

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of May 9, 2023

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Peter J. DeMasi (Fire Chief), Shannon Palone (Pool Director), Martha Mahan, Tim Swartz, 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.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

- IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None.

V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. Peter J. DeMasi, Fire Chief.** Manager Schulz said he invited Chief DeMasi to attend tonight to provide a general update on the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) and also to discuss a proposed memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Town of Northfield and the Capital Fire Mutual Aid System (CFMAS) regarding the proposed upgrade of the emergency radio system. Chief DeMasi reported first that all is well with the NFD, which currently has twenty-one (21) members. In addition, all NFD equipment and vehicles are up-to-date and performing well. He then stated the proposed upgrade of the regional emergency radio system has been planned for several years as there are severe deficiencies with the current system. For example, there is constant interference from Canadian and other distant radio transmitters that can cause dispatching problems, especially in areas with weak reception. CFMAS did obtain a grant that would fund much if not all of the upgrade costs and now it is beginning the changeover process. Stronger radio reception will immediately benefit NFD and the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS), which use Capital West for their dispatching. There also may be eventual benefits to the Northfield Police Department (NPD) as the State of Vermont is phasing out its free dispatching services over the next few years. That would require NPD to seek another dispatching service and that might be Capital West. Chief DeMasi said this system upgrade would be a great development for the region and, due to the grant received, would come at a reasonable price. Board member Morse asked if the NPD has been included in discussions of this upcoming radio dispatching upgrade. Manager Schulz said NPD John Helfant has been monitoring the situation. The additional cost of contracting with Capital West for NPD dispatching has been estimated at between \$50,000 and \$60,000 per year. Board member Morse said this should be discussed in full when the FY 2024-2025 budget is developed. Chair Maxwell asked about the additional cost for NFD to participate in this upgrade. Chief DeMasi said current NFD radios would have to be reprogrammed but that would be fairly inexpensive. There are no concrete numbers yet regarding other additional costs to participating emergency services. Board member Morse noted that there are plans to store large lithium batteries at the King Street electric substation. He asked if NFD was capable of handling a possible fire involving these batteries. Chief DeMasi said he will research what would be required to respond to such a fire. He said the probable course of action would be to protect the surrounding area while allowing the fire to burn itself out.

Manager Schulz asked what the timeline was for approving the MOU and when information about the upgrade's long-term costs would be available. Chief DeMasi said the CFMAS would be meeting again before the end of the month so more will be known after then. The timeline for approving the MOU would be mid-June. Manager Schulz said that would not be a problem as this matter could be put on the agenda for the first June 2023 regular meeting (06/13/23). Chair Maxwell then thanked Chief DeMasi for providing the department status report and the information about this emergency services radio upgrade.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **April 25, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #21-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #21-23 in the amount of \$489,195.43. Board member Morse noted that of the total warrant amount, \$281,327 represented power purchased by the Northfield Electric Department to be resold later to its customers. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through April 30, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$101,365.49. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of 2023 Northfield VT Local Emergency Management Plan.** Manager Schulz said Vermont municipalities are required to update this document each year. It is reviewed first by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) before it is forwarded to Vermont Emergency Management. It provides a framework for local emergency response by specifying the chain-of-command, providing contact numbers for local officials involved, identifying local vulnerable populations and sheltering locations, etc. Manager Schulz said there have been only minor changes from last year's document, such as the new school superintendent. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the 2023 Northfield VT Local Emergency Management Plan. Board member Morse noted the Northfield Middle/High School was listed as the main sheltering location and asked if they had sufficient cots on hand for overnight stays. Manager Schulz was unsure. It was suggested that the American Red Cross probably would provide them in an emergency. Board member Stevens noted the Highway Department now has two (2) graders so the list of local resources needs to be revised. This change will be made. Board member Petty noted Norwich University (NU) did provide warm sheltering at Plumley Armory this past winter for residents who lost power for extended periods. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Town Forest Stewardship Committee Appointment.** Manager Schulz said the municipality advertised for applicants to fill the two (2) vacant TFSC positions. We have received a letter of interest from Blake Pierson. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to appoint Blake Pierson to the Town Forest Stewardship Committee. It was noted Mr. Pierson already serves on the Planning Commission and the Housing Task Force. Board member Petty confirmed TFSC Chair (Jeremy Whalen) has endorsed Mr. Pierson's appointment. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Housing Task Force Committee Appointments.** Manager Schulz said Michael Krause and Thomas Bright have attended a number of recent Housing Task Force meetings and have asked to be appointed as full members. The other committee members endorsed this at their last meeting (04/28/23). Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Michael Krause and Thomas Bright to the Housing Task Force. In the interest of full transparency, Board member Petty noted Mr. Bright is her father-in-law. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- d. **Memorial Park Pool Schedule & Fees.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members have been provided with an updated pool schedule and fees for their approval. The pool is scheduled to open on Saturday, June 24, 2023, and close on Saturday, August 19, 2023. Pool Director Shannon Palone said the pool is opening a week later this year because of the delayed end of the local school year. She researched what other municipal pools are charging for season and daily passes and found that Northfield's fees are comparable. Therefore, Ms. Palone feels last year's fee amounts should stay the same. She did feel it might be possible to apply for grant funds to cover the extra expense of holding swimming lessons without increasing the amount charged. Chair Maxwell suggested she could work with Economic Development Director Tom Davis on this. It was noted Northfield did receive a state grant that will cover the cost of twenty (20) family season passes. The process for eligible families to participate still needs to be worked out. Board member Morse asked if there is a program to provide free passes to local youth who participate in summer reading programs. Ms. Palone confirmed the Brown Public Library (BPL) does have a program that rewards children with free daily passes after they read a certain number of books. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the proposed Memorial Park Pool Schedule & Fees for 2023 as presented. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- e. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).** Chair Maxwell said at the last regular meeting (04/25/23), the Select Board members discussed the development of a scoring plan (i.e., "matrix") that could be used in deciding how the \$1,393,600 in undesignated local ARPA funds should be spent. This decision needs to be made by December 31, 2024, and the funds expended within the following two (2) years. Board member Shernock and her ARPA Funds Outreach Committee held a series of public meetings last year to gauge local opinion and the feedback received is an important factor in the decision making process. Chair Maxwell then asked the Select Board members for their suggestions.

