

**VILLAGE OF NORTHFIELD  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
Minutes of February 9, 2010**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Samantha Baraw, Trustees Colin Bright, Libby Hambleton, Doug Lawson, and Thomas McCarney. Also present were Village Manager Nanci Allard, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Zoning Administrator Michele Braun, Water and Sewer Department Foreman Patrick Demasi, Debra Wick (Chair, Northfield School Board), Lauren Wobby (Northfield School Board, Chris Bradley, and Kathleen Lott (*Northfield News*).

Chair Baraw called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled)**

- a. Michele Braun, Zoning Administrator: Geographic Information System (GIS) for Northfield Utilities.** Ms. Braun had prepared a memorandum for the Board that had outlined "the need for improved GIS capabilities for Northfield's water, sewer, and electric departments..." and included cost estimates and a timeline. The total cost of this proposal is \$32,570. Tonight she will present a PowerPoint presentation of this proposal and answer any questions.

Ms. Braun first explained that GIS links data with spatial references and displays that information in layers. This is an update of the old (and less reliable) method by which an aerial photograph would have numerous see-through plastic layers physically placed on top of it, each indicating roads, parcel information, etc. This bulky system has now been computerized so that her master map has fifteen (15) different levels that can viewed in any combination and quickly printed (or emailed). She noted that the Listers now are using this system to locate errors on tax maps, the Town Clerk to make quick prints of parcel maps, and the Accounting Manager is planning to use it for asset management. Also, the Electric Department now uses GIS to map poles, meters, transformers, streetlights, etc. However, the utility departments could do much more with the software and GIS equipment for which Ms. Braun is seeking authorization to purchase.

Ms. Braun then provided a demonstration of the current system, showing the various data layers available. For example, it is possible to click upon a culvert and see how old it is, its condition, etc. Expanding the current system would allow the utility departments to better schedule maintenance of the infrastructure, locate faster specific elements, conduct preliminary engineering internally (which could provide significant cost savings), and better anticipate long-term replacement costs. This proposal includes a flyover for updated aerial mapping. This would have to be scheduled for fall 2010 or spring 2011, as this needs to be done when the leaves are off the trees. In addition, the utilities crew would need to prepare for the flyover by marking the pavement in order to provide clear reference points.

Water and Sewer Department Foreman Patrick Demasi stated that for the past five (5) years, he and his crew have been gathering data on manholes, valves, catch basins, hydrants, etc. and putting that information into databases. Map coordinates and other information have not been collected yet but would be added with the proposed GIS unit.

Chair Baraw asked how much time it took to update the utility database. Mr. Demasi said that when data is collected during hydrant flushings, it usually takes a couple hours to enter the updates into the database.

Trustee McCarney asked if Mr. Demasi would have direct access to the computer files maintained in the Zoning Administrator's office. Ms. Braun stated that the databases would be in separate locations but the data would be exported (and imported) back and forth on a regular basis. This is similar to how the Listers annually export updated Grand List information to her mapping system.

Trustee McCarney is concerned about accessibility in the field; when the utility crew needs specific information during an emergency, it should be available immediately. If this meant purchasing a laptop computer that could be taken on scene, he felt that this additional expense was justified and should be part of the current proposal. Chair Baraw felt that given the timetable in place, it was important to go forward with the proposal before the Board tonight. Other expenses could be evaluated, and perhaps added, at a future time.

Trustee McCarney asked if the proposed amount (\$32,570) was to be split between the Water and Sewer Departments. Mr. Demasi said that it would and that this amount has been in those departments's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) mapping account. Manager Allard added that the cost of the flyover was not certain, as that part of the proposal must be put out to bid. Also, the Highway Department might fund part of the flyover costs.

Ms. Braun stated that she and Mr. Demasi were looking for the Board's authorization to purchase the new GIS software, GIS equipment, and to create the RFP for the flyover.

Motion by Trustee McCarney, seconded by Trustee Lawson, to authorize Ms. Braun and Mr. Demasi to go forward with the GIS proposal for the Water and Sewer Department for the estimated cost of \$32,570. Trustee Lawson asked that there be periodic updates from Ms. Braun and Mr. Demasi at future Board meetings on the progress of their proposal. This was agreed upon. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. 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  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton 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.

Ms. Wick stated that Chris Bradley had asked last evening about the exact number of current Northfield School employees; she has since checked and there are 128 employees.

Trustee Hambleton asked how Northfield students do on statewide testing. Ms. Wick said that results of the latest New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), as published in the *Burlington Free Press*, indicated that Northfield was one of the top fifteen (15) schools in Vermont. However, we are still waiting for the information from the state on how these scores break down. When that information is received, the school administrators and teachers will be able to adjust curriculum, teaching methods, etc. to address any deficiencies. This has already been done with the mathematics curriculum, as there have been previous indications that Northfield students may be below the state average in this area.

Trustee Bright asked where the staff reductions were being made. Ms. Wick stated that there were cuts in technology, consumer science, and in the English Department. These cuts were keyed to the aforementioned decline in student enrollment. Current studies indicate that enrollment will bottom out in 2014 with small increases each year afterwards.

Trustee Lawson noted that school consolidation was a hot topic. Is there any possibility of Northfield getting involved in this? Ms. Wick stated that most of the discussion focused on combining supervisorial units. For the Washington South Supervisory Union (WSSU), this would mean combining Northfield and Roxbury, which might mean some savings in consolidated curriculum, equipment purchase, etc. As for closing our schools and sending students elsewhere, she noted that there had been some discussion of merging with Williamstown in the 1980s but nothing since. Ms. Wick noted that, for a number of reasons, there probably would be a lot of local resistance to losing our schools so the School Board was not addressing this issue.

