

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of July 25, 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, Tom Davis (Economic Development Director), Deb Zuaro (VOREC Grant Implementation Committee/Northfield Conservation Commission [NCC]), Emily Lewis (DuBois & King), Karina Dailey (Vermont Natural Resources Council), Martha Mahan (MJM Properties), Colin Bright (Town Forest Stewardship Committee [TFSC]), Russ Barrett (NCC/TFSC), Jeremy Whalen (NCC/TFSC), Lynn Doney, David Mears, Liam Mears, Matthew Romei, Kimberly Caldwell, Carolyn Stevens, Mary Nadon Scott, Kaelee Bouleris, Gerard LaVarnway, Tim Swartz, Susan Stillinger, Melissa Rutter, Chris Knox, Caden Knox, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:02 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):**

- a. Deb Zuaro (Chair, VOREC Grant Implementation Committee) & Emily Lewis (DuBois & King): Draft Trail Map and Update.** Ms. Zuaro said this presentation is intended to update the community of her committee's activities over the past several months in determining how best to spend the \$122,965 in state grant funds Northfield received last year from the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC). Recently, the committee has been focusing on a mapping and wayfinding project to be produced by the engineering firm DuBois & King, which Emily Lewis is representing tonight. Ms. Zuaro said the committee members have been providing feedback to Ms. Lewis regarding map design, signage configurations, etc. and the results of that interaction are the draft materials to be presented tonight for the review of the Select Board members as well as the community members attending tonight. These draft materials are available for download from the municipal website (<https://www.northfield-vt.gov/select-board>) and are labelled as "Wayfinding Plan," "Northfield Trail Signage," "Town-Wide Map," and "Wayfinding Map." Ms. Lewis confirmed this project has been a collaborative effort and she has been in regular contact with the VOREC committee members and incorporating their suggestions into the draft materials. She first referred to the Wayfinding Map, which focuses on the trail system in the Town Forest (TF) and on Norwich University (NU) property. The trail routes shown have different color schemes and the map inserts provide trail names, distances, etc. Various points of interest along the trail routes, such as the Beaver Pond, Hawk Watch, etc. also are indicated on the map. This map also provides an overview of the Northfield downtown area showing the locations of Memorial Park, Northfield Common, Dog River Park, the Brown Public Library, Norwich University, and the NU Shaw Outdoor Center. When this map has been finalized, hardcopies will be available for public distribution and there also will be an online version available for downloading. Ms. Lewis then discussed the draft Town-Wide Map, which provides a broader view of Northfield from Vermont Route 64 to Northfield Falls. The TF and NU trail systems are indicated but without detail. The map does show available parking areas for accessing the trail system. At the bottom of the map is a rectangular insert that shows the ridgeline as illustrated in the Paine Mountain Guidebook (1997), written by longtime resident William E. Osgood. Other map inserts include a blowup of the downtown area, "Visitor Information," and a map legend that includes icons for parking options. Board member Stevens asked if the public parking area near the Slate Avenue trailhead is indicated. Board member Petty, who also serves on the VOREC committee, said there is a "limited parking" icon indicated on the map and the downtown insert. There is an attempt with this map to encourage Town Forest visitors to park at other locations where off-street parking is more plentiful, such as the Common, the Brown Public Library, and the Shaw Outdoor Center.

Ms. Lewis said a digital version of the finalized map will be provided at the end of the project and if additional parking areas are created, they can be added to the map later. David Mears noted one map insert is designated as a "Placeholder" with information to be added later. He suggested this space could be used to provide suggestions for proper usage of the Town Forest. Board member Petty confirmed that the text to be incorporated in this space is still under consideration. Ms. Lewis then turned to the draft document regarding trail signage, which shows the proposed designs for trail signs as well as directional signage to be situated outside of the Town Forest. She noted that local graphic designer Jason Endres assisted with the signage design, which incorporates the Northfield community logo that he developed for the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN). This logo will be employed on trailway signage located within the Town Forest and the NU logo will be used on signage located on NU property. Informational kiosks located at trailheads and in the downtown area will provide directional information including maps. Ms. Lewis said once the feedback from tonight's presentation has been received, she will begin reaching out to manufacturers regarding costs estimates for the signage, kiosks, etc. She also is researching whether the signage color scheme, etc. will be in compliance with federal Section 508 requirements for full accessibility for those with mobility, hearing, and/or visual impairments.

