

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
TOWN SELECT BOARD
REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of December 11, 2018**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, K. David Maxwell, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Charlie Morse (Northfield Farmers Market), Cassie Morse (Northfield Farmers Market), Paul Costello (Vermont Council on Rural Development), Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Jonathan Spencer, Gerard LaVarnway, Lydia Petty (Northfield Recreation Trails Committee), Deborah Zuaro (Conservation Commission), Joseph Zuaro, Carolyn Stevens, John Stevens, Brian Baker (Dufresne Group), Craig Sullivan, Steve Davis, Tim Frazier, Robert Matheson, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Charlie and Cassie Morse, Northfield Farmers Market.** Ms. Morse first thanked the Select Board members for allowing the Farmers Market to use the Common from mid-May through mid-October for the weekly Tuesday afternoon outdoor markets. She also thanked them individually for supporting the market as patrons. Ms. Morse said the final winter holiday market of the season would be held on Sunday, December 16, 2018, from 11:00 to 2:00 p.m. at the Northfield Middle/High School. With the New Year, the Farmers Market will be operating on the first Sunday of the month in Norwich University's Plumley Armory. Ms. Morse said there had been the intention to hang flowers around the Common this past summer but this was cancelled due to lack of volunteers to regularly water them. The money that had been set aside for this was used instead to bring in the free horse wagon rides at last Friday's special outdoor winter market (12/07/18) held in conjunction with the annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony. Ms. Morse said the market merchants also helped sponsor a number of community events throughout the year including the Spring Arts Festival, the May Day Pole Dance, the "Night on the Common," etc. Chair Goslant asked if another "Night on the Crescent" was planned for next year. Ms. Morse said this year's initial event was very successful so there should be another held next year provided Norwich University gives permission. Mr. Morse wanted to commend the municipality and its employees for helping the Farmers Market with market setup and other logistics throughout the season. He said the Farmers Market will continue to forward any requests for assistance to Manager Schulz and will contact the Select Board members whenever authorization is needed for any new developments.
- b. Paul Costello, Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD).** Mr. Costello noted the first Community Visit he performed for VCRD was in Northfield in December 2001-January 2002 when Charlie Morse was Municipal Manager. He said VCRD works with Vermont communities by bringing in outside perspective from state and federal leaders to determine short- and long-term goals for the community and the best ways to achieve them. VCRD has held twenty-six (26) Community Visits since 1996 and these have included both small and large communities. He felt every Vermont community is unique and such visits are a good opportunity for those towns with both urban and rural residents to interact and develop common goals together. Mr. Costello noted one town where the senior citizens were concerned about the number of teenagers hanging around the downtown area while the community's youth complained that local entertainment and/or recreational opportunities were sorely lacking. The VCRD worked to bring the community together to find solutions. Mr. Costello remembers the Northfield community visit focused on such goals as municipal merger, new facilities for the ambulance service and/or police department, revitalizing the downtown area by repurposing the Gray Building, extending the water and/or sewer infrastructure, etc. It was noted some of these objectives have been fully or partially achieved while others have not. Mr. Costello said VCRD's next scheduled Community Visit will involve the neighboring towns of Royalton, Sharon, Strafford and Tunbridge. These towns had been the proposed site of a massive development financed by a Utah developer but he abandoned the project last summer due in part to local opposition. Now that this threat has been removed, Mr. Costello said these communities now want to develop a regional plan that would meet their own vision of what can and should be done in the future.

Manager Schulz said the local group Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) has been working on revitalizing the community and one of their requests is the municipality apply to VCRD to have another Community Visit scheduled. Mr. Morse said at the time of the last visit the governance of the community was divided between Northfield Town and Northfield Village and these bodies often had conflicting interests. Mr. Morse said VCRD was very helpful in bringing both sides together to realize common goals. Carolyn Stevens is a NCDN member and she said NCDN was willing to help organize the brain-storming sessions that would precede the Community Visit.

