

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of June 13, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Lucas Herring, Deborah Zuaro, Matthew Romei, Tim Swartz, Colin Bright, Erik Josephson, Susan Stillinger, Gerard LaVarnway, Cody Morris, Taylor Goodwin, 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. Lucas Herring: Northfield Labor Day Weekend Observances update.** Mr. Herring serves as Treasurer for Northfield Observances, which organizes and oversees the annual celebration that takes place in the downtown area over the Labor Day weekend. This includes entertainment and activities on and around the Common as well as the Labor Day Parade. He noted a few concerns for the future of this organization as a number of important leadership roles, such as the entertainment and fundraising chairs, have remained vacant for some time. There are other officers who have committed to helping out this year but will leave afterwards. Mr. Herring said unless the level of local commitment increases, within the next couple of years the parade itself might be the only activity held over this holiday weekend. Another concern Mr. Herring has is regarding the stage used for entertainment performances on the Common over the holiday weekend. Manager Schulz said the stage now is in storage. It has been inspected and the conclusion was that it is servable for another year but should be replaced afterwards due to its poor condition. The stage's great size and weight also are problematic when it has to be put in place. Mr. Herring would like to explore the possibility of fundraising and/or seeking grant funds in order to purchase a replacement. The new stage perhaps could be lightweight and/or sectional, which would allow for easier installation on the Common or perhaps in Memorial Park for special summer events. Board member Shernock asked how much the new stage would cost. Mr. Herring has seen estimates of between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Board member Morse asked if any other organizations have requested use of the current stage outside of the Labor Day weekend. Manager Schulz does not believe there have been any requests. Mr. Herring will do more research about a replacement stage and will provide the Select Board members with more information at a future meeting.

Mr. Herring said Northfield Observances would be making the same requests for street closures and parking bans as in previous years. It also will request that the parking lot entrance next to Northfield Savings Bank be closed so that additional handicapped parking spaces can be created in the downtown area. In addition, due to the large presence of unleashed dogs roaming the Common over the holiday weekend, Mr. Herring is requesting that the local animal control ordinance be more strictly enforced. Signs are put on the Common each year stating dogs are banned over the holiday weekend but this usually is ignored. Manager Schulz said Northfield Observances usually submits an annual request in writing that specifies the road closures, parking bans, etc. they would like for the holiday weekend. Mr. Herring said that written request would be forthcoming. He just wanted to make the Select Board members aware of the special concerns that might affect the festivities in coming years. Mr. Herring also wanted to use this occasion to encourage recent as well as longtime Northfield residents to come forward and join Northfield Observances in order to keep this annual tradition alive.

