

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of September 26, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Laura Stone (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Tom Knight (Stantec), Marie Chilson (Northfield Senior Center), Maryann Beaupre (Northfield Senior Center), Wendy Cashman (Northfield Senior Center), Margaret Snelgrove (Northfield Senior Center), Ray Pelletier (CVFiber Delegate), Jeanne Bright (Northfield Community Center Task Force), Wendy Miller, Arthur Schaller, Timothy Vile, Natalie Kozlowski, Ben Green, Hildy Green, Dorothy Green, Bonita Cortese, Stacy McKiernan, Aaron Rhodes, Sonya Rhodes, Anastasia Rhodes, Donna French, Susan Stillinger, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

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

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Laura Stone, Vermont Agency of Transportation (Project Manager): Rabbit Hollow Bridge Scoping Project.** Ms. Stone said since the bridge rehabilitation/replacement project for the Rabbit Hollow Bridge has federal funds attached to it and this is considered a historic structure, a local concerns meeting needs to be held in order to gauge public opinion on how the project should proceed. Ms. Stone is accompanied tonight by Tom Knight who is a design consultant from the engineering firm Stantec. Normally the VTrans Historic Preservation Specialist, Judith Ehrlich, would be present to discuss that aspect of this project but she was unable to attend tonight. Ms. Stone said VTrans is just in the preliminary stages of scoping this project. The project design phase would come afterwards. At this point, VTrans is seeking additional information and public input regarding the current situation with this bridge, the historic review process, and the feasibility of rehabilitating (rather than replacing) this historic structure. This included forwarding a survey to the municipality. Ms. Stone noted the bridge work itself is now planned for 2026 but this could be delayed an additional year. Federal funds would pay for the actual construction phase but there would be a local match amount to cover planning and engineering costs. In accordance with Act 153, this local share amount could be as low as 2.5% if the bridge is rehabilitated rather than replaced and the road closed during construction. This amount could be as high as ten percent (10%) should the municipality choose options other than what VTrans recommends. Ms. Stone said the bridge is located one-twelfth of a mile off Vermont Route 12A. VTrans has been collecting information on the site including the proximity of utility lines, the rights-of-way in the area, any nearby parks or historic sites, etc. They have no record of any serious vehicular crashes on or near the bridge.

As for existing conditions, Mr. Knight noted the bridge goes over New England Central Railroad (NECR) tracks as well as the Dog River. Both the municipality and NECR have rights-of-way in the area and VTrans also has identified abutting private property owners. There are wetlands not too far from the bridge and there is an overhead telephone line that runs parallel to the bridge. The Rabbit Hollow Bridge was built in 1908 and underwent significant rehabilitation in 1986. The bridge also had some deck work done about six (6) years ago. The bridge span is ninety-one feet (91') and is just under fifteen and one half feet (15'5") wide. The bridge's maximum weight limit now is posted at 16,000 pounds and the vertical clearance over the railroad is just under twenty and one half feet (20'5").

Mr. Knight said VTrans has determined the bridge's average annual daily traffic at 153 vehicles per day. He added that VTrans has a zero (0) to nine (9) scale for rating bridge conditions. The Rabbit Hollow Bridge's deck now is rated at six (6), its superstructure at four (4), and its substructure at five (5). Mr. Knight said if a new replacement bridge was designed, its width would be a minimum of twenty-two feet (22'), which would safely allow for two (2) lanes of traffic along with allowing for bicycle and pedestrian travel on the shoulders. The current bridge now is essentially a one (1) lane bridge due to its narrowness. Ms. Knight noted that due to the slope of the bridge, its vertical curve site distance is about half what it should be and is insufficient for the current posted speed, which is thirty miles per hour (30 MPH). In addition, the bridge railing was not designed for modern vehicular traffic. Because of this, Mr. Knight said drivers have been observed to slow down before crossing the bridge in order to see if there are any other approaching vehicles.

Due to the low maximum weight limit, Mr. Knight noted some delivery trucks now have to detour around the bridge because of their excess weight. Mr. Knight then showed examples of similar truss bridges but noted that the Rabbit Hollow Bridge doesn't have the overhead cross supports that now are relatively standard. Because of fairly recent work, the bridge deck is in fairly good shape as some wood beams were installed at the time to anchor the deck. However, the bridge superstructure and substructure both are in poor condition and need some attention.

