

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Meeting

Thursday, April 16, 2020 @ 6:30pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated

ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE

<https://zoom.us/j/96636431042?pwd=NTVQYUtpakQ4bEdPcE9zZ1lBS1BqZzo9>

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/u/ad4o6KmZ6E>

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 @6:38pm, 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; Kyle Lothian; Randy Connolly

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

Community Members / Others Participating – Charen Fegard – FRA-5 Representative; Lisa Hango – FRA-5 Representative; Ty Choniere; Ben Lowell; Steve Hubbard – RTO Cellular; Paul Costello – Executive Director VCRD; Jenna Koloski – Community & Policy Manager – VCRD; Nick Kramer – Community & Policy Associate - VCRD

B. Public Comment(s)

- Ty Choiniere asked about the batting cages at the arena and if they should be set up this year. The board agreed the answer is no. We don't want to do anything that will encourage people to gather. Once the order is lifted by the Governor, the batting cage can be set up in an hour or two. Randy asked how things are going at the ball fields in general. Ty answered that people are walking the path and some are using the ball fields, but there have been no large gatherings and people are being responsible.

- Charen Fegard, FRA-5 Representative, phoned in and gave an update on unemployment filings. She did not remain on the line for the remainder of the meeting.

C. VT Council on Rural Development

Paul Costello (Executive Director), Jenna Koloski (Community & Policy Manager), and Nick Kramer (Community & Policy Associate) were present via video conference to discuss the Community Visit Program. Paul gave some background on their organization and the services they provide. They have worked with both large and small communities all over Vermont to look at assets and challenges to gather ideas for the future and what is best for the public good. They do not come in with a plan, they engage the community. The people of Highgate are the ones that know what is best for their town. They work to engage the next generation as well as the next generation of volunteers. The community decides what the agenda will be. VCRD brings top tier folks to join in and listen and reflect with the community. They are charged by the farm bill to be a neutral convener and bring together the people of the community with different state offices and heads of agencies. This will include community leaders and also business leaders in our town as well. Once priorities are set, VCRD will help us gear up for action. The process costs about \$40,000.00 but varies from town to town. They work closely with USDA and Northern Borders and do not charge the community they are working with. They ask for a letter of support from the town in advance saying that they are willing to participate and get the word out to our residents. VCRD asks the town to notify all residents about the process to get the word out, which involves a mailing to all homes and flyers going home with the school children. VCRD will also make phone calls and reach out in other ways to get everyone involved. A community visit day will be scheduled where a 20-30 person team comes to town and really starts to get our ideas down. A community dinner of some sort will also be the responsibility of the town. Jenna Koloski added an overview and will send more information to Heidi to share. The community visit will identify goals and initiatives and form action plans. A local steering committee will need to be formed with key representatives from all aspects of the community. That steering committee builds the invite list and builds forum topics for the first big community meeting. A visiting team will also be invited to listen in and reflect. The outcome of the event is a dense set of notes of all the ideas for the future. They come back to the town later and invite the community back to lead a discussion and vote on top priorities. People will be asked to sign up for task forces. Hopefully this will generate new volunteers. The third month (final meeting) is essentially action planning and coming back to the community to help launch the task forces. Another new team will be brought to the town to focus on the topics chosen and determine what our resources are. A final report is then put together which includes everything start to finish with contact information for all the resources and people involved. Paul said there is no guarantee with this process but they are seeing towns do great things! Funding sources like USDA and Northern Borders are looking for towns that have their acts together. VCRD will support the town and connect us with resources to help us be successful. If Highgate elects to participate, we would not start until sometime in 2021. The Selectboard members agreed that working with VCRD would be very helpful and help many town boards like the Village Core Master Plan Committee and the Highgate Airport Infrastructure Study Group. Jenna asked for more information on the VCMP Committee and what they have been working on. We could use help pulling it all together. Bruce spoke about his experience working with VCRD when he was involved

with the Town of Johnson. This is a critical time for us, and we need the support and access to resources. Motion by Kyle Lothian to send VCRD a letter of support from the Town of Highgate for the Community Visit Program with the understanding that the onus is on the town to assist with the original mailing and sponsoring the community meal for the large gathering. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED.** The board thanked Paul, Jenna and Nick for their time and for their passion for what they do. Fairly soon VCRD should be able to pull together their resources and do a review of letters they have received from different communities. It will be a few months before we hear from VCRD on a time frame for 2021.

D. RTO Wireless

Steve Hubbard from RTO Wireless joined the meeting to discuss a WIFI hot spot in Highgate. Essentially, they pay for the hardware and installation as well as the first five years of the license to use it. After five years we have to decide if we want to continue with the license. The electricity bill should be next to nothing. Microsoft reached out and wanted to partner with RTO, who in turn contacted the State, who in turn put out a memo to towns. This was put on the agenda for discussion tonight but yesterday the installation company was in the area and wanted access to the building (Highgate Sports Arena). It was noted that some towns are on a waiting list. Heidi made a few calls and Steve Hubbard connected with Dan Beaugard at the arena for installation at 5pm last night. The intention was to have it happen quickly so people that rely on WIFI that are unable to access it in other ways, have this option. This will fill that gap and give folks a place to access WIFI. Sharon added this will help with the remote learning our school children are currently working with. Randy had questions about the coverage of this hot spot. Steve said this is an outdoor unit that basically covers a parking lot area. This is up and running and we will spread the word. The board thanked Steve for joining us and there were no further questions.

E. Town Treasurer – Shelley Laroche

- Sharon had questions about the annual fee for the GIS website tech support. Randy had questions about the MEI line item which was for reconfiguring the codes in the security panel. Motion by Richard Flint to accept the check warrants. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**
- An updated budget is in Sharepoint to review. Delinquent taxes are at \$102,260.95 as of April 13th. Shelley said people are sticking to their tax payment plans and doing well. She reminded those that come in and pay cash to obtain a money order at the post office and mail your payment to PO Box 189 in Highgate. Randy thanked Matt Bouchard for all his help setting up employees to work remotely during this time.
- Audit RFPs – we received two proposals, one electronically from Sullivan Powers & Company from Montpelier VT (sent electronically because they did not have access to their office during the Governors stay home order) and one from RHR Smith & Company from Buxton ME came in the mail. Shelley had not opened the email or the package until this meeting.
RHR Smith & Company - \$16,000.00 per year which includes travel and client communications related to the audit. Additional consulting services will be \$125.00-\$150.00 per hour. Fixed assets are not included (which we also book), that will be an additional \$100.00 per hour. Accounting services are not included and will be an

additional \$100.00 - \$125.00 per hour. Billing will be in the form of progress billing every month throughout the year.

Sullivan Powers & Company - \$21,000.00 for the first year to increase by \$200.00 each year of the five-year term. This proposal does not list anything else to be charged separately. In the past, anything Shelley needed was included in the cost. Kyle asked for Shelley's opinion. She feels Sullivan Powers does a great job. They are very helpful and knowledgeable. They know the NEMRC software front to back and also audit many Vermont municipalities. Shelley knows there was concern about having the same set of eyes on the books year after year. Sullivan Powers has brought several different employees to Highgate over the years. They have been auditing our books since 2014. Motion by Richard Flint to accept the proposal from Sullivan Powers & Company out of Montpelier VT. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler. Randy asked about a timeline needed for a decision. Shelley can put the proposals in Sharepoint now that they are opened. By voice vote – 4 YES (Sharon, Bruce, Richard, Kyle) to 1 NO (Randy) – **APPROVED**.