- b. Lucas Herring: Northfield Police Chief Search Committee update.** Mr. Herring also serves as chair of the search committee that is seeking to hire former Police Chief John Helfant's replacement. He said the committee has eight (8) members (not including Manager Schulz) and considerable work has been done over the past couple months. The committee members reviewed and revised the position's job description as well as the advertisement in order to reflect current circumstances regarding the Northfield Police Department (NPD). The committee members also drafted a series of questions to provide to the applicants, of which there were eighteen (18) in total. Based on their responses, qualified applicants were selected for remote interviews. The initial interviews were held earlier today. Background checks also are ongoing and additional remote interviews will be scheduled over the next few weeks. Board member Petty asked if the plan was for the committee members to make a recommendation to Manager Schulz once the process has been completed. Mr. Herring said that was the case as Manager Schulz will be making the final decision regarding whom will be hired.
- c. Deborah Zuaro: Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee update.** Ms. Zuaro serves as chair of this committee, which has been holding regular meetings over the past year in order to determine the best way of spending the \$122,965 in state grant funds Northfield was awarded for various outdoor recreation projects. The successful grant application stated these funds would be used for "Improving [the] Town Forest by restoring a trail that was damaged during Hurricane Irene, removing invasive species, developing and implementing a wayfinding masterplan that will connect the trail to town, installing trailhead kiosks with maps, designating nearby parking spaces for trail users, and expanding outdoor gear lending at the local public library." In keeping with this, the first project completed was the rehabilitation of about seven hundred feet (700') of the Lybrand Trail located at the Slate Avenue trailhead. Ms. Zuaro said the contractor hired for this project (Apex Trailworks) did an excellent job and there have been many compliments for the work done. Another contractor (Fogarty Forestry) was hired to remove invasive species (e.g., honeysuckle) and clear the Paine Mountain vista near the Hawk Watch. The first application of herbicide has been completed and brush has been removed. A second application will be done later this year. In regard to the wayfinding masterplan, the engineering firm DuBois & King was hired for this project and currently is working with the VOREC committee members on updated maps of the trail system and community, new signage including trail kiosks, etc. The signage installed along the forest trail system will guide hikers to points of interest and also inform them of what is and isn't allowed in the Town Forest. A local graphic designer, Jason Endres, is assisting with this project so that local branding is implemented on all new signage. In addition, recreation equipment including snowshoes, hiking poles, and binoculars for birdwatching have been purchased for a lending service to be located in the Brown Public Library. Ms. Zuaro then noted that three (3) trail counters have been installed in the Town Forest so that trail usage can be tracked. This will help considerably with future planning. She added that the committee is comprised of energetic and enthusiastic volunteers and much has been accomplished. Ms. Zuaro said the committee is planning to provide a presentation at the July 25, 2023, Select Board regular meeting in order to show examples of the new mapping and signage as the wayfinding masterplan project nears its completion. Board member Morse asked if hunting was allowed in the Town Forest. Ms. Zuaro confirmed it was. She added that the committee is looking to expand public parking near the Norwich University (NU) Shaw Outdoor Center, which is the main access point for the Paine Mountain trail system. Ms. Zuaro said twelve (12) spaces would be added and this would reduce the need for on-street parking at Town Forest access points. There also are plans to provide a scheduled program of organized outdoor activities, such as group hikes. There will be a joint event with NU later this fall. Chair Maxwell was very impressed with the work accomplished by Ms. Zuaro and her committee. He noted several years ago Ms. Zuaro helped lead the effort to obtain voter approval for the municipal purchase of property near the Paine Mountain summit for public use. Chair Maxwell is grateful to Ms. Zuaro for her long dedication to this cause.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. May 23, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #23-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #23-23 in the amount of \$1,665,405.49. It was noted that of the total warrant amount, \$1,109,396 represented property taxes collected by the municipality and then forwarded to the Paine Mountain School District. Another \$245,136 was spent purchasing power for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). Chair Maxwell asked about a \$2,097 payment to the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) related to the "Sanders Grant." Manager Schulz said there was a federal grant through Senator Bernie Sanders' office that assisted NED customers with improved energy efficiency. This was an incidental payment. Board member Petty noted a \$10,207 payment for sludge management at the Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF). This amount seemed higher than normal. Manager Schulz said the WWTF gets more flow in the spring months due to increased stormwater runoff, etc. and this results in the higher expense. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Warrant #23-23A.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #23-23A in the amount of \$30,154.37. This was a bank note payment related to the fire pumper purchase. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through May 28, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$104,689.31. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Pedestrian Bridge Rehabilitation Discussion.** Manager Schulz said the footbridge is about twenty (20) years old and the wooden deck is showing signs of deterioration. The Highway crew did install some new planks as a temporary fix. Highway Foreman Trent Tucker said the footbridge is safe for the time being but permanent repairs are necessary. Manager Schulz asked for deck replacement quotes from Daniels Construction, which performed the rehabilitation work on the Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge last year. Two (2) quotes were provided. The first was to replace the wooden deck with a timber deck for \$62,500. The other quote was to replace the current wooden deck with a "pultruded fiberglass reinforced polymer deck" for \$80,000. This type of deck would better support long-term pedestrian and bicycle traffic and would come with "an antiskid surface." These prices were a little higher than Manager Schulz anticipated but he noted this was just an initial inquiry to get some ballpark figures. Chair Maxwell asked if the bridge now is safe for pedestrian traffic. Board member Petty has seen the bridge and said the recent damage (including holes) have been covered by plywood as a temporary measure. Chair Maxwell believes the damage was caused by snow removal equipment this past winter. Board member Petty is concerned about the price since there now is only about \$7,000 in the Highway Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) account for footbridge maintenance. Chair Maxwell said it might be necessary to borrow the difference if this really is an emergency situation. He would like Manager Schulz to develop a full RFP in order to obtain competitive bids for this project. Manager Schulz will start working on this and will provide additional information at a future meeting. Chair Maxwell noted the current wooden deck worked well for twenty (20) years so replacing it with something similar probably is a good idea.
- b. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).** Board member Petty said she and Board member Shernock worked with Manager Schulz to create a scoring matrix for possible local projects that could make use of ARPA funds. Board member Shernock said this was not an algorithmic approach but rather the basis for full discussions of the relative merits of each proposed project. Board member Petty said the application sheet includes as relevant criteria whether the proposed project would conform to existing local long-term plans. This includes the Northfield Town Plan (2020), the Northfield Area-Wide Plan (2016), and the final report of the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) community visit held in 2002 as well as the upcoming report of the one held earlier this year. There are other questions that attempt to gauge the suitability of the proposed project based on local public support, whether it would have "a long-term positive impact," whether there would be significant ongoing maintenance costs, etc.

