

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING  
Minutes of December 27, 2022**

- 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, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Trent Tucker (Highway Foreman), Gerard LaVarnway, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

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

**III. DISCUSSION**

**a. Proposed FY 2023/2024 Town Budget**

- 1. Highway Department.** Manager Schulz said in the Highway Department's Operations & Maintenance (O&M) budget, there was strong effort to keep the increase down to 1.1%, which is lower than the increase in most departments. There is a slight increase (5.5%) in the budget for personnel services. Manager Schulz some of the budgets for road materials were lowered based on past actuals. This includes gravel/stone (\$50,000 to \$40,000) because there is material already in the Northfield Falls pit that can be crushed and put on backroads. The budget for road salt was lowered from \$65,000 to \$60,000. The Gasoline/Diesel budget was increased from \$48,000 to \$55,000 but it is hoped that the price spikes seen this past year were an anomaly. The Equipment Rental line item has been reduced from \$13,000 to \$6,000 since the purchase of a second road grader negates the need for renting one during the summer months (as in years past). Highway Foreman Tucker said another possible saving is the future purchase of off-road diesel for the highway vehicles. This is the same as regular diesel except it is tax-free, which should result in some savings. He has been told by fuel providers that Vermont municipalities are allowed to use off-road diesel in their vehicle fleets. Mr. Tucker would like to explore this option the next time that the municipality solicits fuel bids. Chair Maxwell asked if there would be bad effects on the equipment. Mr. Tucker said it basically is the same as regular diesel. Finance Director Baroffio believes the municipality's fuel purchases already are tax-free but she will check on this. Board member Goodrich asked why the Vehicle & Equipment Maintenance budget has dropped from \$70,000 to \$65,000. Ms. Baroffio said she and Manager Schulz came to the conclusion that higher actuals over the past couple years were due to unusual circumstances that resulted in higher-than-expected repair bills. These payments ultimately were reimbursed by the municipality's insurance company. Board member Goodrich noted that cost of leasing the pit lot off Vermont Route 12A has doubled in this budget (\$3,000 to \$6,000). Manager Schulz said the owner of the property originally wanted the municipality to pay for repairing a private bridge that leads to the pit. Manager Schulz did not think that was appropriate so instead a higher rental price was negotiated. It might be necessary to reanalyze whether the higher rental cost negates the time and fuel savings now accrued by eliminating the need for trucks working on the southern backroads having to travel back and forth to Northfield Falls for road materials.

Board member Morse asked if Mr. Tucker has any concerns about the proposed Highway budget. Mr. Tucker said his main concern is regarding replacement of the 2003 backhoe in the Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget. He is alright with the rest of the budget. Mr. Tucker did note \$5,000 has been budgeted for Tree Removal since Limlaw Chipping & Land Clearing will no longer remove roadside trees at no cost in return for being able to process the downed material. Board member Morse asked if the municipality received a grant to remove ash trees threatened by Emerald Ash Borer infestation, could we use Limlaw or a similar company to remove them. Manager Schulz said such grants usually have flexible conditions with in-kind services eligible for local match amounts. It would be possible to hire a private contractor to do the work. Chair Maxwell asked if the road material to be crushed in the Northfield Falls pit could be used for resurfacing the backroads. Mr. Tucker said the resultant material would be more appropriate for use on shorter backroads, for washouts, and general road maintenance. Manager Schulz noted there is a separate Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for the backroad resurfacing projects that are done during the summer months. Turning to the Highway CIP budget, Chair Maxwell noted that the amount budgeted for gravel resurfacing of the backroads has been reduced from \$90,000 to \$70,000. He asked if the lower amount would still allow for the resurfacing of three (3) to four (4) miles of backroad this coming summer. Mr. Tucker believes it would. Manager Schulz noted the municipality did receive \$45,000 in state grant funds that will be used for resurfacing backroads and for safety improvements on Lovers Lane. He felt these grant funds allow for the \$20,000 savings in the gravel resurfacing budget. Chair Maxwell was not in favor of this reduction given the great success with backroad resurfacing in recent years. After further discussion, there was a consensus to restore these funds to the Highway CIP budget.

Manager Schulz then noted the CIP account for Guardrails had a healthy balance (\$40,153) so only \$2,000 will be added in the next fiscal year. Some of the aforementioned state grant funds will be used to purchase new guardrail on Lovers Lane. In the Bridges budget, Manager Schulz said there was a \$54,960 deficit in the Slaughterhouse Covered Bridge account that was covered by Town General surplus funds. This deficit spending was caused when the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) reinspected the bridge and drastically reduced its maximum weight limit due to structural concerns. The previous weight limit was restored when the unbudgeted repairs were made. In the Sidewalks account, \$30,000 will be added to the current \$1,818 balance. Manager Schulz noted grant funds are available for sidewalk projects and there is a possibility American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds also could be used. The Paving budget will receive \$225,000 in new funding and the bulk of this (\$130,000) will be used repaving West Hill Road. The remaining funds will be used on Dickinson Drive and Cherry Street, both of which have shown some deterioration. Chair Maxwell asked if the \$225,000 will be sufficient to repave all three (3) roads. Manager Schulz said West Hill Road would be repaved next year and the others might be postponed another year if the paving quotes are too high. Chair Maxwell would like to see an updated copy of the Road Surface Management System (RSMS) plan to understand the current condition of certain roads. Manager Schulz will provide that information.

