

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD PUBLIC HEARING & REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of February 27, 2024

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty (absent), Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Naomi Johnson (Dufresne Group), Andrew Padilla (Norwich University), Lisa Burr (Feed Every Need), Maryann Beaupré (Central Vermont Community Harvest), Heather Slayton (Washington County Mental Health Services), Timothy Bradshaw (Green Mountain Transit), Yvonne Lory (Capstone Community Action), Angie (Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice), Kaitlyn Keating (Northfield Community Development Network [NCDN]), Dan Anderson (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Tim Schwartz (AWPS Task Force), Delane McIlvene (AWPS Task Force), Carolyn Stevens (NCDN/AWPS Task Force), Kahwa Douguih (NCDN), Louise Anderson, Sonya Rhodes, Gerard LaVarnway, Susan Stillinger, and Elroy Hill

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

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those present were asked to join the Select Board members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. PUBLIC HEARING

- a. Northfield Town Meeting Australian Ballot Articles.** State law requires the Select Board to hold a public hearing prior to Town Meeting so members of the public can discuss or ask questions regarding the articles to be voted upon by Australian Ballot. Most involve funding requests from regional non-profit organizations and all were invited by mail to attend this public hearing. Chair Maxwell then went through the list of Australian Ballot articles for any comments or questions.

Article 4. Shall the voters authorize that general obligation bonds or notes of the Town of Northfield in an amount not to exceed Seven Million Two Hundred Thirty Thousand Dollars (\$7,230,000), subject to reduction from available alternate sources of funding, be issued for the purpose of financing the construction of a new water transmission line and reservoir for its public drinking water system, the estimated cost of such improvements being Seven Million Two Hundred Thirty Thousand Dollars (\$7,230,000)? Naomi Johnson from the Dufresne Group has been assisting the municipality with this proposed project, which has been in the planning stages for several years. She said the waterlines to be replaced are about one hundred and fifteen (115) years old and due to their age produce a considerable amount of lost water due to leaks, etc. There also are plans to remove any lead piping for safety reasons and install a new reservoir on Cheney Farm. Ms. Johnson feels this is the optimal time for this project as the State of Vermont is subsidizing about half of the project costs. The remaining balance, the Town's share, will be financed through a forty (40) year no-interest loan. Ms. Johnson estimates that the additional cost to water customers would be about four dollars (\$4.00) per month. Board member Morse noted that while all Northfield residents would be voting on this bond, only water customers would be financially responsible for its repayment. He supports this proposal as it is much needed to protect the municipal water system. Board member Shernock also encourages Northfield voters to approve this bond as a secure public water supply is essential for local economic development. She added that some other Vermont communities have not been as proactive as Northfield in this regard and are now paying the consequences. Board member Stevens agreed that the new waterlines and reservoir are certainly needed. Chair Maxwell noted that since an old water bond will be coming off the books soon, the impact of this project on the water rates will be rather limited. He added that this project will be the culmination of previous water supply upgrade projects that have kept our system operating very well in recent years. Elroy Hill believes this project is needed to protect Northfield from the same kind of water supply problems that are now affecting Middlebury. He thinks the Select Board members have done a very good job in obtaining the engineering and financing for this project. Chair Maxwell said it is important that we remain proactive in keeping our municipal water system operating well and not risk the significant infrastructure problems caused by deferred maintenance.

Article 5. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of an amount not to exceed twenty-one thousand dollars (\$21,000) for FY25 towards the Northfield Commuter year-round commuter with service between Northfield and Montpelier? Timothy Bradshaw is the Green Mountain Transit (GMT) Director of Rural Operations. He is hoping Northfield voters will continue to support their efforts to provide reliable public transportation to the community. Mr. Bradshaw said there have been some route reductions with the commuter service, such as the midday bus service, that was due to a driver shortage.

However, he said that problem should be resolved soon and those routes restored. Chair Maxwell understands GMT ridership is starting to return to pre-pandemic levels. He then asked if rider fees are being charged again. Mr. Bradshaw said the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) is supporting GMT's fare-free service for rural routes for another year. Fees are now being phased back in for more urban bus routes. Chair Maxwell then asked about the weekday shuttle service. Mr. Bradshaw said there is a Wednesday morning shuttle bus service that connects residents to Northfield shopping areas, Green Mountain Apartments, and Norwich University. There also is express service to the Central Vermont Marketplace, formerly known as the Berlin Mall. In addition, there is an on-call volunteer driver program for senior citizens and other eligible Northfield residents.

Article 6. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$14,800 for the Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice? Angie from Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice (CVHHH) provided a brief breakdown of the services that CVHHH provides to the Central Vermont community, including providing visiting nurses to assist those recovering at home from illness, surgery, or hospital stays. CVHHH also provides regular free clinics to help residents receive proper footcare, access to vaccines, etc. During the 2023 calendar year, CVHHH provided 3,334 total visits/contacts to Northfield residents. Board member Shernock knows many Northfield residents who have received CVHHH services and agreed this organization does provide considerable benefits to the Northfield community.

Article 7. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$3,000 for the Central Vermont Council on Aging? There was no discussion.

Article 8. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$2,800 for the Good Samaritan Haven? There was no discussion.

Article 9. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$2,500 for Washington County Mental Health Services, Inc.? Heather Slayton is the Communications Coordinator for Washington County Mental Health Services (WCMHS). She reported that in FY2023, WCHMS provided over 30,425 hours of service to 215 Northfield residents. This included holding mental health forums for numerous groups of varying ages as well as establishing direct contact with those needing their services. One of their goals is to assist individuals with their concerns before they require medical services. WCMHS also provides written materials to help those with mental health issues, substance abuse problems, etc.

Article 10. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,250 for the People's Health and Wellness Clinic? There was no discussion.

Article 11. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,200 for Central Vermont Adult Basic Education? There was no discussion.

Article 12. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,200 for Mosaic Vermont (formerly the Sexual Assault Crisis Team of Washington County)? There was no discussion.

Article 13. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,200 for the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired? There was no discussion.

Article 14. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,000 for Capstone Community Action, Inc.? Yvonne Lory is the Communications Manager for Capstone Community Action, which was established in 1965 with federal funding as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" initiative. Their mission is to help "individuals and families in Central Vermont to achieve stability and rise out of poverty." Capstone Community Action is one of five (5) such agencies in Vermont and there are nearly one thousand (1,000) others located throughout the country. The bulk of their funding comes from federal block grants but town funding provides additional resources needed to support their various programs. These include providing access to healthy meals, affordable shelter, and winter heating assistance. In the last year, Capstone Community Action assisted 11,492 individuals in 6,334 Vermont households in its service area, which includes Lamoille, Orange, and Washington Counties and nine (9) communities in Windsor, Addison, and Rutland Counties. This included 425 Northfield residents in 241 households. Capstone Community Action also assisted those affected by the July 2023 flooding by helping to clear out homes, delivering meals, etc. In addition to the financial support of its service communities, Capstone Community Action is always welcoming volunteers to assist with their many programs.

Article 15. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,000 for Circle? There was no discussion.

Article 16. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,000 for Good Beginnings of Central Vermont? There was no discussion.

Article 17. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$1,000 for the Vermont Center for Independent Living? There was no discussion.

Article 18. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$800 for the Family Center of Washington County? There was no discussion.

Article 19. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$600 for Elevate Youth Services (formerly the Washington County Youth Service Bureau/Boys & Girls Club)? There was no discussion.

Article 20. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$400 for Community Harvest of Central Vermont? Maryann Beaupré is speaking on behalf of Community Harvest of Central Vermont (CHCV). Its mission is to bring communities together by gleaning at local farms to obtain their healthy foodstuffs that for one reason or another cannot be sold retail. CHCV has hundreds of volunteers who work on over fifty-five (55) local produce growers. Ms. Beaupré reported that CHCV was able to increase its storage capacity this past year and this proved to be very helpful in helping those affected by the July 2023 flooding. In Northfield, CHCV provides produce to the Senior Center, public schools, and the after-school programs. In the last year, CHCV delivered over 8,355 pounds of fresh produce to Northfield locations. Carolyn Stevens noted CHCV also provides fresh produce to the local CERV food shelf.

Article 21. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$400 for the Friends of the Winooski River? There was no discussion.

Article 22. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$300 for Green Up Vermont? There was no discussion.

Article 23. Shall the voters authorize the expenditure of \$250 for OUR House of Central Vermont? There was no discussion.

There being no other questions or comments, the public hearing closed at 7:40 p.m.

IV. SET/ADJUST AGENDA. Chair Maxwell stated that Dan Anderson, the Co-Chair of the Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force, has asked to address the Select Board members for an update on ADA compliance issues that AWPS Task Force Co-chair Mary Nadon Scott brought to their attention last year. He will be added to the agenda under "Public Participation."

