

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of February 11, 2025**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell (absent), Acting Chair John B. Stevens, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, and Merry Shernock. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Pierre Gomez (Police Chief), Thomas Davis (Economic Development Director), Karina Dailey (Vermont Natural Resources Council), Roy Schiff (SLR Consulting), Ethan Ely (SLR Consulting), Alan Legacy (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Gary Laroche (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Lisa Kolb (Vermont Emergency Management), Patrick Meehan (Northfield Energy Committee), Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network [NCDN]), Kaitryn Keating (NCDN), Kahwa Douoguih (NCDN), Mary Nadon Scott (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Tim Swartz (AWPS Task Force), Janan Hamm (AWPS Task Force), Delane McIlvene (AWPS Task Force), Sally Davidson, Bethany Drum, Richard Wobby Jr., Lois Melander, Gerard LaVarnway, Brian Massey, and Elroy C. Hill.

Acting Chair Stevens 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. Karina Dailey, Vermont Natural Resources Council: Cross Brothers Dam Removal Project.** Ms. Dailey is pleased to be addressing the Select Board members again on this dam removal project that has been in the works since 2018 but now is fully funded by FEMA and should be completed this year. The project is now in the final design phase and in the hands of the engineering firm SLR Consulting, which is represented tonight by Roy Schiff and Ethan Ely. Ms. Dailey noted that the engineering firm DuBois & King was involved with this project originally and SLR Consulting has updated their initial plans. She added that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has scheduled the Main Street Bridge Replacement Project for 2026 so they are strongly encouraging that this adjacent dam removal project be completed this year. Mr. Schiff said SLR Consulting is planning to hold a community forum on this project in the near future so any residents with questions or concerns can have them addressed. It was suggested that the Community Room probably would be the best venue for this event. Mr. Schiff noted this dam removal project is intended to restore the natural flow of the Dog River at this location while also providing some flood mitigation for the nearby downtown area. He said the dam was originally built for industrial purposes but hasn't served any real function for several decades. The dam also is a safety hazard to anyone in or near the river for recreational purposes due to crumbling concrete, etc. The many people who use this part of the river for swimming, wading, etc. would be able to do so in future and probably prefer the new natural river flow. Carolyn Stevens asked if FEMA funding for this project was secure given the Trump administration's freeze on some federal spending. Ms. Dailey said the funding seems secure as it has been in the pipeline for quite some time. There has been no indication of any funding delays. Mr. Ely then provided a visual demonstration of the project engineering, which is now ninety percent (90%) complete. They are still working with VTrans on some minor concerns. He then showed where sections of the original dam have been removed over the years. The project plans also show where the river bedrock is located as the dam was built by pouring concrete between the bedrock located at either side of the river. When the dam is removed, the bedrock will be left in place and will help form the new river channel after the accumulated riverbed sediment is relocated and/or removed.

There is a sewer line located near the dam site that is mostly encased in concrete but also partially exposed. The dam removal project will take steps to further protect it. Mr. Ely said there now is a buildup of sediment behind the dam concrete that will be relocated when the dam is removed. The sediment removal area will pretty much end before the riverbed under the Main Street Bridge as VTrans does plan to relocate some of the sediment there as part of their project. VTrans plans to anchor the new bridge spans in the river bedrock. The worksite access path has not yet been finalized but probably will start at the Dollar General parking lot. There is a pre-contact sensitive archeological site in the area that will not be disturbed by the heavy machinery, etc. Mr. Schiff said there has been a local request to add a permanent public walking path (i.e., riverwalk) to the worksite path and the design process for this is ongoing. Mr. Ely said that VTrans does have easements in place that will be used for some of the worksite access on the south side of the river. The utility line relocation work that is part of the bridge replacement will be left alone.

Manager Schulz then asked about the dam removal scheduling. Mr. Schiff said they are looking to go out to bid on the construction phase of this project by April 2025 and hope the actual dam removal will start this summer. The current plan is that the project will be fully completed by October 2025. This will include the installation of new vegetation in the areas disturbed by the project. Board member Morse asked if much of the riverbed sediment will be reused as part of the dam removal project. Mr. Ely confirmed that some will be relocated to slightly raise the flood plain with some vegetation (i.e. willow fascines) planted to keep the relocated sediment in place. Mr. Schiff said with the removal of former industrial dams, normally there is every effort to restore the area to a more natural appearance with the planting such vegetation, which will not impede the use of this area for recreational purposes. About 700 cubic yards of riverbed sediment will be relocated in the river and about 1,000 cubic yards will be removed entirely from the river. It has been suggested that this removed sediment (if suitable) could be repurposed as highway material. Board member Morse hopes the work access path will be left in place to help with the future creation of a riverside walking path. Ms. Dailey said they have kept this possibility in mind but have not added it to the engineering plans as that might have delayed the project due to Act 250 permit concerns, etc. Board member Shernock thanked the project planners for the environmentally sensitive work that have done to date. She does hope that greater public access to the Dog River at this location will be one result of this dam removal project. Board member Petty noted this dam removal project has been under Select Board consideration for quite some time and she is pleased that it should be completed this year. Board member Petty then asked if the planned construction of an apartment complex north of the Dollar General store would have any impact on this project. Mr. Ely said they are well aware of this building construction but felt their planned use of the Dollar General parking lot would mean that the projects should not conflict. There also will be pedestrian and vehicular safety signage in place throughout the actual dam removal work. Acting Chair Stevens was grateful for tonight's presentation and the possibility this project will help further local plans for a riverwalk path. It would be good if this dam removal could provide additional benefits to the community with enhanced outside recreational opportunities. Acting Chair Stevens did want to be sure that any rebar disturbed with the dam removal is not left in the river afterwards. Mr. Schiff said if there is any rebar found during the dam removal, it certainly would be removed from the worksite.

Mr. Schiff added that as part of the dam removal planning, some hydraulic modelling has been performed to determine how the new flood plain would handle “100-year flood” events as well as less impactful rainstorms. Ms. Dailey said the improved flood mitigation resulting from this project is a major reason for the FEMA funding. Kaitlyn Keating from the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) said a working group has been meeting regularly to promote the concept of a fully accessible riverwalk path along the Dog River. She and the other working group members have been very hopeful that the dam removal project will leave behind a river access route that could be further developed for the first segment of this riverwalk project. Mr. Schiff said that at the very least they will leave behind a gentle slope down from the area behind the Dollar General to the riverside. This certainly could be further improved to create a walking path in future. Ms. Keating thought that this would be very helpful to their plans. Richard Wobby asked if there are any plans to install additional parking should this become a popular recreation area. Board member Petty thought that most of those accessing the Dog River at this location probably would arrive by foot so new parking spaces would not be needed. Mr. Wobby felt that this possibility should be a future consideration given the current scarcity of parking in the downtown area. Sally Davidson asked if there had been any thought of upgrading the sewer line in the project area during the dam removal project. Mr. Ely said they did contact the Northfield Utility Department about this possibility but there was no interest in any upgrade beyond current plans to protect the now exposed sections. Patrick Meehan has been participating in the Riverwalk working group and he thought it would be useful if that group could have access to the project plans as they are being finalized. Mr. Schiff said that could be done. Gary Laroche from VTrans, who was attending the meeting remotely, stated that when SLR Consulting finalizes their engineering plans for the dam removal, those plans will be incorporated into the plans VTrans is developing for the Main Street Bridge Replacement project. He added that those plans also are moving forward and they should be able to provide an updated project presentation to the Select Board members within the next couple of months. Acting Chair Stevens then thanked Ms. Dailey, Mr. Schiff, and Mr. Ely for a very good presentation on the Cross Brother Dam Removal project. Board member Morse agreed that the information provided tonight was very enlightening.

V. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. **Liquor License Renewals: Good Measure, Inc. and South Village Mobil.**
Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve these liquor license renewals. Acting Chair Stevens noted Police Chief Pierre Gomez has confirmed that there were no problems with any of the local liquor license holders last year. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Outside Consumption Permits: Folino’s Pizza and Good Measure, Inc.**
Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve these outside consumption permits. As there had been some indication before this meeting that there might be an objection to these permits on the basis of public parking concerns, Manager Schulz had contacted the Town Attorney to determine whether this would be a valid reason to deny these permits. The Town Attorney has informed Manager Schulz that potential parking issues cannot be a factor in the decision-making process. Mr. Wobby felt that there was a real parking problem in the downtown area and he asked that action on these outside consumption permits be put on hold until positive steps are taken to address this problem. Mr. Wobby said the problem gets worse during the summer with the Farmers Market and the other special events held on the Common. Board member Morse said these establishments count on outside dining and alcohol consumption to improve their bottom lines during the summer and autumn months so denying these permits could create real hardships for them. Economic Development Director Thomas Davis said Folino’s Pizza is a restaurant, not a bar, so customers come there to dine and not for prolonged outdoors drinking sessions.

In addition, many of the customers for this new business are Norwich University (NU) students who are more likely to walk rather than drive to the restaurant. Mr. Davis said the municipality is working on long-term plans to improve the downtown parking situation but such concerns should not be used to harm local businesses in the interim. He added that according to Development Review Board (DRB) Chair William Smith, who has a Depot Square law office, the only time there is a real problem parking there is during the Farmers Markets. It also has been suggested that a major cause for scarce parking on Depot Square is that employees of the businesses located there take up storefront parking spaces during their work hours. There have been past attempts to encourage them to use the public parking spaces behind the American Legion (i.e., Holland Place) but these have had mixed results. Board member Morse felt there should be another outreach attempt. In addition, Farmers Market vendors also will be asked to park off the Common this coming outdoor market year. Board member Petty said concerns about public parking is not a valid reason for denying these permits. Mr. Wobby said he is only asking for a delay in the approval process. Mr. Meehan said he personally has never had any problems finding a parking space on Depot Square. He also felt it would be wrong to punish these businesses when no proper data has been provided to show that there is a real parking problem. There was a suggestion that management should reach out again to the Depot Square businesses to encourage their employees not to monopolize the short-term parking spaces. Board member Morse felt polite conversations should be able to resolve these problems. Mr. Davis said he was willing to help with this outreach process. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **January 23, 2025 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. Board member Petty found one typo that will be corrected. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **January 28, 2025 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #15-25 & #15-25A-D.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve Warrant #15-25 & #15-25A-D in the amount of \$502,871.76. It was noted that of the total warrant amount, \$245,942 represented power purchases for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). Board member Morse asked about the use of a Wex Bank card for gasoline purchases. Manager Schulz said the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) has this card for making gasoline purchases during long patient transports. Board member Morse also would like legal expense payments better identified in future. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through February 2, 2025.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$126,207.33. Acting Chair Stevens noted that the FY 2024/2025 budget for Northfield Police Department (NPD) overtime (\$45,000) has nearly been exceeded (\$42,985) just over halfway through this fiscal year. Manager Schulz said this particular line item might have an overage but that will be more than offset by savings in the rest of the NPD personnel budget. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Tax Stabilization Policy and Application Form.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the Tax Stabilization Policy and Application Form as provided by management. Board member Shernock would like the policy and form revised by removing the phrase “when feasible” from the request that applicants use energy-efficient heating equipment and appliances in their projects. There was no objection to this change.

Board member Shernock also would like to amend the statement that the proposed project must be “consistent with the Town plan” to specify that this includes its energy efficiency provisions. Board member Petty felt this specification was unnecessary and Board member Shernock withdrew this request. Mr. Davis doesn’t feel the policy should exclude projects that are already in progress since the application form is a new development. He felt the Economic Development Subcommittee should be able to decide project eligibility on a case-by-case basis. Board member Petty serves on this committee (with Board member Morse) and she would not like decisions made that are not consistent with the policy wording. She also would like all applicants treated the same rather than allowing policy exemptions for some but not all. Mr. Meehan believes that the Tax Stabilization Policy is designed to encourage new development rather than reward projects that already have been completed. Board member Petty would not object to providing assistance to current projects that have not yet been completed. Mr. Davis said there is one current project (i.e. the former Masonic Temple housing unit conversion) that started when the application form was not yet available. He felt it should be eligible for tax stabilization. He noted this project is still in its early stages. Board member Morse suggested the eligibility period should be based on when the DRB permit application was first submitted. He also suggested the Economic Development Subcommittee should review the policy further and the Select Board members only approve the revised application form tonight. He also would like a signature page created for the revised tax stabilization policy once it has been finalized. **The revised motion to approve only the tax stabilization application form passed 4-0-0.**

- b. Town Common Rehabilitation Priority Options.** Acting Chair Stevens said he met informally recently with Board member Shernock, who serves with him on the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee, to create a priority list for the Town Common Rehabilitation based on the Final Concept Design presented by DuBois & King last year (10/22/24). The ranked priority list is as follows: 1. Fountain Refurbishment; 2. Bulb-out Installation; 3. Kiosk Restoration; 4. West End Sidewalk Installation; 5. Sidewalk Widening with Pervious Pavement; 6. Curb Cut Installation; 7. Adding New Trees; 8. Permeable Seating Installation around the Civil War Monument; and 9. Seat Wall Installation. Acting Chair Stevens noted there is no budget for these improvements at this time and this priority list is just a recommendation. Ms. Davidson served on the Northfield Common Rehabilitation Project Steering Committee last year and she felt she and the other committee members should have been included in this discussion. Board member Shernock believes the steering committee had completed its work when the Select Board members took receipt of the Final Concept Design and that this project now fell under the purview of the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee. Board member Morse felt that in retrospect this discussion probably should have taken place during a warned meeting so members of the public could participate. Board member Petty noted the Select Board members still need to hold a full discussion of how to proceed with the DuBois & King proposal. Board member Morse felt the priority list provided tonight should be a part of this future discussion.
- c. Public Hearing (Warned Australian Ballot Articles): Tuesday, February 25, 2025.** Manager Schulz said this public hearing is a state requirement as it allows residents to ask questions or make comments on the items to be voted upon by Australian Ballot. It also provides an opportunity for the non-profit organizations seeking public funds to provide additional information and answer any questions. All the groups with funding requests were sent a letter that strongly encouraged them to attend the meeting either in person or remotely.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Main Street Waterline and Tank Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said the project contractor will break ground this April. There will be public notifications of the project work schedule before then.
- b. **Vermont Municipal Code of Ethics.** Manager Schulz said that in keeping with the provisions of Act 171, the new Municipal Code of Ethics is now posted on the municipal website (<https://www.northfield-vt.gov/municipal-code-of-ethics>). Also posted is the complaint form to be submitted should anyone believe that a local official or employee has committed an ethical code violation.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Northfield Personnel Policy & Procedures.** Board member Morse noted a draft revision of this policy was included in the Select Board packets. He asked what was the timeline for its formal approval. Manager Schulz said the Town Attorney is still reviewing some provisions to see if they are consistent with federal and/or state law. The revised policy should be ready for Select Board approval at the next regular meeting (02/25/25).
- b. **Slaughterhouse Covered Bridge Damage update.** Board member Shernock asked if there was any update regarding the recent damage to this bridge and who might be responsible. Manager Schulz was contacted by one neighbor who provided some photos of the bridge that might help determine when the damage occurred. He also is working with a bridge contractor on getting estimates to repair all of the covered bridges that have suffered some recent damage.
- c. **Highway Department Appreciation.** Acting Chair Stevens said he has heard many positive statements from members of the public regarding the Highway crew's response to the snowstorms that seem to come now with some regularity this winter. Manager Schulz said the Highway crew is still short one member but we are advertising widely for qualified applicants to fill the vacancy.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Carolyn Stevens: Town Common Rehabilitation Project.** Ms. Stevens hopes that should a new committee is formed to assist with implementation of the proposed Town Common Rehabilitation design plans, it should be opened up to new members and not just the former steering committee members. Board member Petty said should a new committee be formed, there will be widely advertised municipal notices seeking interested parties to serve on it.

XII. ADJOURNMENT.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/QATU3xqRW9I>

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of February 25, 2025.