Board member Morse said the first two (2) public forum hosted by the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD), known as "Northfield: Our Common Future," has produced four (4) future priorities: (1) Develop a Community Center; (2) Improve Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety; (3) Create a Plan for Downtown Development and Housing; and (4) Build a Norwich University/Northfield Partnership Council. At the upcoming third and last of these forums (05/16/23), task forces will be formed to "build action plans and identify resources to move this work forward." Board member Morse felt the Select Board members need to determine how ARPA funds could be used to achieve these desired goals. Board member Petty thought it might be prudent to wait to see these action plans before developing strategies. Board member Morse felt the downtown development and housing initiatives would be greatly assisted by upgrading the utility lines in the Freight Yard Way region, which is an underdeveloped area in the downtown area. Board member Morse also looks forward to seeing the action plan for this goal.

Board member Morse then brought up a suggestion he made at a previous meeting, which would be to improve local recreational opportunities while attracting visitors to the community by upgrading the municipal park restrooms and the pool bathhouse to make them accessible year round. Board member Morse felt if the bathhouse was made available 24/7 with shower facilities, etc., that would be attractive to RV users and campers visiting Northfield. In addition, if the public restrooms were winterized, they could be used by locals enjoying winter activities at the parks including the proposed ice rink at Memorial Park. This might include installing a key card system. Manager Schulz believes there are existing funds in the Grounds/ Parks/Facilities Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget to accomplish this so ARPA funds probably wouldn't be needed for this.

Board member Shernock has created a scoring system for the previously distributed list of possible ARPA fund projects, which she distributed to the other Select Board members. She felt the projects favored locally (as determined by public feedback) should be considered priorities. Board member Shernock noted this feedback indicated Northfield residents favored projects that would provide maximized benefits to the community; they preferred a number of smaller projects rather than a few large projects; etc. She also felt those who propose using ARPA funds for specific projects should be able to demonstrate how the end results would conform to the community goals listed in the approved Town Plan (2020), the Northfield Area Wide Plan (2016), the VCRD Final Report from the previous community visit (2002); and the action plans that will result from the current VCRD community visit. The other Select Board members were grateful for the scoring sheet as that will be very helpful in the decision-making process.

Board member Stevens has a list of possible ARPA funds uses with suggested dollar amounts. This includes installing new sidewalks (\$500,000); establishing a community center (\$500,000); redesigning and rehabilitating the Community Room (\$100,000); purchasing new equipment to improve the audio/video for hybrid public meetings (\$10,000); using ARPA funds as local match monies for grant applications (\$250,000); and improving handicapped access to the municipal pool and other public facilities (\$50,000). Board member Stevens said the amounts suggested are not set in stone and certainly could be revised if warranted.

Board member Petty would like to have a list of possible ARPA fund uses developed that would have relatively firm cost estimates. This process would be more difficult with overarching community goals like more affordable and available local housing, childcare, etc. She is unsure whether a scoring system or a more open-ended evaluation process should be employed. Board member Petty felt the most important consideration should be whether the ARPA funded project would benefit a wide range of Northfield residents and would have long-lasting and positive results for the community.