Trustee Bright noted that Ms. Wick's report indicated that sixty-six percent (66%) of Northfield High School graduates either went to college or into the military; do we know what happens to the other graduates? Ms. Wick assumes that most went into the workforce but this information is not yet being tracked. She noted that other high schools have used Facebook to keep tabs on their graduates. If that approach provides useful information, it could be tried here.

The Board thanked Ms. Wick for her presentation.

### III. ACTION ITEMS

#### a. Approval of Minutes

1. **January 25, 2010 (Joint Board Meeting).** Motion by Trustee McCarney, seconded by Trustee Bright, to approve the minutes. Motion passed **5-0-0**.

**b. Approval of Bills**

- 1. Warrant #16-10.** Motion by Trustee Hambleton, seconded by Trustee Lawson, to approve Warrant #16-10 in the amount of \$469,868.53. Trustee Bright asked about the disparities in the amounts that Green Mountain Power charges for streetlight repair. Manager Allard stated that the amount charged is based on several variables, including time spent in Northfield, the number of workers required, etc. If needed, she can have Utility Assistant Doug Reed provide a summary with explanations. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**IV. REPORTS**

**a. Village Manager**

- 1. Northfield Falls Hydroelectric Project.** Manager Allard reported that she met again today with Richard Podolec and other interested parties. The project is coming along well and we should expect engineering cost estimates in about a month.
- 2. Northfield Recycling Center.** Manager Allard stated that the contract has been signed with Earth Waste Systems to operate the recycling center during the regular days and hours. Trustee McCarney asked why the Town did not conduct an environmental study. Manager Allard stated that the consensus of the subcommittee was that the site was relatively new and the risks slight. Trustee McCarney felt that this was a mistake, given the liability issues if a problem was found later.
- 3. Property Tax on Utility Lines outside Northfield Village.** Manager Allard has been notified that attorney Charles Merriman is looking into this issue for us and should report back soon. Trustee Lawson felt that this matter should be resolved before there is any talk of extending water and/or sewer lines outside of the Village.

**b. Miscellaneous**

- 1. Energy Audit of Village Facilities.** Trustee Bright has been receiving proposals for an energy audit of the Municipal Building. There already has been walk-through of the building.
- 2. High Risk Rural Roads (HRRR) Program.** Trustee Bright attended the last meeting of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's Transportation Advisory Committee (CVRPC TAC) and obtained the information on this program that was in the packets. He noted that identification (and improvement) of unsafe road locations would probably be more applicable to the Town but there might be some locations in the Village that should be improved.
- 3. Village Budget Process.** Trustee McCarney noted that as the budget process for the next fiscal year approaches, he would like to provide some guidance beforehand. He would like to see no increases in the utility departments' operating budgets. He felt that this would show the ratepayers that the Village is taking their concerns into account during this bad economy.

**V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled).**

- 1. Chris Bradley: Budget Meeting Minutes.** Mr. Bradley had asked for an executive session on this matter. He 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).

Trustee McCarney asked if this was the same topic that Mr. Bradley discussed with the Selectmen last evening. Mr. Bradley stated that it was. Trustee McCarney felt therefore that this matter should be discussed in open session (as it was last night). Mr. Bradley stated that he had some different issues to address at this meeting that may pertain to a legal matter. He believes that throughout the Town's budget process, the average citizen was denied the right to know what was going on because of inadequate meeting minutes.

Trustee Hambleton stated that with the exception of the Village Highway budget, the Trustees would not be holding their budget meetings for another month. All those meetings will be open to the public and everyone is welcome to attend.

Mr. Bradley stated that his concern was that he had heard rumors around New Year's Day that positions were being eliminated but could find nothing in the budget meeting minutes to corroborate this. As the elected Grad Juror for Northfield, he believes that he has the responsibility to investigate this matter and forward any information he obtains to the proper authorities. He realizes that minutes are not meant to be transcripts but there are components that need to be included; he believes that when there is a significant budget decision made to eliminate the position of a long-time employee, this should be reflected in the minutes.

Trustee McCarney stated that he felt that this concern was discussed thoroughly at last night's Selectboard meeting. He added that although he and the other Trustees were not present at the Town Budget meetings, he knows that at Village Budget meetings there are no votes taken until the budget is finalized. Until then, there are only recommendations. He believes that this Board does the best it can do in keeping the public informed. These budget meetings are open to the public and the *Northfield News* also is welcome to attend and report afterwards.

Trustee Lawson stated that for the Joint Board meeting on December 21, 2009, Manager Allard had made some recommendations for some budget cuts, including the elimination of some positions. However, it was the responsibility of the Boards to make any determination on this. He added that there was no vote taken to eliminate the position of Superintendent of Public Works (SPW) at this time; this was only one item under consideration. There was a consensus that the current SPW (William Lyon) be notified after the holiday season that this possibility was being considered. Trustee Lawson felt that great sensitivity was shown in this matter and it was unfortunate that (supposedly) this possibility leaked before Mr. Lyon could be informed. He then asked Mr. Bradley what should have been done differently.

Mr. Bradley still believes that there should have been more transparency in the budget process and that average citizens should have been kept aware that such a big change was being considered.

Trustee McCarney stated that Mr. Bradley was still rehashing what he had said the previous evening. Trustee Lawson agreed that the conversation was going nowhere. He believes that Mr. Bradley's questions have been answered and that there was no intended deception on the Boards' part. He added that the minutes may be taken by an individual but it is the Boards that approve them and correct any inaccuracies.

Mr. Bradley thanked the Trustees for their time and consideration.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Trustee McCarney, seconded by Trustee Hambleton, to adjourn.  
**Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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