

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of August 9, 2022**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Bonnie Waninger (Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission), Russ Barrett (Conservation Commission), Karina Dailey (Vermont Natural Resources Council), Deborah Zuaro (Conservation Commission), Ray Pelletier (8:18 p.m.), Simon Pearish, Matt Caldwell, George Goodrich, Donald Doyon, Steve Davis, and Carolyn Stevens.

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

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

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

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)**

- a. Bonnie Waninger, CVRPC Executive Director: New Economic Development District.** Chair Maxwell said at the previous meeting (07/26/22), Economic Development Director Tom Davis provided the Select Board members with information regarding the proposed creation of a new economic development district ("West Central Vermont Economic Development District") that would be comprised of the communities located in Addison, Chittenden, Rutland, and Washington counties. The Select Board members asked Mr. Davis to invite Ms. Waninger to tonight's meetings to answer questions they might have since CVRPC has been leading the regional effort on this. Ms. Waninger said the first thing to understand is that this economic development district doesn't exist at this time and it will take several years before it would be recognized by the US Economic Development Administration (EDA). The four counties involved in the process are the only ones in Vermont that don't belong to one of these districts and that is why they have grouped together to form one. There already have been two years invested in this effort. At the initial meeting, Northfield was represented by Carolyn Stevens from the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN). The main justification is that belonging to a recognized district would prioritize any federal economic development grant applications submitted on behalf of member communities. This status also would create more grant application opportunities. In practice, the regional planning commissions would work together on economic development projects rather than the individual communities. Ms. Waninger said it may take up to five years to form a recognized district since the US EDA doesn't encourage the formation of new ones as that means fewer federal dollars for the existing ones. Part of the process is drafting a Comprehensive Development Strategy (CEDS) document that must be finalized before asking municipalities if they want the process to go forward. The CEDS now is in the public comment period and is available for review and feedback at the website [www.westcentralvt.org](http://www.westcentralvt.org). It is unlikely that the formal application to the US EDA would be sent until next year. At that time, a formal letter of support from Northfield would be requested. A new committee then would be formed to oversee the application process and Northfield residents would be encouraged to participate. Board member Petty asked if the CEDS has any local purpose or if its drafting is just part of the application process. Ms. Waninger said the document could be used by CVRPC as the framework for a regional economic development plan. The document also lists important regional projects that could be used to obtain state support for federal grant applications. The emphasis now is on job creation and in particular high paying jobs so projects that meet these criteria are strongly encouraged. The document also specifies regional strengths and weaknesses on a number of topics including affordable housing, skilled workforce, etc.

Board member Stevens said this appears to be a complicated process and Mr. Davis will be working on this for some time on behalf of Northfield. As for the CEPS document, Ms. Waninger said it is now being updated and will be provided directly to the Select Board members when the revisions are complete. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Waninger for the valuable information provided tonight.

- b. Russ Barrett: Town Forest Invasives Removal Process.** Mr. Barrett is Northfield's appointed Tree Warden and also serves on the Northfield Conservation Committee (NCC), the Dog River Park Committee, and the Town Forest Stewardship Committee. Tonight, however, he is representing the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee. This group was appointed by the Select Board members to discuss options and provide recommendations on how the \$123,000 in state grant funds should be expended. One upcoming project is the removal of invasive plants from the Town Forest. Mr. Barrett said the target area is near the "Hawk Watch" lean-to and in addition to the removal of invasive flora the project also looks to restore historic view lines where there has been overgrowth. Mr. Barrett will work with Manager Schulz to develop an RFP that would be sent out in a few weeks. The process probably will include the use of state-approved herbicides and the debris then would be burned the following winter after a burn permit has been obtained from the local Fire Warden. The site would be observed in coming years by volunteers to ensure no reoccurrence. The municipality would need to alert the public about the herbicide usage and then again before the brush burn. There also are rare native plants in the target area that will need to be protected. There are no waterways in the area so there is no concern regarding herbicide contamination. Board member Morse said this seems to be a well-thought-out plan and Mr. Barrett has done a fine job. Board member Petty noted NCC has been working with volunteers lately to restore the Hawk Watch lean-to roof. She would like to see some old photographs collected that show how the Town Forest used to look and how it could be restored. Board member Petty then asked about contractor access to the work site. Mr. Barrett said the best approach is through an old road off Turkey Hill Road. He is hoping the municipality can obtain a right-of-way to accommodate this project as well as continued access for future projects. There is a private landowner there and Mr. Barrett will contact him regarding access. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Barrett for all the work he already has devoted to this important project.
- c. Ray Pelletier, Northfield's CVFiber Delegate: CVFiber Update.** The Select Board members asked Mr. Pelletier to return and provide additional information regarding his request at a previous meeting (07/12/22) that the Northfield municipality provide five percent (\$90,000) of its American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds to CVFiber in order to bring high-speed internet to the five hundred and fifty (550) Northfield households now underserved. If the Select Board members approve this request before September 15, 2022, this amount would be matched by the State of Vermont. Mr. Pelletier will be attending this meeting online was not now present. Should he arrive later in the meeting, this matter will be discussed at that time (see below).

## **V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. July 26, 2022 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Morse abstaining.**

## **VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. Approval of Warrant #03-23.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve Warrant #03-23 in the amount of \$463,747.63. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through July 24, 2022.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$105,415.66. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

## VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. Cross Brothers Dam Removal Update.** Manager Schulz said this project has been on the drawing board for some time and the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) has been the driving force behind it. The main benefits of this dam removal would be to provide flood mitigation for the downtown area while also restoring normal fish migration along the Dog River. VNRC Ecological Restoration Coordinator Karina Dailey last addressed the Select Board members over a year ago (04/27/21) and has returned tonight with a project update. Ms. Dailey said the project is moving forward although it might seem quiet as VNRC is still seeking funding from various sources. A grant application was submitted to FEMA last November but they are still waiting to hear back about its status. FEMA would seem a likely source for funding since the project would not only have dam removal but the riverbed also would be cleared of debris, sediment, etc. The total cost of the project would be \$900,000 and they have just over one-third of the funding so far. If the scope of the project was limited to just dam removal, the cost would drop to \$500,000. Ms. Dailey then asked if the Select Board members had any questions. Board member Morse said this project has been a long time coming. He asked if there were any plans to coordinate this project with the upcoming replacement of the nearby Main Street Bridge, which is scheduled for 2025. Board member Morse felt there might be cost savings if the equipment on hand could be shared by using the same contractor, etc. Ms. Dailey said she was aware of this project as there would need to be some coordination with the removal of the current bridge abutments, etc. However, merging the projects would not work since the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) does not do dam removal projects. Also, if the FEMA grant is successful, they would insist on choosing the contractor themselves. Manager Schulz will be meeting with VTrans officials later this week about the bridge replacement project and will bring up possible project coordination at that time. Board member Petty remembers that at the presentation last year there was some indication that this project might result in improved river access for outdoor recreation. She hopes this still is being considered. Mr. Dailey said it would remain part of the project provided there is sufficient funding. There is a current access point behind the Dollar General that is rather steep and certainly doesn't meet ADA standards. Board member Stevens asked what would happen to the removed riverbed material. Manager Schulz said the municipality already has expressed interest in retaining it should it prove suitable for use on the roadways, etc. Ms. Dailey confirmed it should be clean sediment that could have many applications. However, sometimes contractors prefer to keep it for themselves. Board member Goodrich asked if there were any expiration dates for the grant funds already collected. Ms. Dailey said most have a five-year window, which also is VNRC's preferred timeline for this project. In addition, grant extensions are not too difficult to obtain. If the FEMA grant application is unsuccessful, VNRC will look for additional sources such as the State of Vermont's Water Infrastructure Sponsorship Program (WISPr). Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Dailey for the project update.
- b. CVFiber Request for ARPA Funds.** Chair Maxwell suggested the Select Board members could discuss the questions they would have for Mr. Pelletier tonight should he become available later. Board member Petty understands should the Select Board members decide to provide the ARPA funds to CVFiber, it is possible another internet provider (i.e. TDS Telecom) could provide broadband service to underserved Northfield customers before CVFiber can. However, she doubts any for-profit internet provider would be willing to hook up all the 550 underserved households as some would be too far off the grid to make it financially viable. Board member Petty thought it might be possible to make it a condition of granting the ARPA funds that they must be spent within Northfield.