Ms. Lewis then discussed the draft Wayfinding Plan, which is a two-page map that indicates where the informational signs, trail kiosks, and other signage will be located. This signage distribution has not been finalized so other locations could be added in future. Board member Petty asked what the timeline should be for receiving public feedback. Ms. Lewis felt the next couple weeks would be the best timing so she can start contacting the manufacturers by mid-August. Board member Morse asked how many parking spaces are needed for proper Town Forest access. Board member Petty said the exact amount is still being determined. Trail counters now have been installed in the Town Forest and this will help to calculate trail usage over specific timeframes. Ms. Lewis confirmed that the emphasis to date has been trying to direct Town Forest users to park in the downtown area or by the NU Shaw Outdoor Center rather than on roadsides located near trailheads. Board member Morse noted that the Cheney Farm Reservoir probably will require some rehabilitation work in coming years. As this construction probably will require a nearby staging area for heavy equipment, perhaps that area could be converted to permanent parking spaces on the project's completion. Board member Morse then thanked all those who have worked on this impressive project. Board member Stevens suggested that the parking lot located at the Northfield United Church (across from the Brown Public Library) might be another possible preferred parking location. Mary Nadon Scott felt if this did come to pass, it might be wise to install a crosswalk there for pedestrian safety. Mr. Mears agreed that this was high-quality work. He then suggested that the new mapping and signage should include difficulty ratings for the various trails. Ms. Lewis said this had been discussed earlier but there was no resolution on this. This could be revisited in the near future. Tim Swartz likes the idea of a trail access parking area near the Cheney Farm as this would make it easier for less abled individuals to access the higher elevations of the Town Forest. He also is quite impressed with the work to date. Ms. Zuaro would like to provide the Select Board members and the public with an additional grant implementation update in a few months. The current timeline is to complete all the grant-funded projects within the next year. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Zuaro, Ms. Lewis, and all the VOREC committee members for all the work they have done to help improve outdoor recreational opportunities in the Northfield community.

- b. Karina Dailey, Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC): Cross Brothers Dam Removal.** Ms. Dailey reported that this project recently received a \$98,000 grant from Watersheds United Vermont. This amount will cover the ten percent (10%) local match amount as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) already has committed to paying ninety percent (90%) of the total project costs. However, the FEMA award documentation has not yet been issued to VNRC and this might be slightly delayed due to the recent natural disaster declaration covering several Vermont counties. When the documentation has been received, the construction phase of this project will be put out to bid. In addition, the engineering plans, which now are thirty percent (30%) complete, will be finalized over this coming winter. If all goes well, the actual dam removal will be performed next year (2024).

Ms. Dailey said FEMA has been very supportive of this project as it will provide floodwater mitigation for the downtown area as well as help restore proper fish migration along the Dog River. This will build on the accomplishments of earlier local projects such as the post-Irene creation of the Dog River Park with its stormwater retention capacity as well as the removal of a dilapidated dam on Bull Run. Ms. Dailey added that another remaining requirement is a letter of support for this dam removal project from the municipality. Board member Morse is very supportive of this project, especially after learning that no local funds will be required. Recent events have indicated that flooding storms are becoming more frequent so additional floodwater mitigation projects certainly are needed. Board member Stevens also was very appreciation of all the work Ms. Dailey and VNRC have done in planning this project and obtaining all the necessary funding. Board member Petty also is very pleased with the way this project is turning out. As she has discussed earlier, Board member Petty remains hopeful that one of the results of this dam removal will be better Dog River recreational public access. Ms. Dailey confirmed that improved river access will be included in the project design plans. The amount of this work will depend on how much of the FEMA funding can be dedicated to this purpose. Ms. Dailey then noted the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) planned replacement of the nearby Main Street Bridge (scheduled for spring 2025). There will be full coordination between these two projects. Manager Schulz said VTrans now is working on its final engineering plans for the bridge replacement project and he anticipates a full report within the next couple months. Martha Mahan asked if the working dam located behind Nantanna would be affected by the removal of the Cross Brothers Dam. Ms. Dailey said it would not. She has been in contact with the Nantanna dam owners and they have indicated that they might have some riverbed dredging work done in concert with the dam removal. Jeremy Whalen from the Conservation Commission is very supportive of any efforts to improve river access and recreational opportunities as a result of the dam removal. Perhaps a new access point could be established behind the Dollar General store. Ms. Zuaro agreed that this could be a great opportunity to improve recreational access to the Dog River. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Dailey for the valuable information provided tonight and for all the good work she and VRNC have done on this project.

