

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
HIGHWAY PLANNING &
PROJECT OVERSIGHT SUBCOMMITTEE
Minutes of March 21, 2024

- I. **ROLL CALL.** Select Board members Merry Shernock, John Stevens, and Lydia Petty. Others present: Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Highway Foreman Trent Tucker, Mary Nadon Scott, Delane McIlvene, Tim Swartz, Bill Clements, Dan Anderson, Gail Hall, and Jeanne Bright.

The meeting started at 4:00 p.m.

- II. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

- III. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes of February 7, 2024. **Motion passed unanimously.**

IV. **DISCUSSION**

a. **Sidewalk Projects Priority List.**

Manager Schulz noted that a good number of the Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force were present today so he asked them to provide their recommendations first. He then will provide the most recent cost estimates he has received for various sidewalk projects.

Mary Nadon Scott is the Task Force Co-Chair and she then distributed a written list of Task Force questions as well as sidewalk priorities that were developed at their most recent meeting. The first section of the handout included several sidewalk-related questions, such as the cost of relocating existing utility poles to accommodate sidewalk projects, how the proximity of utility poles impacts snow removal from sidewalks, the timeline for clearing snow from sidewalks after a winter storm, etc. As for the first question, Manager Schulz said the municipality usually tries to work around existing utility poles during sidewalk projects as replacing or relocating them can become quite expensive. Board member Petty said there is a narrow walking path on Carpenter Street due to the presence of utility poles along the street. She noted there are some streets where the sidewalk itself could be relocated to the other side of the street where there are no utility poles. Manager Schulz said there is a similar problem on the east side of South Main Street. Ms. Scott said the Task Force has a list of streets where the sidewalk could be moved to the other side of the street to avoid sharing space with utility poles. Many of these streets are located near the public schools. Manager Schulz said there has been debates at Select Board meeting over whether certain streets should have sidewalk on both sides or if one good sidewalk on one side is sufficient. There seems to be some consensus that smaller, less-traveled streets should have sidewalk on only one side. However, streets with heavy traffic, such as Main Street, probably should have sidewalk on both sides.

Board member Petty said the Task Force members' concern is that when the only sidewalk on a street shares space with utility poles, the narrowness of the sidewalk makes it inaccessible for some people. Mr. Tucker said there are some poles along Water Street that are no longer in use but the telephone company has never gotten around to removing them. Bill Clements said there are some poles that could be slightly moved in order to widen the amount of sidewalk available. Manager Schulz said it costs about \$33,000 to move a single pole about ten feet (10'). Ms. Scott asked if sidewalks that share space with poles can be cleared of snow using the town's sidewalk plow. Manager Schulz said the plow can be used on such streets in most cases. There are a few streets where the combination of utility poles and narrow sidewalk does create problems. This includes the east side of South Main Street, where the asphalt is in such bad condition that the snowplow hasn't been used there this winter in order to prevent damage both to the sidewalk and to the plow. However, in most cases the plow operator can manually shovel snow away from the utility poles.

Ms. Scott also asked about the timeline for removing snow from the sidewalks and whether local volunteers, including public school students and Norwich University (NU) students could help out with this. Manager Schulz said the Highway crew do try to remove snow from sidewalks as soon as possible. He noted that NU students have assisted in the past in removing heavy snow deposits from the Common and other public areas. If there are volunteer groups willing to assist with the process, Manager Schulz would like to know who they are so he can help coordinate their efforts.

Ms. Scott then asked about the timeline for marking crosswalks during the summer. Manager Schulz said he has been discussing with Mr. Tucker the possibility of having this work done earlier this year. Board member Petty noted that if the crosswalk marking and road striping is done too early in the year, there is the possibility that snowplows could tear them up. Manager Schulz said the contractor who takes care of the crosswalk marking usually comes into town for a couple weeks to do them all at the same time. He added that he has been looking into longer lasting material for the crosswalk markings but the results have been mixed in the past and the cost can be quite expensive. Mr. Tucker said the cost of installing normal markings each year costs about \$10,000. Manager Schulz said the crosswalk markings usually last until at least the start of winter. Board member Petty thought it might be possible to repaint those markings that seem faded by autumn. Manager Schulz said that could be done on a test basis this year. Board member Petty thought it would be best to focus on the crosswalks located along the most popular walking routes to the local schools.

