

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of October 22, 2024**

I. ROLL CALL. 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, Emily Lewis (DuBois & King), Kait Campbell (DuBois & King), Rick Chellman, Steve Davis, Tammie Davis, Mary Nadon Scott (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Delane McIlvene (AWPS Task Force), Tim Swartz (AWPS Task Force), Dan Anderson (AWPS Task Force), Carolyn Stevens (AWPS Task Force), Cynthia Bushey (AWPS Task Force), Kaitlyn Keating (AWPS Task Force/NCDN), Sally Davidson (Northfield Common Rehab Steering Committee), Richard Wobby, Jr. (Northfield Common Rehab Steering Committee), Gail Hall (Northfield Common Rehab Steering Committee/Northfield Energy Committee), Patrick Meehan (Northfield Energy Committee), Sara Nevin, David R. Black, Shawna Foran, Paul Bean, Susan Stillinger, Gerard LaVarnway, Kelsie Braam, Kim Caldwell, Jacob Preston, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE. Those present were asked to join the Select Board members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Road Discontinuance Request (Park Avenue and University Drive). Chair Maxwell noted Norwich University (NU), which had requested this road discontinuance, formally withdrew their request last Friday (10/18/24). Therefore, this public hearing and the site visit scheduled for earlier this afternoon both have been canceled.

IV. SET/ADJUST AGENDA. There were no changes to the posted agenda.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

a. Emily Lewis and Kait Campbell, DuBois & King: Town Common Redesign Final Concept. Chair Maxwell said that this is the first time that the Select Board members have seen this proposal so there are no plans for any action to be taken this evening. Ms. Lewis said it has been a privilege for her and Ms. Campbell to work with the people of Northfield on this project and it has taken several months and numerous public meetings to develop the current conceptual plan to rehabilitate the Town Common. In this process, they were assisted by the Town Common Rehabilitation Project Steering Committee, consisting of Board members Shernock, Stevens, and committee members Sally Davidson, Gail Hall, and Richard Wobby, Jr. In addition to the public meetings where various design concepts were presented, there were written and online surveys as well as direct interactions with the business owners and merchants located on and adjacent to Depot Square. A Community Design Workshop was held at the United Church in June 2024 that was quickly followed by a Student Design Workshop held at the Northfield Elementary School. In both cases, participants were asked to describe their visions for the future of the Northfield Town Common. There also were presentations made at a couple of Farmers Markets earlier this summer. After taking all this feedback into consideration, Ms. Lewis and Ms. Campbell prepared three (3) design concepts that were put on display on the Common over the Labor Day Weekend and also made available online in conjunction with an additional survey to determine which features of each concept respondents might favor. Ms. Lewis noted that a frequent concern expressed by survey respondents was the real need to make the Common interior more accessible to those with mobility issues. As a result, the final design concept now presented to the Select Board members includes additional curb cuts, wider and more level walking paths, etc. Another recurrent theme was the importance of the water fountain that, along with the Civil War Monument, has been a prominent feature on the Common for well over a century. Ms. Lewis added that as much as people valued the fountain, they also seemed open to its renovation and possible relocation. In addition, the inscribed paving bricks located around the fountain and the monument were another much appreciated community treasure and Ms. Lewis said that the current plan is to repurpose them by incorporating them into brick seating walls where they would be more visible and better protected from the winter weather.

Ms. Lewis said the feedback regarding the three (3) design concepts and their respective features led her and Ms. Campbell to draft the final design concept now under review. She noted that the steering committee members were provided with copies of each set of the evolving design concepts throughout this project so that they could provide their own views regarding which design features might or might not have local support. Ms. Lewis noted that in all the design concepts, the Civil War Monument was always left undisturbed and there is a proposal to remove the shrubbery surrounding it to make it more visible from a distance and allow for a new seating area surrounding it. The fountain would be upgraded, moved slightly southward, and raised in order to create more open space for a performance stage located at the northwestern corner. In addition, three (3) new seating areas would be created near the relocated fountain, by the Civil War Monument, and on the east end of the Common. All these seating areas would have noise buffers making use of seating walls, vegetation, etc. in order to shield them from street noise. They also would have both fixed and movable seating fittings. There also would be some larger chairs with armrests that would be more accessible to older and/or mobility challenged users. Ms. Lewis said this redesign is intended to make better use of the current Common footprint and the proposals recommend the removal of some existing larger trees in some areas and the planting of new trees near the seating areas in order to create much-needed shading during the summer months. Ms. Lewis said the current lighting fixtures would be retained but some would have to be relocated to reflect the Common's revised configuration. In addition, new drinking fountains would be installed along with an accessible bike rack. As indicated previously, a wider, more level sidewalk would be installed around the Common and there would be a new, smoother path in the Commons interior that would link the Civil War Monument, the water fountain, and the new seating areas. There would be some open space left on the east side of the Common to allow for the installation of holiday displays at various times of the year, i.e., Christmas, May Day, etc. Ms. Lewis noted that included with the visual display of the proposed Common rehabilitation was a memorandum that provides explanations for the new features as well as recommendations for new vegetation that would be planted on and around the Common. In addition, the Common's power supply would have to be upgraded at various locations in order to facilitate holding additional public events that would require more reliable electricity access. Ms. Campbell added that this project was a big effort and she and Ms. Lewis were very grateful for the public support and assistance provided throughout the concept design process. Ms. Lewis asked if there were questions regarding this presentation.

Board member Stevens asked what the total cost would be if all proposed rehabilitation features were authorized by the Select Board members. Ms. Lewis said they have provided estimates for the construction phase of this project and if all the proposals were pursued at one time, the total cost would be \$2,073,362. Board member Morse noted there now is a crabapple tree by the fountain that deposits its fruit on the ground, creating problems for people with mobility issues. He recommended that it be removed as part of this project. He then asked if the whole Common would be regraded to make it fully level. Ms. Campbell said the open space near the performance stage would be made more level and other areas would be slightly reshaped to provide more gradual sloping along the walking paths. Ms. Lewis said the particulars of any surface leveling would have to be worked out by the project engineers. Board member Morse asked if the expense of redesigning the fountain for water recirculation is included in the total project costs presented. Ms. Lewis said converting the fountain so that its water would be recirculated has always been a part of the project design but the actual cost is not included in the sheet of cost projections. She will contact their fountain expert (Delta Fountains) for an estimate on how much this conversion would cost.

Board member Shernock thanked Ms. Lewis and Ms. Campbell for all the hard work they put into this project and she looks forward to working with them again on similar projects in the future. Board member Shernock noted that the presence of an entertainment stage doesn't preclude the use of the nearby open space by children. In fact, they might want to make use of the stage itself for their own performances. Also, there is no reason that the entire rehabilitation proposal needs to be done at one time. There is the strong possibility of prioritizing its more desirable components (i.e. fountain renovation) and working on them first. Board member Shernock thought establishing this priority list might be another opportunity for crowdsourcing and perhaps another steering committee could be formed to assist the Select Board members with this.

Board member Petty also thanked Ms. Lewis and Ms. Campbell for all the time and effort that they put into this project. She noted that the Common serves as the heart of the Northfield community and that might be why it has been so difficult to reach public consensus regarding its future. She then asked how the nearby pedestrian safety project on Wall Street might coordinate with this project. Ms. Lewis said that was conceived as a separate project but it does include some pedestrian safety improvements that would impact the Common. That might include installing pedestrian “bulb outs” that would shorten crosswalk lengths. One is planned for the southwest corner of the Common that would link this walking path to Wall Street and towards the Dog River Park. Ms. Lewis noted that the cost of this particular bump out is now included in the cost estimate for the Common Rehabilitation project but perhaps could be done using grant funds that have been awarded for the Wall Street pedestrian safety project. Board member Petty then asked about possibly relocating the kiosk/bus stop as part of the rehabilitation project. Ms. Lewis said the proposal include a bump out from the Wall Street sidewalk by the Mayo Insurance building that would be used to house the kiosk. There had been a previous suggestion to site the kiosk by the former armory building but an engineer recommended against this due to limited access space, etc.

Chair Maxwell said his priorities for any Common rehabilitation project have been to leave the Civil War Monument undisturbed and to refurbish the water fountain at or near its current location. He would not prefer any drastic changes to the Common given the way its historic nature has been cherished by the Northfield community. Chair Maxwell said this rehabilitation design process first arose in large part due to public concern that an interactive water feature (i.e., “splash pad”) might be situated on the Common without any community input on the decision. He noted that the Select Board members now will need to determine how to proceed with the proposed project scope, financing options, etc. Ms. Lewis noted that although some residents did favor putting an interactive water feature on the Common, it was determined after consulting with Delta Fountains that this would entail the same public health requirements as a public pool such as adjacent restrooms, etc. As this was considered cost-prohibitive for this particular project, it was dropped from future consideration. Ms. Campbell noted that some survey respondents did mention the need for cooling areas on the Common during the hot summer months. In the absence of an interactive water feature, she and Ms. Lewis decided to focus on installing strategically located shade trees, etc.

Richard Wobby, Jr. was a steering committee member and he thought it would be very helpful if DuBois & King could provide a phasing schedule for this project. In addition, he felt if usage of the Common is significantly increased with concerts, etc. due to the installation of a performance stage, perhaps it might not be a bad idea to consider installing public restrooms at some point. Patrick Meehan serves on the Northfield Energy Committee, which had spearheaded the effort to site a kiosk/bus stop on Depot Square. The kiosk had been situated near the old Community Bank until the new tenants requested its removal. He is grateful that the concept design does find a new and appropriate location for it. Jacob Preston asked how much the municipality spent to get this Common rehabilitation proposal. Chair Maxwell said about \$40,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds were used. Shawna Foran would like some fencing put around the fountain basin to prevent people getting into it. Ms. Lewis said there would be a seating wall surrounding the fountain basin so people put their feet into the water but nothing else. Ms. Campbell said this was the suggestion from Delta Fountains. In addition, the new fountain basin would be about twelve feet (12') in diameter as opposed to the current basin that is about twenty feet (20') wide. That would make the basin more proportional in size to the current fountain fixture. Ms. Foran asked where the public restrooms might be located. Ms. Lewis is not sure because that possibility did not come up during the concept design process. Mr. Preston asked if the current fountain would be moved or replaced. Ms. Lewis said their recommendation was to refurbish and relocate the current fountain. Mr. Preston asked if Northfield contractors might be employed during the construction phase of this project. Manager Schulz said the project would need to go out to bid in accordance with the municipality's purchasing policy but the process does provide for considerations for local bidders. Chair Maxwell said the receipt of this design concept from DuBois & King is an important step but much work still needs to be done and we probably are still closer to the beginning of this project than the completion of it.

