

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of January 22, 2026

I. ROLL CALL. Chair Charles Morse, Board members K. David Maxwell, Lydia Petty (absent), Merry Shernock and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Steven Mackenzie, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Karl Bailey (Highway Foreman), Tim Swartz, Aaron Rhodes, Curtis Dudley, Carolyn Stevens, Mary Smith, Matthew Romei, Kristin Pollard, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Morse called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED): None.

III. DISCUSSION

a. Proposed FY 2026/2027 Town Budget

1. Budget Recap. Manager Mackenzie said the intention for tonight's meeting is for the Select Board members to formally approve budget presented by management that will be provided to Northfield voters on Town Meeting Day (03/03/26). Finance Director Baroffio has distributed updated budget pages to the Select Board members along with explanatory pages that highlight the budget changes made by consensus to date. Ms. Baroffio will briefly explain these changes along with other possible revisions that the Select Board members could accept tonight.

Manager Mackenzie said that since he has been on the job as interim manager, Highway Foreman Karl Bailey has informed him of the need to create a full-time mechanic position rather than expected the individual who performs vehicle maintenance to also perform road maintenance. Mr. Bailey has noted that taking the mechanic away from work in the Town Garage has created a backlog of vehicle repairs, both major and minor. These repairs affect every municipal department that has a vehicle fleet, which includes the Police Department, Fire Department, Ambulance Service, Highway Department, and the Water/Sewer Department. This full-time mechanic position should be budgeted at \$100,000 and if this cannot be accomplished for the next fiscal year, it should be fully discussed when the FY 2027/2028 budget is first discussed. Mr. Bailey said the recent succession of snowstorms has had the Highway crew plowing everyday for weeks and this has really set back the mechanic's work schedule. This has been a long-term problem and has led to some turnover in this position in recent years. Mr. Bailey noted that the Highway Department has seven (7) employees including the maintenance worker whose salary is split evenly between the Highway Department and Parks, Grounds, and Facilities. As for the current backlog, Chair Morse asked if some of this work could be outsourced to local mechanics. Mr. Bailey said most local mechanics have no experience with heavy trucks so those vehicles would need to be transported to dealerships. In addition, the jobs that the local mechanics could perform might have to be scheduled with them weeks in advance. Mr. Bailey said the current mechanic would like to be an equipment operator only so a new person would have to be engaged for the full-time mechanic position. It is possible a dealership mechanic might be interested. Mr. Bailey believes this hiring would save money in the long run with timely and less expensive vehicle maintenance rather than outsourcing the work.

Board member Maxwell asked if Mr. Bailey has hired any part-time employees to plow snow plow this winter. Mr. Bailey said he has not since the Water/Sewer employees have been willing to help out when needed. Board member Maxwell asked how many positions were now vacant. Mr. Bailey said just one: the maintenance worker. Board member Maxwell suggested that in future this position should be fully funded by the Highway Department and the park maintenance and related work could be outsourced. Board member Shernock said the park mowing, etc. would need to be done regularly or residents will become very upset. Board member Maxwell said this would probably only be a temporary solution until the long-term needs of our recreation department are addressed. Manager Mackenzie said outsourcing this work would save money on employee benefits, etc. Board member Maxwell felt any savings could be used to help fund the full-time mechanic position. Manager Mackenzie was asked to develop an RFP for outsourcing the maintenance work.

Ms. Baroffio said the most recent revisions to the proposed budget would increase the local tax rate by \$0.1635, which would be a 13.5% increase. However, should about \$241,120 in prior year surplus funds be used, the tax rate increase would be lowered to \$0.0911, which would be a 7.5% tax increase. Some of the surplus funds would be used for one-time purchases and others would be used to fund future equipment and vehicle purchases. Ms. Baroffio said the use of surplus funds for one-time purchases could help stabilize future tax rates.