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Andrew Padilla, Norwich University: American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Request.** Mr. Padilla has submitted a formal application for \$7,800 in ARPA funds in order to hire a consultant to design a disc golf course to be located on Norwich University (NU) property near the Shaw Outdoor Center. Mr. Padilla noted he has made other grant applications in order to obtain funds to improve outdoor recreational opportunities in the Town Forest and on NU property. He said the disc golf course would be available for everyone to use, including local youth. Mr. Padilla said the cost of the course design is beyond the budget of the Shaw Outdoor Center and that is why he is requesting ARPA funds for this purpose. Although a professional disc golf course designer will be engaged, he thought most if not all of the actual course construction could be performed by volunteers such as NU students. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members will discuss ARPA fund requests later in the meeting when they consider possible action items. He asked Mr. Padilla to remain available to answer any questions they might have then.
- b. Lisa Burr, Feed Every Need: ARPA Funds Request.** Ms. Burr is requesting \$145,271 in ARPA funds on behalf of Feed Every Need, which is a non-profit organization that provides prepared meals to various locations in Northfield and throughout the Central Vermont area. This includes directing the meals to charitable organizations, including Capstone, who then deliver the meals to homes or other gathering locations. Ms. Burr said Feed Every Need has provided over 50,000 meals that were all prepared out of the Burrs' kitchen at The Woods Lodge. Feed Every Need initially was financed through startup funds from a donor and from grant funds but Ms. Burr said they would like to expand their services and that is why they are seeking ARPA funds at this time. She added that the free prepared meals are a great assistance to families that might be struggling with food security issues. The fact that the meals arrive already prepared especially helps single parent and/or working families that might not have the time to put together group meals in a timely manner.

Ms. Burr said Feed Every Need will be contacting the municipal governments in the communities they serve in order to obtain future budgeted funding by getting on their town meeting warnings, etc. However, receiving the requested ARPA funds would help them address their more immediate needs by expanding their kitchen facilities, obtaining reliable and dedicated transportation for their deliveries, etc. The amount sought is broken down in their application. Chair Maxwell said this request will also be discussed later in the meeting.

c. Dan Anderson, AWPS Task Force Co-Chair: ADA Compliance Concerns update.

Mr. Anderson said his fellow AWPS Task Force Co-Chair Mary Nadon Scott addressed the Select Board members last year (09/12/23) and highlighted a number of ADA compliance issues in the Northfield community. These included providing full access to the Brown Public Library (BPL), Northfield Post Office, Memorial Park, and the Municipal Pool. Mr. Anderson said the AWPS Task Force members have been meeting regularly since then and have been in contact with the Select Board members and Manager Schulz regarding the status of the actions being taken to address these concerns. He now would like an update on some of these matters. For example, Mr. Anderson asked about the status of the installation of the ADA compliant automatic opening doors at the BPL. Manager Schulz said this project has seen some delays but now that electricians have performed the necessary preparation work, the new doors should be installed within the next couple of weeks. Mr. Anderson then asked about the local post office, which also has public access issues. Manager Schulz said he sent a letter soon after that meeting to the local postmaster about the issues that Ms. Scott brought up about the non-ADA compliant doors, the possibility of reserving some parking spaces behind the building for handicapped drivers and installing curb cuts in front of the building adjacent to the wheelchair ramp. He did not receive a response to this letter so Manager Schulz will reach out to the postmaster again. He added that the municipality itself will install the curb cuts in this summer. Mr. Anderson then asked about accessibility issues at the Municipal Pool. Manager Schulz said the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee (Board members Shernock and Stevens) will be inspecting the facility soon to determine what upgrades still need to be done. He added that the Select Board members inserted \$10,000 into the Municipal Pool's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for the next fiscal year to address such accessibility concerns. Mr. Anderson hopes the upgrades can be made before the pool reopens to the public this summer.

Mr. Anderson then asked about the plans to improve and extend the sidewalk along North Main Street from Cumberland Farms to Tops Market. Manager Schulz said the municipality has received preliminary estimates in the range of \$350,000 to fix the sidewalk there. The length of the targeted sidewalk area is about twelve thousand feet (12,000'). Manager Schulz added that the Select Board members have included \$100,000 in ARPA funds in the Sidewalks CIP budget for the next fiscal year. The Highway Planning & Project Oversight Subcommittee (Board members Shernock and Stevens) will be meeting again soon to finalize a priority list of problem sidewalks to be addressed in coming months. Mr. Anderson said the Task Force members have been working on a priority list themselves regarding sidewalks near the public schools that require urgent attention. They will present that priority list directly to the subcommittee members.

