

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of March 26, 2024**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Tom Davis (Economic Development Director), Laura Stone (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Chris Hunt (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Bonnie Donahue (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Gary Sweeney (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Sean James (Hoyle Tanner), Todd Sumner (Hoyle Tanner), Josif Bicja (Hoyle Tanner), Kelly LaVigne (Hoyle Tanner), Emily Lewis (DuBois & King), Cait Campbell (DuBois & King), Mary Nadon Scott (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Dan Anderson (AWPS Task Force), Bill Clements (AWPS Task Force), Tim Swartz (AWPS Task Force), Delane McIlvene (AWPS Task Force), Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), Gail Hall (Northfield Energy Committee), Joy Hedges, Linwood Doney, Marsha Doney, James Cannon, Nancy Hall, James Hall, David Pierson, Vicki Pierson, Lorna Doney, Kay Schlueter, Max Schlueter, Peter J. DeMasi, Margaret Daniels, Steve Porter, Jeanne Bright, Patricia Porter, Irvin Eisenberg, Susan Boyd, Sharon Tisdale, Brian Tisdale, Anne Duffy, Travis Blodgett, Shauna Drown Foran, Ginny Kunkel, Heidi Kunkel, Clare LaFrance, Judith Williams Ehrlich, Judith Williams Ehrlich, Dennis Bathory Kitsz, Jeff Sokolik, Susan Stillinger, Barbara Balch, Dennis Donahue, Penny Day, Maryann Beaupré, Carol Jenkinson, Kristina Kiarsis, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:02 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. Local Concerns Meeting: Cox Brook Road Covered Bridges.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) is using federal grant funds to conduct scoping studies of historic bridges throughout the state. This includes the three (3) covered bridges on Cox Brook Road. This local concerns meeting is an opportunity for interested members of the public to voice their views on how to address any bridge concerns discovered during the scoping study. Laura Stone is a VTrans Scoping Engineer and she noted that this particular covered bridge rehabilitation project is in the very early stages. She added that the civil engineering firm Hoyle Tanner was hired to conduct this scoping study as they have highly regarded covered bridge experts. Their engineers have performed full inspections of each of the covered bridges and tonight they will provide their findings and answer any questions.

Sean James is a Hoyle Tanner Senior Vice-President and the Division Manager for their Ground Transportation Division. He said the intent of tonight's meeting is to collect local input about these bridges so that they can develop future recommendations to address the bridge deficiencies that were found. Mr. James emphasized that no decisions regarding these covered bridges have been made. The purpose of the scoping study is to gather information that can be used to provide safe bridge crossings, address any structural problems, and extend the service lives of these historic bridges. He then asked Josif Bicja, a Hoyle Tanner Vice-President and their Bridge Team Leader, to provide their findings on each of the three covered bridges.

Mr. Bicja's presentation on their bridge inspection findings included a large number of photographs that clearly showed problems with each of the Cox Brook Road covered bridges. He began with a discussion of the Upper Cox Brook Covered Bridge, which is the northwesternmost of the three covered bridges. The bridge was constructed in 1872 and underwent rehabilitation projects in 1967 and 1979. These projects included structural reinforcement and the installation of a new roof. This is a Queen Post Truss bridge and is 52' long with 13'-6" of horizontal clearance and 12'-0" of vertical clearance.

Mr. Bicja said he noted during the inspection that the structure had recently sustained significant damage from a large truck. He added that limited vertical clearance is a major problem with covered bridges as truck drivers don't seem to respect warnings about clearance limits. He added that the conclusion of the bridge inspection was that the overall condition was poor, being given a four (4) rating on the scale ranging from one (imminent failure) to nine (excellent condition). Mr. Bicja then showed a number of inspection photographs that illustrated the bridge's poor condition and highlighted such problems as roof leaks and splits, breaks, and rot in the internal bridge support system. Mr. Bicja said their preference is to repair covered bridge problems while keeping the current bridge materials whenever possible. He then showed where the bridge trusses have been undermined by splits, breaks, rot, and weathering. A major source of these bridge problems is high moisture content in the structure. This can lead to rot and the collection of bridge debris, such as sand, leaves, and trash, which can make the problem even worse. Mr. Bicja then showed photos of where the steel beam supports have been affected by rust holes and advanced corrosion. The bridge portals have significant breaks and cracks, which he attributed to vehicular impact damage. The bridge approach railing also has been undermined by extensive corrosion, rust holes, rotted wood posts, and impact damage. One relatively bright spot was the bridge abutments, which Mr. Bicja said were in fairly good shape and needed only minor repairs. He then asked if anyone had any questions about this bridge report.

Board member Morse asked if this bridge needed any "quick fixes" to be kept functional. Mr. Bicja said none were needed at this time but options will be presented at a later time based on the public feedback received tonight. Ms. Stone said VTrans would provide the municipality with a letter regarding what immediate steps (if any) need to be taken to address urgent concerns. Norma Rooney owns and operates the Falls General Store, which is located near the entrance of Cox Brook Road. She has seen a lot of high clearance trucks go through the covered bridges on a regular basis and asked if steel bars could be added to the bridges to prevent them from going fully through the covered bridges. Mr. Bicja said such steps have been taken in other states but not in Vermont due to concerns about personal injury liability. Ms. Rooney felt any steps taken to keep large truck off the covered bridges would be very helpful. Board member Morse feared that if one inexperienced truck driver, perhaps someone renting a Ryder truck, came to be seriously injured by the steel bar, the municipality could be hit with a very expensive lawsuit. He thought lighted signage would be a safer alternative. Mr. Bicja said there are a number of possible options to warn truck drivers about the bridge low clearance. One would be to raise the bridge support trusses to add another foot or so of clearance. Board member Shernock said summertime foliage sometimes covers the warning signage so that it is much less visible to approaching vehicles. She suggested that the signage could be raised or relocated for better visibility. Mr. Bicja said signage relocation certainly is an option that can be explored. Nancy Hall lives near this bridge and she does see a good number of large trucks coming from Moretown to access the covered bridges. She thought it might be a good idea to install signage before the Cox Brook Road intersection with Aseltine Road to inform truck drivers that they should use that road instead of trying to access and potentially damage the covered bridges. Dan Anderson thought it might be worthwhile to take a less aggressive approach than installing a steel bar by putting in a warning bar made of lighter material. Mr. Bicja said that has been done of several covered bridges in the state. If the vehicle keeps going through the bridge, a camera could be triggered to catch them in the act in case bridge damage does result from their actions. Jim Cannon thought it would be good if all drivers of high clearance vehicles had access to Truckers GPS so they can be informed in advance of covered bridge clearance warnings. Mr. James said there is an organization dedicated to the preservation of covered bridges (i.e., the Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Committee) that is working on this so all drivers will have access to appropriate GPS apps on their mobile devices. Brian Tisdale said trucks seem to be getting bigger all the time so perhaps higher and wider clearance for the covered bridges really is needed. Mr. Bicja said that is an option that could be investigated. However, it is unlikely that more than one foot (1') on each side could be added.

Bonnie Donahue asked if the covered bridges' maximum weight limits could be increased so that heavier farm equipment could use them. Mr. Bicja said that might be possible but this also could encourage even larger trucks to use them. Peter J. DeMasi asked if the bridges could have steel cast decks installed to increase the maximum weight limit. Mr. Bicja said that also was a possibility. Linwood Doney noted snowplows often deposit large amounts of snow on the covered bridge decks and he suggested this could be one cause of the high moisture levels.

Mr. Bicja then turned to the inspection of the Lower Cox Brook Covered Bridge, which is the one in the middle. He said this bridge's background is quite similar to the previous bridge as it was also constructed in 1872 and underwent rehabilitation in 1967 and 1979. The bridge is 57' long and has a horizontal clearance of 15'-4" and a vertical clearance of 12'-0". The inspection report also rates this bridge as poor overall with many of the same problems as the Upper Cox Brook Covered Bridge. This includes metal roof rusting and leaks as well as internal structural support problems with splits, breaks, rot, etc. Mr. Bicja said the vehicular impact damage on this bridge is very noticeable. The bridge trusses also have splits, breaks, rot, and gaps. There is a high moisture level on this bridge as well. The steel support beams show evidence of rust holes and advanced corrosion, which can be largely attributed to the high moisture level. Mr. Bicja said the bridge approaches have drainage issues due to stormwater runoff from nearby Chandler Road. This could be the major source of the bridge's water damage problems but this probably could be addressed fairly easily. The current bridge deck does have some breaks and a poor attachment that often results in the deck moving up and down whenever heavier vehicles traverse it. The poor bridge drainage is the main cause for this. As seen in the photographs he displayed, Mr. Bicja said the bridge abutments have problems with voids, spalling, and exposed rebar. He then showed in one photograph that cinder blocks seem to have been used in the 1967 rehabilitation and they have been slowly deteriorating over the past fifty plus years. Mr. Bicja then asked if anyone had any questions about this bridge.

Carol Jenkinson asked what was the source of the bridge debris that was causing so many problems. Mr. Bicja said the main source was the stormwater coming down from Chandler Road, which would have to be redirected elsewhere. Carolyn Stevens asked if the previous bridge rehabilitation followed the same process of bridge inspection and evaluation that is now taking place. Mr. Bicja said there is no way to determine whether the quality of the work done then is in any way responsible for the current bridge problems. He felt the best approach now is to fix the current problems effectively and make these bridges perfectly serviceable for many years to come. There was a question about possible bridge closures during the rehabilitation process. Mr. Bicja said the final plans still need to be worked out but it is probable that the bridge rehabilitation would be staggered among the three bridges so that proper detour routes could be worked out. It is very likely that the process would unfold over two (2) construction seasons.

Mr. Bicja then turned to the inspection of the Northfield Falls Covered Bridge, which is the southeasternmost and closest to the intersection of Cox Brook Road and Vermont Route 12. He noted that this is the longest of the three bridges at 137' and due to this length has more deficiencies than the other covered bridges and it will take longer to address all these concerns. The bridge was built in 1872 and was rehabilitated in 1942, 1967, and 1979. The horizontal clearance is 16'-0" and the vertical clearance is 12'-0". This bridge also has an overall inspection rating of poor. It was noted and shown in photographs that the bridge roof has splits, breaks, rot, and insect damage. During the inspection period, Mr. Bicja saw and documented that a Ryder rental truck went through the covered bridge and did considerable damage to its braces. The bridge shows similar problems to the other two bridges with high moisture content undermining its support structure with obvious rot, splits, breaks, and misalignment. The steel beams are rusting and there are signs of advanced corrosion. The bridge approaches have severe drainage problems with ponding resulting whenever stormwater comes down from nearby Vermont Route 12. Mr. Bicja said the bridge substructure has some voids, spalling, and exposed rebar. He believes it will be necessary to entirely replace the east abutment. He then asked if there were any more questions at this time.

Board member Stevens asked who determines the maximum weight limit for these bridges. Mr. Bicja said VTrans makes the recommendations based on its biennial bridge inspections. He felt the weight limits for these bridges should stay about they are now after the needed repairs have been made. Board member Stevens asked if a traffic count has been done for these bridges. Mr. Bicja said that has not been done yet but could be done later in the process. Shauna Drown Foran has relatives who live in proximity to these bridges and they feel the historic look of these covered bridges should be maintained rather than give them a more modern appearance. She felt that adding steel decks to these bridges would be one way to make them safer for the traveling public. Mr. Bicja said the goal of VTrans is to rehabilitate these bridges in ways consistent with the public feedback received tonight. He added VTrans has no plans to relocate these bridges and there is every intention to maintain their historic appearance. Increasing bridge support by installing steel decks would not undermine this plan. There was a question about the lifespan of the proposed rehabilitation. Mr. Bicja said such bridge rehabilitations usually provide lasting results for about fifty (50) years. If these bridges are maintained properly in future, it is quite possible that they could last forever. James Cannon remembers that a temporary footbridge was installed as part of the 1967 rehabilitation process. Mr. Bicja said that could be considered though he noted that vehicular traffic in the area was much lower in the 1960s. Ms. Rooney supports the concept of bridge rehabilitation but is concerned that long-term closures might affect her business. The Falls General Store does a lot of business in the foliage season each year so she hopes that any bridge closures would occur as early in the spring as possible to accommodate tourists wishing to visit the covered bridges in the fall. Mr. Bicja said the bridge rehabilitation work would start as early in the construction season as possible. It also might be possible to perform some work during the winter months. He added that the contractor for this project will have substantial expertise regarding matters pertaining to covered bridges. Mr. Bicja said it is difficult to estimate the actual extent of the repair work to be done as more damage may be uncovered during the bridge rehabilitation process. All the work will be done to VTrans standards and there will be an outside observer present overseeing rehabilitation work throughout the process.

Kelly LaVigne is a bridge engineer for Hoyle Tanner and also works in their Ground Transportation Division. She said rehabilitation alternatives are now being explored based on the bridge inspections. Ms. LaVigne said the rehabilitation process will not only extend the service lives of these covered bridges but also take into account the impact of heavier vehicle usage of these bridges. She added that the rehabilitation process will consider potential upgrades of bridge lighting, fire protection, public safety, etc. Public input will be very important in helping develop these alternative plans. The next local public meeting on this matter will be scheduled in a few months' time and will be advertised well in advance to obtain full participation of interested parties. As for traffic control during the rehabilitation process, Ms. LaVigne said the bridges are far too narrow for alternate traffic so they will need to be closed. Off-site detours will be determined beforehand with the probable use of Chandler Road and Aseltine Road to redirect traffic. As these are historic structures, the rehabilitation process will need to follow the standards of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. There will also need to be some coordination with the State Historic Preservation Office and the aforementioned Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Committee. As for the timeline, Ms. LaVigne said the scoping report should be completed later this summer. If all goes well, the rehabilitation contract plans should be developed by the summer of 2028, the project put to bid later that fall, and the construction phase begin in the spring of 2029. She then asked if there were any additional questions or concerns at this time.

Mr. Cannon lives very close to the Northfield Falls Covered Bridge and he did allow the project contractors to make use of his driveway during the last bridge rehabilitation process. He is concerned about getting access to his property during the upcoming project. Mr. Bicja would prefer not to have to make use of private driveways during the construction phase so other alternatives will be explored as the project develops. Mr. Anderson asked if any areas affected by the construction process would be restored to their previous condition. Mr. Bicja said all disturbed areas would be restored at the project's conclusion. Mr. Anderson then asked if there might be improved public access to the river as a result of this project. Mr. Bicja said that is a possibility that could be explored when the project plans are developed.

Kay Schleuter noted the construction phase of this rehabilitation project is at least five years away. She asked if any urgent problems found with the covered bridges would be addressed before then. Mr. Bicja said VTrans inspects each bridge in the state every two years so any new deterioration or other problems will be discovered and reported to the municipality so needed repairs can be made in a timely manner. Ms. Foran asked if we can assume that these covered bridges are safe for normal traffic at this time. Mr. Bicja said some problems were found with the Upper Cox Brook Bridge that should be addressed soon but in general all these bridges are safe for the traveling public. That conclusion is based on their current condition and could change if they were further undermined by heavy vehicle impacts, etc. Any new urgent problems would be reported to the municipality as soon as possible. Travis Blodgett, who is a Moretown resident, asked if it might be possible to upgrade Aseltine Road before the project begins if it is going to be used as a major detour route. This is currently a Class 4 road. Board member Morse said this is a fairly narrow road in places so probably the best course of action would be to have alternating traffic there when it is used as a detour route. He did feel that some road upgrades might be possible. Ms. Stone said VTrans would have a full study of what can be done with Aseltine Road to improve safety conditions if it does become a major detour route. Mr. Blodgett asked if it were possible to bring the road up to Class 3 road standards. Board member Morse thought that might be a possibility. It also might be possible to create a temporary road through private property. Mr. Blodgett asked if neighboring towns have been contacted about how this project and the expected bridge closures might affect their residents. Manager Schulz said that has not yet been done yet but would be part of the process. There then was a question about whether speed bumps could be installed at the bridge approaches in order to slow down traffic and prevent further impact damage. Mr. Bicja said that would be a local decision and added that feelings about speed bumps are quite divided. Some people think they are very helpful while others really despise them. Ms. Bicja then thanked all those who attended tonight's meeting and provided much valuable feedback.

