

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of January 20, 2026

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Charles Morse, Board members K. David Maxwell, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Steven Mackenzie, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Meggan McCusker (Chief, Northfield Ambulance Service), Aaron Rhodes, Kristin Pollard, Mary Smith, Susan Stillinger, Brian Massey Jr., Gary Circosta, Matthew Romei, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Morse called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

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

III. DISCUSSION

a. Proposed FY 2026/2027 Town Budget

- 1. Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS)** NAS Chief Meggan McCusker would like the NAS crew to use ActiveComms this year rather than the standard in-vehicle radios. This would eliminate the NAS Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) funds now budgeted (\$2,000) in the next fiscal year for portable radios. Ms. Baroffio said the Dispatching budget in the O&M Contract Services budget will be increased from \$47,000 to \$49,800 to cover the ActiveComms expense. In the NAS CEP budget, Chief McCusker has received new cost estimates for AutoPulse replacements. This will increase from \$17,000 to \$24,000 and Ms. Baroffio said the set asides in future fiscal years will be increased from \$2,000 to \$2,500. Regarding NAS personnel costs, Board member Maxwell recommends that the municipality negotiate a one-year contract with the new NAS union with possible extensions. He noted labor costs for this department have increased forty-six percent (46%) in the last three (3) years and this is not sustainable. Board member Petty said the former manager has included an average increase of four percent (4%) in the hourly wages of the NAS volunteer categories (i.e., VEFR, EMT, AEMT, and Medic). The Select Board consensus is to stay with this proposal. There are similar increases for weekend duty, etc.

In the NAS CEP budget, Board member Maxwell recommended that the Jaws of Life, which is seldom used, be retained but no money should be budgeted for its replacement. The current balance in this account (\$26,931) will be reallocated to the 2017 Ambulance Unit replacement account. In addition, the amount that was to be added to this account in the next fiscal year will be reduced from \$65,000 to \$35,000. Ms. Baroffio said the 2022 Ambulance unit is scheduled for replacement in FY 2032-2033 with a current replacement cost estimate of \$400,000. It was noted that this amount might be significantly reduced should Chief McCusker go with a different dealer for this vehicle. Ms. Baroffio would like to move towards fully funding this purchase rather than budgeting only for half and then borrowing the shortfall. Chief McCusker should have new replacement cost estimates soon. Ms. Baroffio said new defibrillators were purchased last year and these should have an expected service life of ten (10) years. If they had only been refurbished, they would have had to have been replaced in six (6) years. The next fiscal year budget addition for the two (2) AutoPulse replacement accounts will each be increased from \$2,000 to \$2,500.

Ms. Baroffio said the estimated replacement cost for the two (2) stretchers has been increased from \$63,000 to \$75,600. Therefore, the annual set aside for this account will be increased from \$9,170 to \$15,500. A similar increase will be made in the Stair Chairs CEP budget with the amount to be added in the next fiscal year increased from \$1,000 to \$3,000. However, there will be slight decreases in the set aside amounts budgeted in the PowerLoad replacement accounts.

Ms. Baroffio said a new line item needs to be created in the NAS O&M budget for Contract Services that would cover the \$450 that Barre City Ambulance will charge NAS when making service calls in Northfield. The estimated number of these calls in the next fiscal year is six (6) so \$2,700 will be budgeted for this. In addition, as \$16,500 was added to the NAS CEP budget for the purchase of IV pumps, the NAS O&M budget for Equipment Purchases will be lowered from \$5,000 to \$2,500. There was no objection to this change. Chief McCusker would like to install a Starlink device in the NAS trailer as a backup in case the local cable provider has an outage. The last time that happened, the NAS lost both internet and phone service. Chief McCusker said after the unit is purchased for \$300, you only have to make services payment when the system is in use. She added that the trailer could be moved to distant incident sites and this will provide internet and cell phone service on the backroads where reception is usually difficult. Ms. Baroffio said the Starlink device purchase could come out of the NAS O&M Equipment Purchase budget. There was no objection.

2. **Budget Recap.** Ms. Baroffio then went over a number of previously-discussed proposed revisions to various budgets. In the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) O&M Dispatching budget, there will be an increase from \$22,630 to \$22,950. Also, she clarified that the Northfield Police Department (NPD) personnel expenses budget is based on one (1) police chief, five (5) officers, and one (1) dispatcher. In the Highway Department O&M budget, the line item for winter sand purchases was set at \$74,000 after some discussion. In the Administrative Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget, there is a \$16,510 balance in the VOREC signage account. Ms. Baroffio would like to know if there are any plans to use these funds. Board member Petty, who was a member of the VOREC Grant Implementation Committee, said she believed a second signage order was made and perhaps the invoice for that purchase has not been processed. In any case, there is possible non-signage usage possible for these funds so perhaps the account should be renamed the "VOREC Project" instead. There was no objection.

Chair Morse noted there are numerous problems in the Historical Society basement that should be addressed as soon as possible. The basement budget has a \$1,422 deficit with \$2,500 to be added in the next fiscal year. There also is an \$8,000 balance in the Community Room Update budget and these funds should be used to address the room's deficiencies as soon as possible. Ms. Baroffio said the Municipal Building's CIP account for Building Improvements now has a \$1,048 deficit with \$3,500 to be added in the next fiscal year. There was no objection. In the Parks, Grounds, & Facilities CIP budget, there is a \$1,522 balance in the account for a water/sewer hookup at Memorial Park. Chair Morse said there has been a suggestion that there could be seasonal RV parking at the park but this was never advanced. These funds will be transferred to the Equipment/Facility Repair CIP account.

In the Pool CIP budget, Ms. Baroffio noted the Building/Facility Improvements account has a \$11,938 balance with \$7,500 to be added in the next fiscal year. \$2,400 will be added to the Pool Bathhouse renovation account, which now has a deficit. It was noted that Pool Director Shannon Palone stated that the pool bathrooms did require some upgrades before the pool reopened this summer. However, since no major renovations were planned for this coming year, the \$7,500 was reduced to \$2,000.

In the Highway CIP budget, there is an account for repairs to Town Highway 54 Bridge 56. Ms. Baroffio asked if these repairs are scheduled for the next fiscal year or the one after. How this account should be funded in the next fiscal year depends on the timing of the repairs. Chair Morse is unsure so he asked Manager Mackenzie to contact the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) to see if he can get the answer to this. Perhaps he could get an accurate figure for total project costs. Ms. Baroffio noted there is a \$52,533 balance in the Vine Street Sidewalk account. As this project has been completed, she asked if these funds could be transferred to the Sidewalk general account. If that happened, Ms. Baroffio asked if this budget, which then would have an \$80,069 balance, should still receive an additional \$30,000 in the next fiscal year. Board member Petty noted a number of future sidewalk renovation projects have been identified so she would prefer that the new funds be used to build up this account. Board member Maxwell also would rather leave the \$30,000 alone as we also need to set aside funds for sidewalk maintenance. Board member Shernock said Northfield residents have repeatedly stated how important good sidewalks are for the community. The consensus was for the \$30,000 to stay in the budget.

Ms. Baroffio asked if a new line item should be created for future upgrades to the Common based on the DuBois & King concept design. No funds would be added in the next fiscal year but there would be a place holder for future funds to be allocated. Board member Petty would prefer that the Common revitalization project not be done in stages over the next few years. She does feel that fixing the fountain should be a priority. No changes were made at this time.

In the NFD CEP budget, Ms. Baroffio provided updated numbers based on the municipality deciding to budget for half of the replacement cost for the 2000 Aerial Truck and borrow the shortfall with a fifteen-year bond. The current plan is to purchase a used vehicle for about \$650,000. This CEP account now has a \$234,713 balance with \$20,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. Board member Maxwell would like the set aside kept at \$20,000 as there now are negotiations with Norwich University (NU) over the amount of their annual gift to the municipality. Part of this gift is supposed to help fund the Aerial Truck replacement so changes to this account probably should be deferred until the gift amount is determined.

Ms. Baroffio then discussed the scheduled replacement of the 2007 NFD Pumper Truck, which now is set for FY 2028-2029. This account now has a \$116,100 balance with \$21,840 to be added in the next fiscal year. The estimated cost of a new truck is \$1,127,500 so there now would be a \$150,460 shortfall in funding half the purchase price. Ms. Baroffio said prior year surplus funds could be used to fill the gap.

As requested by the Select Board members, Ms. Baroffio has shortened the expected life spans of certain Highway vehicles from nine (9) to seven (7) years. She has accordingly adjusted the set asides in coming fiscal years to address this accelerated replacement schedule. Ms. Baroffio said this process can be difficult due to the uncertainty over the actual replacement costs. This is especially problematic when the equipment replacement is scheduled several years away.

Ms. Baroffio then asked if the Select Board members had a target for tax rate increases in the next fiscal year. Chair Morse would like it kept under ten percent (10%). Ms. Baroffio said that would require the use of prior year surplus funds. Board member Maxwell said this could be discussed at the next budget meeting. Board member Petty would not want to create problems in future budget years by expending all the surplus funds for a short-term fix to this year's tax rate. Board member Maxwell believes the Select Board members have gone through the proposed budget with a fine-toothed comb but some difficult decisions still need to be made. He is hoping Manager Mackenzie and Ms. Baroffio will be able provide some guidance regarding any remaining issues at the next (and probably final) budget meeting (01/22/26). Ms. Baroffio will distribute updated budget pages at that time that will reflect Select Board budget decisions made by consensus to date.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).

- a. Elroy C. Hill: Sidewalk Snow Removal.** Mr. Hill noted the downtown sidewalks today weren't clear of snow before mid-afternoon. He felt this makes it difficult for older residents to get to the post office, etc.

V. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Petty, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a contract negotiation with Manager Mackenzie present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 7:49 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 8:00 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at: <https://youtu.be/PtS-cH1zfE4>

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of January 27, 2026.