

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of March 8, 2022**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board members Julie H. Goodrich, K. David Maxwell, Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Gary LaRoche (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Brian Baker (Dufresne Group), Naomi Johnson (Dufresne Group), Carolyn Stevens, Kaitlyn Keating, Bonnie Kirn Donahue, Donald Doyon, Carlos Pinkham, and Elroy Hill.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Participants had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

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

III. ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING OF THE SELECT BOARD

- a. Election of Chair.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to appoint K. David Maxwell as Chair. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Maxwell abstaining.**
- b. Election of Vice-Chair.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Julie H. Goodrich as Vice-Chair. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Goodrich abstaining.**
- c. Select Board Subcommittee Assignments.** Without objection, the subcommittee assignments were set as follows: **Budget and Financial Review** (Board members Goodrich and Morse); **Town Buildings & Energy** (Board members Goodrich and Stevens); **Economic Development** (Board members Petty and Morse); **Norwich University** (Board members Maxwell and Stevens); **Highway Planning & Project Oversight** (Board members Maxwell and Stevens); **Public Safety Oversight & Planning** (Board members Goodrich and Petty); **Labor Agreement & Bargaining** (Board members Goodrich and Maxwell); and **Policy Review** (Board members Morse and Stevens). In addition, Board member Stevens will serve as the Select Board's representative on the Water & Wastewater Utility Commission and Board member Morse as the Select Board's representative on the Electric Utility Commission. Board member Petty and Manager Schulz will serve as Northfield's representatives to the Mountain Alliance. Stephen Fitzhugh will be Northfield's representative to Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) and Manager Schulz will serve as the alternate representative.
- d. Regular Meeting Schedule (Dates, Time, and Location).** The Select Board continue to meet on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Room located downstairs in the Brown Public Library. These meetings also will have remote meeting capability for the time being.
- e. Designation of Official Newspapers, Websites, etc.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to designate the *Northfield News* as the municipality's official newspaper for legal notices, advertisements, etc. The social media website Front Porch Forum will be the official website to post meeting agendas, announcements, etc. The *Times Argus* will be used as a secondary official newspaper when needed. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

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

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

VI. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. Liquor License Renewals**
- 1. Depot Square Pizzeria.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- 2. Dollar General.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **February 22, 2022 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Goodrich had a minor correction. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Petty abstaining.**

VIII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #17-22.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #17-22 in the amount of \$1,629,735.47. Board member Stevens saw additional repair bills for the 2014 Northfield Police Department (NPD) cruiser. Manager Schulz noted this often-troubled vehicle is scheduled for replacement in the next fiscal year and he has asked NPD Chief John Helfant to limit the cost of any of its future repairs to \$300. Board member Stevens noted a \$207.12 payment to a Stevens Business Services (no relation). Manager Schulz said this is a collection agency seeking payment of delinquent ambulance bills in return for a percentage of the monies received. Board member Stevens saw a payment involving "Radio Shack," which he thought was a defunct business. Manager Schulz said this payment had nothing to do with this particular business but rather was the cost of providing power to the structure located by the municipal radio tower at the top of Turkey Hill. Board member Stevens noted a number of repairs bills for the John Deere snow blower. Manager Schulz said this piece of equipment is shared by the utility departments so any repair bill is split between the water, sewer, and electric departments. Chair Maxwell would like it noted that of the total warrant amount, \$1,166,900 represents property tax funds collected by the municipality and then forwarded to the Paine Mountain School District. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Warrant #17-22A.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #17-22A in the amount of \$15,419.13. Manager Schulz noted this was the last payment on an old bank note. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through February 20, 2022.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$105,333.54. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IX. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said at the January 25, 2022 Select Board meeting there was a presentation from Gary LaRoche, who is the Structures Project Manager for the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans). At that meeting, Mr. LaRoche provided the Select Board members with several options regarding the conceptual design of the replacement bridge. Given the project's proposed timeline, VTrans would like the Select Board members to now decide on the replacement bridge design and the lighting options so that the project can move forward. Manager Schulz said public comment was sought after this meeting with the presentation made available on the municipal website (www.northfield-vt.gov) as well as physical displays placed in the Municipal Building and Brown Public Library. He said several comments were received and the consensus was to keep the current lighting design on the new bridge. There also was a preference for the sample bridge designs known as "Concrete Railing with Windows" and the "Concrete Combination Bridge Railing." These designs are also known, respectively, as the "Woodstock" and "Chelsea" designs as there were sample pictures in the presentation of bridges in those Vermont communities based on those designs. There also was public preference for the new bridge having sidewalks on both sides along with dedicated bicycle lanes. Mr. LaRoche is present again tonight to answer any questions. Board member Petty was not a Select Board member when the presentation was held but has reviewed the documentation since then. She hopes the Select Board members will choose a bridge design that looks good and will provide users with a good view of the Dog River below. Board member Petty also would like the bridge's lighting structures to match those installed on and around Depot Square while providing the ability to display informational banners. Board members Goodrich, Morse, and Stevens then stated their preference for the Woodstock design. Chair Maxwell asked if a decision was required tonight. Manager Schulz said it would be good to move forward if there is a Select Board consensus regarding the bridge design and lighting. If there is not, the decision could be delayed to a future meeting.