In the Highway Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget, surplus funds could be used to fund the state-mandated repairs on a bridge on Vermont Route 12 south of its intersection with Lovers Lane (TH54 BR56). Another possibility is to use \$42,100 in surplus funds in the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget for the 2007 Pumper Truck replacement account. This would reduce the amount of borrowing that would be required when the vehicle was replaced. In addition, by using surplus funds, the next year set aside for the 2017 Pumper Truck replacement would increase from \$21,840 to \$29,500.

In the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) CEP budget, the 2022 ambulance unit replacement costs are still being researched to determine whether switching to another dealer would result in significant cost savings. If that is confirmed, the result could mean that the vehicle's replacement purchase might result in limited or no borrowing. Ms. Baroffio said that savings from the "Jaws of Life" NAS CEP account will be used in the 2022 ambulance unit replacement fund. In addition, the Stretcher account will have \$22,000 added in the next fiscal year using \$13,000 in surplus funds.

In the Highway CEP budget, Ms. Baroffio adjusted the vehicle replacement schedule from nine (9) to seven (7) years for some trucks. Future set asides were adjusted accordingly with surplus funds being used to fill gaps. Also, new line items were created for the future replacement of the 2026 Western Star trucks that will be delivered in the next fiscal year. The estimated cost of replacing the 2022 Loader was increased to \$240,000 and the next year set aside was increased to \$44,000 using prior year surplus funds. The funds added to the sidewalk machine replacement account in the next fiscal year were doubled to \$32,000 using surplus funds. Ms. Baroffio said reducing the expected service life of some vehicles will result in cost savings on repairs as well as increasing their trade-in value when they are replaced. She added that the proposals she has presented regarding the use of prior year surplus funds are options that the Select Board members may or may not accept.

Ms. Baroffio said that all spending on sidewalks in the current fiscal year was covered by ARPA funds so any spending this year will necessarily result in an increased use of taxpayer funds. In addition, surplus funds were used last year for any spending in the Highway CIP bridge maintenance accounts. In the next fiscal year, \$31,000 will be added to this account and this amount will be level funded in future fiscal years.

Ms. Baroffio noted that Northfield voters have limited the amount of surplus funds that can be carried over from one fiscal year to another at \$190,000. The Town General surplus is now \$660,079 so any excess surplus funds must be used in the next fiscal year budget. She has already included \$199,740 in surplus funds in the proposed budget so the Select Board members must decide to do with the remaining \$270,339. It also is possible to dip into the \$190,000 amount but she doesn't recommend it as that will limit options when the next fiscal year budget is drafted. Ms. Baroffio said with the changes to date, the proposed budget will result in a tax rate increase of 7.5%. She noted that a number of municipal positions remain vacant and that will result in additional surplus funds. Ms. Baroffio said that these proposed budgets are not intended to create surplus but unexpected circumstances usually result in some surplus funds. After some discussion, the Select Board members accepted Ms. Baroffio's recommendations regarding the use of surplus funds in the Highway CIP, NFD CEP, NAS CEP, and Highway CEP budgets. She said that this use of surplus funds should help level out future fiscal year sat aside amounts. It also would reduce the need for future borrowing to finance heavy equipment purchases. There were no objections to reducing the expected service life of certain Highway vehicles from nine (9) years to seven (7). \$163,500 in surplus funds will be used to finance this change. Board member Maxwell would like to use \$18,000 in budget savings to fund the creation of a full-time highway mechanic position. He also would like to use \$40,000 in budget surplus funds to pay for outsourcing the mowing and other maintenance of our public parks. Board member Maxwell also would like to see the contact for cemetery maintenance put out to bid to see if there could be any cost savings there. Ms. Baroffio said with these and other accepted budget revisions, the surplus funds amount has been reduced to \$153,000. She felt that it was good to carry over at least \$100,000 in surplus funds for the next budget process in case of emergency unbudgeted spending, etc. As for sidewalk spending, Board member Shernock felt that the people who would be walking on them for the next twenty (20) plus years should pay for them through long-term bonds.

Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the FY 2026-2027 budget as amended. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

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

V. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Shernock, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at: https://youtu.be/399_6bFwOXE

These minutes are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.