

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of June 27, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board 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, Paul Luciano (OPH Consulting Services), Gary Kessler (Green Mountain Stage Race), Russ Barrett (Conservation Commission), Jeremy Whalen (Conservation Commission/Town Forest Stewardship Committee), Taylor Goodwin, Cody Morris, Gerard LaVarnway, Mary Nadon Scott, Tim Swartz, Matthew Romei, Susan Stillinger, 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.** Manager Schulz said Karina Dailey from the Vermont Natural Resources Council was to provide the Select Board members with an update on the Cross Brothers Dam Removal project. Unfortunately, she was unable to attend tonight due to a family matter and her presentation will be rescheduled for a future meeting.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Paul Luciano, OPH Consulting Services: Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.** Manager Schulz said the municipality is in the process of revising its hazard mitigation plan, which has to be updated every five (5) years in order to remain eligible for state and/or federal disaster recovery funds, etc. Using state grant funds, the municipality hired Paul Luciano from OPH Consulting Services to assist with the process. Mr. Luciano is ready to present the first draft of the plan update tonight in order to obtain some feedback from the Select Board members before finalizing the document. Mr. Luciano said Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which will need to approve the document, would like to understand the update process so that information is included in this draft. This plan is a reassessment of what has happened in this community over the last five (5) years and includes a listing of the natural disasters that have occurred in this timeframe. This includes several severe storm and flooding events as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Luciano said the plan focuses mainly on natural disasters as man-made events, such as train accidents, are categorized instead as "vulnerabilities." The plan includes several suggestions for mitigating the local impact of potential natural disasters. The five (5) action categories are: 1. Reduce vulnerability to flooding by evaluating capabilities of existing road and stormwater management infrastructure, public education and through municipal services and regulations; 2. Improve resilience to severe winter storms; 3. Reduce impact of extreme hot and cold temperature durations; 4. Raise public awareness of hazards and hazard mitigation actions; and 5. Reduce risk and impact of major infectious disease events. The last category is included in order to ensure that the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic are not forgotten. Mr. Luciano said the plan includes an implementation matrix spreadsheet that will track what action is taken in coming years to address these concerns. He added that surrounding towns have been informed that Northfield is in the process of updating its hazard mitigation plan and that copies of the latest draft are available for their review. Once the Select Board members have approved a finalized draft, the document will be forwarded to VEM for its review. After any required revisions have been made by VEM, the document would be sent to FEMA for its approval. Only after this process has been completed will the document be ready for final approval by the Select Board members. Mr. Luciano then asked if the Select Board members had any questions or comments.

Board member Morse first thanked Mr. Luciano for all the work he has already put into this project. This is an outstanding document and Board member Morse felt it was especially important that the community remained prepared in case of another pandemic situation. Board member Morse did find some items that needed to be corrected including repeated references to Northfield Village, which no longer exists as a separate political entity. He also felt the local population decrease in the 2020 census was vastly overstated as 647%. The actual decrease was about 5% and is largely attributable to Norwich University (NU) students moving off campus and back to their hometowns for remote learning during the pandemic. Mr. Luciano will fix this typo.

