

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of June 23, 2026

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Tim Davis, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Mary Smith, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Mitch Osiecki (Zoning Administrator), Laura Stone PE, (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Gary Sweeny (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Josif Bicja, PE (Hoyle Tanner), Kelly LaVigne (Hoyle Tanner), Royal DeLegge (Planning Commission Chair), David Mears (Northfield Conservation Commission [NCC] Chair), Debbie Zuaro (NCC), Russ Barrett (NCC/Town Forest Stewardship Committee), Lara Slesar (Vermont-NEA), Lisa Pettrey-Gill (American Legion Post 63), Ric Braman (American Legion Post 63), David Pierson, Jim Cannon, Keith Cannon, Stephen Coley, Travis Blodgett, Joe Zuaro, Rod Elmer, Dennis Donahue, Jill Donahue, Steve Porter, Pat Porter, Paul Dunkel, Kathleen Osgood, Sharon Tisdale, Brian Tisdale, Nancy Peck, Susan Boyd, Brian Massey, R. Geoffrey Ferrell, Curtis Dudley, Pam Ricker, Gerard LaVarnway, Cara Gauthier, Amie Dudley, Kristin Pollard, Melinda Davis, Peter J. DeMasi, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Laura Stone PE, Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) & Josif Bicja, PE (Hoyle Tanner): Cox Brook Road Covered Bridges Alternatives Presentation. (6:02 p.m.)** Ms. Stone said a local concerns meetings regarding the Cox Brook Road Covered Bridges was held on March 26, 2024 in order to obtain the views of town officials and those living in proximity to the covered bridges regarding possible alternative approaches to address the bridges' many deficiencies. Engineers at VTrans and the civil engineering firm Hoyle Tanner reviewed and updated their plans based on the public feedback and have returned today to present their recommendations. Mr. Bicja said the purpose for this project is to "provide safe crossings over Cox Brook Road and Dog River for the traveling public; address structural deficiencies and ongoing deterioration; and extend the bridges' service life." The need for this project is that the "bridges require rehabilitation to continue to meet the needs of the community."

Mr. Bicja said each of the three (3) covered bridges would be addressed in turn. He began with the Upper Cox Brook Covered Bridge (AKA Bridge 10). He said the bridge was constructed in 1872 and has undergone rehabilitation in 1967 and 1979. This is a Queen Post Truss bridge and is 54'-3" long with a horizontal clearance of 13'-7" and 12' vertical clearance. The overall bridge condition has been evaluated as poor and Mr. Bicja then went through the deficiencies of the various bridge components. He noted the metal roof has leaks and exposed screw attachments and the wooden support structure has splits, breaks, and rot. The supporting steel beams have rust holes and advanced corrosion. The bridge portals have breaks and impact damage and the bridge approach railing has extensive corrosion, rust holes, rotted wood posts, and impact damage. The two (2) abutments have voids, spalling, and exposed rebar. Mr. Bicja said the recommended rehabilitation options include replacement of all existing siding boards, installing a new standing seam metal roof, replacement of the support beams, and replacement of some (but not all) of the trusses on the east and west sides of the structure. He added that there are alternative approaches to strengthening the bridge's floor system with new steel stingers, wooden supports, etc. There also is the option to install a concrete deck beam for better support. There also is a recommendation to raise the bridge's vertical clearance from 12'-8" to 13'-3". The substructure would require only minor repairs. During the bridge rehabilitation, the project right-of-way would be three (3) rods and relocation of nearby utilities would be needed. After the bridge work is completed, the structure should be treated with insecticide, fungicide, and NOCHAR fire retardant. Mr. Bicja said they do not recommend adding new lighting to the bridge due to its short length and available natural lighting. The bridge would be closed during the rehabilitation and the options are either installing a temporary bridge or setting up an off-site detour utilizing Aseltine Road. This detour would add an additional thirteen (13) minutes and six (6) miles to travelers' journeys.

Depending on which rehabilitation alternatives are chosen, the cost of fixing this bridge and installing a temporary bridge would be about \$2,200,000 and Northfield would be responsible for five percent (5%) of this cost. Should the municipality decide to forego the temporary bridge and make use of the recommended detour, the cost would drop to about \$1,700,000 and the municipality would be responsible for 2.5% of the cost. Should the detour option be chosen, Asetline Road would be improved for the temporary traffic increase. Mr. Bicja then asked if anyone had any questions or comments.

