

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of November 19, 2025**

- I. **ROLL CALL.** Chair Charles Morse, Board members K. David Maxwell, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Bill Clements (Norwich University), Brian Gosselin (Sergeant, Northfield Police Department), James Pontbriand (Chief, Berlin Police Department), Cindy Spaulding, Jeff Hatch, Lynn Doney, Rowland Brucken, Josh Slocum, Logan Potkowski, Chris Bradley, Anne Buttimer, Gerard LaVarnway, Shawn Bryan, Dennis Bathory-Kitsz, Sherilyn Matthans, Carolyn Stevens, Carrie McCool, Curtis Dudley, Elisabeth Atems, Gary Circosta, George Fitch, Kristin Pollard, Mary Nadon Scott, Matthew Romei, Pierre Gomez, Tim Swartz, Karen Trombly, Pam Ricker, and Diane Vanecek.

Chair Morse called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

II. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. **Bill Clements: Criminal Justice.** Chair Morse said Board member Stevens had asked this special meeting be scheduled so that Mr. Clements could provide a presentation about criminal justice and the particular problems that are now facing the Northfield Police Department (NPD). The NPD is now absent a chief and due to long-time staffing problems has only one full-time officer (Sergeant Brian Gosselin). Mr. Clements started by listing his criminal justice background, which includes chairing the Vermont Criminal Justice Council and serving as a Professor in the Norwich University School of Criminology & Criminal Justice for several years. He also founded the Vermont Center for Justice Research in 1990 and served as its executive director for some time. In more recent years, Mr. Clements has been a volunteer on the local Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force. He watched the discussion about the NPD at the last meeting (11/10/25) and as a Northfield resident for over forty (40) years he would like to share his expertise and provide some recommendations to address the current situation. Mr. Clements would like it understood that the understaffing of the NPD is part of a nationwide problem as fewer qualified persons are interested in law enforcement careers. He has discussed with Manager Schulz the various resources now available to help with officer recruitment and the urgent demand to hire an interim police chief. This includes working with the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT). Mr. Clements said another concern when recruiting full-time police officers is to make sure that those hired have the proper certification level. Level I and Level II certifications are mainly for part-time officers as there restrictions on the law enforcement duties they can perform. Full-time officers looking for career advancement are expected to achieve Level III certification eventually as that opens up opportunities for specialized investigative roles, etc. Obtaining Level III certification now requires sixteen (16) weeks of training at the Vermont Police Academy although there have been proposals to fast track the process though expedited training and/or converting law enforcement experience into training credits. Mr. Clements said these are only proposals at this time. Out-of-state training also can be taken into account if it matches Vermont standards. He added that lack of Level III certification is quite common in Vermont and estimated that about one-third of Vermont police officers only have Level II certification. Level I certification police officers are quite limited in the duties they can provide, which includes traffic control, court security, etc.

Mr. Clements then recommended that Manager Schulz get in contact with Jim Baker, who now serves as a criminal justice consultant after a long career in law enforcement that included serving as Director of the Vermont State Police, Interim Director of the Vermont Police Academy, and Police Chief in Rutland, Vermont. Mr. Clements had heard a suggestion at a recent Select Board meeting about the benefits of setting up a citizen advisory group that would advise the Town Manager and/or Town Select Board on local law enforcement matters. He felt there would be advantages to having such an advisory group in place but did not feel it should have the authority to override the Town Manager, Select Board, and/or Police Chief on departmental matters. Jeff Hatch said he made such a suggestion some time ago but was told it would require a charter change. Mr. Clements said that would not be necessary if the committee remained advisory only. The process would be similar to forming a Police Chief Search Committee that would advise on the hiring process but not make any employment decisions.