- c. Martha Mahan, MJM Properties: Freight Yard Way Waterline Upgrade Request.** Ms. Mahan previously addressed (05/23/23) the Select Board members with her request that the municipality upgrade the waterline to her property on Freight Yard Way as this would benefit the community by promoting economic development at this location. At that time, the Select Board members deferred any action until issues could be resolved regarding whether the property owner or the municipality owned the waterline, whether easements were already in place, etc. Manager Schulz has had this matter researched since then and found that the previous property owner (Central Vermont Railroad) did provide an easement in 2008 for the then Village of Northfield for the utility lines (water, sewer, and electric) located on the property. As for ownership of the waterline, Manager Schulz said definitive records have been hard to find but he feels it is probable that the Village did install the waterline in the early twentieth century so it most likely is a municipal waterline. Ms. Mahan noted that there were quite a number of businesses located on Freight Yard Way at that time so it is likely the Village installed the waterline to serve them all. She added that MJM Properties has received several offers to purchase and develop this property but any significant economic development would require upgrading its water capacity. Chair Maxwell felt now that the ownership issue has been resolved, perhaps this matter should be referred to the Utility Commissioners. Manager Schulz confirmed this matter has been discussed at their previous meetings and the consensus appeared to be in support of sharing the upgrade costs provided significant economic development in the Freight Yard Way area is feasible. Board member Morse also serves as a Utility Commissioner and noted that their next regular meeting is scheduled for Monday, August 7, 2023. This matter should be on the meeting agenda for further discussion. Cost estimates for this waterline upgrade as well as the source of funding, including possible use of ARPA funds, need to be determined. As Ms. Mahan has suggested previously, there could be some cost savings in rerouting the new waterline so it doesn't go under structures like the current one does.

Another topic for future discussion would be the diameter of the new waterline. Board member Stevens suggested that would be dependent on the amount of development anticipated and how the area is zoned in future. Ms. Mahan has been informed that an eight inch (8") line probably would be sufficient for a new twenty (20) unit building. Board member Petty asked whether there is sufficient water supply now for proper fire suppression in the Freight Yard Way area. Manager Schulz has spoken to Fire Chief Peter J. DeMasi and Utility Superintendent James Russo; both confirmed that there is. Ms. Mahan has concerns that there might be not enough capacity to meet new fire sprinkler requirements should new structures be built. Board member Petty feels economic development in this relatively underutilized downtown area would be an exciting outcome. Ms. Mahan did confirm that she would address the Utility Commissioners with her request at their next meeting (08/07/23). Chair Maxwell then thanked her for bringing this matter to the Select Board members' attention.

#### V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **July 11, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #02-24.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #02-24 in the amount of \$349,515.24. Board member Stevens noted that a large amount (\$10,000) was spent recently repairing one of the Western Star highway trucks. Perhaps it is time to start budgeting for a replacement vehicle before it becomes a money pit. Manager Schulz believes this particular vehicle is scheduled for replacement in the next fiscal year. Board member Petty noted a \$156,440 payment from the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) CIP account for a "New Ambulance 2023." She asked if this was the remounted unit. Manager Schulz confirmed that it was and it will be put back in service once it is registered, etc. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through July 9, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$117,097.05. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Recent Flooding Rainstorm Local Impact Update.** As he reported at the previous meeting (07/11/23), Manager Schulz said the Northfield downtown area did not suffer too badly from the torrential rainstorm that occurred about two (2) weeks ago. Some structures located by the Dog River did have some basement flooding but the waters never rose above the ground level. There also wasn't significant damage to the paved roads in the downtown area. In addition, Manager Schulz stated that the municipal water and sewer system was not adversely impacted by the rainstorm. Water samples collected after the rainstorm were tested and no contamination was found. The backroads did suffer some stormwater damage and about seven (7) had to be temporarily closed for repairs. Most now are fully reopened but additional work is being done on Lovers Lane and Aseltine Road, which are passable but still closed to through traffic. Remaining problems should be resolved over the next couple of weeks. The federal government did issue a natural disaster declaration for Washington County so the municipality will be able to submit a request for full reimbursement for any storm-related damage. Manager Schulz and municipal staff will be working in coming weeks to document all storm damage so proper paperwork can be submitted to FEMA in a timely manner. He added that many staff members have had previous experience with this process from Tropical Storm Irene and that will be very helpful this time. Fifteen (15) property owners have reached out to FEMA already and the municipality will provide assistance to any resident needing help with the paperwork, documentation, etc. The FEMA hotline number is 800-621-3362. Manager Schulz noted donated fans and dehumidifiers were provided to the municipality for public distribution and some have been taken by residents in need. He concluded by saying that despite some storm damage, Northfield actually came out of the situation much better than many of the other communities in the affected counties, especially Montpelier and Barre.

