

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of October 22, 2019**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth W. Goslant, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Laurie Baroffio (Financial Director), Casey Scandore CPA (Kittell Branagan & Sargent), Jane Pekol (Northfield Energy Committee), Gail Hall (Northfield Energy Committee), Deb Zuaro (Northfield Conservation Commission), Russ Barrett (Northfield Conservation Commission), Laura Hill-Eubanks (Northfield Conservation Commission), Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Eleanor D'Aponte (Norwich University), Jean Kerner (Northfield Community Development Network), Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), Kaitlyn Keating (Northfield Community Development Network), Phoenix Mitchell, Lydia Petty, Steve Davis, John Stevens, Bethany Drum, Brad Johnson, Mark Fournier, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 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. Casey Scandore CPA, Kittell Branagan & Sargent: FY 2018/2019 Financial Audit Reports.** The Select Board members were provided with copies of the audit beforehand so Ms. Scandore was present tonight to provide a brief overview and answer any questions. She made it clear the audit was an "unmodified" (or "clean") opinion and no problems had been encountered in the process. She noted the year-end balances for the Town General Fund and for the utilities were positive and fairly consistent with those of the previous fiscal year. The only major change from the previous fiscal year is that the majority of the FEMA flood buyout program ended more than a year ago so it is not included as a major fund in this audit. Ms. Scandore concluded by saying there was nothing unusual regarding the audit process and the municipal staff were very helpful throughout the process. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Scandore for tonight's positive report. He also said Northfield is very fortunate to have Finance Director Laurie Baroffio and her talented staff working for the municipality.

- b. Jane Pekol, Northfield Energy Committee (NEC): Northfield Hitching Post Proposal.** Ms. Pekol first presented the concept of siting a Hitching Post in Northfield at the last meeting (10/08/19). This would be a designated location where residents seeking rides to Montpelier could meet up with drivers willing to transport them. This also would be the place where passengers from Montpelier would be dropped off. The Select Board members had some questions at that meeting regarding the best location for Northfield's Hitching Post and how to finance the setup costs, which were estimated at about \$750. Ms. Pekol has brought Phoenix Mitchell, who first came up with this concept, to answer some of these concerns. Mr. Mitchell lives in Worcester but works in Montpelier. He prefers not to own an automobile so he began commuting by bicycle (weather-permitting) and hitchhiking. In the process he saw the large number of single-occupant vehicles travelling through or from Worcester on the way to Montpelier each workday. He had the idea of matching up willing drivers and passengers at designated spots in those two communities, which turned out to be the Post Office Café in Worcester and Birchgrove Baking in Montpelier. Mr. Mitchell would like to extend this budding transportation network by adding a link to Northfield.

Mr. Mitchell said other towns in the region also are interested in taking part in the Hitching Post program. Prior to tonight's meeting, he scouted the previously mentioned potential site on the west side of the Common near the flagpole. He felt this would be a very good location since it provides excellent sightlines along Vermont Route 12 (i.e. North/South Main Street). Mr. Mitchell also was able to reduce the estimated startup costs down to \$500, which is the exact amount of an available grant from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans). One of VTrans' current goals is to reduce the number of single-occupant car rides to and from Montpelier (and other Vermont cities). Chair Maxwell asked how the municipalities now considering Hitching Post sites learned about it. Mr. Mitchell said he has been focusing on Front Porch Forum postings in potential participating towns in order to discern the level of interest. There also have been newspaper, internet, and television reports of the success of the pilot program in Worcester and Montpelier. He added the first organizational meeting attracted about fifty (50) people and this attracted some media coverage. Mr. Mitchell believes one reason for the enthusiastic response is that other than siting and installing the physical Hitching Post, no other action is required before the program can be up and running. He felt this can be a great community building tool and allows interested Vermonters to take direct and immediate action in acting to reduce their carbon footprints.

Chair Maxwell asked if there was any monetary exchange between the driver and passenger. Mr. Mitchell said since the initial posts were sited at cafés, there was an initial program to create “coffee coins,” which riders could purchase at the café, present to the driver in return for the ride, and the driver could redeem at a later time. However, since drivers appear to want to participate in the ride-sharing without such compensation, the coffee coin program has been suspended. This will have the effect of reducing startup costs. Board member Miller asked about the concept of a “guaranteed ride home.” Mr. Mitchell said VTrans is so committed to supporting this program that it will compensate riders who were unable to obtain a return ride home and had to pay for a bus ride, taxi service, etc.

