

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of July 8, 2025

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Charles Morse, Board members K. David Maxwell, Lydia Petty (absent), Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Pierre Gomez (Police Chief), Rebecca Trower, Lorna Doney, Shawna Foran, Lynn Doney, Krista Ward, Gerard LaVarnway, and Elroy C. Hill.

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

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA. (7:00 p.m.)** Chair Morse noted that the Municipal Condemnation site visit and hearing that had been scheduled for tonight have been cancelled. Manager Schulz will provide a full explanation later in the meeting (see below).

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

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **June 24, 2025 (Regular Meeting). (7:02 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to approve the minutes. Some minor typos and inadvertent misinformation will be corrected. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **June 27, 2025 (Special Meeting). (7:03 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #01-26 & #01-26B-E. (7:04 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve Warrant #01-26 & #01-26B-E in the amount of \$1,123,610.31. Board member Stevens noted that we are still receiving repair bills for the 2014 Western Star truck. Manager Schulz said the plan is to sell this vehicle when its replacement comes into service. Unfortunately, this probably won't happen until November 2025. In the meantime, the current vehicle needed some repairs to pass inspection. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through June 22, 2025. (7:08 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$140,429.40. Board member Stevens asked why this pay period was higher than usual. Manager Schulz said a long-time employee retired recently and received a payout for unused vacation time. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Municipal Condemnation of 73 North Main Street Property. (7:13 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said an agreement was reached this morning between the property owner (Wesco Realty) and the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) for easement access for the Main Street Bridge Replacement Project. VTrans agreed to the amount requested by the property owner (\$37,000) and some of these funds will be used to temporarily relocate the business sign. VTrans can now finalize their construction plans and there will be a presentation from VTrans Project Manager Gary Laroche P.E. at the next regular meeting (07/22/25).
- b. **Approval of 2025-2026 Tax Rates (Homestead & Non-Homestead). (7:14 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to set the FY 2025-2026 Town Tax Rate (Homestead) at 3.2126 and the FY 2025-2026 Town Tax Rate (Non-Homestead) at 3.3626. Board member Maxwell believes the municipality is run in a very efficient and cost-effective manner. The 6.88% increase in the Homestead Tax Rate is due to a 7.34% increase in the local Education Tax (Homestead) that is set by the Vermont Department of Taxes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. **Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) Appointment. (7:15 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Shernock, to appoint Bill Dell'Isola to the Town Forest Stewardship Committee. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Main Street Water Line and Cheney Field Tank Replacement Projects (7:18 p.m.).** Manager Schulz reported that both projects remain on schedule for completion this autumn. The old water tanks on Cheney Field have been removed and the new tank will be installed in the next couple of weeks.
- b. Historic Bridges Scoping & Construction. (7:21 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said VTrans is now conducting a scoping study of the three (3) Cox Brook Covered Bridges and the Rabbit Hollow Bridge. The federal government was to cover all the upgrade costs but those funds are no longer available. VTrans now will be seeking alternate funding sources. In addition, the municipality will be responsible for a five percent (5%) local match amount and the project construction has been delayed by a year until 2030.
- c. Vine Street Sidewalk Upgrade Project (7:22 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said there was a week delay in the project as the contractor ordered the wrong type of curbing. However, the concrete is now being poured and the project remains on schedule for completion by August 1, 2025.
- d. Northfield Electric Department (NED) Rate Increase. (7:23 p.m.)** Manager Schulz reported that on the recommendation of the Utility Commission members, the NED has applied to the Vermont Public Utility Commission (PUC) for a fourteen percent (14%) electric rate increase. It was felt this was needed to cover higher transmission costs and the higher expense of purchasing renewable energy in order to meet state requirements. This will be the first rate increase request in twelve (12) years and the PUC should be able to make their decision on this within the next four (4) to five (5) months. Chair Morse felt it might be a good idea to warn NED's major customers about the anticipated rate increase.
- e. Budget Status Report (7:24 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said FY 2024-2025, which ended June 30, 2025, now seems to have concluded with a budget surplus. However, the final amount of the surplus will not be determined until all pre-July invoices have been processed and an independent audit has been conducted. There will be a large surplus in the Northfield Police Department's personnel budget due to reduced staffing levels.
- f. Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Union. (7:25 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said there was a successful vote for the NAS part-time employees to form a collective bargaining unit. The next step will be for the new union to start negotiating with the municipality on a contract.
- g. Bulk Gasoline Purchases for Municipal Vehicles. (7:26 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said it has been difficult to get fuel distributors to deliver gasoline to the Town Garage to fill up the gasoline-powered municipal vehicles. Delivery of diesel fuel has not been affected. Manager Schulz has been contacting various fuel distributors but the limited amount of gasoline the municipality purchases makes it difficult to find a regular supplier. In the interim, he has arranged for charge accounts at local gas stations.
- h. Turkey Hill Resurfacing Project (7:27 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said that ninety-five percent (95%) of this project has been completed. Additional road material had to be ordered in order to finish the project and the majority of public comments about the work done have been very positive.
- i. 310 Water Street FEMA Buyout Property. (7:28 p.m.)** Manager Schulz reported he has hired a local contractor (Hallstrom Excavating) to raze this FEMA buyout property. He added that Hallstrom Excavating was the low bidder and does have experience in structure demolition. The demolition should take about three (3) to four (4) days once it has been scheduled. There is a September deadline for the work.
- j. Culvert Inventory. (7:29 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) now has sufficient staffing for this project, which should start in the next few weeks. It was noted that Northfield has over 750 culverts and CVRPC said this was the most for a Central Vermont community.

- k. **Municipal Bookkeeper Replacement. (7:30 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said that he is close to hiring a replacement for retired bookkeeper Deb O'Grady. He learned in the process that the standard salary for this position is higher than he originally anticipated.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Bulk Gasoline Purchases for Municipal Vehicles (cont.). (7:31 p.m.)** Board member Shernock asked if there has been some consideration of purchasing electric vehicles (EVs) in future given the difficulty in obtaining bulk gasoline. Chair Morse said he doesn't know of any EVs in the municipality's price range that could handle highway maintenance duties. There had been some consideration of purchasing an EV when the Utility Department vehicle was replaced last year. Manager Schulz confirmed this but added that the Utility Commission members thought the \$10,000 extra cost was too much. Board member Shernock felt EV purchases should be more seriously explored in future given the higher repair costs for gasoline- and diesel-fueled vehicles.
- b. **Finance Director Replacement. (7:35 p.m.)** Board member Stevens asked about the status of the job search for replacing the retired finance director (Laurie Baroffio). Manager Schulz said he has readvertised the position and Ms. Baroffio is willing to come in as a part-time consultant until her replacement has been hired. He added that it is difficult to find people willing to relocate to Central Vermont and hiring a remote worker for this position is not feasible.
- c. **Volvo Loader Update. (7:36 p.m.)** Board member Stevens has heard this vehicle went off the road and suffered considerable damage. Manager Schulz is unsure about all the details about this but will investigate and provide a detailed report on the repairs needed, cost estimates, etc.
- d. **Community Room Upgrade. (7:38 p.m.)** Board member Stevens noted that the room renovations don't seem to have started yet. Manager Schulz said the contractor who will perform the electric upgrade, etc. should be here within the next couple of weeks. He also has looked into the replacement of the large table where the Select Board members sit and received an \$8,000 estimate.
- e. **Municipal Generators. (7:40 p.m.)** Board member Stevens asked if the generators purchased with ARPA funds have been installed and are operational. Manager Schulz said they were although some upgrades will be needed for the one located at the NAS building.
- f. **Stony Brook Road Covered Bridge, etc. (7:41 p.m.)** Board member Stevens asked when this covered bridge would be repaired. Manager Schulz said he is obtaining cost estimates. Board member Stevens would like an additional warning sign located near the bridge that noted its minimum height clearance. Manager Schulz will order the sign. At last night's Utility Commissions meeting, Board member Stevens had asked about the possibility of repurposing old utility poles to support "headache bars" at covered bridge entrances. He would like this option reviewed to see if it could be done. Shawna Foran said that at a Select Board meeting over a year ago (03/26/24), a covered bridge expert brought in for a VTrans presentation discouraged the use of such devices as very unsafe for people traveling in campers, etc. Chair Morse said this was only a preliminary discussion at this time.
- g. **R.E. Tucker Sand Pit. (7:45 p.m.)** Board member Maxwell noted Sherrie Tucker from RE Tucker, Inc. had asked by email to be put on the last meeting's agenda in order to discuss the possibility of the municipality purchasing their sand pit located off Vermont Route 12A. She did not appear at that meeting but the Select Board members did task Manager Schulz with investigating this matter further. Board member Maxwell asked if there were any updates at this time. Manager Schulz said he did reach out to Ms. Tucker about this but has nothing new to report at this time. Board member Maxwell would like more information about this so the Select Board members can make an intelligent decision regarding whether the offer is both feasible and cost-effective.