Mr. Costello said VCRD doesn't charge communities for their visits but they do ask that mass mailings and other forms of community outreach is done beforehand in order to get as many community members involved in the process as possible. He said VCRD does not come into communities with its own set agenda but instead brings in individuals with expertise to help create action plans in order to achieve locally-identified objectives. Board member Maxwell asked what would be the timetable if Northfield asks to be scheduled for a Community Visit. Mr. Costello said the earliest VCRD could hold the visit was in 2020 but he noted a lot of local preparation is required before the visit so this should not be considered a problem. He also advised it would be better to send a letter of interest sooner rather than later. Once the Community Visit has been scheduled, the first step would be to identify the local organizations that can be used to get community members involved in the process. Mr. Costello noted that well-organized towns with clear objectives are far more likely to receive outside funding. He added the process can be an enjoyable one for participants as they often get to interact with community members they either haven't met or don't encounter on a regular basis. Chair Goslant thanked Mr. Costello for the valuable information and said VCRD should be hearing from Northfield soon.

- c. **Gerard LaVarnway: Cheney Farm Solar Project Town Meeting Warning.** Mr. LaVarnway said public hearings regarding the proposed Cheney Farm solar farm were held earlier this year and indicated significant local opposition to the project. Afterwards, there was a commitment from the municipality to put a non-binding article regarding this proposal on the 2019 Town Meeting warning. Mr. LaVarnway contacted the Vermont Secretary of State's office on the proper wording and based on their advice suggests the following: "Shall the Town Voters support the use of Cheney Field, located in the Town Forest and on the Cheney Farm Road on lower Paine Mountain, for the development of a large (1.2 MW, utility-scale) solar project?" Board member Maxwell asked if the treeless Cheney Farm site really was part of the Town Forest. Mr. LaVarnway has viewed maps and other documentation indicating it is. Deborah Zuaro is a member of the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) and she confirmed state documents designating the boundaries of the Town Forest include Cheney Farm. The article wording will be added to the draft version of the warning the Select Board members will approve at the end of January 2019.
- d. **Deborah Zuaro, Conservation Commission: Turkey Hill Maple Farm Lease Agreement.** Ms. Zuaro recently was contacted by a Berlin resident who felt the municipality's contract with Turkey Hill Maple Farm had been violated by the construction of a structure on the property. There also were concerns expressed that roads had been put in and trees had been removed without the municipality's permission. In addition, NCC member Russ Barrett, who also serves as Northfield's Tree Warden, has reviewed the Current Use standards for tapping maple trees and believes the current lease agreement is not in compliance. Manager Schulz said he met with Mr. Barrett and local forester Rose Beatty about the original lease agreement as well as the revision approved by the Select Board earlier this year and changes were made based on their recommendations. Manager Schulz said the site would be inspected next spring to see whether Turkey Hill Maple Farm has committed any actual contract violations and to determine the revenue due the municipality based on \$1.25 per tap. Manager Schulz noted the lease agreement does allow for the building of a storage shelter on the site. Board member Miller said Ms. Beatty will need to survey the area in the near future for the revised Town Forest Plan so perhaps she can review this site for contract compliance at the same time. Ms. Zuaro would like to see a mechanism in place so that the Select Board will have better oversight of the contract provisions rather than just waiting for reports of violations to take action. Tim Frazier is a neighboring landowner and he is very disappointed with what he has seen on the site. He believes apple orchards have been cut down and the site has been made inaccessible for hunting and other recreational purposes. Mr. Frazier has videos that document this. He also feels the owners of Turkey Hill Maple Farm (Howard and Judith Anderson) have underreported the number of taps and thus are not properly reimbursing Northfield for use of the site.

Manager Schulz said the current agreement provides between \$1,800 and \$1,900 each year in revenue for the Water Department (which owns the parcel). He will ask Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi to access the site by ATV to perform a full inspection. If contract violations are discovered, appropriate action will be taken. Joseph Zuaro asked how long the current lease agreement is in effect. Manager Schulz said the agreement expires in 2023 but could be terminated early if lease conditions are being violated.

