

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of February 8, 2010**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Kenneth Johnson (absent), Selectmen Melvin Adams, Kenneth Goslant, Charles Morse, and Gregory Sanders. Also present were Town Manager Nanci Allard, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann Debra Wick (Chair, Northfield School Board), Chris Bradley, Bob Duprey, and Kathleen Lott (*Northfield News*).

Vice-Chair Sanders called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- a. Chair Debra Wick, School Board: Northfield Town School District FY 2011 Budget Presentation.** A handout ("Northfield Town School District Proposed FY11 Budget Highlights") had been previously distributed to the Board in their packets. Ms. Wick now provided a PowerPoint presentation of the highlights of that document with a question and answer period to follow. This overview consists of four (4) main sections: Financial Information, Staffing Overview, Student Highlights, and Tax Rate Impact.

Financial Information. Ms. Wick provided an overview of the proposed budget as a whole. The total expenses of the proposed budget are \$9,922,432, which is a decrease of \$371,913 (3.61%) from the previous fiscal year's total amount (\$10,294,346). She then gave a breakdown of the budget's expense categories, which were: 34% Salaries; 12% Benefits; 19% Special Education; 9% Operations and Maintenance; 7% Program Costs; 6% Washington South Supervisory Union; 4% Grants; 3% Co-curricular; 3% Long-Term Debt Expense; 2% Transportation; and 1% School Directors. Ms. Wick then gave a breakdown of the revenue sources: 44% Statewide Property Tax; 38% Local Taxpayers; 10% Special Education Reimbursements; 4% Tuition, Transportation Aid, and Interest Income; and 4% Federal and other Grants. She noted that part of the previous year surplus (\$225,178) was used to eliminate the deficit in the food service program (as authorized by voters last March). Other surplus funds will be used to replenish the long-range maintenance fund, which is now empty. This will be an article on the School Warning. There also will be a request to purchase a new pickup truck for the School District; a similar request was rejected by the voters last year.

Staffing Overview. Ms. Wick next showed the distribution of school staff by category, which was: 60% Teachers; 26% Instructional Aides; 7% Support Staff; 4 % Administrative Support, and 3% Administrators. She noted that 83% of Teachers are devoted to Regular Education but 70% of the Instructional Aides focus instead on Special Education. Ms. Wick stated that because of a slow decline in student enrollment, there have been some reductions in staffing. 5.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions have been eliminated since FY10, with savings of \$235,000. Since FY09, 8.25 FTE positions have been eliminated for total savings of more than \$500,000.

Student Highlights. Ms. Wick wanted it made clear that these staff reductions have not had an adverse effect on the schools' academic offerings. She cited a few examples, such as the number of students taking Advanced Placement exams (28) as well as the proficiency of fifth-graders in mathematics and that of third-graders in reading and analyzing charts, graphs, and tables. In addition, last year's high school graduates were accepted at 108 colleges and universities, including such distinguished institutions as Harvard University, Columbia University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Tax Rate Impact. Ms. Wick noted that there are three (3) variables that affect the tax rate; these are the Base Education Homestead Tax Rate (set by the State Legislature), Local School Spending (determined by local school boards), and the Common Level of Appraisal (set by the Department of Valuation and Taxation). Therefore, although the Northfield School Board has done its part by reducing expenditures, the tax rate will increase this year by \$0.728 (for a total of \$1.6186) due to factors outside of our local control.

Selectman Morse thanked Ms. Wick for her presentation and for the "tight budget." Ms. Wick stated that the School District now has the proper people in place and this has helped considerably in the budget process. Selectman Goslant asked about the size of the pickup truck under consideration. Ms. Wick was unsure and suggested that he contact the School Superintendent's office for details. Chris Bradley asked for specific numbers of school staffing. Ms. Wick does not have exact figures on hand but will check on this. The Board again thanked Ms. Wick for her concise and informative report.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **January 25, 2010 (Joint Board Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Morse, seconded by Selectman Adams, to approve the minutes. Selectman Morse stated that during the meeting, he had referred to a Northfield restaurant by name as a place where local rumors circulate; he regrets making this specific reference. Also, Selectman Goslant has been informed that the audio feed of the meeting may have caught him using inappropriate language; if that was the case, he sincerely apologizes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

IV. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #16-10.** Motion by Selectman Morse, seconded by Selectman Adams, to approve Warrant #16-10 in the amount of \$47,337.00. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

V. MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Status Reports: Various Projects.** Manager Allard had nothing to add.

VI. SELECTBOARD

- a. **DRAFT Transfer Station Agreement (Northfield Recycling Center).** A draft agreement has been prepared between the Town of Northfield and Earth Waste Systems to operate the Northfield Recycling Center through June 30, 2009. Motion by Selectman Morse, seconded by Selectman Adams, to approve and authorize Manager Allard to sign the Transfer Station Agreement. Selectman Morse wanted to confirm that Manager Allard approved of the proposed agreement. Manager Allard stated that she did. There had been some questions over specific recycling services offered but these had been answered. She added that a representative from the Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District (CVSWMD) would be at the Recycling Center the next day for a final "walk through" before relinquishing control of the facility. CVSWMD will remove all of their remaining equipment at that time. **Motion passed 4-0-0.** The subcommittee that has been meeting on recycling matters will continue to work on long-term solutions, including whether or not to stay in the CVSWMD, developing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for contracted operation of the Northfield Recycling Center beyond the current fiscal year, etc.