Board member Morse suggested that it might be useful for the Task Force members to directly contact our elected federal representatives (i.e., US Senator Bernie Sanders, US Senator Peter Welch, and US Representative Becca Balint) about the problems at the post office. He felt these officials should be informed that a local federal facility is not fully accessible to all of its citizens. Board member Shernock noted the USPS is an independent agency that is not always responsive to political pressure. The repeated delays in the reopening of the Montpelier Post Office is clear proof of that. Board member Morse felt sending a formal letter signed by the Task Force members and perhaps including a petition probably would at least receive a response. Elroy Hill warned that the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968 only requires that federal facilities built after 1968 be fully accessible to the public. The Northfield Post Office is considerably older (circa 1937). The US Congress would have to change this law in order to force ADA compliance for such older structures and Mr. Hill felt action on this was unlikely given the current political situation in Washington DC. He added that the former Northfield postmaster did push hard to have the local post office made ADA compliant but instead he was transferred to other facility. Mr. Anderson said the Task Force members will contact the federal officials, hoping they will obtain a more positive response. They will also remain in contact with the Select Board on this and other such matters.

VI. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. **Liquor License Renewal: Cumberland Farms.** Manager Schulz said Northfield Police Department (NPD) Chief Pierre Gomez reported to Town Clerk Kim Pedley that there was only one incident involving the liquor licenses holders in 2023. That was for selling to minors and the Vermont Liquor Control Board has handled the matter. That establishment is not the one seeking to have its liquor license renewed tonight. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **February 13, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Some minor corrections will be made, most of which are typos. **Motion to approve the amended minutes passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #16-24.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #16-24 in the amount of \$121,839.20. At the previous meeting, an invoice for street sweeping was pulled so that some of this expense could be allocated to the stormwater mitigation project on South Main Street. Manager Schulz confirmed that change has been made and that payment is included in the current warrant. Chair Maxwell noted some ARPA funds were spent in the current warrant on the BPL kitchen upgrade project. He hopes these expenses are being properly tracked by management. Board member Morse suggested such information be provided in the tickler file distributed to the Select Board members at regular intervals. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through February 18, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$109,705.50. Board member Shernock noted that the amount budgeted for NPD overtime in the current fiscal year (\$40,000) has nearly been reached (\$35,022) even though there are still about four (4) months remaining before the new fiscal year begins (07/01/24). She asked what would happen if this particular budget was exceeded. Chair Maxwell said there would be an overage in that particular line item but that would probably be offset by savings in other NPD operations and maintenance (O&M) budgets. Manager Schulz confirmed that probably would be the situation as the NPD is currently short of two (2) full-time officers. Board member Shernock asked when these vacancies would be filled. Manager Schulz said NPD Chief Gomez has been putting extra effort into officer recruitment efforts for full- and part-time officers. Once additional officers have been hired, overtime expenses should decrease significantly. Manager Schulz suggested Chief Gomez could address the Select Board members on this and other matters in the near future. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

IX. SELECT BOARD

- a. **ARPA Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell said there was a lot of discussion the last time ARPA fund requests were discussed at length (01/23/24) about the formal process of approving or denying these requests. There now are requests for sidewalk improvement and/or installation projects for those areas where real problems have been detected, such as the streets near the public schools, on North Main Street between Cumberland Farms and Tops Market, and the section of South Main Street adjacent to and south of the NU campus. Board member Morse said he would rather have ARPA funds spent on actually fixing the sidewalks rather than on scoping studies. He felt we already know the sidewalks are in bad condition and what needs to be done. Board member Morse said the project plans for the new building being constructed on the NU campus is supposed to include improved walking paths by the campus. When those project plans have been further developed, it is possible the municipality can work with NU officials and adjacent private property owners to work out proper solutions for the current walkability and pedestrian safety concerns. Chair Maxwell believes Manager Schulz has said that the planned sidewalk on North Main Street would not require a scoping study. Manager Schulz confirmed he did not think that was necessary at this location since this is a relatively flat area without any major topographical concerns. However, since this stretch of sidewalk involves a state highway, it would be necessary to coordinate with VTrans throughout the project. Chair Maxwell then asked the other Select Board members about how they felt about spending ARPA funds on new sidewalk scoping studies. There seemed to be a consensus that the Select Board members would prefer that ARPA funds be spent fixing the sidewalks rather than on new scoping studies that might prove redundant and unnecessary.