Board member Petty asked about the Footbridge CIP account, which has a \$7,000 balance. The proposed budget notes it would cost about \$60,000 to replace the footbridge but no timeframe is provided. Manager Schulz said the footbridge has been inspected recently and no issues were discovered. It is possible to obtain an estimate regarding when extensive repairs might be needed. Mr. Tucker said the footbridge might need some floorboards replaced in the near future but this should not be too expensive. Board member Petty would like the sidewalk inventory completed as soon as possible so it can be determined whether the funds budgeted for sidewalk work are sufficient. It also might be possible to obtain grant funds for sidewalk repair/expansion. Manager Schulz noted the South Main Street Sidewalk project was funded by state grant awards. There were ADA concerns about the existing sidewalk and that was one factor in the grant award. Normally state grant awards for sidewalk work are for expanding the system and not for replacing old sidewalk. Board member Petty thought we should cite similar ADA concerns on the Wall Street sidewalk and apply for additional state grant funds to replace that sidewalk. Perhaps ARPA funds could be used for any local match amount. Board member Stevens asked how much it cost for new sidewalk. Mr. Tucker estimated about \$130 per foot of granite sidewalk with curbing. Chair Maxwell had floated an idea a few years ago about seeking public support for bonding in order to fund major sidewalk improvements. He also felt the sidewalk inventory should be done sooner rather than later.

In the Highway CEP budget, Manager Schulz said that one proposed cost-saving approach was to increase the expected lifespan of certain vehicles from seven (7) to eight (8) years. He noted the expected lifespans of some vehicles had been set as long as ten (10) years at one time before being lowered to seven (7) in most cases. Manager Schulz felt this change was justified due to higher replacement costs due to supply chain issues, etc. Mr. Tucker would prefer to have the lifespans left at seven (7) years as that usually is the length of most warranties. Beyond that point, expensive repairs might become frequent. Manager Schulz noted an account has been established for the replacement of the 2003 backhoe. \$5,000 will be the initial contribution with \$15,000 added in future fiscal years. Board member Goodrich noted the Water/Sewer Department has its own backhoe and asked if it could be shared with the Highway Department. Manager Schulz didn't think this was possible as Mr. Tucker wants to use it to move road salt, which can have major impact on the equipment. Chair Maxwell saw a "Traffic Light" account for the signal at the intersection of North Main Street and Vine Street. This CIP account has a \$36,460 balance and Chair Maxwell asked if this was sufficient given reports that the signal is "on its last legs." Manager Schulz said the traffic signal is scheduled for replacement in FY 2025/2026, which is expected to cost \$50,000. With the influx of additional funds in intervening years, there should be a sufficient balance by that time. Mr. Tucker then clarified that the work to be done would not be full replacement but rather a significant update. He spoke to a representative from East Coast Signals and was told only an update was needed. This person also recommended that if any major work is done on the road, there should be sufficient funds set aside in the project budget to address the cost of updating the traffic signal. There being no other questions, Chair Maxwell and the other Select Board members thanked Mr. Tucker for attending this budget session.

2. **Brown Public Library (BPL).** Board member Stevens, who also serves as Treasurer on the BPL Board of Trustees, said the BPL budget will increase by \$3,000 in the next fiscal year to cover a six percent (6%) rise in employee pay. There had been no similar increase the previous year. There had been overages last year in the maintenance and computers & tech budgets that had been partly covered by grant funds. Most other line items will see no changes. Board member Morse would like to see a list of which operating expenses are covered by BPL endowment funds. Board member Stevens said a bequest is paying for a \$7,000 furniture purchase but the rest of the operating expenses are covered by municipal funds. In future, Board member Morse would like this information included in writing on the supplied BPL budget pages. He added there is an AmazonSmile program that will allow buyers to designate 0.5% of their purchase amounts to be provided to the library of their choice, which could be our Brown Public Library.

Manager Schulz noted that there is a separate O&M budget that covers the operating expenses of the building that houses the BPL and the Northfield Historical Society. There is a 12.5% increase in this budget largely due to higher heating costs. Recent energy efficient work, such as the installation of new LED light fixtures, should reduce these costs over time. There also has been a reduction in elevator maintenance costs. In the building's CIP account, there is a \$15,000 balance in the "Library Roof" account and \$1,756 in the "Building Improvements" account. Manager Schulz said the building itself is in pretty good condition due to considerable renovations done over the past few years. Therefore, a total of \$7,500 will be added to these accounts in the next fiscal year. Board member Stevens agreed the building is now in good shape. Chair Maxwell noted that when the building's roof does need to be replaced, the estimated cost is \$50,000. Manager Schulz said some major roof improvements were done a couple years ago so all should be good for a few years.

3. **Future Budget Meeting Schedule.** The next budget meeting will be held on Thursday, January 5, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. here in the Community Room. The next, and hopefully final one, will be held at 6:00 p.m. prior to the regular meeting on Tuesday, January 10, 2023.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).** There was none.

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

The Board adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of January 10, 2023.