

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of January 24, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Sarah Wolfe (Northfield Energy Committee), Gail Hall (Northfield Energy Committee), Joe Wantuch, Matthew Fedders, Colin Bright, Dan Anderson, Britta Eberle, Merry Shernock, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting 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. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)**

- a. Sarah Wolfe, Northfield Energy Committee (NEC): Electric Vehicle (EV) Charger Installation Report.** Sarah Wolfe is the NEC Chair and she is joined tonight by fellow NEC member Gail Hall and prospective member NEC member Joe Wantuch. Ms. Wolfe last addressed the Select Board members on this matter last fall (09/27/22) and they had a number of questions for regarding the best location for the EV chargers, the best vendor, how much would be the installation costs, any maintenance costs, etc. Ms. Wolfe has done considerable research since then and now has some answers. She said EV charger vendor ChargePoint is the most famous one but she also found it to be the most expensive (\$11,000 to \$16,000) in terms of installation costs. Instead, the recommendation from NEC is to go with SemaConnect, which provided a quote of \$6,345 to install two (2) EV chargers. As for location, a consultant reviewed the possible sites and it was felt two (2) stations would be best located on the south side of Depot Square on Wall Street near the existing electric transformer. Ms. Wolfe understands the Select Board members had suggested a site near the Police Station but the consultant felt the distance from there to a suitable power source was cost-prohibitive. The installation costs would include the aforementioned payment to SemaConnect as well as the cost of hiring an electrician to make the connection. They have a \$3,675 from Collins Electric for this work. The installation budget also includes \$250 for wayfinding signage and similar expenses. Ms. Wolfe said the NEC did receive a \$4,000 Vermont Council for Rural Development (VCRD) grant as well as a \$500 VPPSA rebate to help cover installation costs. There currently is a \$5,770 shortfall in the upfront costs budget and Ms. Wolfe asked if it were possible to use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to make up this deficit. It is possible future grant awards could reimburse the use of ARPA funds. As for annual ongoing costs. Ms. Wolfe said SemaConnect has a \$400 warranty program that would provide timely repairs should anything go wrong with the EV chargers. In addition, SemaConnect has a \$420 network fee that is required to belong in their system. This annual budget also has \$1,000 proposed for a program that would allow eligible Northfield residents to charge at reduced costs if they are unable to install home EV chargers because they are renters, cannot afford to purchase one, etc. Program eligibility would be based on income level and participants would be provided with a special charging card. Ms. Wolfe said this is only a proposal at this time and there probably would not be too much expense in the first year of the program as eligible residents become more aware of this opportunity. Ms. Wolfe said the cost of electricity is not included in the ongoing costs budget as it is assumed charging fees would cover this expense. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Wolfe for this report and asked if any of the Select Board members had questions at this time.

Board member Morse thought this report was very well written and does answer most (if not all) the concerns the Select Board members expressed at the earlier meeting. He is an appointed member of the Electric Utility Commission and has been supportive of such an effort for some time. Board member Morse believes downtown installation should only be the start as he felt there should be public EV chargers scattered throughout the Northfield community. He then asked who would generate the charging cards. Ms. Wolfe said SemaConnect would should we hire them as vendor. The other potential vendors she investigated would not provide this service.

Board member Morse then asked about potential liability for the municipality should something go wrong. Manager Schulz believed the general liability coverage the municipality already has through the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) should be sufficient but he will look into this. Board member Petty also expressed appreciation for this report and said she also has long supported installing EV chargers in the downtown area. She asked if there had been any outreach to the businesses located near the proposed installation site. Ms. Wolfe said that has not happened yet. She was waiting to see if the Select Board members supported going ahead with the project. Board member Petty asked how much space would be needed for accessibility. Ms. Wolfe said the charging cords are rather thin so no more room should be needed other than the two (2) parking spaces taken. She has researched this and found no problems associated with the charging cords themselves. Board member Stevens also supports the proposal and agrees this was a very informative report. He noted there are two (2) EV charging stations on the Norwich University (NU) campus. He asked who paid for their power expenses. Ms. Wolfe believes NU funds this themselves but could look into this. Board member Stevens noted the EV charging stations are not too far from Kreitzberg Arena and he has seen them occupied during NU hockey games.

