

**Joint Meeting of the Northfield Electric
and Water & Wastewater Commissions
Minutes of July 7, 2025**

Roll Call. Utility Commissioners Dennis Donahue, Steve Fitzhugh (absent), Michael Kelley, John Stevens, and Charlie Morse. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Utility Superintendent James Russo, and Gerard LaVarnway.

The meeting started at 6:30 p.m.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting

Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Kelley, to approved the May 5, 2025 meeting minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

Meeting of the Electric Commission

Northfield Electric Department (NED) Upcoming Projects

Smart Meters. Mr. Russo reported that all the Data Collection Units (DCUs) have been installed, tested, and are operating properly. As soon as the smart meters themselves arrive, they also will be installed and we should be able to perform some test remote reads. Manager Schulz said we are still looking at late autumn for the full conversion over to remote reads.

Recent Power Outage. Mr. Russo said there was a brief power outage last Thursday night (07/03/25) that was due to a transmission line that went own in Warren. The power was rerouted through Montpelier and that kept the outage under one half hour. There also was an isolated break in Northfield Falls that resulted in a much longer power outage with some customers not getting their power restored until nearly midnight. Mr. Russo added that a good number of NED customers have updated their home power system to accommodate increased power usage for heat pumps, etc.

Vermont Route 12 Tree Removal Request. Mr. Morse asked about the status of a request from a South Northfield NED customer to remove a large tree that started in their front yard and then spanned the highway to interfere with power lines on the other side. Manager Schulz said Mr. Russo has obtained a \$3,900 quote to remove the tree and Manager Schulz will be contacting the property owner to see if they would be willing to split the cost with the municipality. It was felt that it would be in everyone's interest to have the tree removed to prevent additional power outages, etc. Although the tree is hanging over a state highway, Manager Schulz said that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans) would not contribute to its removal.

NED Electric Rate Case. Manager Schulz confirmed that we have applied to the Public Utility Commission for a 14%-15% increase in NED customer rates. It was noted that this is the first rate increase request in more than a decade. Mr. Morse noted that the NED did ask for a rate reduction while he was Municipal Manager as the Village Trustees felt the NED was bringing in too much revenue.

Budget Status Reports. Manager Schulz said financial statements covering most but not all of the fiscal year that just ended (06/30/25) were distributed to the Utility Commission members. He noted that there will be a number of FY 2024-2025 invoices that have not yet been processed and some of these could be quite sizable. Manager Schulz said we are now in good shape with NED revenue five percent (5%) above projections. In addition, none of the expenditure line items provide any major concerns. Expenditures now are about six percent (6%) under budget but, as previously indicated, that will change as more invoices are received. NED operating costs are expected to increase in the next fiscal year, which is the reason for the NED customer rate increase request.

Other Business.

Vine Street Utility Poles. Mr. Stevens asked what happened to the utility poles that were removed on Vine Street as part of the sidewalk upgrade project. Mr. Russo said the telephone company took them away since those were the last utility lines transferred to the new poles. Mr. Stevens had hoped they could be repurposed for the installation of "headache bars" in front of the Cox Brook Road Covered Bridges.

Meeting of the Water & Wastewater Commission

Turkey Hill Maple Farm Lease Extension. Manager Schulz said he has revised the current lease agreement in anticipation of reaching an agreement for a five (5) year lease extension. One change is to increase the per tap charge from \$1.50 to \$2.00, which Manager Schulz more properly reflected the current market price. This increase probably will require some negotiation with the lessee, who has made a counteroffer of \$1.65 per tap. Mr. Morse suggested accepting the \$1.65 per tap change the first year of the lease extension and then increasing the amount each year based on the regional cost-of-living adjustment.

Mr. Donahue felt that adjusting the charge on a year-by-year basis might create a burden for the Accounting Department. He would favor having a set annual amount for the length of the lease. Manager Schulz said it would not be too difficult to adjust the per-tap charge on an annual basis based on COLA. He then noted other changes in the lease wording, such as requiring a larger deposit amount to ensure compliance with the lease restrictions, strengthening the ban on tapping smaller trees, etc. Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Donahue, to authorize Manager Schulz to finalize the lease extension agreement with the revisions discussed this evening. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

Northfield Water & Sewer Department Upcoming Projects

Main Street Waterline and Reservoir Replacement Project. Mr. Russo said the waterline replacement project is going well. Depot Square has already been hooked onto the new water mains and East Street, King Street, and Turkey Hill Road will be hooked on tomorrow. The project then will continue to move southward towards Spring Street with adjacent houses added to the new water main as soon as it is put in place. Mr. Russo said that the plan is to have all the work on Main Street completed before Labor Day weekend. Some side street work might still need to be done after then. The Cheney Field Reservoir Replacement is now on hold as the old water tanks have been removed and a new work crew will be here within the next couple of weeks in order to install the new one. For the time being, the community will be reliant on the Garvey Hill Reservoir for its backup water supply. Mr. Kelley felt that the public should be kept informed as the various stages of each project are completed. Manager Schulz said Northfield residents have been very supportive of these projects due to frequent public notices from the beginning of the planning phases through ground-breaking. There have been isolated incidents of flagger abuse but these have been rare. Manager Schulz will prepare project updates for the next edition of the *Northfield News*.

Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF). Mr. Russo said the WWTF is running well but some minor repairs were required recently. One meter will have to be replaced as it burned out after twenty (20) years of service. A rotted V-notch also will need to be replaced after long service. Mr. Russo said recent phosphorous level readings have been good even though it took much effort to reduce them over time. Fortunately, the reduction did not require excessive usage of expensive chemicals. Mr. Russo hopes that the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) doesn't require additional reductions in the phosphorous levels as that probably would require significant building upgrades.

Budget Status Reports

Water Department. Manager Schulz said based on the most recent financial statements, Water Department revenue is exceeding projections by about seven percent (7%). Expenditures are below the budgeted amounts with savings in personnel costs as some utility employees helped out with road maintenance this past winter and their time doing this was charged to the Highway Department. Material and supplies costs were about three percent (3%) under budget, which is quite impressive considering higher material costs in recent years.

Sewer Department. Manager Schulz said Sewer Department revenue is about two percent (2%) above projections and total expenditures are about eight percent (8%) below the budgeted amounts. He has been impressed with Mr. Russo's to keep sludge management expenses under control.

Other Business.

Combined Water-Sewer Rate Increase. Mr. Kelley would like Water-Sewer customers informed about the combined water-sewer rate increase of 2.65% for average residential customers. This increase will be reflected in the utility bills that will go out later this month. Manager Schulz said there could be an insert in the bills that would explain this.

Adjournment. Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Donahue, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk