

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**TOWN SELECT BOARD RETREAT**  
**Minutes of September 1, 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 Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Kahwa C. Douoguih, Erin Hicks-Tibbles, and Carolyn Stevens.

Chair Maxwell called the Board Retreat to order at 10:00 a.m.

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

**III. DISCUSSION**

Chair Maxwell said this is the third such Board Retreat he has attended; he first participated as a Village Trustee and later as a Town Selectman. He had asked the Select Board members to provide their own suggestions of immediate, short-term, and long-term goals for the Northfield community. As there is no set agenda today, these matters can be discussed in a free and open conversation. The presented goals could be as simple as minor policy revisions or as significant as replacing a covered bridge (as an example).

Board member Morse first stated what a significant investment the municipality made in its future in hiring Tom Davis as Northfield's first full-time Economic Development Director (EDD). He believes this will yield significant benefits in coming years. Board member Morse then noted significant challenges for Northfield's economic future as there now are a number of vacant storefronts around Depot Square, the former China Star restaurant site also remains vacant, the Community Bank building (the former railroad depot) soon will be empty as this branch will be closing, etc. Board member Morse attributes some of this to a lack of vision by the property owners and he hopes Mr. Davis will be able to help bring new or expanded businesses to the downtown area. He then noted the municipality uses the town manager form of government, which means that the Select Board establishes policies that management carries out on a day-to-day basis. Board member Morse would like to see a thorough review of current municipal policies so that those that are working well are followed stringently while those that are not working should be revised to reflect current conditions, etc. This includes the current municipal purchasing policy, which has set dollar amounts for the level of bid solicitation required (i.e. quotes by phone, newspaper advertisements, etc.). It is probable that the dollar amounts should be adjusted upward to reflect inflated material costs, etc. Board member Morse said some recent Requests for Proposals (RFPs) resulted in few if any bid submissions and this is another indication some policy revision is needed. The policies could be reviewed individually, perhaps one each month for the foreseeable future.

Board member Morse also would like to have consideration of a new municipal policy that would compensate business owners if their operations are seriously disrupted and/or require relocation due to a municipal infrastructure project. Potential compensation amounts would be included in the overall cost of the project. Whenever possible, the municipality should take steps to ensure that whenever vehicular or foot traffic access to a business is temporarily impeded, the effects are mitigated as much as possible. Board member Morse said he originally proposed such a policy when Gillespie Fuels had to relocate some of its operations to Randolph VT when the Stony Brook Road Bridge was closed for several weeks. The municipality had the ability at the time to install a temporary bridge but chose not to do so. In this example, the compensation amount would not be too significant: about \$500 each week the bridge was closed. There also is an upcoming project that could cause a much more significant business disruption: the Main Street Bridge Replacement Project scheduled for 2025. As part of the project, the Northfield Electric Department (NED), Trans-Video, and TDS Telecom are being asked to relocate their utility lines in the construction area. Board member Morse does not feel these businesses should bear the cost of this but rather this should be budgeted as part of the project's total costs.

Board member Morse also feels that whenever a provision in a new contract is in violation of current municipal policy, that fact should be annotated on the new document. This includes the current contract with the union representing members of the Northfield Police Department (NPD). This contract includes employee disciplinary action that is contrary to what is specified in the current municipal personnel policy. Such conflicts should be footnoted in new contracts or other agreements.

Board member Morse would like the municipality's zoning regulations revised so that mobile park owners become responsible when one of their tenants does not pay their local property tax. This is similar to the policy of the utility departments to make landowners ultimately responsible for their tenants' unpaid bills.

Board member Morse believes sidewalks and dedicated bike lanes are basic safety features. He would like to see sidewalks and bike lanes expanded southward along Vermont Route 12 to Lovers Lane and northward towards Northfield Falls. He also would like to see the recently removed sections of Central Street sidewalk eventually restored. This street will see increased traffic with the aforementioned temporary closure of the Main Street Bridge in 2025, which is expected to last about three months.

Board member Morse would like to see a seasonal bathhouse with showers, etc. installed at Memorial Park. He would like this expense added to the next municipal budget. Manager Schulz has spoken to James Russo (Water & Sewer Department) about scoping this possibility. Once the amount has been determined, this could be added to the next budget. Board member Morse thought it also might be good to create a campsite area at a Memorial Park for those on biking holidays. This would be for short stays only and not long-term shelter.

