

Nanci's Notes

General Information from the Town and Village

March 21, 2011

Snow, mud, ruts: What can I say about this winter except the highway crew has done an outstanding job? Needless to say, they are exhausted. And it just keeps coming. They worked this past weekend hauling stone to alleviate mud conditions and now "they" are predicting more snow. The good news is the roads that were reconstructed last year under our new RSMS program are holding up beautifully!!!

Northfield Ambulance Service: Most municipally-owned ambulance services find themselves struggling with staffing from time to time. That is the current situation with Northfield Ambulance Service. We continue to have a core group who devote a great deal of energy to the service but they are in need of more EMTs. Because of this shortage, we have not had staff to respond to some transports and emergency calls. Therefore, revenue is down. We are currently looking at approximate \$40,000 less in projected revenue. There is nothing I can do about that – on the flip side, we are fortunate that most years find the service pretty much revenue neutral; meaning revenue covers costs.

Village Annual Meeting: The annual meeting for the Village will take place on June 7th so we are busy preparing the budget for the Village General Fund, Water, Sewer and Electric Departments. The Trustees will be reviewing our proposed budget next week. Those meetings are open to the public and are held in the Municipal building.

The Common Project: We have a deadline of July 6th to finish the West Phase Water Project. All we have left to do is rebuild the sidewalk on the south side of the Common with granite curbing. Additional work will include rebuilding the wall along that same sidewalk; some drainage under the sidewalk and rebuild the road from Main St. to the Merchants Bank. The balance of road work and rebuilding the sidewalk on the north side of the Common will commence next year.

Mapping: The utility department will be marking items for the scheduled "fly-over" in April. Ultimately, we will have layers of maps showing our infrastructure; a great tool for planning and maintaining systems.

Leak detection: Water loss is an issue that we have struggled with over the last few years. We track how much water is pumped and compare those numbers with how much water we bill-out on a monthly basis. Currently, we are experiencing nearly 20% in water loss. If you consider electricity to pump water along with the chemicals we use for treatment, you will understand the cost for unaccounted water. We know some is used for flushing hydrants and some by the Fire Department. Our goal is to reduce the loss to 8% - 10%. I think that is about the best we can expect to do; some loss is the result of old, leaking pipes under the ground; which brings me to my next topic.

Water System Improvements: I've reported before that our next large water project will be the South Phase. That is the last of 3 major projects along the main distribution system. We currently plan to proceed with a smaller project on Slate and Highland Avenue. That construction will allow us to close a loop in the system allowing us to refill the reservoir in a more efficient manner.

February 1, 2011

New Village Trustees: The Village Trustees held a special meeting on January 31st to appoint two (2) new members to their Board. The two appointees are Kevin T. Beal and K. David Maxwell. Congratulations, gentlemen and I look forward to working with you on both Village- and Town-related items. The Trustees held a special meeting so the new members can participate in the Joint Board Meeting scheduled with the Town Selectboard on February 8th.

Town Highway: I'm pleased to let you know we hired another employee for the Town Highway Department. That keeps the number of employees for the department the same as before but with a broader range of experience. They have a great deal of work to do to begin to get caught up on road-side mowing/trimming; ditching and, of course, the new RSMS program. This coming summer promises to be an extremely busy time for them.

Water System Improvements: With the news that USDA Rural Development cannot promise to fund the South Phase Water Project, we are reviewing our options. There is still a need to improve water pressure in the Vermont Route 12 area beyond the Vermont Route 12 and 12A intersection. We have a meeting scheduled next week to talk with all the players involved in the project to see where we go from here. My best guess is that we will break the project up into smaller phases. USDA does have money to loan for smaller contracts.

January 26, 2011

Inter-Company Charges: Some may question why the costs for labor, equipments, and materials are charged to different departments. The answer is the Inter-Company Charges policy between the Town and the Village. Each year, the Boards agree how shared costs (labor, equipment) will be charged. For instance, the Municipal Manager's salary is split between the Town and Village 50/50. The Village then charges a portion of the salary to the Water, Sewer, and Electric Departments and the balance of 2% is charged to the Village General Fund. We have done our best to make these charges as accurate as possible but the truth is it is impossible to do. For instance, when Accounting Manager Laurie Baroffio and I meet to discuss how to generally improve efficiencies within the organization, how do we determine who is paying for such conversations?; no one can. I could give you many more examples but I think you can get the idea from the above. Questions? – please let me know.

South Phase Water Project: Unfortunately, we were advised by USDA Rural Development that we do not qualify for grant funds for the South Phase Water Project. The cost will be in the \$3,500,000 range and without some kind of assistance; it is unlikely that the Village Trustees will bring that project forward as it is currently proposed. In order to keep moving infrastructure improvements along, we have the option to downsize the project into smaller phases. I did learn yesterday that the State has a program called "Green Initiatives". I have a call into the State to try and learn more about that. As I understand it, grants may be available for projects that result in conservation measures.