- e. **Lydia Petty, Northfield Recreation Trails Committee: Better Connections Grant Program.** Ms. Petty said this group has met twice and has representatives from local organizations. They have discussed the various state and federal grant programs that might be available to improve and expand Northfield's existing trail system. A good opportunity has been identified in the Better Connections Grant Program, which is under the sponsorship of the Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont Department of Health). If the grant application is successful, the funds would be used to develop strategies and mapping for an expanded trail system that would better link South Northfield and Northfield Falls to the downtown area. This would include trails connecting the local public parks and perhaps include a pedestrian/bicycle system linking Northfield with Berlin and Montpelier. Board member Miller supports applying for this planning grant as potential developments would be identified and some momentum would be created for future action. Chair Goslant has been involved with the Recreation Committee for some time and there have been many requests in the past for establishing an off-road trail system between Memorial Park and Northfield Falls Park. Perhaps this planning grant could provide an economic driver to achieve this. Ms. Petty said this grant has a ten percent (10%) local match requirement and the maximum grant amount is \$70,000. The application deadline is January 31, 2019 so the committee would like some indication whether the Select Board supports the grant application and would fund the local match amount. Board member Maxwell said this matter is on the agenda later in the meeting and the Select Board will be able to take action at that time.
- f. **Brian Baker, Dufresne Group (DG): Elm Street Retaining Wall.** Mr. Baker said DG did an engineering survey of the Elm Street retaining wall in 1996 and it recently reviewed the original plan and the worksite at the request of the Select Board. Mr. Baker said some new issues were discovered and new plans have estimated construction costs of \$473,000. This includes repairing the wall as well as replacing the 1906 water main and road drainage improvements. Chair Goslant asked if it were possible to limit the scope of the project in order to lower costs. Board member Maxwell said the Village Trustees at one time considered lowering part of Elm Street but discovered this would not save money and actually would create new problems. Mr. Baker said DG relied on the original survey rather than create a whole new one. He added the retaining wall was in bad condition in 1996 and has worsened over the past twenty-two (22) years. Manager Schulz said the current budget has set aside about \$35,000 for repairing the retaining wall and this project is a good candidate for a state structures grant that might net up to \$175,000. He added the Utility Department might be able to perform some if not all of the infrastructure work in order to reduce construction costs. The consensus of the Select Board was to authorize Manager Schulz to look into potential grant applications that might help fund the construction phase of this project. Should this prove to be unfeasible, the Select Board may have to look at other funding mechanisms. John Stevens said the Methodist Church on South Main Street had a similar problem with the retaining wall by its parking lot and was able to shore it up at a very reasonable price. Perhaps Manager Schulz should look into their approach.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **November 13, 2018 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Doney abstaining.**
- b. **November 29, 2018 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Doney abstaining.**
- c. **December 3, 2018 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #11-19.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to approve Warrant #11-19 in the amount of \$1,630,491.80. Board member Goodrich noted of the total warrant amount, \$1,040,200 represents property taxes collected by the municipality and forwarded to the Paine Mountain School District. Board member Doney asked about several "Senior Renewables" payments throughout the warrant. Manager Schulz said as part of the Bull Run Solar Project, the municipality is required to purchase generated power in return for renewable energy credits. As a result, the wastewater treatment facility's electric bill has been reduced by about \$9,000 a year and other municipal facilities will see lesser savings. These savings appear on the warrant as payments to various departments. Chair Goslant said the current warrant has \$13,000 spent on tree trimming in order to protect power lines. He felt this proactive policy was one reason the Northfield Electric Department (NED) did not see any power outages during the recent snowstorm that downed many trees throughout the state. Chair Goslant also noted on this warrant the NED power purchase of \$128,000 as well as \$148,590 spent on purchasing VELCO stock. Manager Schulz said this stock purchase helps NED reduce transmission costs and also provides a steady ten percent (10%) investment return. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through December 2, 2018.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$113,471.25. Manager Schulz noted there is a considerable amount of Highway Department overtime for this pay period due to some severe snowstorms. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Northfield Recreation Trails Committee Grant Application.** Ms. Zuaro said Northfield is at a pivotal moment regarding its future economic and community development and applying for this planning grant would be a good first step. She added if this grant application is successful, the resulting information would provide a good road map for obtaining additional outside funding for identified future projects. Ms. Zuaro said the committee is working with Dan Currier from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) on this, which includes the proper grant amount to request on the grant application. Board member Doney favors the grant application but wants to be sure that any future bicycle and/or pedestrian trails developed will not be fenced in as this could disrupt the migration of local deer population. Sally Davidson, who serves as Recreation Committee Chair, said the grant's maximum amount is \$70,000. It is possible for apply for the maximum amount and then receive a lower amount. Ms. Petty reviewed recent grant awards and found most were in the \$50,000 range. Board member Goodrich asked if applying for this grant would negatively affect the municipality's attempt to obtain grant funds for sidewalk rehabilitation. Manager Schulz thinks there would be no impact. As for funding the local match amount, Manager Schulz said this grant application appears to have widespread support and after reviewing the Economic Development Fund policy, he believes this would be an appropriate use of these funds. He noted the current balance of this fund is about \$100,000. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Miller, to authorize Manager Schulz to submit this grant application and to further authorize the use of up to \$7,000 in economic development funds to cover the local match amount. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of 2017 Grand List Closure Form.** Manager Schulz said the Board of Listers worked throughout the year to keep the Grand List up-to-date and at this time the Select Board has been asked to officially close out the 2017 Grand List and sign the accompanying confirmation form. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to approve and sign the 2017 Grand List close-out form as recommended by the Board of Listers. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Slate Avenue Playground Park.** Board member Goodrich saw a lot of work being done this week installing a new playhouse structure, etc. Manager Schulz said the grant funds for this project need to be expended before the end of the year so there has been a recent push to get everything done in time. He noted the playhouse is a bit larger than he expected.
- b. **Aerial Ladder Training on NU Campus.** Board member Goodrich said the new agreement with Norwich University requires annual fire training with the aerial ladder on the campus. Since the campus will be practically deserted over its Christmas break, she felt this was a good time to do this. Manager Schulz will see to this.
- c. **Northfield-Norwich University Subcommittee Report.** Board member Maxwell said he and Board member Goodrich met recently with NU President Richard Schneider to discuss various items. As a result, they received a lot of information about future NU plans and how they might affect the Northfield community. They also discussed local economic development and various suggestions were discussed.