Mr. Clements also noted that there now is a lot of misinformation available on local social media websites about the hiring processes for an interim police chief and for a permanent police chief. He added that it is possible for a constituted search committee to eventually become an ongoing advisory committee rather than just disbanding after the position has been filled. Mr. Clements said this is a difficult period for the NPD and for law enforcement agencies in general but this could be a good opportunity to start from ground zero and create a new police department that would better serve the community in coming years.

Board members Stevens and Petty had no questions or comments at this time. Board member Shernock has known Mr. Clements for several decades through their mutual employment at Norwich University. Board member Maxwell expressed his great respect for Mr. Clements' expertise and experience in criminal justice and felt due deference should be provided to whatever he advises. Chair Morse asked if Manager Schulz has contacted any of the groups or individuals Mr. Clements suggested for reach out. Manager Schulz said he is in the process of reaching out to Mr. Baker. As for the MOU that would set up compensation levels for Berlin police officers assisting with Northfield policing matters, he forwarded the most recent version to the Berlin Select Board for their consideration. Approval of the MOU would allow for the current backlog of unresolved NPD cases to be dealt with as soon as possible and that seemed to be a priority at the last Select Board meeting. Chair Morse asked if Manager Schulz should contact the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Mr. Clements said that at a minimum, they do have a lot of useful information on their website. Manager Schulz will look into this.

III. DISCUSSION

- a. Northfield Police Department.** Chair Morse asked what should be the expected timeline for hiring a permanent police chief for Northfield. Mr. Clements said we are probably looking at nine (9) months to one year. This long process is an important reason why finding and putting in place a good interim police chief should be expedited. Chair Morse asked whether it would be better to hire the interim chief in-house or to hire from outside. Sergeant Gosselin currently only has the Level II certification level and while Officer Logan Potkowski has Level III certification, he still has two (2) years remaining in his military commitment. Therefore, it seems that an outside hire would be preferable at this time. Cindy Spaulding suggested that since Randolph went through a similar recruitment process recently, it might be beneficial to contact Select Board Chair Trini Brassard for some advice. It also could be useful to contact former Randolph Town Manager and Northfield resident Mel Adams for his views. Ms. Spaulding is concerned that having only one full-time officer serving the Northfield community could leave us vulnerable to increasing substance abuse problems, etc.

Ms. Spaulding then asked why the police coverage agreement is being negotiated with the Berlin Police Department and not the Washington County Sheriffs Department. Manager Schulz said he has heard that Washington County Sheriffs don't have the staff available to assist other law enforcement agencies with anything other than traffic control. He also understands that most of their officers only have Level I or Level II certification. Mr. Clements has heard this as well. Lynn Doney asked if there are plans to send Sergeant Gosselin to the Vermont Police Academy for Level III certification when they hold their next training session in February 2026. Manager Schulz said that would be preferable but might not be possible as Sergeant Gosselin is now the only full-time NPD officer. Mr. Doney feels the municipality should reach out to those who applied for the Police Chief position during the last job search a couple of years ago. This would include Matthew Romei, whom Mr. Doney believes was a finalist for the position. Manager Schulz said he has not started the search process. Mr. Clements believes a job search consultant would look into recent past applicants as a starting point. Mr. Doney felt that whoever is hired should have the required certification level from the beginning. He also believes that the person hired as the permanent chief should have an initial one-year contract that would be extended only if they do a good job during the first twelve (12) months of employment.

