

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of November 26, 2024**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse (9:05 p.m.), Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Andrew Bachand (Kittell Branagan & Sargent), Derek Hungerford (Kittell Branagan & Sargent), Mary Nadon Scott (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Tim Swartz (AWPS Task Force), Dan Anderson (AWPS Task Force), Carolyn Stevens (AWPS Task Force), Kaitlyn Keating (AWPS Task Force/NCDN), Janan Hamm, Susan Stillinger, and Elroy C. Hill.

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

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those present were asked to join the Select Board members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Andrew Bachand and Derek Hungerford, Kittell Branagan & Sargent (KBS): FY 2023/2024 Financial Audit Reports.** Manager Schulz noted that this is the time of year when the outside auditing firm that reviews the municipality's financial statements for the previous year provides a written and oral report on its findings. Based on his reading of the written report, Manager Schulz said there were no negative findings. Mr. Bachand, a KBS Co-Managing Shareholder, confirmed this fact. Mr. Hungerford, a KBS Manager, stated the audit produced an unmodified or "clean" opinion, which is the best result that you can achieve. He said this was a true testament to Finance Director Laurie Baroffio and her Accounting Department staff. Mr. Hungerford said due to their hard work and diligence throughout the year, the auditing process went as smoothly and streamlined this year as it has in previous years. He then went through the municipality's financial statements briefly, noting that the Town General and utility department accounts are operating very well with a favorable year-end balance of \$215,738 of actual spending compared to budget projections. Mr. Hungerford stated that \$1,400,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds remain unspent but noted that these funds only need to be obligated by the end of this year. All ARPA funds must be completely expended by the end of 2026. Mr. Hungerford then asked if the Select Board members had any questions regarding the audit report. Board members Shernock, Stevens, and Petty had no specific questions but all were grateful for the positive comments regarding the work performance of Ms. Baroffio and her staff. Chair Maxwell also was very appreciative of their efforts. He then noted that the Select Board members have recently discussed the topic of year-end budget surpluses and would like to know what would be considered proper or excessive amounts. Mr. Bachard said that municipalities should have healthy unassigned budget balances due to the possibility of unexpected but necessary emergency expenditures that might otherwise result in deficit spending. He did add that if the surplus funds end up "sitting around" unused for a considerable amount of time, it might be wise to consider adjusting upcoming local property tax rates. Mr. Bachard had no firm number for the proper amount of year-end surplus funds but warned that it is not wise to try cutting the anticipated amount significantly as deficit spending is a much less desirable outcome. Chair Maxwell believes the municipality has done a tremendous job on its budget process and that there have only been a couple of years recently where unanticipated spending led to concerns about the possibility of deficit spending. Mr. Hungerford said there are many uncertain factors in Vermont, especially the unpredictable severity of its winters, that made it preferable to keep a healthy surplus amount within reason. Mr. Bachard agreed that municipalities don't want to face the possibility of deficit spending due to an unexpectedly bad winter. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Bachard and Mr. Hungerford for providing a very favorable report regarding the municipality's finances.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. November 12, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the minutes. Board member Shernock had a correction. **Motion to approve the revised minutes passed 4-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #10-25 & 10-25A-D.** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #10-25 & 10-25A-D in the amount of \$137,212.15. Board member Stevens asked about a payment for paving work on Cox Brook Road. Manager Schulz said the work was actually done on Jerry Road, which is located off Cox Brook Road and had suffered damage during the flooding rainstorm this past July. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through November 10, 2024.** Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$119,987.28. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell said that a new ARPA fund request has been received from management. Manager Schulz said he sent out RFPs to hire an architect to redesign the pool bathhouse. \$22,000 in ARPA funds had been authorized for this purpose but the bids received exceeded that amount. Manager Schulz would like another \$14,400 in ARPA funds for this project as the resulting \$36,400 would match the low bid amount by a qualified architectural firm. This action would reduce the amount of unallocated ARPA funds in the ARPA Fund Allocation Resolution. Manager Schulz felt approval of the resolution should be postponed until the next regular meeting (12/10/24) so that this and other possible fund reductions can be included. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to authorize an additional \$14,400 in ARPA funds in order to engage an architect to redesign the pool bathhouse. Board member Shernock asked why the bids were so much higher than anticipated. Manager Schulz said the project probably will require the architect(s) to conduct onsite assessments, hold meetings with local interests, etc. and that will add to the project expense. He added that the low bidder does seem to be very well qualified and should produce proper workplans in a timely manner. Board member Petty supports the bathhouse redesign project but has concerns whether such cost overruns will become part of the overall project. She does hope outside funding, i.e. grant funds, will become available for the actual construction work. Board member Petty hopes such renovations will lead to increased usage of the municipal pool as this is a major local resource but is currently underutilized. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

