

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of October 28, 2025

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Charles Morse, Board members K. David Maxwell (absent), Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Thomas Davis (Economic Development Director), Brain Massey Jr. (Planning Commission), Royal DeLegge (Chair, Planning Commission), Sally Davidson, Kristin Pollard, Lorna Doney, Bethany Drum, Mary Naden Scott (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Delane McIlvene (AWPS Task Force), Tim Swartz (AWPS Task Force), Dan Anderson (AWPS Task Force), Kaitlyn Keating (AWPS Task Force), Bonnie Allen (Managing Director, The Veterans Place), Lucas Herring (President, The Veterans Place), Auditi Guha (VTDigger), Lois Melander, Curtis Dudley, Annie Dudley, John Helfant, Sara Helfant, Susan Stillinger, Carolyn Stevens, Kristina Ward, Chris Bradley, Nancy LaVarnway, Jeremy Whalen, Sarah Path, Darcy Grenier, Laurie Beth Putnam, Pierre Gomez, Trevor Morley, and Elroy Hill.

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

II. PUBLIC HEARING

- a. Code of Ethics Investigation & Enforcement Ordinance. (7:01 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the Vermont State Legislature approved a Municipal Code of Ethics last year that provided guidelines for local officials to follow in order to avoid even the appearance of unethical behavior, which could include non-recusal where there is an apparent conflict of interest, using a municipal position for financial gain, benefitting personally from municipal contracts, etc. The legislation also stipulated that certain municipal officials are required to undergo ethics training and that each municipality must create a process so concerned citizens can file a complaint should they suspect a municipal official has acted improperly. Approval of a local ordinance that governs the investigation of ethics complaints is a requirement of the state legislation and this public hearing is an opportunity for members of the public to participate in the process. Chair Morse asked if anyone present would like to comment on the proposed ordinance. There was no response. Board member Petty has two (2) changes that she would like in the ordinance wording and both would replace the Municipal Manager with the Select Board Chair as the person who would take receipt of ethics complaints directed "against the Designated Complaint Recipient." This change is needed because the Municipal Manager will serve as the Designated Complaint Recipient in Northfield. There being no other questions or comments, the public hearing closed at 7:04 p.m.

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

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Lucas Herring, The Veterans Place. (7:05 p.m.)** Mr. Herring is President of the Veterans Place and with their annual meeting approaching, he wanted to provide the Select Board members with information regarding their operations. He is accompanied tonight by Bonnie Allen, who is the Managing Director for the Veterans Place and is largely responsible for its day-to-day operations. Mr. Herring said the Veterans Place has been in operation for sixteen (16) years and focuses on providing transitional housing for veterans, providing training programs so that they can live independently, and raising awareness in the community regarding the serious problem of veteran homelessness. Mr. Herring stated that most Veterans Place residents make use of the facility for three (3) to six (6) months as they seek more permanent accommodations. During this time, the residents are provided with travel to medical appointments and other assistance in addressing health concerns. Mr. Herring said the Veterans Place does receive funding from the federal government but also relies on donations to provide the additional funds needed to help cover specific needs of certain residents.

Ms. Allen confirmed that the Veterans Administration does provide for seventy percent (70%) of their operating costs and the annual appeal for donations covers the shortfall. The funds received cover the cost of operating the facility including such basic necessities as meals, laundry, travel, etc. The Veterans Place staff members also try to provide the residents with extras like the pumpkins that were recently purchased so that the residents could take part in a recent jack o' lantern carving contest. In addition to cash donations, they also accept material goods including food, clothing, etc. Ms. Allen said there sometimes is the need to provide a resident with certain household items as they prepare to move into new accommodations. As many of the assisted veterans don't have family members to support them, the Veterans Place sometimes fills the gap by providing groceries and other necessities. Ms. Allen said that last year, the Veterans Place provided temporary housing for thirty-one (31) individuals and of those, about sixty-seven percent (67%) were relocated within the community. Board member Shernock thanked Mr. Herring, Ms. Allen, and all those associated with the Veterans Place for the great service they provide for the veteran homeless community. She then asked if the Veterans Place would benefit from volunteer assistance during the holiday season. Ms. Allen said they would and this could include providing weekend meals for the residents as well as such Christmas gift items as quilts, etc. Bethany Drum asked if some residents stay for longer than the three (3) to six (6) month average. Ms. Allen said some do stay for a year or longer and this is mainly due to special medical needs, mental health issues, etc. The condition of each resident needs to be stabilized before they can be moved elsewhere. However, the strict behavior rules in place at the Veterans Place regarding alcohol use, etc., are strong incentives for residents to seek their own accommodations and most seek to leave after about nine (9) months or so. Chair Morse then thanked Mr. Herring and Ms. Allen for the Veterans Place update and wished them well with their upcoming fundraising efforts.

- b. Kristin Pollard: Public Information Requests. (7:20 p.m.)** Ms. Pollard said that since Northfield Police Department (NPD) Chief Pierre Gomez has submitted his letter of resignation, she has received the information that she requested and she thanked Manager Schulz and the Select Board members for this. She is still displeased that during his tenure in Northfield, Chief Gomez did not follow proper protocol in wearing his uniform, responding in a timely manner to the public, etc. Ms. Pollard also would like there to be better control and preservation of body camera footage. In addition, Ms. Pollard has sent emails to the Select Board members about various matters and sometimes she did not receive even an acknowledgement that her email was received. There also will need to be some clarity regarding how the now vacant NPD Chief position will be filled and how important NPD matters will be handled in the interim. *Note : Let the record show that Ms. Pollard scolded Board Member Shernock for a visible unprofessional reaction to Ms. Pollard's comments. Board member Shernock conceded that Ms. Pollard was correct, in fact, and Board member Shernock apologized.*

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. October 14, 2025 (Regular Meeting). (7:28 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the minutes. John Helfant had a couple corrections regarding statements he made at this meeting. Other typos will be corrected as well. **Motion to approve the amended minutes passed 4-0-0.**
- b. October 20, 2025 (Special Meeting). (7:30 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #08-26 & #08-26B-E. (7:31 p.m.)** (Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #08-26 & #08-26B-E in the amount of \$744,016.31. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

- b. **Approval of Warrant #08-26A. (7:32 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #08-26A in the amount of \$20,764.59. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through October 12, 2025. (7:33 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$112,766.30. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Accept Retirement/Resignation of Town Manager. (7:34 p.m.)** Chair Morse noted Manager Schulz has submitted a retirement/resignation letter that indicates that he intends to leave his position on March 4, 2026. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to accept with regret his retirement/resignation. Board member Petty thanked Manager Schulz for his long service to the community. Manager Schulz said he has served here for about twelve (12) years and is pleased with what he and the Select Board members have been able to accomplish in this timeframe. Board member Stevens thanked Manager Schulz for his constant support for the Brown Public Library and its operations and wished him well in his retirement. The other Board members expressed their gratitude as well. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Code of Ethics Investigation & Enforcement Ordinance. (7:36 p.m.)** As indicated earlier during the public hearing, approval of this ordinance is required by state law in order to ensure that new municipal ethics standards are maintained by local communities and that there is a process so that members of the public can report apparent code of ethics violations. Board member Petty has requested two (2) changes in the ordinance wording (see above) and these will be incorporated in the final document. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the Code of Ethics Investigation & Enforcement Ordinance as amended. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. **Proposed Norwich University (NU) Land Transfer. (7:38 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said NU has suggested a land swap in which the municipality will transfer Center Park to NU in return for land adjacent to the wellfield. NU would like to reconfigure some of its on-campus streets for improved safety and its ownership of the Center Park parcel would facilitate this process. There had been some question about whether this land transfer would affect property tax collections by the municipality. Manager Schulz looked into this and found that the parcel that NU is offering is already non-taxable so there would be no tax revenue loss with the land transfer. Chair Morse believes the parcel NU would transfer to the municipality has a Northfield Electric Department (NED) power distribution line with right-of-way. He would like this matter cleared up before direct negotiations are turned over to the Northfield-Norwich University Subcommittee (Board members Maxwell and Stevens). Chair Morse said another issue is whether the parcel would need to be subdivided and whether this would require an ACT 250 permit. Manager Schulz said some boundary line adjustment probably would have to be made after the land transfer. Without objection, further action on this matter was postponed until a future meeting when more information is available.
- d. **Planning Commission Appointment. (7:50 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Lucas Herring to the Planning Commission. Board member Petty recently served with Mr. Herring on the VOREC Grant Implementation Committee and said he proved to be a good committee member then. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Main Street Waterline Replacement Project. (7:55 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the project now remains on schedule as the curb-to-curb paving south of the Main Street Bridge is now underway. The waterline installation north of the bridge is nearly complete and the work on Byam Hill and Hill Street also is progressing very well. It now appears that the project will be completed this year.