Board member Goodrich felt this was a very useful and well-written report. She added that her husband, George Goodrich III, is the owner of Trans-Video, Inc. and they now have an electric vehicle in their service fleet. Board member Goodrich noted that the charging level now being proposed (Level 2) usually takes about five (5) hours for a full charge. She asked if there would be a time limit for charging. Ms. Wolfe hasn't considered this but could look into this. She added that most users of public EV chargers usually don't want a full charge from zero but rather a top up before heading home to recharge overnight. Board member Goodrich noted the electrician providing the power connection quote was not local. Ms. Wolfe said NEC was more than willing to work with local a contractor provided they can do the work at a reasonable price. Board member Goodrich had hoped the charging fee would cover all costs of this program without any need for taxpayer funds. Ms. Wolfe said that might be possible in the long run but this cannot be guaranteed at this time due to the various startup expenses. She felt this never would become a revenue source for the municipality but the ongoing costs should be covered once more people become aware and use the EV chargers on a regular basis. Board member Petty asked if there is some pricing competition (as with gas stations) with some public EV charger fees costing considerably less than others. Ms. Wolfe believe some providers based their fees on charge time while others base it on the amount of power taken. In any case, she doesn't think EV drivers in need of a charge will bypass one charging opportunity for another based solely on a slightly higher cost.

Board member Morse asked if it was possible to install EV chargers that provide faster full charges. Ms. Wolfe said Level 3 chargers are available that provide full charges at a much faster rate but they are far too expensive for the purposes of this program. In addition, the existing power transformer would need to be upgraded to handle the increased power flow. Chair Maxwell said it seemed a new policy would need to be drafted to accommodate the logistics of locating these EV chargers in existing parking spaces. For example, the winter parking ban would prevent overnight parking in these spaces five (5) months out of the year but what would happen the rest of the time? In addition, the charging pricing would have to be set at the proper level in order to not discourage usage by being too costly while being sufficient to prevent this becoming a taxpayer-supported expense. There also needs to some consideration of who would pay for the service charges if credit card payment is allowed. Ms. Wolfe said SemaConnect would cover this expense should we become part of their service network. Chair Maxwell asked who would own the EV chargers and equipment. Would it be the Northfield Electric Department (NED)? Manager Schulz thought the municipality would be the owner. Board member Morse believes the site should come under NED control. Chair Maxwell also would like the nearby businesses contacted before anything was done on site. He then asked if there were any ADA-compliance requirements for the charging stations. Ms. Wolfe doesn't believe so but she will look into this.

Chair Maxwell then asked how the other Select Board members about using ARPA funds to cover some of the startup costs. Board member Petty noted that during the ARPA Fund Outreach meetings, there had been positive feedback about using these funds for this purpose. Also, as indicated earlier, this initial outlay of ARPA funds could be reimbursed at a later time should additional grant money become available. Board member Petty then asked about EV chargers' lifespan. Ms. Wolfe is unsure but will investigate this. Chair Maxwell said this matter, particularly the possible use of ARPA funds, will be put on a future Select Board agenda as an action item. Perhaps Ms. Wolfe can provide a further update on any remaining questions at that time. Board member Morse also would like to see this information presented at the next joint meeting of the Northfield Utility Commissions, which is scheduled for Monday, February 6, 2023. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Wolfe and her fellow NEC members for all the work they have put into this project to date and for the valuable information provided tonight.

