

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of July 9, 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, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Mark Fournier, Gerard LaVarnway, Susan Stillinger, Shawna Foran, 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. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Manager Schulz said the appointment of an alternate member on the Development Review Board had been on the agenda but the expected letter of interest has not yet been received. This item will be tabled until the next meeting.

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

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. June 25, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. A couple of minor corrections were requested. **Motion to approve the revised minutes passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #01-25 & 01-25B-G.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #01-25 & 01-25B-G in the amount of \$555,054.18. Board member Stevens asked about the towing charge to South Burlington. Manager Schulz said the 2021 Chevrolet pickup truck had to be taken back to the dealership for repair. Board member Stevens asked about an electric bill for the "Kent Street Garage." Manager Schulz said that is the small building at back of the Municipal Building where the utility vehicle is stored. Chair Maxwell noted there was a towing charge for an ambulance unit from last December; why are we paying that bill over six months later? Manager Schulz said the invoice was only recently received. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through June 23, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$105,596.62. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. Approval of 2024-2025 Tax Rates (Homestead & Non-Homestead).** Manager Schulz said as is the case every year at this time, the Select Board members are being asked to approve the local Homestead and Non-Homestead tax rates so the FY 2024/2025 tax bills can be mailed out to Northfield property owners. The Homestead tax rate this year will increase from 2.6516 to 3.0057, which is a 13.35% increase. The Non-Homestead tax rate will increase from 2.9162 to 3.3243, which is a 13.99% increase. Chair Maxwell felt the Select Board members and municipal management did a very good job in developing a responsible municipal budget for the next fiscal year that was approved by voters on Town Meeting Day. Unfortunately, Vermont state legislators have been unable to determine an equitable method for funding education costs and this has resulted in higher local property tax rates for many communities this year. Board member Morse noted that this is the first time the local tax rate has gone above \$3.00. In recent years, Norwich University (NU) has made an annual gift to the municipality through a PILOT agreement. Board member Morse said NU was to provide \$233,970 in the last fiscal year but those funds were never received. It was noted that the last multi-year PILOT agreement with NU expired several years ago and we have been working on a year-to-year basis since then.

Board member Morse felt those promised funds should be collected otherwise the municipality will be starting the fiscal year with a \$233,970 deficit. He felt Manager Schulz should send a letter to NU administrators regarding this situation, asking them to pay the previously agreed amount. Board member Stevens said the Select Board subcommittee that handles municipal relations with Norwich University (Chair Maxwell and Board member Stevens) will be meeting with NU President John Broadmeadow this coming Friday. He felt any such communication should wait until after then. Chair Maxwell confirmed that this annual payment will be a topic of discussion. Board member Morse asked that if there is no resolution at the meeting, this matter should be fully discussed at the next Select Board regular meeting. Board member Petty said at the last Select Board Retreat (05/07/24), one of the short-term community goals identified was to work with NU on a long-term PILOT agreement. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Revolving Loan Fund Committee Appointments and Procedures.** Manager Schulz said the Economic Development Subcommittee (Board members Morse and Petty) discussed at their most recent meeting (06/10/24) the local revolving loan fund that has been used to provide funds to local entrepreneurs seeking to start up or expand their businesses. It was then noted that the federal program that provided funding for this will not provide any additional funds so only \$20,000 remains available for this purpose. It also was noted that that the program was never very popular with local businesses due to high interest rates and the fees associated with the loan process. The subcommittee members have asked that they be authorized to work with Economic Development Director Tom Davis to revise the program to make it more attractive to local businesses and also to find a new source of funding. Board member Petty said Mr. Davis looked at other municipalities with similar local revolving loan programs and they usually have at least \$150,000 on hand for the program. Board member Morse thought it would have been much better for the community if this program had been used to promote local economic development instead of acting like a traditional bank. The subcommittee will need to do some work to get this loan program working properly and attract real interest. After some discussion, the Select Board members did authorize the subcommittee members and Mr. Davis to revise the loan program and potentially identify new sources of funding. The funding could include American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Any proposal that the subcommittee members and Mr. Davis develop should be ready for Select Board review and discussion in about a month.
- c. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell noted that at the last meeting (06/25/24), the Select Board members went through the list of potential ARPA-funded projects to determine which should be retained on the list as viable considerations and which should be removed. There also was a new joint ARPA fund request from the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) and the Northfield Middle & High School (NMHS) for \$75,000 in order to rehabilitate trails in the Town Forest and on Garvey Hill school property. This request was put on hold until additional information could be provided. Chair Maxwell noted the Select Board members have expressed an interest in holding a joint board meeting with the Paine Mountain School Board and this ARPA request might be a good topic for discussion. He added that the school board will be holding a retreat tomorrow and they will discuss the possibility and logistics of holding a joint board meeting. Should they be interested, Chair Maxwell will reach out to them regarding possible meeting dates, agenda topics, etc. He then asked if the other Select Board members had any issues to be included on the meeting agenda. Board member Shernock said there has been a lot of concern expressed about the often confused and potentially dangerous traffic situation when children are dropped off at the schools in the morning and picked up in the afternoon. Manager Schulz said Police Chief Pierre Gomez has expressed his own concerns about the current situation. Board member Petty thought it would be useful to discuss upcoming sidewalk repairs on popular walk-to-school routes, the process and timing of sidewalk clearing after winter storms, etc. Chair Maxwell asked that any additional discussion topics should be sent to him so they could be added to the joint meeting agenda. As for the NCC/NMHS ARPA fund request, Board member Shernock believes the NCC is working to obtain the requested information and will provide this prior to another fund request presentation.

