

# Joint Meeting of the Northfield Electric and Water & Wastewater Commissions

## Minutes of February 3, 2025

**Roll Call:** Dennis Donahue, Steve Fitzhugh, John Stevens, and Charlie Morse (absent). Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Utility Superintendent James Russo, and Gerard LaVarnway.

The meeting started at 6:30 p.m.

### **Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting.**

Motion by Mr. Donahue, seconded by Mr. Stevens, to approve the minutes of the January 6, 2025 meeting. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

### **Meeting of the Electric Commission**

#### **Northfield Electric Department (NED) Upcoming Projects**

**Smart Meters.** Mr. Fitzhugh said Green Mountain Power (GMP) has delivered new poles at the four (4) locations where they will need to be changed out. The data collection units should be delivered either in late February or early March. Mr. Russo said the new poles have been put in so we are now waiting for the transmission antennae to arrive for installation.

**Norwich University (NU) Cyber Fusion Center.** Mr. Fitzhugh said the building construction is now scheduled to start in early March 2025. There had been some concerns about a possible freeze of the federal funds for the project but it now seems those funds have been released. NU is now waiting for the completion of the soil analysis that would confirm whether or not the former gas station on the building site resulted in significant soil contamination.

**Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** Mr. Fitzhugh said he has been assisting with negotiations to obtain the final easements for this project. Regarding the underground installation of the utility lines, he is hoping that the vaults for this project and for the NU project can be delivered and installed at the same time in order to reduce crane rental costs. Manager Schulz said we are still having problems getting the easement from the Gulf gas station, which has some expansion plans of their own. We will keep working with them to reach an agreement. Mr. Russo said GMP will be in next Monday to perform a changeover on the riser pole on East Street. This will result in a scheduled power outage for about three (3) hours. He added that we now are waiting for a cost estimate from Roux Electric for work on the bridge crossings.

**King Street Battery Storage Project.** Mr. Fitzhugh said most of the details for the interconnection agreement and the energy storage agreement have been worked out. Manager Schulz said there were difficult negotiations regarding the battery storage agreement as the developers had sought terms that were unfavorable for NED. However, there seem to be more equitable terms at this time and we should be able to finalize and approve the agreements soon. Mr. Fitzhugh noted that NED did allow some concessions as part of the negotiations.

**Norwich University Subtransmission Realignment.** Mr. Fitzhugh said the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) study on the utility pole realignment will commence when weather permits.

**NED System-Wide Study.** Mr. Fitzhugh has been working with Boston-based consultants on this evaluation to determine the actual condition of the power system. He also is having them look into the impact of further electrification, i.e. greater usage of electric vehicles, heat pumps, etc., on the power grid in future years. We will need to know what would have to be done (if anything) to meet increased demand for electricity as Vermonters move away from overreliance on fossil fuels. Mr. Fitzhugh said the regular monitoring of the NED system includes keeping track of power outages throughout the year, i.e. their durations, their causes, etc. He added that NED has expanded its tree trimming efforts in recent years in order to reduce the number of power outages caused by fallen tree limbs, etc.

**Nantanna Mill Hydroelectric Facility.** Mr. Fitzhugh said the facility's owners are now waiting for spring to start testing the power generation system. He added that GMP has already put in place the infrastructure upgrades, i.e. new fuses, etc., for restarting this facility.

**Budget Status Reports.** Manager Schulz said there is not a lot of change from last month's budget status report. NED revenues are meeting projections and expenditures are below what had been budgeted. Mr. Fitzhugh said Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) recently contacted its member public utilities regarding the possible impact of Trump administration tariffs on Canadian power. Their advice was that the threatened tariffs probably would not have much impact in the short term. Manager Schulz noted that the proposed tariff on Canadian energy would be ten percent (10%), which is not as bad as it could be. Mr. Fitzhugh noted that with the more moderate composition of new state legislature, there is not much chance of new renewable energy requirements becoming law in the next couple of years.

### **Meeting of the Water & Wastewater Commission**

**Sludge Management Agreement.** Manager Schulz said the agreement the municipality had with Biogenie to collect and transport the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) sludge expired last month. A short-term agreement was reached to continue the collections for now and Biogenie has provided a long-term agreement that could be in effect for the next one, two, or three years. Manager Schulz said the new contract would have a cost increase with the charge for sludge disposal increasing from \$118.00 to \$139.00 per ton. The three-year agreement does include annual cost increases tied to inflation. Manager Schulz said he would need the Commissioners' approval for a three-year contract. Motion by Mr. Fitzhugh, seconded by Mr. Stevens, to authorize Manager Schulz to reach a three-year agreement with Biogenie for WWTF sludge management. Mr. Fitzhugh said one advantage of the longer agreement would be to allow for other possible options to be fully explored during the agreement. Mr. Stevens agreed this was a good idea as the cost of transporting the sludge ourselves to a disposal site probably would be prohibitively expensive.

Although there are no real alternatives to Biogenie’s services at this time, Mr. Russo noted there has been recent discussion of a sludge incinerator being sited in Vermont. However, that project probably would be several years from completion (if it happens at all). He added that we try to dewater the sludge as much as possible to reduce its transportation weight. **Motion passed 3-0-0.** Manager Schulz said he would try to negotiate a slight price reduction of the per ton charges but will not push too hard on this.

#### **Northfield Water & Sewer Department Upcoming Projects**

**Main Street Waterline and Reservoir Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said the contracts for these projects have been signed and we expect the water pipelines to be delivered in coming weeks. They will be stored on municipal property before the project starts up this coming spring. Mr. Russo said he would like to have a new manhole and waterline installed on Noridge Drive in order to replace the sharply angled pipe now in place there. This is a system upgrade and he would prefer to have the work done while nearby South Main Street is torn up for the waterline replacement project. Manager Schulz said the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) is scheduled to repave the non-state highway sections of Vermont Route 12 and Main Street in 2028.

**Cross Brothers Dam Removal.** Manager Schulz said this project should start in July 2025 and be completed within a few weeks. The utility lines in the area shouldn’t be disturbed by the dam removal. The engineering plans for this project will be presented at the next Select Board regular meeting (02/11/25).

**Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Update.** Mr. Russo said we are meeting all our permit requirements including a reduction in the amount of phosphorus being released into the Dog River. This reduction is the result of a judicious use of additional treatment chemicals. The recent cold weather has been helping with this as well.

**Budget Status Reports.** Manager Schulz said both the Water Department and Sewer Department budgets are in good shape with revenue amounts meeting projections. In addition, expenditures remain below the budgeted amounts. He felt there were no real concerns at this time. Mr. Fitzhugh asked if there was going to be any extensive wellfield maintenance performed this coming summer. Mr. Russo expects there to be just routine checks of the equipment, etc. An inspector will be coming in to conduct full evaluations and if any problems are discovered, the affected well(s) will be pumped out and subject to additional service. Mr. Russo said there is no predicting whether additional work will be required in the near future.

**Adjournment.** Motion by Mr. Stevens, seconded by Mr. Fitzhugh, to adjourn. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk