

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of September 27, 2022**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Charles Morse (absent), Lydia Petty, and John Stevens. Also present were Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Sarah Wolfe (Chair, Northfield Energy Committee), Joseph Aldsworth (Vice-President, Capital West Dispatch), Brian Peete (Chief, Montpelier Police Department), Michael Gero (Northfield Police Department), Tom Davis, Lynn Doney, Sally Davidson, Bethany Drum, Gerard LaVarnway, Carolyn Stevens, Michelle Bean, Colin Bright, and Elroy Hill. Manager Jeff Schulz was unable to attend tonight's meeting.

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. Sarah Wolfe, Northfield Energy Committee (NEC): Downtown Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations.** Ms. Wolfe said the NEC has been working on the possibility of installing EV charging stations in the downtown area for some time. This process included soliciting local feedback on whether residents would support this action, where would be the optimal location, etc. This is the first presentation to the Select Board members on this matter as Ms. Wolfe and the other NEC members would like to determine their views on this before proceeding further. There will be a return visit at a future date when more information is available. Ms. Wolfe added that NEC has applied for a Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) Climate Catalyst Grant for the maximum amount of \$4,000. The cost of installing EV chargers is variable depending on the location's accessibility to a power source, the level of EV charger installed, etc. Ms. Wolfe said there are two main local benefits for installing downtown EV charging stations. The first would be to provide an EV charging station within easy walking distance for Northfield residents who cannot have a home charging unit because they are renters, cannot afford the initial installation costs, etc. The second benefit would be to attract non-residents to Northfield who, hopefully, would patronize downtown businesses while their EVs are being charged. Larger picture benefits include encouraging more people to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels by driving EVs that are more efficient and less polluting. According to a Drive Electric Vermont study, as of January 2022 there were about eight hundred (800) EVs in Washington County, which is second only in number and by per capita to Chittenden County, which had about twenty-four hundred (2,400). The NEC members would like Northfield to follow the example of other Vermont communities such as Plainfield and install two (2) EV chargers in the downtown area. Ms. Wolfe said the NEC circulated a survey that included this possibility and the majority of respondents favored having EV chargers located on Depot Square. Nearby Wall Street was the second choice. She then asked if the Select Board members had any questions.

Board member Petty asked if the VCRD grant (if successful) would be able to totally fund the EV stations installation. Ms. Wolfe said that depended on the grant amount awarded as well as the type of charger installed. If there is a shortfall of funds, additional grant monies or perhaps local American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds could be used. Board member Petty asked how many current parking spaces would be used. Ms. Wolfe said ideally two (2) EV chargers would be installed that would take up two (2) parking spaces. Board member Petty asked if a site beyond Depot Square was feasible. Ms. Wolfe was unsure as having ready access to an existing power supply was an important cost factor. Should the Select Board members want the NEC members to investigate this possibility further, a consultant could be brought in to evaluate possible installation sites.

Board member Petty favors a downtown location but would not want EV chargers located directly in front of a business. Having parking spaces occupied throughout the charging period might deter customers from shopping there. Board member Stevens believes the nearby Northfield Police Station would be a good location as there are a number of available parking spaces. Ms. Wolfe said this was a possibility that could be evaluated. She added the project would have initial installation costs but there should not be any ongoing expenses. Board member Stevens believes when an EV charging station is sited on municipal property, the municipality usually receives about ninety percent (90%) of the charging fee revenue.

Board member Goodrich noted EV chargers have different levels with very different recharging times. Which one are we considering for the downtown site? Ms. Wolfe confirmed EV chargers now have three levels. The first level is quite slow and usually is used for hybrid vehicles and/or for overnight charging at a residence. The third level chargers provide very fast charging but can be quite expensive (\$20,000 to \$50,000). Ms. Wolfe said a level two EV charger probably is the best option here as it charges relatively quickly but is not too expensive (about \$3,000 to \$5,000 for a dual-port option). Board member Goodrich asked if NEC members have been in consultation with the local Utility Commission. Ms. Wolfe said there has been a brief conversation that was mainly about potential costs. Chair Maxwell said the possibility of installing EV charges in the downtown area was a topic discussed at the recent Select Board Retreat (09/01/22). The general feeling was that this would be a good addition to the downtown area but there was reluctance to placement in front of a business. There also were concerns about potential costs to local taxpayers or utility ratepayers. Chair Maxwell favors installing these EV charging stations provided the fees generated covered all operational costs. He also feels the Police Station would be a good location. Board member Petty would like this potential site better if there was a good sidewalk connecting it to the Common. Perhaps the EV charger installation could be done in conjunction with the placement of new sidewalk. Chair Maxwell thought that was a good idea. Board member Goodrich also would prefer this location instead of removing two Depot Square parking spaces from general use. She also thought it would be good to track future charge use to determine whether residents or visitors are making the most use of them. Ms. Wolfe thought it might be better for Depot Square merchants and restaurants to not have the EV charging stations too distant from their businesses. Otherwise, instead of making use of their goods and services, those having their vehicles charged might just stay in them while checking their smart phones, etc. In any case, Ms. Wolfe said these options will be explored by the EV charging station consultant. There was a suggestion from one of the remote attendees. With Community Bank soon closing its Northfield branch located in the old train station, the bank's parking area might be a good EV charger site. There are existing power sources nearby. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Wolfe and the other NEC members for all their work done on this so far and he looks forward to the next update regarding potential installation costs, etc.