Board member Petty thought it would be best to distribute this document widely by having hardcopies available in the Municipal Building and also have it posted for download on the municipal website (www.northfield-vt.gov). The completed forms would be forwarded to the Select Board members before an in-person presentation is made at a future regular meeting. Chair Maxwell asked if there should be a deadline for submissions. Board member Petty thought a hard deadline might result in an unwieldy number of requests being submitted at the same time. It would be preferable to encourage rather than mandate timely submissions. It was noted that the deadline for the municipality to commit the ARPA funds is December 31, 2024. The funds then must be fully expended within two (2) years. Board member Morse thought it might be good to send copies of the form to the task forces that were organized during the recent VCRD community visit. Board member Petty thought the Select Board members might want to provide their own submissions for projects that they really believe had significant merit. Chair Maxwell said this will be an ongoing discussion in coming months. Board member Shernock wants to be sure that the process is available to all residents and not just those who belong to targeted groups. Chair Maxwell agreed that the process should be fully accessible as well as fully transparent.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Grant Application.** Manager Schulz said the municipality has submitted a grant application to the VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Grant program. If successful, the grant funds would be used to improve pedestrian safety in Northfield Falls by purchasing two (2) flashing beacons and installing new ADA-compliant sidewalk. Manager Schulz has received word that the grant application has been received and will be reviewed. The decision should be made within the next couple of months.
- b. South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation and CSO Elimination Project.** Manager Schulz said the contractor (Courtland Construction Corporation) has been working steadily on the project in recent weeks and making great progress. At the latest monthly construction meeting, Manager Schulz was informed the current schedule is to complete the work on South Main Street and fully repave the street by July 4, 2023. The project then will shift to the side streets and that work should be completed by the end of July. Some damaged sections of Prospect Street sidewalk will need to be repaired.
- c. Electric Vehicle (EV) Chargers Downtown Installation.** Manager Schulz has been working with member of the Northfield Energy Committee on this project. Quotes for the various stages of the installation process are being solicited and we hope to have the chargers ready for service by August 2023.
- d. Dog River Park Committee Project.** Manager Schulz has been working with committee member Simon Pearish regarding a proposal to remove the knotweed located along the riverbank. This project will require significant volunteer labor in order to physically remove the knotweed that will be relocated from the site. There is a possibility grant funds will be available to fund part of the project. Board member Shernock noted there are young trees along the riverbank and asked if they would be affected. Manager Schulz said there would be every effort to protect them from harm.
- e. Smart Meters.** Manager Schulz said the local transition to smart meters, which can be read remotely, has been discussed for several years. After some discussion, the Utility Commission members have authorized Manager Schulz to start purchasing the equipment and prepare for their installation at local homes and businesses. If all goes well, the installation will commence either this autumn or next spring. The State of Vermont will cover about half of the total cost and Northfield utility customers will be kept aware of the upcoming installation process.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Town Bridge 56 Rehabilitation.** A recent VTrans inspection stated that this bridge, located on a two-house unnamed road off Vermont Route 12, had a support beam that needed replacement. Manager Schulz requested a quote from Daniels Construction and received two (2) options in the amounts of \$189,000 and \$283,000 respectively. Board member Stevens asked how the municipality would pay for this. Manager Schulz said he will look for VTrans structure grant opportunities. It may be necessary to set aside funds for this work when the FY 2024/2025 Highway budget is drafted later this year.

Board member Petty asked if there was a deadline for this work. Manager Schulz said since it was not an emergency situation, VTrans probably would be forgiving given the great expense involved. Board member Stevens thought a full timber replacement bridge would be sufficient and less expensive. Manager Schulz will explore that option.

- b. **Senior Center Expansion.** Board member Morse noted there are plans to expand the Senior Center building by about twenty feet (20') because there is not enough current space for all of its various programs. He felt perhaps this project could be paired with the goal that came from the recent VCRD community meetings that a community center should be established. The task force members for this proposal are enthused about this possibility. This also could be a possible ARPA-funded project.
- c. **Vermont Route 12A Sewer Expansion.** Board member Stevens asked if there were current plans to pursue this long-term goal. Manager Schulz has reached out to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) about the great importance of protecting the nearby municipal wellfield from contamination from private septic systems as justification for funding the project. ANR agreed to pay for half the expense of an engineering study. The municipality did authorize an engineering study of this proposed sewer expansion about fifteen (15) years ago. The project did not go forward due to lack of funding and debates about whether residents with functioning private septic systems would be required or encouraged to hook onto the municipal sewer system. The engineering plans were about sixty percent (60%) completed when the project was shelved. The plans now can be updated and brought to one hundred percent (100%).

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy Hill: Sidewalk Repairs.** Mr. Hill felt the sidewalks along Vermont Route 12 North from Vine Street to Cumberland Farms were in very poor condition and should be fixed as soon as possible. He felt their decrepit condition created a bad impression for community visitors. Chair Maxwell said this matter was discussed at a recent Highway subcommittee meeting. The contracted sidewalk pavers will be coming to Northfield soon and will be addressing this and a number of other problem spots. Board member Petty noted an inventory of the sidewalk system is now underway and will help with the creation of a priority list for sidewalk repairs. Manager Schulz confirmed that municipal staff have started this sidewalk inventory. Chair Maxwell said when the sidewalk inventory has been completed, it will serve the same function as the Road Surface Management System (RSMS) program does for backroads maintenance.

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

The Board went into executive session at 8:26 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 9:20 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:20 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 were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of June 27, 2023.