

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE
Minutes of July 28, 2023

I. ROLL CALL

Committee Chair Erin Hicks-Tibbles, Members Danielle Pelczarski, Lydia Petty, Blake Pierson, and Megan Roush. Also in attendance were Mitch Osiecki (Northfield Zoning Administrator) and guest Anne Donahue.

The meeting was called to order at approximately 3:06pm.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (scheduled): None

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the 06/07/23 and 06/23/23 meetings were approved.

IV. DISCUSSION

a. VCRD community leadership summit

VCRD did the Common Future meetings. They are holding a Community Leadership Summit on August 15th. More information is available on their website <https://www.vtrural.org/summit/>.

b. Flood update

Ms. Pelczarski discussed the impact of the floods for Norwich University:

- Rugby field will be out for entire academic year
- Shaw Center had a collapse to one side
- No water entry on the Dog River run, to which they will try to create an entry
- The Armory was a shelter for both the college and the community for several days
 - Served between 5 and 20 people at any given time
 - High school gym was also a shelter, no one on the committee knew those numbers.
- Norwich housed first responders from New York

Ms. Donahue discussed known impacts to unhoused people – both groups of people with whom she talked were able to find shelter with families. One group was reluctant to use shelters because they were concerned that the shelters would not be able to accommodate their pets. They were not the only people who were reluctant to leave because of pets. The Barre shelter did take pets, but it may have been too far for some; would like to find something local as well.

Ms. Petty indicated that as far as she knows, no one in Northfield has had to leave their homes permanently from this flood. Several people have had bad

basement damage. We will need to look at how to best adapt housing for flooding in the future.

There was some discussion of how long it took to acquire water test kits and the general Vermont state flood response. It would be nice to get information about resources before the flooding. Information was fragmented before, during, and after the event and not everyone knows where to check.

Mr. Pierson indicated that the gravel road and one resident deck on Turkey Hill were wiped out from the flood. Not everyone was able to walk to town during the time the road was out.

Businesses affected by flood in Montpelier are looking for short term – and potentially long term – commercial space in Northfield. There is a pop up currently in the Green Light Realty building. Northfield may make sense as a more flood resilient option than Montpelier in the long term.

Mobile home park space in Northfield was affected by flooding: about 35 people will have their mobile homes condemned. There are 9 spaces available in Northfield Falls.

Will see increased short term demand for residential housing. Committee does not know of anything available for short term housing. Ms. Pelczarski discussed living in TMUs during military service; they are small and prefabricated but livable and have facilities. Could Vermont work on a procurement plan for similar units to deploy as needed? Would likely make more sense at the state level than for Northfield to try to buy some that will not necessarily always be needed in Northfield. The House and Senate had a joint hearing on the flood, which may have involved some discussion of a similar project. The Vermont Emergency Response Center will likely create an after action report.

The Town received 5 dehumidifiers and 15 fans but no sump pumps. The Town is working on updating the hazard mitigation plan, which had been in process when the flood hit.

c. Committee tasks and priorities

Committee agreed to come with three potential committee tasks to present at the next evening meeting. Committee members will also refer to published town documents when considering their vision for the future of housing in Northfield.

Possible questions for the Committee to answer include:

- What housing inventory does Northfield have available?

- How many vacant houses does Northfield have? Why are they vacant? Do any of them present opportunities?
- What do current regulations allow for improving, fixing, and replacing properties in floodplains?
- Are there other available sites for residential development in addition to those the committee has already seen?
 - Mr. Osiecki will talk to the listers and see what they can find
- How does this Committee fit with the Downtown and Housing Task Force from the Common Future meetings?
- What numbers can we put around the anecdotes of companies losing potential employees to lack of housing?
 - Ms. Pelczarski will see what Norwich can tell us about how many people turned down jobs, how many employees currently live within vs. outside of Northfield, and what expansion would ideally look like if housing were not a constraint
- How much of Northfield's zoning is commercial vs. industrial?

V. ADJOURNEMENT

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Hicks -Tibbles