

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of May 12, 2026

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Tim Davis, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Mary Smith, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Jon Anderson (Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity), David Ward (Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity), Zachariah Watson (Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity), Kristin Pollard, Melinda Davis, Stephen Coley, Gerard LaVarnway, Susan Stillinger, Sarah Path, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy C. Hill.

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

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Jon Anderson & David Ward, Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity: Update on Affordable Duplex Home (804 North Main Street). (7:01 p.m.)** Mr. Anderson is the new chair of the Northfield Building Committee, which is an ad hoc group working on this housing project. They operate under the umbrella of the Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity, which itself is the local branch of a nationwide organization that creates affordable housing ownership opportunities for lower income families. He replaced Anne Donanhue who recently stepped down as chair due to her workload in the state legislature as well as health concerns. The Northfield project is the construction of a new duplex on North Main Street that will house two families who will assume mortgages for eventual ownership of their housing units. Even after they pay off the mortgages, the structure must remain affordable housing in future and sold below full market value. Mr. Anderson said Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity is a 501(c) organization that receives no federal funding. The structure now being built is based on a recent Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity construction project in Randolph. The Northfield Building Committee will be making the decision on who will live in the new duplex and that decision will be based on income level, applicant ability to keep up with mortgage payments, etc. Other members of the local committee include Tom Bright (Volunteer Coordinator), David Ward (Fundraising Coordinator), Janan Hamm (Outreach Coordinator), and Carolyn Stevens (Budget Coordinator). A groundbreaking ceremony was held last November when the building foundation was installed. The project restarted within the past two (2) weeks with prefabricated walls and a roof added. Volunteers next will be working on the building interior and there will be assistance from YouthBuild and from the Randolph Technical Career Center. The current goal is to have everything completed by January 1, 2027. Mr. Ward said that in his capacity as Fundraising Coordinator he is looking for ways for Northfield residents to become involved by volunteering their labor, making monetary donations, providing needed building materials, or helping organize fundraising events. Since Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit organization, all contributions are tax deductible. Mr. Ward then thanked the Select Board members for allowing them to provide this project update and he hoped that they will help spread the word about it to community members. Zachariah Watson is the Executive Director of Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity and he was very grateful that the Northfield Community and Norwich University were so welcoming when this particular project was originally proposed. He felt this was a very exciting project and his organization exists to create affordable housing opportunities for Vermonters either by building new structures or revitalizing older housing units. Board member Shernock asked if the prefab housing panels will be properly insulated. Mr. Anderson said there were as they were thirty inches (30") thick. In addition, conduit spaces are pre-engineered so that holes in the wall won't need to be added later. Board member Shernock asked if the structure's roof will have solar panels. Mr. Watson said the building was solar oriented in order to take advantage of natural light and heating. Solar panels are not part of the original construction plans but could be easily added later. Board member Shernock asked how you create a mortgage for a duplex. Mr. Watson said the building committee will draft the document after determining how costs for common spaces will be allocated, etc. Downstreet Housing & Community Development also will assist with the mortgage-writing process.

Chair Maxwell believes one qualification for applying to live in the duplex was veteran status; are there any others? Mr. Watson said one of the units was to be reserved for a veteran family but unfortunately none applied. He said the main qualifications now were income level (i.e., between 30% and 80% of the local area median income), ability to pay the mortgage, lack of significant debt, etc. Board member Petty hopes similar projects will be coming to Northfield in future. Mr. Watson said that depends on local funding. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Watson, Mr. Anderson, and Mr. Ward for tonight's presentation and he hoped their project will continue to progress well.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **April 28, 2026 (Regular Meeting). (7:27 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #21-26 & #21-26A-C. (7:28 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve Warrant #21-26 & #21-26A-C in the amount of \$546,987.43. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through April 26, 2026. (7:31 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$95,728.27. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Review and Approval of FY 2026/2027 Water & Sewer Rates. (7:32 p.m.)**. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio said the Utility Commissioners approved the Water and Sewer Department budgets at their April 13, 2026 meeting after some discussion. The rates to be approved tonight were based upon the approved budgets and they were able to meet their goal of keeping the combined water-sewer rate increase under five percent (5%). One factor in achieving this is that we expect that the first bond payment for the current water project will not have to be paid until the 2027-2028 fiscal year. Chair Maxwell had heard rumors that we were perhaps looking at a sixteen percent (16%) combined rate increase. Ms. Baroffio said that concern might have been based on an early budget projection but the use of prior year surplus funds and some budget cuts were able to reduce the actual rate increase to a more reasonable amount (4.2%). Ms. Baroffio added that the bond that covered the wastewater treatment facility (WWTF) rebuild will be retired by FY 2033-2034 but extensive facility upgrades might be required in the near future so future WWTF bonding might be necessary. She noted the water project bond has fifty percent (50%) forgiveness and there is zero interest (0%) on the remaining balance. This turned out to be a very good deal for Northfield and the annual payments will be about \$90,000. Chair Maxwell asked how water-sewer revenue has been over the past year. Ms. Baroffio said it has been fairly stable with about a three percent (3%) drop in residential usage this past year. This followed larger drops in previous years due to the closure of a major industrial customer and the razing of the FEMA buyout properties on or near Water Street. She added that residents also have become more efficient at conserving water usage during drought periods, etc. Chair Maxwell then asked about the Northfield Electric Department (NED) budget. Ms. Baroffio said last year NED did successfully apply to the Public Utility Commission (PUC) for its first rate increase in about fifteen (15) years. The higher rates went into effect on the March 2026 bills. She said that due to increasing transmission costs and other factors, the next rate increase request probably will come much sooner, probably within a couple of years. Ms. Baroffio said NED rates for residential customers still remain very competitive compared to those charged by for-profit power companies. She did note that NED has benefited from direct VELCO stock purchases in the past and received healthy returns. However, in future we will be required to purchase the stock through VPPSA, which will reduce the dividend amount we receive. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the Northfield water and sewer rates as submitted by management. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Scheduling the Select Board Retreat. (7:46 p.m.)** Chair Maxwell noted the Select Board Retreat is usually an annual event but was not held last year. This special meeting is an opportunity for the Select Board members to discuss at length the short-, medium-, and long-term goals for the municipality. The Select Board members then debated the best time for the retreat with most stating a preference for a late afternoon or evening meeting. After some discussion, it was decided to hold the retreat in the Community Room on Wednesday, June 3, 2026 starting at 4:30 p.m. Based on precedent, the meeting should last about three (3) hours. Manager Smith suggested bringing in an outside facilitator in order to improve meeting productivity. Chair Maxwell would like the Select Board members to come prepared with solid ideas for discussion.

VII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT (7:55 p.m.) Manager Smith said her first two (2) weeks as Town Manager have been interesting but also enjoyable. She said the municipality is moving forward on the union negotiations with the collective bargaining unit now representing the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) part-time employees. There should be a couple more working meetings held within the next month. The site visit for the Cross Brothers Dam Removal project was held last Friday (05/08/26) and was well attended by potential bidders. Manager Smith was present along with the heads of the municipal departments that would be directly affected by the project. Board member Shernock also was there to represent the Riverwalk Project Working Group as the dam removal will greatly facilitate their future efforts. Manager Smith will start providing the Select Board members with weekly reports later this week. Board member Petty said Manager Smith should let the Select Board members know if there is any information they have collectively or individually that would help her do her job.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Street Sweeper. (7:56 p.m.)** Board member Davis noted the rented street sweeper has been operating on downtown streets and asked if there were any plans to have it work on some of the paved backroads. Some have a good accumulation of road sand and dirt and he thought Little Northfield Road and Rabbit Hollow Road would especially benefit from this. Manager Smith said there already were plans to send the sweeper to Rabbit Hollow Road and she will include a trip to Little Northfield Road as well.
- b. Select Regular Meeting Starting Time. (7:58 p.m.)** Board member Petty asked if it were possible to move up the starting time from 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. That would be especially helpful with longer meetings. None of the Select Board members had any objections but it was thought best to well advertise this change to community members before making the change. It was suggested this could start with the July meetings.
- c. Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Covered Bridge Presentation. (8:00 p.m.)** Board member Stevens asked if there had been any response to the VTrans email asking if they could provide an "Alternatives Presentation Meeting" regarding the Cox Brook Road Covered Bridges at a future Select Board regular or special meeting. There would be a sixty (60) minute VTrans presentation followed by a thirty (30) minute question period. VTrans would like to notify affected property owners at least thirty (30) days in advance. Manager Smith said she would contact VTrans about scheduling the presentation. She noted that there already are plans to perform some repair work on the Second Covered Bridge on Cox Brook Road this summer.
- d. Community Garden update. (8:04 p.m.)** Since former Select Board member Charles Morse had been the leading person for this project, Board member Shernock recently emailed him to get an update on the proposed establishment of the community garden on a Water Street FEMA buyout property. Mr. Morse emailed back that the garden site had had its topsoil and organics removed and used as fill on an abutting property. Lime was spread on the garden site in order to improve the soil's pH. A wooden frame and tamper were installed to raise future plant beds in order to allow stormwater to flow through the garden. In addition, an "accessible wheelchair picnic table" has been ordered that will be installed on top of rubber mats. Other measures will be taken to improve wheeled accessibility. Mr. Morse felt if a team of volunteers could be assembled, the remaining beds could be put in place in less than a day. He ended his email by noting that he has a folder of materials regarding the proposed Community Garden that he can share with the Town Manager.

Board member Shernock noted that in his email, Mr. Morse said the grant used to establish the garden specified that its patrons could not be charged. She wondered if this would create an issue with charging for water usage, etc. Board member Petty felt it was unlikely that such a condition could be enforced in perpetuity. Board member Shernock noted Economic Development Director Thomas Davis had applied for this grant so perhaps he could answer any questions regarding any such restrictions. Board member Petty believes that since the Community Garden is located on municipal property, there should be a determination regarding the municipality's responsibilities. She would like such questions answered soon but did not believe this was a priority compared to other concerns affecting the community. Chair Maxwell felt a policy does need to be developed to determine who can use the garden, what they can grow, etc.

- e. **Street Sweeper, etc. (8:11 p.m.)** Chair Maxwell is grateful that the street sweeper is in action so early this spring and thanked Manager Smith for getting this done. Board member Petty asked if the crosswalk striping and other street painting has been contracted yet. Board member Davis believes former interim manager Steve Mackenzie did reach out to Kurt Bellavance about this.. He noted that there aren't as many street painting contractors in business as there used to be.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy C. Hill: Slaughterhouse Road Repairs. (8:17 p.m.)** Mr. Hill said the Highway crew did an excellent job fixing the Slaughterhouse Road apron. He felt the area next should get some asphalt to complete the job. Board member Davis said there had been some discussion of paving the road in order to deal with future stormwater issues and thereby better protect the covered bridge. Chair Maxwell said this probably should be a paving priority for this summer. Board member Davis thought paving the road would save the municipality a lot of money in future.

- X. **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 legal matter, a personnel issue, and contract negotiations with Manager Smith present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:25 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 8:50 p.m. No action was taken.

- XI. **ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Davis, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at: <https://youtu.be/nY4LUr80FTE>

These minutes are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.