

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of January 6, 2026

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Charles Morse, Board members K. David Maxwell, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Steve Mackenzie (Interim Town Manager), Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Peter J. DeMasi (Fire Chief), Karl Bailey (Highway Foreman), Kristin Pollard, Brian Massey Jr., Tim Davis, Dave Hanna, Gary Circosta, Lorna Doney, Karen Trombly, Don Doyon, Gerard LaVarnway, KS Ward, and Elroy C. Hill.

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

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

III. DISCUSSION

a. Proposed FY 2026/2027 Town Budget

- 1. Town General Revenue.** Chair Morse started with an overview of projected municipal non-tax revenue for the next fiscal year. Most of the line items were level-funded from the current fiscal year but there were some limited changes. Those with significant increases include Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) fees (\$907,000 to \$1,200,000), the amount of the annual Norwich University (NU) gift to the municipality (\$235,000 to \$242,050), Accounting Department fees (\$134,630 to \$152,620), and Interest on Investments (\$40,000 to \$60,000). The total anticipated non-tax revenue amount is budgeted to increase from \$1,472,240 to \$1,758,610 (19.5% increase) in the next fiscal year. Board member Petty noted that the Select Board budgeted to provide free swimming lessons to Northfield residents last summer. She asked if that would continue this coming summer. Board member Shernock noted that some people who signed up for free lessons did not actually show up for them. She felt some mechanism should be created to prevent that happening again.

- 2. Northfield Fire Department (NFD).** Chair Morse said the NFD Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budgets will be discussed tonight. A review of the operations and maintenance (O&M) budget will take place at another time. The only NFD CIP account is for Building Improvements and that budget currently has a \$7,516 balance with \$5,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. In subsequent years, the annual addition will drop to \$2,500. NFD Chief Peter J. DeMasi said there were no plans for the funds at this time but he would like to build up this account's balance for when the funds are needed. There are future plans to eventually upgrade the Fire Station bathrooms.

In the NFD CEP budget, Chief DeMasi said the department's fire hoses were tested this past year and it was found that a number of the reserve hoses were too old to be recertified and had to be replaced. As a result, this line item will have a one-time increase from \$5,000 to \$43,000 in the next fiscal year. Chair Morse noted that the other CEP accounts were mostly level-funded from the current fiscal year. The funding for the purchase of replacement NFD vehicles is spread over several years. Chair Morse asked if the 1993 Tanker Truck could be sold. Chief DeMasi said the truck is still used on occasion and probably wouldn't bring in much money if sold.

Board member Maxwell noted that the replacement cost for fire vehicles has increased dramatically in recent years so it is probable that the estimated costs listed in the budget are no longer realistic. Perhaps those figures should be updated to better reflect reality. Finance Director Baroffio said that in the past, the intention was to budget for about half of the replacement vehicle's cost and to borrow for the remainder. That has not been possible in recent years due to the much higher costs to which Board member Maxwell referred. Ms. Baroffio said it might be desirable to set aside additional funds each year in order to reduce the future debt load. Manager Mackenzie said that in many cases when replacement vehicles are ordered, they are not actually delivered for a couple of years. This also makes it difficult to budget these purchases in advance. Chief DeMasi added that it probably isn't feasible to extend the service lives of the current NFD fleet. Board member Maxwell thought it would be prudent to increase future contributions in these vehicle replacement CIP accounts to better match actual purchase prices. Ms. Baroffio said the current budget has decreased the total NFD CEP amount from \$141,190 to 118,190 in FY 2030-2031; perhaps that decrease can be postponed or eliminated. Another option is to use previous year surplus funds. Ms. Baroffio said in terms of fairness it does make sense to borrow to fund the purchase of emergency vehicles as it will be future residents who will benefit from improved fire protection. She added that putting aside Highway CIP funds aside for the local match amount for the Main Street Bridge Replacement Project makes it difficult to fund other projects and/or purchases without raising property taxes too high. It has been suggested that the local match amount could be bonded and thereby spread over several years. In the meantime, the funds already accumulated could be used for other projects. Ms. Baroffio added that the current balance of surplus funds is about \$600,000 with some of this being converted ARPA funds. Chair Morse then thanked Chief DeMasi for attending tonight's meeting and for providing his budget recommendations. Board member Maxwell asked if the NFD had any pressing needs at this time. Chief DeMasi did not have any concerns as the NFD fleet is in generally good shape and there are no staffing problems.

3. **Highway Department.** Chair Morse said tonight's discussion will focus on the Highway Department CIP and CEP budgets. Discussion of the department's operations and maintenance (O&M) budget will take place at a later time. A major expense in the Highway CIP budget is setting aside funds for the maintenance of all the municipal-owned bridges. This budget is split between unnamed minor bridges as well as the larger bridges including Main Street Bridge, the covered bridges, Rabbit Hollow Road Bridge, etc. There is a \$6,515 balance in the account for minor bridges and \$31,000 would be added to this in the next fiscal year. Highway Foreman Bailey said these funds would be used to repair two (2) bridges on Chamberlin Road and another on Monti Road. These bridges all have corroded support beams and at least one is starting to sag. New I-beams will be installed on them. Board member Maxwell asked if local bridges can be considered municipal assets and therefore have their maintenance expenses financed over several years. Ms. Baroffio said that was possible with voter authorization.

