

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of May 13, 2025

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Charles Morse (absent), Acting Chair Merry Shernock, Board members K. David Maxwell, Lydia Petty, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Geoffrey Ferrell (Geoffrey Ferrell Associates), Rick Chellman (TND Engineering), Niki Sabado (CVRPC), Niki Sabado (CVRPC), Susan Stillinger, Kaitlyn Keating, Carolyn Stevens, Martha Mahan, William Kolb, Nancy Peck, Tom Bright, Jeanne Bright, Clare LaFrance, Mary Naden Scott (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Tim Swartz (AWPS Task Force), Janan Hamm (AWPS Task Force), Delane McIlvene (AWPS Task Force), Freda Naden (AWPS Task Force), Michele Winters, Charles Winters, Cara Gauthier, George Fitch, Lorna Doney, Joe Wantuch (Northfield Energy Committee), Ryan Harlow, Erin Hicks-Tibbles, Jeremy Whalen (Town Forest Stewardship Committee), Anne Donahue, Patrick Meehan (Northfield Energy Committee), Krista Ward, Susan Barnard, Sheila Bannister, Gerard LaVarnway, Laurie Beth Putnam, Pam Ricker, and Elroy C. Hill.

Acting Chair Shernock called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Acting Chair Shernock said Sally Davidson was scheduled to address the Select Board members tonight on behalf of the Northfield Community Flag Project but was unable to attend. She will be added to a future agenda. Also, given the large number of persons present in the room, Acting Chair Shernock would like to move unscheduled public participation up on the agenda in case anyone has anything they would like to bring to the Select Board members' attention. There was no objection.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Geoffrey Ferrell: Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) update.** Acting Chair Shernock said Mr. Ferrell and his team held a series of public meetings and workshops this past January in order to present the concept of smart planning to the Northfield community. At this time, Mr. Ferrell and his associate Rick Chellman would like to provide a brief overview of their Community Vision Plan Report. The full report is available online at <https://spaces.hightail.com/space/26W5EnS6te> and on the municipal website at <https://www.northfield-vt.gov/plans>. He added that about seventy (70) people participated in the January meetings and workshops and he thought this was an impressive turnout. Mr. Ferrell said this report is nearly complete although there might be some minor tweaks in future. Now that the report is almost finished, the next step would be to implement its proposals by working with the municipality to help revise local zoning regulations in order to encourage smart development. Such development also would be in accordance with the community goals stated in the Northfield Town Plan (2020-2028). During his time in Northfield, Mr. Ferrell was impressed by the way Northfield's urban and rural environments intersect and one focus of this policy would be to encourage local economic growth while also protecting downtown neighborhoods, rural areas, etc. At the January workshops, one exercise was to ask residents what they would and would not like to see in regard to future development in Northfield. Part of this exercise was to cover a map of Northfield with a plastic sheet and have people sketch in the changes they would like to see. The residents who participated in these workshops did express a clear preference for a more walkable and connected community; downtown development; establishment of a community center; and additional affordable housing units. Mr. Ferrell said part of the Vision Plan is to create a "mobility network" that would allow residents to travel the downtown area and adjacent areas without requiring an automobile. There already is a local initiative to create a "Riverwalk" trail that would follow the Dog River as it bisects the downtown. There also could be measures taken for improved personal mobility in the Northfield Falls area that would allow for easier and safer pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Mr. Ferrell said there also is an illustrative plan for Northfield Falls that would fill in now vacant lots with mixed-use structures. This would include a push to convert Vermont Route 12 there into a type of "Main Street" rather than the high speed highway it often becomes at rush hours. Mr. Ferrell said another option for Northfield Falls would be to make use some of the current vacant space for building smaller houses, i.e. "cottages."

Mr. Ferrell then discussed some possible livability improvements for Central Street. He said this long stretch of the road with good distance visibility does encourage drivers to travel at higher levels of speed, which can present dangers to pedestrians and bicyclists. The report suggests some measures that could be taken to calm the traffic there, which includes planting additional trees on the roadside to limit long distance visibility and installing some "squeeze points" that would require drivers to slow down to accommodate approaching vehicles. In addition, pedestrian crossings could be raised slightly to slow down traffic. This could be an alternative to the current speed bumps. The report also has suggestions for East Street where public parking is relatively scarce. Mr. Ferrell said by rearranging current parking spaces and by recategorizing restricted parking spaces for general use, the number of public parking spaces in the area could be increased from eighty-two (82) to one hundred and thirty-five (135). There also are a number of concerns on Depot Square with what appears to be an excessive amount of roadway asphalt beyond what is needed for vehicular traffic. Mr. Ferrell said this could be alleviated by increasing the Common green space outwards and by moving curbs closer together. Another possibility would be to add new floors to existing buildings in order to create new housing units, etc. In addition, the parking area behind Depot Square (i.e., Holland Place) is designed inefficiently. With a proper redesign of the parking area, the current sixty (60) spaces could be increased to ninety-seven (97).

Mr. Ferrell said Wall Street is an important connector road that joins the Depot Square area with the neighborhoods on Water Street and beyond. He felt this currently is an underutilized area that could host additional structures on both sides of the street. This also could be a good location for a future community center. This area has good views of the Dog River and new housing units could be built there to take advantage of this. Filling in some of the vacant space by the current Green Mountain Apartments could roughly double the number of housing units there while also providing sufficient parking spaces for new residents. Mr. Ferrell noted much of this potential growth area is already municipal property that should be used more efficiently. Freight Yard Way is another underutilized downtown area providing opportunity for future smart growth. Given its proximity to the Dog River, this could become a high value real estate area with new river view housing developments that could be connected to Depot Square with tree-lined streets. The area north of the Main Street Bridge is another area with potential smart growth opportunities. The current vacant lots could be better utilized with high-rise buildings with pleasant river views as well as Main Street frontage.

Mr. Ferrell then provided a brief overview of how these smart growth conceptions could be implemented. He again noted the importance of tree-lined streets as traffic calming measures that improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. This would be especially helpful in Northfield Falls. When the municipal sewer lines are expanded to this area, that would be a good opportunity to install wider sidewalks and (perhaps) dedicated bicycle lanes. In addition to Northfield Falls, there are other parts of the community (i.e., Wall Street, North Main Street, South Main Street, Central Street, etc.) that would benefit from such traffic calming measures as squeeze points, etc.

Mr. Ferrell then discussed "Building Character," which would be an attempt through revised zoning regulations to have new buildings match their appearance with that of existing adjacent buildings. However, he did not feel there had to be strict rules about this and exceptions could be allowed. In the downtown area, Mr. Ferrell felt building height should be limited to four and one-half (4½) floors, which would match the height of the Mayo Block. As for "Overarching Issues," Mr. Ferrell said the Vision Plan would strongly encourage smart growth and in the long run the enabling measures would pay for themselves by expanding the local tax base. There also needs to be a master plan developed that would better coordinate the long-term plans of the community with the short-term plans of potential developers seeking relatively quick returns on their investments. Mr. Ferrell felt many favorable local factors made this a good time for new development in the Northfield community. He added that he will be making future presentations to the Select Board members that would include recommendations for specific revisions to our zoning regulations in order to encourage smart growth.

The Select Board members had no questions for Mr. Ferrell at this time but all expressed their gratitude for his Vision Plan presentation for an improved Northfield community.

Joe Wantuch is the Chair of the Northfield Energy Committee and he has addressed the Select Board members before about the benefits of including Thermal Energy Networks (TENS) as integral parts of any future community development plans. Any new structures will need to be heated and cooled and installing these TENS would improve the community in the long run by providing clean energy while lowering energy costs.

Acting Chair Shernock said the process for smart community development is a marathon and not a sprint. It will be important to keep in contact with Mr. Ferrell and his associates regarding what measures should be pursued locally to make this a reality.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Ryan Harlow: Public Information Request.** Mr. Harlow has submitted to Manager Schulz a public information request regarding a letter from Police Chief Pierre Gomez to Manager Schulz regarding "repeated instances of racial injustice in the workplace." Mr. Harlow said he was initially assured by Manager Schulz that he would receive the requested information in due course but was later was informed that based on legal advice Manager Schulz had received subsequently, this communication was classified as "privileged information" that could not be publicly disclosed. Mr. Harlow strongly disagrees with this interpretation of Vermont public information law and hopes that this decision will be reconsidered. Mr. Harlow believes that it is in the public interest that there be full transparency in this matter so that Northfield residents can be made aware of the serious allegations of widespread racism in this community.
- b. **Lorna Doney: Lynn Doney Dismissal.** Although there has been no official announcement from the municipality, Ms. Doney has heard that Lynn Doney has been dismissed from his employment with the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS). Ms. Doney believes this action is in direct response to Mr. Doney's statement at a recent Select Board meeting that when Chief Gomez wears a hooded sweatshirt rather than his uniform while on duty, Chief Gomez looks more like a "gangster" than a police officer. Ms. Doney believes this dismissal is unfair as everyone should be given a second chance in such circumstances. She also believes other community members have made racial slurs at Select Board meetings without facing similar consequences.
- c. **Sarah Path: Recent Racist Incidents.** Ms. Path believes that racism is an ever-present problem in this community and she provided a list of recent examples to support this view. This included a black child being told to "go back to Africa" by schoolmates; the aforementioned statement that Chief Gomez looked like a "gangster" for wearing a hoodie while on duty; a publicly displayed flag that denigrated the Black Lives Matter movement; a black child being told "that's your father" when a unrelated black man passed by a group of children; a black child being called the N-word while on a school bus; and a multi-racial family being subjected to racial epithets by a passing driver. Ms. Path noted some of these incidents involved racial slurs made by children, which raises the question of where and by whom were they taught such behavior was acceptable. At other times, adults directed racist language at children, which raises another issue: where can these children go for relief in this community. Ms. Path said one vital step that should be taken immediately to address such horrendous incidents would be for the Select Board members to be more vocal in their support for Chief Gomez and in their condemnation of such racist behavior in the Northfield community.

V. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. **Liquor License Renewals**
 1. **Falls General Store.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
 2. **NU Beverage (i.e., Convenience Plus).** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **April 22, 2025 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Acting Chair Shernock felt there should be some amended language regarding some of the public statements made during this meeting. The additions will be made. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

- b. **April 29, 2025 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. **May 8, 2025 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #21-25 & #21-25A-E.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to approve Warrant #21-25 & #21-25A-E in the amount of \$872,679.92. Board member Stevens noted some “No Engine Brake” road signs have been purchased. He asked if they have been installed. Manager Schulz said he has asked Highway Foreman Karl Bailey to make their installation a priority after they are delivered. Board member Stevens also noted a number of repair bills for the 2014 Western Star truck. Manager Schulz will provide a full summary of recent repair expenses for this vehicle for the next regular meeting. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through April 27, 2025.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$115,252.49. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) Appointment.** Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Susan Stillinger to the Northfield Conservation Commission. It was noted that with this appointment, the NCC will expand from seven (7) to eight (8) members. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Mud Season Road Closures.** Board member Maxwell said Chair Morse had asked that this item be added to tonight’s agenda due to a number of resident complaints regarding the long period (6-8 weeks) when Lovers Lane and Aseltine Road were closed to through traffic this spring. Chair Morse felt this was too long a timeframe for such road closures and had constituted a severe inconvenience to the travelling public. He also felt that such a prolonged Mud Season road closure should be a Select Board decision. Manager Schulz said Lovers Lane was reopened yesterday (05/12/25). This had been delayed a few times due to muddy conditions caused by recent rainstorms along with significant damage caused by large trucks tearing up the road. Manager Schulz would like a more proactive action taken next spring with the installation of “Jersey Barriers” that will prevent larger vehicles from accessing the road. The “Road Closed” signage put up this year was insufficient. Manager Schulz believes Aseltine Road also has been reopened. Its prolonged closure was due to deep mud and ruts that Mr. Bailey felt justified this.
- c. **Approval of Condemnation Hearing.** Manager Schulz said part of the Main Street Bridge Replacement Project requires the realignment of waterlines on an adjacent property: 73 North Main Street. This is the location of the Cumberland Farms convenience store and gas station. The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has been engaged in negotiations to obtain an easement from the property owner for a couple of years but the negotiations have reached a stalemate. Due to the urgent timing for this utility work, VTrans has requested that the Select Board members initiate the process for holding a property condemnation hearing for the affected strip of property. The hearing would be tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, June 3, 2025 and VTrans representatives will be present along with the Town Attorney. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to initiate proceedings to condemn a portion of the property known as 73 North Main Street for use in construction related to the removal and replacement of the Main Street Bridge as part of Transportation Project Northfield BF 0241(58) and to determine any damages sustaining by owners or interested persons to the 73 North Main Street property. **Motion passed 4-0-0.** Manager Schulz said quite often these matters are resolved before the condemnation hearing is held because at that time the compensation amount to be provided to the property owner reverts back to the original offer amount.
- d. **Common Project Recommendations.** At the most recent meeting (04/09/25) of the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee (Board members Shernock and Stevens), the priority list for the Town Common Rehabilitation Project was discussed in full. Board member Stevens said the current priority list is as follows: 1. Restore the kiosk to Depot Square; 2. Install bulb out(s); 3. Add additional curb cuts; and 4. Install sidewalk to the Common’s west end while widening the sidewalk on the Common exterior.

Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the subcommittee members' recommendations for Town Common Rehabilitation Project priority list. Board member Maxwell would like a full Select Board discussion at a future meeting regarding possible funding sources for this project as well as a timeline for the work to be done. Board member Petty would like a full discussion on the proposal that the DuBois & King consultants provided to the Select Board members last October. She also favored hiring an engineer to provide up-to-date cost estimates for the various components of the rehabilitation proposal. Board member Petty then expressed her appreciation for all the hard work that Board member Shernock, Board member Stevens, and various others have put into this project. Acting Chair Shernock said the kiosk/bus stop should be restored to Depot Square this year as it connects the community to Green Mountain Transit (GMT) by showing our strong local commitment to public transportation. Board member Petty doesn't see the kiosk as part of the Town Common Rehabilitation Project and believes it should be treated as a separate matter. Board member Maxwell said it is possible to site the kiosk at a temporary location on Depot Square until its final landing spot is determined. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Main Street Water Line and Cheney Field Water Tank Replacement Projects.** Manager Schulz said the contractor for the water line project installed temporary water lines this past week. Excavation of the road for future trench work should start next week. The tank replacement contractor plans to start working on improving the project's access road next week. The contractor has reached an agreement with Norwich University (NU) to enter NU property to create a staging area for this project. Board member Petty is concerned about possible damage to Cheney Field itself. She has heard that the contractor plans to create a new road across the field rather than merely widen the current ones. Board member Petty would like better future communication between the municipality and the project contractor on this.
- b. Vine Street Sidewalk Project.** Manager Schulz said the sidewalk work would start on May 19, 2025. Letters were sent to residents in the project area to inform them of the full scope of the project and possible traffic delays.
- c. Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Union.** Manager Schulz said that the Town Attorney has informed the Vermont Labor Relations Board that the municipality has agreed to a consent election. Mailed ballots must be returned by June 10, 2025. If a majority of NAS employees support the creation of a bargaining unit, the municipality will begin negotiating a contract with it afterwards.
- d. Turkey Hill Resurfacing Project.** Manager Schulz said the gravel resurfacing of Turkey Hill Road will start on June 2, 2025 and should take a couple of weeks to complete. Acting Chair Shernock hopes that better material will be used this time as there have been several complaints about tires being damaged by sharp material. Manager Schulz said the plan is to use smaller stone this time with fewer sharp edges.
- e. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Reporting.** Manager Schulz said the ARPA fund spending compliance report has been filed and it clearly shows that all the federal funds were properly designated before the December 31, 2024 deadline.
- f. Smart Meters.** Manager Schulz reposted that all nine (9) data collection units have been installed on existing utility poles in the community. Installation of the smart meters should start this November.
- g. Wall Street Pedestrian Improvements Project.** Manager Schulz said the grant award letter from the State of Vermont has finally been received. A kickoff meeting for this project will be scheduled in the coming weeks.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Town Common Picnic Tables, etc.** Board member Maxwell asked when the picnic tables, chairs, etc. would be reinstalled on the Town Common. Manager Schulz said the tables, chairs, and community banners should be in place by next week. Board member Stevens would like the picnic tables repainted before they are put back in place. Manager Schulz said that would be done.

- b. VOREC Trail Signage Installation.** Board member Petty said since spring has finally arrived here, the new Town Forest trail signage purchased with VOREC grant funds is being installed. VOREC Grant Implementation Committee members Andrew Padilla and Colin Bright have worked hard on the installation process. Board member Petty also wanted to thank VOREC Committee Chair Debbie Zuaro for first applying for the grant funds and for her subsequent leadership in helping determine how best to use the funds.
- c. Community Room Mural.** Board member Stevens received an email from Northfield Middle School teacher Leslie Striebe that included the proposed design for the mural to be painted at the back of the Community Room. Manager Schulz said he has been in communication with Ms. Striebe about this and it now looks like the mural will be completed before the end of this school year.
- d. VTrans Culvert Replacement Grants.** Board member Stevens asked if Northfield received any VTrans funds to address the problems of stormwater hitting the backroads. Manager Schulz confirmed the municipality did receive these funds this year and he is working with Mr. Bailey to determine on which roads the funds should be spent.
- e. Northfield Municipal Employee Announcements.** Acting Chair Shernock noted that bookkeeper Deb O'Grady will be retiring after over thirty (30) years employed in our Accounting Department. She wished Ms. O'Grady well with her retirement and said she would be missed. Acting Chair Shernock also announced the Northfield Highway Department has hired a new employee: Nickolas Doyle. Mr. Doyle will start work next Monday. Board member Maxwell asked how many vacancies now remain in the Highway Department. Manager Schulz said there was still one vacant position.
- f. Emergency Pet Sheltering.** Acting Chair Shernock said the Select Board members received an email from the Central Vermont Disaster Animal Response Team asking if the municipality had plans in place for sheltering pets during natural disaster evacuations. As there now is no current plan, Acting Chair Shernock would like one developed and included in the Local Emergency Management Plan. Board member Petty felt it was important to have a plan in place as some residents will refuse to evacuate their homes in an emergency without assurance their pets will be properly sheltered.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Elroy C. Hill: Road Resurfacing Engineer.** Mr. Hill thought it might be a good idea to hire an engineer to design the resurfacing of our backroads as he has not been pleased with the local decisions made recently.
- b. Elroy C. Hill: Town Common Rehabilitation Project.** Mr. Hill feels it should be more of a priority to fix our downtown sidewalks, many of which are in very bad condition, before spending large amounts of money rehabilitating the Town Common.

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

The Board went into executive session at 9:50 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 10:07 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 10:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at: <https://youtu.be/2JVcOUcbSJQ>

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