

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of June 28, 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, Tom Davis (Economic Development Director), Erin Hicks-Tibbles (NCDN), Kahwa C. Douoguih (NCDN), Natalie Kozlowski, Gary Kessler (Green Mountain Stage Race), Deb Zuaro (Northfield Conservation Commission/VOREC Grant Implementation Committee), Kimberly Caldwell (VOREC Grant Implementation Committee), Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

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.** Manager Schulz said Northfield Police Department (NPD) Chief John Helfant was to provide a department head report tonight but had to postpone his appearance. His report will be on the next regular meeting agenda.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)**

- a. Erin Hicks-Tibbles, Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN): Northfield Business Guide.** Ms. Hicks-Tibbles noted that at one of their meetings last year (11/09/21), the Select Board members authorized NCDN to draft a Northfield Business Guide that would have both online and print versions. The purpose is to assist those looking to start or expand a local business with navigating state and local regulations, providing useful and relevant information about the Northfield municipality and community, etc. Manager Schulz noted Economic Development Director Tom Davis has been working with NCDN members and especially with their hired web design consultant Natalie Kozlowski in recent weeks to create a website where the online version will be hosted. There will be links from the municipal website to both the online version and to a printable version (PDF). Ms. Tibbles-Hicks said certain features of the guide will be expanded over time, such as the directory of local businesses. Board member Petty asked if the online version will be different from the print version, copies of which were provided to the Select Board members. Ms. Tibbles-Hicks said there would be some significant differences. Board member Goodrich asked to whom the Select Board members should provide their feedback regarding the online and printed guides. Ms. Kozlowski said they could contact her and/or Mr. Davis by email. Board member Goodrich then thanked all involved for their hard work in creating this very useful document. Board member Stevens also was appreciative of their efforts. Chair Maxwell noted this will be a living document that can be updated whenever needed. He was grateful for the NCDN members for taking on this project. This will be a valuable tool in the toolbox for promoting local economic development.
- b. Gary Kessler, GMSR Race Director: Green Mountain Stage Race.** Mr. Kessler said this will be the twenty-first year for the Green Mountain State Race, which will have four stage races held over the Labor Day weekend. The event was cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19 but returned successfully last year. The only change was that due to border restrictions, Canadian racers could not take part and normally they constitute about one-sixth of the participants. They will be back again this year. The second stage of the race will be held on Saturday, September 3, 2022 and will start at the Randolph VT High School at 8:30 a.m., traveling up Vermont Route 12A through Braintree, Granville, Roxbury, and Northfield. The route then turns back to Randolph along Vermont Route 12, ending at the Ayers Brook Goat Dairy. The route is thirty-seven miles with most riders completing just one lap but some advanced riders will do two or three. The race should be completed by late afternoon.

Mr. Kessler said he will be working with local police departments for traffic control along the race route. If the local police cannot commit, he will work with the state police and/or private agencies. Manager Schulz said he contacted NPD Chief Helfant and he has no safety concerns based on past experience. However, due to its current shortfall of officers, NPD may not be able to help with traffic control this year. Mr. Kessler noted GMSR does compensate law enforcement agencies for their assistance. Board member Morse asked what sort of outreach GMSR does to warn the travelling public of possible traffic delays, etc. Mr. Kessler said signs are placed along the race route about a week in advance. Notices also are posted on Front Porch Forum in the affected communities. Northfield residents will be advised to use the interstate if they wish to travel to Randolph that day. Board member Petty is excited about the race and somewhat disappointed the route won't travel through downtown Northfield as part of the Labor Day Weekend Festivities. She asked if race participants will be urged to patronize Northfield businesses, eateries, etc. while in the area. Mr. Kessler said race participants are provided such information and encouraged to buy local. In the past, he has purchased takeout meals in Northfield for distribution to race volunteers, etc. Chair Maxwell thanked Mr. Kessler for including this community in this popular event and for keeping local officials aware of the precautions being taken to keep this a safe activity for all. Mr. Kessler asked about the written statement of consent to use public roads he is asking the communities along the route to approve and sign. Chair Maxwell said since the Select Board members have no objections to the event, Manager Schulz is authorized to sign and return the form to GMSR.

#### **V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. **June 14, 2022 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Petty would like her comments regarding the parking situation near the Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge reworded for accuracy. There was no objection. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### **VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. **Approval of Warrant #24-22.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #24-22 in the amount of \$339,133.51. Board member Morse noted that of the total warrant amount, about \$231,000 represented power purchases for the Northfield Electric Department. Board member Stevens asked about weapons purchased by the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) for its "gun raffle." Manager Schulz said this confused him the first time he saw this purchase on a warrant a few years ago. This is an annual NFD fundraiser and all firearms purchases are from its donation account with no taxpayer funds involved. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through June 12, 2022.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$114,061.74. Chair Maxwell said it now looks probable NPD overtime expenses will come under or close to the budgeted amount this fiscal year. With about three weeks remaining, about \$4,000 remains in the \$50,000 overtime budget. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### **VII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. **Trail Restoration Project Bids.** Deb Zuaro is a Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) member as well as Chair of the new Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee. She said the committee met last night and unanimously favored the bid from Apex Trailworks (Braintree VT) in the amount of \$17,500.

