

TOWN OF HIGHGATE
Selectboard Meeting
Thursday, April 2, 2020 @ 6:30pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated

**** PHONE CONFERENCE CALL MEETING****

The public may also participate by phone using the info below:

Dial in # 425-436-6365
Access code 188557

A. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

The conference call meeting was called to order by Sharon Bousquet, Chair @6:34pm, 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. All participants phoned in from their own location. This meeting was also audio recorded.

Highgate Selectboard Members – Sharon Bousquet - Chair; Bruce Butler – Vice Chair (joined in @ 6:39pm); Richard Flint; Kyle Lothian; Randy Connelly

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Admin. & Grant Admin.

absent from phone conference - Shelley Laroche – Treasurer & DTC

Community Members – Evangeline LaRocque; Ty Choiniere; Brian Spears

B. Public Comment(s)

There were no public comments.

C. Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche

Shelley did not phone in for this meeting.

- Motion by Richard Flint to sign the check warrants. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. The warrants will be signed at a later time.
- A section was added to the personnel policy with regard to emergency closures/situations and a few other minor changes. Motion by Kyle Lothian to accept the personnel policy as amended. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**. This policy will be signed at a later time.

D. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon

- Motion by Kyle Lothian to approve the minutes from *March 19, 2020*, as written. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**.
- As of now, the rabies clinic is still rescheduled for May 16 from 10am-noon. We will have to wait and see if it will be able to happen. Wendi has been working remotely from home and going into the office as necessary to get her work done. Dog licenses and excess weight permits have been coming in the mail. We encourage anyone whose dog is current on their vaccinations to license by mail and not wait

until June 1st. Late fees will be assessed starting June 2nd. Land records recording is up to date and all transfers have been given to the listers office so they can continue their work as well. Title searches have been challenging, as we are no longer allowing appointments. Wendi has been scanning indexes to those that request them and if they can supply the book / page numbers, the documents are being scanned over with an invoice. It is working well, it just takes a little longer. Shelley has been working remotely as well and going in as needed to do deposits, payroll or reconcile bank statements. We have been set up well to access quite a bit from our homes, and all messages and emails are reaching us so we can respond.

E. Administrator Items – Heidi Britch-Valenta

- AOT Grants – Heidi presented two applications. The maximum available for both categories is \$175,000.00. Our match is typically made up in equipment and labor for the Structures Grant or from funds set aside in the maintenance budget. For the Class II paving our required match comes out of the highway fund budget already set aside for paving.

Structures Grant - Rice Hill Rd Culvert upgrade - This would replace a worn out, undersized, metal culvert with a concrete box culvert. We would hire a contractor to do the project. This is exactly like what we did last year on Frontage Rd.

Class II Roadway – This can be any project on a Class II road but typically we use it for paving.

Butch has not selected any Class II roads yet and he did not realize there was a deadline associated with this. Randy Reed met with Butch and Heidi had asked Butch to select what he wanted to pave. AOT grants are being extended to May 15th. Richard Flint spoke to Nick Scott from the town crew recently. Heidi noted that we hired Randy Reed to come out and go over this with the highway department so she isn't sure why it didn't happen. Richard will follow up with Butch Brosseau, Public Works Director, directly. Sharon has spoken with Butch recently about paving projects planned for the town this year. There was an issue on Machia Road, close to the Sheldon town line, where the asphalt is pretty dug up and one of our town trucks almost had a real issue there close to the edge of the bank. More info is needed from the road crew on that section of road. Randy Connelly suggested these issues be logged and documented, and Kyle Lothian agreed that is an excellent idea. The voters approved \$300,000.00 for paving this year in the budget as well as \$80,000.00 for stone and gravel. We have a grant for \$150,000.00 already to pave the Gore Road from Cassidy Road to Tarte Road. This opportunity is for \$175,000.00 and it won't be anything we receive this year. They process things very slowly under the best of circumstances, so if awarded, we would not have a contract until fall. Heidi recommends we apply and even if we are not awarded funds this year, we would have the information to submit for next year for the exact same project. There was lengthy discussion on whether to apply this year or not. Richard will meet with Butch to find out what his hesitation is. Randy asked if we were awarded funds if we could turn it down if the department is overloaded with other projects. Yes, and Heidi also confirmed we would have two seasons to use it. The match is 10%. Heidi feels these grants are less vulnerable than others. Richard will work with Butch to come up with a plan. The deadline is now May 15th, so we have some time. Richard will convey to Butch that the Selectboard would like to apply

and that there is concern about this pool of funding in the future. The estimate for the Rice Hill Road culvert project is \$160,557.00. Motion by Randy Connelly to apply for this grant for Rice Hill Road. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED.**

- We received another concern through the bus company from one of their drivers about the intersection of Brosseau Road and VT Route 207. Heidi forwarded this to Jim Cota and he has sent this up the chain at AOT. There was discussion on this intersection and ways to possibly improve it on our end. Brosseau Road is a town road, but VT Route 207 is a state road. There is a good size dip leaning towards the bank on Route 207 that AOT is aware of and there have been several incidents there recently. This was discussed at the last meeting also. Randy wonders if an additional stop sign at Brosseau Road and Park Street would improve the situation. If motorists are made to stop and then proceed ahead, speed should not be an issue by the time they reach the next stop sign at Brosseau Road and Route 207 (also known as Highgate Road). There will be a learning curve if we add a stop sign, and we could ask for support from SAPD in that area when they patrol also. Evangeline LaRocque asked why there are so many issues there, she has never heard of issues there until now. Speed and distracted driving are likely contributing to the accidents at this intersection. Evangeline expressed concern with visibility coming off Brosseau Road when looking to the south. Richard will speak to Butch and get his input on adding a stop sign and we will discuss this again on the next agenda. The speed limit on Brosseau Road is 35 mph from a point 4,000 feet to the east with the intersection of Route 207. Park Street is also 35 mph.
- VT Fish and Wildlife had planned to attend this meeting. A proposal has been sent to us asking to continue the discussion about the Cherry Hill property on Rheaume Road. This is an 11-acre parcel and F&W owns the surrounding property. This parcel is also land locked and is a wetland. They are offering to purchase it from us for \$1.00 and pick up the taxes going forward through the PILOT program (payment in lieu of taxes). This program does not include the educational taxes, so it is less than a private owner would pay, but more than we get now. This year would have generated \$151.04 in taxes, as an example. Randy had questions about the \$1.00 cost, he reads it as \$1,000.00. Heidi believes the \$1,000.00 represents administrative costs. This property was put out to the public to bid on and we received none. If that is the case, Randy supports the transfer. Bruce supports it if they pick up the costs of transferring ownership. Kyle agrees, noting we can't do anything with the property. Kyle added that when he was involved in the Town of Franklin he did not have a good experience with F&W. Richard is also ok with this property transferring to F&W. Sharon noted that in the motion from town meeting a few years ago the voters added "fair market value" to the approval to sell this parcel. We have attempted to sell it and we have contacted neighboring property owners. The only interest we have received is from VT F&W. Ty Choiniere asked if we have reached out to Ducks Unlimited. Bruce answered that they would turn it over to F&W anyway. It was discussed that the fair market value of this property is essentially zero. Transferring this to F&W would give us a little yearly income through the PILOT program. F&W would be the highest and best use of the property. Motion by Randy Connelly to move forward with the sale of the Cherry Hill property to Vermont Fish & Wildlife, provided they are willing to use the \$1,000.00 to cover our expenses, we will sell it to them for \$1.00. The motion was

seconded by Bruce Butler – **APPROVED**. Heidi will contact them with this information.

- Heidi has looked up pricing for signage regarding the Machia Road bridge dedication to Richard Noel. The board would like to spend a little extra for something that will stand the test of time. She found pricing for signs in aluminum and bronze. The board would like something larger, at least 8.5” x 11” if not larger for something this important. It should be large enough and easy to read. Kyle will touch base with a contact he has on Duffy Hill in Enosburg and will also check with Grizzly Graphics. There was discussion on single sided vs. double sided. Kyle will report back at the next meeting.

