

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING**  
**Minutes of May 23, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse (absent), Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Martha Mahan (MJM Properties), Tanya Crawford-Stempel, Mary Nadon Scott, Gerard LaVarnway, Tim Swartz, Carolyn Stevens, 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):**

- a. Martha Mahan: Freight Yard Way Waterline Upgrade Request.** Ms. Mahan had attended the previous regular meeting (05/09/23) to present the Select Board members with a request for the municipality to upgrade the waterline that services her property on Freight Yard Way. She is returning tonight now that the Select Board members have had time to review this request. In the interim, Chair Maxwell asked Manager Schulz to review the current local water ordinance to determine at what point utility line maintenance and/or upgrade becomes the responsibility of the property owner. Manager Schulz said the property owner became responsible at the curb stop. In addition, the municipality would not upgrade the waterline at public expense unless there is an easement in place and/or a special agreement has been made with the property owner. In the latter case, there must be proof that the upgrade would benefit the general public. Ms. Mahan said CV Properties (AKA Central Vermont Railroad) provided an easement for this property to the Village of Northfield in April 2008. She added that the waterline itself probably hasn't been upgraded since 1906 and its condition is inhibiting economic development in this area. Manager Schulz said the municipality will take over a waterline provided that it already meets the specifications set down in the local ordinance. Usually, a property owner seeking to develop the property will pay for the waterline upgrade before the easement is provided to the municipality. As for ownership of this particular waterline, Manager Schulz said that remains uncertain. The easement provided to the municipality by the railroad might have been only to provide access to the property for non-utility business. Chair Maxwell asked if this request should have gone first to the Northfield Water and Wastewater Commission. Manager Schulz said that depends on whether utility or municipal funds would pay for the upgrade. Board member Petty thought it would be useful to have more research done in order to finally resolve this ownership question. Manager Schulz said he had spoken to the former utility superintendent (Patrick DeMasi) as well as the current utility superintendent (James Russo) about this and neither were certain about ownership. Both did state that the municipality has never performed any maintenance on this waterline other than the semiannual hydrant flushings. Ms. Mahan noted the waterline currently serves only two (2) structures so maintenance probably hasn't been required in recent years. She added that this upgrade is not to directly benefit her company (MJM Properties) but rather to promote economic development in the Freight Yard Way area. Ms. Mahan noted before her company bought the property from CV Properties, two (2) separate public/private corporations attempted to purchase the property from the railroad in order to fully develop the area. Both attempts were unsuccessful. Ms. Mahan said this request is being made now because she assumed on purchasing the property that the Village already owned the waterline. As indicated before, Board member Petty would like this ownership matter resolved as soon as possible so that Ms. Mahan can be provided with an answer regarding her request. Manager Schulz will consult an attorney regarding existing paperwork, which includes the aforementioned easement.

Board member Petty said Freight Yard Way recently has been seen more and more as an underdeveloped part of the downtown that could be used for many purposes for the benefit of the community. Once ownership of the waterline has been determined, the Select Board members will be able to decide on the proper course of action. Chair Maxwell noted the Select Board members now are looking at potential local projects that could benefit from the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. If this upgrade really would result in local economic development, it could be eligible for the use of these funds. Ms. Mahan said it has been difficult to work with potential developers regarding this property while ownership of the waterline remains unclear. She really would like this clarified one way or another. Board member Petty noted at the last meeting, Manager Schulz had provided a \$400,000 estimate for upgrading the waterline. Ms. Mahan said that estimate probably was based on the current route of the waterline, which passes under buildings. Putting in a new waterline that steers clear of these structures and other obstructions might be much less expensive. Manager Schulz said as there is an extra week before the next regular meeting (06/13/23), he probably would be able to obtain an updated cost estimate as well as legal advice regarding ownership of the current waterline before then. He added that if it is decided the Utility Department will pay for the upgrade, it probably would be necessary to obtain a bond note to cover the expense. Board member Stevens favors using public funds to perform the upgrade in order to promote economic development in the downtown area. Board member Shernock would like all the uncertainties resolved before committing herself either way. Chair Maxwell looks forward to receiving the information regarding ownership and the new upgrade cost estimate at the next regular meeting.

- b. **Paul Luciano, OPH Consulting Services: Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.** Manager Schulz said Mr. Luciano's company will be assisting the municipality with an update of its local hazard mitigation plan. Mr. Luciano has informed Manager Schulz that the plan should be nearly complete by the end of next month. He was to provide an interim report tonight but was unable to attend. Chair Maxwell said this report will be tabled until a future meeting.

## V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **May 9, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

## VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #22-23.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #22-23 in the amount of \$155,295.40. Chair Maxwell had a question about a \$54,964 payment for "Solar Overflow Project." Manager Schulz said this was related to the Bone Hill Solar Farm project, which was a joint venture between the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) and the Northfield Electric Department (NED). Some solar farm equipment needed to be upgraded recently and NED paid for part of this as part of its power purchase agreement. Manager Schulz noted purchasing power from this local solar farm allows NED to diversify its renewable energy portfolio and thus meet state regulations. Chair Maxwell asked if this was a one-time expense. Manager Schulz confirmed it was. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Warrant #22-23A.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #22-23A in the amount of \$30,995.10. Manager Schulz noted this was a bank bond payment for the repaving project on Cox Brook Road. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through May 14, 2023.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$114,903.65. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

## VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of the Renewal of Northfield’s Designated Village Center.** Manager Schulz said Northfield currently has two (2) Designated Village Centers. One covers the downtown area and the other is Northfield Falls. These designations need to be renewed every five (5) years and the one for the downtown area is expiring. The renewal paperwork requires Select Board authorization. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to authorize renewing the Designated Village Center status for downtown Northfield. It was noted the Northfield Falls’ designation came later and is not due for renewal. Board member Petty said there is consideration of obtaining the Designated Downtown status for Northfield at a later date but in the meantime the Designated Village Center status should be maintained. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Appointment of Northfield Housing Subcommittee (NHS) Member.** Manager Schulz said the NHS has been making good progress and a Northfield resident (Danielle Pelczarski) who has been attending their monthly meetings has asked to be appointed as a formal voting member. It was noted Ms. Pelczarski is a Senior Vice-President and Chief of Staff for Norwich University. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to appoint Danielle Pelczarski to the Northfield Housing Subcommittee. Board member Shernock said she has worked with Ms. Pelczarski on another committee and favors her appointment. Board member Petty is an NHS member and she noted the subcommittee has been trying to limit its voting membership to seven (7) members. In this case, Ms. Pelczarski will be replacing a former member who resigned. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Northfield Housing Subcommittee (NHS) Guiding Principles.** Board member Petty said the NHS has been meeting at least monthly since its formation last autumn. The subcommittee has drafted a document regarding its guiding principles and now seeks Select Board approval. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the Northfield Housing Subcommittee Guiding Principles document. Board member Shernock noted the document states that the NHS does seek input from non-members who have special insight into local housing concerns. She asked if there has been any outreach to the community’s homeless population. Board member Petty said this has not been done yet but she will bring up this suggestion at the next NHS meeting. Chair Maxwell believes this is an excellent document and as a “living document” can be amended whenever need arises. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- d. **Discussion of Potential Impacts of the End of Housing Assistance Program.** Chair Maxwell said when he met with Manager Schulz and Board member Petty last Friday morning to finalize tonight’s agenda, they discussed the possible impact on Northfield of the ending of the state housing assistance programs that provided hotel vouchers to homeless individuals and families. It was noted some municipalities have developed or are developing policies regarding possible homeless encampments on municipal properties. A copy of the Montpelier “Encampment Response Policy” was provided to the Select Board members to better explain the situation. Board member Shernock noted Berlin VT Police Officer Chad Barrett, who used to serve in our police department, is very knowledgeable regarding homeless issues and it might be useful to have him address the Select Board members at a future meeting. Board member Shernock agrees Northfield should develop its own policy to handle possible concerns. Chair Maxwell thought this was a good idea. He noted this has not been a major problem in Northfield historically but it probably would be best to have a policy in place should problems arise. Chair Maxwell also felt it was important for the municipality to identify local resources that could assist locals having difficulty finding permanent housing. He then asked what would happen now if someone started encamping on municipal property. Manager Schulz said he would first consult with the Police Chief as well as outside agencies to see what services might be available to address this. If it was determined crimes were being committed, it might become necessary to involve law enforcement. Board member Petty thought this would have to be the response without a set policy in place. She felt the first interaction between the municipality and the person(s) encamping should be based on positive communication and not confrontation.

Chair Maxwell said we do need to develop a policy. The Montpelier document is quite lengthy and detailed but it could serve as a good model for a Northfield policy, which probably didn't need to be as extensive. Manager Schulz will start preparing a draft document that will be ready for discussion at the Select Board's second meeting in June (06/27/23). It was noted that Northfield resident Tanya Crawford-Stempel works with the Good Samaritan Haven and would be a valuable resource regarding homelessness in Central Vermont. Ms. Crawford-Stempel said she had no experience in drafting local policies but would be willing to provide information about Good Samaritan Haven and other regional resources. Manager Schulz will reach out to her during the process.

