

TOWN OF HIGHGATE

Selectboard Mtg.

February 2, 2017 @ 7:00pm

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 Bruce Butler, acting Chair, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Highgate Selectboard Members –Randy Connelly; Bruce Butler;

Josh LaRocque *absent – Chris Yates & Sharon Bousquet*

Highgate Office Staff – Wendi Dusablon, Town Clerk; Heidi Britch-Valenta, Town Administrator; Shelley Laroche, Town Treasurer

Public / Other – Alice (Sue) Cota; Jean Chevalier; John P. Patnode; Michael Casella – Casella Waste Management; Elaine Ezerins – St. Albans Messenger; Ben Rose - DEM; Steve LaFar; Shaun Coleman - NRPC; Andy King; Buzz Surwilo - ANR; Richard Backer - NWSWD; Faith H. Brashear; Tim Smith - FCIDC

B. Public Comments

- Jean Chevalier did some research on the microphones to see if the ends can be put back on. They are awesome microphones, however the cords need to be special ordered and will cost \$31.00 each, plus shipping. Randy thanked her for the research and the board will discuss it.
- Jean also wanted to address something from the last meeting where Heidi indicated that the Highgate Concerned Citizens were suing the Town of Highgate. She wanted to clarify that HCC is not suing the town, and they will never, it is not their purpose. She felt it was very unprofessional coming from a town official. Heidi replied that she misspoke, it was an error and that it was corrected that same evening.
- With regard to the Jedware property, Jean referred to last town meeting and Steve LaFar's comments that day. She said Mr. LaFar was correct and that there has been incompetence on the town's part. Jean feels there are always excuses as to why things are not done properly. If the board wants to regain trust, things need to be changed. She feels there is also a lot of misinformation being communicated with regard to MVR. Sue Cota added that HCC gets the word out to residents and people are happy with them for doing so.

C. TDSRS Designation –Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Emergency Management, NorthWest Solid Waste District, Casella Waste Mangement, NorthWest Regional Planning Commission

There were several representatives present from state agencies and other businesses to discuss using the Highgate Transfer Station as a TDSRS (Temporary Debris Storage and Reduction Site) in the event of a large natural disaster. Buzz Surwilo, Agency of Natural Resources, said that they were encouraged by FEMA a number of years ago to develop a disaster debris management plan in Vermont. In December 2014 a plan was finalized, which is now an annex to the State Emergency Management Plan. It is important to have preapproved sites that debris would be sent to and properly managed. There are 25 sites around the state that were chosen. Of those 25 sites, 17 of them have already had their permits amended to become a TDSRS site. In the event of a natural disaster, all bets are off as far as hours and capacity at these sites. The Town of Highgate is interested in how things will happen, should our site be used in this manner. Casella would take the lead and extend their hours as well as add staffing. There were further questions including how funding works, how the response is managed, if there would be any pre-paid reimbursements to the town, access to funds up front, and how long the Highgate site would need to remain open. The town owns the property, but Casella runs the site. Buzz also noted that the state is very close to having a contract with a nationwide debris management firm that the state can execute in the event of a large disaster. The