Board member Petty asked about the price differential between the Woodstock and Chelsea bridge designs. Mr. LaRoche said the Woodstock design, since it is all concrete, would be more expensive. However, the extra cost would be absorbed into the overall project costs, of which VTrans would be paying ninety-five percent (95%). Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize moving forward on the Main Street Bridge Replacement Project with the new bridge based on the Concrete Railing with Windows a.k.a. "Woodstock" design with bridge lighting fixtures to match those located on Depot Square. Mr. LaRoche noted that the new bridge will be slightly longer than the current one and the light fixtures will be installed at the bridge ends. Chair Maxwell asked if that would provide sufficient illumination for drivers and pedestrians. Mr. LaRoche is not an expert on bridge lighting but he will check with VTrans employees who are. If the proposed lighting is deemed insufficient, additional light fixtures could be added to the structure. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation/CSO Elimination Project.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members are being asked tonight to authorize him to work with this project's engineers on moving forward to the next stage, which is soliciting bids for the construction phase. He added that the project is fully engineered and the State of Vermont will fully fund it. There had been some discussion at a previous Select Board meeting of perhaps delaying this project so that it could be done in conjunction with a proposed water main replacement project in the same area. However, Manager Schulz said the engineers do not favor any further delay since the project funding is now secure and in place. Project engineers Brian Baker and Naomi Johnson from Dufresne Group are present to answer any questions. Ms. Johnson said if the Select Board members provide authorization tonight, the project will be put out to bid right away with an expected bid opening in mid-April 2022. Mr. Baker confirmed that if this timeline is followed, the project could be completed this year. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to move forward on the South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation/CSO Elimination Project and authorize Manager Schulz to work with the project engineers on any needed documentation, etc. Board member Morse believes that Manager Schulz already has the authority to go out to bid on such projects that have been fully reviewed by the Select Board members. He would like this philosophy followed in future so that other potential projects don't face similar delays. Manager Schulz said he understood this line of thinking but felt it best to get this authorization on the record as there had been that aforementioned discussion of perhaps delaying this project to another time. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Economic Development Director Position.** Manager Schulz provided a brief recap of the situation with this vacant position. At their regular meeting of November 9, 2021, the Select Board members authorized making this formerly part-time position a full-time one with benefits. The new full-time position was advertised widely and there were five (5) applications received by the December 23, 2021 deadline. Unfortunately, both of the two (2) final candidates chose to withdraw from consideration once they were informed of the proposed annual salary (\$47,000) for the position. The Economic Development Committee has held meetings since then and the general consensus is that the annual salary should be increased to \$65,000 using American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds to make up any budget shortfall. Given that the intention in filling this position is to assist local economic development, Manager Schulz believes this would be an acceptable use of ARPA funds. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to increase the proposed annual salary for the full-time Economic Development Director position to \$65,000 with full benefits. Board member Goodrich is displeased with this proposal as the creation of this position was authorized by voters at the 2020 Town Meeting with the understanding that this would be a part-time position with an estimated salary set at \$31,464 per year. She doesn't feel it appropriate to change this into a full-time position with a much higher salary without new voter authorization. Board member Goodrich understands federal ARPA money will be used for the additional cost but whatever the source, this is still taxpayer money. She opposes this change in part due to the apparent lack of government transparency.

