

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Mtg.

April 16, 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; Paulette Tatro; *Absent - Randy Connelly*

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon - Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Admin; Tom Racine – Town Treasurer

Public / Other – Ben Lowell – Constable; Ernie Saunders - NEMRC; Fred Duplessis – Sullivan & Powers; Andy King; Dick & Merry Souza - HVFD

B. Public Comments

None

C. Sullivan & Powers – Fred Duplessis

NEMRC – Ernie Saunders

We completed a compilation about 18 months ago and most recently in Sept. 2014 we completed an audit. Fred provided a quick overview of what the report says and then would answer any questions. Their role is to give an opinion on financial statements, which are the first three pages of the report. There is an adverse opinion on this report, which means we are not following generally accepted accounting principles, and that is for two reasons. First, we don't present government wide financial statements and the main barrier from doing that is because we haven't completed an inventory of all our fixed assets. The second reason is that the trustee of public funds is a mix of private purpose funds and permanent funds. Those need to be separated. The general fund and highway fund are what affects the tax rate. The total fund balance is \$265,800.00 and some of it is tied up in pre- paid expenses. Some is also tied up by the voters in such projects as Bridge 25. \$137,669.00 of unassigned fund balance is discretionary money, which can be used towards another budget, assigned to something, or set aside. Fred feels its important to maintain a fund balance for cash flow purposes. We collect taxes just once per year (in October), so we are essentially going 4 months without money, although we could borrow, if needed. If we do not have a reasonable fund balance, it would eliminate our ability to mitigate tax increases. We track the highway fund separately. Some towns do it this way, others don't. Because we are part of VMERS (VT Municipal Employees Retirement System) this June we will need to reflect our portion of unfunded liability on our financial statements. It does not affect the general fund, as long as we keep paying the rates they charge for the defined benefit plan. This will be strictly a reporting change. As a whole, we took in more than planned, but spent more than planned also, this is with both the general fund and the highway fund. There is a deficit on the highway fund, which has been addressed. Every fund is tracked separately and reported separately. The money is tracked as well as any restrictions. The audit was completed in accordance with government audit standards, so they also evaluate internal controls. That letter is also included in the audit packet. There are three items noted as weaknesses, two deficiencies, and no items noted as non-compliant, what so ever. They lay out the criteria, as well as what they found and what they recommend, and the town has responded to the issues. Some are long term projects. We are soon going to be in transition when Tom leaves. We need to work on policies and focus on what things are unique to Highgate as a town. Tom noted that the town recently voted to eliminate the office of town auditor, which means the outside audit will become routine. This is a good thing, but cost is a concern. Ernie from NEMRC is also here. Tom has been speaking with both Ernie and Fred about the transition and also about the chart of accounts conversion.

Ernie noted that Tom has been good to work with and has been willing to make changes. Part of what has educated Ernie over the years is watching Selectboard meetings. It has dawned on him that Selectboard members don't really understand accounting unless you make it easy to understand. If we break out funds, such as library or recreation, it is easier to see and understand. There will be questions on who owns the fund balance. It really belongs to the general fund, but Ernie asked if there can be a policy within a town, if a department has a surplus that the funds stay in the general fund. Fred said it would not be binding and the only way to legally do that would be to adopt a charter. Unspent tax money should go back in and be reallocated. Donations given for a certain purpose would be different. Paulette had some questions about cases where it would be a combination. Per Fred, the general rule is to spend specified money first. Tom feels that surplus can make things problematic. He would prefer to have department heads not think of their own proprietary funds and to budget accurately. But first, policies need to be put into place. Fred would like Tom to focus on the chart of accounts and policy manual prior to him leaving as treasurer. Ernie feels there are lots of good reasons to break the funds out, to which Jeff agreed. Jeff also feels that as a board, they need to have more ownership and keep a more watchful eye, and not just rely on Tom. Ultimately it is one pot of money. Paulette asked about the format of the pages in the town report, and how some of them would go back to looking as they did before. There has to be a clear policy about who the fund balance or surplus belongs to. Ernie also mentioned that the library financials should be kept in the town office and not kept separately. Paulette asked about uncollateralized funds. Fred's recommendation is to be sure you are dealing with a stable bank. Ultimately, since you are dealing with public money, we should consider getting it collateralized. Tom and the board will work on the policies. Ernie and Tom will continue working on a new design for the chart of accounts, so it will be done by the time that Tom leaves.

D. Town Treasurer – Tom Racine

1. Pay bills

There were no questions or comments from the board.

2. Job posting info

We have a timeline and now need to appoint a committee for hiring our new town treasurer. This will be further discussed under Selectboard items.

3. Misc.

- The masonry work will be done soon on the front of the highway building that was damaged in October.
- The fire truck was purchased and is here.
- Monahan & Maloney from the Merchants Bank are working on the note for the arena. It should be ready for the next time the board gets together on April 22nd.
- VLCT is wondering if we are still interested in getting a quote for short term disability coverage. Chris and Jeff would like Tom to pursue getting a quote.

