

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PUBLIC SAFETY OVERSIGHT & PLANNING
SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of September 16, 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), Scott Bagg (Northfield Ambulance Service), Danielle Farnum (Northfield Ambulance Service), Gaelin Kurtzman (Northfield Ambulance Service), and Troy Seckington (Northfield Ambulance Service).

The meeting started at 1:06 p.m.

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

- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES.** Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the minutes of December 5, 2023. There was no objection.

IV. DISCUSSION

- a. Review Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) and Supplementary Document.** Manager Schulz said an updated LEMP needs to be approved each year for the municipality to remain eligible for certain grant opportunities. Due to the increasing number of flooding events in recent years. Manager Schulz has also created a supplemental document with additional information about emergency shelters, etc. Board member Petty thought such information should be widely distributed to Northfield residents so that they would be better prepared for regional emergency situations. She then noted that the Northfield Middle & High School (NMHS) was listed as the primary local emergency shelter with Norwich University's Plumley Armory designated as the secondary shelter. Board member Petty wondered if that order should be reversed as there have been problems in the past contacting NMHS staff in an emergency situation to make the space available. Manager Schulz agreed that Norwich University (NU) does seem to be more responsive in opening the armory in a timely manner. Board member Shernock agreed with this and noted that NU does have Sodexo on campus to provide meals on an emergency basis. Board member Petty thought emergency shelter and similar information should be made available to the public on a regular basis so they can better prepare for the next severe weather event. NAS Chief McCusker said such information is maintained on their Facebook page. There was no objection to the basic LEMP as provided.

Manager Schulz then asked for comments regarding the supplemental document, which provides additional background information regarding the supplementary document. This document outlines outreach efforts during emergency situations, the guidelines for when the emergency operation center (EOC) should be established, etc. Board member Petty asked if Economic Development Director Tom Davis should be added to the emergency contact list as he does update the municipality's Facebook page. Manager Schulz said that was a possibility. He added that the Northfield Police Station will remain the EOC primary location with the nearby Fire Station available for overflow space (if needed). Board member Petty thought there should be more clarity in the document regarding when the EOC should be opened in an emergency situation, who would staff it, etc. She felt this information should be made available to Northfield residents so that there is one location where their questions could be answered.

Chief McCusker noted that the Ambulance Bay, which is located in a flood zone, has had to be evacuated a few times in the past during local flooding events. NFD Chief Peter J. DeMasi noted that in his forty (40) years as a Northfield firefighter, he has seen three (3) major emergency events: Tropical Storm Irene (which flooded much of the downtown area), the Amtrak derailment, and when a fuel truck overturned. Of these three, Irene was the only one that really required the EOC to be opened. Manager Schulz noted that there also have been less significant flooding events that also needed the EOC in operation to coordinate local response efforts. He agreed that the prerequisites for opening the EOC should be made clearer in the supplementary document.

Manager Schulz noted this is a working document and he would like the subcommittee members to provide possible suggestions for improvement before it is discussed again at the next subcommittee meeting.

- b. Ambulance Bay Flood Resilience Improvements.** Manager Schulz said given the great cost of such improvements, the municipality probably will need to apply for a planning grant before any remedies can be engineered. Chief McCusker noted this will remain a recurrent problem for as long as the Ambulance Bay remains located in a flood zone. She has done what can be done to better protect NAS equipment and supplies from flood damage during such events. Board member Petty agrees with the need to fully explore grant opportunities to address this problem. Chief DeMasi thought perhaps the municipality could make use of higher-level open space at the sides of nearby Vermont Route 12 to establish a floodwater retention area that would reduce the amount of stormwater reaching the Ambulance Bay. He believes that some of this property is owned by the municipality and some by the State of Vermont. Manager Schulz thought this might be a possibility and will contact the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) about it. He also will remain on the lookout for any grant opportunities.
- c. Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Improvements update.** NPD Chief Pierre Gomez reported that Good Measure Brewery and Baroffio's Garage has donated some much needed items so that the EOC could be staffed for a prolonged period. This includes a new refrigerator, cooking grill, futons, and a big screen television. Board member Petty asked if anything else was needed. Chief Gomez did not think so as the building already has sufficient tables and chairs. Manager Schulz added that the building's new emergency generator would be installed this coming November. Chief McCusker said so long as the building has reliable internet service, they should be good.
- d. General updates from the Fire, Police, and Ambulance Departments.**