Board member Morse also asked what are “interim river corridor protection standards.” Manager Schulz said that was terminology employed in the local zoning regulations in the section on flood hazard zones. Board member Petty asked if the local zoning bylaws meet FEMA requirements. Manager Schulz said the Planning Commission members were addressing this in their current update of local zoning regulations. Board member Morse asked about the suggestion to better invest the “tipping fees” the municipality receives. He did not know what these fees were. Manager Schulz believes this is a reference to when the municipality charged private customers to dispose of their own waste at the Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF). That practice has been discontinued. Board member Stevens noted the plan’s suggestion to maintain an updated inventory of local culverts. Mr. Luciano said it was best to know the age, size, condition, etc. of all the culverts installed in the community for better flood mitigation planning. The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) could help with this. Chair Maxwell agreed that an up-to-date culvert inventory really is needed. Board member Petty thought this document would be very valuable resource when completed. She did find some redundant language in the sections about flood mitigation that she will forward to Mr. Luciano. Board member Petty thought it was inspiring that so many residents responded to the online survey regarding their hazard mitigation concerns. She then asked if the NU facilities that have been offered as warming or cooling sites met all the suggested requirements. Mr. Luciano will research this further. Board member Petty noted Plumley Armory has been offered in the past and she doesn’t believe it has air conditioning. She then asked if the members of the Planning Commission (PC) and the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) have been able to review this draft. Manager Schulz believes the PC members have but is unsure about the NCC members. He will forward copies to them if requested. Board member Petty asked if the document would be made available online for public review. Manager Schulz said it would but Mr. Luciano would prefer to wait until after the changes proposed tonight have been made. Chair Maxwell suggested that the Select Board members should send their individual comments to Manager Schulz and he will forward them to Mr. Luciano. He then thanked Mr. Luciano for tonight’s presentation and for the good work he has done to date.

b. Gary Kessler, Race Director: Green Mountain Stage Race. Mr. Kessler said his organization will hold four (4) stage races over the Labor Day Weekend. The second stage of the race will be held on Saturday, September 2, 2023, and will start at the Randolph VT High School at 8:30 a.m., and travel up Vermont Route 12A through Braintree, Granville, Roxbury, and Northfield. The route then turns back to Randolph along Vermont Route 12, ending at the Ayers Brook Goat Dairy. The route is thirty-seven (37) miles with most riders completing just one lap but some advanced riders will do two or three laps. The race should be completed by late afternoon. Mr. Kessler said he will be working with local police departments for traffic control along the race route. If the local police cannot commit, he will work with the state police and/or private agencies. Chair Maxwell noted the Northfield Police Department (NPD) currently has a staffing shortfall and also will be providing coverage in the downtown area over this holiday weekend. Therefore, it probably would be best for Mr. Kessler to work with state or county law enforcement on this. Board member Petty felt this was a great event and hoped that participants would be able to venture into downtown Northfield and patronize our restaurants, etc. Mr. Kessler said the riders are encouraged to do so. He himself does purchase meals from a local sandwich shop for race volunteers. Since the Select Board members had no objections, Manager Schulz will sign the “Statement of Consent to use Public Roads” and send it to Mr. Kessler.

c. Russ Barrett, Conservation Commission: Conservation Easement Process. Mr. Barrett said the NCC and the Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) held a joint meeting last month (05/24/23) and there was discussion of seeking a conservation easement for the Town Forest in order to ensure its long-term protection from development, etc. Mr. Barrett was then authorized to conduct some additional research and also approach the Select Board members regarding this possibility. This status for the Town Forest would make the municipality eligible for additional grant opportunities. The Select Board had been approached about this several years ago and there were concerns at that time that the language in the easement documentation would prevent certain actions and/or developments in the Town Forest in perpetuity. Board member Morse would welcome the possibility of more grant money for outdoor recreation but hoped the provisions in the easement could be written to allow for the possibility of new technology, such as energy generation, being located within the Town Forest.