Annual Budget: The Selectboard approved the budget for the ensuing year. This week everyone involved with the annual report process is working very hard to get the material to the printers.

Board of Village Trustees Vacancy: The Village Trustees interviewed 3 candidates for 2 vacancies on the Village Board of Trustees. They will officially appoint 2 new members to their Board at their next regularly scheduled meeting on February 8, 2011.

January 18, 2011

Paine Mountain Trails: The Planning Commission got its first look last night at the trail system and reception facilities planned by Norwich University. Our own Conservation Commission applied for and received a grant last year for \$7,100 to improve the existing trails on Paine Mountain on Water Department-owned land.

Sewer System Expansion: Dubois & King Engineers held a meeting at the Municipal Office last Friday to “kick-off” plans for the final design for sewer system expansion for the Route 12 and 12A area. This project is very important to the community not only for well-field protection but economic growth. It is estimated to pick up approximately 130 new properties. Funding is always the key for these infrastructure improvements.

Winter in Vermont: We don’t have a lot of snow on the ground but these pesky storms sure take a toll on our sand and salt budget. The budget for this fiscal year includes \$29,000 for contracted sanding and plowing. As of this writing, those dollars are nearly expended.

Sidewalks around the Common: A meeting was held at the Municipal Building with representatives from Stantec Engineering to discuss improvements around the Common. There will be a special article on the warning for a new sidewalk on the north side of the Common. A new sidewalk on the south side of the Common was part of the most recent water project and those monies are being held for that purpose. Other issues include the resurfacing the roadway and correcting some drainage problems.

Drainage Issues: Now that we have completed replacing the largest culvert on Central Street, we need to keep moving toward correcting other drainage issues.

December 22, 2010

Street Lighting: I applied for and received a grant from Efficiency Vermont to convert street lights in the Town and Village to LED fixtures. We have been assigned an engineer to help us inventory the existing fixtures and determine what savings there may be by investing in the LED lighting. I understand it could be as little as a 2-year payback; the engineer will be the best source for that information.

Planning Grant: Congratulations to our Zoning Administrator, Michele Braun, is to be congratulated for successfully writing a grant to update the Municipal Zoning Regulations. Northfield will receive around \$6,500. The Planning Commission and Michele have been working on sections of the current regulations for several months. With the grant funds, we will be able to hire an attorney to review the proposed revisions.

Brown Public Library/Historical Society: The library and historical society shared the cost for a contractor to determine what is needed to make the two section of that complex energy efficient. The cost is about \$26,000 for both sections of the complex. Some thought we would qualify for grants to cover those costs; below is the response from the USDA Director regarding the same grant program the Rutland Library used:

Nanci – Same program but Rutland’s Median Household Income (MHI) is \$30,478 which qualifies them for up to a 30% grant. Northfield’s MHI is \$41,523 which does not qualify for any grant. We can make a loan but frankly it would not be any better rate than the Bond Bank and would come with federal const. requirements. I checked your surrounding towns but their MHI’s wouldn’t change your grant eligibility. We don’t get a lot of grant \$ in VT - \$150-300,000 each year. For the last two years we also had ARRA funding which is how we were able to make a much larger than typical grant to Rutland who got a \$463,200 loan and \$200,000 grant.

Hope this helps explain – I know it’s very confusing and all the announcements on ARRA funded projects over the past few years makes it more so! If you want to pursue the loan program, I’d be happy to provide more info and put you in touch with our Area Office staff that would process the application.

Rhonda L. Shippee
Community Programs Director
USDA Rural Development - VT/NH
89 Main Street, City Center
Montpelier, VT 05602

Water line Extension: The Village Trustees approved extending water services to a new development off of Rte 12A across from the wellfield. The main along Rte 12A will be increase to an 8” pipe and one new hydrant at the entrance of the development.

December 13, 2010

Brown Public Library Community Room: Thank you to the Senior Center for donating a used dishwasher for the Community Room in the Brown Public Library; the dishwasher and stove need replacing. Beginning in 2005, the library turned all donations for the use of that room into the Town. I set those funds aside for repairs and maintenance that portion of the facility. Currently, we have about \$3,400 and will use some of those funds to purchase a new electric range.

December 10, 2010

Purchasing: Doing business with our local businesses is very important to us but we cannot exclusively buy from our local merchants. The Selectboard has a purchasing policy that mandates any purchase over \$5,000 must include a competitive bid. From time to time, a department head will simply research vendors with the best price therefore allowing the Board to waive its policy.

Department Head Meetings: Each Thursday morning, I meet with all the department heads. These meetings allow department heads the opportunity to share information, get to know each other a little better, and learn the advantage of working together. I feel it is very important for them to know what is going on in their peers' world. I also take that opportunity to discuss safety issues and try to include some kind of professional development topics. This week, we discussed how each is evaluating their specific departments, personnel, and overall needs.

