

TOWN OF HIGHGATE
Selectboard Meeting
Thursday, August 6, 2020 @ 6:30pm
@ Highgate Sports Arena

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated

Join Zoom Meeting from your computer
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/96636431042>
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Dial in # 425-436-6365
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5:00pm – site visit to Franklin County Airport

A. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

The in-person Selectboard meeting / video conference call / phone conference call meeting was called to order by Sharon Bousquet, Chair @ 6:50pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, changes to open meeting law allowed for this meeting to take place in various ways. The meeting was held at the Highgate Sports Arena for proper physical distancing for those who wanted to attend in-person. Zoom video or conference call was also available.

Highgate Selectboard Members – Sharon Bousquet - Chair; Bruce Butler – Vice Chair; Richard Flint; Kyle Lothian; Vern Brosky III

Highgate Office Staff –Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche – Treasurer & Delinquent Tax Collector (all in-person)

Community Members / Others Participating – Kellie Uzell; Evangeline LaRocque; Jason Wetherby – SAPD; Maurice Lamothe – SAPD; Richard Trombley; Sue Cota (all in-person)

B. Public Comment(s)

Sue Cota reported that the State is still planning on doing the Monument Road river bank project this year.

C. St. Albans Police Department Update

Maurice Lamothe and Jason Wetherby were present for this update. Maurice is serving as interim chief for SAPD. He spent over 20 years with VSP, retiring last year. He grew up in this community and has spent most of here career here also. He is happy to be in this position with SAPD. The board is very pleased with SAPD in Highgate, though Sharon noted lately they seemed to have backed off some. She wants to keep the pressure up. It is understandable with COVID-19 that things have changed some and SAPD has scaled back on person-to-person contact with vehicle traffic. All safety concerns are still being addressed. There was lengthy discussion on ATV activity in our town (and others) and how to best address it. It was noted that tickets would be a civil

infraction. They won't chase or spike ATVs so they are asking for help from the community to deal with the ATV issues we are experiencing. It was noted that most ATV riders are respectful and it is a few ruining it for the rest. SAPD can and will send an unmarked cruiser into town if that's what the board wants to see. Several "hot spots" of activity were brought up and Jason made note of them for future patrols. They will adapt and overcome. In Sheldon, store owners have shut off pumps for ATVs and the situation improved. We are now in a 26 hour per week contract with SAPD and police presence in town means everything and has been effective. There was discussion on our ATV ordinance and ticketing associated with it. We no longer have a constable in Highgate. Sharon stated that SAPD has the complete support of the Selectboard and that we are very happy with their service and hope to continue with good solid communication. Vern asked if video footage is helpful in traffic court with ATVs. It should help, although people are hesitant for fear of retaliation. SAPD does not want people to fear for their safety, but realistically that is how it works, people need to step up and be willing to submit statements and show up in court. There were questions about anonymous complaints. To be charged with a trespass by motor vehicle does not apply to UTVs or ATVs, per statute. Richard Flint had questions about illegal burns and SAPD responding even if they are not on duty.

D. HVFD Update

Joe Depatie, Fire Department Chief, was unable to attend this meeting. He asked to be put on the next agenda.

E. Recreation Update – Dan Beauregard

Numbers were low for the archery clinic. The cornhole league has started. Other programs such as roller blading and pickleball have all had low attendance as well, which is expected due to COVID-19. Fall soccer registration is now open on the Highgate Recreation website <https://highgatevt.myrec.com/info/default.aspx> for grades 1-2 and 3-4. There is a link also on the town website www.highgatevt.org. Dan will have more info to share on Cross Country next week. The recreation department is always looking for coaches and volunteers, so contact Dan if you would like to help out, 868-4406 or recdirector@highgatevt.org. The HVAC RFP is posted and bids are due by Aug. 13. The ice is scheduled to go in towards the middle of October. Dan has been in contact with the athletic director at MVU, John Lumsden. The VPA met last week but no announcement has been made yet. High school games are already scheduled for the season. If there won't be a high school hockey season, local organizations are planning to create U19 teams so the kids can still play. MAHA is not affiliated with the school so they don't follow the same guidelines. The board thanked Dan for this update.

Sharon Bousquet welcomed our new board member, Vern Brosky III, to the Highgate Selectboard.

F. Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche

The auditors will be here at the end of August. The personnel policy was edited back in April but was never signed. A motion was already made so the policy was signed. Shelley presented the Municipal Internal Control List to the board for signature. Motion by Kyle Lothian for Sharon to sign this document. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**. Shelley presented the check warrants for approval. Motion by Bruce Butler to sign the check warrants. The motion was seconded by Kyle

Lothian – **APPROVED.** Shelley sent out tax sale notices as normal which keeps people on their toes and lets mortgage companies know the situation. The list is down to a few properties and if they are not on a payment plan they received a letter. The outstanding delinquent balance is \$68,999.80, slightly higher than last year at this time, but still very good. The listers finalized the grand list on Tuesday. Next meeting we should be able to set the tax rate. Tax bills will go out on Sept. 18, with a due date of Oct. 30 this year. Neon labels are being placed on each envelope about payment options. If you pay by check, please mail it. If you pay by card, go to the website (fees apply). If you want to pay with cash, you need to call Shelley for an appointment.

G. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon

Motion by Richard Flint to approve the minutes from July 16, 2020, July 23, 2020 and July 30, 2020., as written. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.** The State Primary Election is Tuesday, August 11th. Wendi and Shelley will be at the polls, held at the Highgate Arena from 7am – 7pm. Over 500 absentee ballots have been mailed out, and as of today 334 have been returned to be processed. There is one vacancy in the listers office and letters of interest are due by August 28th. You have to be a Highgate resident to be a lister. The lister position is part time, approximately 1-2 days per week. We also have a vacancy for the Zoning Administrator position and application packets are due by Aug. 21st. You do not need to be a Highgate resident for the ZA position. This is part time, approximately 16-20 hours per week. Rick Trombley, DRB Chair, was present and had questions about the ZA position and how this was going to work. It is a function of the Planning Commission to recommend a new ZA to the Selectboard once applications are in and applicants have been interviewed. We do need to have an appointed person to process permits etc. for the interim period. Motion by Kyle Lothian for Richard Trombley to serve as interim ZA to sign off on permits and letters of compliance that do not require the entire DRB to review. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED.**

H. Administrator Items – Heidi Britch-Valenta

Heidi has lots of information on her Town Administrator report for the board to review. We applied for a \$30,000.00 USDA grant and were only awarded \$15,000.00. Heidi has asked if there are any funds we could use towards our match. There will be a contract coming forward on this. This will go towards working with a consultant to create economic development strategies such as impact fees and a TIF district. We also had six firms come to the site visit for the Rollo Road project through the Grant-in-Aid program at NRPC. Bids for this will be back on Aug. 10th. Heidi proposes that Richard Flint (road commissioner) and the public works department open them and review them prior to the next meeting. Richard Flint has concerns. We have a grant for \$14,000.00 and there is a good chance this could go way over that. Where will the additional funds come from, as this was not budgeted for? Richard spoke with Butch and Butch does not want to use funds from his line items in the budget. Multiple bidders will hopefully make it more competitive. If bids are too high we could go back to NRPC and reduce the scope of the project. There will also be deducts in there that the public works department can try to help with. Richard noted that the department is already behind because of COVID-19 and he does not want them to be overwhelmed. The project covers 1,650 of road, which is a lot. This project needs to be complete by October 15th to be compliant, based on the extension we got. If it doesn't work out we can back away from the grant. Motion by Kyle Lothian to allow the road commissioner and public works

department to review the bids after the due date and have a recommendation for the Selectboard at the next meeting. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED.** Heidi shared information on the Northern Borders Regional Commission grant. We applied for \$1 million and were awarded \$507,107.76. We have been asked to confirm our budget, timeline and scope and none of those things would have changed based on the reduced amount. We have until September 2021 to get our ducks in a row and to say yes or no. This grant funding is with regard to the airport expansion project, specifically to bring a water and sewer infrastructure extension to the airport. We do have the opportunity to apply again next cycle and the state has the ability to apply for other funding options for money towards this project. The more money we procure from funding sources, the less we have to ask the taxpayers for. A public vote is required prior to September 2021 to show that we have public support. We are not looking at going to construction until 2022 for completion sometime in 2023. If the taxpayers vote no for the town's contribution the grant money goes back. The board, for the most part, sees this a positive opportunity and a good economic opportunity for Highgate and Franklin County. Bruce asked if we accept the offer from NBRC when do we receive the funds? We would spend the funds and then be reimbursed. Sharon feels the board should all agree and be on the same page about this. Richard expressed concerns based on what he hears in the community about the economy. Kyle added that we need to try to educate the public and let them decide. The Selectboard has been holding special meetings to educate themselves by talking to lots of people to get information and facts out to the public. Vern asked about the commitment of the voters. By September 2021 we have to know what the plan is including a positive vote by the public. Heidi will brush up on deadlines for EDA grants and a March vote at Town Meeting is possible. Motion by Bruce Butler to accept the offer from Northern Borders Regional Commission. The motion was seconded by Kyle Lothian – **APPROVED.** It was noted that up to 80% funding for this project can be federal funds. That leaves \$680,000.00 and how the town, state and individual investors factor into this remains to be seen. NRPC is working with several towns to create a Communication Union District. This will pool resources in our area to try to improve communications in Vermont. NRPC will be participating in our next meeting. Previous conversations have taken place regarding Labor Day events in town. Richard Flint has spoken with HVFD and they still seem nervous about moving forward with large events. The other board members agreed, with Vern noting that 2020 is a year that we will all want to erase from our life calendars. Motion by Richard Flint to, in the interest of public safety, not hold any town events for Labor Day weekend and to hope for a fabulous and wonderful 2021. The motion was seconded by Vern Brosky III – **APPROVED.** We have received a letter from VSP asking if we would like to have a visit. Yes, even if its just to show our support of law enforcement. Kellie Uzell and Shelley both noted calls requesting VSP and they did not show. We have also received notification from Fish & Wildlife about using chemicals to treat sea lamprey. It will not be advised to swim or fish for 3-7 days during that time. They will let us know when this is scheduled. Evangeline LaRocque asked if the report is back from Arnold & Scangas on the historical assessment. No, not yet but it should be here before the VCMP meets on Aug. 25.

Motion by Sharon Bousquet to exit the regular Selectboard meeting @ 8:34pm. The motion was seconded by Vern Brosky III – **APPROVED.**

I. Executive Session

Motion by Richard Flint to enter into executive session @ 8:34pm with Heidi Britch-Valenta and Shelley Laroche to discuss contracts, personnel and legal where premature general public knowledge would place the town and/or the individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Vern Brosky III – **APPROVED.**

Motion by Richard Flint to exit executive session @ 9:49pm. The motion was seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED.**

J. Adjournment

Motion by Richard Flint to adjourn the meeting @ 9:54pm. The motion was seconded by Sharon Bousquet – **APPROVED.**

Respectfully submitted by:



Wendi Dusablon
Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes Approved by:



Sharon Bousquet
Selectboard Chair