- b. Rick Chellman: Transit-Oriented Development (TOD).** The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) received federal grant funding from the US Department of Transportation in order to “develop a comprehensive plan for transit-oriented development for 12 communities across a five-county region in Northwest Vermont. In conjunction with TOD planning, it will also support improved bus services and/or commuter rail to connect economically disadvantaged rural residents to employment opportunities and services in the economic hub of the greater Burlington region and other employment areas.” The CCRPC is now engaging with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) in order to work with Washington County communities like Northfield to create such comprehensive plans. That included hiring consultants like Mr. Chellman who will engage directly with community members. Mr. Chellman said he resides in Portsmouth NH and he spent much of today going around Northfield, taking pictures, and engaging residents about what transit-related and other civic improvements they would like to see here. This outreach project will start in Northfield in January 2025 with public meetings that will involve such topics as creating a more walkable community, improving access to public transportation, etc. Mr. Chellman will need to gather much more local information in the coming months before this outreach process begins. Board member Petty believes that there will be a kickoff meeting followed by facilitated workshops that would attempt to create visualizations of how public and private transportation improvements could be developed here. This also would include how our local zoning regulations could be revised in order to encourage more housing and other facilities in our downtown area. Mr. Chellman said the whole effort would be to collect local information and viewpoints and there would be no attempt to impose anything on the community. Board member Petty said the focus area of this project would start in Northfield Falls and then move southward along the Vermont Route 12 corridor towards and into the downtown area. Board member Morse noted there are long-term plans to extend our public sewer lines towards Northfield Falls and perhaps this could become part of the ongoing conversation. Mr. Chellman said it was possible that such a project could encourage the development of new sidewalks, bike paths, etc. along the proposed construction area. Chair Maxwell asked what the ultimate goal of this outreach effort would be. Mr. Chellman said it would be the revision of local codes (i.e., zoning, housing, etc.) to better reflect what the Northfield community would like for future local development. He felt in much of the northern New England states, current land use regulations impair the ability of communities to create more livable downtown areas. This would include proper planning for better integrated public and private transportation systems that would facilitate urban development. Chair Maxwell asked if other Vermont communities have gone through this process and seen such improvements. Mr. Chellman said each Vermont community has individual characteristics but there have been successful outcomes in Jericho and Winooski due to similar outreach efforts. Board member Petty noted the local zoning regulations recently were reorganized and upgraded to maintain compliance with state law and to make them more user-friendly. However, she felt much more could be done with these regulations to encourage local economic development, create new affordable housing, etc. Board member Petty felt this TOD process could provide much useful information to facilitate this. Economic Development Director (EDD) Tom Davis said the CCRPC received \$100,000 in federal funds to pursue this project. After speaking with Mr. Chellman, Mr. Davis believes when additional housing units are built here in Northfield, there should be sufficient planning performed beforehand regarding their siting, configuration, etc. to ensure their presence would contribute to future local economic growth and not become eyesores and deterrents to future projects. Chair Maxwell thanked Mr. Chellman for the information provided tonight and he looks forward to the start of the TOD process in a few months.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. October 8, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. One typo will be corrected and Tim Schartz will provide additional wording regarding the discussion of proposed upgrades to the Municipal Pool bathhouse. **Motion to approve the revised minutes passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #08-25 & 08-25A.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #08-25 & 08-25A in the amount of \$205,742.29. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Warrant #08-25D.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve Warrant #08-25D in the amount of \$21,209.08. Manager Schulz confirmed this was a payment on an old bond note for Depot Square roadway improvements. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through October 13, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$117,674.90. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Vermont State Revolving Fund Loan Agreement (Public Wastewater Improvements).** Manager Schulz said this loan agreement is to provide funding in order to update engineering plans to extend municipal sewer lines southward along Vermont Routes 12 and 12A in order to better protect Northfield's public water source at the Well Field. He added that these plans were drafted about fifteen (15) years ago and the State of Vermont will cover fifty percent (50%) of this expense by forgiving half of the loan agreement amount. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the Vermont State Revolving Fund Loan Agreement in the amount of \$40,600; to approve the Vermont Bond Bank General Obligation Note; and to approve the Vermont Clean Water State Revolving Fund Resolution and Certificate. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Community Capital of Vermont (CCVT) Memorandum of Understanding.** As the Select Board members requested at a previous meeting (09/24/24), the CCVT has provided a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for their approval that would "establish a framework for collaboration between the Town [of Northfield] and CCVT to create and administer the Northfield Loan Fund..." This agreement would establish a new revolving loan program available to Northfield businesses. Manager Schulz has reviewed the document and believes it contains all the provisions the Select Board members requested to create a successful small business loan program that would benefit local entrepreneurs. This includes designated responsibilities, a termination clause, etc. Unfortunately, as this document was only received last Friday, the Town Attorney has not been able to provide a legal opinion on it. However, Manager Schulz doesn't see any apparent red flags and doubts the Town Attorney will either. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve and authorize Chair Maxwell to sign the Memorandum of Understanding with Community Capital of Vermont pending legal review by the Town Attorney. Mr. Davis has worked with CCVT on this proposal and his only concern is that the document limits the loan program to local businesses; he feels local non-profit organizations also should be able to participate in order to improve their facilities, etc. It was a friendly amendment to the motion that the MOU be revised to include the eligibility of non-profit organizations should the Town Attorney recommend adding this language. Board member Petty thanked Mr. Davis for discovering this new method for assisting Northfield businesses either start or expand their operations through this revolving loan program. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell noted that no new requests for ARPA funds have been received since the last meeting. He then went through the updated balance sheets for ARPA designated and non-designated funds that was included in the Select Board packets. Board member Petty asked if the RFP for the sidewalk improvements on Vine Street and Cross Street has been sent out yet. \$400,000 in ARPA funds were designated for this project but a signed contract needs to be provided to fully obligate these funds by the year's end deadline. Manager Schulz said the project engineer should have the RFP sent out by the end of this week and a work contract should be signed long before the deadline. There were some recent purchases (i.e. portable steel seating) and some completed projects that need to be taken into account when the list of non-obligated funds is next updated.

Board member Petty asked when the Select Board members should receive the resolution that would reallocate any remaining non-obligated ARPA funds as “workforce retention” funds that could be added to the Town General budget as surplus funds. Chair Maxwell would like this document made ready for discussion at the next regular meeting (11/12/24) in case it takes more than one meeting to fully resolve this matter.

- d. **Development Review Board (DRB) Appointment.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to appoint Elroy Hill to serve on the Development Review Board. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IX. TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT

- a. **Pool House Rebuild.** Manager Schulz noted that the RFP for this project has been released and copies of it were included in the Select Board packets.
- b. **FY 2025/2026 Town Budget.** Manager Schulz said the budget worksheets that were sent to the Department Heads have been returned and the current schedule is to have a budget proposal ready for the Budget & Financial Review Subcommittee (Board members Maxwell and Morse) to review by mid-November.

X. BOARD MEMBERS’ COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Turkey Hill Regrading.** Board member Stevens asked if Turkey Hill was regraded this fall. Manager Schulz said he spoke to Highway Foreman Karl Bailey about this and it was decided to postpone this work until next spring.
- b. **Post Office Curb Cut.** Board member Stevens asked when the curb cut by the building’s handicapped access ramp would be installed. Manager Schulz said Nutbrown Construction would be back in town soon to complete sidewalk work in Northfield Falls and on Central Street. They will install the curb cut at the same time.
- c. **Culvert Inventory.** Board member Stevens asked if there has been any new developments regarding the updated culvert inventory that he requested at the last meeting. Manager Schulz said he would be working with CVRPC on this and should have more information available at the next meeting.
- d. **Building Energy Audit.** Board member Stevens, who serves on the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee, was not very impressed with the recently completed energy audits of the Municipal Building and Brown Public Library. He did not agree with several of the recommended building upgrades. Manager Schulz asked Board member Stevens to meet with him to go over these energy audits so they can express their concerns to the firm that produced the reports. Manager Schulz has already submitted some grant applications for various energy-saving proposals so it is likely that the work will be done in the near future. It was noted that putting solar panels on these buildings would require new roofs to be installed first.
- e. **Open Meeting Law and Group Email Responses.** Board member Petty warned the Select Board members not to reply to group emails when identified as a Select Board member as such discussions could be considered violations of the Open Meeting Law. Select Board members should only discuss local concerns during properly warned meetings so all interested residents can take part in the discussion.
- f. **Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Implementation Committee update.** Board member Petty serves on this committee and she reported that the Economic Impact Study required to closed out the state grant has been completed. It will be presented to the Select Board members at their regular meeting of December 10, 2024. She added that the new trailway and directional signage is now being manufactured and should be installed over the next couple of months.
- g. **New Housing Off-Street Parking Concerns.** Board member Petty noted that the DRB members is now reviewing plans to convert the former Masonic Temple into fifteen (15) housing units. One holdup is the lack of off-street parking spaces in the area. Board member Petty thought the Select Board members perhaps should address off-street parking requirements in order to facilitate future such housing initiatives. Manager Schulz said the DRB members are able to issue variances regarding off-street parking availability in certain circumstances.

- h. Paine Mountain School Board Discussions.** Board member Petty noted the school board has started a series of discussions on the future of current school buildings in Northfield and Williamstown. This could include closing some school buildings and merging Northfield and Williamstown student class levels into existing or new buildings. Board member Petty thought the Select Board members should be kept aware of these discussions. Chair Maxwell has been attempting to schedule a joint meeting with the Paine Mountain School District for some time but has been unsuccessful. In the short term, as Select Board Chair he authorized Board member Petty to attend these meetings and report back to the other Select Board members.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Elroy Hill: Engine Brake Concerns.** When the local Disorderly Conduct Ordinance (aka "Noise Ordinance") was recently revised, Mr. Hill asked if a future revision could include a prohibition on engine brakes (aka "jake brakes") within town limits. He asked if any action has been taken about this. Manager Schulz said he will look into how other Vermont communities have taken action to restrict the use these very loud brakes in residential areas. In the interim, Board member Morse suggested putting signage at both ends of town asking that engine brakes not be used within Northfield town limits.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/d5nTYZXaGa0>

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of November 12, 2024.