Ms. Scott noted that the pavement near the footbridge is in poor condition. Manager Schulz said the Highway Department is responsible for maintaining the footbridge and this area will be patched as soon as weather conditions permit. Mr. Tucker agreed that the pavement there needed replacement. It has been patched too many times. Board member Petty thought it would be a good idea to fix the pavement at the same time as the footbridge itself is undergoing repairs this year. This work will include installing a new bridge deck. Manager Schulz confirmed this project is already out to bid with submissions due by Monday, April 15, 2024. This work should be completed by early summer. Ms. Scott then said there are a number of street intersections where the sidewalk is in bad condition and needs to be replaced. This includes the bottom of Pearl Street. Manager Schulz said the Select Board members have made it very clear that sidewalk repair is a high priority for them and are open to using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to hasten the process over the next couple of years.

Ms. Scott then discussed the Task Force members' recommendations for a priority list for sidewalk work and other pedestrian safety improvements. They felt there should be some emphasis on fixing the sidewalks along Water Street from its intersection with Wall Street to where it connects with North Main Street. This is the detour route for vehicular and pedestrian traffic when the Main Street Bridge is replaced in 2025 and out of commission for about three (3) months. There also are a number of problem sidewalks located along Vine Street and Cross Street near the Northfield schools. Ms. Scott said there is an additional recommendation to add flashing lights and speed bumps on Vine Street to slow down vehicular traffic.

Delane McIlvene noted that Vine Street does get a large amount of vehicular traffic at certain times of the day, usually at the beginning and end of the school day when parents drop off and later collect their children. Unfortunately, these are the same times when there is an increase in the number of student pedestrians in the area. Don Anderson added that in the last afternoon when school lets out, there sometimes are areas where dark shadows fall upon the crosswalks, making them less visible to drivers. Board member Petty said she has sometimes seen parents apparently rushing to work along Vine Street after dropping their own kids off at school.

Mr. Tucker then noted that the traffic signal at the intersection of Vine Street and North Main Street is scheduled for upgrades this year. Ms. Scott then noted she had gone through the full list of questions and recommendations for the subcommittee. Board member Shernock thought having this information provided in writing was very helpful. Manager Schulz was also grateful for this.

Manager Schulz then turned to the cost estimates he has received to date for various potential sidewalk projects. One is the installation of new sidewalk along Route 12 North from Cumberland Farms to Tops Market, which is about nineteen hundred feet (1,900'). The cost of installing concrete sidewalk with granite curbing along this route is about \$350,000. Manager Schulz said this was expected to be an expensive project and the cost estimates have borne this out. He also received quotes for installing new sidewalk along Vine Street from North Main Street to the North Street intersection by St. John's Church. The cost for concrete sidewalk is \$444,000 and asphalt sidewalk would be \$354,000. There would be an additional \$150,000 for installing new concrete sidewalk on Cross Street. Mr. Anderson asked if there were different lifespans for concrete versus asphalt sidewalk. Manager Schulz said there are differing opinions about this. A lot depends on the quality of the installation work. Mr. Tucker said he preferred asphalt sidewalks as they are much easier to repair if problem areas develop. Board member Shernock asked if there would be new sidewalk on both sides of Vine Street. Manager Schulz said that was the current plan. Board member Shernock would like to see an estimate for installing new sidewalk on only one side of the street. Board member Petty said she would prefer the Task Force recommendation that new pavement only on the south side of the street from North Main Street to St. John's Church and then installing sidewalk on the other side of the street from there to Cross Street.