beauty of this is that municipalities can tap into that contract also. Josh asked who would be responsible for contamination clean up if more debris is taken in than we can hold and contamination results from it. Casella would be responsible. If they can't manage it, they won't take it. It was noted that Casella would be able to handle the material coming in, but there would be variables depending on the type of disaster. Steve LaFar asked about the other 24 proposed sites and where they are located. They are scattered all over Vermont, within reasonable distances from each other. Andy King asked about costs associated with a TDSRS and upfront costs. Buzz noted that tipping fees would increase for Casella and that if the town picked up debris and brings it in, that would be reimbursable to the town through FEMA. Ben Rose works for the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. He argues against FEMA on behalf of Vermont towns. Tropical Storm Irene was the biggest disaster Vermont has seen since the 1927 flood, but the storm that generated the most debris was the 1938 hurricane. The purpose of amending the permits for these towns is to have a pre-procured contract that could be latched on to at a moment's notice with confidence that it will be federally reimbursable. If we needed to exercise this there would be lots of loads coming in from surrounding communities. Receipts should be kept for a 75% reimbursement. Steve LaFar asked about damage to our roads and if the town would be responsible for repair to our infrastructure. A case could be made to FEMA that those repairs should also be reimbursable. Sue Cota noted that in 1998 with the ice storm, there was major damage to Monument Road and she believes FEMA came in and made repairs. Ben spoke about FEMA funding that came into Vermont after Irene. Bruce asked if any of the land west of the airport had been considered as a debris site. Buzz answered that they stuck to already permitted locations, like the Highgate Transfer Station, but that area could be looked at as a good back up plan. FEMA can waive procurement rules for the first 70 billable hours. Our situation is unique here, because the town owns the land and Casella runs the site. Both the town and Casella would have to agree to become a TDSRS. Michael Casella stated that Casella is in full support of this. Randy asked if Casella already has a policy with regard to disasters. They have plans for current waste streams, but not a formal written plan. They will start looking at writing up these plans. Casella won't have access to FEMA public assistance because they are a privately owned entity. Casella and the town both already have permits for the transfer station and brush depot. Both permits would need to be amended. Becoming a TDSRS is not mandatory, but would free Casella to operate at full capacity in the event of a federally declared disaster. Shaun Coleman, NorthWest Regional Planning, asked if the town would have any leverage with FEMA with regard to our application on the slope stabilization project at the transfer station. No, we would not. By becoming a TDSRS, we would not have any additional leverage with FEMA. Our application for the slope stabilization project is still live with FEMA and was submitted in early 2013. FEMA has asked for more info on the project and we have asked for pre award costs to gather more information but we don't have an answer. If our application is denied we still have appeal rights. FEMA funding is last resort funding, and they ask a lot of questions. John Leddy from NorthWest Solid Waste District was not able to be here tonight, but Richard Baker was present. There were questions about the proposed landfill site in Sheldon. Periodically the district has to recertify to keep an existing permit alive and file it with the state. The latest notice we received was regarding that. This site is a "holding spot" in the event that it someday may need to be opened when the Coventry site closes. Steve LaFar would like to see the board table this discussion until the next meeting, as we have two board members not present. Michael Casella brought tonnage reports for the last three years to share with the board, both inbound and outbound for trash and recycling.

D. Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation – Tim Smith

Tim Smith, Executive Director of FCIDC, was present for his yearly update. FCIDC was formed 45 years ago when Franklin County was seeing unemployment rates of 12%. The focus of FCIDC is to attract jobs, retain jobs and focus on capital investment. Franklin County currently has an unemployment rate of 3.45%, so we are in better shape than many other Vermont counties. He reported that the Energizer building in St. Albans sold in December and was purchased by a developer who will try to recruit new businesses to the site. Peerless Clothing will be leasing 2/3 of the building. Tim noted that in the next year about \$100 million dollars in new construction will

be happening in Franklin County with Ben & Jerry's, Vermont Precision Tools, Peerless and Mylan all expanding. We are a county of approximately 48,000 people and with the expansions there will be 100-150 new jobs, higher end and with decent pay. The VT Brick building in Highgate remains vacant, as the deal to sell fell through. It is back on the real estate market. FCIDC continues to work on cross border initiatives with Canada. The recent "In Good Taste" event in St. Albans had 30 vendors and 350 attendees. There is a lot happening, and anyone who is currently not working there is probably a reason for it. The forecast looking out ten years shows a drop in population, as more people leave the state. There are 7,000 less people working in jobs than there was in 2010 in the State of Vermont. Tim is working to get high schools more engaged in career education. He spoke about the percentage of students moving on to college versus those that don't and who is reaching out to the population of students that do not plan to attend college. Those students need to be educated as well with regard to other opportunities. The cost of living in VT continues to be an issue, as well as issues with the VT education pension fund that is very underfunded. NorthWestern Medical Center has recently expanded and a new hotel is being built in St. Albans, set to open in mid-May. Tim had no new updates for us on the Franklin County Airport. He did add that there is a shortage of CDL drivers. Roughly 10,000 people leave Franklin County every day for work in neighboring counties, and we have approximately 4,500 coming in to Franklin County daily as well. If we offer the right jobs and pay it could be an opportunity for more folks to work locally.

E. Treasurer Updates – Shelley Laroche

- **Check Warrants** – There were no questions on the check warrants.
- **Copier Contract** – Brian Clodgo from Canon Solutions America, Inc. stopped in to see where we were at with our current Symquest contract on the copier. He feels he can cut our monthly lease payment in half. We currently pay \$332.00 per month through Symquest, which is financed with a third party. Symquest no longer carries Canon copiers. We have about 1.5 – 2 years left on our current lease (total 5 year lease). Brian will have numbers to us by Monday. We will have to look at options to get out of our current lease if that is what is decided. We are very happy with our Canon copier. Randy has experience with Canon Solutions America and has been pleased with their service.
- **Town Reports** – The last two weeks we have been very busy and the town report is off to the printers. Sue Cota offered to help distribute them when they arrive.

F. Town Clerk Updates – Wendi Dusablon

- **Minutes** – Motion by Bruce Butler to approve the minutes from January 19, 2017 as amended and the minutes from January 26, 2017 as written. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.
- **Town Meeting Updates** – Petitions for elected offices were due on Monday, January 30th. We have a two way race for one of the Selectboard seats. Wendi is working to arrange a candidate forum, which is looking to be on Thursday, February 16th @ 5:30pm, which is before the next Selectboard meeting. NorthWest Access TV will tape and televise the forum. Ballots have been ordered and Wendi will be posting the warning as well as a lot of other town meeting day information tomorrow, Feb. 3rd.
- **ACS /Xerox Contract Renewal** – This is in the drop box for review, and Wendi will be asking the board to sign this at their next meeting. Our current five year contract for the land records software runs out in March. Randy has submitted some questions which have been relayed to ACS / Xerox and answered. Any more questions should be addressed prior to Feb. 16th.
- **Hockeyville** – This contest is out there again for 2017 if anyone wants to nominate Highgate Sports Arena – www.krafthockeyville.com. Wendi had advertised it and some have submitted entries, but she has not pushed it as much this year. We did very well in the 1st year (2015) and were a finalist, and also very well last year, but for whatever reason were not chosen as a finalist in 2016.
- **Liquor License Renewal** – Motion by Randy Connelly to exit the Selectboard meeting and enter into the liquor control board @ 8:17pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**. Motion by Randy Connelly to sign the 2017 liquor license renewal for Martin's General Store. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**. Motion by

Randy Connelly to enter back into the regular Selectboard Meeting @ 8:19pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

G. Administrator Items – Heidi Britch-Valenta

- **Field Days Racing Letter** – Motion by Josh LaRocque to sign the letter in support of the racing events at Franklin County Field Days for 2017. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.
- **RFPs for Emergency Equipment Management** – Heidi had an opportunity to speak with Joe Depatie, HVFD Fire Chief, and FireProTech is their first choice. Everyone else has already looked over the documents. Motion by Randy Connelly to accept the proposal from (MEI) Mike's Electric, Inc. and to contract with them for \$1,870.00 for monitoring of the fire panel, security panel and fire alarm inspection. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**. Motion by Randy Connelly to contract with FireProTech for \$535.00 for fire extinguisher inspection, emergency lighting inspection and inspection of the suppression system at the arena snack bar. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**. It was further clarified that MEI would be doing all the security monitoring, even here at the municipal building. Shelley noted that FireProTech was also giving us a 10% discount and asked if that was figured into the \$535.00 figure in the motion.
- **Miscellaneous** - Heidi wanted to address earlier statements made under public comment. There is no ill will coming from the town administrator to anyone. She supports and encourages people to participate and express themselves, but requests that it is done respectfully. There have been statements and social media posts that have devalued the work of town employees, which is hurtful and counterproductive. Jean takes issue with her comments, stating that employee work is not being devalued and questioned what posts she was referring to. Heidi did not want to reopen the issue, she understands there is ill will and people may be sad about things, but noted that calling someone incompetent is not respectful and not an accurate representation of what she does. Heidi can take it, but it is unnecessary. Jean replied that there is no ill will, they are blown away and that the facts speak for themselves.