Board member Morse shares the concern that TDS Telecom could complete its fiber optic expansion project before CVFiber's work reaches here. A big problem is the uncertainty regarding the timeline for future TDS Telecom work in Northfield. Chair Maxwell is reluctant to commit these funds when there are so many unanswered questions. He would like reassurances that CVFiber's work in Northfield would start sooner rather than later. Board member Goodrich noted Governor Phil Scott recently announced \$48,000,000 in state funds that would go towards broadband expansion. She wanted to know how much of these funds would go to CVFiber. She also shares the concern about what would happen to the \$90,000 in ARPA funds if TDS Telecom completes its project first. Board member Morse wanted to have some idea of the monthly charges for CVFiber customers, especially those living in locations considered uneconomical for other internet providers. Chair Maxwell said the monthly charges should be a major concern and something that needs to be answered before the ARPA funds are committed. He then suggested that if Mr. Pelletier doesn't arrive before the end of the meeting, the questions raised tonight could be compiled and forwarded to him by Manager Schulz.

#### **VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. South Main Street Stormwater Project.** Manager Schulz said the construction phase is underway on South Main Street. There were some washouts yesterday due to the rainstorm but all is progressing well.
- b. FY 2021/2022 Utility Financial Statements.** Manager Schulz said that for the fiscal year just concluded, the utility departments revenue projections were on target. Individual line items were either close to or under the budgeted amounts.
- c. VTrans Grant Funds.** Manager Schulz said additional funds for work on the backroads became available so Northfield received an additional \$45,000. This will be added to the \$200,000 grant previously awarded for work on Lovers Lane.
- d. Highway Department Projects.** Manager Schulz said the Highway crew have been kept busy on various projects including the roadside work along Little Northfield Road. Some downed brush was left by the side of the road but will be cleared up soon.
- e. Bone Hill Solar Project.** Manager Schulz said the Bone Hill Solar Farm came online today. This will be another renewable energy source for the Northfield Electric Department (NED), which is a good development since the State of Vermont will require a higher percentage of renewable energy sources in coming years.
- f. Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge.** Manager Schulz reported that the repair contractor has begun work. There was more deterioration to the bridge than originally thought and Manager Schulz will meet with the contractor in a couple days to review this. Manager Schulz plans to apply to VTrans for emergency funds to cover the extra expense. Board member Morse said not having access to the bridge during haying season will greatly inconvenience some farmers in the area.

#### **IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. Municipal Email System.** Like the other Select Board members, Board member Morse was provided an email address from the municipality for official business (i.e. [cmorse@northfield.vt.us](mailto:cmorse@northfield.vt.us)). However, due to the large amount of junk mail and spam coming through this account, Board member Morse plans to go back to using his personnel email address.
- b. Business Interruption Policy.** Board member Morse would like a municipal policy that governs what should happen as well as possible recompense whenever a local business has to temporarily close or relocate due to an infrastructure project.

- c. **Paine Mountain Hike, etc.** Board member Petty said there would be a group hike to the summit of Paine Mountain this coming Sunday (08/14/22). Participants are asked to meet at the Green Mountain Medical Center (87 Paine Mountain Drive) at 10:00 am. In addition, there will be a ribbon cutting ceremony celebrating the trail restoration work recently completed at the trail starting at the end of Slate Avenue. This event will be on Saturday, August 27, 2022 at 2:00 p.m. beginning at the Brown Public Library. Participants are asked to park there and then take a short hike from there to the trailhead. Simon Pearish lives near the trailhead on Slate Avenue and he thinks what had been a scary looking trail is now very attractive.
- d. **Select Board Retreat.** Chair Maxwell thought it might be a good idea to hold a Select Board retreat in the near future. This would be a non-structured meeting where Select Board members can have a free and open conversation regarding short- and long-term goals for the community. After some discussion, it was decided that the retreat would be held on Thursday, September 1, 2022 starting at 10:00 a.m. in the Community Room.
- e. **ARPA Funds Timeline.** Chair Maxwell noted that two additional ARPA Funds Outreach meetings are scheduled for next month (09/11/22 and 09/14/22). Soon afterwards the Select Board members will have to start serious conversations and making hard decisions regarding how to spend these funds on local projects.