 - 1. Northfield Fire Department.** Chief DeMasi confirmed he will be stepping down as Northfield Fire Chief next July after eleven (11) years. He has been a Northfield firefighter for over thirty (30) years. Chief DeMasi had no complaints but just felt it was a time for new blood. Board member Petty asked if he had any thoughts regarding his replacement. Chief DeMasi said he did and will be sharing that information later. He added the NFD vehicles are overall in good shape but the Fire Station does need some bathroom improvements fairly soon. Also, the upstairs fire sprinkler system needs work as well. Manager Schulz said estimates for these building improvements should be ready in time for upcoming meetings regarding the FY 2025/2026 municipal budget.
 - 2. Northfield Police Department.** NPD Chief Gomez said the department is still short-staffed and one officer currently is on light duty. He added that NPD Officer Brian Gosselin has been promoted to Police Corporal due to his outstanding work. Chief Gomez noted all Vermont law enforcement agencies are having staffing problems and we might have to overpay to recruit new officers. He noted one New Hampshire community is offering a \$30,000 signing bonus for new police officers. Board member Shernock asked if the presence of Norwich University could help with recruitment. Chief Gomez did not think so as many of the NU cadets who might be interested in law enforcement careers already have post-graduation commitments to serve in the armed forces, ROTC, etc. He felt the lack of affordable housing in the area is a real deterrent to officer recruitment, especially for officers with families. Chief Gomez then noted that he now has completed his certification to serve as a Vermont police officer. Manager Schulz noted that Chief Gomez completed the required training, etc. much faster than most police officers relocating to Vermont.
 - 3. Northfield Ambulance Service.** Chief McCusker said the ambulance units are generally in good shape. The air conditioning in one needs to be fixed and the remount of the 2006 unit still needs to be scheduled. She added that the 2006 unit now has a starter problem that probably would need to be fixed before it is transported west for the remount. Chief McCusker would like the unit sent out this year before the snow flies.

Board member Shernock asked if the NAS would have its annual Christmas Tree and Wreath sale this year. Chief McCusker confirmed it would at a slightly smaller scale than in previous years. There will be about one hundred (100) trees available along with a good number of wreathes in various sizes. Board member Shernock thought the NAS holiday sale was a good tradition and she really liked the holiday lights displayed at the Ambulance Bay last year.

Chief McCusker said NAS staffing levels are good mainly because NU students are now here to help fill shifts. She added that non-emergency transfers are done on a fairly regular basis even though the standby times are not being utilized by local hospitals, etc. as much as she had anticipated. Chief McCusker believes the Central Vermont Medical Center (CVMC) has gotten used to contacting Barre Town Ambulance first when they have transfers even though she has reached out to inform them of NAS standby availability. We are getting additional requests for transfers from Gifford Medical Center. Board member Petty asked if the non-emergency transfer standby hours should be adjusted. Chief McCusker did not think that would have much impact unless we want to start making the standby crew available over the weekends. However, that scheduling would be difficult as NAS does provide good number of paid standby services at sporting events, graduations, etc. Chief McCusker felt the current setup was good but we just need to make CVMC aware of the new situation and contact us first more often. She added that non-emergency transfer revenue is still coming in fairly regularly including long runs to Brattleboro, the White River VA, etc. These long runs are especially desirable due to the additional mileage compensation. Manager Schulz will provide the Select Board members with the NAS revenue figure before the next fiscal year budget is developed. Chief McCusker said the data set for the non-emergency transfer standby program will be limited as it only started this past July. Board member Petty thought a timeline should be set for determining whether or not the new program is bringing in sufficient revenue to justify the extra expense. Chief McCusker noted the NAS recently started billing at a higher rate for non-transport emergency responses and that also should bring in additional revenue.

- e. **Other Matters.** Board member Petty thought it would be nice to have additional community get-togethers where residents can interact with our local first responders. There was a suggestion to perhaps close Central Street to through traffic for a couple of hours on Halloween night. Chief Gomez noted that some parts of the street are really dark at night and this would really promote child safety. Board member Petty thought this might be a good topic for Select Board discussion at one of their upcoming meetings. She also noted that this subcommittee had not met since last December so perhaps it might be good to start meeting on a more regular basis. After some discussion, the next meeting was tentatively scheduled for Monday, October 28, 2024 at 1:00 p.m. Manager Schulz hopes the subcommittee members will have forwarded their suggestions for improving the LEMP supplementary document before then so that it can be finalized at that time.

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 2:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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