

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of October 11, 2022**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell (absent), Vice-Chair Julie H. Goodrich, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Lawton Rutter (Chief, Northfield Ambulance), Michael Gero (Northfield Police Department), Thomas Davis (Economic Development Director), Donald Smith, Lois Melander, Colin Bright, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Acting Chair Goodrich 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.** Manager Schulz said there was to be a follow-up discussion tonight regarding the immediate, short-, and long-term community goals identified at the Select Board Retreat (09/01/22). However, since Chair Maxwell is absent tonight, that discussion will be postponed until the next regular meeting (10/25/22).

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

V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. Lawton Rutter, Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Chief.** Chief Rutter said he serves as NAS Chief, Health Officer, and E-911 Coordinator for Northfield. He will provide brief reports regarding all these roles tonight. He said that during the 2021/2022 fiscal year, which ended on June 30, 2022, the NAS had 893 calls for service that resulted in 944 total runs sheets. Chief Rutter explained the discrepancy by noting some calls for service involve more than one patient. The further breakdown includes 569 emergency calls, 62 non-emergency calls, 24 standby events, 52 lift assists, 8 incidents when the NAS was unable to respond (UTR), 231 no-transport calls, 12 paramedic intercepts from other agencies, and 101 NAS medic calls. This activity resulted in a total of 631 billable events. Chief Rutter further explained that no-transport occurs when the patient refuses to be taken to the hospital. That often happens with suspected drug overdoses. He added that the number of paramedic intercepts has fallen dramatically since NAS started its own paramedic training program. A good number of the 101 NAS medic calls previously would have been paramedic intercepts for which the municipality would have to compensate the responding ambulance service.

Chief Rutter then discussed the data from the first three months of the current fiscal year. From July 2022 through September 2022, there have been 265 total calls for service, 167 emergency calls, 20 non-emergency calls, 13 standby events, 10 lift assists, 92 no transports, 1 paramedic intercept, and 29 NAS medic calls. This resulted in 302 total run sheets and 187 billable events. He noted the higher volume (so far) over the previous fiscal year with an average of over 100 run sheets per month. That trend has continued for the first ten days of this month, with 44 calls for service, 33 emergency calls, 3 non-emergency calls, 2 standby events, 3 lift assists, 7 no transports, 1 paramedic intercept, and 5 NAS medic calls. This resulted in 46 total run sheets for the first third of October 2022. Chief Rutter noted the increased call volume does put more wear on the NAS vehicle fleet and results in higher personnel costs but ultimately will provide greater NAS revenue for the municipality. He added that there was a serious accident last week that required two (2) paramedics on scene followed by a helicopter transport to the hospital.

As for staffing issues, Chief Rutter said he is attempting to expand the number of NAS EMTs who are not Norwich University (NU) students, who are a great asset but usually are not available for service during the summer and school holidays. Unfortunately, it has been difficult to attract additional EMTs when other regional ambulance services pay a higher hourly wage. There currently are six (6) NAS volunteers going through EMT training. Chief Rutter said the NAS equipment is running well. A good used ambulance unit recently was purchased from Mad River Valley Ambulance Service (MRVAS). It has been re-lettered for NAS and is on the road. Chief Rutter then asked if the Select Board members had any questions.

Board member Morse noted when he was Town Manager twenty years ago, it was thought the NAS was keeping busy when there was at least one call for service each day. He applauded the NAS crew all for their hard work dealing with this much higher call volume and also for their exemplary training standards. Board member Morse also commended the NAS EMTs for their distribution of COVID-19 testing kits at local gatherings. He noted that any resident who would like to assist with local emergency responses can do so by volunteering for service in the NAS, which he felt was a tribute to Chief Rutter's leadership qualities.

Board member Stevens then asked about the used ambulance unit that was recently purchased. Chief Rutter said this began as a loaner from MRVAS but it was decided that since the ambulance unit scheduled for remount will be stuck in at the dealership in Missouri for about six months, it was necessary to have more than one ambulance unit consistently on hand. The purchase cost was \$22,000, which did not include the re-lettering expense (\$575). Chief Rutter noted that there was a serious drop in NAS revenue when only one unit was regularly in service. This also created an unsafe situation for the community.