- b. Joseph Aldsworth, Capital West Dispatch: Radio Communications.** Mr. Aldsworth is a Vice-President of Capital West Dispatch as well as serving as Deputy Fire Chief and EMS paramedic for Barre City. Mr. Aldsworth also served as a Fire Captain in the Northfield Fire Department several years ago. He is attending tonight along with Montpelier Police Chief Brian Peete in order to provide the Select Board members with information about a planned upgrade of Capital West Dispatch's communications system. Mr. Aldsworth said the current network of radio towers, etc. was installed in the 1990s and was funded by a federal grant. This system has worked well for several years but now needs replacement in order to take advantage of newer technology that will allow for more reliable radio and cell phone communication over longer distances. Grant funds were used to finance a study that confirmed this need to upgrade the system. The current estimate to replace the current communications system is about \$3,500,000.

This upgrade will come at about the same time the Vermont State Police is phasing out its free dispatching services for local law enforcement agencies. Capital West Dispatch currently contracts with the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) and Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) for dispatching services. It is very likely the Northfield Police Department (NPD) will be joining them in the near future. Mr. Aldsworth said the upgrade project would include installation of additional communications towers throughout the Central Vermont region. This would provide system redundancy so the communications network would continue to operate even if one or more tower failed to function in an emergency situation. As for Northfield, the current plan is to install a new local communications tower on the Norwich University (NU) campus at Dalrymple Hall. The current radio tower on Turkey Hill will be taken out of service as the site is no longer suitable. Mr. Aldsworth said the placement of new communication towers in some communities has been difficult due to local opposition to placing them too close to homes, schools, etc. as well as the effect on ridgeline views, etc. Since fiber optic installation would be cost-prohibitive, Capital West Dispatch has reached out to the Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) about using some of their transmission towers for this purpose. Governor Phil Scott has said that he would like the regional emergency communications system upgraded in a fiscally responsible manner with the newly improved system able to provide exceptional service for several years.

Mr. Aldsworth said Capital West Dispatch has applied for state grant funds to finance the upgrade project but also has been banking funds to cover supplemental expenses, etc. As part of this, the Northfield municipality has been asked to contribute \$3,800 per year for the next ten years to help cover some of the local costs. This is in addition to the current quarterly dispatching charges for NFD and NAS. Mr. Aldsworth said his main purpose tonight was to inform the Select Board members of this upcoming project. This is the twelfth such presentation he has made in recent months. Chief Peete added that a lot of work and soul searching went into trying to determine the best way to invest into a regional emergency communications program that will serve Central Vermont residents well for decades to come. He and Mr. Aldsworth have been reaching out to affected communities to make sure the process will be fully transparent throughout its various stages. Mr. Aldsworth said the upgraded communications system would be mixed media in that it would provide access to two-way radios, cell phones, pagers, etc. in order to allow local emergency services to keep their current equipment for the time being. It is expected, however, that most will upgrade over time towards cellular units in order to take advantage of new technological advances. As for the state grant application, Mr. Aldsworth believes today was when awards would be announced but he hasn't heard anything yet. Chief Peete said he learned this afternoon that Capital West Dispatch has been awarded \$2,400,000 in state grant funds. Supplemental grant funds could finance the potential ±\$1,000,000 budget shortfall. Mr. Aldsworth said with this initial grant award, Capital West Dispatch will be able to develop and disseminate an RFP for the initial project phases. Chief Peete noted that the state grant didn't require any local matching funds.