Board member Petty said she had asked previously about some ARPA fund-awarded projects that still don't seem to be fully allocated through either the funds being fully spent, having a work contract in place, etc. This includes the \$25,000 allocated to the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee in order to complete the first phase of its signage project. Ms. Baroffio said the final invoices for this project have not yet been received and she would rather make sure all the grant funds are expended first before using any of the ARPA funds. Otherwise, those unspent grant funds would have to be returned to the state. Ms. Baroffio added that since the intent of the aforementioned resolution is to redesignate ARPA funds as Town General surplus funds, any remaining payments for the signage project could come from surplus at a later date. Board member Petty said the Select Board members have been considering the request from Economic Development Director (EDD) Tom Davis to allocate \$200,000 in ARPA funds to be used for local match funds for future grant applications. She asked if the income interest generated from banking the ARPA funds could be used for this purpose as those funds aren't subject to the same guidelines as regular ARPA funds. Ms. Baroffio said that was a possibility and there could be a discussion at the upcoming budget meetings of setting up a voter-approved reserve fund for this purpose. She added that the interest income amount will not be include in the resolution as there is no deadline for designating those funds.

Chair Maxwell looks forward to this discussion and warned about defining too narrowly how the monies in this reserve funds can be used. If the Select Board members decide at some time to use these funds for another purpose, that would require another authorization from voters. Board member Petty thought the fund reserve could be specified as for local economic development, which might include local match funds for grant applications but not limited to just that purpose. Ms. Baroffio will review the guidelines for setting up such reserve funds and determine the best course of action. As for the ARPA Fund Allocation Resolution, it was noted that Board member Morse has asked that an explanatory document be produced that would explain to Northfield residents how and why the undesignated ARPA funds will be converted into Town General surplus funds. This would include some indication of how these reallocated funds would be used in future. Manager Schulz said he could include this explanation in his departmental report in the next Town Report.

Ms. Baroffio noted that once the ARPA funds have been thus reallocated, they will no longer be considered ARPA funds but will be treated like any other surplus funds in the Town General budget. The exact amount of these surplus funds would be unknown until the current fiscal year ends on June 30, 2025 and its financial statements audited. Those surplus funds could be used to fund various projects in the FY 2026-2027 municipal budget and/or used to lower the local property tax rate. Ms. Baroffio said the aforementioned reserve fund could be set up and voter-authorized at the 2025 Town Meeting.

- b. Approval of ARPA Fund Allocation Resolution.** As indicated above, action on this item has been tabled until the next regular meeting.
- c. Review of Select Board Goals (Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term).** The list of these goals were last reviewed in early September and Chair Maxwell would like to see which goals are on track and which require additional attention at this time.

The list of **Annual Goals/Activities** and updates is as follows:

Open Meeting Law Training. Chair Maxwell said all local board, commission, and committee members are encouraged to participate in Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) Open Meeting Law training sessions whenever they become available.

DEI Training. Manager Schulz said grant funds have been received to cover the cost of these training sessions. The Select Board members would prefer that this be in-person training rather than online training as the latter is more effective.

Honor Volunteers Annually. There are plans to select the first volunteers thus honored by the municipality over the next couple of months so that this public recognition can be included in the next Town Report.

Joint Meetings with School Board and others. Chair Maxwell stated that he has invited members of the Paine Mountain School Board to attend the next regular meeting in order to provide an update on their recent activities and future plans.

State Representative Updates. Chair Maxwell also has invited Northfield's state representatives to attend the next regular meeting.

Review and Update Municipal Policies and Ordinances. It was noted that the update of the Employee Personnel Policies is nearly complete. Manager Schulz was asked to forward the latest draft to the VLCT to determine whether its provisions remain in compliance with state law.

Northfield Representation on the CVRPC (Transportation Advisory Committee) TAC. It was noted that EDD Tom Davis now serves as Northfield's representative on this committee.

Update Employee Succession Plan. Chair Maxwell would like a copy of the updated plan in the next Select Board meeting packet.

Maintain Electronic Tickler File. It was noted that an updated tickler file is included in every Select Board meeting packet.

Marketing of Town Parks, Pool, and Trail Events. Chair Maxwell felt it was necessary to develop a strong marketing plan for the municipality's outdoor recreation resources. He suggested that perhaps EDD Davis could assist with this effort. Board member Petty thought such marketing could be added to the list of EDD goals and expectations. Chair Maxwell said this might require an adjustment of the EDD job description. Board member Petty will provide a written summary of how this marketing program should be conducted.

The list of **Short-Term Goals (16 months)** and updates is as follows:

Subcommittee Reclassification & Refine Duties. Chair Maxwell would like the various Select Board Subcommittees reviewed so that each have properly defined and not overlapping responsibilities. He would like this review completed within the next year.

Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Improvements. Board member Shernock reported that this work has been completed so this item may be removed from the list.

Rehabilitation of Town Common and Fountain. Chair Maxwell said the engineering firm DuBois & King has provided a rehabilitation plan for the Town Common based on local feedback. The Select Board members will need to determine how to fund this project, whether it should be accomplished in phases, etc.

Address Municipal Building Deferred Maintenance Issues. Manager Schulz said the grant application to provide funds for building upgrades was not successful. Chair Maxwell would like short- and long-term plans established for this building. He felt this has been an ongoing issue for several years. It was noted that the building's restrooms have been upgraded fairly recently but it was felt a more comprehensive upgrade plan was needed.

Refine Town Policy for Road Discontinuance. Manager Schulz noted an updated policy was adopted a couple of years ago (03/28/23) but perhaps this matter should be revisited in case the process can be further streamlined. This would include facilitating the process for discontinuing a one-house road when ownership of the sole abode changes.

Purchase Emergency Generators for Municipal Facilities. Manager Schulz noted the generators for the Municipal Building, Police Station, Fire Station, and Ambulance Bay have been purchased and should be installed in the coming weeks. Therefore, this item can be removed from the list.

Municipal Park Policy and Maintenance Plan. Manager Schulz said this plan has been revised and completed so this item can be removed from the list.

Explore Options for Screening Junk Vehicles. Manager Schulz felt requiring this screening might require a municipal ordinance so he will review possible options. Board member Petty would prefer that the focus of the screening proposal should be based on public safety rather than just reducing sight pollution.

Complete Engineering for Sewer Line Extension on Vermont Route 12A. Manager Schulz said the State of Vermont has agreed to cover half the costs of updating existing engineering plans for this project. The plans should be completed by mid-2025 so this item also can be removed from the list.

Add Steel/Street Turnabout for Slaughterhouse Covered Bridge. Chair Maxwell would like to discuss this possible project during the upcoming FY 2025-2026 budget meetings.

Add Zoning Categories (Engage Professional). Manager Schulz will be applying for a planning grant so that the local zoning regulations can be further updated with the assistance of a consultant in order to encourage local development. This would include revising the current zoning districts in order to promote creation of additional affordable housing units.

Paint/Clean Bridges – Develop Maintenance Plan. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members received some sticker shock recently when quotes were received for repainting the covered bridges on Cox Brook Road. Chair Maxwell would like this matter discussed further during the budget meetings. Options include creating a new Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) account for this purpose.

Covered Bridge Signage (Aseltine Road). Manager Schulz said this warning signage has been installed so this item can be removed from the list.

Grant Funding for Wall Street Sidewalk Construction. It was noted that the grant application for this project was successful so this item will be removed from the list.

Refine Costs/Sidewalk Needs. It was noted that ARPA funds have been designated for sidewalk work but this matter also can be discussed further during the budget meetings.

Bridge Inventory/Repairs. Manager Schulz has had some additional bridge inspections performed that would supplement the biennial inspections that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) conducts. Chair Maxwell said any identified problems can be addressed during the budget meetings.

Work with Norwich University (NU) on Long-Term PILOT Agreement. Chair Maxwell said negotiations on this matter have been ongoing and there have been some recent positive developments.

Address Housing Issues (Task Force). Chair Maxwell felt EDD Davis should be engaging with these issues since the local housing committee has suspended its activities.

Support Working Groups. This item refers to the various task forces that formed as a result of the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) Community Visit public forums held in early 2023. These include groups focusing on Community Center Development; Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety (AWPS) Improvements; Norwich/Northfield Partnership Development; and Downtown Development and Housing. Chair Maxwell said the AWPS Task Force has been regularly interacting with the Select Board members over the past year and the Select Board members have been largely supportive of their efforts.

Road Surface Management System (RSMS) Update. Manager Schulz said the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) should be able to help with this update, which should be completed by next spring.

Recreation Vision 1-3-5 Year Combined Effort. Chair Maxwell felt we need to find a local recreation champion who would take on this project. This item fits together with the previous ongoing goal to better market Northfield's outdoor recreation opportunities.

Finish Covered Bridge Assessment. Manager Schulz said VTrans will be providing an update on their assessment of the Cox Brook Covered Bridges in a few months.

Create Social Infrastructure/Park Recreation Full-time Position. Chair Maxwell said this possibility also will be explored during the budget meetings.

Pool & Sidewalk ADA Compliance. Chair Maxwell said this is an ongoing concern but some accessibility improvements have been already completed at the Municipal Pool, etc.