E. FNLC ERP Storm Water Planning Grant – Denise Smith

Denise is the executive director of Friends of Northern Lake Champlain for Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. She is here to talk about the Ecosystem Restoration Planning grant. This grant has been ramped up and they are releasing funds more often than in prior years. There is a very short timeline to submit the application. A few land owners on Shipyard Road contacted her about a program called Lake Wise, which encourages land owners to implement storm water practices around their homes to treat storm water before it enters the lake in that area. Jeff contacted her, because his entire neighborhood is interested and there are significant issues in that area. There are three pieces to the grant and no implementation work at this point. This would cover 10 to 15 landscape designs for property owners that are agreeable. This would basically be looking at the site, come up with a plan or plans, and landscape. There are three larger storm water treatments on the hillside, which may or may not be in the right of way. This would provide a shovel ready application for Platt Road and Shipyard Road. Jim Smith could provide the engineering work and would be paid for with the grant. The ERP does not require match money. She submitted the grant without letters of support from the board. A letter has been prepared, if the town wishes to support this by signing. Denise is asking for support on the shovel ready engineering, and by signing the board is stating that they have been informed. Jeff feels it is timely, as summer residents aren't here yet. Many residents are doing

their own thing and its all ending up in the lake. Denise pointed out that we could be looking at next spring before any work would be completed. Paulette asked about the separate timelines for grants. Denise said they have changed the way they do applications, and now they separate out the design and the construction. Heidi also noted that we are applying for a BBR grant, which will identify projects. Denise is not asking the board to commit to any projects at this time. This is more of a design and planning grant we are looking at. Stewardship for the life of the project would be required if the grant is through ERP. Also, any funding with tax dollars would require the town to maintain it. The letter presented for signature supports the application to have a shovel ready application ready to go if we have a funding source. Denise added that FNLC started in the Missisquoi Bay 10 years ago. She finds that property owners are being considerate about what to do with their storm water. There are some really neat projects going on around Lake Carmi also. Motion by Chris Yates to sign the letter of support for the ERP grant application submitted by FNLC for the Highgate Springs Shoreline Neighborhood Storm Water Project. Motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**. Denise also noted that the FNLC annual event at the Tyler Place is on May 21st. There is a cost to attend and this year's theme is "Our Lake, Our Legacy" - invitations to follow.

F. ADA Planning Grant to study modifications of the Town Office

Due to some wording issues with a previous meeting warning, we were asked to warn this one more time. It has been an identified need for a long time that this office needs to be modified to better serve all our needs. We have a vacant upstairs that has never been utilized for anything other than storage. We have been awarded a grant for \$10,000.00 to pay an architect to look at the offices, meet with departments and come up with other ways to utilize the space and create an ADA accessible lift or other way to access the upstairs. The listers have outgrown their office space, and Tom's space is also small. There will be public meetings for the public to be involved, and different designs to be reviewed. If we have a construction ready project, we can apply for an ADA grant for construction. Heidi will issue something to get a consultant, meet the players, understand the needs and come up with a few alternatives.

G. Town Clerk – Wendi Dusablon

1. Minutes from April 2nd and April 8th

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the minutes from April 2, 2015 as amended.

Motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the minutes from April 8, 2015 as amended.

Motion was seconded by Diana O'Hara – **APPROVED**.

2. Dog update

We have 610 dogs licensed as of today, with approximately 200 left to go.

Wendi will be providing a list to Vonnie and Kristy tomorrow so they can start knocking on some doors.

3. Hockeyville update

Highgate Sports Arena has made it to the **TOP 10 of KRAFT HOCKEYVILLE!** There were over 1,100 rinks entered into the contest and we are among the top 10 in the nation for passion, creativity and community spirit. We are guaranteed \$20,000.00 towards arena renovations and are in the midst of a voting round to narrow it down to the top 4. This round is a pure numbers game. Voting in this round ends at 11:59pm tonight, and we will find out on April 18th if we are moving on.

H. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta

1. BBR grant

Heidi attended a BBR workshop. We can also apply for another \$10,000.00 grant for a construction project.

2. East Highgate dam removal

There was a site visit today to the East Highgate dam. This has been a safety concern and is a risk for boaters. Fish & Wildlife would like to put some labor and funds behind this project. Northern Forest Canoe Trails and the Village of Swanton (owner of the dam) are also working on this. If all goes well, by fall the dam could be out, but it could take longer.

3. EOP update

This Emergency Operations Plan needs to be updated every year and the fire department and school are working on this.

4. **Landfill restriction**

Motion by Jeff Towle to sign the notice of environmental conditions for the Highgate landfill. Motion seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED**. This needs to be recorded in the land records. The date needs to be adjusted and Jeff will stop by tomorrow and sign it.