The Main Street Bridge Replacement Project local match budget now has a \$309,970 balance with \$150,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. The local match amount is five percent (5%) of total project costs, which is now estimated at about \$12,000,000. Chair Morse noted that this project has been delayed twice already and this has considerably increased the total cost estimate given higher labor and material costs. He suggested reallocating some of the current balance for other purposes and then bonding to obtain the full local match amount. This might require voter approval. Ms. Baroffio said Northfield voters already approved the creation of this reserve fund so it might be confusing to them that the fund would be reallocated this way. She added that it might have been a good idea to bond this expense from the beginning but changing this now might cause other problems. Ms. Baroffio is unsure but does believe that CIP funds set aside for bridge maintenance can be shifted between different bridges without the need for a public vote. She will check on this. If a public vote is required, Chair Morse wondered whether it would be better to hold it this year or wait until next year when we would have a better idea of the total cost of the bridge replacement project. Manager Mackenzie thought it might make better sense to wait until we are certain that the project actually will happen next year and also have firm numbers for the project costs and the local match amount. Chair Morse noted that \$207,000 is being budgeted for the Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge in the next fiscal year. There also are two (2) bridges on Vermont Route 12 south of Lovers Lane that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) said need to be repaired over the next couple of years. Funds have been budgeted for these bridges but we probably need updated engineering reports to see if the current account balances are sufficient.

Chair Morse said Highway CIP funds will be allocated for any repairs to the footbridges located on Water Street and Wall Street. The Sign & Post budget has been moved to the Highway Department O&M budget. In the next fiscal year, Highway CIP funds will be budgeted for Retaining Walls (\$25,000), sidewalks (\$30,000), and for drainage (\$5,000). The budget for road paving will be increased from \$190,000 to \$225,000 in the next fiscal year. The roads now planned for repaving are Gillespie Road, Robinson Road, and Old Mill Hill Road. There is a current balance of \$65,186 in the Gravel Resurface budget with an additional \$90,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. Mr. Bailey plans to use these funds to resurface two (2) different backroads this coming summer.

In the Highway CEP budget, Chair Morse said the two (2) 2018 Dodge Ram trucks will be replaced in the next fiscal year. The estimated cost of each new vehicle is \$180,000 and there will be sufficient funds in their respective CIP accounts after about \$55,000 is added to each account in the next fiscal year. Mr. Bailey said the new Western Star tandem dump trucks are already on order but they will not be delivered until Autumn 2026 at the earliest. The Salt Truck is scheduled for replacement in FY 2028-2029 and Mr. Bailey would prefer to replace the current one with a heavier duty vehicle. He will obtain a quote for this so that the budget can be adjusted if necessary. We are also budgeting for the scheduled replacement of two (2) loaders, a grader, and the sidewalk machine. The funds required (\$47,500) to replace the traffic signal have already been budgeted and the work was supposed to have been done last year. We will try to get that done as soon as possible this year.

The Highway CEP budget for the purchase and/or maintenance of in-vehicle radios will increase from \$3,000 to \$8,000 in the next fiscal year. Mr. Bailey explained that some of the current radios are obsolete and this makes it difficult sometimes for the Highway crew members to communicate with each other on the backroads. The \$8,000 will cover the purchase price of two (2) new radios. The tire machine balancing unit needs to be replaced and \$4,000 has been budgeted for this. The cost of this is about \$9,000 and there already is a \$5,040 balance in this CEP account. Ms. Baroffio will add additional funds for the maintenance of the tire machine itself. Chair Morse noted that no new funds are being set aside for the replacement of the roadside mower. The current plan is to outsource roadside mowing when the current machine becomes inoperable. Board member Maxwell asked if the municipality budgets for the full amount of Highway equipment replacement costs. Ms. Baroffio said we have been able to do this for several years. Mr. Bailey thought it would be a good idea to establish a seven (7) year service life for highway vehicles rather than the current eight (8) or nine (9). He felt that way these vehicles would stay under warranty and this would allow us to avoid costly repair bills as much as possible. Board member Maxwell said such a change might result in having to purchase numerous new vehicles in the same fiscal year. Ms. Baroffio said in addition to the possibility of lower repair costs, lowering the expected vehicle service life would significantly increase the vehicle's trade-in value. Ms. Baroffio will provide updated budget regarding how this change would affect the current Highway CEP budget. Manager Mackenzie asked if the municipality has ever looked into leasing highway vehicles. Ms. Baroffio said this has been tried before but the budgeting impact was less than impressive.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).

- a. Dave Hanna: Union Brook Road Safety Problem.** Mr. Hanna said a Union Brook Road resident is now parking numerous vehicles in the road and this is creating a serious safety hazard for drivers. Mr. Hanna was recently rear-ended by another driver when he slowed down to try to navigate around the obstruction. He would like something to be done about this. Chair Morse said he has been aware of this problem for some time and has been working with the legal experts at the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) on possible solutions. This concern will be on the next regular meeting agenda (01/13/26) and Chair Morse will present what he has learned. There is a possibility of putting "No Parking" signs at this location, which might require an amendment to the local traffic ordinance. There also is the prospect that current state law already covers this situation. Mr. Hanna will be pleased if something is done to directly address this hazardous situation.

V. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at: <https://youtu.be/Ib5104TM-L8>

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of January 13, 2026.