Chair Maxwell asked if the lifespan of the bridge's floor system would be lengthened if concrete was used rather than wooden beams. Mr. Bicja said a concrete or steel floor would last about seventy-five (75) years whereas wood beams would last in the range of forty-five (45) to fifty (50) years. Board member Petty noted the project calls for installing wooden curbing within the bridge and asked if the resulting width would be sufficient for pedestrian traffic. Mr. Bicja said it would and installing the curbing would in fact improve pedestrian safety. Board member Shernock is pleased that the bridge's vertical clearance is being raised as a good number of oversized vehicles attempt to cross our covered bridges on a regular basis. Jim Cannon asked if installing the internal curbing would impact snowplow access to the bridge. Mr. Bicja thought the general practice for snowplow drivers was to raise their plows before going through the bridge as the covered structure shouldn't have inside snow to clear. The approaches to the bridge would need to be plowed but not the interior. Stephen Coley asked how long the bridge would be closed for rehabilitation. Mr. Bicja thought the work should be done in one summer construction season (i.e., April through October). It might be possible to have the two (2) shorter bridges (Upper and Lower Bridges) done during the same construction season. The whole project therefore should be completed within two (2) to three (3) years. It also is possible for the temporary bridge to be used in turn for both of the shorter bridge projects. Peter J. DeMasi said the natural lighting for the covered bridges vary considerably so some internal lighting might have to be installed. Mr. Bicja said LED lights could be installed on the bridges with darker interiors.

Kelly LaVigne (Hoyle Tanner) then started her presentation regarding the Lower Cox Brook Covered Bridge (AKA Bridge 11). She noted that the bridge was built in 1872 and has been rehabilitated in 1967 and 1979. This also is a Queen Post Truss bridge and is just over sixty feet (60') long. It currently has a 15'-5" horizontal clearance and 12' vertical clearance. As with the previous covered bridge, it has an overall rating of poor due to various deficiencies. These include rusting and leaking on the metal roof as well as splits, breaks, rot, and insect damage to the wooden support system. These conditions are about the same for the upper bracing members. Ms. LaVigne said the wooden trusses have splits, breaks, and high moisture content and the steel beams have rust holes and advanced corrosion. The bridge approaches have drainage issues, resulting in some ponding. The bridge deck has some breaks and poor attachments. The two (2) bridge abutments have voids, spalling, and exposed rebar. Ms. LaVigne said the recommended rehabilitation options include repairing strengthening, and (in some cases) replacement of bridge members. It is recommended that new siding boards should be installed along with a new standing seam metal roof. Some of the bracing work needs to be replaced but the truss system will require only minimal replacements. The bridge's floor system should have its steel stingers replaced with new glulam beams. The bridge deck should be replaced with a glulam deck with new wooden curbing installed. The bridge's vertical clearance would be raised from 12'-10" to 13'-3". The bridge's east abutment would need to be replaced with reinforced concrete but the west abutment would require only some repairs. As with the previous bridge, once the rehabilitation work has been completed the bridge would be treated with insecticide, fungicide, and NOCHAR fire retardant. Nearby utilities would need to be relocated during the rehabilitation and there is the same option of either installing a temporary bridge or a traffic detour that would make use of Asetline Road. With the temporary bridge installed, the estimated cost of the project is about \$3,400,000 with Northfield covering about five percent (5%) of the total cost. Should the traffic detour be used instead, the project cost would drop to about \$3,000,000 with Northfield responsible for 2.5% of the total cost. Mr. Bicja said this bridge rehabilitation is more expensive than the previous one because one of the abutments needs replacement. He then asked if there were any questions or comments regarding this bridge project.

Travis Blodgett asked if the bridge's width would be narrowed. Ms. Bicja said the bridge approaches would remain the same but the bridge interior would be slightly narrowed due to the new wooden curbing. Ms. LaVigne said the new curbing would direct cars towards the middle part of the bridge interior. Pat Porter asked if this project is still planned for five (5) years from now. Ms. Stone confirmed that the current timeline is for the construction phase to start in 2031. Mr. Bicja said VTrans believes that all of these covered bridges are safe to travel at this time.

