

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of May 27, 2025**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Charles Morse, Board members K. David Maxwell, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Sally Davidson, Ryan Harlow, Kristina Ward, Auditi Guha ( VT Digger), Lorna Doney, Gail Hall, Sarah Path, Kristina Kiarsis, Clare LaFrance, Janan Hamm, Dan Anderson (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Tim Swartz (AWPS Task Force), Delane McIlvene (AWPS Task Force), William Wakefield, Phil Susmann, Amanda Guazzoni, Gerard LaVarnway, Dennis Donahue, Susan Stillinger, Susan Barnard, Carolyn Stevens, Bill Clements, and Elroy C. Hill.

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

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

**III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. Sally Davidson: Northfield Community Flag Project. (7:00 p.m.)** Ms. Davidson is co-chair (with Bill Passalacqua) of the Northfield Community Flag Project Committee. She is asking if the Select Board members would be willing to match the donations they receive from the public for their current fundraising effort. Ms. Davidson said the combined cost of each flag and pole set is \$65.00 and their fundraising goal is \$15,000. Board member Maxwell said he was co-chair with Mr. Passalacqua of this committee during the 2000 fundraiser. He asked if there was a request for municipal funds at that time. Ms. Davidson doesn't know as she was not involved with that effort. Board member Petty asked how much in public funds is the committee asking for. Ms. Davidson said they are hoping the municipality would make up any shortfall if they cannot get the full \$15,000 from private donations. She added that TDS Telecom is willing to assist with the flagpole installation. Chair Morse asked what was the timeframe for the current fundraising effort. Ms. Davidson said there was no deadline as they hope the new flags can be installed this summer or at least before the next Veterans Day. Chair Morse said this expenditure is not budgeted so the Select Board members would need to discuss this matter as an action item when the requested amount has been determined. On a separate matter, Ms. Davidson asked when the flagpole on the Common would be put back in place. Manager Schulz is working with Utility Superintendent James Russo on this and they are now trying to determine whether a granite or concrete base would be more effective. The flagstaff should be in place within the next couple of weeks.
- b. Kristina Ward: Public Information Request. (7:09 p.m.)** Ms. Ward has been speaking with Northfield residents and they would like to know how they can best show their support for Police Chief Pierre Gomez in light of allegations that he has been subjected to repeated racial slurs by certain community members. Ms. Ward said these residents also would like to know where the Select Board members stand in regard to showing their public support for Chief Gomez. Chair Morse said the Select Board members have hired a private investigating firm to look into the ethics complaint filed by Chief Gomez in January 2025. This is a confidential process that remains ongoing and, much like a "whistleblower" situation, there is some information that might remain permanently sealed. Ms. Ward would like to know if the individual Select Board members do support Chief Gomez and condemn the racist behavior to which he has been subjected. Chair Morse said Chief Gomez does have his full support. Manager Schulz said he was the person who made the decision to hire Pierre Gomez as Northfield Police Chief. He doesn't regret this decision and said Chief Gomez still has his full support. Select Board members Maxwell, Shernock, and Stevens then expressed their own support for Chief Gomez. Board member Shernock added that she has always supported racial justice. Board member Petty said that she supports all municipal employees and she has been very impressed with Chief Gomez's performance in the time he has been here. Board member Petty also knows there are racial injustice concerns in this community that need to be directly addressed. She opposes all forms of discrimination and noted that the Select Board members did approve and sign a Statement of Anti-Racism in October 2020 and a Declaration of Inclusion in December 2022. Board member Petty said she and the other Select Board members are certainly willing to take action to make this a better, more equitable community. Ms. Ward then asked if Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is a municipal holiday. Manager Schulz said it has been a "floating holiday" for employees in the past but that might change when a new personnel policy is approved in coming weeks. Ms. Ward asked if the Declaration of Inclusion included Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training requirements. Board member Petty said there has been online DEI training for municipal officials and employees in the past but we are now in the process of establishing in-person DEI training requirements. This will be discussed later in the meeting.

Ms. Ward said that the refusal to provide the requested information will incur significant legal costs for the municipality. Manager Schulz said it was the Town Attorney who advised him the requested information was confidential. He did not want to go against this legal opinion.