Board member Morse would like to see the municipal sewer lines extended southward in order to facilitate new housing units along the Vermont Route 12/12A corridor. He also would like the municipality to promote the establishment of affordable housing units near the schools in the currently forested areas along Garvey Hill. Board member Morse concluded by saying he is encouraged by the positive steps the municipality has taken recently and he feels privileged to serve on this Select Board. He does believe more can be done to get this community moving in the right direction.

Chair Maxwell asked if the other Select Board members wanted to comment on Board member Morse's suggested goals. Regarding his suggestion to review/revise current municipal policies, Board member Petty asked how often that has been done in the past. Chair Maxwell said it has been infrequent. It was more likely to have new policies instituted rather than old ones revised. Manager Schulz said minor changes have been made when required. Board member Morse said several policies have not changed since the Town and Village merged in 2014. Manager Schulz said the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) does provide model policies for municipalities that pass legal muster. Many current Northfield policies are based on these VLCT models with some adaptations to reflect special local circumstances. Manager Schulz agrees with Board member Morse's suggestion that the policies should be reviewed one at a time over the next few months. Chair Maxwell noted that in preparation for municipal merger, an appointed merger committee did review the separate Town and Village ordinances and policies and did their best to blend them as much as possible. Manager Schulz said some policies probably would only take one regular meeting to review/revise whereas others might take a bit longer.

Board member Morse felt it would be best to start the habit of keeping municipal policies up to date. Chair Maxwell believes it would be best to prioritize the list of policies to be reviewed. Some may not require any revision at all. Manager Schulz said the policies adopted within the past couple of years should be fine. Board member Petty asked if the policy review would be a one-time process or if it would be ongoing. Manager Schulz said once the wholesale policy review has been completed, future review probably could be put on hold for a couple years. During the policy review, we probably should obtain advice from VLCT regarding which policy provisions need to be revised or removed due to recent changes in state law, etc. Chair Maxwell said such policies are living documents that can be addressed at any time. He believes this should be a continual conversation. Board member Morse noted almost of the current Select Board members were not serving when the older policies were approved. They might have their own ideas about the composition of some of these policies. Board member Goodrich believes this policy review is a good idea and it also would be an educational.

Board member Petty does have concerns about Board member Morse's proposed policy to compensate private businesses should their operations be disrupted by municipal projects. She would want to ensure that any such policy drafted would be legal, modern, and would not expose the municipality to extensive financial liability. Chair Maxwell said he also has concerns about such a policy, which he has previously discussed with Board member Morse. Board member Petty said we need to be very careful before starting such a precedent. Chair Maxwell feels this proposal could be like opening Pandora's Box for claims against every future municipal project. For example, the upcoming Main Street Bridge Replacement Project anticipates a three-month period when the current bridge is removed and the new one installed. Such a policy could result in every business located in the downtown area submitting claims. In addition, the budget of every future project would need to reserve funds for compensation claims.

Board member Petty asked if the policy review process might lead to consideration of other new policies. Chair Maxwell said if the process uncovers matters that need to be addressed by new policies, that should be discussed by the Board members. Manager Schulz said anytime a Select Board member feels a new policy is required, they should reach out to the Select Board Chair to have this matter put on a regular meeting agenda for full discussion.

Board member Goodrich said the proposed extension of municipal sewer lines north and south also is on her list of long-term goals. There are some residents with old private septic systems that are no longer working properly and this is a major concern. Chair Maxwell said this also is on his list with a focus on protection of the Well Field. Also included on his long-term goal list is addressing the required upgrade of the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF), which the state will be requiring in a few years. This will be a major expense. Board member Morse asked if a complete rebuild will be necessary. Manager Schulz said we are unsure at this time. It is possible some key components will need to be rebuilt. Board member Morse said the WWTF is over twenty years old so this should not be a surprise. He added some upgrades already have been made in recent years. Manager Schulz said the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) has focused on requiring improved efforts to remove copper and phosphorus from the treated wastewater that is released back into the Lake Champlain watershed. He added about ten years ago the municipality spent about \$180,000 on engineering plans for extending the sewer lines southward. The project cost was estimated at about \$7,000,000 at that time. Nothing was done then due to lack of funding but Manager Schulz has been trying to bring the plans up to date since ANR funding now seems much more likely. Chair Maxwell noted Castleton VT recently received a state grant for a similar project.

