

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of August 8, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens (absent). Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Tom Davis (Economic Development Director), Kaitlyn Keating (Northfield Community Development Network), Lucas Herring (Northfield Observances, Inc.), Gerard LaVarnway, Mary Nadon Scott, Sarah Capron, Tim Swartz, and Elroy Hill.

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

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

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

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Tom Davis, Economic Development Director: Northfield Designated Downtown Boundaries.** At previous meetings, Mr. Davis informed the Select Board members of the many advantages of obtaining Designated Downtown status for the Northfield downtown area. It has currently Designated Village status as has Northfield Falls. Mr. Davis noted that of 250 Vermont communities, only twenty-four (24) of them have Designated Downtown status, including Burlington, Rutland, Bennington, Brattleboro, Middlebury, Barre, Montpelier, and Waterbury. He noted that the new status would make Northfield eligible for additional state grant opportunities at a time when the State of Vermont appears to be shifting more of its available resources towards Designated Downtowns rather than Designated Villages. Recently, the boundary of the downtown Designated Village was expanded southward to include the Freight Yard Way area. The northern boundary now extends to the Gray Building. In the application for Designated Downtown status, Mr. Davis would like to shift the boundary northward on Vermont Route 12 to include Nantanna Mill and the former Bean Chevrolet building. He had considered moving the southern boundary to include Norwich University (NU) but was informed that approval for this was unlikely due to the large amount of residential housing between the downtown and NU. Mr. Davis said obtaining the new status would be a long process but he believes all the application prerequisites are being met. One requirement is the establishment of a Designated Downtown Board and Mr. Davis recommends that the members of the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) be appointed to serve on this board. He noted that this board cannot be controlled by the municipality and NCDN is a well-established independent body as well as a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Another requirement is that the applying community have a Development Review Board with clear zoning regulations. Mr. Davis noted that the Planning Commission currently is revising the local zoning ordinances and this process will include meeting any Designated Downtown requirements. It is anticipated that that the revised zoning bylaws will be ready for the local approval process in coming weeks. Mr. Davis said unless there are any unanticipated delays, the State of Vermont should be approving Designated Downtown status for Northfield by next spring. He added that there really are no downsides to moving from Designated Village to Designated Downtown status. The new status could help considerably with the revitalization of our historic structures with tax credits. Board member Morse wanted to clarify that these would be income tax credits that would not decrease the amount of local property taxes collected. Mr. Davis confirmed that and said that there now is in the pipeline an application for the structure at 70 Depot Square (the old railroad depot) to receive \$70,000 in these state income tax credits. Board member Petty noted that having a local Economic Development Director is another prerequisite for Designated Downtown status and we are fortunate Mr. Davis now fills that role for Northfield. Chair Maxwell thanked Mr. Davis for all his work on this process and noted that the required Select Board action for this application is later on tonight's agenda.

- b. **Kaitlyn Keating, Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) Chair: "Night on the Common."** Ms. Keating announced that this year's Night on the Common would be held on Tuesday, September 19, 2023, in conjunction with the Northfield Farmers Market. This will be an opportunity for local community groups to showcase their good works and obtain needed support and perhaps some new volunteers. As in past years, a community photo will be taken and Ms. Keating specifically invited the Select Board members to attend and take part in this. As this date is "International Talk Like a Pirate Day," there will be a special tribute to the Northfield High School Marauders class of 1961. There also will be a musical performance that evening. In addition, Ms. Keating is making the usual requests for municipal support for this event such as providing nighttime lighting, closing off the south end of Depot Square to traffic, etc. She will coordinate with Manager Schulz on these matters. Board member Petty is a big supporter of this event and suggested that it would be good to have framed copies of the previous community photographs made available for display. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Keating and the NCDN for holding this popular celebration of our local community spirit.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **July 25, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **August 3, 2023 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #03-24.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve Warrant #03-24 in the amount of \$420,168.07. Board member Petty asked if there any payments on the warrant related to the July flooding event. Chair Maxwell noted \$28,000 was spent on road gravel to address backroads problems. Since Washington County did receive a federal natural disaster declaration for this storm, FEMA and the State of Vermont will reimburse about 93% of any storm-related expenses. Board member Shernock noted a \$561.96 water bill for the Common Fountain. Manager Schulz confirmed this was a monthly expense while the fountain is operating. Board member Petty asked about a \$4,866 payment for "chlorine monitoring." Manager Schulz said the Sewer Department monitors chlorine levels at the Wastewater Treatment Facility to make sure they do not exceed safe levels. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through July 23, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$118,434.58. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of Northfield Designated Downtown Revised Boundaries.** Manager Schulz said Mr. Davis previously provided the reasons for shifting the boundary of the proposed new Designated Downtown northward to include additional commercial and industrial properties. The Select Board members do need to formally authorize this boundary change. Mr. Davis noted this action will need to be accompanied by a signed letter of support. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the proposed Designated Downtown boundary revision as presented and also authorize Manager Schulz to draft and sign the required letter of support. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Appointment of Northfield Community Development Network as Designated Downtown Board.** This matter also was discussed earlier during Mr. Davis's presentation. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to appoint the NCDN membership to serve as the new Designated Downtown Board. Board member Morse is appreciative that the NCDN members have agreed to serve in this capacity. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