Board member Goodrich thanked Mr. Aldsworth and Chief Peete for all their good work on this project to date and for the valuable information provided tonight. She asked if Northfield would have to provide any additional funds other than the aforementioned \$3,800 annual investment. Mr. Aldsworth said there would not other than the current quarterly charges, which are not expected to increase much due to the upgrade. As indicated earlier, the NPD probably will be getting its dispatching services through Capital West Dispatch in the near future when the free dispatching service provided by Vermont State Police ends. Chief Peete said he has been in contact with NPD Chief John Helfant about these coming changes.

He added that the dispatchers employed by Capital West Dispatch have high levels of training and there are two of them on shift at all times. There also will be new training programs that will help the dispatchers better handle emergency calls related to mental health issues. Mr. Aldsworth added that unlike the Vermont State Police, which has had dispatching staffing issues, Capital West Dispatch has been able to keep a full complement of well-trained and efficient dispatchers who are very good at their jobs. Board member Goodrich asked what would be the timeline for the project. Mr. Aldsworth said one potential contractor (Motorola) estimates project completion about eighteen (18) months after it commences. Chair Maxwell asked if there now is the perception that NPD, NFD, and NAS will be unified under one dispatching service. Mr. Aldsworth said that it is the expectation. Chair Maxwell asked if Capital West Dispatch has been coordinating with NU officials regarding the new tower. Mr. Aldsworth confirmed that there have been several conversations on this. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Aldsworth and Chief Peete for tonight's presentation and he looks forward to their next progress report.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **September 13, 2022 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Goodrich wanted it clarified that she recused herself regarding the CVFiber motion due to a potential conflict of interest rather than just abstaining. Board member Petty found a typo in the discussion of the Wayfinding Master Plan bid results. **Motion to approve amended minutes passed 4-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #06-23.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #06-23 in the amount of \$238,670.79. Board member Stevens noted the municipality is paying the monthly charge for a portalet sited at the transfer station. It was his understanding that our agreement with Casella Waste Systems made them responsible for this expense (along with the cost of electricity, etc.). Since Manager Schulz is not present tonight, Chair Maxwell will ask him about this in coming days. Board member Stevens then asked about a \$1,365 charge for "copper consulting." Chair Maxwell will reach out to Manager Schulz regarding this payment as well. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through September 18, 2022.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$113,854.89. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Appointment of Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Representative.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Tom Davis as Northfield's representative to the CVRPC TAC. Manager Schulz has been serving in this position for a few years but has been unable to attend their meetings as they conflict with Select Board regular meetings. He will continue to serve as the alternate representative. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **DRAFT Purchasing Policy Revision.** Chair Maxwell said Manager Schulz has been working on a revision of the municipality's current purchasing policy. This is the first step in an overall review of municipal policies as was advocated at the Select Board Retreat. Since neither he nor Board member Morse are present tonight, this discussion will be tabled to the next meeting. Board member Petty does have some concerns about the draft policy but will save them for next time.