F. Town Clerk – Wendi Dusablon

- Motion by Bruce Butler to approve the minutes from April 2, 2020, as written. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.
- Motion by Randy Connelly to approve the catering list for 2020 and give Wendi permission to sign off on catering requests and forward them on to the State of Vermont Department of Liquor Control for the 2020 wedding season. The motion was seconded by Kyle Lothian – **APPROVED**. It was noted that there is hopefully a 2020 wedding season 😊!
- Please license your dogs by mail – send your check \$13 or \$17 per dog to PO Box 189 in Highgate. Your license and tag will be mailed back to you. The rabies clinic is set for May 16th from 10-noon here at the Municipal Building. If the Governor extends the stay at home order, we will need to rethink this. There was discussion on having it outside with proper distancing. Late fees will be assessed starting on June 2nd.
- Excess weight permits are also being completed through the mail. Please mail your application and fee to PO Box 189 in Highgate.
- Wendi asked the Selectboard if there was any feedback from the community as far as the office and being closed to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emails and voice mails are being received while working remotely and all emails and calls are being returned. Title searches are moving forward with Wendi scanning indexes to the requestors and from there they request specific documents with book and page numbers. Those documents are being sent with an invoice and it's working quite well. Everyone is getting what they need, it is just taking a little longer.
- Wendi had emailed some info to the board earlier this week with regard to ATV activity in town. There have also been complaints about dirt bikes in the town park. All info has been forwarded to SAPD already and they are aware of the issues people are concerned about. Ben Lowell was also participating in this meeting as a concerned resident with regard to these issues.

G. Town Administrator – Heidi Britch-Valenta

- Heidi will be putting a packet of information together for the Northern Borders Regional Commission grant program with regard to the Highgate Airport

Infrastructure Study. Lisa Hango, FRA-5 Representative, was participating in this meeting via video and agreed that is a good grant program and there is no harm in applying for it. Heidi will have more information for the next meeting.

- Complaints with regard to the intersection of Brosseau Road and Highgate Road (Route 207) were forwarded to AOT. Heidi recapped the issues we have been seeing for Lisa Hango. Richard Flint spoke to Butch Brosseau, Public Works Director. They will be taking some time to go look at a good location for the additional stop sign that was discussed last meeting (Park Street & Brosseau Road). Lisa will reach out to VTrans also about the conditions at that intersection on the State Road. Heidi will forward Lisa more info. Sharon added that a hole has now formed on Route 207 (western side) and the road is giving out. VTrans has an issue there and we need to keep this on their radar.
- Kyle had some follow up questions with regard to the signage for the Machia Road Bridge dedication (B25). We need to have a consensus on what we want for verbiage as that will drive the cost. The sign should be large enough to easily read. Heidi will send an email out for everyone to chime in on wording. The cost Kyle will get will include everything including installed on the post.

H. Selectboard Items

- Sharon shared condolences to Heidi on the recent loss of her mother-in-law. The town sends our best to Kurt and their family during this time.
- We have all seen the notice sent out by NRPC and the Governor's office with regard to Public Works Departments. At this time, our public works department is on call and available for emergencies but working remotely from home. There will be some push back from town residents, but this is the Governor's order during the state of emergency due to COVID-19. Kyle agrees completely, as this is the order of the Governor. He asked if Richard saw these emails and as Road Commissioner if he was notified. Richard said he spoke to Shelley and as soon as he was made aware, he talked with Butch, who had also already met with Shelley. Emails sent to the Public Works Department go to Nick and calls are forwarded to Butch. They will get any messages that are sent to them. Wendi will post on social media and on the digital board with regard to the Public Works Department and how they can be reached in case of an emergency situation.
- The purchase and sale agreement for the Cherry Hill property (Rheume Road) will be sent to Ed Adrian for review. Richard had questions about the property. He heard the property had been moved and wanted to know if we know exactly where it is located. This was part of a transaction between Fernand Gagne and Vermont Fish & Wildlife. This piece was excluded for the Town of Highgate. If there was a dispute, the abutting neighbors have had opportunity to air their concerns. Toni from F&W has clarified that the \$1,000.00 mentioned in the agreement will cover our legal fees for a title search and cover any concerns. There was discussion on what the parcel was originally conveyed to the town for and why the town owns it. Motion by Randy Connelly to have Ed Adrian review the documents regarding the conveyance of the Cherry Hill property to Vermont Fish & Wildlife. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**.
- Shelley missed the last meeting (phone conference) and the lengthy discussion about Highgate Little League receiving their check. The check for \$2,000.00 for FY 2019-2020 has already been cut and is on her desk. This was approved in March 2019 and