- c. Northfield Observances, Inc. Labor Day Weekend Festivities Requests.** Lucas Herring serves as Treasurer on the Northfield Observances governing board. He said Northfield Observances is making the usual annual requests so the holiday weekend festivities can be held again this year. These include blocking off through traffic on the Common starting at 7:00 p.m. on Friday, September 1, 2023, and lasting through Labor Day afternoon (09/04/23); allowing the event banner to be hung on North Main Street; imposing a “No Parking” ban on Main Street from the Crescent to Kenyon’s Hardware Store starting at 7:30 a.m. Monday morning and lasting through the duration of the Labor Day Parade; allowing for a coin drop at two (2) Main Street locations on Labor Day morning prior to the parade; having municipal employees assist with setting up the stages, the installation of nighttime lighting, etc.; and allow for temporary road closures on South Main Street, etc. so that the adult and kid footraces can be held on the morning of Saturday, September 2, 2023. Mr. Herring said there are a couple of new requests this year. One would be for the Northfield Police Department (NPD) to really enforce the “No Dogs” signs placed on the Common over the holiday weekend. The other would be to block off from through traffic the section of South Main Street from the Municipal Building to East Street. Drivers would be diverted along Central Street. Mr. Herring said in past years NU cadets assisted with traffic control for people crossing the street by the Common but they will not be available this year. In addition, there is a request to institute a “no parking” ban in front of the Mayo Block starting Friday evening. Board member Morse did not think it would be possible to reroute traffic along Central Street, etc. for the whole holiday weekend. This also would prevent access to East Street businesses for several days. After some discussion, there was consensus that traffic control would be provided by either volunteers or professional flaggers who would fill the same role the NU cadets performed in years past. Manager Schulz will review this matter and make a recommendation for the most efficient and cost-effective way to ensure pedestrian safety at this location. It also is possible NPD officers could assist with traffic control for brief periods over the holiday weekend. As for the enforcement of the “No Dogs” rule, Manager Schulz believes the currently understaffed NPD probably wouldn’t be able to provide much assistance with this over the holiday weekend. It was suggested that persons with unleashed dogs could be politely reminded that they are in violation of the local animal control ordinance. The “No Dogs” signs will not be posted on the Common this year. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the aforementioned Northfield Observances’ requests with the exception of blocking off South Main Street over the whole holiday weekend. Manager Schulz will work with Northfield Observances regarding pedestrian safety concerns. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- d. Revised Municipal Personnel Policies & Procedures.** At the April 11, 2023, regular meeting, the Select Board members provided some specific suggestions for revising the latest draft of the Municipal Personnel Policies & Procedures, which is being updated to keep in compliance with state and federal law, with the most recent Northfield employee union contracts, etc. An updated draft of the policy including changes made after that meeting was distributed to the Select Board members for further comment. Manager Schulz said the document is not yet ready for final approval as it still needs to go through additional legal review by the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) in light of recent revisions. There also are some concerns that some provisions still remain in conflict with stipulations in the approved union contracts. Board member Morse noted that he and Board member Stevens comprise the Policy Review Subcommittee. He thought it would be more expedient that any future revisions go first through this subcommittee. Chair Maxwell would like the subcommittee to consider developing a “whistleblower” policy as well as a policy that creates a procedure for complaints against management. Board member Petty has some personnel policy revisions to suggest and will forward them to the subcommittee. She also would like the subcommittee to review the sample policies provided on the VLCT website.