- c. Winter Sand Purchases.** Chair Maxwell said at their regular meeting of July 26, 2022, the Select Board members awarded the winter sand bid to McCullough Crushing (Montpelier VT) for the pit price of \$10.75 per yard. He added that McCullough Crushing was the sole bidder for winter sand. Chair Maxwell said Highway Foreman Trent Tucker recently inspected the McCullough Crushing pit and found the material to be unsuitable for our purposes. In addition, their charge for delivering the material to Northfield would double the purchase price. In light of this, Manager Schulz is asking that the Select Board members rescind the bid award and authorize him to negotiate with another provider. This would allow the municipality to obtain acceptable material at a reasonable price. Board member Goodrich doesn't understand why McCullough Crushing was awarded the bid without meeting our specifications. Chair Maxwell believes it used to be the policy to inspect the pit material before the awarding of bids but this time it was done afterwards. He added this matter does have some urgency as the Highway Department does need to start stockpiling its winter sand soon. A local supplier (Tabor Earth Extractors) has indicated its ability to provide the required quantity of winter sand. Board member Petty asked why Tabor Earth Extractors did not submit a bid proposal at the time. Chair Maxwell said the pit foreman was unsure then if they would be able to provide sufficient amounts to Northfield due to the demands of its other customers. He now believes this will not be a problem. Board member Petty thought there might be lessons from this experience that could be reflected in the revised purchasing policy. This would include greater flexibility in allowing bid awards to other than the lowest bidder if there are concerns about material quality. Chair Maxwell agrees that the revised policy should allow for more leeway in such matters. He also does feel comfortable with Manager Schulz's request to authorize him to seek a better deal by negotiating with Tabor Earth Extractors. Board member Goodrich would like McCullough Crushing to be given an opportunity to rectify the situation. Chair Maxwell said this provision could be added to the motion. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to rescind the winter sand bid award to McCullough Crushing and authorize Manager Schulz to negotiate with another vendor provided he also contacts McCullough Crushing regarding concerns about their material quality, delivery charges, etc. **Motion passed 4-0-0.** Elroy Hill believes obtaining winter sand from Tabor Earth Extractors would be good because not only are they a local business but they also are willing to reopen the pit during the winter (if needed). Chair Maxwell noted their pit also is quite close to the Highway Department's stockpile located on rented property off Vermont Route 12A.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Proposed Water Improvement Project.** Board member Stevens noted Manager Schulz's written report included information about a waterline extension project that would cost an estimated \$6,000,000. He asked if Manager Schulz will look for grant funding to finance the project. Chair Maxwell said Manager Schulz should be able to provide more information about this at the next meeting. However, at this time it does seem likely all project costs will be covered by outside agencies with little or no direct cost to taxpayers or ratepayers.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Lynn Doney: Northfield Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Hourly Pay.** Mr. Doney serves as a Northfield EMT and it was his understanding that with the start of the new fiscal year (07/01/22), their hourly wage would increase by two dollars (\$2.00) from \$15.00 per hour to \$17.00 per hour. However, when the first paychecks for the new fiscal year arrived, they showed only a \$1.00 per hour increase. Mr. Doney doesn't think is particularly fair given Northfield EMTs conducted COVID-19 tests at the NAS Bay and other locations throughout the pandemic that brought in \$94,000 in net payments for the municipality from the State of Vermont. He would like the Select Board members to reconsider and increase EMT pay to \$17.00 per hour as he believes was promised.

- b. Lynn Doney: Main Street Bridge Sidewalk Hole.** Mr. Doney said there is a large hole in the bridge's westside sidewalk that poses a real risk to pedestrians. He asked if there are any plans to fix it. Chair Maxwell said Manager Schulz has hired a paving contractor to address this. The work should start once materials arrive.
 - c. Lynn Doney: North Main Street Sidewalk.** Mr. Doney said the much of the sidewalk from the Common Café to the Main Street Bridge is in very bad condition. He has seen many older residents, including some using walkers, trying to navigate this broken sidewalk and is very concerned for their safety. Chair Maxwell said sidewalk upgrades will be discussed during the upcoming budget meetings. He has heard similar concerns about some sections of Wall Street sidewalk. Board member Petty said there was discussion during the Select Board Retreat of creating a sidewalk inventory that would categorize sidewalk conditions throughout the community. She feels that if this can be completed in time, this would be a valuable resource during the budget meetings much like the Road Surface Management System (RSMS) program's highway inventory is for backroads, etc.
 - d. Lynn Doney: Proposed Tree Donation for Northfield Common.** Mr. Doney noted in recent years, a cut tree has been put on the eastern part of the Common during the holiday season to serve as the community's Christmas Tree. He said Northfield resident Paul Abare has offered to donate a twenty foot (20') tall live tree that could be planted in the same location that would serve the same purpose for years to come. Tree Works would install the tree for about \$1,500. Sally Davidson added Thomas Trombley has agreed to maintain and keep the tree trimmed properly. Mr. Doney believes the Select Board members need to authorize this tree placement within the next few weeks before the ground freezes, etc. He feels this is a "win-win" situation and cannot understand the objections of at least two Select Board members. Chair Maxwell said he learned of this possibility recently from Manager Schulz. He believes there has been a communications breakdown on this matter. Chair Maxwell himself has concerns about this location as the tree's placement might cause sightline problems for those driving around Depot Square. Another issue is that the Select Board members are looking to develop a long-term plan for revitalizing the Common, which includes rehabilitating the water fountain, etc. Having a large tree planted on the east end of the Common might not conform to the finalized plan. Board member Petty thinks this would be a significant step to take without a full discussion. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members cannot take action on this tonight but this matter will be considered once Manager Schulz can provide his recommendation and the Select Board members have had an opportunity to consider and discuss all the ramifications.
 - e. Lynn Doney: Mill Street Highway Pavement.** At a previous meeting (04/12/22), Mr. Doney brought up the poor condition of the road paving on Mill Street. Is this to be addressed this year? Chair Maxwell said Manager Schulz has engaged a contractor who will repave the road before winter sets in.
- X. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:20 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 October 12, 2022.