Board member Goodrich then referenced Board member Morse's proposal to extend sidewalks north and south. She asked if one good sidewalk on one side of the street would be considered sufficient. Board member Morse envisions sidewalk expansion being done in conjunction with the extension of sewer lines. When the roadside is torn up to install new sewer lines, new sidewalk could be installed when the roadside is restored. Chair Maxwell also favors sidewalk expansion but noted this could prove to be very expensive. Manager Schulz noted there has been much sidewalk work in the downtown area in recent years, i.e. Depot Square, South Main Street, Central Street, etc. Board member Petty suggested creating a sidewalk inventory to determine where future work is needed. She would be willing to assist with this effort. Chair Maxwell thought this was a good idea since we already have the RSMS program that categorizes the state of all our roadways. Board member Petty also would like to see some dedicated bicycle lanes on the major roads. Manager Schulz said the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) is planning to pave the state highway section of Vermont Route 12 North next year. There have been discussions of using this opportunity to enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety along this route. Chair Maxwell said there was a study a few years ago that proposed creating a new bicycle path from Northfield towards Montpelier by traversing the Bean Industrial Park. Nothing came from this proposal. This paving project could be a good opportunity to get something done. He added that due to the narrowness of the roadway in some stretches, there probably will be some engineering challenges to extending sewer lines to Northfield Falls.

As an immediate goal, Board member Petty would like welcoming packets provided to new municipal committee/subcommittee members. These could include copies of the Open Meeting Law, relevant municipal policies, etc. Board member Petty also would like to see the establishment of a new committee that would be devoted to local housing issues. Manager Schulz said he and Mr. Davis have been working on this possibility. Chair Maxwell would like this discussion broadened for additional input.

Board member Petty also feels affordable child care is another important local concern. She is unsure whether this would require the formation of another committee but having information available would really help new families in the community. Chair Maxwell said Mr. Davis is expanding the local business directory incorporated into the new online Northfield Business Guide (<https://northfieldvtbusinessguide.org>). This should include registered childcare facilities. Manager Schulz said this information also is available on state websites.

As her fellow Board members are aware, Board member Petty over the past few years has engaged in and/or led several volunteer efforts to secure outside funding to pay for small, creative projects for the community. This includes the Community Banners located on and around the Common, the new benches and chairs around Depot Square, etc. In addition, the local schools have provided additional community enhancement projects such as the wall mural located on North Main Street. Board member Petty feels the municipality should make some commitment to help maintain these volunteer efforts.

Another immediate goal, Board member Petty believes, should be promoting pedestrian safety in Northfield Falls, which should include enhancing the crosswalk located by the Falls General Store. Manager Schulz said as the result of a \$20,000 grant award, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) has been performing an on-site investigation of pedestrian safety concerns in this area. When the final report is completed, the plan is to provide this to VTrans to see if the state would provide funding for upgrades or at least allow the municipality to make improvements within the state's right-of-way. Unfortunately, there have been delays the process due to CVRPC staffing issues, etc. Board member Petty said such concerns are a regular source of complaints by Northfield Falls residents who feel their problems are generally ignored by the municipality. Upgrading this crosswalk and perhaps adding some new sidewalk in nearby neighborhoods might show that their concerns are being addressed. As part of this project, there could be steps taken to provide residents with improved river access near the covered bridges on Cox Brook Road. The long-term goal would be to connect Northfield Falls to the downtown area with sidewalks, bike paths, etc. Manager Schulz said if the Select Board members feels this proposal should go forward, we should begin scoping the project. He noted there would be difficulties because, as Chair Maxwell indicated earlier, the roadway to Northfield Falls can become quite narrow in places. Chair Maxwell said Northfield Falls residents cannot be neglected by the municipality. Board member Morse noted that this is the northern gateway to the community. Chair Maxwell said one problem is that the section of Vermont Route 12 North that bisects Northfield Falls is a state highway that is outside of the municipality's control. Board member Petty suggested resurrecting a bike path committee that could work with private property owners to create a path that bypass sections of Vermont Route 12 North. Board member Morse noted the state highway starts at the old Northfield Village border and asked why wasn't this changed with merger. Manager Schulz said there is a similar situation in other Vermont communities where the VTrans is responsible for road paving and other major projects while the local government is responsible for such routine maintenance as snow plowing, etc. Board member Petty said it might be useful to research the additional cost of the municipality assuming more control over this section of state highway.