- e. **Vermont Department of Taxes Order to Reappraise.** Manager Schulz said the Department of Taxes informed the municipality by letter that due to Northfield's "coefficient of dispersion" dropping below twenty percent (20%), a local townwide reappraisal now is required. The State is asking that the Select Board members formally acknowledge receipt of this letter and also pledge that the municipality will "work towards submitting a reappraisal compliance plan" within 150 days of this order, which would be December 20, 2023. Manager Schulz said the Board of Listers are aware of this stipulation and will work towards compliance. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to authorize Chair Maxwell to sign the receipt form. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- f. **Cross Brothers Dam Removal Letter of Support.** At the last regular meeting (07/25/23), Katrina Dailey from the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) provided an update on the planned removal of the Cross Brothers Dam. She reported now that the funding for this project is in place, the only local documentation still needed was a letter of support from the Select Board. Manager Schulz subsequently drafted this letter of support for Chair Maxwell's signature. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the letter of support and authorize Chair Maxwell to sign it. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **July 2023 Flooding Storm Update.** Manager Schulz said all roads have been repaired and reopened with the exception of Lovers Lane, which is passable but needs to have its guardrails reinstalled. There also were some considerable washouts on the road edges of Union Brook Road but a contractor was brought in to remove some ledge and put down some new material. In addition, there was significant roadside damage at the start of Berlin Pond Road near Sanders Drive. Bids to fix this damage are being solicited in order to obtain cost estimates for FEMA reimbursement documentation. Jersey barriers have been installed on the roadsides for the time being. FEMA representatives will start making site visits soon and the paperwork for the affected areas will be compiled and submitted in a timely manner. This will be an ongoing process in coming months.
- b. **South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation Project.** Manager Schulz said the project contractor is now preparing the street for the final level of paving. Once that is completed, they will refocus their efforts on completing the stormwater mitigation work on the side streets, i.e., Prospect Street, Highland Avenue, etc.
- c. **NPD Chief Search Process.** Manager Schulz said there has been great progress in reaching an employment agreement with the preferred candidate. This matter should be resolved soon and the start date for the new NPD Chief will be announced.
- d. **Municipal Computer Outages.** There was a two-day local internet outage in mid-July related to the heavy rainstorm. Because the new municipal cloud servers are highly reliant on internet access, the municipal computers were out of service for a couple workdays. We have reached out to Symquest, which provides our computer support, to find workarounds in order to keep the municipal computer network operating in case of another prolonged internet outage.
- e. **Utility Commissions Update.** Manager Schulz said the Utility Commissions held a joint meeting last night and there was discussion of replacing the waterlines located on Freight Yard Way as requested by property owner Martha Mahan. Board member Morse attended the meeting and said this was a positive conversation.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **King Street Substation Lithium Battery Bank.** Board member Morse said another item discussed at the Utility Commissions meeting was the proposed installation of lithium power storage batteries at the King Street Substation. As Northfield Fire Department (NFD) Chief Peter J. DeMasi stated at a previous Select Board meeting, should there be a fire at this lithium battery bank, the NFD's only option would be to let the fire burn itself out while protecting neighboring structures. Should this project come to fruition, Board member Morse felt it would be best to inform nearby property owners of this possibility and perhaps develop evacuation plans. This matter will be discussed at future commission meetings.
- b. **Thompson Hill Killer Bear.** Board member Morse reported that a serial killer bear was operating in his neighborhood recently, resulting in three pigs being killed outright and two others mortally wounded. Board member Morse then announced that this killer bear has been removed from circulation (permanently).
- c. **Central Street Stormwater Collector.** Board member Petty wanted to thank Steve and Joan Fitzhugh for trimming around the stormwater collector at the bottom of Central Street. It now looks quite attractive and no longer is an eyesore.
- d. **North Main Street Mural.** Chair Maxwell wanted to thank Leslie Striebe, Eric Howard, and all others who helped with the new design of the wall mural and its installation this past weekend. It is a marked improvement on the faded mural that was there before.
- e. **Community Beautification Appreciation.** Chair Maxwell also wanted to thank Guy Martin and Stevie Balch for placing flower arrangements on our Northfield Falls covered bridges. He also thanked Sally Davidson and Northfield Gardeners for all the good work they do each spring and summer with the flowerbeds on and around the Common.
- f. **Northfield Highway Crew.** Chair Maxwell wanted to thank the Highway crew for all their efforts in restoring the backroads after last month's flooding rainstorm. There still are some areas that need some attention, such as Little Northfield Road, but they have been making their best efforts to get to them as soon as possible.
- g. **Public Meeting Behavior.** Chair Maxwell would like to remind everyone that the Select Board members (and other committee members) are volunteers and as such shouldn't be subjected to verbal abuse from anyone attending their meetings. It is understandable that not everyone will be pleased with the state of municipal operations but there is no reason public meeting attendees cannot express their concerns while also conducting themselves in a polite and proper manner.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:30 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 revised and approved at Select Board regular meeting of August 22, 2023.