

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of August 13, 2024**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse (7:27 p.m.), Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Pierre Gomez (Chief, Northfield Police Department), Meggan McCusker (Chief, Northfield Ambulance Service), Danielle Farnum (Northfield Ambulance Service), Emily Lewis (DuBois & King), Kait Campbell (DuBois & King), Blake Pierson (Gray Building Coalition), Eric Braman (American Legion Post 63), Jeremy Whalen (Northfield Conservation Commission), Mariela Swiech (Northfield Conservation Commission), Ray Crowder (Town Forest Stewardship Committee), Susan Stillinger, Carolyn Stevens, 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. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Emily Lewis and Kait Campbell, DuBois & King: Wall Street Pedestrian Amenities Scoping Project.** Emily Lewis is a Landscape Architect and Ms. Campbell a Landscape Designer & Community Planner for DuBois & King and they have been working on this scoping project for several months. The Select Board members were provided with an updated draft of the scoping study that Ms. Campbell said was nearly finalized but could be further revised based on any comments or suggestions provided tonight or in the next few days. Ms. Campbell said the project area is Depot Square, Wall Street, and Water Street and the intention is to create a safer walking path from the Northfield Common to Dog River Park. The scoping study provides alternative approaches to achieve this and the accompanying recommendations are based on feedback from Select Board members and from the general public. There was a Local Concerns Meeting held on November 16, 2023 and a Scoping Study Alternatives Presentation was held at a Select Board regular meeting on March 26, 2024. Based on the feedback from those meetings, two alternate proposals have been developed. The first would add two bump outs on Depot Square in order to reduce the length of the crosswalks there. Ms. Campbell explained that long crosswalks can be challenging to those with mobility issues, those walking with small children, etc. In addition, new sidewalk would be installed on the north side of Wall Street and the current crosswalk there would be slightly relocated with another bump out installed to shorten its length. The other alternative would be to install new sidewalk on the south side of Wall Street but that option has a number of difficulties and is not recommended. For example, establishing the walking path on that side of the street would require pedestrians to cross several busy parking lot entrances. There also are a number of utility poles on that side of the street that would have to be navigated around or relocated. Beyond Wall Street, the plan is to add new sidewalk along Water Street leading to Dog River Park. The options there are either have the new sidewalk next to the road with new curb cuts installed in order to improve ADA access to the park's interior. The alternative is to pave the existing walking path located within the park. However, the main problem with the second option is that the path would meander rather than provide a direct path to the park pavilion, parking areas, etc. In addition, the Dog River Park is intended to be a "functioning floodplain" in case of heavy rainstorms and there are FEMA restrictions on adding "imperious surfaces" within the park. At the aforementioned public meetings, there was a definite preference expressed for the first Wall Street option presented, i.e. installing sidewalk on the north side of Wall Street. There were mixed views regarding the Water Street proposals. The total project costs of the two Wall Street options is estimated at about \$550,000 each and the first Water Street alternative is estimated at about \$150,000 and the second at about \$330,000. Ms. Campbell said she and Ms. Lewis would be more than willing to work with the municipality on locating and securing grant opportunities to fund this project. She then asked if the Select Board members had any questions or comments regarding the scoping study.

Board member Shernock did not have any specific questions but said how impressed she was with this well-written report. Board member Stevens also appreciated the great amount of work that went into this. Board member Petty would have like to have seen it specified in the report what should be the ideal width and length for crosswalks. Ms. Lewis said there are state and federal highway standards that are usually adhered to but some communities do prefer their crosswalks to be slightly wider and a bit shorter. In addition, the presence of heavy trucks using the project route had to be taken into consideration when the recommended crosswalk lengths and locations were determined. Board member Morse asked if there had been any thought of using the parking area by the former Merchants Bank as a shorter route to the interior of Depot Square. Ms. Campbell said that route had been considered but the poor sightlines at that location probably would mean a crosswalk there would not receive Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) approval. In addition, there have been indications that the new business at that location is planning to close off this pedestrian shortcut in future. Chair Maxwell then asked about the next steps in the process. Ms. Lewis said VTrans has completed their review of the project plans and their recommendations have been incorporated into the current draft. Once any additional suggestions have been received and included in the document, the document will be finalized and prepared for further Select Board consideration. Board member Petty noted a grant application to cover the construction costs already has been submitted. In addition, the Select Board have provided tentative approval for \$150,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to cover the local match amount should the application prove successful. Board member Morse asked if this project could be done in phases. Ms. Lewis said that was possible. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Lewis and Ms. Campbell for tonight's presentation .

- b. Blake Pierson, Gray Building Coalition: ARPA Funds Request.** The Gray Building Coalition has submitted a request for \$250,000 in ARPA funds in order for site remediation and for the "re-greening" of the location. Mr. Pierson said the building is now at ninety percent (90%) occupancy and the coalition recently was awarded a Bruhn Grant for repainting the building's exterior. Mr. Pierson said there now are plans to improve the building site by removing two structures that are no longer in use: an adjacent brick building and an old boiler room. These structures no longer have any purpose and their removal would allow for additional open green space that could be used for community gatherings, etc. There also is consideration of creating a public amphitheater with the additional space provided by configuring the building's parking lot and turnaround. The total cost of all components of this project is estimated at \$250,000 and the award of ARPA funds in any amount would help start the process. Mr. Pierson said the estimated cost of removing the two unused structures is about \$75,000. Board member Morse believes there is an old coal chute near the Gray Building that also would need to be removed or filled in with concrete. This chute now serves as an attractive nuisance with safety concerns. Board member Morse also would like to see the \$250,000 figure broken down into components (rather than just the structure removal) so the Select Board members could consider funding specific phases of the overall project. Board member Stevens also would like to see this information. Mr. Pierson said the removal of the aforementioned structures is the only urgent part of this long-term project. The creation of additional green space could be accomplished over several years. He is willing to provide additional cost estimates for the all project components and he thanked the Select Board members for considering this proposal. Board member Petty is pleased to see the Gray Building better utilized than in years past and feels that the creation of additional open green space would be a desirable outcome. However, Board member Petty also noted that this far into the ARPA allocation process, undesignated funds are now limited and she would be reluctant to provide a significant amount to an organization that has already demonstrated its ability to seek and acquire grant funds. Eric Braman said he felt the Gray Building serves an important role in the community and providing some ARPA funds for this project would be a worthy investment. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Pierson for the information provided tonight and said the Select Board members will further discuss this request as a possible action item later in this meeting.

- c. Eric Braman, American Legion Post 63: ARPA Funds Request.** The American Legion has submitted a request for \$100,000 in ARPA funds for the purpose of conducting needed building improvements. These include upgrading its electric infrastructure to meet current code; purchasing and installing an emergency generator in case of a prolonged regional disaster-related power outage; repair or replace the building's aging roof; replace the building's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system; replace the building's water heaters to provide continuous hot water in an energy efficient manner; repair the building's leaking atrium and install energy efficient windows to reduce heating loss; and upgrade the building's kitchen capacity to allow for at least nine hundred (900) meals to be produced daily "for community relief during natural and man-made disasters." Board member Morse thought that the American Legion is an important resource for the community but added that it does have membership restrictions that means it is not fully accessible to the general public. Mr. Braman admitted that their charter does limit its membership to US military veterans (i.e. "Legionnaires"), their male descendants (i.e., "Sons of the Legion"), and "Auxiliary" members (i.e., spouses or family members of current Legionnaires). Mr. Braman did note that the building is fully open to the public for special events throughout the year including weddings, fundraising dinners, blood drives, etc. Board member Shernock said the fact that the facility is not fully open to the public makes it difficult to award public funds for its upkeep. She then asked if cost estimates for the different components of the ARPA fund request could be provided. Board member Shernock then asked if there is any consideration of relocating Post 63 elsewhere. Mr. Braman said there are no plans to leave the current building, which has been the home of American Legion Post 63 for the last twenty-eight (28) years. From 1922 to 1996, it was located on South Main Street in the Governor Charles Paine House now occupied by the Northfield Historical Society. Board member Petty asked if the list of needed building improvements were in order of priority. Mr. Braman confirmed that addressing the building's electric system certainly is the main priority at this time. The other building improvements are not as urgent. Board member Petty said given the limited availability of ARPA funds at this time, it might be best to focus on most urgent needs only. Chair Maxwell said it would be useful if a breakdown of the \$100,000 request into separate components could be provided so this matter can be fully considered. He also considers American Legion Post 63 to be an important resource for the Northfield community given all the volunteer work done and fundraising efforts for worthy causes regularly performed by its membership.
- d. Jeremy Whalen and Mariela Swiech, Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC): ARPA Funds Request.** The NCC and the Northfield Middle & High School (NMHS) have submitted a joint request for \$74,800 in ARPA funds in rehabilitate the trail systems in the Town Forest and on school property located on Garvey Hill. The funds would be used to bring in Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) workers to perform the bulk of the work with the assistance of local volunteers. One goal of this project is to provide NMHS students with practical outdoor work experience under the supervision of professional trail restoration specialists. Mr. Whalen thanked the Select Board members for considering this request and asked if they would need any additional information beyond what has already been provided. Board member Morse is still not clear whether or not the NMHS applied for FEMA funds to cover the expense of repairing any damage to school property due to the July 2023 flooding rainstorm. Mr. Whalen doesn't believe a FEMA application was made as the damage to the Garvey Hills trail system is the result of numerous storm events over the past few years. That includes winter storms that downed trees along the trail system. The main intention of restoring the walking paths on Garvey Hill is to allow them to be again for organized team sports (i.e., cross-country running, etc.); for individual use by NMHS students, staff, and the general public; and restore entry to a now inaccessible outdoor classroom. Board member Shernock was grateful to see the letters of recommendation from school administrators for this proposal. She also knows that the outdoor classroom was well used when it was in operation. Board member Petty is supportive of efforts to rehabilitate the local hiking trail system, which has suffered much recently due to storm events. This matter will be discussed later in the meeting as a possible action item.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **July 23, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #03-25 & 03-25A-H.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #03-25 & 03-25A-H in the amount of \$675,841.88. It was noted that of the total warrant amount, \$449,029.01 was spent on power purchases and other operating expenses for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). Board member Stevens noted the Highway Department purchased about \$3,000 of calcium chloride for the backroads. He asked where this was deposited. Manager Schulz said a good part of it was put on Lovers Lane and Hallstrom Road. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through July 21, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$120,197.94. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through August 4, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$116,912.70. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell noted that an updated ARPA fund summary was included in the board packets. It shows that \$608,641.19 in ARPA funds have been expended to date, which leaves \$1,341,414.07 in unexpended funds. However, the amount of total expenditures and commitments is \$1,771,879.19, which leaves an undesignated balance of \$178,176.07. There is an additional \$106,018.90 of ARPA fund interest earnings and those funds are not subject to ARPA fund designation (12/31/24) and expenditure (12/31/26) deadlines. Board member Morse noted that \$7,000 in ARPA funds had been tentatively awarded to the Northfield Farmers Market as local match funds for a grant application. It now appears that the grant application was not successful so those funds can be returned back to the ARPA undesignated fund balance. Board member Morse also asked that further discussion of the ARPA fund requests from the Gray Building Coalition and American Legion Post 63 be delayed until the applicants have provided the additional information requested earlier tonight. There was no objection to this request.

Board member Petty believes all the additional information requested for the NCC/NMHS request has been received and she felt the Select Board members should be able to take action on this. Chair Maxwell had hoped to discuss this matter at a future joint meeting with the Paine Mountain School District Directors. However, he has been unable to get a firm date for this meeting so it might be best to proceed now with this request. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the ARPA funds request from the Northfield Conservation Commission and the Northfield Middle & High School in the amount of \$78,000 for the purpose of engaging the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to restore trail systems located in the Town Forest and on Garvey Hill school property. Board member Shernock noted that the intention is to spend \$30,000 of the requested funds on Garvey Hill and the rest in the Town Forest. She would prefer to prioritize the Garvey Hill work and thus reduce the award amount to \$30,000. Board member Petty would like to see some trail restoration work done in the Town Forest as well even if the full request award amount is reduced. After some discussion, the motion was amended to reduce the award amount to \$40,000 with the funds to be split evenly between Garvey Hill and Town Forest trail restoration work. **The amended motion passed 5-0-0.** Mr. Whalen said a contact with VYCC will be prepared that will contain the stipulation that the \$40,000 awarded for the trail restoration work be split evenly between the two locations.

Board member Shernock said that a final report regarding recommended rehabilitation process for the Town Common should be presented to the Select Board members by this October. At that time, there should be a discussion regarding whether ARPA funds should be used to perform some or all of the recommended rehabilitation work. Board member Petty favors the proposal by Economic Development Director Tom Davis to set aside \$200,000 in ARPA funds to establish a reserve account that would be used to cover local match amounts for future grant applications. She asked when a decision regarding this proposal should be made. Manager Schulz said the reserve account amount should be determined by this October. Chair Maxwell also would like updated cost estimates for addressing the various deteriorating retaining walls located around the community. Manager Schulz will obtain these estimates and noted there will be various options available depending on how much we are will to spend on this.