As for the historic preservation aspect of this project, Ms. Stone said cultural and historical factors regarding the bridge need to be taken into consideration when the decision is made to either rehabilitate or replace it. Due to its historic nature, VTrans considers rehabilitation to be the preferred approach unless it can be demonstrated that this option is neither "feasible nor prudent." Mr. Knight said this determination also depends on public feedback from those who traverse the bridge on a fairly regular basis. Ms. Stone said VTrans sent a survey to the municipality regarding the value of this bridge to the community, how necessary it is for emergency vehicle responses, how any bridge closure for this project would impact the community, the extent of pedestrian and bicycle traffic on this bridge, etc. It now appears that the major defects of the current bridge are its unsure support system and the low weight limit. Mr. Knight said he considered it feasible that a bridge rehabilitation would successfully address both these concerns and provide an additional fifteen (15) years of service life before the next rehabilitation is required. The actual new maximum weight limit probably would not be significantly higher and would be set by the municipality. VTrans also would recommend that the bridge be closed during the rehabilitation process. This would result in a detour that would make use of Little Northfield Road to reach Vermont Route 12A. This would add an average of about fifteen (15) additional minutes of travelling time for residents. Mr. Knight said placing a temporary bridge at the site probably would not be a viable option due to the lack of space there as well as the high cost. He then asked if any members of the public had any questions or concerns about the proposed project.

Wendy Cashman asked what would happen with delivery vehicles that need to reach houses if the rehabilitated bridge's weight limit still remains too low. Mr. Knight said these vehicles would either need to detour around the bridge or reduce their loads in order to meet the weight limit. Arthur Schaller asked if the concrete bridge abutments would be replaced during the rehabilitation. Mr. Knight said these abutments probably could be repaired in place. The bridge's width would not increase much due to the rehabilitation. Aaron Rhodes asked how the bridge would be improved through the rehabilitation. Mr. Knight said that answer would require additional research on his part. The bridge at a minimum would be significantly reinforced with improvements to its substructure and superstructure. There might be some slight widening, the sight distance would be improved, the railing would be upgraded, etc. He noted that sometimes bridges are kept narrow as traffic calming measures. Ms. Stone said the biggest improvement would be the bridge's overall condition with such obvious improvements as truss replacement, repainting of the whole structure, etc. Nancy Miller said the traffic flow on Rabbit Hollow Road seems to vary significantly throughout the year with more visitors in the summer and fall months and much less in winter and spring (mud season). She added that the current situation is not safe as some drivers go much too fast when approaching the bridge. Ms. Miller has seen a number of near misses on the bridge so she is surprised there haven't been serious accidents. When two cars attempt to cross the bridge from opposite directions at the same time, one of them will need to back down. She felt daily use of the bridge was troublesome.

Chair Maxwell then asked if any of the Select Board members would like to comment. Board member Morse asked about the survey that Ms. Stone mentioned. Manager Schulz said he is filling it out with the assistance of relevant department heads and will return it to VTrans soon. Board member Morse noted that even with the bridge rehabilitation, the maximum weight limit probably will not increase much and this raises questions about how larger emergency vehicles would be able to access the newer houses along Rabbit Hollow Road, etc. In addition, he felt rehabilitation might create some environmental hazards with lead paint chips, etc. falling into the Dog River during the work. In addition, the bridge clearance is too low for some of the new trains now being put into service. Pedestrian and bicyclist safety also cannot be assured with the bridge remaining so narrow. Although it might be a good idea to preserve historic bridges, Board member Morse felt in this case that might not be the deciding factor if the resulting bridge still did not meet minimum standards for a modern bridge. Board member Shernock suggested that if the bridge is kept narrow, perhaps there should be traffic signals at each end to make this a proper one-way bridge. This would eliminate the need for drivers to back up to let another cross.

Board member Stevens noted that there used to be a truss street on Vine Street that was removed and relocated for conversion to a pedestrian bridge. Is that a possibility here so a new modern bridge can be built in its place? Ms. Stone said that was possible if there was an identified place where it could be relocated. Even if it were made into a pedestrian only bridge at another location, it still would need to be rehabilitated due to its weakened support system. Board member Morse suggested that the current bridge could be repurposed for only pedestrian and/or bike traffic and a new highway bridge built next to it. Mr. Knight said that was a possible course of action and he will look into developing cost estimates, permitting needs, etc. Board member Petty hopes the residents who use the bridge on a regular basis will be able to express their views and have them taken into consideration when the various options are explored. Ben Green appreciates the historic nature of the current bridge but has had some bad experiences as he drives over it frequently. However, he also is concerned that a wider, more modern bridge might encourage higher driver speed along Rabbit Hollow Road. Stacy McKiernan feels the narrowness of the current bridge does slow down traffic so she would like the same bridge configuration kept. Chair Maxwell remembers that the bridge was closed for nearly a year when there was a debate over who really owned it: the municipality or NECR. Manager Schulz believes research did indicate NECR owned the bridge and they did play for the recent deck repairs. Ms. Stone said in this case NECR probably will not provide any funding for more extensive bridge renovations and this bridge does serve community needs. Board member Shernock asked what happened with the emergency services during the bridge closure. Board member Morse said they came up with backup plans that included detours around the bridge. Chair Maxwell asked if there was an alternative to wood decking. Mr. Knight said there are more durable composite alternatives but he would prefer to stick to timber in order to not significantly increase the bridge's weight. It also seems to have done a good job protecting the bridge in recent years.

Natalie Kozlowski doesn't feel the bridge really is unsafe as most drivers do slow down when approaching it. She did add that the road speed has seemed to creep up recently. Ms. Kozlowski would like to see the bridge rehabilitated rather than replaced and suggested additional warning signage might be helpful. Ms. Cashman believes she was told at one point that the best thing to do when crossing the bridge was to stop, honk the horn, and then proceed. This is mainly due to the limited visibility and she agreed that new signage might be needed. Mr. Knight said new signage and other safety improvements will be considered as part of the research process. Installing stop signs on each end of the bridge is one possibility. He will brainstorm the various options. Timothy Vile lives on Rabbit Hollow Road and he walks along the roadside quite often. He has serious concerns about the bridge's low weight limit and how even a rehabilitated bridge would handle the increasing weight of delivery vehicles and other heavy trucks. Mr. Vile suggested installing a new bridge with a design similar to the current one. He appreciates historic bridges but also would like one that can handle the increasing amount of traffic along the road. Ms. Stone said it would be possible to design a new bridge similar to the current one. This bridge could be designed as either a one- or two-lane bridge depending on local feeling.

Chair Maxwell then asked about the next step in this process. Ms. Stone will draft a community needs summary and forward it to the municipality for feedback. Based on the results, VTrans will develop several options with cost estimates. There will be a second VTrans presentation in a few months to obtain additional input from the Select Board members and members of the public. Mr. Knight said project options will be developed that will meet community needs although VTrans would prefer preserving the current bridge rather than replacing it. Chair Maxwell noted the Main Street Bridge is scheduled for replacement in 2025 so if this project is anticipated for the following year or two, the Select Board will need to start budgeting funds for the local match amount. Ms. Stone said the next presentation will probably take place this winter and another with preliminary conception plans would happen next summer. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Stone and Mr. Knight for the valuable information provided tonight and also thanked the residents from the Rabbit Hollow area for their presence and participation tonight.

- b. Marie Chilson, President, Northfield Senior Center Board of Directors: American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Request.** Ms. Chilson said the Senior Center did curtail some of its services during the pandemic but over the past year they have actually expanded the programs that they provide to residents of the Greater Northfield area, which also includes Roxbury and West Berlin. This includes Meals-on-Wheels, eat-in or takeout meals, exercise classes, painting groups, etc. Because of the increasing usage of the Senior Center building, Ms. Chilson said its Board of Directors decided to ask the municipality for \$350,000 in ARPA funds in order to finance an extension of the building. This would be a twenty foot (20') by eighty foot (80') addition to the current structure. This new space would allow for adding an office at the front of the building for the Senior Center Director, the creation of a large conference room, and other amenities.

Ms. Chilson said the current building is ADA-compliant but the current footprint is too small to house all the services and programs they now provide. She added that \$40,000 already has been raised for this project through bingo nights and other fundraising activities. Some building improvements have been made in recent years, such as kitchen renovations, but there just isn't the space now for all the services they continue to provide to the community and for the expanded programs they envision for the future.

Board member Morse said the Senior Center building certainly needs to be enlarged. He asked if there was any other documentation for this request beyond the application form and cover letter. Manager Schulz said this was only the initial presentation for this request and there is no thought that the funds would be awarded this evening. Chair Maxwell would like to see the creation of a firm timeline and process for the awarding of these ARPA funds. Ms. Chilson said that in addition to this request, the Senior Center has been seeking other grant opportunities, such as state and federal programs that provide funds for building weatherization, technological improvements, etc. Board member Morse would like to see a better explanation of how these funds would be spent on this building expansion. This probably would include a project budget. He suggested that Economic Development Director Tom Davis could provide some assistance with this and perhaps he could help identify other grant opportunities for this project. Ms. Chilson said she has already been in contact with Mr. Davis, who is (coincidentally) her brother. Board member Shernock asked if there are any ways younger members of the community, including local teens, could benefit from this proposal. Ms. Chilson said their organization's focus is on senior citizens but certainly additional space, especially the new conference room, could be made available to the general public. She added that the Senior Center now relies on part-time staffing so most of their programs and activities are held in the mornings and early afternoons. Nighttime usage of the conference room by other groups or individuals certainly was possible but the Senior Center doesn't have the staff to administer this usage. Board member Shernock said there now is a task force that is looking into the creation of a community center for Northfield. Perhaps there could be some coordination of these efforts. She noted when the public meetings were held and surveys distributed to obtain local feedback on how best these ARPA funds should be expended, the consensus seemed to favor spreading out the funds amongst a number of smaller local projects rather than just a few major projects. Board member Shernock felt this was a large amount of money to devote to one project that would benefit only one section of the community. Ms. Cashman said when the Northfield Senior Center was first established as a non-profit organization, its governing bylaws specified that its focus would be on benefiting local senior citizens. There would need to be a change to these bylaws if this focus were to be ended. Board member Morse asked for confirmation that other groups could make after hours use of the new conference room. Ms. Chilson repeated that this was a definite possibility provided that the Senior Center staff were not expected to organize these events. She added that the Senior Center does host some weekend events that are open to the public. There is also a foodbank located at the center that is open to all residents.

Board member Stevens would also like to see a preliminary breakdown of how the \$350,000 in ARPA funds would be spent on this project. Board member Petty asked if the Center's Board of Directors have looked into other funding sources for the building expansion. Maryann Beaupre, who serves as the Senior Center's Director, said they have been working with Senator Bernie Sanders' office on a possible federal grant for this project. They have completed almost all the steps for this grant and now are waiting for the US Congress to approve legislation that contains this appropriation. Unfortunately, given the current political situation in the nation's capital, it is uncertain when these funds would become available. Board member Petty asked when the current building was built and how this was funded. Ms. Chilson said it was built in the 1980s; she will have to do some research regarding the source of funding. Board member Petty thought it might be possible for the Senior Center to receive a lesser amount that could serve as a local match amount for other grant opportunities. Ms. Chilson said that possibility had been discussed but it was the decision of the Board of Directors to request \$350,000 in ARPA funds at this time.

Chair Maxwell asked if the building expansion would be contained to current Senior Center property. Ms. Chilson said it would as the expansion would be in the direction of the adjacent senior housing and parking lot. Chair Maxwell said if part of the focus of this project is to develop a community center to be used by the general public, perhaps the municipality could contribute some of its property located by the nearby Fire Station. Jeanne Bright serves on the Northfield Community Center Task Force and she noted that its plans now are in a very preliminary stage as they have just started distributing a survey to ascertain local opinion on the various options. Therefore, she cannot state whether the task force's eventual focus will be on one central meeting location or a number of satellite sites.

Chair Maxwell would also like to see some cost estimates for this project. Ms. Chilson confirmed she would be able to provide this information to the Select Board members. Pending the arrival of this information, this request will be reconsidered at a future meeting.

- c. Ray Pelletier, Northfield's CVFiber Delegate: CVFiber update.** Ms. Pelletier is Northfield's representative on the CVFiber governing board, which oversees the activities of this Communications Union District (CUD) formed in 2018 to bring highspeed internet services to underserved sections of Central Vermont. The twenty (20) member communities are Barre City, Barre Town, Berlin, Cabot, Calais, Duxbury, East Montpelier, Marshfield, Middlesex, Montpelier, Moretown, Northfield, Orange, Plainfield, Roxbury, Washington, Waterbury, Williamstown, Woodbury, and Worcester. Mr. Pelletier, who also serves on CVFiber's eight-member Executive Committee, is present tonight to provide an update on CVFiber activities. He first noted that there will be a ground-breaking ceremony at the Calais Town Hall on Wednesday, October 11, 2023 to celebrate fiber optic installation in that community. Mr. Pelletier said installation work was done this past year in the communities of Calais, East Montpelier, Middlesex, Montpelier, and Worcester. 180 miles of fiber optic cable was put in place over the past year and there are plans to install another 250 miles next year. In addition to local ARPA funds contributed by member communities, CVFiber is funded by state and federal grant funds as well as taking out construction loans that will be repaid through subscriber fees. Mr. Pelletier said the current plan is for the construction phase in Northfield to start in 2025 or 2026. Board member Morse heard a rumor that CVFiber is also hooking up hunting camps with highspeed internet. Mr. Pelletier said that was inaccurate as they are only hooking up structures with E-911 addresses. Chair Maxwell is disappointed that the work in Northfield won't be starting for at least a couple of years. Mr. Pelletier said the governing board decided to prioritize those communities that had the greater percentage of underserved residents. He added that Northfield is higher on the priority list than Waterbury. The original plan was to install forty (40) miles of fiber optic cable each month but this was an overly optimistic estimate. Chair Maxwell asked if Mr. Pelletier was confident the funding would be in place by the time the installation work in Northfield is scheduled. Mr. Pelletier said in addition to the previously mentioned sources of funding, revenue bonds will be taken out (if necessary). Chair Maxwell asked what would happen to the ARPA funds Northfield already has contributed to CVFiber (\$90,000) if the installation process never reaches us. Mr. Pelletier said there is no possibility underserved Northfield residents will be left out of this.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. September 12, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the minutes. Board member Shernock suggested a couple revisions to the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #06-24.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #06-24 in the amount of \$435,544.66. Board member Morse noted a payment to the *Times Argus* newspaper for publishing notice of this week's Develop Review Board (DRB) meeting. He asked why this wasn't done instead through the Front Porch Forum social media site, which is free. Manager Schulz said state statute might require advertising the notice in a regional newspaper. He added that the cost of publishing the notice is covered by the zoning fee charged to applicants with business before the DRB. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through September 17, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$113,252.90. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Requests.** Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members have established a policy of setting aside a place on the agenda of the second regular meeting each month for the review of any ARPA funds requests that have been received. As requested, Manager Schulz has provided an up-to-date summary of the ARPA account showing total fund expenditures and commitments, which now total \$552,551.50. This leaves an undesignated ARPA balance of \$1,444,281.75. Chair Maxwell noted that in addition to the earlier discussed request from the Northfield Senior Center, there are two (2) new requests that have been submitted for Select Board consideration. The first is from Economic Development Director Tom Davis, who is asking for \$200,000 in ARPA funds in order to establish a "Match Funds Account" that would be used to apply for federal and/or state grants that have matching fund requirements.

Mr. Davis says that having this account established would make it much more feasible to apply for such grants as the matching funds would not have to be budgeted in advance. He added that having this account on hand to facilitate future grant applications would have the effect of substantially increasing the “investment value” of our local ARPA funds. The second request is from the Vershire Development Company, which is requesting \$200,000 in ARPA funds in order to “renovate and restore the properties of the Gould Mansion and Rustic Restaurant” in Northfield Falls. In addition to bringing a long established public restaurant back into service, the project would also add new housing to the community. Manager Schulz said representatives from the Vershire Development Company will be at the next regular meeting (10/10/23) to present their proposal in person. The timeline for the ARPA program is to commit all the funding to various projects by December 31, 2024 and to expend all these funds within the following two (2) years.