- b. Town of Northfield Flood Hazard Area Regulations.** Manager Allard stated that the Planning Commission had developed these new regulations based on the new flood hazard mapping developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The Selectboard needs to hold a Public Hearing before the new regulations can be adopted. Manager Allard suggested that this might be best done before a Joint Board Meeting, as these new guidelines affect both the Town and Village. There was a consensus that this Public Hearing be held the night of the second regular meeting in March (03/22/10).
- c. Repeal of Emergency Ordinance 2010-1.** This ordinance had been approved at the last meeting (01/25/10) at the request of Northfield Snowmobilers, Inc. (NSI). Their trail system had been disrupted when a landowner near Bear Farm Road withdrew his permission for a snowmobile trail across his property. NSI then requested (and received) temporary and conditional permission from the Town for snowmobile travel along Bear Farm Road itself. Since that time, the landowner has reconsidered and the original trail has been reinstated. Therefore, NSI has withdrawn its original request and the ordinance is now unnecessary. Motion by Selectman Morse, seconded by Selectman Adams, to repeal Emergency Ordinance 2010. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- d. Public Hearing (Australian Ballot Articles): February 22, 2010.** There will be a public hearing on this night to discuss the warned Town Articles to be voted by Australian Ballot on Town Meeting Day (03/02/10). The various organizations involved have been contacted in case they would like to send representatives.
- e. Status Reports: Various Projects**

 - 1. High Risk Rural Roads (HRRR) Program.** There was a handout in the packets that summarized this program and indicated how municipalities could apply for grant monies to eliminate (or reduce the risk of) dangerous travelling locations. Selectman Sanders suggested that discussion of this issue should be postponed until Chair Johnson is able to attend.
 - 2. Town Budget Sheets.** Selectman Sanders noted a mistake in the latest budget sheets; the "life expectancy" of certain vehicles had not been revised as the Board requested. Manager Allard will make sure this change is made.

VII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

- 1. Chris Bradley: Budget Meeting Minutes.** Mr. Bradley had originally asked for an executive session on this matter but now thinks that this discussion should be in open session. Mr. Bradley had distributed copies of the meeting minutes of eight (8) recent meetings: Town Budget meetings (11/30/09, 12/01/09, 12/03/09), Joint Board Meetings (12/15/09, 12/21/09, 01/25/10), a Town Selectboard meeting (01/11/10), and a Village Trustees meeting (01/12/10). Mr. Bradley felt that the accuracy of the budget meeting minutes in particular was inadequate; important decisions had been made but this was not reflected in the minutes.

Selectman Adams stated that at budget meetings, decisions are reached by consensus but nothing is finalized until the Town Budget is approved in its entirety. This is exactly what happened at the meeting two (2) weeks ago (01/25/10). The minutes of the budget meetings had been brief and non-specific but this was neither unusual nor a violation of state law.

Mr. Bradley agreed that meeting minutes were not expected to be transcripts; however, he felt that when motions were made, discussions are made, and votes are taken it should be recorded. Selectman Adams again stated that votes were not taken. The budget process is one of negotiation and that nothing is determined until the finalized version of the budget is approved for the Town Warning. The budget then goes to the voters for their approval at Town Meeting Day. Selectman Goslant believes that Mr. Bradley's questions have been asked and answered and that it served no purpose to go over this matter again and again.

Mr. Bradley then cited the criterion in Vermont's "Open Meeting Law," which states that minutes must include (at a minimum) a list of those present; indication of all motions, proposals and resolutions made; and the results of all votes. He believes that the minutes in question (with the exception of the roll call) do not meet this minimum standard.

Selectman Adams again said that nothing was done wrong. There was an attempt to provide some fairness to an employee whose position was being considered for termination. There was a consensus to postpone notification of this possibility under after the holiday season. Unfortunately, this information leaked out beforehand. Selectman Goslant agreed that the intention was to treat this employee with respect while also trying to save tax dollars by reducing personnel expenses.

Mr. Bradley then asked why municipal employee salaries were not listed in one location in the budget rather than split over numerous departments. Selectman Adams stated that there has not been a request from the public to put this information into the Town Report in that particular format. Employee salaries are public record and are easily obtainable upon request.

Mr. Bradley still feels that the public should have been made aware in real time of the budget options being considered. Selectman Sanders stated that during the budget process, there is a great deal of back and forth between meetings. He thought that there was no need to elaborate in writing each tentative action. Mr. Bradley still believes that major discussion points should be reflected in the meeting minutes. He stated that he would continue to look into this matter in his capacity as the elected Grand Juror for Northfield. Selectman Adams stated that holding this office did not grant Mr. Bradley any special investigative privileges.

VIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Selectman Adams, seconded by Selectman Sanders, to go into executive session in order to discuss a legal matter. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:01 p.m.

Motion by Selectman Adams, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:13 p.m. No action was taken.

IX. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Selectman Morse, seconded by Selectman Adams, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes are subject to approval at the next regular meeting.