

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
NORTHFIELD COMMON REHABILITATION  
PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING  
Minutes of March 28, 2024**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board members Merry Shernock and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Emily Lewis (Project Manager, DuBois & King), Kait Campbell (Community Planner, DuBois & King), Gail Hall (Energy Committee), Sally Davidson, Bethany Drum, and Mary Nadon Scott.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February 7, 2024.** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed without objection.**

**IV. DISCUSSION**

- a. Public Meeting Planning.** Manager Schulz said the key initial step in the Common Rehabilitation Project is to start planning for the public meetings at which Northfield residents will be able to express their views on the whole process. He added that Emily Lewis has been working on proposals for this since the last meeting. Ms. Lewis said she wanted to focus this meeting on what shape this public engagement will take. She is now looking at four (4) individual events starting with the initial community outreach. Ms. Lewis said this step could be taken through surveys that could be distributed throughout the community and also made available online. There also could be small gatherings of targeted groups, such as those living and/or working in close proximity to the Common. The second step would be to hold a Town Common Design Workshop that would bring interested residents together to explore the various options for the rehabilitation process. Following this would be a Student Design Mini-Workshop that would try to engage local students (kindergarten through Grade 12) in the process and thus obtain feedback from Northfield youth on what should be done with the Common to make it more kid-friendly, etc. The final step will be a draft concept presentation to the community that would present various options for public discussion. Sally Davidson asked if the student mini workshop would also involve Norwich University (NU) students. Ms. Lewis said it is intended strictly for the public school students in order to obtain a youth perspective. She added that Board member Shernock had provided her with contact information for the Northfield Elementary School and Northfield Middle/High School in order to start working with administrators, teachers, and students to start the process. Ms. Lewis said the current plan is to hold the mini workshop in early May so that it can be done long before the end of the school year in mid-June.

Ms. Lewis said that she and Kait Campbell have been working together in developing ideas for the initial outreach phase. They have been informed that local surveys have yielded significant results over the past few years with significant participation and useful information generated. There also needs to be direct contact with those who work and/or live either on Depot Square or nearby who would be significantly impacted by any changes on the Common. Ms. Lewis then asked if the committee members had any thoughts on this. She added that there probably will be many different and contrasting ideas about what should be done with the Common, including those wanting wholesale changes and others who would like the Common left pretty much as it is now.

Gail Hall asked if the purpose of the initial outreach phase was to gather information from community members or to provide them with a general overview of the coming rehabilitation process. Ms. Lewis said it would be a little bit of both. We would like to hear from people who would be directly affected by the project. She added that there are no specific rehabilitation proposals prepared at this time as these would be developed based on local feedback, etc.

Ms. Hall believes face-to-face meetings would be very important in obtaining a wide range of viewpoints on this matter. Ms. Lewis said that was the intention of holding the Town Common Design Workshops so that residents can engage with direct conversations with each other as various project options are formulated. Manager Schulz feels that online surveys are a good idea as we have had great success with the ones Economic Development Director Tom Davis devised for the proposed Community Garden and for exploring interest in establishing an Amtrak whistle stop at the former Depot Square train station. These surveys received a good number of responses and yielded much valuable information, useful suggestions, etc. Ms. Lewis then provided some examples of potential open-ended questions for this survey, such as how people are currently using the Common, is there something new that they would like to see there, etc. We can also ask what people don't want changed. Ms. Davidson said that some people really would like to see a gazebo installed that could be used for musical events, etc. Ms. Lewis said the survey should have around five (5) broad questions. This could include getting ideas about how the Common could be made more accessible for those with mobility issues. Board member Shernock thought that the permanent installation of lighting would be a significant improvement as it would allow for more nighttime events. Ms. Lewis said that Ms. Campbell thought it would be good to ask people how they normally reach the Common, i.e., by automobile, by foot, by bicycle, etc. We could also develop a separate survey for the Depot Square business owners and other project stakeholders about how their location on the Common affects their operations, whether they make use of the unique opportunities available there, etc. Ms. Lewis said a flyer about the Common rehab project was distributed at Town Meeting Day and this flyer could be revised to include the QR code for the online survey. Board member Shernock would like hardcopies also distributed at a number of locations throughout the community including the Municipal Building and the Brown Public Library as well as other locations such as local businesses, restaurants, etc. Ms. Lewis thought that was good idea provided that someone would be willing to collect the completed surveys and make sure they get to her and Ms. Campbell in a timely manner. Board member Shernock volunteered to help with this. Ms. Hall asked about the timeline for distributing the surveys. Ms. Lewis thought it would be good to get them out next week. She added that when the business owner specific survey is provided to the Depot Square merchants, that might be a good time to ask if hard copies of the general public survey could be made available at their businesses. Mary Nadon Scott suggested publishing the project flyer in the Northfield News that would include a QR code for the online survey as well as a listing of all the locations where hardcopy surveys are available to be picked up. Ms. Hall thought there should be some coordination with the local task groups that are involved in matters with some connection to the Common. That would avoid having duplication of outreach efforts, etc. Ms. Lewis said these groups could be contacted and invited to attend the stakeholder meeting. After some discussion, this meeting was scheduled for Thursday, April 18, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. in the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library. Ms. Lewis will send out the invitations and also have a draft survey ready for committee member review by next week.