- b. Grand List 2023 Errors & Omissions.** Manager Schulz said a parcel was overvalued by \$30,100 by the Board of Listers because the property size was miscalculated on a recorded survey. The correct parcel size is 53.3 acres, not 83.9 acres. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the Grand List correction request from the Board of Listers. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds.** Chair Maxwell said there will be an ongoing process to identify local projects that should receive ARPA funds as requested by Northfield residents. It was Select Board consensus that this matter be placed on the agenda of the second regular meeting of each month for the time being. In the packets was a list of possible projects that Manager Schulz had developed earlier in the process. Board member Morse feels it would be good practice to attach projected costs to those proposals that appear to have public support. There also are some major infrastructure projects that would benefit from having ARPA funds set aside as local match funds for future grant applications. Board member Morse said cost estimates would help with perhaps providing approval to smaller, less expensive project requests that have been submitted by residents using the approved application form. Manager Schulz said he could provide some ballpark numbers for some of the major projects that have been proposed, such as municipal sewer line expansion to Northfield Falls, new sidewalk installation, etc. Board member Morse said rehabilitation of the fountain on the Common has been a popular topic but he doesn't know how much this would cost. Manager Schulz said he is now receiving proposals for this. In addition to cost estimates, Board member Petty thought some projects that require easements for access through private property, etc. should be evaluated for their feasibility. Chair Maxwell said this matter will be discussed again at the second meeting next month (08/22/23) and this should include some cost estimates for the more popular proposals.

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

- a. South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation Project.** Manager Schulz said the base pavement has been installed where the stormwater work was performed in the roadway. Some minor work remains to be done, such as fixing stormwater drains, repairing some road depressions, etc. When the work on South Main Street has been completed, the project focus will shift to the side streets, i.e., Prospect Street, Highland Avenue, etc. In addition, a new asphalt sidewalk will be installed on Prospect Street as part of the project. The contractor will work with the property owners on this. Chair Maxwell asked if there would be any project scope cuts due to cost overruns. Manager Schulz said there would be some work that would need to be done internally but fortunately all the project materials have been purchased. We will have two (2) years to complete all the grant-funded work.
- b. Delinquent Property Tax Sale.** The public sale of certain properties with more than one year of delinquent taxes will be held in the Municipal Building at 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 3, 2023. The original tax sale list contained thirteen (13) properties but Manager Schulz expects this number to be halved by the time of the sale as current property owners make payments. He noted that even if a property is purchased at the tax sale, the current owner has a full year to redeem the property by paying back taxes.
- c. TDS Telecom Fiber Optic Cable Installation.** Manager Schulz said this project will be ongoing for several months. Some of the new cable will be installed on existing TDS Telecom utility poles, some on Northfield utility poles, and there also will be some underground installation. The schedule for the installation process remains unclear but Manager Schulz will emphasize to TDS Telecom the need to inform affected residents.
- d. Smith Hill Road and Union Brook Road updates.** Manager Schulz said both these roads have some pavement cracks. These are on the list for repair when the contracted paver comes to town. However, there might be some delay due to extensive storm-related road damage in neighboring communities. Chair Maxwell felt there were some sections of Cox Brook Road that also needed to be resealed.

