

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD PUBLIC HEARING & REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of February 25, 2025

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Monica White (Green Mountain Transit), Kelly Finnegan (Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice), Yvonne Lory (Capstone Community Action), Denise Sanders (Circle), Nancy Peck (Central Vermont Community Harvest), Don Doyon, Brian Massie Jr., Carolyn Stevens, Pam Ricker, Sharon Alderman, and Elroy C. Hill.

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

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those present were asked to join the Select Board members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. PUBLIC HEARING

- a. Northfield Town Meeting Australian Ballot Articles.** State law requires the Select Board to hold a public hearing prior to Town Meeting so members of the public can discuss or ask questions regarding the articles to be voted upon by Australian Ballot. This year, these articles are all funding requests from regional non-profit organizations and they were invited by mail to attend this public hearing either in person or remotely. Chair Maxwell then went through the list of Australian Ballot articles.

Article 7. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of an amount not to exceed twenty-one thousand dollars (\$21,000) for FY26 towards the Northfield Commuter year-round commuter with service between Northfield and Montpelier? As no one was present initially from Green Mountain Transit (GMT), Chair Maxwell asked Manager Schulz what he felt was the future of GMT in Northfield. Manager Schulz said GMT has been facing some financial issues over the past year but he did not feel that it would affect the operation of the commuter bus service during the next fiscal year. Board member Morse felt that was good as a number of new housing units are being built this year and some of these residents might require public transportation to Montpelier. Monica White, the GMT Director of Central Vermont Services, did arrive a few minutes later to attend the public hearing remotely. She said GMT is very grateful to partner with Northfield for the operation of the weekday commuter bus service as well as the local shuttle bus service that operates every Wednesday. Ms. White also is grateful to Northfield voters for their past support for GMT services. During the last fiscal year, GMT transported 3,146 riders on the Northfield Commuter Bus and 474 riders used the Northfield Community Shuttle service. In addition, 929 older and/or disabled Northfield residents were provided special transportation services in order to access medical appointments, food shelves, etc. In addition, GMT provides Northfield residents with connecting bus services to Waterbury, Burlington, and beyond. Chair Maxwell then asked Ms. White about the future of GMT in Northfield. Ms. White said GMT has been required by recent state legislation to evaluate its rural bus services in order to see if some routes could be transferred to another regional transit provider for greater efficiency, cost savings, etc. This evaluation has been returned to the state legislature, which is now reviewing it. There is a possibility that the local public transportation services now provided by GMT could be taken over by Tri-Valley Transit, which now operates in Addison, Orange, and northern Windsor counties. Ms. White said if that change did come to pass, it would not take effect until July 2026 and there would be no reduction in transportation services. Affected municipalities also would be informed long beforehand. Board member Morse said that based on his own observations, it appears that GMT ridership has increased in recent years and has returned to pre-pandemic numbers.

Article 8. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$14,800 for the Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice? Kelly Finnegan is the Community Relations & Events Coordinator for Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice (CVHHH). She said during the 2024 calendar year, 179 Northfield residents benefited from CVHHH services and this included 3,343 total visits/contacts and 219 total admissions. Most of these interactions involve home health care, hospice care, and palliative care services. Ms. Finnegan added that there were seventeen (17) new Northfield CVHHH participants during 2024. Board member Morse said his neighbors benefited recently from CVHHH home hospice and palliative care and they were provided flawless service.

Article 9. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$2,800 for the Good Samaritan Haven? There was no discussion.

Article 10. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$2,500 for Washington County Mental Health Services, Inc.? There was no discussion.

Article 11. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,200 for Central Vermont Adult Education? There was no discussion.

Article 12. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,200 for Mosaic Vermont (formerly the Sexual Assault Crisis Team of Washington County)? There was no discussion.

