

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of August 11, 2022**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Economic Development Director Tom Davis, Committee Member Chalie Morse, and Committee Member Lydia Petty.
- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled): None.**
- III. DISCUSSION**
- a.** Mr. Schulz brought the meeting to order commenting on the regular meetings Mr. Davis has conducted to keep Mr. Schulz informed and how the potential for opportunities for Northfield is unusually abundant. Mr. Davis discussed the process of using a project management product called Trello to keep track of all ED projects and inform the committee.
 - b. Review of completed projects.** Mr. Davis announced the **Northfield Business Guide** is live online at northfieldvtbusinessguide.org. He complimented Natalie Kozlowski, site developer, for her excellent work and help after completion. Feedback has been positive.
 - c. Northfield Business Directory,** which is also part of the Business Guide, is also live and has about 70 businesses listed to date. Additions of new businesses continue. Mr. Davis explained the search mechanism that allows visitors to search by word.
 - d. Revolving Loan Fund** - Mr. Davis reported that the Northfield Revolving Loan fund guidelines and applications are now posted on the town website and the town is ready to accept applications from local businesses. The next step is to promote the availability of the Loan Fund. Ms. Petty suggested that the promotional strategy should include, particularly of the new Business Directory, making clear that the town has yet to find and post all Northfield businesses and to make sure those businesses know they are welcome and that, if they contact the town, their businesses will be added to the Directory as soon as possible.
 - e. Efficiency Vermont** – Mr. Davis reported on a local resident who owns a property with three apartments on-premise along with a local business. The resident was looking for any assistance he could receive for making improvements on another unit on the property that could be transformed into an additional apartment, as well as financial assistance with the installation of a new heating/cooling system for the entire complex that used an alternative to fossil fuels. Mr. Davis connected the resident directly to a person in the Vermont Grants department as well as a representative from Efficiency Vermont to learn more about low-interest loans for HVAC replacement projects

- f. Margaret Holland Inn** – Mr. Davis has been working with the owner of the Margaret Holland Inn on South Main Street. The Inn was shuttered by fire inspectors even after the owner spent thousands of dollars on new fire detection and alarm system and other fire safety improvement. The inspectors were, in the owner’s opinion, setting unreasonable standards for the owner to re-open. Mr. Davis was able to get the regional fire safety inspector to meet with the owner and Mr. Davis on the property, where Mr. Davis, a former general contractor, was able to prove that three of the Inn’s rooms, which were shut down due to lack of sufficiently sized egress windows, were actually compliant. The regional manager agreed and made other provisions to that allowed the owner to reopen with an assurance of completing a small checklist of improvements within a reasonable time period. Ms. Petty suggested that it might be valuable to have an intermediary who could work with landlords, tenants, and government officials to find a resolution in the event of a dispute. Mr. Schulz noted that some of the bigger Vermont communities get federal dollars for that type of position. Mr. Morse said he used to act in that role when he was Northfield’s town manager. Mr. Schulz has also assisted local residents with these types of issues as a service. Mr. Morse asked if there should be a landlord-tenant link because the state is well into these issues. Ms. Petty pointed out that there is a lot of information available through the state.
- g. Google Analytics** – Mr. Davis reported that the town website and the Business Guide now have Google Analytics installed to monitor engagement. Current analytics provided by WIX estimate that the town website receives between 2,000 and 2,500 visitors per month. Mr. Morse asked if Norwich has a link to the town of Northfield on their sites. Mr. Davis said he would look into it.
- h. Northfield Marketing Plan** – Mr. Davis reported that he is not ready to present a marketing plan yet because a number of projects the town is working on currently will strengthen the plan upon completion. Mr. Morse asked if it is worthwhile to go to businesses in town that have websites and ask if they are willing to put a link to the town on their sites. Mr. Davis agreed it was and said he would contact them.
- i. La Panciata** – Mr. Davis reported his work with the owner of La Panciata to obtain funding from the Vermont Training Program for new employees and current employees who could learn to operate additional equipment at the business. The company qualifies but the issue of finding new employees continues to hinder many companies in town from moving forward.
- j. Brownfield Sites** – Mr. Davis reported on previously identified potential brownfield sites in town and clarified that some of those businesses are not listed in the state registry as a brownfield site.

- k. **Act 250** – Mr. Davis reported on the application to convert Northfield from a 1-acre town designation to a 10-acre town, which is allowed because the town has both zoning bylaws and a zoning administrator. Mr. Davis spoke to an Act 250 state attorney who said she had no reason to believe the town’s request would be denied. This would be highly advantageous to the community in future development. Discussion ensued by all parties as to how the town received the 1-acre designation, which is not clearly known.
- l. **Gray Building, Housing, and Land** – Mr. Davis reported that he is working with various groups and individuals who have expressed an interest in housing developments on various parcels in Town.
- m. **Community News Hub** – Mr. Davis reported that the news hub is ready to launch. He spoke with several communities about how they manage their news feeds to provide their community with the most accurate information about town operations, events, and related information. The news hub will include an official town government Facebook page which will have clear rules on what type of comments will be accepted and what will not be permitted. The news will also be posted in a news section of the town website.
- n. **Designated Village Center Application** – Mr. Davis reported that the application for the revised Designated Village Center was returned for small additions such as color vs black and white photos. The edited application will be submitted by the deadline of September 5, 2022.
- o. **Northfield Dog Park** – Previously officials at the state who interface with FEMA expressed concerns that the land the town has designated for a dog park would not be permitted because of the installation of a chain link fence around the park property, which could become a hazard if dislocated in a flood. Mr. Davis revised the application and site plan to install a “no dig” fence which could quickly be removed if a severe weather warning was issued over the town. The application has been resubmitted. Ms. Petty asked about the aesthetics of the fencing, given the property is highly visible from Water Street. Mr. Davis reported that no dig fences are more attractive than chain link fences.
- p. **Earthwise Global** – Mr. Davis is working with the proprietor of Earthwise Global, who has developed an agricultural technology that has resulted in contracts with the USDA and the country of Iraq. The owner works with Norwich University and would like to keep his growing business in Northfield if possible. He is working with Mr. Davis on a potential grant from the new Elevate Vermont program.
- q. **Mureta’s Butcher Shop** – Mr. Davis has been working with Chris Mureta on a grant to fund Mureta’s goal to become a USDA-certified slaughterhouse. Mr. Davis identified funding potential from the Vermont Working Farms grant program and is assisting Mr. Mureta with his grant application and interface with grant representatives.

- r. **VEDA Funding for Local Businesses** – Mr. Davis reported on a forgivable loan fund for businesses that continued to sustain losses in the previous year due COVID related problems. This fund works much like previous business funding. Mr. Davis is going to disseminate information to alert local businesses of this opportunity.
- s. **Northfield Amtrak Station** – Mr. Davis is working with Amtrak to reopen the Northfield station as a stop on the Vermonter line. Initial and informal responses from Amtrak cited doubts of the town being able to provide enough ridership to merit the stop, but Mr. Davis is working with Norwich University, which is highly supportive of reopening the station for its students and employees. Mr. Davis is also garnering the support of Governor Scott and Vermont’s representatives in Washington. A full packet, including a formal request and supporting documents, will be submitted when completed. Mr. Morse pointed out that one obstacle is that trains leaving Northfield from a full stop have to regain momentum for an uphill portion of track south of the town, which is “a huge fuel slug.” Mr. Davis will attempt to gather more data on the fuel impact on Amtrak compared to the additional ridership revenue.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled) There was none.

V. ADJOURNMENT The subcommittee was adjourned at 3:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas G. Davis

Thomas G. Davis

Economic Development Director and Acting Clerk