- c. **Ryan Harlow: Public Information Request. (7:24 p.m.)** Mr. Harlow was the person who submitted the public information request to the municipality regarding a letter from Chief Gomez to Manager Schulz alleging racist treatment. Chair Morse reiterated his previous statement that the Select Board has hiring private investigators to look into this ethics complaint. He added that the Select Board members cannot publicly discuss an investigation that is both ongoing and confidential. Mr. Harlow said he has submitted a new ethics complaint separate from his original public information request. This new complaint focuses on perceived conflict of interest related to his original request. Chair Morse said he will follow up on this complaint. Mr. Harlow said the municipal ethics policy does require targeted persons to remove themselves from the process.
- d. **Nancy Peck: Clark Road. (7:31 p.m.)** Chair Morse said Ms. Peck was unable to attend tonight's meeting but submitted a letter detailing her concerns about the past maintenance of the road she lives on and how that has resulted in recurrent problems. Mr. Peck has had repeated instances of stormwater flowing off Clark Road and into her yard and/or driveway. She has made repeated requests to the Town Manager and Select Board members to resolve this problem. Just over a week ago, a very strong rainstorm washed out the road again and made her driveway impassable. Highway Foreman Karl Bailey and his crew were able after a few hours work to clear a clogged culvert that was causing the problem. Mr. Bailey acknowledged at that time that past neglect of the road's underlying problems were responsible for the most recent washout. Ms. Peck is very grateful for the hard work Mr. Bailey and his crew put in to resolve the most recent problem and hopes that he will honor his commitment to come back to Clark Road soon and provide more lasting solutions.

#### IV. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. **Liquor License Renewal: American Legion. (7:36 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Outside Consumption Permit: American Legion. (7:36 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the outside consumption permit. It was noted that the outside consumption would take place on American Legion property. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **May 13, 2025 (Regular Meeting) (7:38 p.m.)**. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Chair Morse abstaining.**

#### VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #22-25 & #22-25A-C. (7:39 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #22-25 & #22-25A-C in the amount of \$1,229,992.00. Board member Shernock noted a fee for transferring images from the covered bridge cameras. Manager Schulz said this was a regular expense. Board member Shernock felt it might be wise to perform a cost analysis to see if the expense of maintaining the cameras on the covered bridges is worth the expense. The idea behind them was to identify truck drivers who have caused damage to the covered bridge and force them to make restitution. However, the municipality hasn't been too successful in getting this reimbursement. Board member Petty thought getting repayment for major damage could provide significant funds. Board member Shernock then asked about a \$3,800 payment for "wayfinding signage." Manager Schulz said this expense was covered by VOREC grant funds. Board member Petty noted this wayfinding signage project was quite a long process that involved a good number of dedicated volunteers. The project is nearly complete as the signage is now being installed along Town Forest trails, etc. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Warrant #23-25A. (7:46 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #23-25A in the amount of \$29,782.94. It was noted this was a payment on a bank note for the Cox Brook Road paving project from a few years ago. Board member Shernock asked when the crosswalk will be completed at the intersection of Vermont Route 12 and Cox Brook Road. Manager Schulz said the contractor for this project should be here before the end of this week. This project has seen numerous delays because this is a state highway and the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has not been very cooperative in getting it done. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through May 11, 2025. (7:48 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$116,749.98. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

## VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Cheney Field Water Tank Replacement Project. (7:49 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the contractor for this project (Preload) over the past week has been upgrading an existing road on Cheney Field in order to better access the worksite. During the process, they found large trucks would not be able to navigate the sharp turn on the road so they reached out to Norwich University (NU) for permission to access their adjacent property. NU provided their permission and the contractor then started building a new access road. Manager Schulz learned of this development from second-hand sources and then contacted the contractor to inform them that this was not allowed according to the project contract. The contractor disputed this point so Manager Schulz will conduct a further investigation on this. Manager Schulz also feels strongly that the contractor should have contacted the municipality before building a new road. He added that the archeologically sensitive area of Cheney Field was not affected by this development. According to the project contact, any part of Cheney Field disturbed by the project must be restored at its conclusion. Board member Petty felt the engineer for this project should have realized early in the planning stages that the sharp turn in the existing road would need to be addressed. Also, the discussion with NU about access to their property should have included the municipality. The new road might have been a necessary development but Board member Petty felt this step should not have been taken without informing the municipality beforehand. In addition, Northfield residents should have been informed of this as well since public notices about this project have included the assurance that the bulk of Cheney Field would not be adversely impacted by this project. Manager Schulz did inspect the site and agreed that the presence of ledge in the area probably required a new access road. Board member Petty thought that the contractor should have installed some temporary fencing to better isolate removed ledge rocks from the rest of the field. Board member Stevens also looked at the site and felt that the project seems to be encouraging the spread of knotweed across the field. Manager Schulz will discuss this with the contractor as preventing the spread of invasive vegetation was stipulated in the project contract. There now is a temporary parking lot on the field but this was permitted in the project contract. Board member Petty said there has been some discussion by the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) and other groups about the possibility of having the new parking area remain in place after the project's conclusion to allow for better public access to Cheney Field and the nearby Town Forest trail system. However, there are differing views on this subject and this matter remains unresolved. Board member Shernock said NCC member Debbie Zuaro has asked who will be held responsible for any culpability regarding the unauthorized new access road. Manager Schulz said it is the opinion of the project's engineer that Preload would be held responsible for any permit violations. Chair Morse said an alternate route for the new access road probably would have required the removal of over forty (40) trees and considerable ledge. In retrospect, putting the new access road across an open field probably was more appropriate but there should have been much better communication between the contractor and the municipality before any action was taken. Board member Petty also would like some new signage installed to warn hikers in the area so they don't inadvertently enter the work area. Manager Schulz will see to this.
- b. **2025 Memorial Park Pool Schedule & Fees. (8:13 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to approve the 2025 Memorial Park Pool Schedule & Fees as presented. Manager Schulz met with Pool Director Shannon Palone earlier this week to get her recommendations for the pool operating schedule and whether there should be any adjustments to the fees charged. Ms. Palone did recommend that the cost of Northfield resident family season passes be increased from \$125 to \$140 this summer. This is the first time in five (5) years that this particular fee has been increased. In addition, as was discussed when the Municipal Pool operating budget was proposed, the first two (2) swim lesson sessions will be free to Northfield residents. The pool is scheduled to open on Saturday, June 21, 2025 and will close on Saturday, August 16, 2025. Board member Petty hopes that there will be better advertising this year regarding the pool's operating hours, etc. as well as the fact there will be free swimming lessons this year. She added that in addition to adjusting the pool budget to cover the loss of swimming lesson revenue, the Select Board members also budgeted funds for additional special events at the pool this summer and she hopes these events also will be well advertised in advance. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. Review and Approval of FY 2025-2026 Water & Sewer Rates. (8:17 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the Utility Commission members fully reviewed the Water and Sewer Department budgets at their April and May meetings. The proposed budgets will result in a combined water-sewer rate increase of 2.65% for the average residential customer. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the FY 2025-2026 water and sewer rates as proposed. Manager Schulz added that usage of municipal water and sewer has finally returned to pre-pandemic levels. Board member Maxwell would like to receive copies of the Water and Sewer Department budgets. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. Approval of 2025 Northfield VT Local Emergency Management Plan. (8:20 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the Northfield VT Local Emergency Management Plan as presented. Manager Schulz said this local plan, which has emergency contact information, the locations of emergency shelters, etc., needs to be updated each year so that the municipality remains eligible for emergency planning grants and other state emergency management programs. In addition to the basic plan based on the Vermont Emergency Management template, Manager Schulz has provided a supplemental document with additional information. This document includes some updates based on Select Board member suggestions and comments made last year. Manager Schulz added he has confirmed residents having to evacuate their homes in an emergency will be able to bring their pets to the emergency shelter located at the Northfield Middle & High School. The other emergency shelter located at NU's Plumley Armory currently does not allow pets. Board member Petty suggested a few minor corrections. She then asked if Northfield has an Animal Control Officer. Manager Schulz said Northfield Police Department (NPD) officers do handle minor animal complaints but we also work with Random Rescue (Williamstown VT). We also encourage residents to contact the local Health Officers if they have complaints about problem dogs. Board member Stevens would like the new generators located at the Fire Station and Police Station added to the supplemental document. Board member Shernock would like the contact information for Select Board members to include their official municipal email addresses (i.e., *name@northfield.vt.us*). Since there is no urgent need for plan approval tonight, the motion was tabled until the next meeting.
- e. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training. (8:34 p.m.)** Chair Morse would like the Northfield Personnel Policies & Procedures document amended to require that all municipal employees must attend DEI training. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to require that all Northfield municipal employees attend Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training sessions in accordance with the municipality's Statement of Inclusion. The Select Board members will begin scheduling their own DEI training sessions in the near future. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- f. Northfield Common Rehabilitation Project. (8:37 p.m.)** At the last meeting, there was a discussion of the priority list for individual components of the overall project. At that time, it was noted that the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee (Board members Shernock and Stevens) has recommended that the return of the kiosk/bus stop to the Common area should be the top priority. Chair Morse would like to determine at this time what is the best location for the kiosk/bus stop so that it can be reinstalled as soon as possible. Manager Schulz said possible sites include the south side of the Common between the NU Armory and the Mayo Insurance Building. The DuBois & King consultants for the Common Rehabilitation Project discouraged this location as they thought there is insufficient room between the two buildings. Their recommendation was to install a bump out near that location where the kiosk/bus stop could be sited. Chair Morse asked if there is a possible location that doesn't require any additional spending. Manager Schulz said there was not. It was possible to site the kiosk on Wall Street near the Police Station but Green Mountain Transit (GMT) has objections to placing the kiosk/bus stop beyond the Wall Street railroad tracks. Gail Hall is a member of Northfield Energy Committee (NCC) that spearheaded the placement of the kiosk at its former location near the former Merchants/Community Bank. She noted that wherever the kiosk is located, a nine foot by nine foot (9'x9') concrete foundation would need to be installed below it. Chair Morse said if the kiosk is re-sited on private property, he wants to make sure that there will be an easement in place so it would not have to be relocated (like last time) should property ownership or tenancy change. Board member Stevens feels the proposed location by the NU Armory/Mayo Insurance Building provides sufficient space and that should be the target location. Manager Schulz will contact NU and Mayo Insurance to see if they would have any objections to putting the kiosk there. There also would need to be some research on the property lines there. Chair Morse would like Manager Schulz to work on this and report back to the Select Board members at a future meeting. He added that there probably are funds in the municipal budget that could cover the cost of the new kiosk foundation.

