

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of March 14, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board members K. David Maxwell, Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, John Helfant (Police Chief), Gerard LaVarnway, Mary McDaniel, Susan Stillinger, Steve Davis, Tim Swartz, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING OF THE SELECT BOARD

- a. Election of Chair.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint K. David Maxwell as Chair. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Maxwell abstaining.**
- b. Election of Vice-Chair.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Lydia Petty as Vice-Chair. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Petty abstaining.**
- c. Select Board Subcommittee Assignments.** Without objection, the subcommittee assignments were set as follows: **Budget and Financial Review** (Board members Maxwell and Morse); **Town Buildings & Energy** (Board members Shernock and Stevens); **Economic Development** (Board members Petty and Morse); **Norwich University** (Board members Maxwell and Stevens); **Highway Planning & Project Oversight** (Board members Shernock and Stevens); **Public Safety Oversight & Planning** (Board members Petty and Shernock); **Labor Agreement & Bargaining** (Board members Maxwell and Shernock); and **Policy Review** (Board members Morse and Stevens). Board member Petty and Manager Schulz will serve as Northfield's representatives to the Mountain Alliance. Stephen Fitzhugh will be Northfield's representative to Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) and Manager Schulz will serve as the alternate representative.
- d. Regular Meeting Schedule (Dates, Time, and Location).** The Select Board will continue to meet on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Room located downstairs in the Brown Public Library. Board member Stevens thought it might be a good idea to hold an occasional meeting at the Northfield Middle/High School.
- e. Designation of Official Newspapers, Websites, etc.** The Select Board members designated the *Northfield News* as the municipality's official newspaper for legal notices, advertisements, etc. The social media website Front Porch Forum will be the official website to post meeting agendas, announcements, etc. The *Times Argus* will serve as a secondary official newspaper when needed.

- IV. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

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

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. February 28, 2023 (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 #17-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #17-23 in the amount of \$1,646,812.92. Of the total warrant amount, Board member Morse noted \$1,118,100 was property taxes collected by the municipality and forwarded to the Paine Mountain School District. Another \$277,761 was spent purchasing power for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through March 5, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$129,441.75. Board member Stevens pointed out that even though the current fiscal year is only two-thirds completed, the Northfield Police Department (NPD) overtime budget already is about fifty percent (50%) over budget. Manager Schulz agreed but noted the line item for full-time officer pay is currently underbudget. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Main Street Bridge Replacement Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Presentation Follow up.** Manager Schulz said VTrans representatives provided a detailed presentation at the last meeting (02/28/23) that included the preliminary plans for the bridge replacement, information about proposed vehicular and pedestrian detour routes, concerns about possible contaminated soil in the project area, etc. They would like any Select Board member questions or comments no later than the end of this month so that they can proceed with finalizing the project plans, which should be done by the end of this year. Manager Schulz has collected some of the comments and questions that were brought up at that meeting and asked if there were any additional at this time. Board member Petty would like additional information about the contaminated soil issue and whether the parcel owned by the Fernandez Family Trust (where the DS Café is located) should be tested for soil contamination. Manager Schulz said he spoke to the VTrans representatives and they would like him to join them when they meet with the property owners. The property owners can either authorize the soil testing or refuse permission to have it done. Manager Schulz said he has been assured by VTrans that there probably won't be any major concerns during the project regarding contaminated soil mitigation. Chair Maxwell understands testing the soil at that location would not be a major or expensive undertaking since only a five foot (5') deep trench is required. Board member Morse noted this site used to host a gas station so it is very probable that petroleum-sourced contamination will be found. Given this assumption, he sees no need to pay for the soil contamination study. Board member Petty said during the presentation it was stated there are grants available that would cover the expense of mitigating petroleum-sourced soil contamination. In that case, she felt it would be useful to have the study done to know for sure either way. Chair Maxwell also would like additional information about the full costs of either reusing or removing any contaminated soil found in the project area. Board member Petty noted she raised questions during the presentation about the pedestrian detour route during the three (3) month period when the bridge is closed. She also has concerns about safety provisions for the new dedicated bicycle lanes on the new bridge and whether the new bridge's sidewalks should be widened for safety. Chair Maxwell said these issues will be added to the follow up communication from Manager Schulz. His own major concern is how to exclude tractor-trailers from the vehicular detour along Wall Street and Water Street. Chair Maxwell also would like additional information regarding the temporary two-way traffic on the south side of Depot Square during the project. Board member Morse felt delivery companies should be provided considerable forewarning so they can make plans ahead of time for making their deliveries north and south of the closed bridge without making use of the vehicular detour route.