*The Select Board members took a brief recess for refreshments at this time.*

Board member Morse said if Northfield did take control over this section of state highway, it would be much easier to site the new sewer lines to Northfield Falls where we choose. Chair Maxwell noted Montpelier VT took control over some former railroad property to establish riverside bike paths to other communities. Board member Morse thought it might be a possible long-term goal to assume local control of this section of state highway in order to facilitate future infrastructure projects. Board member Goodrich noted that this stretch of state highway starts just south of Cumberland Farms and then travels north about one and one-half miles to the Berlin VT border. Manager Schulz said when Northfield Falls residents complained about excessive speeding in the area, there was a petition to VTrans to lower the posted speed limit to 25 MPH. VTrans then conducted a traffic study and concluded lowering the speed limit was not warranted. Chair Maxwell said the NPD conducted a similar study and came to the same conclusion that most drivers were abiding by the current 35 MPH speed limit. Manager Schulz said he informed VTrans that similarly populated areas of Barre had 25 MPH limits. He asked why these two areas were being treated differently but never received a clear response.

Board member Petty asked if Northfield had active involvement on the CVRPC Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). Manager Schulz said we haven't been able to find anyone willing to serve as Northfield representative for several years (despite widely advertising the position). He currently serves as the representative but is unable to attend their monthly meetings as they conflict with Select Board regular meetings (4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays). He does follow their correspondence, posted meeting minutes, etc. He has asked persons who have some expertise in transportation matters if they would like to assume this role but without success. Since TAC meetings now can be attended remotely, it might be possible to find a willing volunteer. Perhaps Mr. Davis might be willing to serve on an interim basis. Chair Maxwell said this is an important position to leave virtually empty.

Board member Petty felt another short-term goal would be to better maintain the walking paths and playground equipment at Dog River Park. This area is used all the time so there has been some wear and tear. Chair Maxwell felt the municipality should have an overall policy for proper maintenance of all its public parks. As a long-term goal, Board member Petty would like to see pedestrian safety improvement on and around Depot Square.

With VTrans repaving Vermont Route 12 North, Board member Petty would like the municipality to take steps to ensure that establishing dedicated bike lanes is part of the larger project. Manager Schulz said since this is a state project, the municipality could reach out to VTrans and encourage this but cannot compel it. This recommendation could be a letter from the Town Manager or a joint effort of the Select Board members in the form of a signed resolution. Board member Morse believes it is standard VTrans practice to install bike paths whenever repaving a state highway. Manager Schulz said this has been done in some places but not everywhere. Board member Petty would like VTrans made aware that the Select Board members would like to have painted bike lanes, related new signage, etc. as part of this repaving project.

Board member Petty said other long-term goals should include the removal of the Cross Brothers Dam, which has been discussed for several years. The municipality should do whatever it can to facilitate the process. She felt this project also should include increased river access and perhaps a riverside parklet (if feasible). Another long-term goal would be the creation of a community path system that would include the riverside path that traverses Freight Yard Way and neighboring Norwich University (NU) property. This pathway might help encourage economic development of this underutilized downtown area.

As for local recreation, Board member Petty suggested the municipality might want to consider hiring a part-time recreation coordinator. There are many local volunteers who help promote and organize youth sports and perhaps the municipality could provide some assistance with this new position. This need not be just to facilitate team sports but could be used to promote all forms of outdoor (and indoor) recreation in the community. As with affordable housing and childcare, additional recreational opportunities would be good ways to encourage young families to move to Northfield.

Board member Petty also felt there should be some updates to the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library. This room is well-used but some modernization of the facilities, including new chairs, might encourage even more public usage. Chair Maxwell felt such a project should be discussed at the next budget meetings as the municipality does set aside funds for building renovations. He added that the municipality has done a good job in recent years in establishing Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) accounts for maintenance and renovations of the various municipal facilities. However, some CIP accounts have seen funds accumulate over time as they are not being used for their designed usage. Board member Goodrich noted that there sometimes are problems finding the manpower to perform the facility improvements. Chair Maxwell would like a full discussion during the budget meetings of how best to use these CIP funds to make sure the municipal facilities are being maintained properly over time.

Board member Stevens had a few short- and long-term goals that he would like to present at this time. Among short-term projects would be rehabilitating the water fountain located on the Common. Another would be reinforcing the Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge with steel supports. Among long-term goals would be extending sidewalks northward to Northfield Falls and southward to the Vermont Route 12/12A intersection. Sidewalks also should be extended beyond this intersection along Vermont Route 12A to the Norwich Apartments. Board member Stevens agrees that the municipal sewer lines should be extended northward towards Northfield Falls and southward along Vermont Routes 12 and 12A. He also would like the junk cars located by North Main Auto screened from public view.

Board member Stevens would like to see a new municipal building and believes the Gray Building would be a good location. Manager Schulz said he is working on a state grant that would provide up to \$500,000 for new/improved municipal facilities. Board member Goodrich asked if Board member Stevens is suggesting the municipality purchase the Gray Building. Board member Stevens thought that might be a good idea since the building has been for sale for some time. Chair Maxwell thought the purchase price would be about \$400,000. He then asked why Northfield needs a new municipal building. Board member Stevens doesn't believe the current building can be properly renovated. Board member Morse felt there was a lost opportunity when the National Guard Armory on the Common became available. Instead, NU purchased it to house its graduate programs, etc. Board member Petty felt the Gray Building probably had more vacant space than the municipality would need. Perhaps some of the extra space could be rented out as a revenue source. Board member Stevens reiterated that this would be a good long-term goal.

Board member Stevens would like to see development of the Freight Yard Way area. This could include housing, mixed use, etc. This area is a mostly flat vacant tract in the downtown that should be properly utilized. There are public/private economic development programs that should be explored. Board member Stevens feels affordable housing is a real concern in this community. His wife, Carolyn, recently attended a conference in Randolph VT that discussed various options for addressing this problem (see below). Chair Maxwell also feels that local housing initiatives should have priority given their great importance to the community.

Board member Goodrich asked about Board member Stevens' suggestion to screen off the junk cars located by North Main Auto. Board member Stevens would like a screen or fence installed that would block the view of the junk cars from those travelling through Northfield. Chair Maxwell said this matter has been brought to the attention of zoning administrators in the past but to little effect due to state law restrictions. Manager Schulz said state law does regulate junk yards and he will check to see if anything can be done to make the area less unsightly. Board member Goodrich said there appears to be a double standard in that the car lot by Baroffio's Garage seems to be highly regulated but nothing can be done with the North Main Auto site. Board member Morse believes they have been able to keep the state at bay by obtaining status as a used car dealership rather than a junkyard. He felt it was unfortunate that this collection of junk cars was the among the first things visitors see of Northfield. It seems not much can be done to rectify the situation. Board member Goodrich asked if this could be addressed in our local zoning regulations, which are now being revised. Manager Schulz will check if this is possible. Board member Goodrich believes installing the screening the site would improve the roadside view without impacting the business. Board member Morse noted this site has a potential water source but the recognized possible spring now has old cars parked on it.

Board member Goodrich has a few policy-related suggestions. For example, she believes the employee policy drafted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic should be preserved in written form. Manager Schulz said the policy is a written document although it probably should be revised to deal with more recent developments. Chair Maxwell thinks it best that copies be provided to the Select Board members. Board member Morse felt the policy should be reviewed and possibly revised in case it needs to be resurrected for a future pandemic, etc.

Board member Goodrich believes that we need a clear policy regarding proper maintenance of our public parks. There has been a lot of negative public feedback recently about what is not being done, i.e. trash collected, etc. As a more immediate concern, she also feels the Common fountain problem needs to be resolved. Board member Goodrich would like to have the problems fixed regarding the Municipal Building basement space that CERV uses for its clothing shelf.

Board member Goodrich also would like clear guidelines of the respective responsibilities of NU Security and the NPD in regards to on-campus events. She feels having clear directives would create greater understanding and improve the long-term relationship between NU and the Northfield community. Manager Schulz said there have been some lengthy discussions between NU administrators and the NPD about generating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that delineate the separate roles for NU Security and the NPD but nothing has been agreed upon.