- b. Water Tank Replacement Project. (7:57 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said this project also is nearly complete with site restoration as the only remaining issue. Whether the worksite is restored to its original condition depends much on the weather in the next few weeks.
- c. FY 2026-2027 Municipal Budget (7:58 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the budget process for the next fiscal year is now starting. The Department Heads have been provided their worksheets and we hope to have the draft budget delivered to the Select Board members by the end of November.
- d. Community Police Coverage. (7:59 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the Berlin Police Department has agreed to provide law enforcement assistance on request to the Northfield community much as the Vermont State Police have been providing in recent months.
- e. Smart Meters. (8:00 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the smart meters will be installed at Northfield utility customers' homes by next spring. This will allow for utility consumption to be monitored in the Utility Office in the Municipal Building and eliminate the need for an in-person meter reader going to every residence. Public notifications about this will start in the next couple of months.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Central Street Halloween Night Closure. (8:00 p.m.)** Board member Petty would like confirmation that Central Street will be closed to through traffic from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Halloween night this year. Manager Schulz said that would be the case. In addition, the Common will be closed to through traffic from 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. so that the "Truck or Treat" can be held there.
- b. Habitat for Humanity Groundbreaking. (8:01 p.m.)** Board member Petty noted that the groundbreaking ceremony for a Habitat for Humanity project on North Main Street will be held tomorrow morning (10/29/25) at 11:00 a.m. This project will result in the construction of "a permanently affordable duplex home for two local families."
- c. Main Street Post-Construction Paving Project (8:01 p.m.)** Board member Stevens asked if the old concrete pavement was all removed on South Main Street before the repaving of the street was started. Manager Schulz said the old highway concrete was either removed during the current project or during the previous stormwater mitigation project. The paved area north of the Main Street Bridge will be patched for now but could be repaved next year.
- d. Municipal Culvert Repairs. (8:05 p.m.)** Board member Shernock asked if the problem culverts identified in the recent inventory will be addressed this year. Manager Schulz said some have already been repaired by the Highway crew but others will have to wait until next year.
- e. Tax Sale Legal Matter. (8:06 p.m.)** Board member Shernock noted that there was a legal document in the packet regarding a request by a Northfield resident to invalidate the delinquent tax sale held last year. Manager Schulz said the property owner did redeem the property by paying all back taxes and fees within one year of the tax sale but did so "under protest." The property owner did obtain assistance from legal services and is disputing the amount of interest charged during the redemption period and some other charges. The municipality has turned this matter over to the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT), which will arrange for appropriate legal counsel. Manager Schulz noted that Vermont law has changed much in recent years and has made it much more difficult for municipalities to make use of tax sales to collect unpaid property taxes.

- f. **R.E. Tucker Sand Pit Site Visit. (8:10 p.m.)** Earlier this year, R.E. Tucker Inc. offered to sell its sand pit located off Vermont Route 12A to the municipality. Part of the negotiation process would include a site visit and Chair Morse would like to schedule one during daytime hours. Board member Petty suggested that perhaps the Highway Planning & Project Oversight Subcommittee (Board members Morse and Stevens) could do this site visit as part of their next meeting. They then could provide their recommendations to the other Select Board members at a future regular meeting.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **John Helfant: Public Information Requests. (8:13 p.m.)** At the previous meeting, Mr. Helfant had asked that the municipality honor a request from Kristin Pollard to get a copy of a deleted NPD Facebook posting. Since that meeting, his wife Sara has made the same request in writing. Manager Schulz said he will respond to this request as well as any other written public information request as soon as possible. Mr. Helfant also would like to know which municipal employee was involved when the new NPD email address was set up and would like copies of all emails sent between Chief Gomez and Economic Development Director Davis.
- b. **Pierre Gomez: Public Attacks, etc. (8:17 p.m.)** Mr. Gomez said he was commenting tonight as a private citizen and not as the former police chief (his resignation is effective 11/01/25). He had participated remotely at the last regular meeting and felt he had been improperly shut down on several occasions. In addition, it has been stated disparagingly by some residents that he had been a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) hire as police chief and he wanted to confirm whether or not that was the case. Manager Schulz does not remember if that had been a consideration during the hiring process. Mr. Gomez said he continues to receive hostile emails from Northfield residents about various matters that happened when he was police chief. He thinks it is shameful that he continues to be slandered even though he is no longer employed by the municipality.

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a personnel issue. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:26 p.m.

Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 8:32 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of November 10, 2025.