Chair Maxwell then went through the list of potential ARPA proposals still under consideration and asked if there were any updates. Manager Schulz said the Select Board members did authorize up to \$100,000 in ARPA funds in order to purchase emergency generators for the Police Station, Fire Station, Ambulance Bay, and Municipal Building. The bids were due yesterday (07/08/24) and two were received before the 4:00 p.m. deadline. Manager Schulz is still analyzing the bid proposals but should be able to make the bid award in the next few days. There is another proposal to spend \$8,500 in ARPA funds to rebuild the Memorial Park bleachers. Chair Maxwell would like an explanation of what this rebuild would entail. Manager Schulz said the work would most likely consist of replacing the bleachers' wooden boards. Chair Maxwell said Leslie Striebe from Welcome Home Northfield has suggested purchasing portable metallic bleachers that can be moved from one location to another. Manager Schulz will get estimates for this and also will check with NMHS administrators regarding how often the local schools use Memorial Park for organized sports events. It has been suggested over the past couple of years the sports teams have been making more use of the Norwich University and Williamstown High School playing fields. Chair Maxwell said further action regarding the bleachers will be tabled until this information has been received.

Chair Maxwell asked if there have been any updates regarding the \$150,000 ARPA funds request for a local match amount for a grant application to install pedestrian safety improvements along Wall Street to Dog River Park. Board member Petty said the grant application has been submitted and we should know by this September whether or not it was successful. She suggested the Select Board members could authorize this use of ARPA funds contingent on the grant being awarded. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Shernock, to authorize \$150,000 in ARPA funds as the local match amount for a grant to fund Wall Street pedestrian safety improvements with this authorization dependent on a successful grant award. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Stevens voting in the negative.** Chair Maxwell then asked if there was an update regarding the proposal to use \$20,000 in ARPA funds in order to allow municipal customers to make in-person credit card payments in the Utility Office and the Town Clerk's Office. Manager Schulz said he and Financial Director Laurie Baroffio have been gathering additional information but the July 4th holiday caused some delays. He should have the information available at the next regular meeting. Chair Maxwell inquired about the \$200,000 ARPA fund request from Economic Development Director Tom Davis to establish a reserve fund that could be used to provide matching grant funds for future municipal projects. Board member Morse would like any ARPA funds still undesignated by the December 31, 2024 deadline used for this purpose. Board member Petty noted there also is accumulated bank interest related to undesignated ARPA funds that also could be used for this purpose. Chair Maxwell noted that as of today, the only remaining public request for ARPA funds is the one from NCC/NMHS and that one should resolved quickly after the requested information has been provided.