- b. Water/Wastewater Commissioner Appointment.** Board member Stevens indicated he would like to continue serving as the Select Board’s representative on the Water & Wastewater Utility Commission. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to reappoint John Stevens to the Water/Wastewater Commission. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Stevens abstaining.**
- c. Electric Utility Commissioner Appointment.** Board member Morse confirmed he would like to serve another year as the Select Board’s representative on the Electric Utility Commission. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint Charles Morse to the Electric Utility Commission. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Morse abstaining.**
- d. Housing Task Force Appointments.** Manager Schulz said this committee has been meeting monthly since November 2022 and has focused on expanding affordable housing opportunities in Northfield. Manager Schulz, Economic Development Director Tom Davis, Board member Petty, and Erin Hicks-Tibbles from the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) were the initial committee members but there always was consideration of expanding the membership to include a representative sampling of local homeowners, renters, etc. There now are three (3) applicants to serve: Megan Roush, Blake Pierson, and Tyler Renaud. Board member Petty said all three have been attending recent meetings, all have passionate interests in housing issues, and would provide good representation of the Northfield community. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Megan Roush, Blake Pierson, and Tyler Renaud to the Housing Task Force. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- e. Police Chief Search Committee.** Manager Schulz said in light of NPD Chief John Helfant’s intention to retire in May 2023, he has been advertising for members of the public to serve on the search committee for his replacement. Following precedent, the committee will consist of the Town Manager, a Select Board member, a member of law enforcement, four (4) Northfield residents, and two (2) members from other local interested groups or institutions. The ideal committee person will have a background in human resource recruitment, management, or law enforcement. Manager Schulz said he already has received thirteen (13) letters of interest. Since a Select Board member will serve on the search committee, perhaps that person also could help him review these applications so he can make recommendations for appointment at the next regular meeting (03/28/23). Board member Morse suggested the members of the Public Safety Oversight & Planning Subcommittee (Board members Petty and Shernock) could assist with this. Board member Petty thought it might be best for one subcommittee member to help with the composition of the search committee and the other to serve on it. There was no objection.
- f. CVFiber Agreement.** Manager Schulz said the municipality has been a member of CVFiber since voters authorized joining this communications union district at the March 2018 Town Meeting. He added that CVFiber’s governing board recently has asked that there be a formal agreement between the municipality and CVFiber in light of the Select Board’s decision last year (09/13/22) to provide five percent (5%) of Northfield’s American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds (\$90,000) to CVFiber for the purpose of expanding high-speed internet access to underserved parts of the community. The agreement would specify how these funds would be employed to achieve this result. The Town Attorney has reviewed the document and has recommended Select Board approval since it would benefit both parties. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and authorize Chair Maxwell to sign the agreement. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Planning Commission update.** Manager Schulz reported that the newly reconstituted Planning Commission (PC) met last week (03/08/23) and it was a very productive first meeting. Stephen Fitzhugh was appointed Chair and the PC members committed themselves to work with the hired planning consultant (Juli Beth Hinds) to ensure that the draft of the revised local zoning bylaws is completed by the May 31, 2023 deadline.
- b. Municipal Facilities Grant.** Manager Schulz has been working with Economic Development Director Tom Davis on a state grant application that could provide significant funds to improve municipal facilities. If the application is successful, the bulk of grant funds would be used on the Municipal Building and the Town Garage. He felt the other municipal facilities are in fairly good shape.
- c. Northfield Utility Budgets.** Manager Schulz is working with Finance Director Laurie Baroffio and Utility Superintendent James Russo on drafting FY 2023/2024 budgets for the Water, Sewer, and Electric departments. The draft budgets will be reviewed by the Utility Commissioners at their next meeting (04/03/23). The plan is to have the budgets finalized by the beginning of June 2023 so the Select Board members can set the water and sewer rates at a regular meeting that month before the start of the next fiscal year (07/01/23).
- d. NED Power Outage.** Manager Schulz said due to the large amount of snow deposited last night and earlier today, the Northfield Electric Department (NED) suffered a two (2) hour power outage this morning. The cause was a burned-out power line by Norwich University. Green Mountain Power (GMP) responded to the scene quickly so that power was restored just after 11:00 a.m.