F. Selectboard Items

- Kyle had questions and concerns about the decision for the Public Works Department to be working from home and on call. He believes they are considered essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sharon took full responsibility for the lack of communication. She emailed out some information earlier today from VLCT. There are concerns for all our workers, and particularly for those, like Nick, whose wife is a nurse and they have small children. Randy added that this is a personnel issue and the conversation could be saved for an executive session. There was discussion on what other towns are doing and what VTrans is doing. Kyle was asked by a community member why they weren’t working, and he didn’t have an answer. Randy asked if the crew had the essentials to do their job, be safe and follow the Governors orders. Bruce would not want to force anyone, but also added that we simply can’t put all road maintenance on hold. Bruce feels they could keep their distance, operate separate vehicles and would not need to be together in close proximity to keep things on track. Richard can get a list of tasks put together with Butch. If they don’t feel safe the Selectboard needs to know. The crew has gloves, but no masks. They also have the ability to separate adequately from one another. Sharon spoke with Butch this morning to go over concerns, similar to what Bruce has brought up, about feeling safe at work. They have been on call and did put in a long day on Tuesday to replace a culvert on Cassidy Road. Butch told Sharon the roads are in decent shape and he would like to start grading. He feels safe and has enough work for the others to work separately. It is understood that if any members of the town crew feel ill they should go home immediately. Butch did request to give Nick the two weeks off because of his family situation. After further discussion and speaking with Butch the board was comfortable with Butch and Luke returning and Nick having more time at home. Motion by Kyle Lothian for Butch Brosseau and Luke Choiniere to start back at work on Monday 4/6 and for Nick Scott to continue with his two weeks at home. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**.
- Butch also asked about moving to summer hours earlier than normal (four 10-hour days). Other local towns have already switched to their summer schedules. Butch is in favor of the longer days to help with projects like grading. There was discussion about rotating days and / or crew members. They typically work ten-hour days Monday through Thursday, but the board would like to leave it up to Butch to make the decisions with the crew on what works best for them. Ty Choiniere wants to make sure they are safe and having one person work alone could be dangerous. Randy also put it out there that weekend days could be considered if that works into the departments schedule. With this pandemic and stay home order all our days are

basically the same lately. Motion by Bruce Butler for the Public Works Department to start with their summer schedule hours effective Monday, April 6th. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. Motion by Randy Connelly to give Butch Brosseau, Public Works Director, the discretion as he sees fit to schedule his crew around a seven day week if he chooses in support of them having flexibility around the COVID-19 pandemic and also the weather. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**.

- Sharon also asked Heidi and Wendi about the Municipal Office situation and their thoughts on moving forward. We are all working remotely with access to many of our job functions from home. Wendi has been going in as needed, as have Heidi and Shelley, and things are getting done. Calls and emails are being returned and we are helping people whenever and wherever possible. So far it is going quite well, overall. Motion by Kyle Lothian to allow the Municipal Offices to remain closed until the Governor relinquishes his Stay Home – Stay Safe order. The motion was seconded by Richard Flint – **APPROVED**. This is all new territory and Randy wants all town employees to reach out to the board if they need further tools to stay home and stay safe while working remotely.
- Motion by Richard Flint to appoint Scott Bessette to the Highgate Planning Commission. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**. Scott will be filling the remainder of Richard Noel's term. Richard has stepped down from the PC to give others a chance to serve. Richard continues to serve the town in many other capacities. Thank you, Richard and welcome, Scott!
- The board discussed the contribution to Highgate Little League and raking of the town parks. This year's budgeted amount for LL in exchange for raking the parks is \$1,250.00. Due to the Stay Home-Stay Safe order and the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot have the children and their families gathering in the parks this year. Ty Choiniere noted that there might not even be a LL season this year and he thinks we should postpone the donation until next season. Brian Spears has already done two of the town parks on his own time and he is planning to do the rest, also on his own time. Randy brought up that LL can't do the work this year, legally, without breaking the order of the Governor. He further stated that LL has no budget, that we don't know if there will or will not be a season at this point and this has been a long-standing tradition in this unprecedented time. Randy sees this as more of a personal issue than a raking of the parks issue and should not be brought into discussion for \$1,250.00. That \$1,250.00 was approved by the voters as part of the budget at Town Meeting. Even if there is no season this year that money would be there for them to start next season for such items as balls, helmets, bats, whatever they need. LL has low registration fees and no child is turned away because they are unable to pay. Sharon asked if the LL has a board of directors that handles the funds. They do have a board, but the funds are handled by someone else, who happens to be a town employee. The \$1,250.00 is not coming from the Parks and Recreation budget. There was further discussion looking at this from many angles. Kyle feels these are crazy times and we would not normally even be talking about it. It's all about the kids and what's best for them. Because these funds were approved for LL if we were to spend them on something else, that is an auditing issue. This conversation should take place during the budgeting process. The Selectboard is supportive of Highgate LL and it's fabulous that no child is turned away. Brian Spears was on the line and added to the conversation. He does the finances for LL and has held the checkbook for 20+ years. LL does have some money in their