Mr. Bicja then started his presentation on the Northfield Falls Covered Bridge (AKA Bridge 15). This bridge was constructed in 1872 and was rehabilitated in 1942, 1968, and 1979. This is a Town Lattice Truss bridge that is 139' long with a 15'-5" horizontal clearance and 12' vertical clearance. Mr. Bicja said it has a reinforced concrete pier as well as stone and concrete abutments. This bridge also has an overall poor rating and the roofboards and rafters have splits, breaks, rot, and insect damage. The bracing and truss members have splits, breaks, rot, impact damage, and high moisture content. The steel beams have rusting and advanced corrosion. The bridge approaches have drainage issues that sometimes result in ponding. Mr. Bicja said the bridge's abutments and pier have voids, spalling, and exposed rebar. He noted that rehabilitation options include repair, strengthening, or replacement of bridge members depending on the extent of damage. VTrans does recommend that all existing siding boards should be replaced, a new standing seam metal roof be installed, and some of the rafters replaced. In addition, some (but not all) of the bridge upper bracing and trusses should be replaced. It also is recommended that the current deck be replaced with a glulam deck and that wooden curbs be added to the bridge's interior. The bridge's vertical clearance will increase from 12'-11" to 13'-9". Mr. Bicja said the bridge's east abutment will need to be replaced but the west abutment can be repaired. The bridge will be closed during this rehabilitation and there would be a detour route by way of nearby Chandler Road. Given the length of the bridge and the relatively short detour route, VTrans does not recommend that a temporary bridge be installed. As with the other bridges, some utilities will need to be relocated and the completed bridge treated with insecticide, fungicide, and fire retardant (NOCHAR). The estimated cost for this bridge rehabilitation is \$5,500,000 and Northfield would be responsible for 2.5% of this expense. Mr. Bicja then asked if there were any questions or concerns regarding this bridge.

Board member Shernock asked how wide the pedestrian lane would be on this bridge. Mr. Bicja said about two feet (2'), which is wider than on the other bridges. Jim Cannon lives very close to this bridge and is concerned about how his driveway would be affected by this project. Mr. Bicja said VTrans will work with the project contractor in order to maintain residents' driveway access most of the time but there may be some brief periods when driveways might not be accessible. If this is the case, they would provide advanced warning. Pat Porter also lives close to this bridge and is concerned about how the project right-of-way would affect her property. Ms. Stone said VTrans would hold meetings with impacted neighbors as the planning stage of this project proceeds. If there is lasting impact, some monetary compensation might be provided. The initial outreach would probably start in a couple of years.

Ms. LaVigne then discussed some possible options for future bridge protection after the rehabilitation has been completed. This could include a remote detection system that would identify oversized vehicles and warn the vehicle's operator to seek an alternate route. This system would be based on laser beams and would sound an alarm that would alert the driver to turn around. The system also could include cameras that would document the license plates of any violators causing damage. It would cost about \$125,000 to set up this advanced warning system for all three covered bridges. There probably would be additional maintenance costs as well as upgrade expenses in future years. Board member Petty asked if the town would be responsible for the full cost. Ms. Stone said some of the initial setup expense could be shared with VTrans but future maintenance costs would be a local responsibility. Ms. LaVigne then discussed the project timeline, starting with tonight's alternatives presentation (i.e. "Scoping Report, Summer 2026"). The contract plans are scheduled to be finalized by Fall 2029, the project RFP advertised in Fall 2030, and construction to begin in 2031.

Board member Petty noted that the cost estimates for this project are based on current prices. She asked how they would be affected by the fact that this project won't start for another five (5) years. Ms. Stone said VTrans usually anticipates that material, labor, and other project costs will increase about five percent (5%) each year. The years during and after the COVID-19 pandemic saw significantly higher cost increases due to supply chain disruptions, etc. They don't see this happening again in the next few years. In addition, since these covered bridges are considered to be significant historical structures important to the State of Vermont, Ms. Stone believes this timeline is feasible and will be followed. Chair Maxwell asked when the Select Board members could receive more accurate project cost estimates. Ms. Stone said nothing is really certain until the project bids are received in 2030. Until then the 5% rule is the best guesstimate they can provide. Brian Tisdale asked if any emergency repairs will need to be done before 2031. R. Bicja checked out the bridges himself before this meeting and noted some recently inflicted damage on the Upper Cox Brook Covered Bridge. It is likely that such impact damage will need to be repaired sooner. VTrans does perform annual inspections of these covered bridges and will inform the municipality if any new problems are found that require an immediate response. As he indicated earlier, VTrans considers these bridges safe for the travelling public. Chair Maxwell then thanked the representatives from VTrans and Hoyle Tanner for their presentation tonight.

- b. Royal DeLegge, Planning Commission Chair: Town Forest Overlay District. (7:48 p.m.)** At the last regular meeting (06/09/26), representatives from the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) and the Vermont Land Trust spoke about the long-term advantages of the municipality establishing a conservation easement for the Town Forest. It was noted such an action would forever protect the Town Forest from development but this would require permanent loss of local control over these lands. Chair Maxwell noted Planning Commission (PC) Chair Royal DeLegge had made a presentation to the Select Board members last year about the possibility of establishing an overlay district for the Town Forest and this alternative approach also was brought up at the last meeting. Chair Maxwell asked Mr. DeLegge to provide additional information about this tonight. Mr. DeLegge said he and the other PC members had been approached by the NCC in order to review options to provide additional protections for the Town Forest. Mr. DeLegge said the PC explored several options, which included doing nothing at this time as there is no immediate threat of commercial development in the Town Forest. The other options were to establish a conservation easement or an overlay district for the Town Forest. After some discussion, the PC members concurred that establishing an overlay district would be the best option and encouraged the Select Board members to pursue this. Mr. DeLegge said this course of action would provide real protections for the Town Forest and would only impact the municipal property now designated as Town Forest. This action would not require revising the local zoning ordinance but the relevant language could be incorporated into the ordinance text when it is next revised in a few years. Board member Petty asked if an overlay district would really provide additional protection for the Town Forest. Mr. DeLegge said an overlay district and a conservation easement would provide similar protections but the overlay would be under the control of the local government; a conservation easement would be under the control of an outside agency like the Vermont Land Trust. He added that once an easement has been established, it is very difficult if not impossible to revise its terms or terminate. Mr. DeLegge then asked if there were any questions.

Paul Dunkel said it seems like there is a strong public desire to protect the Town Forest in the long-term but a difference of opinion on how best to achieve this. He would prefer establishing an overlay district instead of a conservation easement that would be controlled by an outside agency. We cannot be sure how that agency would use that authority and there would be no future recourse. Kathleen Osgood held a different view as she had an easement established for some of her property and she felt the Vermont Land Trust has done a very good job of maintaining the property. Russ Barrett asked if there were any existing overlay districts in Northfield. Mr. DeLegge did not believe so as this is a fairly new instrument for protecting forested lands. Rodney Elmer noted that the municipality has a public water source in the Town Forest and it would not be a good idea to surrender control of it to an outside agency. He also did not see any immediate need to take action at this time. Mr. Elmer also noted that should Town Forest's tree resources be properly harvested, the funds accrued could be directed towards maintenance of our public lands. Mr. DeLegge said that the water supply area probably would be excluded from any district overlay or conservation easement.

Debbie Zuaro serves on the NCC and noted that she has been able to work with other interested residents to obtain about \$250,000 in grant funds (including the VOREC grant) that were used to improve the Town Forest trail system, install new signage in the Town Forest and around the community, etc. She would like the Select Board members to consider the significant advantages that establishing a Town Forest conservation easement would provide the community. Ms. Zuaro noted the Vermont Land Trust has said they would cover the legal and other expenses of establishing this easement and there are some outdoor recreation grants that are not available to communities without such easements in place. She believes this is a good opportunity to provide perpetual protection for the Town Forest. Board member Shernock asked if it were possible to establish overlay districts affecting some municipal property and conservation easements affecting others. Mr. DeLegge said that was possible. Nancy Peck felt establishing a conservation easement would not give up ownership of the property but would provide everlasting restrictions regarding future development, etc. She felt the municipality should be able to negotiate the conditions of the easement before it is approved. Ms. Peck is concerned that a future Select Board might not consider Town Forest protection to be a real priority.

David Mears is the NCC Chair and he spoke to the Select Board members at the last meeting of the many advantages of establishing a permanent conservation easement. He favors an easement over an overlay district because he felt the Vermont Land Trust has the resources to properly maintain and sustain forested lands. This is in contrast to the municipality, which has more limited resources for this purpose. Mr. Mears believes almost everyone would like to see the Town Forest protected in the long-term and would not like to see the community divided over the correct way to achieve this. He added that the NCC members do favor establishing a conservation easement but do not oppose the concept of an overlay district for the Town Forest. Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki said several Vermont towns do have overlay districts to manage their municipal forests and it has seemed to work well. He added that the municipality has adopted a Town Forest Stewardship Plan that specifies what activities are and are not permitted in the Town Forest, etc. Chair Maxwell feels this is an important decision for the community and he would like more information before the Select Board members take any action. He also felt that a decision of this magnitude perhaps should be subject to a public vote. This matter certainly will be revisited several times in coming months.

IV. LIQUOR COMMISSION (8:32 p.m.)

- a. **Liquor License Renewal: American Legion.** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. It was noted that the application indicated one of the applicants had traffic violations in 2022. The Select Board members asked why this information was included on the permit form. Manager Smith will ask Town Clerk Kim Pedley why the State of Vermont's Liquor Control Division feels the need to include this. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Outside Consumption Permit: American Legion.** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the outside consumption permit. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES (8:36 p.m.)

- a. **June 3, 2026 (Board Retreat).** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **June 9, 2026 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS (8:38 p.m.)

- a. **Approval of Warrant #24-26 & 24-26A-B.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve Warrant #24-26 & 24-26A-B in the amount of \$419,335.12. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Warrant #01-27A.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve Warrant #01-27A in the amount of \$46,151.89. This special warrant includes the payment of Washington County taxes and for an old water bond. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through June 7, 2026.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$97,656.82. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD (8:39 p.m.)

- a. **Approval of Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Town Road and Bridge Standards 2026.** Manager Smith said VTrans has updated its road and bridge standards and are asking for municipalities to approve them as well. It is possible for municipalities to have their own standards that exceed what VTrans has approved for itself. The major change in these standards is in the section "Drainage Crossings" and specifies that when culverts are replaced, the new culvert must be at least eighteen inches (18") in diameter. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the VTrans Town Road and Bridge Standards 2026. Chair Maxwell noted that these new requirements might compel the Select Board members to budget more each year for stormwater mitigation. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT (8:43 p.m.). Manager Smith provided a brief overview of her recent activities, which included another meeting of the group negotiating the initial union contract for Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) part-time employees. She also noted that the new Police Chief (Eric Nordenson) and Deputy Police Chief (Kevin Moulton) will begin working for Northfield on Tuesday, July 14, 2026. Manager Smith said the installation of new smart meters started this week and she has been working to finish up some FEMA projects.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS (8:45 p.m.)

- a. **Highway Concerns, etc.** Board member Davis expressed a number of highway maintenance concerns that need to be addressed soon. This included fixing the edges of Doyon Road, which was paved last year, beyond its intersection with Whetstone Drive. In addition, additional roadside mowing needs to be done as there are visibility problems on some of the backroads. In addition, last week's storm took down some trees and there still are some downed limbs along Little Northfield Road that need to be removed. Board member Davis said there remains some roadside debris from the recent paving projects on Water Street and Vine Street. Manager Smith said she spoke to the paving contractor about cleaning up the area. Board member Stevens suggested that it might be a good idea to hold a Highway Subcommittee meeting in the near future.
- b. **Financial Director Search.** Board member Stevens noted Norwich University recently hired a new Chief Financial Officer. He suggested that perhaps one of the finalists for this position could be approached as to whether they would be interested in the municipality's vacant financial director position.
- c. **Northfield Falls Amtrak Whistlestop.** Board member Shernock floated the idea of perhaps exploring the possibility of an Amtrak stop in Northfield Falls

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). (8:48 p.m.) There was none.

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION. (8:49 p.m.)

Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Shernock, that the Select Board finds premature public knowledge of attorney-client communications concerning a lawsuit would place the Select Board at a substantial disadvantage, including by potentially waiving attorney-client privilege and disclosing confidential information. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss legal matters with Manager Smith and Town Attorney John Klesch present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:00 p.m.

Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:33 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at: https://youtu.be/Ua_w9LkzCeU

These minutes are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.