Lorna Doney works at Mayo Insurance and asked if putting the kiosk there would result in the loss of parking spaces. Chair Morse would like Manager Schulz also to look into how many parking spaces (if any) would be lost. Ms. Doney felt there is a serious lack of parking on Depot Square and that should be taken into consideration. Chair Morse said we really need to get that kiosk back in service soon and Manager Schulz will look into all possible relocation sites. Lorna Doney thought the empty space on North Main Street by the Domino's Pizza would be a good site for the kiosk. Chair Morse thought that also could be a possibility.

- g. Northfield Covered Bridge Issues. (8:54 p.m.)** Chair Morse noted Vermont Governor Phil Scott, at the request of the Vermont Covered Bridge Society, has officially proclaimed the week of August 2, 2025 through August 9, 2025 as "Covered Bridge Week in Vermont." There is a banner available for \$80 that could be displayed on a covered bridge during this week and Chair Morse asked if the Select Board members would authorize this purchase. He understands some local businesses already have pledged to purchase some banners themselves. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to authorize the purchase of a "Covered Bridge Week in Vermont" banner for \$80.00. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

On a related matter, Chair Morse said there has been considerable Select Board discussion in the past about how to better protect Northfield's covered bridges from damage from oversized vehicles. Board member Stevens has suggested adding "headache bars" that would hang down from the bridges' entry points to prevent large trucks from entering them. He recently contacted the Town of Lyndon about their experience with these. The report he received was positive provided that the bars are set at (and not below) the covered bridge's height limit and there are nearby posted signs, preferably blinking, warning truck drivers of their presence. As indicated earlier, Board member Shernock would like a determination about whether the current surveillance cameras on the covered bridges are cost-effective. If not, we could eliminate them and with the savings purchase new headache bars and signage. Chair Morse also would like warning signage installed at the two separate entrances to Stony Brook Road informing truck drivers that they should detour along Smith Hill Road in order to prevent potential damage of the Stony Brook Road Covered Bridge (AKA Moseley Covered Bridge). Manager Schulz will have this new signage installed in the next couple of weeks.

### VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Property Condemnation Hearing. (9:02 p.m.)** At the last meeting, the Select Board members authorized holding a Condemnation Hearing for the property located at 73 North Main Street. There are stalled negotiations between VTrans and the property owner (Wesco Realty LLC) regarding utility work easements for the Main Street Bridge Replacement project. The date of this hearing was tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, June 3, 2025 but after further consideration by the Town Attorney, that hearing has been postponed to Tuesday, June 24, 2025. There had been some dispute about whether this hearing would require fifteen (15) or thirty (30) days' notice and the new date will eliminate that concern.
- b. Main Street Water Line Replacement Project. (9:03 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said in the next week the project contractor will continue removing pavement and installing new water lines along South Main Street. He noted that an updated project schedule was included in the Select Board meeting packets. Board member Maxwell would like future public notices to include an explanation for the blue temporary water lines placed at the sides of the street.
- c. Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Unionization. (9:05 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the NAS members are currently voting on whether or not they would like to form a collective bargaining unit for part-time employees. The vote will be tallied on Tuesday, June 10, 2025 and if the vote is successful, the municipality will begin negotiations with the new union.
- d. Planning Grant. (9:06 p.m.)** Manager Schulz announced that the municipality has received a \$16,389 planning grant that will be used to further update Northfield's zoning regulations in order to accommodate and encourage smart development, new housing, etc.
- e. VLCT Insurance Loss Run Report. (9:07 p.m.)** Also in the meeting packets was an insurance loss run report covering the last five (5) years from the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT). This report showed that they were no workers' compensation or injury claims from the Northfield highway or utility departments over this timeframe. That was good news because most Vermont communities see considerable numbers of potentially expensive workers' compensation claims from their public works department employees.

## **IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. Northfield Common Rehabilitation Project Design Award. (9:08 p.m.)** Board member Shernock was in Randolph recently and DuBois & King engineer Emily Lewis provided her with the 2025 Vermont Public Places Merit Award plaque DuBois & King received for the "Northfield, Vermont Town Common Redesign." Manager Schulz said the plaque would be displayed at an appropriate location in the Municipal Building.
- b. DLS Day 2025. (9:10 p.m.)** Board member Shernock said the Washington County Diversion program will be holding a special event on Wednesday, June 25, 2025 to assist those with suspended driver's licenses get their licenses reinstated while paying their violation fines in installments. The event will be held at 322 North Main Street, Barre VT from 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. For additional information, call 802-479-1900.
- c. 2014 Western Star Repairs. (9:11 p.m.)** Board member Maxwell noted in the board packets there was a printout of the various repair bills this particular vehicle has incurred since July 1, 2024. The total amount spent was \$25,974. Manager Schulz said this vehicle is scheduled for replacement in the next fiscal year, which starts July 1, 2025. There was Select Board consensus that no more money should be spent on this vehicle.

## **X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. Sally Davidson: Police Station Propane Tanks. (9:14 p.m.)** Ms. Davidson said there were two (2) large propane tanks located by the Police Station that she felt constituted a real eyesore. There should be a better location for these propane tanks out of public view. Chair Morse will take a look at this the next time he drives by the building.
- b. Elroy C. Hill: Police Chief Support. (9:18 p.m.)** As he has previously stated, Mr. Hill personally supports Chief Gomez one hundred percent (100%).
- c. Tim Swartz: Select Board Appreciation. (9:18 p.m.)** Mr. Swartz also wanted to thank the Select Board members for their service.

## **XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION. (9:19 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Petty, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a legal matter and a personnel issue with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:25 p.m.

*Manager Schulz left the executive session at 9:50 p.m.*

Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 10:25 p.m. No action was taken.

## **XII. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Shernock, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 10:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of June 10, 2025.