H. Selectboard Items

- **Miscellaneous**
 - Sue Cota thanked the Selectboard for the additional lighting at the end of Monument Road. The new signage will be going up soon, they just came in. She asked why there were only two new lights, she thought there was going to be three, but is still pleased with the changes.
 - John Patnode had questions about the town's purchasing policy and why all contracts have not had to go through a bid policy. He inquired about the interpretation of "emergency". There was conversation about ambulatory falling under professional services. John felt that was a stretch, he sees how it could fit, but it's a stretch in his opinion. Shelley noted that ambulatory is a specialized field and not just anyone could bid. John compared the issue to a professional that, for example, could line stripe a parking lot. The purchasing policy was done by a previous board in 2010 and edited in 2016. John feels that the ambulatory process should have been a sealed bid. Bruce commented that he is a new comer to all of this, and looking at the purchasing policy, he does not see how ambulatory would be covered under the policy – so the board or the policy should not be held at fault for anything. Heidi reminded the board that there is a pending law suit that revolves around some of these issues and did not feel it was wise for the board to discuss it. John knows nothing about any law suit and doesn't care, he cares about the policy. Jean feels it might behoove the board to look at policies and procedures and tweak it with the new board so things are clarified and this doesn't come up over and over again. Ron Nye was in this morning to reconcile the bank statements and asked about policies that need to be addressed. Randy invited Jean to join the finance committee and be part of the process. If the finance committee meets during the school day or after 7pm she may be interested. She further stated the board has done well with the policies they have put into place so far. Shelley noted that the only change made in 2016 to the purchasing policy was the \$5,000.00 amount which was previously left blank. The rest of that policy was approved by a previous board. Jean would like to see the \$5,000.00

amount reevaluated at town meeting, as that was set back in the 1960's. John further questioned when he sees a policy has been amended how he would know what has been changed since the last time. Only current policies are on our website. He would have to come into the office and look at previous policies, many of them are recorded in the land records.

- Jean asked how many years are left on the arena bond – 12 years. That was approved in 2014.

I. Upcoming Events

Feb. 7	6pm	Parks & Rec. Mtg. @ arena
Feb. 9	6pm	DRB Mtg.
Feb. 9	6:30pm	Library Trustee Mtg. @ library
Feb. 16	5:30pm	Selectboard Candidate Forum
Feb. 16	7pm	Selectboard Mtg.
Feb. 20		OFFICES CLOSED – Presidents Day
Feb. 21	6pm	Planning Comm. Mtg.

J. Executive Session

Motion by Randy Connelly to enter into executive session @ 8:41pm to discuss legal and personnel where premature public knowledge could place the town or the individuals involved at a substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Randy Connelly to exit executive session @ 9:26pm. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

Motion by Randy Connelly to hire Patrick Loyer for the position of Public Works Director. The motion was seconded by Josh LaRocque – **APPROVED**.

K. Adjournment

Motion by Josh LaRocque to adjourn the meeting @ 9:45pm. The motion was seconded by Randy Connelly – **APPROVED**.

Respectfully submitted by,



Wendi Dusablon, Highgate Town Clerk

Minutes approved by,



Bruce Butler, acting Chair, Highgate Selectboard