account. Brian added that it is very hard to get the volunteers there when they rake the parks and he wonders if we give them money for nothing how they turn out next time will be. Brian will be finishing the other parks in the near future. He plans to be in the Highgate Falls park for the next several days. Randy stated that undoubtedly everyone wishes they could get out and help rake this year, but in this current time how would we gather people in the park and still follow the law? Following further discussion, the board agreed that Highgate Little League will get their voter approved funds in the amount of \$1,250.00 for this year. The board is also very appreciative of the work Brian has done and continues to do in the parks. Moving forward we hope to have a good crowd to rake next spring, and Brian would appreciate the help. Brian enjoys doing it and it's a good way to practice social distancing because no one bothers him 😊.

- Richard asked about the Memorial Day events traditionally celebrated in the Town of Highgate (BBQ, parade, auction). Many of the Memorial Day committee members are in on this phone conference tonight. They all agreed that planning the event takes a lot of time and effort. Not knowing when the Stay Home-Stay Safe order will be lifted they feel it should be postponed for now. There was discussion on celebrating at the end of the summer, on Labor Day weekend instead. June Dairy Days in Enosburg has already been cancelled for early June, as well as many other traditional events in our community. Keith Ploof still plans to lay the wreaths in the cemeteries. Ty will connect with the Highgate School about having the children do an assignment on Memorial Day as part of their remote learning. There is still a Christmas tree in the park that looks good. There is interest in decorating it with Easter eggs. The board was fine with this request. Motion by Richard Flint to postpone the Town of Highgate Memorial Day celebrations. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.
- Sharon requested that we all check on our neighbors, our elders, and anyone else that may need it. There are people and organizations looking for basic items – cleaning supplies, paper towels, etc., so reach out if you have items and want to donate. The State of VT has a website and Meals on Wheels / Age Well needs volunteer drivers in our area. There is also a group of widows / widowers associated with the Catholic Church also looking for basic supplies.
- Heidi asked for the board's vision on future meetings. We had discussed Paul Costello from the Vermont Council on Rural Development doing a presentation. We could use a video format such as Zoom. Randy had questions on who would be hosting the Zoom meeting. Heidi will clarify with Paul and communicate back to the board members. There were questions from board members about Zoom and how it works. Zoom does also offer a phone line call in number for those without a computer.

G. Upcoming Events

April 16	6:30pm	Selectboard Mtg. – more info to follow
May 16	10-Noon	Rabies Clinic
June 1		Dog licenses due – late fees begin June 2
May 30		Green Up Day

H. Executive Session

None

Sharon thanked everyone for joining us via conference call this evening.

I. Adjournment

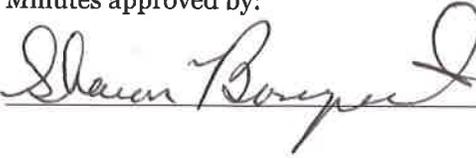
Motion by Richard Flint to adjourn the Selectboard meeting @ 8:29pm. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by:



Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

Minutes approved by:



Sharon Bousquet – Chair, Highgate Selectboard