Article 13. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,000 for Capstone Community Action, Inc.? Yvonne Lory is the Communications Manager for Capstone Community Action, which was established in 1965 with federal funding as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" initiative. Their mission is to help "individuals and families in Central Vermont to achieve stability and rise out of poverty." Capstone Community Action is one of five (5) such agencies in Vermont and there are nearly one thousand (1,000) other such organizations located throughout the country. As part of their mission to improve the lives of those living in poverty, Capstone provides Central Vermont residents with improved access to basic living needs such as food, shelter, winter heating, home weatherization, etc. They also helped improved living conditions with workforce development and other training programs. In the past year, 133 Northfield households representing 265 individuals benefited from Capstone services. Additional information about Capstone, their various service programs, and their annual report is available at their website <https://capstonevt.org>. The website also has an up-to-date schedule of all their upcoming free online training seminars.

Article 14. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,000 for Circle? Denise Sanders tonight is representing Circle, which was formerly known as Battered Women's Services and Shelter. Ms. Sanders said Circle has been in operation for thirty-five (35) years and provides services to victims/survivors of domestic violence. They also provide educational presentations in local schools in order to help break the circle of violence that can exist in families affected by domestic abuse. As its services are confidential, it is difficult to determine the hometowns of all those assisted by Circle services. However, during its last fiscal year (2023-2024) Circle handled 126 hotline calls and in-person meetings with clients who self-identified as Northfield residents. Ms. Sanders then thanked Northfield voters for their past support for Circle.

Article 15. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,000 for the Vermont Center for Independent Living? There was no discussion.

Article 16. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$800 for the Family Center of Washington County? There was no discussion.

Article 17. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$600 for Elevate Youth Services (formerly the Washington County Youth Service Bureau/Boys & Girls Club)? There was no discussion.

Article 18. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$400 for Community Harvest of Central Vermont? Nancy Peck is one of sixty-eight (68) Northfield residents who volunteer for Community Harvest of Central Vermont (CHCV). By working with local farmers, CHCV volunteers glean surplus produce that then is provided to local food banks, schools, and other facilities. In Northfield, that includes the CERV food shelf, the Northfield Senior Center, and the Northfield public schools. The produce they gather is perfectly healthy but for various reasons cannot be sold in markets. The institutions that receive the produce specify what they will take and the qualities they require so nothing goes to waste. CHCV also works with local farmers to supplement the produce they distribute with meat, cheese, and other animal products. In the last year, CHCV provided Northfield residents with over 6,400 pounds of fresh, nutritious food through its partner sites. Board member Shernock noted that this program started as a Community College of Vermont (CCV) class project and has over the last eleven (11) years to become an important food resource for the Central Vermont community.

Article 19. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$400 for the Friends of the Winooski River? There was no discussion.

Article 20. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$300 for Green Up Vermont? There was no discussion.

Article 21. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$250 for OUR House of Central Vermont? There was no discussion.

There being no other questions or comments, the public hearing closed at 7:25 p.m.

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

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED): None.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **February 11, 2025 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Chair Maxwell abstaining.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #16-25 & #16-25A-E.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #16-25 & #16-25A-E in the amount of 243,745.72. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through February 16, 2025.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$132,888.15. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Personnel Policies and Procedures.** Manager Schulz said it has been a long process to revise and update the personnel policies and procedures for Northfield municipal employees. These policies and procedures were last updated in 2010 and there have been considerable changes in federal and state employment laws since then. Manager Schulz has taken input from the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) and from the Town Attorney to ensure that any new policy revisions will be consistent with current law and established employment practices. In addition, language has been incorporated in the latest draft that is taken directly from the approved union contracts for Northfield employees and for Northfield Police Department (NPD) officers. Manager Schulz said one major change in the policy is to move away from the formal employee discipline scale in favor of at-will employment. This change was recommended by both VLCT and the Town Attorney in order to streamline the process for dismissing bad employees. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the revised Personnel Policies and Procedures as presented by management. Board member Morse approves of removing the former Appendix A, which was the Disciplinary Guideline Table, from the revised policy. He then asked about the Social Media Policy that the Select Board members approved as a separate policy in July 2015. Manager Schulz said it will be incorporated into the personnel policy as an appendix.