- b. Northfield Pedestrian Path Scoping Study Alternatives Presentation.** Present tonight from the engineering firm DuBois & King are Project Manager & Landscape Architect Emily Lewis and Landscape Designer & Community Planner Kait Campbell. Although she is not here tonight, DuBois & King Senior Engineer Jenny Austin will be assisting them with this project. Also contributing tonight will be VTrans Landscape Architect Bonnie Donahue and VTrans Project Manager Chris Hunt. Ms. Lewis said the main purpose of this project is to discuss alternative options for the design of a safer walking route from Depot Square to the Dog River Park. The main section of this route will be along Wall Street. Ms. Lewis noted that during the Main Street Bridge Replacement project coming in 2025, Wall Street will become the major vehicular and pedestrian detour route. This adds some urgency for providing safety improvements in this area. Ms. Lewis noted that from October 2013 through October 2023, fifteen (15) vehicle crashes were reported in this project area with about a third occurring near Wall Street's intersection with Main Street. Ms. Lewis added that previous studies and events have been conducted to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety along this access route. In 2019, an AARP grant funded "Take a Walk to Dog River Park" event was held to encourage a group walk from Depot Square to the Dog River Park with temporary safety improvements installed. A similar event occurred two years later with painted lanes and delineators installed as temporary measures. In 2021, the Ridge and River Routes project looked at this area as part of a general effort to improve the connections between Northfield residents and recreational opportunities. The following year there was a "pop-up" event on the Common as AARP and Local Motion Vermont experts explored options for improving pedestrian safety in the area by installing temporary bump outs and proposed new crosswalk locations. This current scoping study will look at various alternatives for improving pedestrian and bicycle safety along the route from Depot Square to the Dog River Park while seeking public feedback regarding the most favorable and feasible options. This project started with a kick-off meeting last September followed by a Local Concerns Meeting held on November 16, 2023. Since that meeting, the project alternatives that will be presented tonight have been developed for public discussion. That included measuring the street width at various locations along Wall Street from Depot Square to its intersection with Water Street. These widths do vary significantly along the proposed access route.

Ms. Lewis said one major concern brought up during the Local Concerns Meeting was the general lack of crosswalk and curb cuts along the pedestrian route. There also were concerns expressed about the poor lighting along the route, the lack of shade trees and benches to rest upon, etc. Ms. Lewis added that there are a number of site constraints as well due to the railway crossing that bisects Wall Street just west of Depot Square. There also are a number of concerns about heavy truck traffic along this route partly due to the Gillespie Fuels & Propane storage facility located on the south side of Wall Street near the Freight Yard Way intersection. Ms. Lewis noted historic resources and archaeological issues would need to be fully evaluated before any site improvements, such as new sidewalk, were installed. It was noted that no historical structures would be impacted by this project. Ms. Campbell said an archaeological study would need to be performed with a focus on the Wall Street and Water Street intersection where old building foundations could be situated. Ms. Lewis then provided examples of project alternatives, which included installation of new sidewalk, buffers that would protect pedestrians from vehicular traffic, relocating current crosswalks and perhaps adding new ones, etc. One option is to install new sidewalk along the north side of Wall Street at locations where it doesn't now exist. This process would include using buffers to narrow the entrance of the Police Station parking area from 57' to 30'. A similar narrowing with buffers would be done at the intersection of Depot Square and Wall Street. Sidewalk would be installed where it doesn't now exist to the left of the Fire Station where there are three (3) ash trees and a fire hydrant on the roadside. There are alternative suggestions on how to locate the new sidewalk due to the proximity of the trees and hydrant. It might be possible to relocate the hydrant if that is not too expensive. Ms. Lewis said keeping proper vehicle turning space while also promoting pedestrian safety could be achieved with bump outs at the intersection of Depot Square and Wall Street. The railroad track pedestrian crossing would have a five foot (5') wide sidewalk and five foot (5') wide grass strip installed on the north side of the crossing.