Manager Schulz said a traffic engineer would be brought in to make recommendations about bump outs. He added that the extent of new sidewalk proposed would carry a significant cost but it might be possible to apply for federal and state grant funds to cover some of the cost. Board member Petty believes such grant funds are usually for new sidewalk and not just repairs. She therefore felt that grant funds should be sought for the Route 12 North project and ARPA funds used for fixing the sidewalks near the schools. In addition, using the ARPA funds that are already on hand would considerably hasten the process for fixing sidewalks on the walk-to-school routes. Manager Schulz said if this sidewalk project were put out to bid by late spring, it is possible the work could be completed this year. Board member Shernock thought it would be good to have these sidewalks fixed before school restarts this autumn. Board member Petty noted that there is a retaining wall on Vine Street just past the school that could be problematic if the sidewalk there is fixed/replaced. Mr. Tucker agreed the wall is in bad shape but we would need to speak to the homeowner as it is located on private property. Board member Petty also would like a price quote for installing sidewalk along Water Street from North Main Street to Wall Street. Manager Schulz will get that quote. He then stated we now seem to have a sidewalk priority list that can be presented to the Select Board members.

b. Other Highway Projects

Manager Schulz said the project to install new sidewalk and a flashing pedestrian safety light in Northfield Falls near Cox Brook Road is now out to bid. Submissions are due by Friday, April 5, 2024. The potential contractors who have inspected the site believe the work could be completed by early summer.

Manager Schulz said the current plan is to repave East Street, Doyon Road, and Dickinson Drive this summer. Some underground utilities installation, which is part of the Main Street Bridge Replacement project, will need to be done first.

There also will be the annual resurfacing of the backroads this summer. Mr. Tucker suggested completing the work on Hallstrom Road first. The new gravel was put down there last year but new culvert still needs to be installed. Manager Schulz it remains to be determined where the new gravel will be put down this summer. He added that there have been concerns expressed that with climate change problems increasing, it is possible that Mud Season will get worse each year if backroad problems aren't fully addressed. A lot of ditching and culvert installation work has already been done using state funds but much more needs to be done. Board member Petty asked if we are tracking the additional costs of Mud Season problems so this expense can be better budgeted in future. Manager Schulz confirmed this tracking is taking place. Board member Shernock noted that a good amount of backroads material should be made available from the riverbed dredging that is part of the Main Street Bridge Replacement project.

Gail Hall asked if there is a municipal plan for scheduled road maintenance or if we just wait to see what problems show up each summer. Manager Schulz said there is the RSMS (Road Surface Management System) program that is used to track road conditions throughout the community. This program is used to plan and budget for road maintenance on a regular basis.

Ms. Hall then asked about the informational kiosk/bus stop that was recently relocated from 70 Depot Square. She is concerned about its current storage location as she doesn't want the structure to further deteriorate. It was noted that the kiosk was removed from its previous location since the new building tenants wanted to establish outdoor dining at that location. Manager Schulz said we would like to find a new permanent location as soon as possible. He has been in discussions with Bizhan Yahyazadeh, the Norwich University (NU) Vice President for Facilities Operations, about locating the kiosk by the old Depot Square armory that now houses the NU College of Graduate & Continuing Studies. There seems to be some NU interest in this and Manager Schulz also has reached out to Green Mountain Transit about relocating the bus stop here. He is still waiting to hear from GMT about this. However, this seems the most likely landing spot at this time. Ms. Hall would like to see NU provide a written agreement for this so the kiosk doesn't get bounced again in the future. Manager Schulz said having a written agreement in place has been a priority in his discussions with Mr. Yahyazadeh. This doesn't seem to be a problem. Ms. Hall said another possible location would be on the east side of the Common opposite from the flagpole and garden. Board member Petty isn't very enthusiastic about this location. Ms. Hall said there should be every attempt to site the kiosk at a location that would be visible to the travelling public. She is also concerned that the site Manager Schulz proposes would be on the detour route when the Main Street Bridge is being replaced. Manager Schulz said that project is only expected to last twelve (12) weeks so that should not be a major inconvenience. Board member Petty said there would be an alternative presentation at the next Select Board meeting (03/26/24) that will explore various ways to improve pedestrian access to the Dog River park from Depot Square. She thought Ms. Hall should attend in order to see what options are now being explored for the Depot Square/Wall Street area. Manager Schulz said once he has a written agreement in hand from NU, he plans to bring this matter to the Select Board members for their discussion. He felt the armory location was the best current option for relocating the kiosk in the near future. He is, however, willing to listen to alternative suggestions if they are feasible.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

VI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn.
Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes are subject to approval at the next committee meeting.