Chair Maxwell noted that the Select Board members previously agreed to establish a July 23, 2024 deadline for the submission of new ARPA fund request applications. He asked what should now happen with the requests that have already been submitted but have not been acted upon. Board member Morse thought that in the interest of full transparency, unless further information has been requested, applicants should be informed about the status of their applications. For example, Bob Kelley submitted an ARPA funds request last year (10/31/23) asking that the municipality purchase and implement the "311" computer application. At the time, Manager Schulz was asked to research this matter further and determine whether the benefits of this software would justify the additional expense. Manager Schulz has looked into this and found that the initial startup cost of this program is about \$30,000 and subsequent annual costs are about \$20,000. He added that this program, which allows residents to report infrastructure problems and communicate with local officials in real time, is usually employed by larger municipalities where the lines of municipal communication are much more difficult to navigate than in Northfield. Manager Schulz has spoken to officials in South Burlington who are happy with the program but do have concerns about the cost. Therefore, Manager Schulz does not recommend awarding ARPA funds for this purpose. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to deny Mr. Keeley's application for ARPA funds for the 311 application. **Motion passed 4-0-0.** Manager Schulz will inform Mr. Keeley in writing of the Select Board's decision.

Chair Maxwell then turned to the management request for \$75,000 in ARPA funds to purchase emergency power generators for the Police Station, Fire Station, and Municipal Building. This request had been put on hold until it was known whether a federal grant application to purchase generators would be successful. The grant application was unsuccessful so the Select Board members should now take action on this. Board member Morse said Green Mountain Power (GMP) does provide Telsa Powerwalls, which are integrated battery systems that store energy for backup protection for when the local power grid goes down. These cost about \$10,000, which would be much cheaper and more environmentally friendly than gas powered generators. Manager Schulz will investigate this possibility to see if Tesla Powerwalls would be an acceptable and less expensive alternative. Board member Shernock asked what should be done with the other remaining ARPA fund requests. Chair Maxwell said they probably should be left open for the time being. They all should be reviewed and acted upon before the December 31, 2024 federal deadline for dedicating these funds.

The Select Board members then turned to Mr. Padilla's request for \$7,800 in ARPA funds for the design of a disc golf course near the Shaw Outdoor Center. Board member Morse said one of the purposes of the ARPA fund program was to finance recreational projects that would benefit a broad section of the community. He believes this request does meet this criteria. Board member Morse asked if the \$7,800 request included funds for constructing the course. Mr. Padilla said these funds were solely for hiring a professional disc golf course designer. He feels that volunteers should be able to perform most of the course construction unless removal of heavy brush, etc. requires hiring a professional to do it. Board member Morse believes having a plan in place for a new recreational opportunity for the community would be worth the \$7,800 cost. Board member Shernock noted community members as young as six (6) years old would be able to use the disc course. Her one concern is there should be some sort of written agreement guaranteeing the completed disc golf course would remain available for all Northfield residents and not just for the NU community. Board member Morse asked if the course would be ADA compliant. Mr. Padilla did not think that was possible given the uneven terrain near the Shaw Outdoor Center. Board member Shernock has asked a number of Northfield residents about this possible project. It seems older residents aren't that interested but younger one do show a lot of enthusiasm. Mr. Padilla said it also would be a low-cost activity as the participants would only need the flying discs themselves to play. It also is possible these discs could be borrowed from a lending library either onsite or nearby. He will check regarding possible liability issues and whether injury waiver forms would be needed. Mr. Padilla has spoken to a professional disc golf course designer and that person has time available later this spring to do the work. Board member Morse asked how much it costs to purchase the disc baskets for each hole. Mr. Padilla said they cost about \$500 each and NU already has eighteen (18) of them in storage. Chair Maxwell shares Board member Shernock's concern about future public access to the completed disc golf course. He would like to see a formal written agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) that would cover this. Mr. Padilla will look into this possibility. He noted community members already enjoy complete access to the trail system located on NU forested properties.

Chair Maxwell does support the concept of this proposal but would like all the details worked out before formally awarding the ARPA funds. He asked Mr. Padilla to work with Manager Schulz on the process for drafting a formal agreement or MOU that guarantees public access to the new facility. He felt this would be necessary because public funds would be used for the course design. Chair Maxwell looks forward to a future update on this proposal.