Ms. Zuaro said local company Gillespie Fuels & Propane did submit a slightly lower bid (\$15,300) but the committee members felt Apex Trailworks' extensive past experience in creating/rehabilitating trail systems justified the extra expense. Also serving on the committee is Colin O'Neill, who manages Norwich University's Shaw Outdoor Center. Mr. O'Neill has worked with Apex Trailworks before and highly recommends their work. Fellow committee member Russ Barrett also felt Apex Trailworks should be awarded the contract as we want the finished product to be a true forest trail instead of a road through the forest. Ms. Zuaro said three other bids were submitted but the amounts were much higher than these two. Board member Morse said he usually favors awarding projects to the low bidder but he understands proprietary knowledge regarding trail systems would be an important factor in awarding this project to a (slightly) higher bidder. Board member Petty also serves on the VOREC Grant Implementation Committee and she also supports awarding the project to Apex Trailworks. She noted that their bid amount is lower than the amount that had been budgeted for this project so it is possible the rehabilitation work could be extended a little further along the trail route. Chair Maxwell asked if there is precedent for not always accepting the lowest bid. Manager Schulz said the municipality's purchasing policy as well as this project's RFP make clear the municipality has the right to award a project to other than the low bidder if it is felt another bidder would be better suited to the project. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to award the Trail Restoration Project to Apex Trailworks for \$17,500 based on the recommendation of the VOREC Grant Implementation Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

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

- a. End of Fiscal Year 2021-2022.** Manager Schulz noted that the last day of the current fiscal year will be later this week (06/30/22). It appears the municipality's finances are in good shape although there probably will not be the large surpluses we had last year due to the pandemic and other factors. The Select Board members will be provided with a preliminary year-end report at the next Select Board regular meeting (07/12/22). It should be noted that it probably will be some weeks until all the FY 2021/2022 expenses are paid since invoices are still coming in.
- b. Northfield Grand List.** Manager Schulz said the Listers lodged the Grand List last week. The Grand List amount is about \$3,800,000, which is almost \$60,000 more than for the previous year. The higher number is largely attributable to higher assessments for commercial buildings as well as a number of new structures. The next step for the Listers is to hold grievances hearings next week for property owners who received notices of higher assessments. Once the Grand List is finalized and the state education tax is known, the local property tax rates (homestead and non-homestead) will be prepared for approval at the next regular meeting.
- c. Municipal Building Basement.** Manager Schulz said DuBois & King is working on plans to address structural problems in the building's lower level. They estimate it will cost about \$20,000 to fix the problems. Once the plans are completed, Manager Schulz will seek quotes from qualified contractors.
- d. Central Street Sidewalk Project, etc.** Manager Schulz said the Highway Department crew are continuing to work on the street by removing the last of the deteriorating sidewalk on its east side. All the work is on schedule and the contractor that will be installing new sidewalk on the lower section of the street (by its intersection with Wall Street) will be here next week. The road itself will be repaved later this summer. In coming weeks, the Highway Department crew also will be clearing roadsides where vegetation is spilling onto the road. This is especially bad on Union Brook Road. Chair Maxwell asked there were plans to limit Central Street on-street parking to only one side of the road after all the work is completed. Manager Schulz said that has not been considered. Board member Petty noted this is a fairly wide street so parking on both sides is not a problem.

- e. **Memorial Park Pool.** Manager Schulz said the municipal pool is up and running. Unlike in many communities nationwide, our pool has a full complement of lifeguards and will maintain its normal operating hours this summer. Chair Maxwell lauded the efforts of the pool staff in keeping this a well-run operation.
- f. **Stony Brook Road Bridge Repair Project.** Manager Schulz said the project has been completed and there have been many compliments for the results. He added that some paving will be done on part of this road later this summer.

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

- a. **Northfield Falls Pedestrian Crossing.** Board member Stevens asked if Manager Schulz has heard how the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) is progressing with its study of pedestrian safety in the area of the Falls General Store. Manager Schulz hasn't had an update on this but will check to see if and how the project is moving forward.
- b. **CVFiber Request for Funds.** Board member Morse noted there was a letter in the Select Board packet from Ray Pelletier, who serves as Northfield's delegate to this communications union district. Mr. Pelletier is requesting the municipality consider contributing five percent of its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) local recovery funds to CVFiber in order to extend broadband internet service to the 550 Northfield households now considered underserved. Based on the \$1,900,000 ARPA amount Northfield is receiving, this would be about \$95,000. Mr. Pelletier estimates it would cost about \$800,000 to provide broadband access to these 550 households. He noted Middlesex already has committed \$100,000 of its ARPA funds to CVFiber and other member communities have committed smaller amounts. The Vermont Community Broadband Board will match these contributions up to a total of \$1,500,000. Board member Morse had understood TDS Telecom was planning a fiber optic update in Northfield this year but he now understands this might be delayed as they now are focusing their efforts in Maine. Should this project be further delayed, perhaps the Select Board should consider Mr. Pelletier's request as the only viable option for extending high-speed internet access to the more rural parts of Northfield. Board member Petty suggested Mr. Pelletier could address the Select Board members at a future meeting to provide more information and answer any questions about this. Chair Maxwell thought this was a good idea. He was under the impression only state and/or federal funds would be used to address this problem. Board member Morse also understands CVFiber will need a local site, most likely located on municipal property, to house its equipment. Manager Schulz will contact Mr. Pelletier regarding his availability for a future meeting.
- c. **Brown Public Library (BPL) Summer Reading Program.** Board member Morse noted BPL has a summer reading program that rewards children for reading books over the summer. He asked if it were possible to provide free pool passes as one of the rewards. Board member Petty noted the rewards usually are distributed at the end of summer, by which time the pool will have closed for the season. Perhaps the passes could be given out as mid-summer prizes. This also might be a good way to bring children (and their families) to the pool who hadn't been there before.
- d. **Northfield Gardeners.** Chair Maxwell would like to thank this organization for its good work in planting flowers by the covered bridges, on Depot Square, and other public areas. They do a great job in keeping Northfield beautiful for residents and also for visitors to the community.

**X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).** There was none.

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

The Board adjourned at 7:50 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 Select Board regular meeting of July 12, 2022.