

**APPROVED MINUTES
TOWN OF RYEGATE
PO BOX 332
RYEGATE, VERMONT 05042**

**SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
MINUTES – MAY 10, 2017**

The legal voters of the Town of Ryegate, are hereby warned and notified to meet at the Ryegate Town Hall on Wednesday, May 10, 2017 at 7:00 PM to vote on the following article received by petition:

Article 1: We petition the Town of Ryegate Select Board to take action concerning excessive levels of salt in residential wells near the Town Highway Department. We request a special Town Meeting.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Moderator Regina Hazel. Select board members present: Andrew Smith, Paul Keenan. About 50 people attended the meeting. The Moderator, Regina Hazel, read the warning and reminded us of Roberts' Rules of Order.

She read the warning again and asked for a motion. Jamie O'Connor moved the article and Grant Nelson seconded the motion. The Moderator asked for discussion and invited Grant, as petitioner, to speak. Grant, in turn, asked the Select Board to start at the beginning and summarize the situation.

Andrew Smith, Chairman of the Board detailed the situation. He first learned of a previous town well drilled in the fall of 1990 that was abandoned because of excessive sodium. The current concern is a problem we've all inherited. The Town subsequently drilled a well by the Town Hall which is 600 feet deep and yields one gallon a minute. When tested, sodium was less than 10 mg. When the Town learned of issues with two other wells in the area we contacted the Town Attorney. When the Town found out on February 8, 2017 that insurance would not cover these claims the Board contacted several people including Andy Shivley from the State of Vermont Transportation Office who said the State does pay salt claims. He has been involved with 50 State claims that have been paid. The Board also contacted a plumber from ARC Mechanical to look at the Town Well as a possible source of water for the involved houses, but found there is too little water there. People have had no qualms recommending a filtration system. Jenny Nelson had contacted a Paul Sestito who is giving her a list of people who may be of help. Andy went on to say the attorney's advice was for the Town to do nothing because the Town isn't insured for this situation. Andy feels the Town would need an appropriation directed article. Tonight's article is an advisory question for whatever is decided tonight.

Richard Hodgson asked if the insurance non coverage is part of the general policy. Andy read directly from the section that addresses the issue. Betty Beauvais wondered how widespread is the issue. She wondered about the adjoining neighbors and the Town Office. The Town Office water comes from the Town well at the Town Hall. Anyone can have their water tested at \$12.00 for the test. Gerry Brooks mentioned that when they bought their house it was hooked up to Tim Murray's original well for four or five years. When a liner was put in around 1996 the Brooks decided to drill an artesian well which they have used for 20 years. That well is between 400 and 500 feet. Tim Murray introduced Jen Gould from his well drillers' company and asked permission for her to speak. He felt someone should have warned him about the salt issue when they saw the well driller there. He mentioned three water specialists from the State of Vermont who said it must be coming from the Town Garage area. The question was asked at what level you start tasting the salt. Andy talked about the State's initial encouragement to cover Town sand and salt. He remembers there was no support from the Town for such a building and so it wasn't pursued. Jen Gould, from Gould Well Drilling, was present to answer questions concerning drilling and wells and health issues as they came up.

She mentioned testing Murray's well twice. Sodium and Chloride were high and in 99.9% of the cases, high levels like this are manmade. There were underlying pockets in the soil. Twenty five bags of mud were used to hold the soil in place. Water came in at 3 ½ gallons a minute so there was no need to go deeper than 300 feet. When asked about health issues with high salt levels she said at about 500 mg per liter a laxative affect is produced. Other health issues could follow. Richard Hodgson asked if drilling the well deeper would help. Ms. Gould said it's a possibility, with no guaranty it would work. Cheryl Sargent asked if water should be tested before a house is sold. Jen Gould said the standard bearer test is for bacteria. Goulds were hired to shock test the Coleman's well and they tested for bacteria. They did their work before Tim drilled his well. The well at Coleman's was very old and between 360 and 380 feet deep. Gene Perkins mentioned he was on the Board when the first town well was drilled. He said the Fire Department water was very smelly. The Department bought a chloride injector. After filling a tanker truck with the water they now have no taste or smell to the water. Bill Hetu asked if the veins could be flushed. Would it help? Jen Gould said when you have a chemical spill you pump and purge. Thankfully sodium chloride is not the same as oil. Purging possibly might help. Andy thanked her for her thoughts and mentioned his idea of using the water on the roads this summer for dust control. He would propose taking the first load of water out and then taking a salt sample and at the end of the summer taking a last load and then taking a sample. The Board could report back at another Special Town Meeting. Devin Coleman asked if that would be a permanent fix. Ness Flax asked if it was reasonable to flush the wells. Does it address the underlying problem? She feels it is the purpose of the meeting to have the Select Board understand what the public wants and she feels it is important for her to say that regardless of the legalities involved she feels the Town has a legal and ethical responsibility to help our neighbors out with this problem not of their choosing and not their responsibility. She doesn't want to live in a town where neighbors aren't helped out. Jen Gould talked about draining as the least expensive way to find out what's up. She said there are two issues: 1) Stop the future issue 2) Stop the current problem. She feels flushing out might be an answer. Bob Sargent said they need to do something to contain the salt and not just flush out the wells. Andy said there has been no salt in the sand pile for eight years. He agrees completely the

Town needs a new salt shed. He wants to build a salt storage shed and the Board plans to build one this summer. Bob Sargent said there IS salt in the sand pile. Devin Coleman agrees. Nelson Elder, Town Road Foreman said there is no deliberate application of salt to the sand pile. He has been on the crew since 2004. They stopped applying salt to the sand eight years ago. There may be some spillage because the salt is scooped out with a bucket. Jillian Coleman asked about the fire pond and the possibility of high salt in that. She wondered if that would go into their well if it was pumped. Jen Gould feels fire ponds are based in clay so there is less chance of leakage. Betty Beauvais asked if the Town can remediate the salt in people's homes. Andy talked about a filtration system. It could be put into the Town Office cellar and service both Coleman's and Murray's homes. The cost might be about \$9,000. He feels the Town has been here 100 years and overtime eventually the situation will improve. Paul Keenan asked Jen Gould if it was more common for deep wells to have salt or shallow wells to have salt. She said a shallow well might flush itself faster with rain water.

Jenny Nelson asked about health issues with high salt levels. Greg Murray wondered if the sand pile should be taken down. Nelson Elder mentioned that years ago the crew took all the sand down and cleaned off the area. Nessa asked Andy what the Board needs from the people to move on this problem. He said he wasn't getting a clear sense of what people thought of flushing. Summer plans would be to flush and spread the water on roads with permission and then to come back with a special town meeting to see if the Town will vote an amount not to exceed a certain figure to create a filtration system for the two houses.

Attorney William Davies said the purpose of this meeting is only to decide if the Town is going to advise the Select Board to take action. Nessa repeated what Andy had just said about plans. Davies said he was advising him he shouldn't say this. Bill Davies said you can amend a motion but not an article. Andy is saying yes we want to do something and maybe at a future Select Board meeting the Board would be more specific. Jamie O'Connor moved advising the Board to take action in a manner to resolve the excessive salt in the water. Ernie Demers seconded the motion. Jenny Nelson wants the motion to include testing of neighbors' wells, not only the Coleman's and Murray's. Davies said if you advise the Board to take action regarding excessive levels of salt you have said enough. Andy is glad of the Special Town Meeting. He did not get this feeling around town that he is finding now. Tim asked if it was included in the article to reimburse landowners. William Davies said there is no dollar amount specified. If the article passes the Select Board has the authority and guidance to study further into the matter and bring a specific article to a future special town meeting.

The Moderator then asked for a voice vote on the motion and it carried unanimously with a voice vote.

Tim Murray moved adjournment at 8:25 PM. Robert Zambon seconded the motion and it carried.

-----Regina Hazel, Moderator

-----Andrew Smith, Select Board Chairman

Attest: -----Marsha Nelson, Clerk