Board member Morse understands this concern but said the situation has changed significantly with the availability of ARPA funds to partially fund the position and the inability of the municipality to fill this position since the former Economic Development Director (Jon Ignatowski) had to resign due to health concerns. It has become clear that qualified candidates with necessary education and experience will not work on this part-time or accept insufficient compensation for a full-time position. He also felt putting this matter on the agenda and holding this public vote does show governmental transparency. Board member Morse feels having an Economic Development Director in place at this crucial time is a necessity and cannot see any alternative to the pay rise. Board member Goodrich asked if this would be a one-year trial or a permanent hire. Board member Morse felt a single year would be an insufficient trial period so this would be a permanent hire. Board member Goodrich thought it would be necessary to determine how this position would be budgeted after the ARPA funds are no longer available. She also did not believe there was sufficient warning on the posted agenda that the Select Board members were considering such a significant salary increase.

Chair Maxwell is willing to support this salary increase as a necessary investment in the economic future of Northfield, which would require hiring the best person available for our Economic Development Director. He believes the money spent on that person's salary and benefits would be well spent as there probably would be long-term fiscal benefits. The ARPA funds don't have to be totally spent until the end of 2026 so there is sufficient time to determine how to budget this position in future. Chair Maxwell would like the salary amount included in the revised advertisement for this position in order to attract a good number of well-qualified applicants. He asked if action on this matter should be delayed so that the proposed salary increase can be specified on the next meeting agenda. Board member Morse doesn't feel that is needed. Tonight's agenda stated that the "Economic Development Director Position" would be discussed and the salary requirements for the position is a valid component of that discussion. Board member Petty recognizes Board member Goodrich's concerns regarding the salary increase, the process taken to approve it, etc. but she also feels there are special circumstances at this time with the large amount of local ARPA funds available for investment into this community. Having an Economic Development Director here is vital to making sure these funds are invested wisely. Board member Stevens agrees that Northfield does need an Economic Development Director at this important time. Board member Goodrich said she is not disputing the importance of this position but felt she had to draw the line at such a salary increase without voter authorization. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Goodrich voting in opposition.**

- d. **Select Board Letter to USPS Postmaster General.** Board member Morse recently learned that it is current USPS policy to prohibit postal employees from informing members of the public of possible interruptions in mail and/or package deliveries due to staff shortages, etc. He has drafted a letter to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy that asks that this policy be overturned in order to allow better communication between USPS employees and the general public. Board member Morse is asking that the other Select Board members approve and sign this as a joint letter from the Northfield Select Board. Board member Petty does not oppose sending this letter as a message but she doubts it will have much impact on the situation. She also is concerned about possible negative impacts on our local postal carriers. Board member Morse said it was from our local postal carriers that he learned of this prohibition. He also doubts that the letter will reach Postmaster General DeJoy's own desk but he felt it was important to make the effort. Both Board member Goodrich and Board member Stevens had some suggested changes to the original draft letter. Chair Maxwell felt one letter of this nature probably won't make too much of a difference but problems with rural delivery is a state-wide problem. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and sign the letter drafted by Board member Morse including the proposed revisions from the other Select Board members. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- e. **Certification of Compliance of Town Road and Bridge Standards & Network Inventory.** Manager Schulz said VTrans requires annual certification from municipalities that their local road and bridge standards as well as network inventory meet or exceed state requirements. He noted the current Northfield standards were approved in July 2019 so they probably will need to be reviewed and perhaps revised later this year. However, they should be sufficient for this year's certification. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the Certificate of Compliance for Town Road and Bridge Standards & Network Standards. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- f. **Appointment of Lister.** Included in the packets was a memorandum from Town Clerk Kim Pedley stating it was discovered after last week's Town Meeting vote that the leading vote getter for the Board of Lister position (Lauren Heath) was not a registered voter in Northfield at the time of election. Town Clerk Pedley contacted the State's Director of Elections (Will Senning) who informed her that the election was thereby voided. The possible solutions to this would be to hold a new election for this position, which would be cost-prohibitive, or to have the Select Board appoint Ms. Heath or another applicant to serve in the position until the 2023 Town Meeting. Although she did become a registered voter in the past week, Ms. Heath now has decided against serving as a Lister. The current recommendation is that the vacancy on the Board of Listers be advertised and the Select Board members appoint a suitable applicant at a future meeting. There was no objection to this proposed course of action.
- g. **Appointment of Electric Utility Commissioner and Water/Wastewater Commissioner.** Manager Schulz said there was another glitch in last week's election in that the names of the candidates running unopposed for positions on Northfield's two (2) utility commissions were transposed. The Director of Elections was contacted and it was his opinion that since the races were unopposed, it would be acceptable for the Select Board members to make the correct assignments by appointment tonight. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Dennis Donahue as Electric Utility Commissioner. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Stephen Fitzhugh as Water/Wastewater Commissioner. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

X. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Northfield Transfer Station & Recycling Depot.** Manager Schulz said Casella Waste Systems is now operating the facility on behalf of the municipality as the previous operators (All Clean Waste Systems) declined to extend their contract. Manager Schulz said this was an interim agreement as he had wished to avoid an interruption of service at the Transfer Station. Casella would like to negotiate a five (5) year contract and Manager Schulz will be meeting with their representatives tomorrow morning to start the dialogue. The facility's hours of operation will remain the same (Wednesdays and Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.). The fee structure for trash disposal, recycling, etc. is largely the same as before though customers have noted some differences.
- b. **FY 2022/2023 Utility Budgets.** Manager Schulz said the Utility Commissioners have started the process of drafting the municipal water, sewer, and electric department budgets for the next fiscal year. The current timeline is to present the proposed budgets to the Select Board in May so that the water and sewer rates for FY 2022/2023 can be approved in June.
- c. **Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) Local Visit.** Manager Schulz has been informed that there will be a recommendation to schedule a Northfield Local Visit when VCRD holds its next executive meeting. If approved, the Local Visit would be held here in late 2022 or early 2023.

Board member Goodrich left the meeting at this time.

XI. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **New Select Board Member.** The other Select Board members welcomed Board member Petty to the board and wished her well. Board member Petty is glad to serve with her new colleagues.

- b. Local Impact of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine.** Board member Morse hopes that the Northfield community will be able to adapt to the disruptions caused by this war, which will include much higher fuel costs in coming months. Some residents may need to adjust to these higher costs through carpooling, using public transportation, etc.
- c. Common Water Fountain.** Board member Stevens said Norwich University (NU) engineering students are looking into various options to redesign the water fountain located on the Common. He believes there are working on three (3) different designs, which include reconfiguring the current fountain to recirculate water, etc.; installing a new, more efficient fountain; or installing a fixture with no fountain but instead shoots water directly into the area at several ground-level openings. The latter is known as a “Children’s Fountain” and Northfield resident Bonnie Chouinard has volunteered to pay for its installation. Board member Morse thought this was a very generous offer. Board member Stevens said the NU students will present their designs for Select Board review and public input within the next couple months.
- d. Stony Brook Road Potholes.** Board member Stevens felt the cold patching of the large road holes near the Stony Brook Bridge is not working very well. Manager Schulz said the Highway Department recently received some new patching material from out of state that has fixed some but not all the problem spots. Board member Morse noted the bridge itself will be replaced later this year so he would not want to spend too much to fix this problem. However, some of these holes have become difficult to negotiate craters so he would like some temporary solution.
- e. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Outreach Committee.** Chair Maxwell said this committee has been meeting remotely on Friday evenings and the general public certainly is invited to participate. Agendas including remote access information are posted on the municipal website and on Front Porch Forum.

XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Select Board In-Person Attendance.** Elroy Hill noted that only three (3) of the five (5) Select Board members were able to attend tonight’s meeting in person. He is hoping that it will not be too long before all five will be able to be here at the same time.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:40 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 were approved at the regular Select Board regular meeting of March 22, 2022.