The Select Board members then turned to the request submitted by Ms. Burr for \$145,271 in ARPA funds for an expansion of the Feed Every Need non-profit organization. Board member Morse said during the ARPA funds outreach process that sought public input on the type of local projects to be explored with ARPA funds, he doesn't remember there being any consideration of using these funds to help expand existing charitable organizations. He then asked if Ms. Burr has requested ARPA funding from any of the other Central Vermont communities that benefit from this program. Ms. Burr said she has not yet made such requests yet. Looking at the breakdown of how the \$145,271 would be spent, Board member Morse noted that some of the funds would be used to cover payroll expenses, which he does not believe is permitted by the federal ARPA guidelines. Board member Morse then noted that there are a number of local service groups that provide meals and other food assistance to Northfield residents, such as the Senior Center, CERV, etc. Before proceeding further, he would like to know how their board members feel about this Feed Every Need proposal. Ms. Burr said the request for ARPA funds is to finance the expansion of their current activities, such as purchasing new food storage and food preparation equipment, such as larger freezers, convection ovens, etc. Board member Morse feels it would be a hard sell to residents to award ARPA funds to an organization that provides benefits to other communities that aren't making any kind of financial commitment. He would like to have letters of endorsement from the non-profit organizations that might benefit from the expansion of Feed Every Need services as well as some type of financial contribution from all the communities being serviced. Ms. Burr said the ARPA fund request amount could be reduced to eliminate any spending that would be not allowed under federal guidelines and/or which the Select Board members might consider inappropriate. Ms. Burr said their ultimate goal is to solicit petitions in the served communities in order to get voter approval to be included in future municipal budgets. However, they do need to figure out first how the program costs should be properly allocated amongst those communities. Chair Maxwell asked how many of these prepared meals are delivered annually in Northfield. Ms. Burr said about 4,800 prepared meals are delivered through the various non-profit organizations that make the direct deliveries. They also make these meals available through the local Farmers Market.

Board member Shernock said ARPA funding for this type of program probably didn't come up during the public outreach process because people facing food insecurity usually don't have the opportunity to participate in online surveys, etc. She believes there is the need for this type of program in this community to provide prepared meals to those in need. Board member Shernock would support this proposal provided there is some severability in case the full amount of Northfield ARPA funds requested is not provided. Ms. Burr said that certainly is a possibility and she is willing to approach the other communities serviced to see if they would like to contribute ARPA or other funds to this effort. She added that the meals provided are completely free and there is no need to qualify in any way to receive them. The meals are delivered to various locations in Washington and Lamoille counties for later home delivery. Board member Morse asked if Feed Every Need did any home deliveries of their own. Ms. Burr said not at this time. However, if that sort of program was initiated, it probably would start with Northfield. Chair Maxwell said it seems the Select Board consensus is that we would like to see letters of support and perhaps financial contributions from the other communities where Feed Every Need meals are being distributed. Board member Morse thought it might also be useful to get a Feed Every Need funding request petitions and ballot articles on future Northfield Town Warnings in order to obtain voter authorization. Board member Shernock said ARPA funds were allocated to all Vermont communities so the ones benefiting from this program should be willing to contribute some of them towards this. Ms. Beaupré asked Ms. Burr if she and her husband still operated The Woods Lodge. Ms. Burr confirmed that was the case but noted there is an organizational firewall between the for-profit Lodge and the non-profit Feed Every Need. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Burr for coming forward tonight with her request for local support for this very worthy organization. He looks forward to learning the results of Ms. Burr's outreach process.

Chair Maxwell noted Economic Development Director Tom Davis made a request last year for \$200,000 in ARPA funds to set up a fund to be used for local match amounts for grant applications. He asked if any research has been done to see if this is permissible by the federal government and beneficial to the community. Manager Schulz said he and Finance Director Laurie Baroffio met recently with Katie Buckley from the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) about the possibility of Northfield putting some of its ARPA funds in the municipal budget as a reserve fund. That action would make it easier to meet the federal deadlines for designating and spending ARPA funds. The initial response was that this was possible but he would meet again with Ms. Buckley to get this in writing. He will provide this written opinion to the Select Board members. Manager Schulz said it might be necessary for the Select Board members to waive certain local municipal restrictions on carrying over large amounts of surplus funds over several years. Board member Morse feels it is important to get something in writing from a qualified ARPA expert before taking this action.