- h. Cross Brother Dam Removal update (7:46 p.m.)** Board member Maxwell would like to know if the planned dam removal remains on schedule for this year. Manager Schulz said he spoke to Karina Dailey (Vermont Natural Resources Council) about this and was told FEMA funding for this project is still in place. However, the agency is so understaffed at this time there is no certainty about the project timing, etc. Board member Maxwell asked if any delay for the dam removal would impact the Main Street Bridge Replacement project scheduled for next year. Manager Schulz said this should be a question for VTrans Project Manager Laroche at the next meeting.
- i. NED Power Outage. (7:50 p.m.)** Board member Maxwell noted there was a brief power outage last Thursday night (07/03/25) during a heavy rainstorm. He asked why this happened. Manager Schulz said a transmission line in Warren was brought down during the storm. Green Mountain Power (GMP) employees then switched Northfield's power source over to a transmission line in Montpelier, which restored power within a half hour. Chair Morse added that a separate power outage in Northfield Falls due to a damaged transformer took a few hours to fix.
- j. Northfield Falls Pedestrian Crossing Improvements, etc. (7:52 p.m.)** Board member Shernock said everyone she has spoken to in Northfield Falls is very pleased with the new pedestrian crossing sign with flashing lights. She added most drivers respect the new signage but perhaps additional warning signs further from the crossing should be installed. Manager Schulz said these pedestrian improvements on this state highway would have occurred much earlier had VTrans been more cooperative throughout the process. There now is some indication VTrans would like the site redesigned with the removal of some concrete panels but nothing is certain at this time. Board member Shernock added that there is a pedestrian hazard on the Cox Brook Road corner of this intersection. Manager Schulz said the utility crew will be fixing this soon.
- k. Northfield Falls Recreation Park Trees. (7:55 p.m.)** Board member Shernock said some new trees have been planted in this park. She feels it would be a good idea to surround them with some fencing to prevent deer damage.
- l. Cheney Field Potential Parking Area. (8:00 p.m.)** Board member Shernock said she brought together some members of the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) and the Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force in order to see if some compromise could be reached regarding the possibility of establishing permanent parking spaces on Cheney Field after the water tank project has been completed.
- m. Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC). (8:01 p.m.)** Chair Morse reported that VYCC members are now in town performing trail restoration work on Garvey Hill and in the Town Forest. ARPA funds are paying for part of this project.
- n. Northfield Municipal Pool Appreciation. (8:02 p.m.)** Chair Morse spoke to a Northfield Farmers Market customer from Montpelier earlier today. He had visited our municipal pool for the first time today and had been very impressed with the facility.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT (cont.)