Chair Maxwell asked if the current goal is to create one Hitching Post site in Northfield and additional ones in Montpelier and connecting towns. Mr. Mitchell said it was. He felt additional sites could be added in Northfield Falls, etc. if the program proves successful here. Board member Doney asked if there would be any expense to the municipality. Mr. Mitchell said there would not. Chair Maxwell is concerned riders might run into the street to contact drivers. Mr. Mitchell said Depot Square seemed to be a safe pickup spot since it is off the main road and the turnaround at the east side of the Common would be a good place for drivers to momentarily stop to collect passengers.

Lydia Petty said the NEC has drafted a letter that indicates the Select Board’s support for siting a Hitching Post here in Northfield. Once the Select Board members have authorized this letter, it would be forwarded to VTrans as the first step in receiving the \$500 startup costs. Chair Maxwell asked how long it would take to install the post. Mr. Mitchell said it could be up in a couple weeks. The physical Hitching Post would be a four inch by four inch (4”x4”) wooden pole about seven feet (7’) tall with a wagon wheel plaque attached. Those seeking a ride would attach a thin bicycle flag with pennant. Motion by Board member Doney, seconded by Board member Miller, to authorize a letter of support for siting a Hitching Post on Depot Square with the understanding that this program will incur no cost to the municipality. The Select Board members expressed general support for the concept though some doubted there would be sufficient traffic to make the program feasible in the long term.  
**Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Gail Hall, Northfield Energy Committee: Informational Kiosk Update.** At the previous meeting, Ms. Hall presented the Select Board members with a proposal to install an informational kiosk at a major Green Mountain Transit (GMT) stop in Northfield that would include bus route information as well as local information. The Common was considered the logical site and Ms. Hall indicated there was the possibility of getting Norwich University (NU) students to provide recommendations on properly siting the kiosk, determining the best design, etc. as part of a class project. Eleanor D’Aponte is an Associate Professor in NU’s School of Architecture and Art, teaching graduate-level seminars and lecture courses in architecture including Fundamentals of Design I + II. She said her fall semester students work on design concepts while her spring semester students are expected to perform a community project based on their predecessors’ designs. This particular project has significant interest as it would have among its goals increasing GMT bus ridership and help reduce the community’s carbon footprint. Professor D’Aponte believes NU students would make increased use of the Northfield-Montpelier commuter bus services for access to campus and internship opportunities in Montpelier if the bus route schedule better matched their work and/or class schedules. The project now is in the early planning stages and objectives include making the bus stops more visible from the street (and thus increase public awareness of the service), adding some shelter to protect riders from rain and/or cold weather, etc. The spring semester students would assist in the actual placement of the kiosk.

Chair Maxwell asked how large the kiosk would be. Professor D’Aponte thought it would be the about the same size as a typical walking trail kiosk with room for a small sheltered bench. Her spring semester students should have three (3) design concepts available for Select Board review before the end of January 2020. Among the first steps would be to determine where on Depot Square the kiosk would be best located as this would be a factor in its size, layout, etc. Ms. Hall said the initial vision of the structure’s size was about nine feet (9”) wide and six feet (6’) deep but this would depend on the location, especially if it is decided to share the east side of the Common with the Hitching Post. Ms. Hall can be present at the next regular meeting (11/12/19) to provide more information. Chair Maxwell would like to know the approximate size and construct of the kiosk before agreeing to a location. If sited on the east side of the Common, he doesn’t want it so excessively large as to block views of the Common’s interior from Main Street. He then thanked Ms. Hall and Professor D’Aponte for the valuable information presented tonight.

- d. Deb Zuaro and Russ Barrett, Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC): Town Forest Stewardship Plan.** Ms. Zuaro said the NCC members have been working on this stewardship plan over the past four (4) years and presented it to the Select Board members for their review and possible approval at the last meeting. The overall appraisal of the proposed plan was favorable but there had been some concerns expressed and Ms. Zuaro said the plan was revised to address the issues raised. For example, the plan no longer restricts downhill use of mountain bikes on certain trails. In addition, the plan now makes it clear that even with the creation of a NCC subcommittee dedicated to Town Forest matters, the Select Board members will be final decision-makers on all matters related to the Town Forest. Ms. Zuaro hopes the Select Board members will formally approve the Town Forest Stewardship Plan at tonight's meeting. Manager Schulz has looked over the revised plan and believes the changes made are sufficient to address the Select Board members' previous concerns. He said there still might be some questions regarding the plan's endorsement of a conservation easement for the Town Forest. However, this is only a recommendation and not a directive. Other than a few remaining typographical errors, Manager Schulz is pleased with the changes made in the plan since the last meeting.