Board member Petty also thanked Chief Rutter and his crew for their service to the community. She then asked if the recent surge in call volume should be expected to continue. Chief Rutter is unsure. He usually expects increased volume when the NU students return each August even though NU responses usually comprise only about fifteen percent (15%) of the total NAS call volume. He thought Northfield's aging population probably contributes to the callout increase. In addition, some is due to additional callouts to individuals with mental health issues. There was a time when law enforcement agencies handled the bulk of mental health intervention events but in recent years there has been a greater focus on treating these as medical issues. Chief Rutter said current NAS staffing seems to be on top of the situation but there might be a problem when the NU student EMTs leave next summer. Board member Morse thought it might be a good idea to engage in safety promotions in order to reduce the number of NAS emergency callouts. Chief Rutter said this could include notices to the elder population about addressing fall prevention by removing trip hazards, wearing no-skid shoes, etc. There also could be campaigns to address local mental health concerns, which is a major concern even though public resources to fund such outreach programs are limited. Board member Morse suggested some local American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds could be used to finance such outreach efforts.

Acting Chair Goodrich noted the current NAS fee schedule does allow for charging for lift assists. She asked if the NAS actually sends out bills for this. Chief Rutter said NAS usually bills only for repetitive calls from the same location. It is felt the patient and/or family members should be able to take reasonable measures so the NAS doesn't need to be called out every time the patient has to be moved. Acting Chair Goodrich then asked how long the EMT training class lasts. Chief Rutter said the class started last week and will run through next April. There are shorter classes available that provide lower levels of certification.

Chief Rutter then discussed his Health Officer duties. He first noted that Christopher Golder, who has been serving as Deputy Health Officer for the past couple years, has resigned. As this is an uncompensated position that requires long hours with much public interaction, follow-up visits, paperwork, etc., it might be difficult to find a replacement.

Chief Rutter stated currently there are four (4) open cases that he now must handle on his own. Two (2) involve the same landlord with similar issues in separate rental units, i.e. mold on walls, etc. Another involves lead paint issues. The last one involves a bank-owned property from which a tenant was recently evicted. The bank then had the utilities to the rental unit shut off without knowing this would affect another separate rental unit. Chief Rutter has been working with the bank to resolve this problem. Board member Petty hopes some stratagem can be found to recruit a new Deputy Health Officer as soon as possible.

As for his duties as E-911 Coordinator, Chief Rutter has been informed that the State of Vermont's Enhanced 911 Board wants two Northfield roads renumbered. This first is Fairway Drive off Berlin Pond Road, which has houses with out-of-sequence numbering. Chief Rutter has started contacting the road's residents about this. The other is Jarvis Lane, which is a dead-end road bisected by Washington Street. The street's houses now are numbered in sequence starting at the southern end. However, the state board would like the numbering sequence to restart at the intersection with Washington Street with resulting North and South Jarvis Lane addresses. The contact process for this street with ten (10) separate domiciles will take a bit longer than the outreach for Fairway Drive, which only has half as many. Board member Morse asked if the United State Postal Service (USPS) is involved in the E-911 address process. Chief Rutter confirmed he has to inform USPS of any addressing changes. However, it sometimes takes several months for the USPS database to be updated. Board member Morse suggested some of the contact work could be outsourced so Chief Rutter can focus on his other duties.

Acting Chair Goodrich then thanked Chief Rutter for the valuable information provided tonight and for his excellent work since his last report.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **September 27, 2022 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #07-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #07-23 in the amount of \$1,349,230.28. Board member Stevens wanted an answer to the question he posed at the last meeting: is Casella Waste Systems paying for the electricity used during its operation of the Transfer Station and for the rental of the portalet sited there? Manager Schulz said Casella Waste Systems will be paying for power usage and he soon will be discussing with them the portalet rental cost. He added that the electric feed to the Transfer Station does need to be updated and the municipality will pay for this work. The power line to the Transfer Station would have had to be upgraded in any case. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through October 2, 2022.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$122,310.31. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **DRAFT Purchasing Policy Revision.** At the aforementioned Select Board Retreat, one of the suggestions was a wholesale review and possible revision of municipal policies, some of which hadn't been updated in several years. Manager Schulz said he would like to start the process with the purchasing policy as that is the one most out-of-date. He has created a draft policy based on a standard municipal model and also incorporating provisions from other Vermont municipalities with recently updated purchasing policies. Due to inflation and other considerations, the amounts that trigger different requirements for departmental purchases have been changed. Purchases under \$3,000 would not require quotes; purchases between \$3,000 and \$10,000 would require verbal quotes; purchases between \$10,000 and \$20,000 would require written quotes; and purchases over \$20,000 would require sealed bids. In addition, purchases made through the State of Vermont would not require bids or quotes.