Chair Maxwell then noted that as of February 19, 2024, the amount of designated ARPA funds is \$329,451.50. The current balance of undesignated ARPA funds and accrued interest is \$1,182,924.37. He added that the Select Board members did authorize \$5,000 in ARPA funds so that Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) could conduct a preliminary consulting project in order to establish a river walk path. He asked if any invoices have been received yet for the preliminary study. Manager Schulz had not received any. Chair Maxwell then asked the other Select Board members if they were comfortable allowing an outside organization disburse these funds without municipal supervision. Board member Morse doesn't believe the municipality should have a direct role during the expenditure process. In this case, however, he would prefer that one issue to be explored during the preliminary scoping project, i.e. whether New England Central Railroad (NECR) would allow a pedestrian railroad crossing path, should be turned over to the DuBois & King engineers who are now working on the Northfield Common Rehabilitation project. Board member Morse also would like the group overseeing the Cross Brother Dam removal project (Vermont Natural Resources Council) contacted to see if they would be able to contribute any funding to a local riverside access project. Chair Maxwell also would like some clarification as to whether the dam removal project will include funding for improved Dog River access. He also doesn't want management to directly implement the expenditure process for approved ARPA fund projects. Manager Schulz feels that there should be some municipal oversight when public funds are spent by an outside group. Chair Maxwell would like such a policy drafted and put into writing. Manager Schulz said the process with the BPL kitchen upgrade project has worked well to date. Board member Morse would like any invoices NCDN has incurred for its preliminary consulting project paid and any remaining funds left over from the \$5,000 outlay perhaps provided to DuBois & King so it can add the railroad pedestrian crossing to its project scope. Chair Maxwell said the \$5,000 in ARPA funds was awarded to NCDN to conduct a preliminary study to see if the NCDN request for \$50,000 in ARPA funds was feasible. He felt this was a reasonable expenditure of ARPA funds as the preliminary study could provide much useful information even before the larger project is pursued. Chair Maxwell does believe that NECR will eventually agree to establishing a pedestrian railroad crossing on Wall Street. Manager Schulz said it seemed the NECR representatives he spoke with did seem open to this possibility. Board member Shernock believes NCDN representatives spoke at a previous meeting of breaking up the proposed river walk path into three (3) separate phases. Therefore, the continuation of this project is not entirely dependent on receiving NECR permission. Board member Stevens has seen a good number of pedestrian railroad crossings in Vermont communities that still have active railroad lines. That includes some that don't have crossing gates, etc. He felt such crossings should be allowed in Northfield as well.

Kaitlyn Keating is the NCDN Chair and she reiterated that NCDN did ask for \$50,000 in ARPA funds to conduct a scoping study for the river walk path project. The \$5,000 that was awarded for a preliminary feasibility study was the alternative course that the Select Board members authorized. She added there is one consulting fee invoice related to the preliminary study and this will be provided to the municipality for payment. Ms. Keating said it now seems that the larger NCDN request has become tied up with the railroad crossing permission matter but that is only a minor part of the larger project. She noted the three (3) separate phases of the river walk project will not be done simultaneously so it should be able for NCDN to pursue the project without further delay. It now seems likely that the first phase will focus on the northern end of the proposed path by the Main Street Bridge and the area behind the Dollar General store. Ms. Keating said if NCDN is to pursue grant opportunities, the initial \$50,000 request should be approved so the funds can be used as local match amounts, etc.

Chair Maxwell then went through the updated list of ARPA fund requests, including the request for \$300,000 for a waterline upgrade project on Freight Yard Way. He asked about the status of this proposal. Manager Schulz said this was discussed at a recent Utility Commissions meeting. Utility Superintendent James Russo is soliciting quotes for the work that will be put before the Utility Commissions for discussion and recommendation. The ARPA fund request for sidewalk installation/repairs does not have an estimated cost at this time. Chair Maxwell would like to add the \$350,000 estimate for the work on North Main Street to the \$100,000 already included in the FY 2024/2025 Highway CIP budget for a total of \$450,000. The Select Board members already have designated \$40,268 in ARPA funds so the engineering firm DuBois & King can conduct a public information and comment project regarding various Town Common and Fountain rehabilitation possibilities. Based on this feedback, DuBois & King will provide a number of rehabilitation options to the Select Board members by August 2024. As for the \$325,000 request for the purchase of emergency generators, as was discussed earlier in the meeting, Manager Schulz will explore the possibility of less expensive alternatives. The Northfield Senior Center has made a request for \$325,000 in ARPA funds in order to expand their facility. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members have requested additional information regarding this request that has not yet been received. There is \$15,000 ARPA fund request to establish a Community Garden to be located on a FEMA buyout property on Water Street. Board member Shernock would like to see a community garden governing board and bylaws established before ARPA funds are designated for this purpose. Board member Morse added there also seems to be some uncertainty about the actual garden site and this needs to be determined.