Chair Maxwell said all the recent NPD chiefs have addressed this matter but none of them endorsed the various MOU versions promoted by NU because they felt the contained conditions would impede NPD officers in their official duties. Chair Maxwell is not pleased with the current situation and hopes when the next agreement between NU and the municipality regarding NU's annual donation to local emergency services, this matter can be negotiated and resolved. He recently has had positive feedback from the NU President's Office about this so he has some optimism that this concern can finally be dealt with.

Board member Goodrich said NPD dispatching is a potential problem that will need to be resolved in the near future. The State Police used to provide this service free of charge but have indicated that they will not be doing so for much longer.

Board member Goodrich noted former Board member Nathaniel Miller put a lot of effort into the possibility of privatizing some one- and two-house roads and thus saving our Highway Department significant personnel and material costs. Perhaps this should be revived with the provision that this privatization would only take place when affected properties change owners. Board member Morse agrees with this. Chair Maxwell knows of three properties located on the previously targeted roads that have been sold recently. The road discontinuance policy should be drafted as soon as possible before more such properties change hands. Board member Goodrich personally feels that all the targeted roads should be thrown up but the public hearing process taken in 2018 indicated this probably isn't feasible. She understands the current property owners are getting a good deal having the municipality maintain their access roads and do not want to surrender this service. Manager Schulz noted in many cases these short roads end right at someone's front door and are therefore not really distinguishable from long driveways. Board member Goodrich said she learned a lot during the three site visits and public hearings held to discontinue the fifteen targeted roads. Although some homeowners were able to point to special conditions for keeping a road publicly maintained, in most cases there was no real justification for charging local taxpayers to help maintain other residents' driveways.

Chair Maxwell said as a short-term goal, he would like the employee succession plans updated. There are a large number of longtime employees who won't be working here forever so there should be some preparation for when retirements commence. It also might be useful to look at departmental reorganization at the same time. There recently was a request from a resident to reestablish the position of Highway Superintendent in order to provide improved oversight of our road system. That might be one consideration. In addition, it might be a good idea to create a major projects task force so that Well Field protection and similar significant concerns are not neglected when long-term planning is considered.

Chair Maxwell feels local economic development received a significant boost when the municipality committed to hiring a full-time EDD. As a longtime Northfield resident, Mr. Davis is exceptionally well-suited to fill this role. As for recreation matters, Chair Maxwell said a number of concerning developments led to the dissolution of the former recreation committee. He now hopes we can move beyond this and find positive solutions for moving forward. Chair Maxwell believes the municipality has done a better job of maintaining the backroads in recent years with new gravel being installed where needed each summer. He felt the unpaved roads are now in the best condition that they have been in years.

Regarding the NPD, Chair Maxwell said the municipality has absorbed some significant cost increases due to higher labor costs, etc. He felt at some time there would need to be a full discussion of this community's commitment to a 24/7 police force or whether the cost has become too high.

Chair Maxwell noted some major capital projects have been identified today that will need to be budgeted in future years, such as potentially major upgrades at the WWTF. He feels management should keep Select Board members properly informed of the status of this and other major projects as they approach the planning stages, etc. He also would like to see a full rehabilitation of the Common, not just the fountain. There also should be periodic updates from the Utility Commission regarding needed utility infrastructure projects. Chair Maxwell feels our utility infrastructure probably requires some serious upgrades in coming years and would like some preparation for this. Board member Morse, who serves on the Utility Commission, asked what upgrades Chair Maxwell felt were needed. Chair Maxwell said power outages have become much more frequent over the past year. Many of them were traced to failed cutouts that were installed over twenty years ago. Board member Morse would like the Select Board members to receive the most recent outage reports in their packets.

Chair Maxwell is concerned that more outages are being caused by equipment failures. Storm-related outages are probably unavoidable but steps should be taken to make sure older equipment is replaced before it can cause problems. There should be a fresh look at the overall system. Manager Schulz said this might be a good time to do this as the utility budgets are in good shape. Chair Maxwell feels there should be more investment into our utility infrastructure.

As for the upcoming WWTF upgrades, Chair Maxwell said we were originally told this might cost about \$10,000,000 but who knows what current estimates might be. This expense needs to be incorporated into any of our long-term plans. Chair Maxwell would not like to see the WWTF's capacity reduced in any case, especially since we are exploring the possibility of expanding sewer lines north and south. Manager Schulz said the WWTF's capacity is in good shape as we now are only using about 55%. Board member Morse felt it was a good idea at the time to build bigger than we actually needed then.

Chair Maxwell noted our covered bridges are major tourist attractions. He felt there should be a covered bridge restoration program in place to keep them in good condition. The Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge now is getting some needed structural repairs but the covered bridges on Cox Brook Road are looking a little shabby. In addition, he believes Lovers Lane probably needs an engineering redesign. Manager Schulz noted we have received \$250,000 in VTrans funding for Lovers Lane improvements over the next couple years. This will include new guardrails and other safety features. As for affordable childcare, Chair Maxwell recognizes this as a major local concern but is unsure what specifically the municipality can do to address the problem. More research will need to be done on this.

Board member Morse would like an electronic "tickler" file maintained that will provide Select Board members with the status of current and upcoming municipal projects. Board member Petty recommended using the internet-based Trello program as a good way to better share this information.

Manager Schulz then provided his list of suggested municipal priorities. He felt the waterlines on Main Street needed to be replaced as soon as possible. The current waterlines are very old and ANR would be willing to cover almost all of the engineering costs. As for sewer expansion southward, Manager Schulz is trying to convince ANR of how important this project would be in projecting the Well Field from failed private septic systems, etc. He is making every effort to meet ANR's criteria for grant funding. Chair Maxwell asked if there was anything the Select Board members could do to help influence this decision. Manager Schulz did not think anything needed to be done at this time. It does need to be made clear that Well Field protection is a sufficiently important rationale for state funding.

As for NPD staffing problems, Manager Schulz said this is not merely a statewide problem but also is affecting law enforcement agencies across the country. Personnel costs are rising significantly and this will need to be addressed at the next budget sessions. NPD employee retention has been good over the past few years but this might become problematic in the near future given statewide and regional staffing concerns.

Manager Schulz said municipal management will start work on drafting the 2023/2024 budgets in coming weeks. This process has been relatively easy the past couple years due to pandemic-related surpluses, etc. but higher personnel and material costs will make things harder this time. As for sidewalk maintenance, Manager Schulz has been actively looking for grant funds to replace sidewalks that are in bad condition. Unfortunately, most grant programs are geared towards installing sidewalk extensions rather than fixing what already is in place. The grant to replace the South Main Street sidewalk was successful since this is a major thoroughway with connections to the downtown area, the NU campus, etc. There also was a need to bring the sidewalk up to ADA standards. He will try this approach in future sidewalk grant applications.

As for the Municipal Building, Manager Schulz said there is a \$500,000 grant opportunity that could be used to fund needed building improvements. This would include structural improvements as well as improving the building's heating core. There also are grant funds available to purchase generators so Manager Schulz will be applying to site one to be shared by the Fire Station and Police Station, as those buildings would house emergency operations in case of a natural or manmade disaster. Chair Maxwell suggested perhaps purchasing a second one to be sited at the Town Garage to be shared by the Highway Department and Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS). Manager Schulz said he is looking into that possibility.

Board member Goodrich noted the department heads are sometimes scheduled to address the Select Board members at their regular meetings. Should a department head be unable to attend for various reasons, Board member Goodrich would like a written report provided instead. She felt that would be very helpful.

Chair Maxwell then brought up Freight Yard Way and other underutilized properties located in the downtown area. He noted Mr. Davis has engaged with the property owners as there now is available funding for public/private partnerships. Chair Maxwell believes expanding the Grand List is key to promoting local economic development initiatives. He would like the municipality to be proactive and provide no impediments. Freight Yard Way also could be the location for a new municipal building. Board member Morse thought this might be a good locale for TDS Telecom to move all its operations. Manager Schulz said Mr. Davis is doing a great job meeting with current and potential business leaders and there soon should be positive developments.

#### **IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled)**

Kahwa C. Douoguih left the meeting before its conclusion but posted the following comment online: "Thanks for making your retreat discussion so accessible! I know this is a high-level strategic discussion, so I have one point to make as priorities are considered regarding transportation. The proliferation of E-bikes makes safe, off-road transportation corridors more accessible and appealing to more people and could be a game changer for the town in terms of quality of life, health, attracting new residents, economic activity, etc. Thanks again. I'm off to mountain bike up Paine Mountain."

Carolyn Stevens said this Select Board has been responsive to community needs and feedback over the past couple years. She has some suggestions for community improvements. The first would be siting an electric vehicle charging station in the downtown area. This would allow people to shop, dine, etc. while their vehicles are being recharged. This shouldn't cost the municipality anything as it could charge the amount need to cover the expense. Ms. Stevens felt having the charging station(s) in place would be an important statement of the community's priorities. Chair Maxwell would have no objection to this provided it truly would be revenue neutral. Ms. Stevens also sees a need for affordable licensed childcare in Northfield. We need young families to move here and this would be a great magnet to bring them in. As mentioned earlier, Ms. Stevens recently attended a Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) meeting in Randolph VT where housing was the main topic. The speakers emphasized how important it was to establish a local housing commission. Ms. Stevens said this commission would act much as the current Northfield Conservation Commission and Energy Committee in identifying and highlighting local concerns, opportunities for improvement, etc. The new housing commission could evaluate the current situation and make recommendations on strategies to address deficiencies. Ms. Stevens said at the VCRD meeting, it appeared Northfield was the only represented community that did not have a housing commission already in place. She added this community does have a good pool of committed volunteers who might be willing to serve. Ms. Stevens said it was emphasized at the meeting that such a housing commission should have broad-based representation that included landlords, tenants, homeowners, employers, employees, etc. It is important to get input from every perspective so it might take some time and effort to find the right mix of volunteers for the initial housing commission.

Erin Hicks-Tibbles was glad that this retreat is being held and that the public was invited to take part. She felt that part of the municipal policy review should include statements attached to each policy justifying its existence as well as providing metrics to determine whether or not the policy is successful, irrelevant, etc. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles also would the municipality to establish additional venues where community members can provide continual feedback on what is going on and what they would like done. Not everyone can attend Select Board meetings. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles encourages the Select Board members to think of long-term community needs when considering major infrastructure projects. That way, future needs, such as sidewalk expansion and bike path projects, can be combined with other projects to get them done as efficiently as possible with potential cost savings. There also should be consideration of the ultimate environment impact of such projects. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles also felt there should be greater coordination with neighboring communities regarding regional goals. Chair Maxwell said there has been some discussion of perhaps merging some of our emergency operations with other communities in order to share personnel and material expenses. The main obstacle to this is concern about loss of local control.

**V. DISCUSSION (cont.)**

Ms. Stevens felt some great ideas were brought up today but wondered if corresponding action will be taken to bring them to fruition. Chair Maxwell said unanticipated events always have the capacity to derail future plans but he also believes today's discussion has encouraged him to believe that positive steps can be taken to achieve the goals discussed. He would like to see the municipality run in a more business-like manner, which wasn't really possible before merger. Chair Maxwell feels much has been accomplished in the past five years or so with both minor and major improvements in the community. Ms. Stevens agreed that much has been done but we cannot rest on our laurels. Much still needs to be done. She then asked if there has been an update on the timing of the next VCRD Community Visit. Manager Schulz said the last time he contacted VCRD he was told it probably held in 2023 either early or late in the year. Board member Petty reviewed the final report (January 2002) of the last VCRD Community Visit in Northfield and saw that a number of specific goals had been achieved, i.e. municipal merger, but a number still remain. She then asked how will we move forward from this meeting. Chair Maxwell said Manager Schulz will draft a list of immediate (less than one year), short-term (1 to 3 years), and long-term (3-5 years) goals discussed today for Select Board review and discussion. Once the document has been finalized, it will be a reference point for future action. As for the policy review, Manager Schulz recommends starting with the purchasing policy and the personnel policy as they probably are the most in need of revision. Board member Petty asked about establishing a housing commission. Manager Schulz said that can be put on the future Select Board meeting agenda and fully discussed then. Mr. Davis has been working on this topic so he should have some recommendations regarding this possibility. Chair Maxwell said perhaps we should look at what other Vermont communities have done in this regard rather than trying to reinvent the wheel.

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

The Board adjourned at 12:45 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 September 13, 2022.