5. **Misc.**

- FEMA came to town this week to visit the transfer station. We filed an application for \$250,000.00 for an overall maintenance plan that would improve drainage and limit risk of landslides. It is a requirement in the permit of switching to custodial care to make sure the area is stabilized. They should be letting us know this summer if we will get the funds. We can then hire a firm to look at the property and get a plan in place.
- At the last meeting, Jeff asked about Ancient Roads. The deadline is July 1st. AOT was asking about the road off of Route 78 across from Carter Hill that heads to the rail trail. That road is not showing on our map. The program was designed to force towns to make decisions and to avoid property disputes. The board will look this over for a future discussion at a future meeting.
- We have received 3 dog bite complaints in the past week that will necessitate an additional meeting within 7 days. One is a dog we have previously had a hearing on. Chris, Paulette and Diana can be available on April 22nd starting at 6pm. Jeff and Heidi are not able to be present. We will notify Randy as well about this additional meeting.
- Heidi noted that we have received some comments about the brush depot and the protocol during the week. Currently we have the resident call us and we call the transfer station to let them know someone is coming down during the week. Saturdays it is staffed and no call ahead is necessary. This is for Highgate residents only, and the way we have been managing this during the week seems to work, even though it might be an extra step for the resident. We will keep things as they are.

I. **Selectboard items**

1. **Mini pumper bids – opened**

Bid #1 – from James LaMontagne, Norwich VT \$1,500.00
Bid #2 – from David Tremblay, Highgate VT \$1,650.00

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the bid of \$1,650.00 from David Tremblay. Motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**. It was noted that the truck is as is and where is. Mr. Tremblay will have two weeks from the date of notification to arrange proper payment and to receive the vehicle.

2. **Arena boards bids – opened**

We did not receive any bids. Andy King asked if there is a place they could be transported to as a long term solution. Time is of the essence to get them moved from where they are now, with ball season ready to kick off. Andy will email Don Gilbert to see if there is any room in any of the trailers, or if the contents can be consolidated to accommodate the boards and glass.

3. **Tablets**

Chris got several quotes on tablets, all with the same specs. The best price was through Walmart for a 16GB Apple iPad with WIFI only. We do not pay tax as a government entity. Motion by Chris Yates to purchase five (5) iPads from Walmart for \$349.99 each. Motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED**.

4. **Sweeper brushes**

Motion by Chris Yates to purchase the replacement brushes for the sweeper for \$914.08 from Harvest Equipment. Motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED**.

5. **Guardrail pricing**

We asked Steve to look into guardrail pricing along Hanna Road where the brush had been cut. Steve took measurements and calculated that for the three separate locations it would be \$18,870.00, which we do not have a budget for. Paulette wants to table this discussion until everyone has had a chance to drive by independently and look at the sections in question. Before the next meeting each Selectboard member will take a look.

6. **Misc.**

- The hiring committee for the Town Treasurer position will be Paulette, Diana, Jeff, Wendi, Tom & Heidi.

- Chris asked about the MOA from Efficiency VT and if we had returned it. Heidi believes so, but will check on it.
- Paulette asked about the letter of intent for DEW for cutting of the concrete at the arena. We are holding off on that.
- Chris asked about summer hours for the highway crew. They will be looking to go to a 4-day work week (10 hour days) starting May 1st. This will be discussed further under personnel in executive session. Wendi asked if someone could be designated on call on a rotating basis for the Fridays they are not here. She often gets calls on Fridays and needs a go to person. Andy King asked if there is a solution for 5-day coverage that would still afford them a 4-day work week by splitting their days off. The summer hours are May 1 – Oct. 1, per the personnel policy.

J. Upcoming events

April 25	9am – 4pm	Pitch Hit & Run @ Highgate LL fields
May 2		Green Up Day
May 7	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
May 14	6pm	DRB Mtg.
May 19	6pm	PC Mtg.
May 25		Memorial Day Celebration in Highgate

K. Executive session

Motion by Jeff Towle to enter into executive session @ 8:58pm for personnel and a legal issue. Motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Chris Yates to exit executive session @ 10:25pm. Motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Jeff Towle to accept the Sullivan & Powers proposal of \$18,000.00 for audit services. Motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the modified ACO job description with minor edits. Motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Chris Yates to accept the new public works job descriptions with minor edits. Motion was seconded by Jeff Towle – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Jeff Towle to appoint Heidi Britch-Valenta as the designated spokesperson for the Brosseau appeal, to contact the court and request to receive documents associated with this case. Motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Jeff Towle to accept the resignation of Steve Ploof, pending legal advice. Motion was seconded by Chris Yates – **APPROVED.**

L. Adjournment

Motion by Jeff Towle to adjourn the meeting @ 10:45pm. Motion was seconded by Paulette Tatro – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by,

_____ Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by,

_____ Jeff Towle, Chair – Highgate Selectboard