#### X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Matt Caldwell: Broadband Access.** Mr. Caldwell lives on the Loop Road at a location beyond high-speed internet access. He does have "Turbo Internet" from TDS Telecom but felt that was a misnomer as he cannot get sufficient download and upload speed to hold remote meetings, download large documents, etc. He sometimes has to go to the Common and use Trans-Video's free public wifi to get work done. Mr. Caldwell believes devoting five percent of Northfield's ARPA funds towards broadband internet service would be a positive investment. This is especially true while matching funds are available.

#### XI. SELECT BOARD (cont.)

- a. **CVFiber Request for ARPA Funds.** Chair Maxwell noted Mr. Pelletier has joined the meeting remotely and he asked the Select Board members to direct their own questions to him. Board member Morse asked when CVFiber would start stringing cable in Northfield. Mr. Pelletier said this year CVFiber will be focusing its efforts in the Calais/East Montpelier region. He expects the work in Northfield will start no later than 2024. Board member Morse asked if CVFiber received the Northfield ARPA funds (and matching funds), would it commit to providing service to the remaining underserved households should TDS Telecom provide service to more accessible areas. Mr. Pelletier said CVFiber is committed to providing high-speed internet to all underserved households. If the TDS Telecom expansion stops at a certain location, CVFiber will attach its own lines beyond that point to reach any remaining underserved households. Board member Morse asked if would be more economical to purchase Starlink satellite dishes for those households beyond the current reach of wired internet. Mr. Pelletier said that option is already available to those with no other choice. He did note satellite internet is slower and less reliable. Board member Petty asked if other Central Vermont communities have provided ARPA funds to CVFiber. Mr. Pelletier said Calais just provided \$200,000 of their ARPA funds. CVFiber now has about \$1,000,000 of such municipal donations and the State of Vermont is still providing matching funds for the next month. Board member Petty said she supports providing these ARPA funds to CVFiber since she doesn't consider this to be a high-risk investment and broadband internet access is so important to the community.

Board member Stevens asked about the different colored dots on the map provided by Mr. Pelletier. Mr. Pelletier said the red dots indicate households without high-speed internet access. The other colored dots indicate the varying levels of internet speeds available. Board member Stevens asked if CVFiber was in contact with the Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) about using their utility poles for stringing internet cable in Northfield. Mr. Pelletier said they have been in contact on a regular basis about this. Board member Goodrich asked how much of the \$48,000,000 in broadband access state funding Governor Scott recently announced will go to CVFiber. Mr. Pelletier said about \$12,000,000. A similar amount of state funding is expected next year. Board member Goodrich asked if Mr. Pelletier could guarantee that any ARPA funds provided by Northfield would be spent in Northfield. Mr. Pelletier said he could promise that. He doubts TDS Telecom's fiber optic expansion would reach all 550 underserved households and the \$90,000 from Northfield and the state matching funds (for a total of \$180,000) would hook up one hundred and twenty (120) households. Board member Goodrich asked what would be the monthly subscriber rate for CVFiber customers. Mr. Pelletier said that hasn't been calculated yet but he expected it to be less than one hundred dollars (\$100) per month. The final amount depends on whether CVFiber needs to take out bonds to obtain all the needed funding. Board member Goodrich asked how much funding does CVFiber now anticipate to receive through bonding. Mr. Pelletier said about \$23,000,000. Chair Maxwell asked how long it would take to hook up the underserved households in Northfield once CVFiber starts local work. Mr. Pelletier said it probably would take about a month to complete the thirty-six-mile circuit. Chair Maxwell asked what was CVFiber's budget for connecting Northfield to broadband internet. Mr. Pelletier said about \$2,000,000. He added CVFiber would greatly appreciate a contribution from Northfield as that would reduce its need to bond for funds and this would lower the burden of future subscribers. Chair Maxwell said there will be two Select Board members absent from the next regular meeting (08/23/22) so this matter probably will be discussed at length again at the Select Board Retreat now scheduled for Thursday, September 1, 2022. The next regular meeting after then will be on Tuesday, September 13, 2022, which is two days before the deadline to commit ARPA funds to CVFiber in order to receive state matching amounts. If any Select Board members have any additional questions for Mr. Pelletier, Chair Maxwell advised to send them to Manager Schulz and he will forward them on to him.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:08 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 Select Board regular meeting of August 23, 2022.