Board member Stevens then had a number of suggestions, such as specifying the timing and frequency of employment recruitment postings. In addition, there are references to the "Town" taking certain actions and Board member Stevens would like it specified whether it would be the Town Manager or the Select Board members who would be acting in certain circumstances. Board member Stevens also would like it specified whether Select Board members have the right to inspect employee personnel files. Manager Schulz reached out to the Town Attorney about this and the answer he received is that this is not permissible in most cases. However, the Select Board members have the right to review the Town Manager's personnel file at any time. Board member Morse felt the Select Board members should be able to determine whether personnel files are being maintained properly through periodic inspections. Manager Schulz will contact the Town Attorney regarding this. Board member Petty asked if all prospective employees undergo background checks. Chair Maxwell noted the language regarding this is that prospective employees "may" be subject to a background check. After some discussion, it was Select Board consensus that in the interest of consistency background checks will be required for all prospective employees. Board member Petty then pointed out a few typos in the draft document that will be corrected. She also noted a reference to a municipal Safety Committee and asked if there was one currently in existence. If not, the reference should be removed from the document. Board member Petty added that she is very pleased with the progress being made to update and improve the current document. As there were still some suggested revisions and corrections to the policy that need to be included, the motion to approve the policy as presented tonight was tabled. The revised document should be finalized and made ready for formal Select Board approval at the next regular meeting (03/11/25).

- b. Tax Stabilization Policy and Application Form.** Manager Schulz said the Economic Development Subcommittee (Board members Morse and Petty) met last week with him and Economic Development Director (EDD) Tom Davis to discuss possible revisions of the municipality's Tax Stabilization Policy. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the revised Tax Stabilization Policy. Board member Morse felt the current policy has a flaw in that it excludes development projects already in progress when the Tax Stabilization application form is submitted. He would like to remove this restriction. Board member Petty believes the purpose of the Tax Stabilization Policy is to promote new development that might not happen otherwise. She has reviewed tax stabilization policies from other Vermont municipalities (i.e., Montpelier, Barre, Waterbury, etc.) and they all require that the tax stabilization application be submitted before the project's construction phase. Board member Petty would make exceptions for some local projects that started before the current application form was drafted (see example below). Chair Maxwell agrees the application form normally should be submitted at the start of the project. Manager Schulz suggested defining the word "construction" in the policy to indicate whether preliminary exploratory work would or would not result in tax stabilization agreement disqualification. Board member Morse felt that such initial work should not result in tax stabilization agreement ineligibility. Chair Maxwell noted the municipality already has a Tax Stabilization Policy in effect so what is now being considered are amendments that would further clarify certain matters. He would like any Select Board suggestions for additional revisions to be submitted to Manager Schulz as soon as possible so they can be fully discussed at a future meeting. The motion to approve the revised policy was tabled and this matter will be discussed again at the next regular meeting.
- c. Tax Stabilization Application – 151 South Main Street.** Vermont Rental Solutions is currently renovating the former Masonic Temple in order to create fifteen (15) one-bedroom apartments. They have applied for a tax stabilization agreement based on their thus providing new affordable housing units for the Northfield community. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the application from Vermont Rental Solutions for a five (5) year tax stabilization agreement for their development located at 151 South Main Street. This motion includes a waiver on any tax stabilization policy restrictions on projects already under construction. Board member Petty noted normally tax stabilization agreements are limited to three (3) years but that timeframe can be extended if the project meets certain criteria. In this case, the creation of affordable housing units and the use of energy efficiency measures during construction justify extending the agreement length to five (5) years.

Board member Petty then noted that the building hasn't been used in recent years but its historic facade will be maintained after the project's completion. Board member Morse noted the lack of off-street parking near the building remains a concern, especially during the winter when a street parking ban is in effect for several months. However, he felt that some solution will be found with the developers working in conjunction with the Development Review Board (DRB). Board member Shernock thought that according to the construction plans, this should be considered workforce housing. She added that there is nearby access to public transportation (GMT) bus stops. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Main Street Water Line and Cheney Farm Water Tank Replacement Projects.** Manager Schulz said construction work for these two (2) projects should start in April 2025. The project schedules will be posted on Front Porch Forum and other local social media websites in order to keep Northfield residents fully aware of what is going on.
- b. Northfield Utility FY 2025-2026 Budgets.** Manager Schulz said work has begun on the next fiscal year budgets for the Electric, Water, and Sewer Departments. He noted that local utility usage has pretty much returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- c. 310 Water Street FEMA Buyout.** Manager Schulz said the paperwork for this FEMA buyout will be completed by the end of this week. It then will become municipal property and the next step would be to develop an RFP for the building's razing.
- d. Smart Meters.** Manager Schulz said data collection units will be installed at various locations around town in preparation for the arrival and installation of the smart meters this autumn. The cost of this project is largely covered by state grant funds.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Winter Road Conditions.** Board member Morse said the frost heaves on the paved roads are quite bad this winter and advised local drivers to go slowly when approaching them. The Highway crew, which has been keeping quite busy recently with recurrent snowstorms, will address them when weather permits.
- b. Northfield Town Meeting 2025.** Board member Morse noted the Town Meeting Open Session will start at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, March 3, 2025 in the Mary Granai Corrigan Auditorium at the Northfield Middle & High School. The Farmers Market will provide free "snackables" to those attending. Voting on the Australian ballot articles will be held the next day from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. in the Northfield Middle & High School Cafeteria.
- c. Central Street Drainage Issues.** Board member Shernock has been informed there still are stormwater drainage issues on Central Street near its intersection with Washington Street. Manager Schulz said some work already has been done to mitigate the problem but there still are some puddling issues at the bottom of some elevated driveways. Further efforts, such as asphalt trimming, will be performed when weather permits. Board member Petty said there is a fairly new sidewalk on the west side of the street and it should be fully accessible to pedestrians throughout the year.
- d. South Main Street Sidewalk Snow Clearance.** Board member Shernock said residents living on the east side of South Main Street are not pleased that the sidewalk in front of their homes has not been plowed over the past couple of winters. Manager Schulz said there has been some discussion of repaving and widening this asphalt sidewalk, which now is in such poor condition that use of the snowplow there would result in further sidewalk damage. Chair Maxwell added that the presence of utility poles on that side of the street further restricts proper snowplow use.

- e. **Town Highway 54, Bridge 56.** Board member Stevens asked about the status of this bridge, which is located off Vermont Route 12 just south of Lovers Lane. The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has categorized the bridge as in poor condition and requested that it be repaired as soon as possible. Manager Schulz said \$160,000 in Highway Department Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) funds have been budgeted for this bridge repair project and he will develop an RFP so the work can be done this summer. That timeline presumes the current project budget will be sufficient. If not, the repair work might have to be postponed another year.
- f. **Lovers Lane Paving.** Board member Stevens asked about the status of plans to pave Lovers Lane. Manager Schulz said he and EDD Tom Davis have been exploring grant opportunities that would cover the expense of this project, which is estimated to cost about \$800,000. In the interim, new guardrails will be installed and work on the road base performed by making use of previously received state grant funds.
- g. **Depot Square Parking Situation.** Board member Shernock was pleased to see that a letter was sent to Depot Square business owners/operators requesting that their employees park at Holland Place in order to free up Depot Square storefront parking spaces. She asked if there has been any responses. Manager Schulz said he has received some suggestions for resolving the problem, such as allowing overnight parking in the Municipal Building parking lot, etc. He is now reviewing several options to determine which would be feasible, cost-effective, etc. Board member Petty would like these parking issues on a future Select Board meeting agenda for a full discussion. It is possible grant funds might be available to conduct a parking study to determine whether this is a real problem and, if so, what possible solutions could be put in place.
- h. **Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) Access.** In light of his own recent heart episode, Chair Maxwell thought it might be a good idea that the municipality purchase additional AEDs that would be made available at additional locations throughout the community. It also is possible Northfield residents purchased the AEDs themselves to benefit the community.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy C. Hill: Support for S. 66.** Mr. Hill has long been an advocate for eliminating excessive motor vehicle noise in this community including prohibiting the use of “jake brakes.” There now is a bill under consideration in the Vermont State Senate “to establish limits for noise from motor vehicles; to prohibit the modification of vehicle exhaust systems in a manner that results in excess noise or smoke emissions; and to prohibit the use of engine compression brake devices without a muffler.” Mr. Hill felt such legislation was long overdue and he hopes the Select Board members and other Northfield residents will contact state legislators to express their support.

XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a personnel matter and a legal issue with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:05 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:20 p.m. No action was taken.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of March 11, 2025.