Summer Sounds

returning to Highgate in 2021. It was agreed that for the safety of our music lovers, our musicians, our social hosts, and our volunteers that the 30th annual Highgate Summer Sounds Concert Series for 2020 be cancelled. Motion by Richard Flint for the appropriation to Summer Sounds to still move forward. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. This was supposed to be Dick's last year, but he plans to return for 2021.

D. Tim Smith – Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation (FCIDC)

Tim reaches out to area Selectboards once per year to give an update regarding economic development (or lack of) around the county. FCIDC is helping to circulate information during the COVID-19 pandemic for the Cares Act. He detailed information that has been shared with area businesses and various groups during this difficult time. FCIDC has helped to distribute cloth masks at no cost. Highgate received 50 cloth masks which we are grateful to have received. Prior to the pandemic we were at 2.4% unemployment rate. It will be interesting to see how this situation plays out and how it affects workforce development numbers. There will be a phone call next week with Congressman Peter Welch and area manufacturers. They continue to be in discussions with potential new businesses moving into our area, but many things have been forced to be put on hold. Sharon asked Tim what he thinks about where Highgate stands with regard to the Airport Infrastructure project and making that successful. He doesn't have a crystal ball, but he is telling people that the City of St. Albans won't get back to where it was for two or three years. FCIDC and the City of St. Albans will be aggressive about getting businesses in. Tim noted that One Federal (restaurant) has gone out of business and will not be reopening. We may see even more of that. During the pandemic most area manufacturing remained open as essential businesses. Even with infrastructure in place at the FC Airport, we may not see anything for years. Jim Harrison has some leads on potential businesses that may be interested, and Tim is optimistic. The Airport Infrastructure project is a good project (assuming we get a vaccine and the pandemic under control and return to normal). Sharon had more questions for Tim about the economy and returning to the new normal. The Governor continues to open things up slowly each week. Tim, speaking as Mayor of St. Albans, noted that Memorial Day celebrations have been cancelled and that he will be contacting towns about lowering flags for the Memorial Day weekend. Highgate still plans to lay wreaths on Memorial Day. Sharon thanked Tim and the staff at FCIDC for all they do.

E. Airport Infrastructure Project Discussion

Tim Smith, Wayne Elliott, Bethany Remmers, Elisabeth Nance, Jim Harrison and Jeff Carr were all participating in this discussion. Heidi has received information on the Northern Borders Grant Program and is looking for any funding sources to help us with this project. She has also spoken to the VT Community Development Program about their block grant. The feedback she is getting is that we should apply and that there will be stimulus money as well as funds available in the programs that are open right now. EDA is on the same timeline as Northern Borders. It is recommended we apply soon and is open on a rolling basis. It was noted that this is a very trying time to look at spending taxpayer dollars and asking them to approve loans and / or bonds. Jim Harrison has been part of the project from the beginning and feels confident on moving forward. He is willing to commit some of his own funds to help with our match of 20%. Mr. Harrison spoke about large projects he has been involved in and the time it takes to complete them. The process is not scary to him. He believes that bringing water and

sewer to the airport will be great for the area and with the runway extension project, over time it will be very positive. Mr. Harrison's enthusiasm eases Sharon's mind some. Jeff Carr added to the conversation, talking about the economy currently. Mr. Carr believes that in the long run we are positioned reasonably well to come through this with opportunities we might not have had. The economy will work its way through. We need a medical end point to get us past the issue of health concerns. Mr. Carr agrees with Mr. Harrison and the land adjacent to the airport will be limited without the new infrastructure. The state seems to be committed to extending the runway. We will have more clarity on the COVID-19 situation in 6-12 months. There seems to be a reasonable opportunity to work on funding for both projects at the same time. Heidi spoke with EDA today and they have a large pot of money and encouraged us to apply. This is a good project and we have done a few things that make for a solid application. We also went the extra step to get the economists prediction of jobs. Even cutting the estimate in half is a significant number of jobs. We also applied for funding to look at planning concepts. VCDP has a funding opportunity. The challenge with that is that the airport area is not a village designation or growth area. These are things we should look at and would make us eligible for clean water funding as well. Sharon asked for a break down on what is out there for grant funding and what is estimated to be asked of the taxpayers: Sewer \$1.8 million; Water \$1.6 million; Total project estimated at \$3.4 million. There is a restriction with Northern Borders funds that we would not have more than 80% federal funding. We could ask them for \$1 million and EDA could fund up to 50% of our project based on our distress level, which is \$1.7 million. This would take us up to the 20% mark, leaving \$680,000.00 for the town to cover. Jim Harrison can assist with our match, contributing \$200,000.00 of his own money. That would be an agreement between Mr. Harrison and the town. His concern is he does not want to put up any matching funds prior to knowing proof positive that the project is a go. He also clarified his contribution will not be used for studies, etc, but will be used towards the actual project costs. This would leave the town with \$480,000.00 to ask the taxpayers for, provided all the other funding sources come through. Tim and Bethany were asked about other funding sources. FCIDC may, provided we rebound from the COVID situation, be able to help with a small amount between \$15,000.00 - \$25,000.00. The Community Foundation was mentioned, and VEDA had not been investigated yet. VEDA is all loans and always at variable rates. Loans are also available through ANR and USDA. The State Infrastructure Bank offers low interest loans. Wayne Elliott added the possibility of loan money from the state that is not tied to federal dollars. The VT Municipal Bond Bank is another option. There was discussion on loan terms, percentages, timelines and fiscal periods. Sharon is concerned about making a commitment without input from the taxpayers. The board agreed this is a great project, but Richard feels very nervous in this economy about asking people for more money. He talks to a lot of people and they are scared about the future, scared they won't have a job to return to and worried about paying their basic needs. Heidi clarified we can apply to Northern Borders with just a statement that we would put this before our voters for approval. We have until Sept. 2021 to lock down a bond vote. If they award us with funding and we put it before the voters and they say no, it doesn't go any further. There was discussion on a timeline for a vote – this November was mentioned as an option with the General Election. We need voter approval for the EDA grant. Bethany Remmers echoed what Tim said about funding options. Each Selectboard member shared thoughts on the project and the process to get there. Heidi has a deadline of June 1st, so for tonight she is looking for the ok from the board to move forward with the