Complete Phase I of Riverwalk Project. Board member Shernock said the municipality will need to work with Dollar General in order to adjust their Act 250 permit to allow for the riverside trail to be constructed. Manager Schulz has been in contact with Dollar General about this and for a trail easement. Board member Petty asked if it were possible to build this trail on municipal property alone. Manager Schulz said the steep terrain in the area does require traversing Dollar General property for river access. Access to Dollar General property also will be needed for the upcoming Cross Brothers Dam Removal Project and the Main Street Bridge Replacement Project, which will occur in 2025 and 2026 respectively.

RSMS Training for Highway Subcommittee Members. Manager Schulz will explore the options for such training (VLCT, CVRPC, ?).

Due to the lateness of the hour, Chair Maxwell said the lists of **medium- and long-term goals** will be reviewed at the next regular meeting.

- d. **Ratification of IBEW Union Contract.** Manager Schulz advised that this discussion should take place in executive session as a contract negotiation. There was no objection.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Vine Street Sidewalk Project.** Manager Schulz said three (3) bids were received for this project. He plans to sign an agreement with the low bidder, Northwoods Excavation, in the amount of \$346,900. This bid amount is very close to the engineer's estimate (\$347,500).
- b. **FY 2025-2026 Municipal Budget.** The initial draft of the proposed budget has been completed and soon will be distributed to the Select Board members in anticipation of the upcoming budget meetings. Chair Maxwell noted that the budget meetings for this month have been scheduled for Tuesday, December 3, 2024; Thursday, December 5, 2024; Tuesday, December 10, 2024; Thursday, December 12, 2024; and Tuesday, December 17, 2024. After the holiday break, the budget meetings will recommence in the new year with the first held on Tuesday, January 7, 2025. All these meetings will be held in the Community Room and start at 6:00 p.m.
- c. **Delinquent Property Tax Sale.** Manager Schulz said the delinquent tax sale will take place tomorrow (11/27/24) at 3:00 p.m. in the Municipal Building. Due to recent payments, the number of tax sale parcels has been reduced from the original seven (7) to four (4).
- d. **New Speed Monitoring Devices.** Manager Schulz said new speed monitoring devices have been purchased and once installed roadside will record travelling speeds. This will allow for traffic data to be compiled and analyzed to determine what future action should be taken. The devices are solar-powered and will be relocated around the community on a regular basis.
- e. **Proposed Skateboard Park update.** Manager Schulz said he spoke to Police Chief Pierre Gomez about the possibility of siting a skateboard park behind the Police Station. Chief Gomez did not think this would be a good idea due to the close proximity to the building and the possible impediment of emergency vehicles entering and exiting the Police Station and Fire Station. Alternative sites for the skateboard park will be considered.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Downtown Designation update.** Board member Stevens asked about the status of obtaining Downtown Designation for downtown Northfield. Manager Schulz said EDD Davis has been working on this over the past few months and there is a considerable amount of paperwork involved. There also is a resolution that the Select Board members must approve. Chair Maxwell felt achieving this status should be a priority. Board member Petty agreed as this would open up additional grant opportunities for the municipality.
- b. **Highway Department Winter Weather Preparations.** Board member Stevens asked if the Highway Department crew was ready for winter. Manager Schulz confirmed that was the case and the road salt purchase agreement already is in place.
- c. **Northfield Falls Pedestrian Safety Improvements.** Board member Petty asked about the status of this project. Manager Schulz said VTrans recently did require revised project plans, which delayed the project somewhat. The sidewalk contractor has not started work yet despite earlier promises to have everything completed this month.
- d. **Northfield Common Revitalization Recommendations.** Chair Maxwell would like a recommendation from DuBois & King regarding whether this project could (or should) be completed in phases and how this would best be accomplished. Manager Schulz said this would probably require a new engineering agreement as such a determination was not considered part of the original project scope. Chair Maxwell would like to know if project phasing is possible as that would help determine the budgeting approach for this project.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Tim Swartz, Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety (AWPS) Task Force: Pool Bathhouse Redesign Project.** Mr. Swartz first wanted to thank the Select Board members for their past support for the AWPS Task Force members and for their previous recommendations regarding Brown Public Library improved access, etc. He is disappointed that the architect bids for the pool house renovations were higher than expected and he added that he was willing to work with the chosen architect(s) to hasten the process and reduce costs. Manager Schulz said the architects who bid on the project said the site plans that Mr. Swartz provided were very helpful for their visualization of the proposed project. Mr. Swartz said Pool Director Shannon Palone also provided a number of helpful suggestions.

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss legal matters and contract negotiations with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:05 p.m.

Board member Morse remotely joined the executive session at this time.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 9:45 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize Manager Schulz to sign the four (4) year contract with the IBEW and the union employees. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

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

The Board adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at https://youtu.be/GcdOB_MBWt4

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of December 10, 2024.