#### V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **January 5, 2023 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **January 10, 2023 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **January 10, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Petty said it was a Vermont Housing Finance Agency representative that attended a recent Housing Task Force meeting (not Downstreet Housing & Community Development). In addition, Board member Stevens said road repairs he had requested on Smith Hill Road involved crack sealing, not repaving. These corrections will be made. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **January 17, 2023 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. Board member Stevens said the increase for Brown Public Library operations budget in the next fiscal year was \$3,000, not \$33,000. This will be corrected in the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #14-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #14-23 in the amount of \$130,337.21. Board member Stevens asked about a \$995 payment from the Northfield Police Department (NPD) school/training budget for a "Survival Tactics Course." Manager Schulz said this surprised him as well. He spoke to NPD Chief John Helfant and learned an NPD officer had been authorized to attend this course, which involves emergency responses in hilly, difficult terrains. Northfield has a number of these. Board member Stevens asked about \$2,125 spent on sidewalk repairs. Manager Schulz said this was for repair work done on South Main Street near the Washington Street intersection. He said some of the new sidewalk had to be slightly lowered so a driveway entrance could be made more accessible. Board member Goodrich noted some paving work had been done recently on Mill Street. There had been a recent complaint about the state of this road. Chair Maxwell asked about a \$250 paramedic intercept charge. Manager Schulz said the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) now has four (4) certified paramedics but none were available when this request was made. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through January 8, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$113,154.67. Board member Morse asked what was the point of approving employee payroll in this manner since the paychecks have already been distributed. Manager Schulz said this is mainly done for informational purposes so specific personnel expenses, such as departmental overtime, can be tracked over time. Should the Select Board members want this information provided in a different manner and/or taken off the agenda in future, they should let him know. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

## VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of FY 2023-2024 Town Budget.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members provided tentative approval to this budget at the last budget meeting (01/17/23) but now the budget document has been finalized to incorporate the revisions accepted at that meeting. Now that the final budget version has been distributed in written form, he is asking for formal approval at this time. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the FY 2023-2024 Town Budget. Approval of this proposed budget by voters on Town Meeting Day would result in an estimated tax rate increase of 8.8%. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of 2023 Northfield Town Meeting Warning.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the 2023 Northfield Town Meeting Warning as presented by management. Manager Schulz explained that a bill approved by the state legislature and now on Governor Phil Scott's desk would reauthorize the Select Board members to warn an Australian Ballot-only Town Meeting again this year. This has been the situation in Northfield the past two (2) years with the open sessions cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After a brief discussion, it was determined the Select Board members would like to hold the open session again this year. The approved warning will reflect this with voting from the floor on the proposed budget and some other items. Chair Maxwell then asked about the process for nonprofit organizations to get their funding requests on the warning. Manager Schulz said the current policy is for them to petition for the first three (3) years of the request or if they change their request amount. After three (3) years of being on the warning at the same amount and having their funding request approved by voters, the organization has to contact the Town Clerk's Office with a request to be put on the warning. Chair Maxwell would like this policy reviewed before the next Town Meeting. Board member Morse will look into this.

Board member Morse would like to have a warning article devoted to a discussion on the future of the Common Fountain, i.e. should it be simply repaired, should a water recirculation system be installed, should it be reconfigured to include a splash pad, etc. It was noted that a Northfield resident (Bonnie Chouinard) has offered to finance the installation of a splash pad. Chair Maxwell understands the spirit behind the request to have a dedicated article on this matter but he also felt there still were too many unanswered questions about this before it could be brought to a public vote. Manager Schulz noted that the final article on the warning allows for the discussion of any non-binding business at the end of the meeting. If this matter is to be brought up during the Town Meeting open session, he felt this was the proper venue. Manager Schulz also felt ARPA funds could be used for fountain repair or replacement but a professional consultant first should be hired to inspect the current fountain before any decision can be made. Board member Morse would like this matter on the warning to convey to the public that something is being done about this concern. After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Select Board members not to add this matter as a warning article. Manager Schulz will continue to collect information on this so that the Select Board can have a full discussion and resolution at a future regular meeting at which public input will be strongly encouraged. Board member Petty would like a larger study that would include all aspects of possible Depot Square rehabilitation including improved pedestrian safety, etc. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Northfield Energy Committee Appointment.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to appoint Joseph Wantuch to fill the vacancy on the Northfield Energy Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **Northfield Police Department (NPD) Union Contract.** Manager Schulz said since a contract negotiation is involved, this matter will be discussed later in the meeting in executive session. He noted that the Select Board's Labor Agreement & Bargaining Subcommittee (Chair Maxwell and Board member Goodrich) support approval of the proposed contract as do the NPD union representatives.

### VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Main Street Waterline Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said the engineering plans for this project are ninety percent (90%) complete. They will be presented to the Utility Commissioners for their review and then provided to the Select Board members. This project would replace the aged waterlines along Main Street from the NU campus to the Nantanna Mill and also include new waterlines up Prospect Street to the Cheney Hill Reservoir. The total cost of the project is \$7,500,000. Manager Schulz said there already is a commitment from the State of Vermont to fund at least half of the construction costs and he is looking for additional funding sources as the project is made shovel-ready. Chair Maxwell asked about the timeline for this project. Manager Schulz said that would be the Select Board members' decision but it probably should wait until additional outside funding becomes available to cover most if not all of the project cost.  
  
Chair Maxwell doesn't like that Main Street will be torn up again right after it will be restored from the stormwater mitigation project. Manager Schulz said the engineers believe the new waterlines could be installed on the other side of the street with minimal disruption. He does believe grant funds will become available in the near future as such projects are strongly encouraged by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR).
- b. **Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has been preparing preliminary plans for this project but have asked for a delay until next month before presenting them at a Select Board regular meeting.
- c. **Highway Department update.** Manager Schulz said the Highway crew have been filling potholes whenever the winter weather permits. Additional road material arrived today and additional work will be done on Lovers Lane when the road dries up a bit.
- d. **Municipal Building Structural Repairs Project.** Manager Schulz drafted and advertised an RFP for this project. One bid was received before last week's deadline (01/20/23) and he will check out that company's references before proceeding.
- e. **NAS Chief Replacement Search.** Manager Schulz has had held several interviews with applicants in recent days. He is confident a qualified candidate will be hired soon.

### IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Ticker File update.** Board member Morse said he is pleased to be working with Manager Schulz on creating an electronic tickler file that will meet all of his and the other Select Board members' expectations.
- b. **Municipal Computers Policy.** Board member Morse asked if municipal employees are authorized to put their own software purchases on work computers. Manager Schulz said this can be authorized by management on a case-by-case basis. Board member Morse said he believes an employee is using a private application at this time. Manager Schulz believes the program in question is online only and is not installed on the work computer itself.
- c. **South Main Street Stormwater Separation & CSO Abatement Project.** Board member Stevens had some questions about the update included in the packets. Manager Schulz said due to project construction delays due to the need to re-engineer, etc., there have been cost overruns in this project. The Dufresne Group engineers are looking for ways to resolve this, which might involve reducing some of the project scope and/or having municipal employees provide some of the stormwater mitigation work themselves, etc. Manager Schulz emphasized that these cost overruns will not result in any additional cost to the municipality.
- d. **Central Street Traffic Concerns.** Board member Goodrich noted that there was a letter in the packets from a Central Street resident (Katharine deSousa) who believes that speed reduction measures needed to be taken on the street for the safety of pedestrians. Ms. deSousa feels speed bumps installed at regular intervals might be one solution. Manager Schulz said he has looked into installing temporary speed bumps on Central Street but these cannot be installed properly during winter months. It probably would be best to hold a Highway Planning & Project Oversight Subcommittee (Chair Maxwell and Board member Stevens) meeting in the near future to discuss this matter and find the best solution.

Board member Goodrich felt additional signage might be another solution. Chair Maxwell said the subcommittee would provide a recommendation to the other Select Board members so appropriate action can be taken at a future regular meeting. He thought it best that this subcommittee meeting be held later in the day than normal so interested Central Street residents might be able to participate either in person or remotely. Chair Maxwell added he recently did some research on speed bumps himself and learned that some could be installed in the summer months and then capped over the winter. Elroy Hill doesn't support the idea of installing speed bumps on Central Street. He feels a greater NPD presence in the area would be more effective in the long run. If they issued speeding tickets on a regular basis, that would be a better deterrent. Chair Maxwell noted the NPD does patrol the street regularly and also installed a speed monitoring device to see if speeding is prevalent. He remembers the device showed no major speeding issues on the street. Mr. Hill asked why then are there these frequent complaints. Manager Schulz believes part of it is due to the Central Street houses that are located close to the road. This can provide the false impression vehicles are travelling much faster than they actually are. Board member Morse felt it might be good to inform Central Street residents of this fact.

**X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. Elroy Hill: Common Fountain.** Regarding the earlier discussion of the possible reconfiguration of the Common Fountain to include a splash pad, Mr. Hill really doubts those eating at Depot Square restaurants really want to see teenagers splashing around in their bathing suits while they are trying to enjoy their meals.

**XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss legal issues, personnel matters, and a contract negotiation with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:39 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:52 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:53 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.