Acting Chair Goodrich noted Board members Morse and Stevens serve on the Policy Review Subcommittee. She asked if they would like to comment first on these and other proposed revisions. Board member Morse recommended some stylistic changes throughout the document. He also suggested revising Section 8.7 (Bid Protest). Since Manager Schulz usually makes the decision on awarding bids, he probably should not be the best person to whom unsuccessful bidders make their protests. The Select Board members probably should hear these themselves. Board member Stevens would like it clarified in the section about bid awards (8.5) that the municipality is not required to go with the lowest bidder if there are concerns about that bidder's past work performance, their suitability for a particular project, etc. Acting Chair Goodrich said it is stated in the next section that any and all proposals can be rejected "in the best interest of the Town." Board member Petty felt this passage should make it clearer that the municipality can choose companies with higher bid amounts if there are real concerns about quality of service or materials to be provided. Board member Stevens feels the section regarding "Disposal Methods" should be a separate policy. Board member Petty asked about Section 3.4 (Contracts) that states the Town Manager is the only person who is authorized to sign contracts but he/she also has the authority to delegate this authority. She asked why such delegation would be needed. Manager Schulz said this was in case the Town Manager was absent for a prolonged period due to illness, vacation, etc. Recently he authorized NAS Chief Rutter to sign the purchase agreement for the used ambulance unit because he was absent for several days. Board member Petty then asked about Section 3.6 (Cooperative Purchasing). She asked how that works in practice. Manager Schulz said in case of extreme emergencies such as regional natural disasters, it might be necessary to share the purchase of a high expense equipment with another community. This would be a very rare circumstance. In Section 7.1, it is suggested that a minimum of two (2) vendors be contacted when quotes or bids are solicited (even though three are recommended). Board member Petty thought the requirement should be raised to at least three (3) contacts. Manager Schulz will review this. In the section on bid awards (8.5), Acting Chair Goodrich would like it clarified that when a Department Head decides to award a bid to other than the lowest bidder, the written justification for this should be sent to the Town Manager and/or the Select Board and not to the bidders themselves. Section 12 (Exemptions) lists some goods and services that would be exempt from the bid process. Board member Petty would like specific examples of this. Manager Schulz said we often employ engineering firms for a certain project without going through the bid process because they have worked in this community before on similar projects and therefore can be expected to provide good service. He agreed that it might be good to reword this section to clarify this. Acting Chair Goodrich said Manager Schulz will review and incorporate many (if not all) of the suggestions provided tonight in the next draft of the revised purchasing policy. This revised draft will be discussed at the next meeting.

- b. Northfield Housing Task Force.** Manager Schulz said another topic that was discussed during the Select Board Retreat was the lack of affordable housing in this community. As a follow-up, Manager Schulz tasked Economic Development Director Tom Davis to draft a framework for the creation of a local housing task force. Mr. Davis has provided a written proposal in which he suggested starting with a small group comprised of himself, Manager Schulz, Board member Petty, and Erin Hicks-Tibbles, who is a Data Analyst for the State of Vermont and also a member of the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN). Mr. Davis noted that when he has contacted local business owners about possible expansion of their operations, a frequent concern expressed is the probable inability of new employees to find affordable housing and/or rental units in Northfield. He added the task force would focus on four (4) specific areas: Affordable Housing (both for rental and purchase), Middle-Income Housing (mainly for purchase), Zoning Modernization Efforts (to increase housing development), and Funding Sources (for individuals and development partners).

Mr. Davis also has produced the following mission statement draft: "The mission of the Northfield Vermont Housing Task Force is to affect the prudent and expeditious process of increasing available housing in the Town of Northfield." The initial meeting of the initial group would discuss possibly finalizing this mission statement; discerning areas of focus; discussing the final composition of the complete task force and recruitment of additional members; determining the timing and frequency of future meetings; etc. Mr. Davis then asked if there were any questions.