- e. Transfer Station Bathroom.** There was a suggestion at a previous meeting that instead of paying a monthly charge for portalet rental, the municipality should look into installing a new bathroom at the Transfer Station. Manager Schulz and Utility Superintendent Russo reviewed this possibility and found some difficulties given the distance between the facility site and water/sewer lines. Manager Schulz added this might be a moot point since Casella Waste Services, which operates the site, itself has been considering installing an employee restroom. Board member Morse asked if three-phase power is available at the Transfer Station. Manager Schulz confirmed that was the case. Since the municipality has already paid for this, Board member Morse felt therefore Casella should indeed step forward and foot the bill for this additional site improvement. Board member Stevens asked who would clean up the new accommodation, provide bathroom supplies, etc. Board member Morse felt that would become Casella's responsibility as this would not be a public restroom.
- f. Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) Community Visit.** Manager Schulz noted the first of three (3) public forums on local concerns will be held on Tuesday, March 21, 2023 at the Northfield Middle/High School starting at 4:30 p.m. Free dinner and child care will be provided to participants who will be discussing such issues as youth & family issues, affordable housing, public & community safety, expanded recreational opportunities, etc. All Northfield residents are encouraged to attend. Board member Morse is concerned the number of attendees might overwhelm the school parking lot. He suggested the on-street parking bans near the school be lifted for this event. Manager Schulz said he could do this on his own authority and will include this information in his next Front Porch Forum posting on this event.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Hydrologically Connected Road Upgrades, etc.** Board member Stevens asked which of these local roads would be worked on this summer. These roads are located one hundred feet (100') or less from a waterway. Manager Schulz believes Stony Brook Road and Little Northfield Road are on the preliminary list but this must be confirmed by the Highway Subcommittee. Board member Stevens asked what other highway work is projected for this summer. Manager Schulz believes there will be some road ditching, resurfacing of the gravel backroads, and some sidewalk repairs. There will be extensive work done on Lovers Lane as the result of a successful state grant application. Another topic for discussion at an upcoming subcommittee meeting is whether the anticipated grant work on Lovers Lane should be expanded through the use of municipal funds.
- b. Municipal Building Bathrooms.** Board member Stevens asked if the building's bathrooms were being renovated at this time. Manager Schulz confirmed they were undergoing extensive upgrades and the work is ongoing.
- c. Public Ice Rink.** Board member Stevens noted a Northfield resident offered last year to provide a free outdoor rink at Memorial Park for this winter. He asked why this wasn't done. Chair Maxwell said the rink was purchased but there never was favorable weather to install it. Local temperatures in early winter were never consistently low to create a usable ice surface. We will try again next year.
- d. New Select Board member.** Chair Maxwell welcomed Merry Shernock as the new Select Board member.
- e. Central Street Traffic Concerns.** Chair Maxwell has been doing some follow up research on the possibility of installing speed bumps and/or other traffic calmers on Central Street. A resident recently submitted a letter complaining about the excessive traffic speed on the street and suggested some ways to address it.
- f. Municipal Projects Tickler File.** Board member Morse was very grateful for the tickler file provided in the packets. Manager Schulz said he can provide Select Board members with additional information on each project if they request it.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Elroy Hill: Sidewalk Maintenance, etc.** Mr. Hill believes the Highway Department drivers plowing the roads should drive a little slower sometimes in order to keep large amounts of snow from being deposited directly onto the sidewalks. In addition, in regards to the sidewalks to be installed on the new Main Street Bridge, Mr. Hill would not like them made too wide or the sidewalk sweeper would need to make numerous passes to clear them off. He believes five to six feet (5'-6') in width should be sufficient. As for detour routes during the bridge replacement, Mr. Hill would like every effort made to keep large trucks barred from the side streets. Having tractor-trailers going around sharp curves would be very dangerous for pedestrians, especially children and seniors. He felt the extra mileage delivery trucks would have to travel is a small price to pay for pedestrian safety. Perhaps supply companies could switch to using smaller delivery trucks during the project. In addition, since this is mostly a summertime project, Gillespie's fuel delivery trucks should not be affected too much.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:05 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 are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.