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

- a. Northfield Falls Pedestrian Safety Grant Application.** Board member Petty asked if there was any update on the status of the submitted grant application. Manager Schulz said the decision should be made soon but he will inquire as to the exact timing.
- b. Kent Street and East Street Storm Damage.** Board member Morse noted the Select Board members received a letter from East Street property owner William Lyon regarding damage to the Kent Street culvert during the recent rainstorm. This resulted in some road damage and debris being deposited in the Northfield Saving Bank parking lot area and into East Street. Mr. Lyon said this particular culvert has failed before during heavy rainstorms and needs extensive rehabilitation. He is hoping FEMA would be able to reimburse the municipality for this upgrade. Manager Schulz said the damage on municipal property will be documented and FEMA will be sent the reimbursement request. As for damage on private land, the property owner would need to contact FEMA directly regarding any damage claims. If it appears FEMA funds will not pay for fixing this particular culvert, Manager Schulz will explore flood mitigation grant opportunities. Board member Morse suggested that this problem area should be added to the Town Manager's tickler file for ongoing projects. He also noted that during some past severe rainstorms, a good amount of stormwater was diverted onto public roads due to the poor landscaping of adjacent private properties. Board member Morse feels some property owners need to take more responsibility for fixing stormwater drainage problems on their own lands before they cause road damage, etc.
- c. Northfield Falls Crosswalk.** Board member Stevens noted this crosswalk still remains unpainted. Manager Schulz said he already has made several requests to VTrans about this but would contact them again. As this is a state highway, VTrans is responsible for its maintenance.
- d. Lovers Lane.** Board member Stevens asked about the grant to install new guardrail along Lovers Lane. Manager Schulz confirmed those grant funds are on hand and he plans to apply for additional grant funds that would pay to fix all the recent storm-related damage. This should be discussed soon at a Highway Subcommittee meeting.
- e. FEMA Storm Damage Reimbursement.** Board member Stevens asked how much FEMA would compensate for the recent storm damage. Manager Schulz said FEMA would reimburse about seventy-five percent (75%) of the expense, the State of Vermont about eighteen percent (18%), and the municipality would be responsible for about seven percent (7%). Therefore, the financial impact on the municipality should be minimal.
- f. Dog River Park.** Chair Maxwell noted the floodwater retention role of Dog River Park played a very important role in minimizing the flood damage in the downtown area. He thanked former Zoning Administrator Michele Braun, who spearheaded the FEMA buyout process that led to the park's creation, and all others responsible for this.

## **X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. Lynn Doney: Various Local Concerns.** Mr. Doney presented the Select Board members with a list of thirty-one (31) items that he felt should be addressed. About half of these related to roadway and/or sidewalk concerns, such as missing bridge guardrails, potholes, missing paving, broken sidewalk, etc. Mr. Doney said he has brought up several of these problems in the past and is very upset that they have never been properly addressed. Mr. Doney also is concerned that the hiring process for the new Northfield Police Department (NPD) chief appears to be dragging along with no resolution. In addition, he feels if the NPD cannot fill night shifts due to understaffing, perhaps the concept of 24/7 local police coverage should be reevaluated. Mr. Doney also has on his list that "there were no thank you's or any acknowledgement from the Select Board or the Manager for the endless amounts of hours that emergency services put in during the flood." Chair Maxwell strongly disagreed with this statement because, as documented in the meeting minutes, at the last Select Board regular meeting (07/11/23) Board member Petty, Board member Morse, and Chair Maxwell all specifically thanked the first responders for their exceptional work during this crisis.

In addition, Manager Schulz in his storm updates on Front Porch Forum also thanked the emergency services for their efforts. For example, his posting on July 12, 2023, includes this statement: "I wish to thank the Highway Department, the Utility Department, the Ambulance Service, the Police Department, the Fire Department and all Town employees for their hard work and dedication over the past two days. The employees responded quickly and were and are ready to assist as needed." Mr. Doney said the thirty (30) EMS members "don't read the minutes." He felt someone should have come down to the Ambulance Bay and thanked them in person. Mr. Doney did not read out all the items on his list but said he would be returning to future Select Board meetings should they fail to address them all soon. He said some of the items he could fix himself "within a day."

- XI. 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 personnel matters, legal issues, and contract negotiations with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:24 p.m.

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 9:52 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:52 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 August 8, 2023.