Board member Morse hopes that one result of this process would be greater availability of affordable starter houses in this community. Mr. Davis said he has spoken with some NU alumni who have floated the possibility of building a factory in Northfield that would build small modular homes for placement within this community and also for transportation elsewhere. If this or similar proposals come to fruition, Northfield could acquire a reputation as a good place to both work and live. He also noted NU engineering students have won awards for designing and building of two (2) "tiny houses" that were provided for Barre VT "vulnerable populations." Mr. Davis added that NU President Mark Anarumo has been very supportive of such efforts. Board member Stevens feels it is a good idea to start with a small core group to start addressing this affordable housing problem. He hopes that the results truly will benefit Northfield's lower-income residents. Acting Chair Goodrich said the action framework Mr. Davis has devised seems workable and wished him success. Mr. Davis said he will go forward with his proposal and will report back to the Select Board members at a future date.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. South Main Street Stormwater/CSO Elimination Project.** Manager Schulz said the labor force for this project has been working steadily in recent days and real progress is being made. He understands local concerns about project delays but the project contractor, like other Vermont employers, has been dealing with labor shortages that has impacted this and similar projects. At the most recent project progress meeting, Manager Schulz received reassurances from the contractor that the work along South Main Street will be completed this year and the road restored before winter sets in. Unfortunately, the municipality has only so much control over the timing of such major projects when state funds are used.
- b. Municipal Computer Server.** As reported earlier, Manager Schulz said computer servers have a five (5) year life span and ours are reaching their limit. Replacement has been budgeted and quotes are being solicited. We also are looking at whether data should be shifted from hardware units to the cloud. This would reduce initial costs but there would be additional storage charges down the line.
- c. Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge.** Manager Schulz stated this bridge repair project is nearly complete. The new cross beams have been installed and soon the bridge's previous 16,000-pound maximum weight limit will be restored. Board member Morse feels the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) did a poor job when it conducted its last biennial inspection of this bridge. As Manager Schulz confirmed, the wooden material removed during repairs showed signs of extreme rot and we are very lucky the bridge did not fail and create a worst-case scenario event. Manager Schulz said VTrans will be inspecting the covered bridges on Cox Brook Road soon as he will discuss these concerns with them. Acting Chair Goodrich noted that we now have a very safe bridge on Slaughterhouse Road.
- d. ARPA Federal Payment.** Manager Schulz said the municipality recently received the federal government's final payment of local ARPA funds (\$633,000). The total amount received was about \$1,920,000. These funds need to be allocated by the end of 2024 and expended by the end of 2026. Therefore, the Select Board members will need to hold serious discussions soon regarding what local projects should be pursued making use of these funds. He added that the ARPA Funds Outreach Committee led by Merry Shernock will be providing a report within a month on the results of their online surveys and their six (6) community meetings that sought and obtained local feedback on how these funds should be spent.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. New Northfield Police Department (NPD) Cruiser.** Board member Stevens asked if the new NPD cruiser has arrived and is in service. Manager Schulz said he spoke to Chief Helfant about this and was told the vehicle should be delivered within the next two (2) months. Its arrival was expected last month but there have been delays. Donald Smith asked if the new vehicle would be all-black like one of the current cruisers or if it would be marked like a regular police vehicle. Manager Schulz believes this vehicle will be lettered but will check with Chief Helfant.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Donald Smith: Concerns about Municipal Operations.** Mr. Smith believes Manager Schulz has not provided proper oversight of the Northfield Police Department and also has neglected his duties as Delinquent Tax Collector. He cited a couple incidents in which he felt NPD officers did not treat him properly when he was issued separate parking violation and disorderly conduct citations at his residence. Mr. Smith asked Manager Schulz to investigate this matter. However, in a letter dated October 16, 2021, Manager Schulz informed Mr. Smith that he had reviewed these matters and determined the NPD officers had acted correctly in both instances. As for delinquent taxes, Mr. Smith felt Manager Schulz did not provide him sufficient warning last year before his property was included in the annual tax sale notice due to what he felt was a relatively small amount of late taxes. Acting Chair Goodrich thanked Mr. Smith for bringing these matters to the Select Board members' attention. She did ask that in future Mr. Smith should document his concerns and submit them to the Select Board members in writing. Board member Morse is willing to meet with Mr. Smith and discuss these concerns with him provided the exchange was fully documented.

- XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a personnel matter. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:47 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 9:35 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:35 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 October 25, 2022.