Drainage issues: Within the last couple of years, the Town has sponsored two (2) studies to evaluate drainage problems; one is in the Northfield Falls area and the other at the south end of Town. Public Works Forman Demasi is in the process of bringing a proposal forward to begin addressing how he will prioritize drainage improvements in both of these areas.

Annual Audit: We have received our annual audit report. It is an excellent report; congratulations to Accounting Manager Laurie Baroffio and her team.

December 2, 2010

Roads and Downed Trees: The warm weather is raising havoc with all the gravel roads. Every one of them has turned to MUD and there is nothing we can do until the weather turns cold again. Then they all will be graded.

The crew was very busy into the evening taking care of more than thirty (30) downed trees. Northfield Electric Department did experience 1 or 2 very brief outages. I believe Superintendent Demasi's aggressive tree-trimming program prevented more damage and loss of power.

Suspended Police Officer: The State's Attorney office has not acted on the State Police report involving the suspended police officer. The latest information from them is it could take other three-plus months before they will act. This is certainly not a good situation for our Police Department.

Northfield Water Department: We are experiencing a problem with Well # 3. Superintendent Demasi has an electrical contractor here to troubleshoot the problem. Fortunately, the other wells are functioning well so we don't anticipate any kind of emergency measures to consumers.

Zoning Ordinance: The Zoning Administrator (Michele Braun) and the Planning Board are updating the zoning regulations. When they are finished, the document will go to the Selectboard approval. The process must be completed by September 2011.

November 29, 2010

Highway Departments: I like to take this opportunity to commend the highway crew for the work they did over the long weekend. There was a variety of weather to contend with; all without any incident to man or machine. We have one new town highway employee (Zack LaPerle). Until we can fill the other vacancy, Foreman Demasi will continue to assist with plowing, sanding and salting.

Street Lighting: We have had no offers from the community to serve on a Street Lighting Committee. The charge for the committee will be to evaluate all the street lights in the Town and Village and determine how effective the new LED fixtures will be.

Wage and Salary Compensation Study: The Selectboard and Village Trustees commissioned a study to determine if our employee compensation package is still in a competitive range to attract and keep qualified employees. The results are in and I'm happy to report that only a few adjustments are recommended.

Playground Equipment: The Recreation Committee applied for and received a grant to purchase new playground equipment. The highway crew dismantled and disposed of the old playground equipment. Earth Waste Systems will remove the tires for us. The new equipment arrived last Friday and is being stored in the lower level of the Municipal building.

November 22, 2010

Rate Case: VPPSA has filed for an increase of 4.65% in electric rates. If approved, the new rate will go into effect on January 1, 2011.

Highway Department Vacancies: We have two (2) openings in the Highway Departments; one for the Town Highway Department and the other for the Village Highway Department. This does not mean any new positions but will bring the Town Highway Department back to four (4) full-time employees, one (1) mechanic, and one (1) Foremen; the Village Highway Department would again have two (2) full-time employees (one recently resigned).

Proposed Budget for the Ensuing Year: The proposed Town General Fund budget is up over 11% as first presented to the Selectboard. In my opinion, there is no way we can present that for voter approval. The majority of the increase is putting back the position for a sixth (6th) Police Officer; that position was eliminated last year. The second item that will increase the spending request is an increase in the pay for emergency medical responders. Another large piece of the increase is due to less surplus funds to use to reduce taxes. The Selectboard will be working on the proposed budget on November 23rd at 6:00 P.M. in the Municipal Building Conference Room.

November 9, 2010

Well, now that I know these notes are actually being read, I'll be more conscientious about keeping them current. And I thank you for taking the time to read them.

Central Street Culvert Project: This project is done and came in under budget. A great deal of credit goes to the utility department as well as the highway department for their contribution to make this project so successful.

Police Department: "Baptism by fire" somewhat expresses Chief Outten's first couple of months as our new Police Chief and he has to be commended for taking these issues in stride. On his second day as Police Chief, he suspended an officer until an investigation by the State Police is finished. The report is done and has been forwarded to the State Attorney.

The second situation came from Norwich University when they issued a letter to Chief Outten with an attached Memorandum of Understanding outlining how Northfield Police Department will interact with Norwich University. That MOU is being re-written and will be reviewed by our attorney, Chief Outten and the Selectboard before executing the document. The MOU is not structured to prohibit law enforcement functions and may very well secure the very strong working relationship Northfield and Norwich University has enjoyed for many years.

Street Lights: Northfield Electric Department has the opportunity to apply for a grant that will allow all (some) of the street lights within the Town and Village to be replaced with more efficient LED lighting. A committee of Selectmen, Trustees, and citizens will improve this project. There are currently 348 streets light in both the Town and Village. The new improved lighting fixtures should eliminate the need for some lights throughout the community while preserving safety.

