

Town of Northfield, Vermont
Joint Meeting of the Northfield Electric
and Water & Wastewater Commissions
Minutes of August 5, 2024

Roll Call: Steve Fitzhugh, Dennis Donahue, John Stevens (absent), and Charlie Morse. Others present: Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Gerard LaVarnway, and Michael Krause.

The meeting started at 6:30 p.m.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting.

Motion by Mr. Donahue, seconded by Mr. Morse, to approve the minutes of the May 6, 2024 meeting. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

Meeting of the Electric Commission

Northfield Electric Department Upcoming Projects.

Main Street Bridge Replacement Project. Mr. Fitzhugh said that as part of the bridge replacement project, which now has been delayed until 2026, utility conduits are now being installed on East Street. The main conduit is six inches (6") in diameter while some four-inch (4") conduit also is being installed for future use. It was felt better to install extra conduit at this time rather than having to dig up the road again at a later date. The work is being done by our utility crew and should be completed before the end of the week. Manager Schulz said the road would be repaved by early September. Mr. Fitzhugh noted that the State of Vermont is still trying to get permission to install new conduit on the Fernandez property near the former China Star restaurant.

Norwich University (NU) Cyber Fusion Center. Mr. Fitzhugh has been working with NU and Green Mountain Power (GMP) regarding the logistics of supplying power to the new building. The cost of the electric hookup should be about \$135,000 and much of the work needs to be scheduled far in advance. The new service needs to be in place before building construction as the work site lies directly on existing power lines.

Water Street Transmission Line Replacement. Mr. Fitzhugh said GMP still needs to relocate some transmissions lines that were heavily damaged by the July 2023 flooding along Water Street near the NU campus. As this relocation will involve railroad property, there will need to be some coordination with New England Central Railroad (NECR) on this. Manager Schulz said he has been in contact with NECR and provided all the information that they have requested but still hasn't received formal permission for the utility pole relocation.

NU Cemetery Electric Service. Mr. Fitzhugh said NU has asked that the Northfield Electric Department (NED) provide service to their cemetery on Scenic View Drive. There was a similar request several years ago but no action was taken at the time. Mr. Fitzhugh said there had been a structure at that location several years ago but the power lines to it were removed when the building was taken down. NU now would like to install lighting at the cemetery along with powered water pumps. Since this would be a reinstallation of a previous NED service, GMP has provided a cost estimate of \$25,000 that would include putting in underground conduit along the road that would connect to the nearest active utility pole. This would eliminate the need to remove any trees or traverse any adjacent private property. Mr. Fitzhugh said the Utility Commissioners should be able to recommend to Manager Schulz that the service be restored for the project to commence. Mr. Morse feels the old utility poles had not really been removed but instead allowed to deteriorate before falling over on their own. Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Donahue, to recommend that NED service be restored to the NU cemetery located on Scenic View Road. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

King Street Battery Storage Project. Mr. Fitzhugh and Manager Schulz held a recent meeting with representatives of DeLorean Power, which is the private entity that is pursuing this project. DeLorean Power is still working with the Vermont Public Supply Authority (VPPSA) on completing a financial agreement along with an interconnection agreement with NED. Whether NED would cover some of the upfront costs or not will be discussed at the next Utility Commissions meeting. By that time, the actual costs for that phase of the project should be determined.

VPPSA Retreat update. Mr. Fitzhugh said VPPSA staff and local public utility representatives held a retreat last month. At this retreat, VPPSA was made aware that its member public utility companies don't all want to conform to the same operating practices, such as using the same accounting software, etc. The retreat also some considerable discussion of the long-term future of public utility companies in Vermont. Mr. Fitzhugh attended the retreat and he suggested that VPPSA staff should organize a conference for the local representatives of the public utility companies so that potential problems could be discussed in full. This would include the state legislature's expanding renewable power requirements. Mr. Fitzhugh asked that his fellow commissioners let him know what they would like to see addressed at this conference.