Board member Morse has mentioned before that he thought it would be expedient to sort ARPA fund requests into small, medium, or large categories based on the amount sought. That way, it might be possible to award some smaller requests on an ongoing basis while taking more time to consider larger requests. In addition, Board member Morse would like to set an October 2024 deadline for the submission of ARPA fund request applications. He also felt there should be some mechanism put in place to ascertain that ARPA funds provided for a specific purpose will actually be spent as indicated in the documentation provided by the applicant. Board member Morse believes there should be some accountability for this ARPA fund distribution process.

Chair Maxwell believes the discussion held earlier tonight on the request from the Northfield Senior Center provides a good example for how similar requests should be evaluated in future. This is a good start to the process and Chair Maxwell would like to see additional public participation involving those who plan to submit applications for ARPA funds for their own particular projects. This would be especially the case when smaller sums are requested. Board member Petty said Mr. Davis’s request to set up a matching funds account would be very helpful when the municipality applies for federal or state funds for major infrastructure projects such as new sidewalks, etc. Board member Shernock would prefer that the Select Board members discuss these ARPA fund requests first amongst themselves before the applicants come to one of their meetings. That would allow for the Select Board members to request additional information from the applicants, such as project budgets, etc., before the in-person interviews. She also would like the option for the Select Board members to reject requests without further action should they fail to meet the basic program requirements, such as providing long-term benefits to the overall community.

Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to review ARPA fund request applications during the Select Board’s second regular meeting of each month and provide Select Board members with the ability to decide which requests would be further considered and which would not before the applicants are invited to provide an in-person report. Board member Petty would prefer it if ARPA fund applicants had the right to present their request in person before the Select Board members decide to reject it. Chair Maxwell also feels they should be given this opportunity. Board member Morse felt this should be the procedure in order to provide a sufficient level of transparency for the whole process. Board member Shernock feels the Select Board members should have the ability to reject an application out of hand if it doesn’t meet minimum requirements. **Motion failed 2-3-0, with Board members Shernock and Stevens voting in favor and Board members Maxwell, Morse, and Petty voting in opposition.**

Board member Morse earlier had suggested an October 2024 deadline for submitting ARPA fund requests. Chair Maxwell thought perhaps an earlier date would be preferable. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to require that all ARPA fund request applications be submitted by the Select Board’s second regular meeting in July 2024 (07/23/24). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) Appointment.** There currently is a vacancy on the TFSC due to resignation. Manager Schulz said this matter was discussed at a recent TFSC meeting and the consensus was to recommend the appointment of Andrew Padilla, who became the new director of the Norwich University Shaw Outdoor Center earlier this year. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Andrew Padilla to the Town Forest Stewardship Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation/CSO Elimination Project.** Manager Schulz said the project is nearly completed with only minor cleanup and paving work on South Main Street. The new stormwater lines, etc. have been installed on the side streets and the new sidewalk curbing along Prospect Street will be installed next week. Once that is completed, the new asphalt sidewalk will be installed. All the work should be completed before the end of October. Chair Maxwell asked what the backup plan would be if the paving contractor doesn't complete his work in time. Manager Schulz is very confident that the curbing subcontractor will get their work done before the end of October. That phase of the project would be important to make sure there is proper street drainage over the winter months.
- b. **Electric Vehicle (EV) Chargers Installation.** Manager Schulz said the equipment has arrived and the installer will be putting it in place soon. The two (2) EV chargers will be located on the south side of Depot Square.
- c. **Smart Meters.** Manager Schulz said we are looking to have the new smart meters for all Northfield electric and water customers installed over the next few months. There will be a kickoff meeting on this topic for Vermont public utilities held in Swanton next month and Manager Schulz plans to attend.
- d. **New Northfield Police Department (NPD) Chief.** Manager Schulz said NPD Chief Pierre Gomez started work last Monday (09/18/23) and attended the "Night on the Common" the following day in order to introduce himself to community members. Chief Gomez will provide his first "Department Head Report" at the next regular meeting (10/10/23).
- e. **Local ADA Compliance update.** Manager Schulz has reached out to an ADA-compliance contractor to address all the problems in the public parks, facilities, etc. that were brought up at the last meeting by the Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force. Board member Morse asked where the municipal funds were to pay for this. Manager Schulz said there are some existing Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) funds that could be used. Board member Shernock was grateful for the letter Manager Schulz wrote to the local US Postmaster requesting that the post office's entryways be made fully ADA-compliant.
- f. **FEMA Reimbursement for Storm Damage.** Manager Schulz and other municipal officials have been meeting with FEMA representatives on a weekly basis in order to fully document the local storm damage from the flooding rainstorm this past July. He said the process seems to be progressing well.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Cox Brook Road Covered Bridges.** Board member Shernock spoke recently to the owner of the Falls General Store and she is grateful to Manager Schulz that the planned work on the covered bridges has been postponed from October (foliage season) to November (stick season). Board member Shernock was told that the General Store makes more money during the relatively brief foliage season than it does over the whole winter.
- b. **Janitorial Services update.** Board member Stevens asked for an update regarding the contracted janitorial services that cover the Municipal Building, Brown Public Library, and Police Station. Manager Schulz said he has interviewed a couple of potential contractors this past week and he should be hiring someone soon. The previous janitorial service contractor quit abruptly without notice last month and this caused some delay in finding a replacement.
- c. **"Night on the Common."** Board member Petty would like to thank all those who contributed to help make this community event such a success again this year. Another Community Photograph was taken and Board member Petty hopes this and all the previous ones can be framed and put on display in the Municipal Building (or other prominent location).
- d. **Norwich University (NU) Paine Mountain Trail Race.** Board member Petty thanked NU for holding this event last Friday afternoon (09/22/23). There were a large number of participants in the adult and kids races from Northfield as well as many visitors to the community. She hopes that this will become an annual event.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Carolyn Stevens: ARPA Fund Request Process.** Ms. Stevens is concerned that the way the award process is now set up makes it seem that those who submit their requests first have a real advantage over those who submit at a later time. Therefore, the awarding process seems to favor the expedient over those whose proposals actually might have more merit. Ms. Stevens worries that awarding ARPA funds on a rolling basis might result in the fund being depleted before some truly meritorious requests have been made. Chair Maxwell said the ARPA fund program has been widely publicized locally over the past couple of years and yet we have had only three (3) formal applications submitted to date. Any group or individual with an interest in applying for ARPA funds should submit an application as soon as possible. Board member Petty said this will be a deliberative process and the Select Board members will not be awarding large amounts of ARPA funds without significant public discussion. Submissions that do not meet the criteria cited on the application form will not be rewarded. Board member Shernock agreed that quick decisions will not be made and that the Select Board members reserve the right to request additional information from applicants. Those who worry about the fund being depleted before they can submit a request really need to redouble their efforts because the aforementioned ARPA deadlines must be met. Elroy Hill said applications may be considered on a rolling basis but that doesn't mean they will be awarded on a rolling basis.
- b. Sonja Rhodes: Central Street Traffic Concerns.** Ms. Rhodes has learned that temporary speed bumps will soon be installed on Central Street in order to address residents' concerns about speeding drivers. She asked if radar speed signs also will be installed to record the actual road travel speed. She was told that they would. Chair Maxwell said these devices have been placed on Central Street before and the results indicated that overall, most drivers comply with the 25 MPH speed limit. However, due to repeated vocal complaints from Central Street residents, the temporary speed bumps will be installed on an experimental basis to see if they actually address their concerns. If the test is unsuccessful or they prove unpopular, they can be relocated elsewhere in the community.
- c. Sonja Rhodes: Stormwater Drainage on Central Street.** Ms. Rhodes lives on Central Street near its intersection with Washington Street and is concerned that the most recent road paving has redirected the street's stormwater towards her residence. She is especially worried that snow berms forming this winter might cause spring runoff to pool in her driveway. Manager Schulz will ask Highway Foreman Trent Tucker to look into this and make any corrections he feels would remedy the problem.

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

The Board adjourned at 10:35 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 were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of October 10, 2023.