Board member Shernock supports having a conservation easement for the Town Forest and doesn't understand why this hasn't been done before. Before taking this step, Board member Petty would like to see a list of the new grant opportunities that would become available and the amount of money involved. She also would like to see how similar conservation easements have benefited other Vermont communities. It might be possible to put some but not all of the Town Forest under the aegis of this conservation easement. Mr. Barrett said a special protection zone could be created that is outside of the specified easement area. He would like the Select Board members' authorization to conduct more research before returning with a formal proposal. The target date for this would be this fall. Board member Morse would like to see some easement language that would allow for the possibility of taking advantage of technological advances in the lands covered by the easement. For example, there are potential water sources in the Town Forest that should not be made permanently inaccessible. He would like this wiggle room while still providing the municipality with the ability to become eligible for additional grant funding. Mr. Barrett said one needed determination would be who would hold the easement. In most Vermont communities this has been the Vermont Land Trust but he can look into other possibilities. Board member Morse would like all options explored before any binding decisions are made. Board member Shernock thought there should be some available examples of easement language that would allow more access to grants without totally surrendering local control. Mr. Barrett will look into this possibility and bring back options. Chair Maxwell asked about public input into this discussion. Board member Morse said that can be done when this matter is discussed again at a future public meeting. Manager Schulz noted there now seems to be Board consensus to authorize Mr. Barrett to look further into this matter and come back with additional information and a formal proposal. There was no objection.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **June 13, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #24-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #24-23 in the amount of \$390,933.28. It was noted that of the total warrant amount, \$240,311.66 represented power purchases for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). Board member Shernock asked about several purchases denoted as "senior renewables." Manager Schulz said these were purchases of electricity generated at the Bull Run Solar Farm. These power purchases are spread among several municipal facilities and have resulted in lower energy costs while also expanding NED's renewable energy portfolio. Chair Maxwell asked about a \$2,019 payment to Green Mountain Power (GMP) for "yard lights" on Lovers Lane. As this did seem to be a high price, Manager Schulz will look into this. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Warrant #01-24A.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #01-24A in the amount of \$30,925.89. Manager Schulz explained this was a payment on an old water bond. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through June 11, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$106,151.28. Manager Schulz noted this was the second-to-last payroll payment period for the current fiscal year. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Cross Brothers Dam Removal Design and Implementation Subgrant Agreement.** Although Ms. Dailey was unable to attend tonight, she did send an email that provided an update on funding for this project that has an estimated total cost of \$952,647. She reported that a FEMA grant will cover about ninety percent (90%) of this amount and the remaining cost would be covered by a subgrant agreement that would provide about \$98,000 in state funds. Ms. Dailey said this would require the Select Board members to approve the subgrant agreement documentation. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and authorize Manager Schulz to sign the Cross Brothers Dam Removal Design and Implementation Subgrant Agreement. Board member Morse noted that part of the project will be waterfront restoration and he felt this could be a great economic benefit to Northfield.