- b. 2024 Grand List Change: Errors & Omissions.** Manager Schulz received a request from Board of Listers Chair Thomas Alsheimer that the Grand List total amount be increased by \$11,900 in order to correct a clerical error made during a property transfer. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the requested Grand List adjustment in the amount of \$11,900. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Proposed Ambulance Fee Revisions.** Manager Schulz noted that the fee schedule for various Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) services has not been adjusted for three years. Since then, there have been significant price increases for operating costs as well as material and labor expenses. The proposed fee revision would raise the fees charged for various NAS services an average of fifteen to twenty percent (15%-20%). Manager Schulz noted this adjustment will make the NAS fees schedule more comparable to those of neighboring agencies including the Waterbury, East Montpelier, Barre City, Montpelier, and Barre Town ambulance services. NAS Chief Meggan McCusker then provided the reasons for specific fee increases. For example, the amount charged for no transport treatment responses would double in the current proposal in order to better reflect the actual cost of such emergency callouts. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the NAS fee schedule adjustment as presented. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. Public Hearing (Disorderly Conduct Ordinance Revisions).** There has been a request to revise the local Disorderly Conduct Ordinance in order to prohibit "outdoor recreation discharge of a firearm in the high and medium density, industrial and downtown centers as identified in the current zoning ordinances." In order to amend this ordinance, a public hearing must be held beforehand and it has been tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, September 10, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. in the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to authorize holding this public hearing at the date, time, and location specified above. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. FY 2023-2024 Town General Year-End Report.** Manager Schulz said a draft budget report for the recently completed fiscal year has been included in the board packets. The preliminary figures show a \$295,668 surplus in the Town General budget. The Town Highway budget currently shows a \$36,175 deficit but that will be more than offset when \$150,000 in FEMA storm-damage reimbursement funds are later received. Board member Morse noted the amount of the budget surplus and wanted to know the amount of budget surpluses over the past five fiscal years. That information would be very useful to have on hand when the next fiscal year budget is prepared.
- b. Vine Street and Cross Street Sidewalk Project.** Manager Schulz said the engineer has completed the preliminary plans for this project. Manager Schulz will meet again with the engineer next week to finalize the plans so that bid documents can be prepared.
- c. Northfield Falls Pedestrian Safety Improvements Project.** Manager Schulz said the project contractor will be reviewing the area later this week and the work itself should begin next Monday (08/19/24).

- d. **Labor Day Flashing Signs.** Manager Schulz has ordered two flashing informational signs that will be on display over the holiday weekend in order to warn drivers to slow down due to increased pedestrian traffic, etc. There was only one sign in place last year but Manager Schulz felt a second one would be more effective.
- e. **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Training Grant Opportunity.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont Community Foundation has grant funds available to cover the expense of DEI training for Northfield municipal employees, officials, etc. A letter of support for the grant application has been drafted for the Select Board Chair's signature.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Crosswalk Painting.** Board member Morse noted several crosswalks were repainted over the past week. Even though the contractor did not provide flaggers, Northfield drivers seemed to be able to navigate the work areas without any difficulty.
- b. **Memorial Park Bleachers.** Board member Stevens asked if there is an update for the proposed replacement of the Memorial Park bleachers. Manager Schulz said at a previous meeting, the Select Board members seemed to favor purchasing portable bleachers that could be moved from location to location for special events. Manager Schulz is still investigating cost estimates for this possibility.
- c. **Memorial Park Playing Field Mowing.** Board member Petty would like to see better coordination between the school and the municipal work crews regarding the maintenance of the Memorial Park playing fields.
- d. **Bridge #67 Repairs Project Update.** Board member Stevens asked about the planned repairs for this bridge, which VTrans has requested be done as soon as possible. Manager Schulz said the bidding for this project closed yesterday (08/12/24) and he is now reviewing the submissions. He noted that the low bidder would prefer to perform the work next spring so it is possible another contractor who could complete the work this year will be chosen even at a (slightly) higher cost.
- e. **Municipal Pool.** Board member Petty noted the Municipal Pool will close for the season this coming Saturday (08/17/24). Given the high temperatures over this summer, this has been a very important community resource. She then asked when the pool painting and other repairs would take place. Manager Schulz said the painting and other repair work, including the installation of new skimmers, will be done within the next few weeks right after the pool closes.
- f. **Jack Baroffio Tribute.** Chair Maxwell noted the recent passing of Jackamo (Jack) Baroffio and noted Mr. Baroffio was a true pillar of the Northfield community who served as a Village Trustee for several years and also was a longtime member of the Northfield Fire Department. In addition, Mr. Baroffio provided firearms safety training to hundreds of Northfield youths over a forty-year period and this included future state and national rifle shooting champions. Chair Maxwell also has learned that Baroffio's Garage now is the oldest continually operated family business in Northfield.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy Hill: Retaining Wall Repairs.** Mr. Hill suggested that perhaps the Pearl Street retaining wall could be repaired at a limited cost by being treated with waterproofing sealant. There are reputable local contractors that could provide this service and provide multi-year warranties for their work.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/hm4YI9RJI2Y>

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of August 27, 2024.