Board member Miller is pleased with the document as it is now written. Board member Doney asked what would be the benefits of having a conservation easement for the Town Forest. Mr. Barrett said having an easement in place would allow the NCC to apply for grant funds for such items as public parking areas, trail improvements, etc. Grant funds also could be used to provide for improved timber access. Board member Doney asked if having an easement in place would prevent establishing new trails, etc. Mr. Barrett said this would depend on how the easement is written. Some conservation easements do have very restrictive language but others do not. NCC member Laura Hill-Eubanks said an easement for the Town Forest could be written to focus on protecting it for future generations. She added establishing an easement is only a recommendation in the stewardship plan. The actual wording of a proposed conservation easement could be discussed in depth at a future Select Board meeting and could be written to the specifications of the Select Board members. Mr. Barrett said a conservation easement could be written that would gain grant eligibility without being too restrictive regarding future use.

Board member Goodrich is concerned that the Cheney Farm would be covered by the stewardship plan and that is the location of an underground municipal water storage facility. She wouldn't want a conservation easement that might interfere with standard maintenance of the facility as well as future use of this property. Board member Goodrich would like the recommendation for a conservation easement removed from the document. Ms. Hill-Eubanks said these concerns could be reflected in the written easement when drafted. It was noted Dustin's Pasture is not included in the stewardship plan because that is a potential water source for the community. Chair Maxwell noted the underground tanks on Cheney Farm need to be re-lined about every ten (10) years so he would not like any restrictions on such periodic maintenance. Board member Miller feels any tank maintenance issues could be written into the easement. Ms. Hill-Eubanks suggested the Utility Commission members could assist in developing the proper wording for this. Mr. Barrett said the establishment of conservation easements to cover public forests is a fairly common procedure and is strongly supported by leading experts in the field. He felt it would be remiss for the NCC to fail to advocate for one given the many potential benefits.

Board member Goodrich asked what would be the function of the new subcommittee (i.e. the "Town Forest Stewardship Subcommittee"). Ms. Zuaro said the subcommittee would be the first point of contact for any public requests or complaints regarding the Town Forest. The subcommittee would make recommendations to the NCC. The NCC, based on its deliberations, then would make recommendations to the Select Board if action needs to be taken. Board member Goodrich would not like the subcommittee to have any decision-making abilities regarding leases, contracts, etc. Mr. Hill-Eubanks stressed that the subcommittee would be advisory only. At the previous meeting, Board member Goodrich wanted an exception on the overall ban of trapping in the Town Forest if there is a problem with nuisance beavers, etc. She would like language to this effect included in the plan.

Brad Johnson lives on Stony Brook Road and is a professional logger and forester. He has read the stewardship plan and believes it is generally well-written. Mr. Johnson would like to see more details in the forest management plan that would better delineate future use of the property. He suggested the municipality might want to look into reaching a carbon sequestration contact with a business that would pay for carbon credits. This could provide significant income for the municipality over a number of years depending on how many and what type of trees were covered in the contract. The contract might include some conditions similar to a conservation easement and the contacts usually are for several years with significant penalties for early withdrawal from the program.

Mr. Johnson can provide additional information on this possibility if the Select Board members are interested. Board member Miller asked if participating in this program would be compatible with a separate conservation easement. Mr. Johnson felt it probably would but that depend on the wording of the carbon sequestration contract and the conservation easement. Mr. Barrett believes such programs usually pay about \$15 per year per acre.

Chair Maxwell asked how the Select Board members would like to proceed regarding approval of the Town Forest Stewardship Plan. Board member Miller has the impression that the conservation easement recommendation is a sticking point for the majority of Select Board members. Chair Maxwell suggested removing this recommendation from the plan might be the only way to move forward tonight. This would not preclude the possibility of the Select Board members adopting a conservation easement plan in the future and he wouldn't want to hold up approval of the whole plan over this one issue. After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Select Board members that they would approve the stewardship plan with the removal of the easement recommendation (along with other minor edits). Board member Goslant said the NCC members could approach the Select Board members at any time should they be able to draft a conservation easement with such language that would gain the support of the majority of Select Board members. He felt the approved plan shouldn't include the recommendation since Select Board and NCC membership as well as attitudes regarding conservation easements may change in the near future. Board member Goslant doesn't want today's viewpoint locked into a plan that may serve the community for several years.

Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Goslant, to approve the Town Forest Stewardship Plan presented by the Northfield Conservation Commission with the condition that any references to conservation easements be removed from the document. Minor edits requested by the Select Board regarding trapping, etc. also will be made. Mark Fournier suggested the Select Board members should withhold formal approval until they have reviewed the final document. Chair Maxwell feels the NCC members can trusted to make the requested edits in the stewardship plan. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Miller voting in the negative.**

- e. **Steve Davis: Social Media.** Mr. Davis would like to create new Facebook and Instagram websites in order to better promote the Northfield community. Manager Schulz noted the municipality has an official Facebook page that was first created to provide updates in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene. The Facebook page has only been periodically updated since then as more focus has been put on the official municipal website ([www.northfield-vt.gov](http://www.northfield-vt.gov)) and Front Porch Forum. Board member Goslant doesn't believe Mr. Davis needs Select Board permission to create his own Facebook and Instagram pages. Chair Maxwell would like Mr. Davis to have a copy of the municipality's approved Social Media Policy. Board member Goodrich is concerned the Facebook page might just become another venue for residents to complain, for example, about Highway employees when their roads aren't plowed quickly enough to suit them. Mr. Davis said he would monitor message boards to restrict or remove any nasty comments, etc. He would like discussions on the message boards to remain civil. These webpages would have disclaimers stating they are not officially sanctioned by the Northfield municipality. Board member Goslant wished Mr. Davis well in his efforts to better extol and publicize the Northfield community.

## V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **October 8, 2019 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **October 14, 2019 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Goslant abstaining.**

## VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #08-20.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve Warrant #08-20 in the amount of \$115,639.42. Board member Doney asked if the \$1,710.90 payment to Lyndon Rescue, Inc. for processing ambulance billing represented the normal amount paid each month. Manager Schulz said it was. He now is working on a RFP that would address this and other concerns when a new contract for ambulance billing services is negotiated in the coming weeks. There should be a copy of the draft RFP in the next packets. Board member Doney asked about the purchase of "built up rear springs" for the Dodge Ram (\$1,024.33); he asked if their installation would nullify the vehicle's warranty. Manager Schulz doesn't think so but will check. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through October 6, 2019.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$105,664.26. Board member Doney feels the amount of Northfield Police Department (NPD) overtime (\$3,169.44) seems excessive for a two-week period. Manager Schulz said a NPD officer had a complicated investigation of a vehicle crash that involved alcohol use. The officer had to complete the paperwork as soon as possible and this resulted in several hours of overtime. Board member Goslant would like NPD overtime discussed further in executive session when there will be an update on the status of the negotiations over a new contract with the NPD union. He also would like to know who authorizes additional training for already-qualified NPD officers, as this usually results in overtime expense to cover their shifts. Manager Schulz said that was the NPD Chief's decision. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

## VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Camp Wihakowi Dam Removal Project.** Manager Schulz said this issue was discussed at the previous two regular meetings. The Friends of the Winooski (FOW) has spearheaded the effort to remove a failing dam on Bull Run that is in danger of an eventual collapse that might damage neighboring properties. As this project would incur no expense to the municipality, the two main concerns have been what to do with the estimated 26,000 cubic yards of river sediment and knotweed that would have to be removed and whether the nearby access bridge would be able to handle that many truckloads of heavy material in a short period of time. The municipality would have the right to claim some of the sediment to be possibly repurposed as road material. Manager Schulz has inspected the site with Highway Foreman Trent Tucker and they agree that it is difficult to estimate how much of the removed material actually can be reused on the roads. Given this, Manager Schulz has drafted a letter to FOW asking that the municipality be designated as a secondary disposal location and that it would only commit to accepting no more than 9,000 cubic yards of usable material. He now asks for Select Board authorization to send the letter. Board member Goslant asked why the amount of usable material accepted should be capped at 9,000 cubic yards. Manager Schulz said the material taken from the river would all come out in a relatively short time. He doesn't think the municipality has storage space for more than 9,000 cubic yards of such material at one time. Given the current cost of road material (about \$15.75 per cubic yard), Board member Goslant thinks the municipality should make every effort to accept as much as possible. Manager Schulz said he could delete the 9,000 cubic yard limit from the letter. After further discussion, this was the consensus of the Select Board members.
- b. **CERV Relocation Project.** Manager Schulz said CERV (Community Emergency Relief Volunteers) has formed a committee to find a new shared location for its Food Shelf and Clothing Shelf. The current thinking is building a new structure on Kent Street municipal property where a storage shed is located. As this matter involves contract issues, Manager Schulz would like to continue this discussion in executive session. There was no objection.

## VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Funding Requests on 2020 Town Warning.** Board member Goodrich noted GMT has submitted its FY 2020/2021 funding requests for the Northfield-Montpelier Commuter bus service (\$21,000) and for specific Elderly, Disabled, and Medicaid transportation services (\$3,351). She noted the requests came with a copy of the proposed FY 2020/2021 GMT budget. Board member Goodrich asked if it were possible to obtain copies of budgets from the other non-profit organizations likely to have funding requests on the 2020 Town Warning. Manager Schulz will obtain this information and distribute it to the Select Board members.
- b. **Household Hazardous Waste Collection.** Chair Maxwell said Mountain Alliance and Casella Waste Management will be hold the last of four (4) collection events this year behind the Northfield Fire Department (128 Wall Street) on Saturday, November 2, 2019, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This event is open only for residents of Randolph, Braintree, Brookfield, and Northfield. The full list of materials that will and will not be accepted is now on the municipal website, will be printed in the *Northfield News*, and posted on Front Porch Forum.

## IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Increased Employee Health Insurance Costs.** As seen in a front page story in today's edition of the *Times Argus* (i.e. "Health care spike coming"), Manager Schulz said Blue Cross/Blue Shield health insurance rates are expected rise significantly next year. As a result, the municipality is looking for alternative employee health insurance plans that would be more cost-effective.

- b. FEMA Storm Reimbursement.** Manager Schulz said the municipality is still working with FEMA to obtain funds to cover the local cost of the April 2019 storms. We should expect reimbursement of about \$22,000 for road materials, labor expense, etc.
- c. Union Brook Road Repairs.** Manager Schulz noted a special meeting was held last week (10/14/19) so the Select Board members could state their preference on what should be done to provide interim repairs to Union Brook Road prior to the major road reconstruction scheduled to take place next year. The consensus of the members present was to take the less expensive approach of filling the worst potholes for an estimated \$5,000 instead of providing temporary road paving (±\$30,000) or grinding sections of the road down to the gravel base (±\$23,000). After this meeting, Manager Schulz spoke with Mr. Tucker and the paving company (Pike Industry) and their shared view was just filling potholes would be inadequate given winter is coming. Their suggestion was put a shim coat at two locations, which should cost about \$10,000. Board member Goodrich said the special meeting wasn't very useful if the recommendation coming out of it was so easily ignored. Manager Schulz said additional information was received that wasn't available before the meeting. Board member Doney asked if this \$10,000 was in the highway budget. Manager Schulz said there are more than sufficient funds in the RSMS (Road Surface Management System) CIP budget. Board member Doney doesn't want to spend \$5,000 on pothole repairs that will only last a few weeks. Chair Maxwell is not convinced of the short life expectancy of pothole work. He noted some of the pothole repair done last spring on Union Brook Road is still in good shape. Board member Miller said given the great expense of the total road reconstruction project (\$1,700,000), he would favor spending as little as possible on the road in the meanwhile. Perhaps the company that did the spring effort (FreshCoat Asphalt) would be willing to come back to do more pothole work. Chair Maxwell asked if the \$5,000 estimate for pothole filling is still accurate. Manager Schulz believes it is. Since it appears to be the consensus of the Select Board members to keep to its previous recommendation, Manager Schulz will proceed on this course unless the \$5,000 estimated cost proves unrealistic.

**X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. Mark Fournier: Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Mr. Fournier asked if the RFPs for this project had been drafted and solicited yet. Manager Schulz said the municipality had to wait until last week (10/17/19) to see if any petitions to overturn the bond vote would be submitted before the thirty (30) day deadline. This did not happen so work on the RFP can commence right away. Since there is some time before the construction phase can start late next spring, Chair Maxwell would not like to rush the RFP-writing process but rather make sure everything is done correctly the first time.
- b. Sally Davidson, Recreation Committee: Trunk or Treat, etc.** Ms. Davidson reminded everyone that this year's event will take place on Halloween night (Thursday, October 31) from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on the south side of the Common. Of the fifteen (15) vehicle spots, only three (3) are left so please contact her as soon as possible if you would still like to help distribute candy that night. Ms. Davidson also noted the shortage of organized sport playing fields in Northfield and asked if the stormwater collection site near the corner of Water Street and Union Street could be used for this purpose (once the grass grows in). It was noted possible recreational use of the property was considered from the onset of the project.

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

The Board went into executive session at 10:05 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 10:45 p.m. No action was taken

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

The Board adjourned at 10:50 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 November 12, 2019.