He then noted that GMP has been very responsible in regard to its service contract with NED, which has eliminated the need to maintain a local line crew, equipment, etc. This has resulted in NED having relatively low customer costs. Smart meters also will be a great assistance to NED and its customers over time. Mr. Fitzhugh said having this conference should be a great assistance to VPPSA, which plans to perform a new SWOT analysis (i.e., Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) at next year's retreat. Mr. Fitzhugh expects the conference, which could be in-person or online only, to be held by this November. Mr. Morse asked if VPPSA has a vision for the future. Mr. Fitzhugh believes VPPSA would like to strengthen its member public utilities by helping them handle new state and/or federal operating requirements. They also would like to see these utilities update their systems by embracing new technology, such as smart meters, in order to keep up with what private utility companies are able to provide their customers.

FY 2023-2024 Budget Status Reports. Manager Schulz reported that the new fiscal year started on July 1, 2024 so we now have some preliminary figures for the just completed fiscal year. He said all looks well with NED finances as its FY 2023-2024 revenue exceeded projections by \$219,000. In addition, expenditures were \$279,000 underbudget. Manager Schulz added that NED power sales have gone up this summer. Mr. Fitzhugh suggested that the hotter weather has resulted in more use of air conditioning.

Meeting of the Water & Wastewater Commission

Northfield Water & Sewer Department Upcoming Projects.

Main Street Waterline and Reservoir Replacement Project. Manager Schulz said the construction phase of the project has now gone out to bid. Submissions are due by Thursday, August 29, 2024. He added that some of the sideroad work for this project could be done later this year but the bulk of the work would be done starting next spring. Manager Schulz is grateful that the State of Vermont will pay half of the total project costs and the rest will be covered by a forty (40) year no-interest bank note. All we can do now is wait to see how the bids turn out.

Lead-Lined Pipe Inventory. Manager Schulz reported that this project has been completed.

Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Reevaluation. Manager Schulz said this study is nearly complete and the final report should be sent to us by this September. It is very likely that significant upgrades will be recommended. This could include enhanced phosphorus treatment, etc. The report also will be sent to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) and they have the authority to mandate any recommended upgrades.

Water/Sewer Personnel update. Manager Schulz reported that a fourth utility employee has been hired. His name is Cody Lemieux and he does have water/wastewater experience and a couple members of the current crew already know him. His references checked out and his background check was very good. Utility Superintendent James Russo is looking forward to when Mr. Lemieux starts work so he can start laying pipe, which really requires a four-person crew.

FY 2023-2024 Budget Status Reports. Manager Schulz reported that the prior fiscal year revenues for the Water Department was very close (99%) of what had been projected. Expenditures came out \$38,000 underbudget. He noted that having the fourth utility crew position vacant during FY 2023-2024 probably contributed to this. Manager Schulz then noted that the Sewer Department also is in good financial condition. Its FY 2023-2024 revenues exceeded estimates by about \$12,000. Expenditures were about \$26,000 overbudget but much of this can be attributed to higher than expected costs for WWTF chemicals and for sludge management. Overall, Manager Schulz said the utility department budgets are in good shape especially compared to Vermont communities that suffered infrastructure damage due to flooding, etc.

Public Participation (unscheduled)

Michael Krause, Norwich Commons Stormwater Concerns. Mr. Krause is an owner of the Norwich Commons housing complex that is located at the intersection of Vermont Routes 12 and 12A. This area has suffered increased stormwater damage in recent years and Mr. Krause is hoping that the municipality and perhaps nearby Norwich University would agree to cover some of the costs of culvert replacement, etc. Manager Schulz has informed Mr. Krause that stormwater really isn't an issue for the Utility Commissions. Mr. Fitzhugh agreed that stormwater issues are considered a Highway Department concerns, which would put this matter under the purview of the Select Board members. Mr. Krause is free to address them at one of their regular meetings about his concerns. Due to technical problems with his computer, Mr. Krause was able to hear this meeting but not respond orally. He did inform the Utility Commissioners by text that he does intend to bring this matter to the attention of the Select Board members in the near future.

Adjournment. Motion by Mr. Fitzhugh, seconded by Mr. Morse, to adjourn. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk