

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of April 25, 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, Carolyn Stevens, Gerard LaVarnway, Tim Swartz, Cassie Morse, 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):** None.
- V. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION**
- a. Liquor License Renewals: American Legion, Convenience Plus (NU Beverage), Depot Square Pizzeria, Falls General Store, Good Measure Pub & Brewery, Northfield Country Club, Norwich University (Sodexo Vermont), O'Maddi's Deli & Café, Tops Markets, and The Woods Lodge.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve these liquor license renewals. Northfield Police Chief John Helfant already has confirmed there were no problems with any of these establishments over the past calendar year. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Outside Consumption Permits: American Legion, Good Measure Pub & Brewery, Northfield Country Club, O'Maddi's Deli & Café, and The Woods Lodge.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve these outside consumption permits. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
- a. April 11, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS**
- a. Approval of Warrant #20-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve Warrant #20-23 in the amount of \$124,460.84. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through April 16, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$106,570.13. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- VIII. SELECT BOARD**
- a. Capital Equipment Note (CAT Loader).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve and sign the Capital Equipment Note for the 2022 CAT Loader in the amount of \$128,000 at 3.69% interest; the Capital Equipment Borrowing Resolution; and the Non Arbitrage and Use of Proceeds Certificate. Manager Schulz noted Northfield voters authorized this exact amount of borrowing for the purchase of this loader at the 2022 Annual Town Meeting (03/01/22). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Review and Approval of FY 2023/2024 Water & Sewer Rates.** Manager Schulz said the Utility Commissioners developed the FY 2023-2024 budgets for the Water and Sewer departments over the past couple of months. As part of the process, they also drafted for Select Board approval proposed water and sewer rates for the next fiscal year. Using a combination of \$25,000 in previous year surplus funds and \$20,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, the proposed water rate increase for the average residential customer will be kept at 9.63%. The sewer rate increase for the average residential customer will be 4.9% and this was done by using \$20,000 in ARPA funds but not surplus funds. The combined rate increase for the average water/sewer customer will be 6.99%. Manager Schulz added there were budget savings in these departments by deferring the hiring of a fourth utility employee (the replacement for former Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi) until March 2024. In addition, any new water and/or sewer pipe installation will be suspended in the next fiscal year. It was felt the utility work done over the past couple of years would allow for this. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the FY 2023-2024 Water and Sewer Rates as presented by management. Board member Morse felt in this time of double-digit inflation, it is good that the rate increases will be kept under ten percent (10%).

Board member Shernock has concerns about using \$45,000 in ARPA funds in order to keep these utility rates lower as this will not benefit those Northfield residents who are not on municipal water and/or sewer. This is in addition to the \$70,000 in ARPA funds that went into the current fiscal year (FY 2022-2023) Water Department budget and the \$78,000 in ARPA funds in the current fiscal year Sewer Department budget. Board member Stevens also feels this is a questionable use of ARPA funds. Board member Petty said the use of ARPA funds to help lower utility rate increases may not benefit all Northfield residents directly but there will be indirect benefits by helping local businesses limit their own operating expenses. This in turn will help reduce the local cost of goods and services to Northfield customers. Board member Petty also noted that helping municipalities make up revenue loss directly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the rationales for the ARPA program. The municipality did lose considerable utility revenue when the Norwich University (NU) campus basically shut down during the worst months of the pandemic. In addition, some local businesses reduced their operations and thus cut back on their utility usage. Board member Petty asked if the use of ARPA funds would be needed in future fiscal years. Manager Schulz did not think so since municipal water and sewer usage amounts are nearly back to pre-pandemic levels. In fact, the water use of single-family dwellings actually has increased over pre-pandemic numbers. Manager Schulz noted the increased cost of materials and services due to spiking inflation has also caused budgeting concerns for the utility departments but these costs seem to have stabilized in recent months. Board member Shernock said she would not oppose setting the utility rates as proposed but she still feels ARPA funds should not be used in this way. Board member Petty asked if the pause in installing utility pipe and not filling the utility department vacancy would cause any lasting problems. Manager Schulz did not think there would be any setbacks due to these temporary budget restraints. Chair Maxwell has real concerns about using prior year surplus funds, also known as our "rainy day fund," to keep the water and sewer rates artificially low. When such funds are no longer available for this purpose, utility customers might get "sticker shock" should they receive large rate increases in one year rather than steady increases over several years. Chair Maxwell did not oppose this use of surplus funds the past couple of years due to the impact of the pandemic on revenues but now is concerned about depleting our reserve funds. He would like four (4) months of working capital available. Manager Schulz said the current policy is two (2) months. Board member Stevens asked what the rate increase amount would be if ARPA funds were not used. Manager Schulz did not calculate this precisely but suspects the combined rate increase would be around ten percent (10%). **Motion passed 3-2-0 with Board members Maxwell and Stevens voting in opposition.**

- c. **Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Community Goals.** At the Select Board retreat held last autumn (09/01/22), the Select Board members developed lists of short-, medium-, and long-term community goals. These lists were prioritized at subsequent meetings and tonight Manager Schulz will provide updates on the these items.

Short-Term Community Goals (16 months)

1. **Review and Update Municipal Policies.** Manager Schulz said this process has begun and an update of the municipal purchasing policy has already been approved. The Select Board members are now considering revisions to the municipal personnel policies and procedures. This will be an ongoing process.
2. **Establish a Local Housing Task Force.** The task force has been established and is holding monthly meetings.
3. **Develop Welcome Packet for New Committee Members.** Manager Schulz has drafted this packet for Select Board review.
4. **Add Northfield Representation on Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's Transportation Advisory Committee.** Tom Davis, our Economic Development Director, was appointed to serve as Northfield's TAC representative.
5. **Employee Succession Plan.** Manager Schulz said the plan has been developed.
6. **Electronic Tickler File.** Manager Schulz has been providing this tickler file on a regular basis in the Select Board packets.
7. **Rehabilitation of Fountain on the Common.** Manager Schulz is working on getting engineering and installation estimates for rehabilitating the fountain. He will bring this information to the Select Board members at an upcoming meeting.

8. **Address Municipal Building Deferred Maintenance Issues.** Manager Schulz said a contractor has been hired to address the building's structural and other deficiencies. In addition, the building's bathrooms are being renovated. One has been completed already and the other is in process. In addition, Manager Schulz has applied for grant funding to address concerns in several town buildings.
9. **Refine Town Policy for Road Discontinuance Process.** A revised policy was drafted and after some discussion was approved by the Select Board members at a recent meeting (03/28/23).
10. **Replace South Main Street Waterline.** Manager Schulz said the final engineering for this project has been completed. The plans have been submitted to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) for its approval. ANR has already committed to paying at least half of the total project costs and Manager Schulz is looking for other funding sources to help make up the difference.
11. **Install EV Charging Stations in the Downtown Area.** The Select Board members have authorized the use of up to \$11,000 in ARPA funds for the installation of two (2) EV charging stations on the Common. The specifics are now being finalized but it is likely the installation will be done sometime this summer.
12. **Develop Sidewalk Inventory and Plan for Sidewalk Replacement.** Manager Schulz said Board member Stevens has provided a template for this inventory and municipal employees will start working on this in upcoming weeks.
13. **Purchase Emergency Generators for Police Station and Ambulance Bay.** Manager Schulz is working with Mr. Davis on a facilities grant application to fund this purchase, which is estimated at about \$150,000.
14. **Construct Seasonal RV Site, Bike Campground and Showers at Memorial Park.** Manager Schulz said there are funds in the Grounds, Parks, and Facilities budget to accomplish this. Plans are being developed that will soon be presented for Select Board approval. This would not be a comprehensive plan covering all future park uses but rather a limited experiment this summer. Board member Morse suggested this possibility after seeing similar public park usage in other Vermont communities. Chair Maxwell said there has been a public perception in recent years that park maintenance has not been done properly on a regular basis. This concern now seems to have been addressed. Board member Shernock would like to see a comprehensive plan developed rather than having items added piecemeal.
15. **Install Pedestrian Crosswalk and Safety Measures at the Intersection of Route 12 and Cox Brook Road.** This matter was fully discussed at the previous regular meeting (04/11/23) and will be discussed again later tonight (see below).
16. **Develop a Policy and Maintenance Plan of Municipal Parks.** Manager Schulz said the maintenance plan has been developed.
17. **Discussion of Policy and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Campus Guidelines & Responsibilities between Norwich University (NU) and Northfield Municipal Departments.** Manager Schulz said discussions with NU officials on this matter are in process.
18. **Develop a Plan to Address Northfield Police Department Dispatching Issue.** Manager Schulz said the State of Vermont Emergency Management is currently working on this and we are monitoring their progress.
19. **Comprehensive Study of Northfield Electric System.** Manager Schulz has been coordinating with Utility Commissioner Stephen Fitzhugh on developing a comprehensive study of the Northfield Electric Department (NED). This will be discussed at the next Utility Commissions meeting before it is brought forward for Select Board review.
20. **Explore Options for Screening of Junk Vehicles.** The current zoning ordinances are being reviewed and revised at this time and this matter could be included in this discussion.
21. **Complete Engineering Plans and Obtain Funding for Extension of Municipal Sewer on Route 12 and 12A.** Manager Schulz had been working with ANR on obtaining state funding for this project with wellfield protection as the major justification. Plans for this project were developed several years ago when adequate funding was not readily available and will have to be updated to reflect current costs, etc. ANR will pay for a portion of these re-engineering costs.

Medium-Term Community Goals (2-3 years)

- 1. Update the Community Room.** Manager Schulz said some minor improvements have already been made, such as improved lighting, but we will need to develop plans for major renovations.
- 2. Removal of Cross Brothers Dam.** The Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) has been leading this effort and Manager Schulz reported the funding needed for this project now seems to be falling in place. He believes it now is possible the dam removal can be completed within the next year. Board member Petty would like improved river access and perhaps a new parklet included as part of this project.
- 3. Comprehensive Study of all Covered Bridges.** The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) will be providing grant funds that will be used to rehabilitate the covered bridges on Cox Brook Road. This will facilitate creating this study.
- 4. Develop Vacant Lands on and near School Property for Affordable Housing.** Mr. Davis is working on this possibility under the aegis of the Housing Task Force.
- 5. Install Additional Structural Improvements to Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge.** Manager Schulz noted this bridge did have structural improvements last summer to bring its maximum weight limit back to 16,000 lbs. He will be looking for additional grant opportunities to fund additional improvements.
- 6. Begin Engineering and Planning for Upgrade to Municipal Sewer Plant.** Manager Schulz said this work will need to begin soon in order to meet ANR deadlines for upgrades required to meet new state and federal wastewater standards.
- 7. Consider Hiring a Part-time Recreation Coordinator.** Manager Schulz feels there will have to be a full discussion of the long-term costs of creating this new municipal position. Perhaps this will occur during the next budget process.
- 8. Explore and Seek Opportunities for Public/Private Development.** Manager Schulz believes Mr. Davis has been working on this on a regular basis as this is considered one of his position's major responsibilities.

Long-Term Goals (4 Years Plus)

- 1. Extend Municipal Sewer to Northfield Falls.** See below.
- 2. Extend the Sidewalk along Route 12 to Northfield Falls.** See below.
- 3. Extend the Sidewalk to the South along Route 12 and 12A.** See below.
- 4. New Location for Municipal Building.** See below.

Chair Maxwell said each of these long-term goals will require extensive planning due to the great time and expense involved. These items also have been under discussion at the recent Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) community forums. It will be interesting to see what recommendations are made when the final report is issued later this year. He then thanked Manager Schulz for providing this update and said there probably should be another in a few months. Board member Morse said any new progress on these goals also could be included in the tickler file.

- d. Northfield Falls Pedestrian Safety Improvements.** As indicated above, this matter was thoroughly discussed at the last regular meeting. CVRPC consultant Keith Cubbon then provided a \$60,000 estimate to install sidewalk and a flashing crosswalk sign. Manager Schulz felt this was a little high so he did his own research. He believes \$40,000 is a more accurate figure. This would break down to \$30,000 for the new sidewalk and \$10,000 for the new signage. There is a VTrans Bicycle & Pedestrian grant opportunity that could provide about half of this amount. The application deadline is June 9, 2023, and he felt it was important to identify the source of the local match amount in the documentation. Chair Maxwell believes it should be possible to find \$20,000 in the current budget for this purpose. Board member Petty suggested ARPA funds could be used if necessary. If the VTrans grant is successful, it might be possible to complete the project before the end of this calendar year. Board member Shernock believes there was significant public support for using ARPA funds to install pedestrian safety improvements, especially in Northfield Falls. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to authorize the use of existing municipal funds to provide matching grant funds in order to install pedestrian safety improvements in Northfield Falls. Board member Petty said if the grant application was unsuccessful, she would not oppose using ARPA funds to pay for the entire project in order to get it completed sooner rather than later. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- e. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).** Chair Maxwell said last year Board member Shernock led the ARPA Funds Outreach Committee that held six (6) public meetings (05/31/22, 06/04/22, 06/07/22, 06/09/22, 09/11/22, and 09/14/22) and also distributed surveys (both hardcopy and online) in order to get public feedback on what should be done with the \$1,950,055.26 in ARPA federal funds Northfield received. The written report on the outreach findings subsequently was provided to the Select Board members and is available on the municipal website (<https://www.northfield-vt.gov/select-board>). Chair Maxwell felt since we have this valuable resource, it is now time for the Select Board members to start the decision-making process and determine how these funds would best be spent. The deadline for designating how these funds will be spent is December 31, 2024, and the funds must be fully expended within two (2) years (12/31/26). Board member Petty felt it would be useful to create a comprehensive list of possible uses that would be ranked based on this public feedback and other criterion. Board member Morse would like to review the current Northfield Town Plan, as that document includes a number of community goals. Other relevant documents include the previous VCRD Site Visit Final Report (2002) as well as the one that will be produced when the current site visit process is concluded. Board member Shernock then distributed a "Summary of Community Sentiment" based on last year's outreach process. The document indicated that the "common threads" from the public meetings and surveys basically broke down into four (4) categories: 1. Invest in Our People; 2. Downtown Revitalization; 3. Invest in Our Natural Resources; and 4. Invest in Our Infrastructure. These categories include examples of possible uses. The first category includes childcare and early childhood education; bike lanes, pedestrian safety and access; etc. Board member Shernock said it would be possible for her to resurrect the outreach committee in order to provide the Select Board members with additional assistance during the decision-making process. Chair Maxwell felt it was vital to create a comprehensive plan (i.e., "matrix") in order to make informed decisions before these deadlines. He then asked the Select Board members how they would like to proceed since further delays are unacceptable. Board member Morse thought the Select Board members could bring lists of suggestions to the next meeting. The feedback obtained by Board member Shernock and the outreach group does provide a solid overview of what Northfield residents would like to see at the end of the process. Chair Maxwell attended one of the public meetings and he remembers that people wanted the municipality to approve projects that would have the broadest impact on the whole community. Board member Petty recalls that there seemed to be a preference for a number of smaller projects rather than sinking all the funds into one or two major ones. There are some goals, such as local childcare, affordable housing, etc., that cannot be solved with just money. However, it might be possible to use ARPA funds as "seed money" for grant applications. There are other goals that are much easier to achieve with the money now available so there will be a need to develop cost estimates. Chair Maxwell noted that a number of items on Board member Shernock's list have been brought up for discussion at the recent VCRD community meetings.

One issue that has arisen in recent weeks is whether the municipality should not only retain a third ambulance unit but also fully equip and staff it. Board member Shernock asked about the status of this request. Manager Schulz said Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Chief Meggan McCusker is developing a proposal for this. This will include how much additional NAS revenue can be brought in with increased numbers of non-emergency transfers, standby events, etc. Once the proposal is received, he will share it first with the Public Safety Subcommittee before bringing it to the full board for discussion. Chair Maxwell said at one point we will need to determine the core mission of NAS, which he personally felt should be considered a public service rather than a revenue generator for the municipality. Manager Schulz noted that with this potential expansion of NAS operations, there probably would be the need to hire additional staff, budget for increased equipment purchases, higher maintenance costs, etc. Chair Maxwell doesn't feel it would be appropriate to use ARPA funds in order to increase NAS revenue. He also believes NAS has been well-supported by the Select Board in recent years. The request for a second full-time NAS employee was not approved for budgetary reasons but he felt otherwise they have been largely supportive. Chair Maxwell felt the municipality has provided well for all the local emergency services in recent years and the Northfield community receives exceptional emergency response coverage as a result. He would like to see the NAS proposal regarding the third ambulance unit so an informed decision can be made at the proper time, which he felt was done during the most recent budget process. Chair Maxwell then concluded the ARPA discussion, saying he looks forward to seeing the development of a proper scoring matrix at the next meeting.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Cox Brook Road Third Covered Bridge.** Manager Schulz said this bridge recently suffered truck-related damage and soon will undergo structural repairs. He has spoken to Highway Foreman Trent Tucker about perhaps installing new signage so oversized vehicles don't try to go through the covered bridges, which have limited clearance. There also is the possibility of installing cameras so those responsible for the damage can be more easily identified afterwards and made to reimburse repair costs.
- b. **Northfield Police Department (NPD) Chief Job Search.** Manager Schulz said the advertisement for NPD Chief John Helfant's replacement has been widely distributed and fifteen (15) applications have been received to date. The response rate is about the same as the last time we went through this process in 2018 when Chief Helfant was hired.
- c. **Cabot Socks Sale 2023.** Manager Schulz has been speaking to Cabot Hosiery/Darn Tough Vermont about the planned resurrection of this popular annual event after a three (3) year absence. The current plan is to hold the Socks Sale on the third and fourth weekends in October (October 21/22 and October 28/29) at their Nantanna warehouse location. Manager Schulz will speak to them further about parking, traffic, and other issues. Board member Morse thinks Cabot Hosiery should hire an event coordinator for this large gathering.
- d. **Smart Meters.** Manager Schulz said Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) will provide Northfield with about \$450,000 for the installation of smart meters. The logistics will be discussed at a future Utility Commissions meeting and there will be a presentation to the Select Board members afterwards. We hope installation will start this calendar year.
- e. **Northfield Falls Park Fountain.** Manager Schulz spoke with Utility Superintendent James Russo about this fountain. Mr. Russo said some of the fountain was removed during the pandemic when people weren't really congregating at the park. It will be restored soon.
- f. **Green Up Day 2023.** Manager Schulz said Green Up Day this year will be held on Saturday, May 6, 2023. Those interested in taking part should meet at the Northfield Fire Station (128 Wall Street) at 8:30 a.m. when the green collection bags will be distributed and trash gathering locations assigned. The Rotary Club of Northfield is coordinating this event again this year so anyone with questions should contact them at northfieldrotary@gmail.com

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Road Posting.** Board member Morse asked whom should be contacted regarding individual exceptions to the posting of certain roads. Manager Schulz said all such requests go through Highway Foreman Tucker.
- b. **Public Park Bathrooms.** Chair Maxwell asked if the water had been turned on and bathrooms unlocked at the public parks. Manager Schulz said he spoke to Mr. Russo about this a couple of weeks ago and believes this has been done. However, he will confirm this with him tomorrow.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy Hill: Select Board Support for Municipal Departments.** Mr. Hill has attended nearly all of the Select Board's budget meetings in recent years and he feels the Select Board members on the whole have been very supportive of the department heads when specific budgetary requests are made. Board member Morse feels the merger of Northfield Town and Northfield Village about a decade ago was an important factor in reducing overlapping responsibilities, etc. and has made the various municipal departments more efficient and cost-effective. Chair Maxwell concurred and added we also have outstanding employees and this very much contributes to how well the municipality operates.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:43 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 May 9, 2023.