Chair Maxwell felt anyone proposing ARPA funds for a pet project should be able to provide some level of credibility by including accurate cost estimates. Board member Morse felt it would be useful to attach such cost estimates to the recommendations that ultimately come from the VCRD public forums. Chair Maxwell said it can't be assumed that the forum participants expect ARPA funds to be used to achieve the prioritized goals. Perhaps they might be looking into state and federal grant opportunities, local sponsors, etc. Chair Maxwell then asked Manager Schulz to start the process of putting together a scoring matrix with ranked options to be discussed at the next regular meeting (05/23/23). Board member Petty felt it was important to share the Select Board members' decision-making process with residents so they will be able to understand why some proposals will be ultimately chosen over others that also might have some public support.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation and CSO Elimination Project.** Manager Schulz has heard from the project contractor (Courtland Construction Corporation) that they will restart this project within the next couple of weeks. This will mean new stormwater lines, basins, etc. A new road base will be laid down so the affected road sections can be properly repaved at the end of the project. The work on South Main Street should be completed by July 1, 2023, but work on the side streets (i.e., Prospect Street, Highland Avenue, etc.) probably will take longer.
- b. Upcoming Highway Projects.** Manager Schulz said the contractor for painting the crosswalks, etc. has begun work and probably will be finished by next week. A more lasting material will be used this time that is a little more expensive but will provide better results. In addition, the contracted street sweeping should start by the end of this week. The Highway graders also are operating regularly on the backroads now that they have dried up.
- c. Green Up Day 2023.** Manager Schulz understands this year's Green Up Day was very successful. The Highway Department has picked up a good number of filled green trash bags along the roadsides in addition to (unfortunately) over eighty (80) tires. Board member Morse was very grateful for all the work the local volunteers performed. Chair Maxwell was also impressed by the number of filled green trash bags while driving through town. Although the amount of waste annually deposited on the roads is disappointing, he saw it as very encouraging that the State of Vermont sets aside the first Saturday in May every year for this public cleanup and so many Northfield residents choose to participate.
- d. Hydrant Flushing.** Manager Schulz noted the semiannual hydrant flushing will be held next week starting on Monday (05/15/23) and finishing by Friday (05/19/23). Notices have been put on the municipal website, Front Porch Forum, and Trans-Video. The Water/Sewer crew will try to be extra careful this year about releasing the water onto private lawns, etc.
- e. Municipal Building Repairs.** Manager Schulz said the project contractor will be starting work in the basement next week. CERV has been informed of this as they run their clothing shelf there on Wednesday and Saturday mornings.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Municipal Pool Handicapped Parking.** Board member Shernock noted Board member Stevens had included improved handicapped access to the pool as one of his ARPA fund priorities. She asked if something could be done this summer to improve handicapped parking there. Manager Schulz will look into this. He noted inside the pool itself is very handicapped accessible. Board member Shernock thought perhaps a professional evaluation of ADA compliance is needed.
- b. Sunny Brook Bridge.** Board member Stevens (and the other board members) received by email the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) inspection report on Bridge #56, which crosses over Sunny Brook. He was unsure where this was located. Manager Schulz said the bridge is on a short road off Vermont Route 12 in South Northfield. He and Highway Foreman Trent Tucker plan to view the bridge themselves and get estimates for the repairs VTrans recommended. Chair Maxwell said more information regarding this bridge is definitely needed.

- c. **Housing Task Force (HTF) update.** Board member Petty is a member of this committee that meets monthly and she reported HTF now is engaged in public advocacy. The members have produced a letter of support for passage (with amendments) of legislation (S.100) that "proposes to increase the supply of affordable housing in this State, promote homeownership, and broaden housing opportunities for Vermonters." This would include loosening of some current Act 250 restrictions. If this bill becomes law, Board member Petty said there would be very positive benefits to the Northfield community.
- d. **Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee update.** Board member Petty is also a member of this committee and she said much work has been done with a wayfinding project that DuBois & King has been contracted to perform. This project will result in new Town Forest trail maps, new signage leading to and along the trail system, etc. Another current project is a recreation equipment lending library that will be located in the Brown Public Library. This includes snowshoes, hiking poles, binoculars, etc.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Martha Mahan: Freight Yard Way Waterline Upgrade Request.** Ms. Mahan provided a written request to the Select Board members that the waterline leading to her and other private properties on Freight Yard Way be upgraded at public expense in the interest of future economic development. As the Select Board members have just received this request, Ms. Mahan has asked to be put on the agenda for the next regular meeting (05/23/23) so there can be a full and informed discussion of this matter. Board member Morse said he suggested this upgrade as a possible ARPA funded project earlier this evening (when Ms. Mahan was not present). There were some questions from the Select Board members regarding the expected cost of this project and related issues that Manager Schulz will review before the next meeting. There also was the question of the exact location when a property owner becomes responsible for utility line maintenance. Manager Schulz stated the current water ordinance specifies the municipality has ownership only up to the curbside. After that, it is the property owner's sole responsibility.

XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a legal matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:25 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:42 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of May 23, 2023.