Board member Petty thought it was a very good that this important project will be completed without any local tax dollars required. She credited Ms. Dailey for this and praised her work throughout this project. Manager Schulz confirmed that this document has undergone legal review and no problems were found. It is possible that the timeline for the dam removal might overlap with the Main Street Bridge Replacement project in 2025 but it is also possible that it could be done sooner. There will be coordination between both project engineers to prevent any conflicts. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Lead Service Line Grant Program.** Manager Schulz said the DEC has been pushing for Vermont communities to complete and submit inventories of their lead service lines no later than October 2024. DEC will provide the funds to cover the expense through a loan agreement that provides funds that don't need to be repaid ("forgivable loan"). The funds can be used to hire a private contractor to perform the work or it could be done internally by municipal staff. Manager Schulz spoke to Utility Superintendent James Russo about this and Mr. Russo felt his employees would be able to complete the work themselves. The state funds would be used to reimburse the municipality for the employee hours spent on this inventory. Mr. Russo said this project would not keep his crew from their other duties. Manager Schulz would like the Select Board members' authorization to apply for this forgivable loan. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize this forgivable loan application and to have the inventory performed by municipal employees. Board member Morse thought a \$28,000 loan that didn't have to be repaid was a good deal. He asked if any waterlines would need to be dug up to conduct the inventory. Manager Schulz didn't think so as this project would require very little fieldwork. DEC has assured us that the local documentation is very solid. In addition, this project does need to be done and this seems to be the most efficient and cost-effective way to do it. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Appointment of Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) Member.** Manager Schulz noted there has been a TFSC vacancy for several months. Winter Street resident Ray Crowder recently submitted a letter of interest and his appointment is recommended by TFSC Chair Jeremy Whalen. Mr. Crowder has lived in Northfield for less than a year but he has an impressive résumé, been a frequent visitor to the Town Forest (hiking, biking, etc.), and did attend the most recent TFSC meeting (06/20/23). Chair Maxwell agreed that Mr. Crowder is a very qualified applicant. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Ray Crowder to the Town Forest Stewardship Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. DRAFT Northfield VT Encampment Policy.** Manager Schulz said at a previous meeting (05/23/23) the Select Board members requested that he draft a local encampment policy as other Vermont communities have been doing in response to the phasing out of state programs that provided motel vouchers to homeless families and individuals. There was a concern that homeless persons might attempt to establish encampments on Northfield municipal property, such as Memorial Park, Dog River Park, etc. Manager Schulz reviewed the policy that the City of Montpelier recently approved and used parts of it as a model for an encampment policy specific to Northfield. Manager Schulz said an attorney has reviewed the draft policy and found only minor problems that have been corrected. Board member Morse feels that if this policy would have the weight of law, it perhaps should instead be approved as a local ordinance. After some discussion, the consensus was to first approve this as a policy but leave the option open for ordinance approval at a future time (if circumstances warrant). Board member Shernock would favor reversing the order of the first two (2) steps in the "Contact with Persons Camping on Municipal Property." She felt it better to have municipal staff make an initial assessment of the situation before contacting law enforcement. Board member Petty would not oppose this change but felt it might be best to have law enforcement officers make the initial contact as they would be better able to recognize any potential safety hazards. Board member Petty noted the Montpelier policy included as an appendix an "Encampment Response Form" that documented any encounters and also provided an assessment of the encampment situation, noted any health or safety concerns, etc. She felt the Northfield policy also should include such a form.

Board member Petty would like to have all initial encounters with those encamping to be as low-key as possible since we do not want to criminalize those who have no other housing options. She would also like to be sure that those who would be cleaning up after the encampment removal have proper safety training in case there are any hazardous materials, discarded “sharps,” etc. Chair Maxwell would like the draft policy revised and prepared for approval at the next regular meeting (07/11/23).

- e. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).** After the previous regular meeting, the approved ARPA funds request form has been posted on the municipal website (<https://www.northfield-vt.gov/select-board>). The Northfield municipal Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100084154886359>) also has a direct link to the document and other information. Economic Development Director Tom Davis put a notice on Front Porch Forum (FPF) that has a direct link to the form as well as some background information on what types of projects would be eligible for ARPA funding. Board member Shernock is pleased with the approved request form but felt the FPF posting about funding criteria had some outdated information that might discourage applications. She would like a second FPF posting that was more encouraging to potential applicants. Board member Petty also would like it specified that those submitting the request form would be expected to attend a future Select Board meeting in order to answer any questions, etc. Once the request forms start to come in, Board member Petty would like discussion of these requests to be on the agenda of future Select Board meetings on a regular basis. Board member Morse asked how submitted proposals should be evaluated. Chair Maxwell said the form itself contains evaluation criteria, such as whether the proposed project would conform to current long-term municipal plans, would it provide long-term benefits to the community, etc. Board member Petty believes that awards, particularly for smaller projects, should be done on an ongoing basis. Board member Morse asked what would happen if someone provided an outstanding proposal near the end of the process after almost all of ARPA funds had already been allocated. Board member Shernock noted that some ARPA funds already have been spent to stabilize utility rates, promote high-speed internet accessibility, etc. She also thought it might be a good idea to set some of the ARPA funds aside as local match funding should the municipality seek state and/or federal grants for larger-scale projects. Chair Maxwell said a good number of suggested projects, both big and small, have been publicly promoted already. Board member Petty thought it might hasten the process if the Select Board members would submit request forms themselves for proposals that have already received significant local support. Chair Maxwell thought it might be good to review the lists of suggested uses for ARPA funds that came from last year’s ARPA Fund outreach meetings, the more recent Vermont Council on Rural Development (VRCD) community forums, etc. Board member Morse thought it might be useful to make a publicized ARPA fund award every few months in order to encourage more residents to submit requests. Board member Petty believes it was learned during the outreach meetings that residents would prefer ARPA funds be spent on a number of smaller community enrichment projects rather than one or two large projects. Board member Morse thought it might be helpful to categorize received forms based on the requested fund amount. Some smaller amount requests might be “no-brainers” while larger amount requests would require much more consideration before any decision is made. Chair Maxwell would like to see some Select Board initiative regarding proposals that have been in circulation for some time and appear to have significant public support.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT

- a. **Northfield Police Chief Search Process.** Manager Schulz said the process has been proceeding well and in-person interviews are continuing. He will have much more information to share at the next regular meeting.
- b. **2023 Town General Grand List.** Manager Schulz noted that the 2023 Grand List recently was lodged by the Board of Listers. A summary was included in the Select Board packets that showed a total Grand List amount of \$3,299,436. This is a \$34,310 increase that is largely attributable to new housing and the Bone Hill Solar Farm.

- c. **Electric Vehicle (EV) Chargers.** Manager Schulz reported that the EV charging equipment has been ordered and he still expects its installment later this summer.
- d. **Highway Projects.** Manager Schulz confirmed that the sidewalk inventory project is ongoing. In addition, Hallstrom Road residents are being contacted about upcoming work on the road, i.e., tree trimming, new culverts, etc.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Central Street Stormwater Issues.** Board member Shernock was contacted by a Central Street resident who said the road resurfacing last year resulted in stormwater being diverted towards basements rather than into storm drains. This is happening near the intersection of Central Street and Washington Street. Manager Schulz said there had been similar problems on the road nearer to Wall Street that have been addressed. That there are any remaining drainage problems is news to him and he certainly will look into this.
- b. **Covered Bridge Surveillance Cameras.** Board member Shernock would like solar-powered cameras installed on the covered bridges so the municipality would be able to document who is responsible for any future damage. Manager Schulz thought this would be helpful as drivers usually leave the scene rather quickly after a collision.
- c. **South Main Street Paving Project.** As the South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation Project is nearly complete, the road in the construction area now is being prepared for full repaving. Board member Stevens asked about the process. Manager Schulz said the whole roadway will be uniformly paved and this means removing old pavement down to the base. We should have a completely level road in a couple of weeks.
- d. **Zoning Regulation Revision.** Board member Stevens asked about the status of the Planning Commission's revision of local zoning regulations. Manager Schulz said the final draft is nearly complete and public hearings will be soon scheduled. The first ones will be held by the Planning Commission. Once any initial public feedback has been addressed, the finalized document would be presented to the Select Board members in preparation for their own public hearings prior to final approval.
- e. **Culvert Inventory.** Regarding the culvert inventory that was discussed earlier, Board member Stevens asked how old is the current one. Manager Schulz said it is about three (3) years old and the records are maintained by the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans). The Highway crew will be updating this inventory in coming months. Board member Stevens would like to see the current inventory as he feels a culvert installed on Smith Hill Road is undersized. Board member Morse believes that particular culvert was installed after Tropical Storm Irene took out the previous one. Manager Schulz believes the engineers that installed this culvert after Irene thought it was large enough at the time. Over ten (10) years later, the question now is whether it still meets current VTrans standards. That will be determined by the new inventory.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy Hill: ARPA-Funded Sidewalk Work.** Mr. Hill noted sidewalk repair/expansion work has been frequently brought up for possible use of ARPA funds. If indeed ARPA funds are used for sidewalk projects, Mr. Hill felt there should be a priority for rehabilitating existing sidewalks before any new sidewalk is installed.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:05 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 revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of July 11, 2023.