Chair Maxwell noted there is a \$275,000 request to fund "enhanced pedestrian amenities on Wall Street from the Common to Dog River Park." Manager Schulz said there is a scoping project to enhance pedestrian safety along this route. The project consultant's report will be provided this summer and will provide many alternatives to achieve these goals. Chair Maxwell then asked about the \$600,000 request to install Pedestrian and Bike Safety Improvements in the Falls, and from the Falls to Downtown." Manager Schulz said we did receive a state grant that will cover fifty percent (50%) of the cost of ninety feet (90') of new sidewalk, a flashing beacon, etc. near the intersection of Cox Brook Road and Vermont Route 12 North. He added that the Select Board members will need to decide whether ARPA funds should be used to cover the balance of the project costs.

Chair Maxwell noted ARPA funds have been used to cover the salary and other expenses of the full-time Economic Development Director (EDD) position. Manager Schulz said that outlay will be phased out over the next couple of years. Chair Maxwell noted there is an ARPA fund request with an undetermined amount indicated to help reduce energy use in municipal buildings. Manager Schulz said an energy audit needs to be performed at the Municipal Building and the Brown Public Library to determine the actual cost of any energy usage reduction project. There is a \$10,000 ARPA funds request to cover the expense of digitalizing municipal records. Manager Schulz will need a formal proposal from the Town Clerk's Office for this. An ARPA fund request for \$125,000 is for the creation of a "Plan for Downtown Development and Housing." Board member Shernock would like to see a formal proposal for this. Manager Schulz said this request could be taken off the list for now. EDD Tom Davis did submit a formal request for \$200,000 in ARPA funds to establish a municipal account to cover local match amounts for grant applications. As indicated earlier in the meeting, Manager Schulz is researching with the assistance of VLCT whether this would be an appropriate usage of ARPA funds.

Chair Maxwell noted that among the possible projects listed included sewer line extension northward to Northfield Falls and southward along VT Routes 12 and 12A. The estimates cost of these projects are listed as \$6,500,000 and \$8,000,000. After some discussion, there was consensus that since neither project could be completed in time to meet the federal deadlines, they will be removed from the ARPA funds request list. In both projects, Manager Schulz will be seeking state and/or federal funds to cover a good portion of the project costs. This closed the discussion of the current ARPA fund requests for the time being. Chair Maxwell felt much had been accomplished in willowing the list and also attaching cost estimates where possible. Manager Schulz will update the list of these requests for the next time these ARPA fund requests will be discussed at length, which will be the regular meeting of March 26, 2024.

X. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Municipal Pool Upgrade.** Manager Schulz said five (5) bids were received for the upcoming pool painting and repairs project. Most were within the budget allocated for this purpose.

- b. **Northfield Town Reports 2024.** Manager Schulz said the reports were delivered by the printer and copies are available for pick up at various locations around town including the Municipal Building (inside and outside), Brown Public Library, Northfield Senior Center, Falls General Store, Gadbois Laundromat, Kenyon's Hardware Store, Northfield Pharmacy, South Village Mobil, Tops Market, and Trans-Video. An electronic version of the report also is available at the Northfield VT municipal website: <https://www.northfield-vt.gov/town-reports>
- c. **Norwich University (NU) Cyber Fusion Center Project update.** Manager Schulz recently spoke with Ron Lyon, the engineer who is assisting NU with this building construction project. The current plan is that the Select Board members will be provided with a full project update at an April 2024 regular meeting. Manager Schulz has learned that the proposed building has been slightly downsized due to cost considerations. There also will be an update at that time about possible sidewalk upgrades in the building construction area.

XI. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Northfield Footbridge Problems.** Board member Shernock was recently informed that a young person's leg went through a hole in the footbridge while crossing it. She felt any such safety concerns with the footbridge should be addressed right away. Manager Schulz hadn't heard of this particular incident but will have the footbridge inspected tomorrow morning by the Highway crew.
- b. **Depot Square Kiosk/Bus Stop.** This kiosk was located near the former bank building at 70 Depot Square for a few years without any problems. However, the new lessee has plans for where it was situated and asked for it be relocated as soon as possible. Board member Stevens asked where it would go. Manager Schulz said he is working with the members of the Energy Committee to determine a permanent location. There also have been discussions with NU officials about placing it near the old armory building. Manager Schulz will provide the Select Board members with an update at the next regular meeting (03/12/24).

XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

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

The Board adjourned at 10:30 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 are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.