Annual Budget: The first draft of the annual budget for the ensuing year was distributed to the Selectboard Monday night. Meetings to review the proposed budget will commence on Monday, November 15th; 6:00 P.M. at the Police Station.

Restructuring the Organization: One office space is now converted to an area for the servers that support our IT system and office supplies. Most of these items were formally in the large accounting office.

In an effort to work toward job sharing and cross training, the employee who formally shared an office with the Zoning Administrator has moved to the large accounting office.

Highway Foreman: Peter Demasi has assumed the responsibilities of running the Town and Village highway departments; along with that are the responsibilities to supervise the care for all public grounds and buildings. Thus, his new title is Public Works Foreman. This position will not be strictly administrative and will be an employee who will to be part of the crew when needed. In Pete's absence, Tim Davis has been promoted to the Assistant Public Works Foreman position.

Rate Case: Northfield Electric Department has avoided the need to increase electric rates for a couple years; now with the cost of power, we find the need to increase rates providing Public Service Board approves our request for an increase. We are hoping to keep the increase at less than 5%.

September 8, 2010

Labor Day Festivities are over and Northfield Observances should be commended for all their work. It certainly is a wonderful function for the community.

Police Chief Search: The search is over and Chris Outten has accepted an appointment as Northfield Police Chief. He comes to us with a great deal of experience and great ideas about how to police this community. Stop by his office and say "hi" if you get a chance.

Central Street Culvert Project: Norwich University has offered to fund additional sidewalk along Central Street to President Schneider's home. We need to review where the proposed water line will be placed if the voters approved the next phase of the water system improvements before moving forward with additional sidewalk. At present, the line is proposed under the sidewalk on west side of Central Street from the parsonage to Washington Street.

Soapbox Derby: The local Cubs Scouts are considering bring back the Soapbox Derby. I understand the races used to be held in front of the Municipal building; more information on this topic when I have it.

Lovers Lane: Work began on Lovers Lane today and should be complete by Friday. This work is funded in part by a State grant.

August 20, 2010

Central Street Culvert Project: The concrete culvert arrived yesterday in 15 10-foot sections weighing 22,000 pounds each. It was amazing. The entire culvert was laid in the ground by the end of the day. The Utility Department will reconnect the water and sewer mains next week; we expect the project to be complete and the road reopened by the end of the month.

Water System Improvements: Plans are complete for Slate Avenue and Highland Avenue. We expect to bid that project soon but construction will not begin until next year. The funds for that project are set aside in the CIP so it won't require new borrowing.

Police Chief Search: The candidate for Police Chief has completed all tests. We are waiting for the results of an extension background check. That should be complete within a few more days.

Recent Power Outage: The Northfield Fire Department responded to a report of a fire at the King Street substation. The cause appeared to be a squirrel that travelled where he should not have been and tangled with a breaker.

July 30, 2010

Central Street Culvert Project: Work will begin on replacing a culvert at the south end of Central Street on August 9th. That portion of the street will be closed to traffic for about 3 weeks.

Water System Improvements: We are still awaiting notification from USDA regarding qualification for a grant for the South Phase of our water system improvements plan. Our engineers are in the process of designing improvements for water mains on Highland Avenue and Slate Avenue. The current plan is to construct those improvements during the summer next year.

Road Improvements: Work continues on the RSMS program. This week the crew completed work on Evans Road, Freeman Road, Gibb Lane, Little Northfield Road, and Murphy Road.

July 23, 2010

Police Chief Search Committee: We began the process by appointing a committee to review applications for the vacant position. The committee included citizens from the business sector and some elected officials. Of the 48 resumes we received, the committee chose to interview five; all from the local area. On July 22nd, two finalists interviewed before an Oral Board of law enforcement professionals. The next step will involve testing and an extensive background check. I want to take this opportunity to thank Sergeant Outten for serving as Acting Chief during this transition period.

Road Improvements: The highway crew has finished improvements on 2 gravel roads: Rabbit Hollow and Monti Road. The cost for these two roads is approximately \$58,000.

Village Treatment Plant: The Trustees are waiting for a proposal from Dubois and King Engineers to extend sewer mains beyond the Village in the Route 12 and 12A area. This proposal is driven by the need to protect the Village water supply.

Water System: The Village has completed the “West Phase” of the water system improvements and submitted an application to USDA for the third and last major project. The next and last phase will be known as the South Phase improving the mains near the well field; Central Street, Washington Street and Jarvis Lane. If approved, we will qualify for up to a 45% grant for the 3.5 million dollar project.

Utility Rates: Beginning with the next billing cycle, interest will be charged on all delinquent account. This is an attempt to reduce the cost of processing approximately 500 overdue notices per month.