Kristen Pollard said everything she has posted on Facebook has been truthful although she agrees that there is a lot of misinformation circulating on local social media. She noted that since Manager Schulz is retiring next March, he probably will have a limited role (if any) in the process of hiring a permanent police chief. Ms. Pollard also feels that Sergeant Gosselin has been put in a difficult position recently and has been asked to perform tasks for which he is not fully certified. She feels the best and most expediate solution would be to contact Mr. Romei to see if he would be interested in serving as interim police chief. Having him in place quickly would solve a lot of problems. Jeff Hatch would like to see a civilian panel put in place that would help the Select Board members oversee the Northfield Police Department. He believes that the Select Board made a mistake in hiring Pierre Gomez as police chief after the last job search. Board member Shernock said it was a diverse group of Northfield residents that comprised the last search committee and it was their recommendation to Manager Schulz that Mr. Gomez be hired. Under our current form of local government, it is the Town Manager who makes the final decision on such matters. Chair Morse said that removing the Town Manager as the person who makes such decisions would require a charter change. Josh Slocum asked if this would be an appointed or elected search committee. Chair Morse said the Select Board members would choose the members after soliciting letters of interest from the general public. Mr. Sanders said that even if the Washington County Sheriffs might not be able to perform certain law enforcement duties due to lack of certification, their visible presence in the community might provide some needed crime deterrence.

Rowland Brucken has served on a police chief search committee before and did not consider it a pleasant experience. It seemed to him that a number of the committee members had hostile attitudes towards law enforcement agencies based on bad past experiences with police officers. When the next search committee is formed, he hopes it is well-advertised beforehand in order to get a good cross-section of the local population and not just those with preexisting grievances. Mr. Brucken said a good search committee could help bring the community together by recommending a good consensus candidate who would be widely accepted.

Mr. Brucken also has heard that NPD pay is much lower than for similar law enforcement agencies in the area. Chair Morse said that is not accurate as there was a compensation analysis performed when the current police union contract was being negotiated. It was found that the NPD does provide competitive wages and benefits. Some NPD officers have left to serve in larger police departments not necessarily for higher pay but because they provide more opportunities for personal advancement. Mr. Brucken thought it might be worth consideration to reduce the number of budgeted NPD officers (6) and instead hire fewer officers at higher pay. Chair Morse said that could be something the new interim and/or permanent police chief could look into and perhaps recommend to the Select Board members in the future.

Berlin PD Chief James Pontbriand said he hasn't heard directly from Manager Schulz about the proposed MOU for the Berlin PD to provide compensated law enforcement service in Northfield. Due to this lack of communication, he would prefer not to move forward on this proposal. Manager Schulz said this agreement needs the approval of the Berlin Select Board so he has been directly working with Town Administrator Vince Conti on this. Mr. Conti has the most recent version of the proposal at this time. Chair Morse asked if the other Select Board members would object if he worked with Manager Schulz to establish improved communication with Chief Pontbriand and other Berlin officials in order to get an approved agreement as soon as possible. There was no objection. Mr. Clements asked if other law enforcement agencies in the regional have been contacted about providing some assistance to the NPD. Chair Morse said there was outreach to the Montpelier PD but we were told they did not have the extra resources to spare for Northfield. Perhaps we should contact them again to see if the situation has changed.

Board member Stevens asked if Sergeant Gosselin would like to sign up for the February 2026 Level III certification training. Sergeant Gosselin said he has signed up for this training in the past but had to withdraw due to NPD staffing problems. He would like to sign up for this next session but is reluctant as there might not be an interim chief in place when the session starts. Mr. Doney thanked Sergeant Gosselin for staying with the NPD while others went elsewhere over the past couple of years. He again recommends that Mr. Romei be hired as interim chief as soon as possible provided he is still interested in the position. This would get this vacancy filled right away and Mr. Doney predicted that Mr. Romei would be able to fully staff the department within six (6) months. Ms. Pollard agrees with this recommendation. She felt once a good police chief is in place, it will be a lot easier to hire new officers. Chair Morse said there is a hiring procedure that needs to be followed. Pierre Gomez, attending remotely, said there has been much discussion of hiring Mr. Romei for interim chief tonight but he felt Montpelier PD Detective Sergeant Jeff Pearson is another worthy candidate with impeccable credentials. However, regardless of whoever is ultimately hired, Mr. Gomez said the Select Board members should make sure to do their homework first and avoid any candidate with any possible issues.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

V. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at: <https://youtu.be/A9z5DN7T2LM>

These were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of November 25, 2025.