

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
NORTHFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Wednesday, August 26, 2026

Community Room - 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

1. ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 1801 with Russ Barrett, Ragnar Eberle, Nigel Hicks-Tibbles, David Mears, Suz Stillinger, Mariela Swiech, Jeremy Whalen, and Deb Zuaro in attendance.

2. UPDATES TO TONIGHT'S AGENDA

David reports that the Select Board was unable to meet yesterday due to technical difficulties so have not yet appointed Ragnar to the Commission. The appointment is on the agenda for August 27th.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED): None.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING: August 5, 2026

Russ moved to approve the minutes; Jeremy seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously without ammendment.

5. DISCUSSION

1. Emerald Ash Borer Discussion

Russ reports that though the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) has been on the back burner for several years, it is now more active. He and Ruth Ruttenberg completed an Ash Tree Survey for the town perhaps a decade ago. He has told Town Manager Mary Smith that he will forward her a copy of that survey. He also stated that we need to remind people of the recommendations. He will send something to the Northfield News for their next issue. We can also post on FB and FPF.

Suz asked if it would be helpful to the town if we looked at the trees on the survey so they could prioritize any preemptive tree removal. Russ agreed to ask Mary.

David will ask Mary if retreating ash trees on the common (and other town trees?) is in the budget.

2. Dark Sky Presentation Planning

Suz reported that Jon McCann, president of DarkSky Vermont, is unable to come to any of our currently scheduled meetings. She asked that we reschedule our November and December meetings to a Wednesday in early December that he is free. (The NCC usually makes one meeting out of both of those meetings.) Everyone is available on December 9th. David will alert Ken McCann to change the meeting date on the town website. He will also invite the Berlin Conservation Commission. Suz will write write to Jon McCann.

Jeremy will update the energy commission and someone will come if they are able.

3. Friends of the Winooski Training -- How to Host a River Cleanup: Next Steps & Planning

Suz attended the informational webinar hosted by FWR which went phase by phase from planning to completion of an event. Suz asked for input whether the Dog River was in need of clean-up. Ragnar says right now there is little trash along much of it but there are parts that could benefit from a cleanup. Perhaps it could be scouted next year ahead of time to pick the places most in need of cleanup.

Suz will ask FWR what we might expect costs to be and David will mention it to the town when asking when to submit budget requests.

6. UPDATES

1. Update on Town Forest Conservation Easement Next Steps - Meeting with Town Manager to be Scheduled

Jeremy says that the Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) now has copies of the MOUs that both Berlin and Montpelier have with the local chapter of mountain bikers. They define what the conservation easement is on those properties. Jeremy thinks this would be useful to bring to the meeting with Mary. Jeremy will send to David. David will write to Mary about when the meeting can be scheduled.

Jeremy talked with Jens Hilke, conservation planner for Vt Fish and Wildlife, about whether the state's conservation design planning could help with the easement conversation. He, Jens and David will discuss further.

2. Friends of the Winooski Reconnecting with Rivers Cohort Meeting Update

Deb, Jeremy and David attended the meeting. Deb stated that much of the focus for the Northfield break-out group was on the Cheney Field Working Group as an example of different groups working together.

The "Committee of Chairs" has not happened yet.

Suz suggested that a river cleanup could be a great joint project since there are multiple groups interested in the Dog and it would be an opportunity to bring new people to the river.

3. Friends of the Winooski Wellfield Project Proposal Update

David reported that both Mary and Jim Russo, head of public works, are concerned about the possibility that roots from the plantings would interfere with waterlines. David will ask Michele Braun and Sam Puddicomb of FWR to address these concerns.

4. Town Forest Accessibility Update

The practice day went well. Mary and Jim developed a list of items to clarify before they sign off on an actual pilot public event.

5. VYCC Youth Trails Improvement Fundraising

Deb reported that a VOREC grant may be possible as trail improvement can lead to economic and recreational use increases.

David will review the grant requirements as well and speak to Tom Davis (economic development director) about this and other grant possibilities.

6. Town Forest Stewardship Committee

Jeremy provides the update:

-The final draft of the engineering report for repairing the Lybrand Trail is coming in 3-4 weeks.

-GNAR (Greater Northfield Area Riders) is its own group and not part of a larger mountain biking organization. They have been working on the Orange Trail at the Shaw Center. The TFSC will meet with the group before they start any work in the town forest.

-They have received the Audubon Assessment for work to increase bird habitat.

-Mary has agreed to hire out the mowing of the entire Cheney Field (except the large area of knotweed) in September or October. Jeremy estimates this will be less than \$1,000. From here, the committee will develop a multi-year plan for optimum bird habitat.

-"Race to the Top" will be September 27th. Organized by NU cross country running coach Mike McGrane, this race is open to the public. In the past, they have donated some money back to the town.

7. Berlin Conservation Commission Coordination

David will invite them to the December 9th meeting since DarkSky Vermont may be of interest to them too.

7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Suz gives Mariela a big thank you for her years on the NCC. David makes a motion to recognize her for her contribution, especially in connecting with youth; Jeremy seconds. It passed unanimously. This is her last meeting.

9. AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING (September 23, 2026)

Budget requests?

10. ADJOURNMENT

Jeremy makes the motion to adjourn; Russ seconded. It passed unanimously at 1850.