- e. **Northfield Mural Funds Request.** Manager Schulz said there was a letter in the packets from Leslie Striebe and Eric Howard, art teachers at Northfield Middle/High School (NMHS) who were involved in the creation of the wall mural on North Main Street. The mural was installed five (5) years ago and according to the letter has suffered considerable peeling, fading, and staining. Ms. Striebe and Mr. Howard have created a project estimate of \$4,178 for replacing the mural and putting in preservation enhancements that would better protect the finished project. They are now asking the municipality to provide some if not all of this funding. It has been suggested that since this would be an unbudgeted expense for the municipality, perhaps ARPA funds could be used. Board member Petty is unsure whether this would be a permissible use of ARPA funds and believes other options should be first explored. After some discussion, Manager Schulz reviewed the Grounds/Parks/Facilities Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget and found \$1,900 in undesignated funds that could be used. He added these funds have been in this CIP account for some time so using them for the mural will not impact other planned projects. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to authorize the use of \$1,000 in CIP funds for the Northfield Mural project. Chair Maxwell suggested NMHS could fundraise from other sources for the balance of the project budget. Had the Select Board members been provided more advanced warning of this request, it is possible additional municipal support could have been budgeted specifically for this project. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- f. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).** Chair Maxwell said at the previous meeting, Manager Schulz was tasked with creating a scoring matrix to help the Select Board members decide how to spend the remaining ARPA funds on suggested local projects. Manager Schulz has created a spreadsheet that lists a number of these potential projects along with columns for rating these projects and another one for comments. Board member Petty thought this matrix would include the factors that would help score these projects based on specified criteria, such as whether the proposed project conforms to long-term goals in the approved Town Plan, etc. This could help score the merits of each suggested project. Chair Maxwell believes the provided spreadsheet will be useful but also would like to see the rating system broken down to include that scoring criteria. After some discussion, Manager Schulz suggested that he could work with Board members Petty and Shernock on developing this rating system. Both Select Board members agreed to provide this assistance.

#### **VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. **South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation/CSO Elimination Project.** Manager Schulz reported that this project's contractor (Courtland Construction Corporation) has restarted work after the winter shutdown. This will start with tearing up some of South Main Street to install new stormwater crosslines and basins. As some drivers might take Central Street to avoid the construction area, Manager Schulz has asked the Northfield Police Department (NPD) to install its radar speed signs there and conduct some patrols to deter those who would exceed the posted speed limit (25 MPH). Board member Stevens said the dust generated by this project over the past couple days has been very bad. Manager Schulz will see if the Utility crew can perform some dust control.
- b. **NPD Chief Search Process.** Manager Schulz the search committee will meet this Thursday night (05/25/23) to review the applications. A shortlist will be developed soon and interviews scheduled in the near future. It is hoped that the new Northfield Police Chief will be in place by mid-July 2023.

- c. **Vermont Route 12 Paving Project.** As discussed at previous meetings, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) is planning to repave Vermont Route 12 from Montpelier southward to the old Northfield Village boundary (near Cumberland Farms). There has been some local interest in using this opportunity to install dedicated bike lines and Manager Schulz has been in contact with VTrans about this. However, due to the narrowness of the street, VTrans has not been too encouraging. It is possible some new pavement can be added to the wider stretches of road.
- d. **Municipal Building Repairs.** Manager Schulz said the contractor has been working on shoring up the building's supports in the basement this past week. This and other work throughout the Municipal Building should take a couple of weeks to complete.

**IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. **Municipal Pool Passes Grant.** Board member Shernock wanted to commend Economic Development Director Tom Davis for a successful grant application that will provide free pool passes this summer for eligible children. The grant award amount was \$2,500 and will make some local children very happy.
- b. **Pedestrian Bridge.** Board member Petty would like a full discussion on possible rehabilitation of the pedestrian bridge behind the Senior Center. This bridge is very important to many people and the deck is in poor condition. Manager Schulz said he would put this on a future agenda. He agreed that significant work is needed and he has been seeking quotes from contractors.

**X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. **Elroy Hill: ARPA Fund Spending.** Mr. Hill hopes that the Select Board members will perform due diligence and use ARPA funds only for projects that will provide lasting benefits for the community. Since it will be future generations that will be paying the taxes to cover this massive federal spending, they should get something out of this.
- b. **Elroy Hill: Vermont Route 12 Sidewalk.** Mr. Hill noted many people have new sidewalks stretching from the Common to Northfield Falls on their wish lists. He said these people should realize that the great expense of such a project would not only include the initial construction costs but also the annual expense of maintaining these new sidewalks, including clearing them from snow each winter.

**XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a contract negotiation with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:42 p.m.

Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:10 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:10 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 June 13, 2023.