

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PUBLIC SAFETY OVERSIGHT & PLANNING
SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of October 28, 2024**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board members Lydia Petty and Merry Shernock. Others present included Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Pierre Gomez (Chief, Northfield Police Department), Peter J. DeMasi (Chief, Northfield Fire Department), Meggan McCusker (Chief, Northfield Ambulance Service) (1:33 p.m.), Scott Bagg (Northfield Ambulance Service), and Danielle Farnum (Northfield Ambulance Service).

The meeting started at 1:05 p.m.

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

- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: September 16, 2024.** Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the minutes. There was no objection.

IV. DISCUSSION

- a. Review Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) and Supplementary Document.** At the previous meeting (09/16/24), Manager Schulz distributed draft updates of the local emergency management plan. At that meeting, he asked that the subcommittee members provide any additional suggestions, which Board member Petty has provided some and Chief DeMasi has some corrected emergency contact information. Board member Petty said that there also had been some discussion about providing clear guidelines in the LEMP for when the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) located at the Police Station would be opened in case of a local or regional emergency situation. Manager Schulz has included new language specifying that the EOC would be opened if sufficiently ominous weather forecasts, which could include flood warnings, are issued by Vermont Emergency Management and/or the National Weather Service. Board member Petty thought the local population should be kept on alert whenever there is the possibility of the EOC opening or emergency shelters being established. She also felt the community should be provided with emergency contact numbers so they can speak to a responsible party who could answer all of their questions. EMT Scott Bagg felt there should be frequent updates in case of a developing emergency situation so it becomes clear that the municipality is monitoring the situation and providing accurate, up-to-date information. Manager Schulz said this could be problematic because if a developing emergency situation turns out to be not as severe as initial indications, there might be accusations that the municipality is "crying wolf." That might lead to residents not trusting these alerts for a later event. Mr. Bagg thought the LEMP should clarify that the emergency service chiefs are expected to provide their own expert evaluations to the Town Manager and Select Board Chair so that an informed decision can be made whether or not to open the EOC in an emergency situation. Board member Shernock said this decision process should be better communicated to the general public. Chief DeMasi thought the municipality's Facebook page could be used to keep the public informed. Manager Schulz thought information also could be provided to residents regarding open emergency shelters in Northfield or neighboring communities in case they don't feel safe staying in their homes. In addition, there might be emergency situations not related to storm events, similar to the train derailment several years ago, that might require the EOC to open on a perhaps limited basis. Manager Schulz will make some additional revisions to the draft document. This will include removing some duplicated information, etc. Board member Petty thought there could be periodic reminders on Facebook and Front Porch Forum reminding residents where information is available in order to stay informed during an emergency situation.

- b. Ambulance Bay Flood Resilience Improvements.** Manager Schulz said this matter also was discussed at the last meeting. It was noted then that the building now housing the Town Garage and the Ambulance Bay is located in a flood plain and there has been some discussion of relocating to higher ground. This could be on parcels owned by local or state government such as the grassy area located by the shopping center entrance for Tops and Dollar Tree. Chief DeMasi thought this area is too small to site the Ambulance Bay but some landscaping here could help reduce the amount of stormwater reaching the Ambulance Bay, Town Garage, and Wastewater Treatment Facility located across the street. Manager Schulz said there is a process to purchased state-owned property for such flood mitigation work. Board member Petty would like a stormwater expert inspect the site first to see if such a project was feasible and would have the desired effect. That could save a lot of time and help direct our attention towards other possible solutions.

Chief McCusker arrived at this time.

Manager Schulz said he would contact Jaron Borg, the state’s river management engineer, about this possibility. He added that there are grant programs for stormwater mitigation projects and he will look into them as well. Manager Schulz said there are other options such as raising these buildings or relocating the Ambulance Bay to Wall Street in the vicinity of the Fire Station and Police Station. Chief McCusker added that in addition to the flooding threat, the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) is outgrowing its current facility.

- c. General updates from the Fire, Ambulance, and Police Departments.**
- 1. Northfield Fire Department (NFD).** Chief DeMasi reported that the department hasn’t been kept too busy lately. In addition, all the equipment and vehicles are in good condition. All the recertifications were done this past July. Board member Petty suggested that Chief DeMasi should get quotes for any Fire Station improvements needed in the near future, such as bathroom upgrades, before the Select Board members start discussing the budgets for the next fiscal year. Chief DeMasi noted that the NFD roster is now at about twenty-one (21) volunteers, which is just about the average number in recent years.
 - 2. Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS).** Chief McCusker said their workload has been rather busy the past few months with record numbers of emergency callouts. She felt one reason for this is that this is an aging community and many calls are the result of chronic illnesses that should have been addressed before becoming urgent concerns. Chief McCusker said the equipment is in good shape but one unit needs a new starter that, because of its age, might be hard to find. This is the unit scheduled for remount so if the starter problem can’t be resolved, it might have to be transported to the remount location rather than driven there. She added that yesterday’s chicken BBQ fundraiser was very successful and training sessions were held this past weekend. Chief McCusker said there now are between fifty (50) and sixty (60) volunteers on the NAS roster with about thirty-five (35) being active members.

Board member Shernock asked if there has been any improvement in local hospitals contacting the NAS for non-emergency transports. Chief McCusker said there are seeing improving numbers in that regard and also have done more long haul transports to Burlington, etc. which bring in considerable revenue. Mr. Bagg added that the increased non-emergency transport revenue is more than covering the extra expense of having the transport crew on standby at the Ambulance Bay. As this was a test program, this situation is being closely monitored. Chief McCusker added that there has been some consideration of changing the non-emergency transport standby days from Monday and Friday to Tuesday and Friday.

Mr. Bagg then noted that a Norwich University (NU) employee recently had a heart episode and co-workers fortunately were able to properly perform CPR until the first responders arrived. Their actions probably saved that person's life and Mr. Bagg considered this a success story for all NAS has done with training sessions, defibrillator access, etc. to make this a HEART Safe community. Manager Schulz then asked out the building status. Chief McCusker said they are doing their best to get an exterior door fully repaired before winter sets in. In addition, the bathrooms are now working properly.

3. **Northfield Police Department (NPD).** Chief Gomez said the department is not too busy at this time, which is a good thing as there are now down an employee. However, that officer should be back from injury sometime next week. He is starting to hear that some officers in other Vermont communities with problems associated with a large homeless population are considering transferring elsewhere. As Northfield doesn't currently have that problem, that could be a benefit to us in the long run. Chief Gomez also noted that other Vermont law enforcement departments have had to overpay their certified officers to recruit and retain them. That might become necessary here as well. He added that the Vermont State Police have been very helpful with overnight coverage, etc. Chief Gomez noted a new vehicle will enter the NPD fleet next week. It will be a Ford Explorer but he is thinking to transitioning the NPD fleet to Chevy Tahoes in future as they are considered more reliable and have higher ground clearance. Board member Petty would like to see the numbers regarding how often the State Police are in town for coverage or for emergency responses. Chief Gomez will provide that information. He added that there haven't been any significant incidents during State Police coverage hours. Board member Shernock asked if Central Street would be temporarily closed to through traffic on Halloween night. Manager Schulz confirmed that was the case and he will post a notice on Front Porch Forum about this. There also will be officers on scene in case drivers try to bypass the temporary barriers, which will be in place from 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Board member Petty hopes this will work to keep the trick-or-treaters safer on this street.

- d. **Other Matters .** The next subcommittee meeting was tentatively scheduled for Monday, November 25, 2024 at 1:00 p.m. It is hoped that the LEMP can be finalized at that time and that the emergency departments' budgets can be fully discussed before the Select Board budget meetings begin in December.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

VI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Petty, to adjourn. There was no objection.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes are subject to approval at the next subcommittee meeting.