will be sent out. The voters approved \$1,250.00 in March 2020 for FY2020-2021. Any discussion on whether or not to further allocate to Highgate LL should take place during the budgeting process.

- Ty Choiniere asked about mowing of the parks and arena property once they are allowed to mow. Brian Spears has mowed the arena property for a number of years and Ty has mowed the parks for the last few seasons. Randy asked how Dan Beauregard was doing and with all the programs cancelled for spring, does he have time? He is staying fairly busy with the list the Rec. Commission gave him. Richard asked why Dan was still working with everyone else working remotely from home. Kyle asked why we need to decide now, we are at least 3-4 weeks out from mowing. There was discussion on if what Dan is currently doing was essential and if he should be set up to work remotely. Dan is working alone in an otherwise empty building. Kyle said we should paint everyone with the same brush. Lisa Hango has some information to share and will send it over. There are no big projects happening at the arena right now and Dan has mostly been doing office work. Randy would like to continue this as a personnel discussion in executive session. Bruce doesn't see that as being necessary – the town has to do what is prescribed during the pandemic and it really isn't up to the Selectboard.
- Heidi has been chatting with the attorney from VLCT PACIF about the dehumidifier claim. VLCT is in the process of suing VHV to recoup their losses. We sent them what we have and the attorney is going through the file again and noticed we are the claimant but MAHA signed the contract with VHV so we have to figure out how to resolve that. Heidi will send them a lot more information but basically it will boil down to having documentation from MAHA saying they entered into a contract on our behalf. The town funded the project and MAHA paid the balance, which was loaned to MAHA. It is a town asset, and at the time the arena was being run by MAHA.
- Randy asked about contracts for the pro shop and snack bar at the arena and how those were going. Shelley said the feedback she heard was that the price went up but there was less home ice time so they did not feel the increase in rent was warranted. Bruce was not following the conversation and was not sent any information on it. He questioned how we can hold someone to a contract when they are not even able to use the space at this time. It was noted that the ice season was wrapped up before the COVID-19 pandemic started.

I. Upcoming Events

May 16	10am – Noon	Dog & Cat Vaccination Clinic
May 30		Green Up Day

Motion by Richard Flint to exit the regular meeting @ 8:54pm. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.**

J. Executive Session

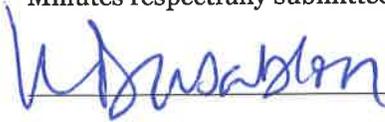
Motion by Sharon Bousquet to enter into executive session @ 8:54pm with Heidi Britch-Valenta to discuss personnel where premature general public knowledge would place the town and / or the individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.** Sharon asked anyone not participating in executive session to please exit the Zoom meeting.

Motion by Richard Flint to exit executive session @ 9:54pm. The motion was seconded by Kyle Lothian – **APPROVED.**

K. Adjournment

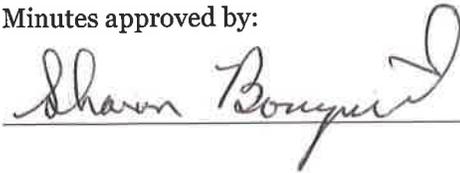
Motion by Randy Connelly to adjourn the Zoom meeting @ 9:54pm. The motion was seconded by Kyle Lothian – **APPROVED.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by:



Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes approved by:



Sharon Bousquet – Chair, Highgate Selectboard