Ms. Lewis said that Ms. Campbell has developed some ideas for the youth outreach phase of this project. Ms. Campbell said this outreach could include activities taking place during school hours that would be tailored for different age groups. The first age group would include younger students from kindergarten to Grade 4. This activity session might include providing the students with clipart images that they might cut and paste onto depictions of the Northfield Common to show what they want and where. That could include installing new benches, tables, etc. Older students (i.e., Grades 9 through 12) would be provided with word cloud suggestions in order to get their views on proper concepts for the Common area. This could include such general word concepts as lunch, parade, picnic, etc. Ms. Campbell said she is still working on the Grade 5 through 8 ages groups. Their activities could be some kind of middle ground between what is provided to the younger and older students. She suggested that the students could first be broken down into smaller groups so they could develop their own ideas and then brought back into a larger group in order to share their ideas with others. Ms. Hall said the teachers conducting these sessions probably would be able to provide some feedback themselves. Ms. Lewis thought it would be best to start this outreach soon so that teachers would be to incorporate these activity sessions into their lesson plans. Ms. Campbell said we cannot force the teachers and students to participate in these activity sessions so we will focus on those who show the most interest. If this cannot be done in class, perhaps worksheets could be provided to the students that they can do on their own time after school. Board member Shernock noted that in Northfield there is the Bridges After School program so it might be good to contact its coordinators to see if these mini-workshops could become after-school activities. Ms. Lewis said the stakeholder meeting and other initial outreach efforts should take place over the next month. Afterwards, it should be time to start planning the Town Common Design Workshop in greater detail.

- b. Other Items.** Board member Shernock wanted to discuss the possible locations of pedestrian safety bump outs on depot Square as well as the future location of the kiosk/bus stop that was recently removed and is now in storage. Ms. Lewis had provided a Depot Square map for this meeting that was used for an earlier Depot Square rehabilitation project in 2012. He will have a surveyor come to Northfield to provide a more updated overhead map of the Common. Ms. Hall spoke with Green Mountain Transit (GMT) representatives yesterday about the commuter bus routes that go through Depot Square and about possible relocation sites for the kiosk/bus stop. The most favored site that they discussed would make use of one of the new bump outs at the intersection of Depot Square and Wall Street. This would not be too far from its former location. Another possibility would be to relocate the kiosk and bus stop to the turning “cut through” at the eastern end of the Common. However, this site has been opposed by some individuals and probably would only be employed if there were no other feasible options. Ms. Lewis will look into the possibility of expanding the bump out in order to host the kiosk. The feasibility of this depends on the being able to still provide sufficient turning space for the heavier trucks that use Depot Square, which includes Gillespie Fuels delivery trucks. Ms. Hall said there are a number of Northfield residents who rely on the commuter bus service to Montpelier to get to work, etc. Northfield voters have shown their support for this bus service every year on Town Meeting Day since this bus service was first established. Ms. Lewis will look at various options for finding a permanent location for the kiosk and will report back to the committee members regarding the best options. After some discussion, the next meeting of this committee was scheduled for Wednesday, April 24, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.

**V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled).** There was none.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT.** Without objection, the meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were revised and approved at the committee meeting of April 24, 2024.