- d. **Planning Commission (PC) Member Appointment.** Manager Schulz reported Northfield Falls resident Elroy Hill has submitted a letter of interest for one of the vacant PC positions. There also is a written recommendation for Mr. Hill's appointment from PC Chair Royal DeLegge. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Elroy Hill to the Planning Commission. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Main Street Water Line and Tank Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said the project remains on schedule and the RFP for the construction phase should go out before the end of the month.
- b. **Union Brook Road Repairs.** Manager Schulz said he has received a \$57,500 quote from a contractor in order to fix six problem spots on this road. He intends to award the project tomorrow with the road repair work commencing soon thereafter.
- c. **Vine and Cross Street Sidewalk Project.** Manager Schulz has signed an engineering agreement in the amount of \$31,700 in order to conduct an engineering study and develop an RFP for this project. He believes the engineering report should be completed and ready for Select Board review and discussion by this September.

- d. **Noise Complaint Response.** Manager Schulz has reached out to Norwich University Vice President of Student Affairs & Commandant of Cadets William McCollough about recent complaints of NU students making excessive noise (including loud music) while conducting early morning marches on the backroads.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Noise Ordinance Update.** Board member Morse would like the Policy Review Subcommittee (Board members Morse and Stevens) to look into the possibility of revising this ordinance in order to better regulate shooting ranges located in the high density residential areas.
- b. **CVFiber Concerns.** As he expressed at an earlier meeting, Board member Morse would like Tom Davis, who serves as Northfield's CVFiber delegate, to investigate and report back regarding CVFiber's future plans to provide high-speed internet to underserved households in Northfield. He would like to know how many of these remain after TDS Telecom's own optic fiber installation work on Northfield's backroads. Board member Morse also would like to know how CVFiber's planned merger with NEK (i.e., Northeast Kingdom) Community Broadband will affect its future plans in Northfield. It was noted CVFiber was awarded \$90,000 in local ARPA funds in September 2022 with the understanding those funds would be spent only in Northfield. Board member Morse would like some confirmation that this will actually happen in the next few years.
- c. **King Street Battery Storage Project.** Board member Morse has not had an update on this proposed project for some time. He would like it added to the "tickler file" of current projects that Manager Schulz updates for each meeting.
- d. **Northfield Falls Pedestrian Safety Project.** Board member Shernock thought this project was supposed to be completed by August 1, 2024 but it hasn't even started. Manager Schulz said the contractor awarded this project said this is next on their work schedule and they will make every effort to have it completed on time.
- e. **Main Street Bridge Sidewalk Problems.** Board member Petty noted that since the Main Street Bridge Replacement project has been delayed until 2026, it might be good to provide at least temporary fixes to the crumbling sidewalks on and approaching the bridge. That work had been put on hold when it was thought the bridge replacement would take place next year. Manager Schulz said he has spoken to Highway Foreman Karl Bailey about fixing these sidewalks as well as filling in many identified potholes around town. This work will be done as soon as possible. Chair Maxwell is pleased these potholes will be addressed as there have been many complaints about them.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Mark Fournier: Union Brook Road Maintenance.** Mr. Fournier is pleased about the upcoming work to be done on Union Brook Road but he also felt the current situation would not be so bad if there had been more consistent road maintenance performed there over the past few years. He felt regular maintenance of the backroads is not being done properly and perhaps the solution would be to resurrect the former position of Highway Superintendent (or "Road Commissioner") so that one person could focus solely on maintaining and upgrading the local highway system.

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

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.

A video recording of this meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/NMX3ELzqEu0>

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of July 23, 2024.