contingency of putting it before the voters sooner than later to get the balance of the funding on the hook. Richard added that a lot has happened since our joint meeting with Swanton Village in early March. He feels we are moving too fast and hears that the community is saying and feeling about the economy. Richard would like to see this all put on hold. Lisa Hango spoke that she too hears what people are saying and knows there are fears. She sees nothing wrong with pursuing this and seeing what the voters want. Motion by Randy Connelly to move this forward and put it before the voters for a decision. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**. 3 YES (Sharon, Bruce, Randy) – 1 NO (Richard). Sharon understands that folks and businesses are scared and she is not going to go forward without believing this project is a good idea. Richard added that he has a very different outlook than he did back in March before the pandemic. We are investigating further and taking more steps to see what we can accomplish. Sharon thanked everyone for participating in this discussion and for the information they shared.

F. Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche

- Working remotely is very different from being in the office. Shelley goes in as needed and everything is getting done.
- Randy had questions about the hood being cleaned at the arena. Worthington Chimney & Exhaust performed the service. Judy Laroche paid them and we reimbursed Judy \$550.00. Motion by Randy Connelly to sign the check warrants. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**.
- There was discussion about the possibility of more people having struggles with paying their property taxes this fall. Shelley said only one person has cancelled their payment plan, everyone else is keeping up with their arrangements. She will work with those that will require plans for the upcoming collection season. Some have paid ahead using their tax returns or stimulus money. Small payments can make a big difference.

G. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon

- Motion by Richard Flint to approve the minutes from April 16, 2020, as written. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**.
- Motion by Richard Flint to host the rabies vaccination clinic on May 16 from 9am – noon at the Highgate Sports Arena. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**. A flyer will be circulated very soon with all the information. Swanton cancelled their clinic so we are starting one hour early, at 9am. The location has been moved to the arena to accommodate more people and vehicles. Proper physical distancing and masks will be required for everyone to remain safe. Cost will be \$15 rabies, \$18 distemper, or \$25 for both. You can also license your dogs at the clinic. Fees until June 1 are \$13 per dog spay / neutered or \$17 per dog if not. Late fees kick in on June 2. A few HVFD members will be helping. Kyle and Richard from the Selectboard have offered to help, as well as a members from the Recreation Department. It will be a very busy day. Wendi thanked the board for allowing the clinic to proceed. The fear is that we will have a big problem of unvaccinated pets if we don't host the clinic this year. We are the only clinic in our area this spring.
- The town offices remain closed to the public. There was discussion on opening up by appointment and if we could meet all the regulations the Governor has imposed if we

do. All departments are working remotely and going in as needed. Things are moving forward. They take longer but people are getting what they need. Wendi was willing to schedule appointments for title work if the board supported it. Wendi asked Sharon about her email earlier in the week about opening back up and our thoughts. If there are complaints, Wendi would like to know about it so it can be addressed. Other than one attorney, Wendi has not heard any complaints. Heidi doesn't see the point in putting us back in the office if we can do things from home. We have all been set up very well to continue remote work. Sharon added that she has had a couple complaints, mostly about accessing the zoning department. Samantha is working remotely as well and going in on Fridays to process permits and anything else that has come in. Things are still operating. If people are calling or emailing the office, they are getting what they need. If we don't know we can't help them. The listers office is moving along nicely with finalizing the grand list and updating property cards. Aimee is going in as needed and also working from home. Motion by Richard Flint for the municipal offices to continue to operate as they have been, working remotely and going in as necessary, and this will be revisited at the May 21st meeting. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. 3 YES (Randy, Richard, Bruce) / 0 NO / Sharon abstained from the vote. It was noted that if things change drastically in between meetings we could call a special meeting and adjust on the fly.

H. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta

- Next meeting on May 21st will be an update on the Machia Road stabilization project. John from DeWolfe will be present via Zoom. The Youngs who live across the road have been sent a packet of information already.
- The town owns the area where the former store/ apartment building was located next to the new bridge. It was noted during the inspection of Bridge 25 on Machia Road and also through a safety complaint from a resident that people have been parking there. The state is proposing bollards in that area and no parking signs. We will own the bollards and be on the hook to maintain them. Richard visited the site and didn't see any vehicles there. There was discussion on a fence instead. Randy asked if the town has reached out to the building owner next door and politely asked that their tenants not park there. No, this has not happened. Evangeline LaRocque asked for clarification on the location – intersection of Route 78 and Machia Rd. Richard would also like a letter to be sent. Randy would like the town to be good neighbors and communicate. He thinks bollards are ugly and overkill. Heidi will start with a phone call. Randy is not opposed to no parking signage. Motion by Randy Connelly to start with a phone call and a no parking sign. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED** 3 YES (Sharon, Randy, Richard) / 1 NO (Bruce).
- Sharon received a notification during this meeting that the alarm was going off at the town offices. Keith Ploof went to make sure everything was ok. Earlier at the start of this meeting there was a notification that the alarm at the library was also going off.
- There was discussion on the paving grant for the public works department. Richard thought this was already taken care of. Butch needs to connect with Randy Reed. The due date is May 15. Richard understood that Butch and Nick didn't believe we would receive any funding. We can't win if we don't play. Richard will get together

with Butch to get the info to Heidi and meet the May 15 deadline. It is worth applying for to cover a lot of extra paving if we are awarded. We are low on the list due to previous awards, but it is worth a try!

- We will talk about the traffic ordinance on May 21st. A summary is in the packet.

I. Selectboard Items

- Motion by Richard Flint to approve the signs of 2020 MVU Highgate seniors be placed in the town park. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.**
- The ATV and dirt bike activity has increased in town. Evangeline agrees, she sees it in the town park and in the village. Flat Iron park is being used as a shortcut for certain residents to get to the store. These concerns have been communicated to SAPD.
- Our attorney has reviewed the purchase and sale agreement on the Cherry Hill property to Fish and Wildlife. A few edits were made and F&W has approved it. Motion by Bruce to approve the purchase and sale agreement. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.** Only Sharon needs to sign it.
- Make sure to complete the 2020 Census. You can complete it online or by mail. It is very important to be counted. The info helps with grants and federal funding.
- SAPD is working on their processes and are making changes and updates to their hiring process.
- Sharon sent thoughts and prayers to Mike Lambert and his family on the recent and unexpected loss of his wife, Wendy.
- Richard wants to recognize the area stores for all the support they give to the town, and specifically HVFD when needed. He wants to do more than send letters and asked the board for their opinion on plaques. Richard is very proud to live in the Town of Highgate. Richard will work with Heidi on the wording and put something before the board to vote on. Sharon also offered to help Richard.
- Motion by Richard Flint to accept the estimate Kyle received for the B25 sign dedication to Richard J. Noel. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**
- Motion by Randy Connelly to allow Swanton Village to put brush from the Highgate dam at the Highgate brush depot. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED.**
- Michael Casella was supposed to join the board in executive session but is unable to do so. Heidi has one issue from the last meeting to discuss as a carry over.

J. Upcoming Events

May 14	DRB Mtg.	Postponed until June 11
May 16	Rabies Clinic	9-Noon @ Arena
May 21	Selectboard Mtg.	6:30pm via Zoom
May 30	Green Up Day	Green Up bags will be here soon

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit the regular Selectboard meeting @ 8:50pm. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED.**

K. Executive Session

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to enter into executive session @ 8:50pm with Heidi Britch-Valenta and Shelley Laroche to discuss personnel, contracts and legal, where premature general public knowledge would place the town and / or the persons involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Richard Flint to exit executive session @ 9:20pm The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.**

L. Adjournment

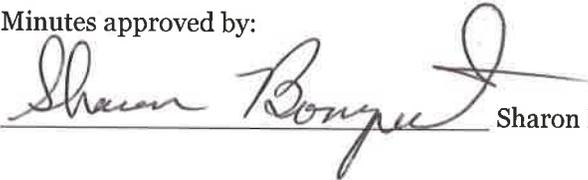
Motion by Randy Connelly to adjourn the meeting @9:20pm. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by:



Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes approved by:



Sharon Bousquet – Chair, Highgate Selectboard