- a. Vermont Route 12 Problem Tree. (8:04 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said VTrans will not get involved with the proposed removal of a large tree that starts on one side of the state highway and then reaches out to impact NED power lines on the other side. Utility Superintendent James Russo has obtained a \$3,900 quote from Snapping Turtle to take the tree down and Manager Schulz will contact the property owner to see if the cost could be evenly split. The property owner requested that the tree be removed and even though everyone involved believes this is the correct course of action in this instance, Manager Schulz doesn't want to create a precedent given the high cost of tree removal.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Rebecca Trower: Municipal Harassment Allegation. (8:05 p.m.)** Ms. Trower said she is now being harassed by the municipality (and specifically by Manager Schulz) regarding issues related to her property at 331 Central Street. For example, she received a letter from Manager Schulz last fall requesting the wooden pallets stored at the corner of her property at the intersection of Central Street and Washington Street be relocated elsewhere as they were creating a visibility hazard for drivers pulling out from Washington Street. Ms. Trower felt she was being singled out in this instance because other properties in the area had similar issues. She asked Manager Schulz to provide her with the state statute that governed this matter but believes it was never sent to her. More recently (06/24/25), Ms. Trower was sent a letter from Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki in which he stated he had been contacted by her neighbors complaining that the large deposits of garbage on her property were attracting rats. Ms. Trower said Mr. Osiecki claimed to have photographic evidence provided by Washington Street resident John Knox of the alleged vermin but she has never been provided with any photos that clearly show evidence of rat infestation. Ms. Trower now would like a public apology from the municipality given the harassment she has suffered from municipal officials. She feels she has been slandered and has been subject to character defamation. Ms. Trower believes that the municipality has been sued in the past for similar actions against community members. Elroy Hill said he was one of the residents who complained about the driving hazard created by the aforementioned wooden pallets. He felt their proximity to the corner created an unsafe situation. Chair Morse confirmed Manager Schulz sent the letter from the Town about the pallets only after receiving many similar complaints from community members.
- b. **Lynn Doney: Problem Potholes, etc. (8:15 p.m.)** Mr. Doney first provided the Select Board members with a copy of his response to a "Notice to Cease and Desist" letter that NPD Chief Pierre Gomez sent him a few months ago (04/10/25). Mr. Doney said they could review the document at their own leisure. He then complained about a number of potholes including a really bad one located near the Norwich University campus and another near the intersection of Water Street and Union Street. Manager Schulz said there are plans to repave North Main Street later this summer and this should resolve some of the worst pothole problems. He also will have Highway Foreman Karl Bailey investigate the other problem areas. Mr. Doney then noted that persons unknown have been dropping garbage off the side of Vermont Route 12 near its intersection with Fairground Road. Fortunately, VTrans recently installed additional guardrails at the side of the highway to prevent further deposits.
- c. **Lynn Doney: Storage of a Private Vehicle on Municipal Property. (8:17 p.m.)** Mr. Doney said that a private vehicle has been stored in a municipal building (Police Station Garage) for several weeks and he did not feel this was appropriate. NPD Chief Gomez said that he does store his personal vehicle in the Police Station Garage during the week when he is driving an NPD patrol vehicle. He uses his own vehicle on weekends and other times when he is not working. Chief Gomez said he has been doing this for over a year without any complaints. If there is a problem with this, he will store his vehicle elsewhere. Chief Gomez added that if Mr. Doney really has had a problem with this, he could have informed him about this at any time. There was no need to bring this up at a public meeting.
- d. **Elroy Hill: Select Board Appreciation. (8:20 p.m.)** Mr. Hill thanked the Select Board members for performing due diligence when putting the FY 2025-2026 municipal budget together. He felt they did their very best to help out Northfield taxpayers by keeping this year's tax rate increase as low as possible.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of July 22, 2025.