President Schneider is planning to retire in May 2020 and his successor will be chosen before he leaves. Board member Maxwell said he spoke last year to Northfield Savings Bank (NSB) President Thomas Pelletier on the possibility of the bank and the municipality coordinating efforts to revitalize certain underdeveloped properties in the community. There was interest from NSB and Board member Maxwell said President Schneider appears interested in expanding this partnership to include Norwich University.

- d. **NAVI Christmas Tree and Wreath Sale.** Chair Goslant noted Northfield Ambulance Volunteers, Inc. (NAVI) will be holding its annual tree and wreath sale at the Ambulance Bay. Trees and wreaths come in a variety of sizes and are available for sale from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. during the week and from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on weekends. Free delivery is available.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Depot Square/East Street Lighting.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board tasked him to look into improving the nighttime street lighting covering this intersection's crosswalk. He reached out to CED Twin State Electric and they have submitted a proposal to install two new LED lights near the crosswalk's overhead blinking light. There is a cost estimate of \$3,500 for the purchase of two (2) new lights at this location. It is Manager Schulz's recommendation to purchase one (1) new light at this time. The existing cable at the site will be used to power the new light and a second light can be added later if it is needed. Board member Maxwell is very concerned about pedestrian safety in the downtown area. He felt installing a flashing roadside sign would alert drivers they were approaching a crosswalk. The sign would be activated by the person wishing to cross the street. Manager Schulz will look into this. Ms. Petty said the 2014 Vermont Downtown Action Team (V-DAT) final report identifies East Street as a likely site for future development. Improved nighttime lighting in the area could be valuable first step to achieve this.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Sally Davidson, Recreation Committee: Update.** Ms. Davidson thanked the Select Board members for their support for last Friday's Christmas Tree Lighting on the Common. She also thanked NAVI for donating the Christmas tree and Norwich University for sending cadets to help with event setup and crowd control. Ms. Davidson said the recent power upgrade on the Common also made the event run much smoother. She added the Recreation Committee recently received the donation of a skating rink and is hoping the municipality will donate a site where it can be installed. She suggested an area by the Fire Station as such rinks were installed there in the past and there is good lighting and parking there. Manager Schulz will look into this. Board member Maxwell warned that you need good volunteers to lay out and then maintain the ice surface on a regular basis.
- b. **Sally Davidson, Recreation Committee: Committee Vacancy.** Ms. Davidson said there has been a vacancy on the Committee for some time. The position was advertised and Northfield Falls resident Frank Hall has submitted a letter of interest. Ms. Davidson noted Mr. Hall has been involved with local youth organized sports for some time and would be a valuable addition to the Committee. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to appoint Frank Hall to fill the vacancy on the Recreation Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- XI. **EXECUTIVE SESSION** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss contract negotiations with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:50 p.m.

Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 10:27 p.m. No action was taken.

- XII. **ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 10:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 8, 2019.