Joint Meeting of the Northfield Electric and Water & Wastewater Commissions Minutes of November 9, 2026

Roll Call. Utility Commissioners Tim Davis (absent), Dennis Donahue, Steve Fitzhugh, Michael Kelley, and John Stevens (absent). Also present were Town Manager Mary Smith, Director of Public Works James Russo, Jeffrey Lewis, P.E. (Aldrich + Elliott), Mallory Duncan (Aldrich + Elliott), Gerard LaVarnway, and Michael Miller.

The meeting started at 6:33 p.m.

Public Participation:

Jeffrey Lewis, P.E. & Mallory Duncan (Aldrich + Elliott): Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Twenty-Year Evaluation Report & Recommendations. Mr. Lewis said the twenty year evaluation was completed a couple of years ago. Ms. Duncan said the whole Northfield public wastewater system was evaluated, which included pump stations, manholes, etc. in addition to the WWTF. The focus was to determine how well the current equipment was holding up after twenty years, which is the usual service period for such a facility and equipment. Ms. Duncan said the major findings is the exposed interceptor line near Sherman Avenue needs to be addressed as soon as possible. She added that the WWTF is in overall good condition but there are some components that require replacement in the near future. Mr. Lewis said the most important current issue for the WWTF is the need to reduce the copper and phosphorus levels in the dis charge going into the Dog River. This has kept under control in recent years through increased chemical treatment but that is not a long-term solution. Mr. Fitzhugh asked if there is a current plan for equipment replacement over the next five (5) to ten (10) years. Mr. Russo said he recently ordered a $100,000 grit classifier that was really needed. Mr. Duncan said that a facility refurbishment will be needed that could be funded through state loans. Mr. Lewis said much of the current WWTF equipment was installed in 2004 and therefore has already exceeded the twenty year service expectancy. He said the WWTF is now on borrowed time and it now is time to plan for a major upgrade. Mr. Fitzhugh asked if the WWTF would be taken offline during the upgrade. Mr. Lewis said it wouldn't be taken out of operation. He added that there now is an engineering study regarding the best way to resolve the exposed line near Sherman Avenue and there are grant funds available that would cover at least half of the total cost. He repeated that the exposed line should be covered as soon as possible. As for the copper and phosphorus problem, Mr. Lewis said Aldrich + Elliott is looking into various options to bring these levels down as increased chemical treatment using the current equipment is not sustainable. He added that the current levels pose no real threat to the local population. Manager Smith asked if the City of Montpelier was having similar problems with its wastewater system. Mr. Lewis is unsure but will look into this. He noted that the renewal application for the WWTF's state discharge permit does have a compliance schedule and this will include copper and phosphorus levels reduction.

Mr. Lewis now would like authorization for a preliminary engineering plan for reducing the excessive copper/phosphorus levels. The estimated cost of this study is $28,000 and he believes it probably will recommend installing a tertiary filter on the wastewater system. The total cost of the upgrade itself would be about $3,500,000 and will address these problems along with corrosion issues, etc. This project also will be eligible for state grant funds. Mr. Lewis said a number of other Vermont communities also will be asked by the state to reduce their phosphorus discharge levels. Mr. Fitzhugh noted that there are other sources for higher phosphorus levels in the Lake Champlain watershed including farm waste runoff, stormwater discharges, etc. It seemed to him that the State of Vermont is holding public utility customers responsible for expensive facility upgrades that might have a limited impact on the phosphorus levels reaching Lake Champlain.

Mr. Russo noted that he has heard that the State of Vermont might be looking into new restrictions on nitrogen discharge. Mr. Lewis has seen nothing to indicate this but will look into the possibility. Mr. Kelley asked what was the timeline for the upgrade project. Mr. Lewis said the State of Vermont would like to see an aggressive timeline since they informed Northfield of this problem in 2024. He felt a preliminary engineering design should be completed by the spring of 2027 with the final design completed before the end of the year. Project construction preferably would start in 2028 but the following year is the more likely scenario. The state has provided no fixed deadline for completing this project other than "as soon as possible." Mr. Lewis noted there are several federal/state funding sources for this project but those budgets have been underfunded in recent years. Ms. Duncan said the WWTF situation would be considerable worse had the operators not done such a good job keeping in in good shape. Manager Smith thanked Mr. Lewis and Ms. Duncan for their presentation tonight and for informing us of what has to be done. She noted that if the requested upgrades are not made, the State of Vermont could start imposing stiff fines on Northfield. Manager Smith will return a signed agreement for the engineering study to Aldrich + Elliott as soon as possible in order to qualify for the fifty percent (50%) subsidy. She added that the expense of the whole project will be a tough pill to swallow.

Mr. Lewis and Ms. Duncan left at this time.

Mr. Kelley then asked for some background information about the exposed pipe near Sherman Avenue. Mr. Russo said the sewer line was properly installed several years ago but the course of the Dog River has shifted over time due to various flooding events. This particular problem became more evident in the wake of Tropical Storm Irene. However, the problem was not resolved then to the expected high cost. In addition, the State of Vermont doesn't like it when local governments engage in projects that affect the riverbed. Mr. Donahue said the state might allow for an exception in this case due to the extreme circumstances. There aren't many options available at this location. Manager Smith would prefer that the sewer line be armored instead of relocated. A similar action was done recently during the Cross Brothers Dam Removal project. Mr. Russo felt it would be best to work with Aldrich + Elliott on various options and potential costs. Manager Smith believes the cost would probably be about $100,000. Mr. Russo noted that the project will require various state permits, easements from adjoining property owners, etc.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting. Motion by Mr. Donahue, seconded by Mr. Fitzhugh, to approve the minutes of September 14, 2026. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

Meeting of the Water & Wastewater Commission

Northfield Water & Sewer Department Project Status

Main Street Waterline Installation Project. Mr. Russo said this project has been concluded as the last of the requested change orders have been approved.

Smart Meters. Mr. Russo noted that we are having some programming issues with the water smart meters. Once these have been resolved, the rest of the water smart meters will be installed. We are not having similar problems with the Electric Department's smart meters.

Meeting of the Electric Commission

Northfield Electric Department (NED) Project Status

King Street Battery Storage Project. Mr. Fitzhugh said that the new transformer will not be delivered until next February so the facility will not be online until then.

Smart Meters. Mr. Fitzhugh said we have a contracted with an outside company to finish the installation process as soon as possible. As indicated earlier, these meters are not having the same problems as the water smart meters.

Grid Resiliency Grant. Mr. Fitzhugh said all the grant paperwork has been submitted to the Department of Energy and we are waiting to hear back from them.

Main Street Bridge Replacement Project. Mr. Fitzhugh said all of the project's make-ready work has been completed. The new bridge's lighting system will require the installation of new controllers during the bridge construction. Mr. Russo confirmed that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and its construction contractor will be here on April 1, 2027 to start all the preliminary work.

Norwich University (NU) System Upgrades. Manager Smith asked if the NED scheduled with Green Mountain Power (GMP) regarding the upgrades NU requested due to the construction of the new Cyber Fusion Center, etc. Mr. Fitzhugh said we are waiting for NU to take the lead in this as we are not entirely sure what they want regarding switching schemes, transformer replacement, etc. He added that NU may be still looking at how they are going to pay for this upgrade. Since NU owns the electric system on their campus, they do need to take the initiative on this. Mr. Russo said it might be useful to perform a switchover test while the campus is largely shut down over the holiday season. He will make the outreach on this possibility. Mr. Kelley though it might be even better to hold off on this until next May after NU graduation.

Adjournment. Motion by Mr. Kelley, seconded by Mr. Donahue, to adjourn. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk