

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of April 23, 2024

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board 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, Pierre Gomez (Police Chief), Naomi Johnson (Dufresne Group), Debbie Zuaro (VOREC Grant Implementation Committee), Gerard LaVarnway, Lynn Doney, Carolyn Stevens, Susan Stillinger, and Elroy 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. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Naomi Johnson (Dufresne Group): Main Street Waterline and Reservoir Replacement Project update.** Ms. Johnson stated that the Step III Drinking Water State Revolving Fund application was submitted last December and is still being processed. Since that time, Northfield voters on Town Meeting Day (03/05/24) authorized \$7,230,000 in general obligation bonds or notes for this project. Ms. Johnson said the State of Vermont will subsidize fifty percent (50%) of these project costs. She is still waiting for input from the State Historic Preservation Office before the environmental review process can be completed. Ms. Johnson doesn't feel this process will provide any real delays. The current project timeline includes advertisement for the construction phase contract in June-July 2024, approval from the bond bank by July 2024, the construction phase starting on side streets in September 2024, installation of the replacement water tank in April 2025, and project completion by late fall 2025. Board member Morse asked if there would be much disruption to the public when the construction phase starts this September. Ms. Johnson said the initial work would not be on Main Street but on side streets (i.e., Prospect Street, Byam Hill, etc.). This early timeline depends on hiring a project contractor who would be able to start this year. In any case, the work on Main Street would not start until Spring 2025. Board member Petty was pleased to get confirmation that the state would cover fifty percent (50%) of the project costs. Board member Stevens asked how this project might affect the Main Street Bridge Replacement project, which is also scheduled for 2025. Ms. Johnson said she will be coordinating with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) on this so that the two projects will line up together. Gerard LaVarnway, who lives on Byam Hill, asked if the waterline installation on his street would start this year. Ms. Johnson said the work through his property probably would not start until 2025. In the interim, she will work with Mr. LaVarnway on the easement to allow the work on his property. Manager Schulz then thanked Ms. Johnson for all her efforts in helping to obtain the state subsidy for this project.

V. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. Liquor License Renewal: NU Beverage LLC.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. April 9, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #20-24 & #20-24A-C.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #20-24 & #20-24A-C in the amount of \$100,419.32. Board member Stevens is pleased not to see any Symquest invoices on this warrant. He then asked about a purchase of "Silly Acid" for the Water Department. Manager Schulz said these were chemicals needed for the operation of the public water supply system. The related invoice from Allen Engineering was consulted and it was confirmed the purchase was for "Silly Acid." Manager Schulz will look into this further and provide the Select Board members with an explanation.

Board member Petty asked about the purchase of a "Floor Leveler" for the Ambulance Bay. Northfield EMT Lynn Doney said this was needed to level out the building floor after a new sewer line was installed under it. Board member Petty asked about "Speedbump Replacement" on Central Street. Manager Schulz said some parts of the speedbumps located there had been damaged and had to be replaced. Chair Maxwell noted this damage occurred during the last snowstorm. Board member Petty then asked about the replacement of the swing at Dog River Park. Manager Schulz said the damaged one was replaced with a sturdier model using donation funds from the Northfield High School Class of 1957. Board member Petty asked about \$2,400 "Ammonia Analysis" tests. Manager Schulz said this was an annual testing of wastewater samples provided by the Sewer Department. Chair Maxwell asked about a \$5,293 payment for "Pedestrian Scoping" of the Wall Street sidewalk. Manager Schulz said this was the local match amount for the grant that funded this study. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through April 14, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$106,654.88. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of 2024 Northfield VT Local Emergency Management Plan.** Manager Schulz said the annual update of the Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) is required by the State of Vermont and after its approval is filed with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC). In addition to the shorter version that makes use of the official template, Manager Schulz also has drafted a supplemental document for internal usage that provides additional information. This is a working document that will be periodically updated in consultation with the Fire, Police, and Ambulance department chiefs. Board member Shernock found some typos in the supplemental document and will provide a full list of them to Manager Schulz. As an aside, Board member Shernock said she has been informed by Northfield Rotarian President Mel Adams that providing "creature comfort" improvements at the Police Station is their priority project for this year. This is intended to make the facility more comfortable for emergency responders if it is used as Northfield's primary Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for a prolonged period. Board member Petty had a number of suggestions regarding the document that will be provided to CVRPC. For example, she would like the Northfield municipal Facebook page added to the list of local social media websites for transmitting public information during an emergency situation. In addition, Board member Petty would like more information included in the document about the emergency shelter located at Northfield Middle/High School, i.e., the capacity, if there is a generator, are pets allowed there, etc. She felt residents asked to evacuate need to be informed at the time if they can take their pets with them. Board member Petty would also like to include afterhours emergency phone numbers for school officials. Chair Maxwell noted he no longer uses his landline so it should be removed from his contact numbers. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the 2024 update of the Northfield VT Local Emergency Management Plan as amended by the Select Board members. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Annual Financial Plan for Town Highways.** Manager Schulz said VTrans requires each municipality to provide its annual financial plan for its Town Highways in order to document the local amount budgeted for highway maintenance in the next fiscal year and how those funds will be spent. The municipality must also certify that it will spend at least \$300 per mile of Class 1, 2, and 3 Town Highway in the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz confirmed Northfield will spend much more than that per highway mile. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and sign the Annual Financial Plan for Town Highways. Board member Shernock asked about the use of \$155,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for highway maintenance. Manager Schulz said these funds are in the voter-approved FY 2024/2025 Highway Department budget for sidewalk work and for repairs to the footbridge. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Certificate of Compliance for Town Road and Bridge Standards.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the Certification of Compliance for Town Road and Bridge Standards. Board member Morse asked if approving this document would restrict the municipality's use of non-standard bridges in an emergency situation. Manager Schulz said VTrans does allow for the installation of non-standard temporary bridges for short periods of time. This is with the understanding that the bridge at that location will be brought to compliance at a later date. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **Northfield Zoning Bylaws Update.** Manager Schulz said the Planning Commission (PC) has been working over the past couple of years on updating the local zoning regulations in order to bring them into compliance with new state laws while also making their provisions clearer to members of the public. The Select Board members held a public hearing on the draft version on February 13, 2024 and the PC members subsequently further revised the document in accordance with requests made at that meeting. This mainly meant returning the minimum lot size in the low-density districts back to five (5) acres. The PC members had suggested lowering this to three (3) acres. The PC members then held their second public hearing on the document on April 3, 2024 after which they approved the changes recommended by the Select Board members. The document now has been returned to the Select Board members so they can schedule and conduct their own second public hearing prior to formal approval of the document. Manager Schulz noted that after the PC public hearing, former PC Chair Laura Hill-Eubanks raised some concerns about whether the most recent draft was in full compliance with the Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone (HOME) Act that was approved by the Vermont legislature and signed into law by Governor Phil Scott at the end of the 2023 legislative session. The law seeks to encourage the development of multi-unit housing developments by easing local zoning restrictions regarding off-street parking requirements and minimum lot sizes. Manager Schulz has looked into this concern and believes only slight changes to the revised zoning bylaws would address these issues. Board member Petty believes the HOME Act requires that minimum lot sizes for multi-unit structures must be the same as for single-family units. She would like this change included in the revised zoning regulations. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to review the proposed revisions of the Northfield zoning bylaws. Board member Petty asked if the Select Board members could make a motion to ask the PC members to make changes to the revised zoning bylaws in order to make them compliant with the new provisions of the HOME Act. Manager Schulz that that was a possibility. There also could be an informal request to take this action. The zoning bylaws could be adjusted accordingly before the next Select Board public hearing on this matter. Manager Schulz did not believe these would be "substantive" changes that would require the PC members to hold another public hearing. Board member Petty said a number of Vermont communities are now revising their own zoning bylaws to be in compliance with the HOME Act. She would like a legal review done in order to determine what changes need to be made in the draft document to achieve full compliance. Board member Petty noted that without approved local zoning bylaws in place, Northfield's application for Downtown Designation has been delayed. She would like the zoning bylaws approved by the Select Board once the legal review has been done and any needed changes made. Any remaining concerns regarding special protections for the Town Forest, allowing case-by-case waivers of minimum lot sizes in the low-density areas, etc. can be addressed by the PC members in coming months and become part of the next approved revision of the zoning bylaws. Chair Maxwell also felt this would be the most expedient course of action. Board member Petty also thought additional planning grant funds might be available so the PC members can look into future zoning bylaw revisions that would allow for "smart development" in the Northfield community. She asked Manager Schulz convey the Select Board members' suggestions to Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki so that the legal review of the proposed zoning bylaws can be performed as well as raising the possibility of pursuing additional planning grant funds. The earlier motion was tabled.

- e. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell noted that a new request for \$25,000 in ARPA funds has been submitted by the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee. Debbie Zuaro, who serves as that committee's chair, is present tonight to explain this request and answer any questions. Ms. Zuaro said the \$25,000 would be used to supplement the current VOREC grant budget for various types of wayfinding signage that would be situated in the downtown area and along the Town Forest trail system. The additional funds would allow the VOREC committee to draft and distribute an RFP for Phase 1 of the wayfinding signage project. Ms. Zuaro noted the estimated cost of signage design, materials, etc. had increased significantly due to pandemic supply chain issues so the original amount of signage to be purchased and installed had to be reduced to include essential locations only. Chair Maxwell asked how this ARPA funding would affect the VOREC committee's ability to close out this grant. Ms. Zuaro said it would allow for the wayfinding signage component of the grant to be put out to bid and also made it more likely that the signage purchased can be installed this summer. She added that one requirement of the VOREC grant award was to produce an economic impact study and that cost also turned out to be much higher than originally anticipated. Grant funds also have been allocated to support programming projects that would include special events in the Town Forest and along the trail system. Board member Petty, who also serves on the VOREC committee, added that some grant funds had to be reallocated from a proposal to expand parking spaces near the Norwich University (NU) Shaw Outdoor Center. That project has been delayed due to uncertainties about whether or not this work would be covered under NU's existing Act 250 permit. Board member Petty said the committee members felt purchasing and installing the wayfinding signage this summer was a much more urgent concern at this time. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the request for \$25,000 in ARPA funds to enable the VOREC Grant Implementation Committee to purchase and install wayfinding signage. Board member Shernock supported this request as it would benefit Northfield residents as well as visitors to the community. Board member Petty noted that if this request is approved, the VOREC committee will have \$54,000 in their wayfinding signage budget, which should allow for the completion of Phase 1 of this project. Board member Morse thanked Ms. Zuaro and the other VOREC committee members for all the work that they put into this and he felt this would be a good investment for Northfield. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

Chair Maxwell then reviewed the list of previously submitted requests for ARPA-funded projects. Board member Shernock would like to discuss the request to use ARPA funds to encourage economic development in the Freight Yard Way area by installing new waterlines. Manager Schulz said the initial request for this work came about a year ago from Martha Mahan, who owns property on Freight Yard Way and felt the existing water capacity was limiting future growth in this area and also discouraging potential developers from investing in the creation of new businesses, housing units, etc. The Northfield Utility Commissions discussed this matter and concluded that this waterline upgrade would be good for the community and also suggested ARPA funds should be used for this project. Board member Morse, who also serves on the Utility Commission, said the proposal was to install new eight inch (8") waterlines in order to encourage additional development in this underutilized part of the Northfield downtown. The commissioners also felt ARPA funds should be requested rather than have the Water Department (and their customers) cover the entire expense of this project. The ultimate goal would be to increase the Grand List through the construction of new businesses, new housing units, etc. The current proposal is for \$75,000 in ARPA funds, which would cover the cost of the new water pipes (\$35,000) and project engineering (\$40,000). Board member Petty asked if there would be any additional cost to procure any easements for the waterline installation. Board member Morse said any such expense would be covered by the Water Department. There is an existing Northfield Electric Department (NED) easement in the area that possibly could be used for this purpose. Chair Maxwell asked what would happen if the new piping was purchased with ARPA funds, put into storage, and then it was discovered that for whatever reasons this project could not go forward for the foreseeable future. Board member Morse believes the Water Department would reimburse the ARPA fund for the water pipes and use them for another project. Board member Petty felt the engineering study should be able to discover if there are any serious impediments to this proposed project.

Chair Maxwell believes Northfield voters authorized the creation of the Economic Development Fund in order to support such infrastructure upgrade projects. Board member Morse believes that putting ARPA funds into this account for future use might be a better course of action than purchasing project materials in advance without any specific timeline for their use. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board policy governing the use of the Economic Development Fund would need to be reviewed to confirm that this would be an allowable use of these funds. As this is a board policy, it could easily be revised if needed. Board member Petty believes there also is an existing request from Economic Development Director Tom Davis to use \$200,000 in ARPA funds to create an account to be used for local match amounts when applying for state and/or federal grants. Manager Schulz said he is still trying to get a written legal opinion from the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) on whether this would be an appropriate use of ARPA funds. He should get this legal opinion in the near future. Chair Maxwell felt putting ARPA funds into the Economic Development Fund for potential infrastructure improvement projects would be better than allocating those funds to vague proposals that might be years away from realization. Manager Schulz agreed that this would allow for much more flexibility for such economic development projects. This matter will be discussed again when the ARPA fund requests are discussed next month (05/28/24).

It was noted that the deadline for new ARPA fund requests is July 23, 2024. Board member Morse felt it might be good to contact previous fund applicants and ask they finalize their requests as soon as possible. In several cases, the groups or individuals making the ARPA fund requests for were asked by the Select Board members for more complete information regarding their proposal project budgets, whether they had sought other sources of outside funding, etc. Chair Maxwell would like Manager Schulz to send out these letters to previous ARPA fund applicants as soon as possible so some resolution can be made regarding the relative merits of these requests. Manager Schulz will have these letters sent out prior to the next Select Board regular meeting (05/14/24).

Mr. Doney then asked about the proposal to use ARPA funds to purchase emergency generators for municipal facilities. Manager Schulz said he received quotes of \$25,000 each for generators to be installed at the Fire Station, Police Station, and Municipal Building. He had looked into the possibility of purchasing less expensive "Tesla Walls" but found that these were mainly used as backup power for residential units. Board member Petty said if the \$75,000 quote is still valid, she would like to go ahead and have the Select Board members authorize this expenditure. Manager Schulz will obtain new quotes and provide this information to the Select Board members in case they wish to take action at the May 28, 2024 meeting. Board member Shernock would also like an updated ARPA Fund Summary for that meeting that would show how much of the fund has already been expended (or designated) and how much remains undesignated.

Board member Petty noted a request for \$10,000 in ARPA funds for the "Clerk and Utility Billing System." Manager Schulz said he included this request himself as he thought it might be helpful to allow customers to pay their municipal bills with debit cards and/or credit cards in future. This is not currently an option for the Town Clerk's Office and utility customers have to contact an online third-party automated payment service to make credit card payments. Chair Maxwell would like an update on this proposal.

Chair Maxwell feels the Select Board members have been making real progress regarding the designations and expenditures of the ARPA funds. Board member Shernock would like some clarification regarding how much in ARPA funds will be set aside for sidewalk updates. Board member Petty also would like this amount specified as the Highway Planning & Project Oversight Subcommittee has already made its recommendation for a priority list of sidewalk repairs in the coming year. She felt the best approach if there are remaining undesignated ARPA funds by the year's end, those funds should be put towards future sidewalk work and also distributed to the proposed accounts for future economic development projects and for funding local match amounts for future grant applications. That way, all the ARPA funds would be properly designated before the December 31, 2024 deadline. Chair Maxwell said this can be discussed the next time the Select Board members discuss the ARPA requests.

Board member Shernock reported she has heard an update from Andrew Padilla, who has made a \$7,800 ARPA funds request for the professional design of a disc golf course to be located near the NU Shaw Outdoor Center. As requested by the Select Board members, Mr. Padilla has been working in drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would guarantee full public access to the disc gold course once it is in operation. Mr. Padilla will discuss this in person at the May 28, 2024 meeting. Chair Maxwell says there will seem to be a lot of heavy lifting expected at that meeting.

- f. **Select Board Retreat.** The Select Board members will be holding a Board Retreat in the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library (93 South Main Street) on Tuesday, May 7, 2024 starting at 10:00 a.m. Members of the public are invited to attend and there will be remote meeting access. The Select Board members would like to use this meeting to update and revise the list of short-, medium-, and long-term goals for the Northfield community that was developed at their last retreat (09/01/22).

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Cox Brook Covered Bridge Repairs.** Manager Schulz said that the deficiencies VTrans discovered with the Upper Cox Brook Road Covered Bridge during its recent scoping project have been addressed.
- b. **NU Cyber Fusion Center update.** Manager Schulz has been in contact with engineer Ron Lyon regarding the building to be constructed this year on the NU campus. The current plan is to submit the building application to the Development Review Board (DRB) in May 2024. There will be an update at the next Select Board regular meeting (05/14/24). It seems that the project has been scaled back a bit due to higher cost estimates than had been anticipated.
- c. **Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said there have been several local meetings with VTrans regarding this project recently. The final plans should be completed within the next six (6) weeks and copies will be provided to the Select Board members as soon as they become available.
- d. **Cross Brother Dam Removal Project.** Manager Schulz said the next step for this project, which is scheduled for next year, is to complete the engineering services.
- e. **Highway Department Foreman Vacancy.** Manager Schulz said this vacant position has been widely advertised and he has already received letters of interest from qualified applicants. He will start scheduling job interviews in the near future.
- f. **Contracted Street Sweeping.** Manager Schulz said there have been some delays in getting the contracted street sweeping done this spring due to workforce shortages. However, the work should be done within the next couple of weeks. Chair Maxwell noted another contractor was sweeping the NU campus this past week in anticipation of this weekend's graduation ceremonies. He thought it might be best in future for the municipality to coordinate with NU on this, perhaps using the same contractor, to make sure the town looks its best for all the out-of-state visitors expected this weekend.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **CVFiber update.** Board member Morse said CVFiber, which is a non-profit organization designed to providing highspeed Internet access to underserved areas of Central Vermont, plans to merge with NEK Broadband, which serves the Northeast Kingdom. This proposed merger is intended to reduce organizational costs and thus direct more funding towards the expansion of its fiber optic network. Unfortunately, Northfield is unrepresented on the CVFiber Executive Committee since its previous delegate (Raymond Pelletier) resigned last fall. The vacant position has been advertised but there hasn't been any local interest to date. Chair Maxwell suggested that Manager Schulz could reach out to possible applicants, including NU Associate Professor of Computer Science Jeremy Hansen who lives in Berlin VT.
- b. **Cox Brook Road Covered Bridges.** Board member Shernock asked if Manager Schulz has contacted local fuel delivery companies about using detours to reduce the chance of their vehicles damaging these low clearance covered bridges. Manager Schulz confirmed he has spoken to them about this.
- c. **South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation & CSO Elimination Project.** Board member Stevens thought that the new pipes for this project were supposed to go up to Hill Street. Manager Schulz said the pipe for this has been purchased and will be installed by the Water/Sewer crew when time permits.

- d. **Prospect Street Sidewalk.** Board member Petty asked if the work on this new sidewalk will be completed soon. Manager Schulz said the sidewalk contractor plans to be here by early May 2024.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Lynn Doney: Ambulance Bay Generator.** Mr. Doney noted the previously discussed plans to purchase emergency generators for the Fire Station, Police Station, and Municipal Building. He asked if there is any consideration of purchasing one for the Town Garage, where the Ambulance Bay is located. Mr. Doney said the NAS has a amount of materials and medical supplies that could be damaged by a long-term power outage. There is also a lot of expensive equipment stored there. Board member Morse thought the Select Board members should look into this. Chair Maxwell felt a Town Garage generator should be added to the list of possible ARPA fund expenditures.
- b. **Lynn Doney: Public Park Maintenance.** Mr. Doney is a member of the Northfield Activity Group (NAG) and he wanted to be sure sufficient funds have been budgeted for proper maintenance of the local parks. He noted in particular that the bleachers located at Memorial Park are in poor condition. Manager Schulz said about \$3,000 has been budgeted in the Grounds/Parks/Facilities Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for "facility repairs." Another \$3,000 has been allocated for the Memorial Park dugouts. Mr. Doney asked if ARPA funds could be used to address any problems in the parks. Manager Schulz said that was possible should Mr. Doney wish to submit a formal application. Manager Schulz could provide some assistance with this.
- c. **Lynn Doney: Various Road Concerns.** Mr. Doney said there is a big dip in the road at the intersection of Vine Street and North Street that he would like addressed. In addition, he was not very pleased with the paving work that was done on the north and south ends of Mill Street where they intersect with Vermont Route 12. Mr. Doney would like a more professional paver to do the work in future. Chair Maxwell agreed that the work on the north end looked like a patch job. Mr. Doney said we also need some paving work on Richardson Road, which leads to Mayo Healthcare, as the NAS units often travel this route and we would prefer a smoother ride for the patients.
- d. **Lynn Doney: Proposed Sidewalk Work.** Mr. Doney asked if the focus of the upcoming sidewalk work would be to fix existing sidewalks or to install new sidewalk. Board member Petty said the current plan is to use ARPA funds to fix existing sidewalks and apply for grant funds to be used to install new sidewalk. Chair Maxwell said the municipality recently completed a sidewalk inventory and that will be used to generate a priority list for sidewalk repairs. He then noted Mr. Doney had previously asked that the sidewalk be fixed on the west side of North Main Street from the Common Café to the Main Street Bridge. Chair Maxwell said VTrans has asked that this work be delayed until after the bridge replacement project.
- e. **Lynn Doney: Ambulance Bay Bathrooms.** Mr. Doney wanted to thank Manager Schulz for having the sewer line that leads to the Ambulance Bay fixed. It now is possible to use the bathrooms again.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of May 14, 2024.