A very different alternate scheme for Wall Street would be to focus on the south side of the street with new sidewalk as well as narrowing of the entrances to the parking areas by NAPA Auto Parts and Gillespie Fuels. The railroad track crossing also would be on the south side of the street with the same dimensions of sidewalk and grass strip. After the intersection of Wall Street and Water Street, either new sidewalk could be installed along the Water Street roadside or the existing gravel path that travels from the intersection through the park could be paved. Ms. Lewis said as this is a FEMA buyout property, it first would need to be confirmed with FEMA that this paving would be allowed. If the new sidewalk is installed along the roadside, new curb cuts would need to be added to allow for full access to those with impaired mobility. As for the cost of adding the new sidewalk and other improvements, Ms. Lewis had rough estimates at this time. The cost of adding all the proposed improvements along Wall Street and a small portion of Depot Square would cost between \$250,000 and \$300,000. The new sidewalk and other improvements on Water Street would cost between \$200,000 and \$270,000. She noted those are ballpark figures only and there are a number of factors that might result in some cost savings. Ms. Lewis said there is no need to select any of the proposed alternatives at this time as the main point of this presentation is to obtain public feedback regarding which approaches might be more desirable.

Bill Clements noted that the informational kiosk and bus stop was recently removed from its former location at the intersection of Depot Square and Wall Street because the new tenants of the adjacent building wanted to use this location for outside dining. If the pedestrian safety bump out at this intersection is installed, he felt that might be a good new location to site the kiosk. Gail Hall from the Energy Committee, which oversaw the design, construction, and placement of the kiosk on the Common, felt that might be an option worth exploring. Board member Morse thought having the kiosk at that location might create a traffic blinding situation for vehicles going around the Common or coming down from Central Street. Ms. Lewis said there are many options for situating the kiosk at or near this location that can be looked into.

Board member Morse asked about the purpose of these bump outs, which are also known as curb extensions. Ms. Lewis said their main purpose was to limit the length of the crosswalk that pedestrians would need to travel to cross the street. Older and less able pedestrians often find it difficult to use long crosswalks without feeling pressure from approaching vehicular traffic. Board member Petty noted that a good number of seniors live near Wall Street at the Green Mountain Apartments and they probably would appreciate the shorter crosswalk distances. Ms. Lewis said the use of such bump outs must be carefully designed so that trucks will still have sufficient turning radii around street corners. Chair Maxwell noted if new sidewalk is installed on the north side of Wall Street, the fact that the old entrance to the former bank is no longer needed would make its installation much easier. Board member Shernock noted many children use Wall Street as a walking route to the Northfield public schools. She felt diverting the new sidewalk around the ash trees would be a wasted effort as the children would just take a shortcut across the lawn. Ms. Lewis agreed that probably would happen so this option is probably the least feasible. Board member Shernock asked if it were possible to perform the project construction phases in stages. Ms. Lewis thought that it probably would be best to have all the Wall Street work done at the same time due to the interconnectedness of the project planning. The work on Water Street certainly could be delayed to another time. Carolyn Stevens thought the proposals under consideration would not only provide needed pedestrian safety improvements but would also improve the aesthetics of the area by adding green strips, etc. Virginia Kunkel usually favors using the sidewalks on the north side of Wall Street because of the heavy vehicles coming from the parking lots on the south side of the street. It also was noted that on windy days, a lot of dust swirls around these parking areas. Board member Petty asked if anyone present would favor installing the new sidewalk along the south side of Wall Street. There seemed to be no interest in this. Chair Maxwell said if the envisioned economic development and perhaps new housing does come to pass in the Freight Yard Way area, there might be a need for new sidewalk there at a future time. However, this probably would be many years away (if it does happen). Board member Petty noted that the intersection of Central Street and Wall Street does seem to have some considerable issues so perhaps adding new crosswalks there should be considered. Ms. Lewis agreed that this is a tricky intersection. Tim Swartz asked if the railroad crossing safety gate would need to be relocated if the new sidewalk and grass strip are installed there. Board member Petty said there was a recent meeting with a representative from the New England Central Railroad (NECR) and that person agreed that this was the most likely location for a railroad track crossing pedestrian path. It also was suggested that NECR probably would not object if the safety gate arm was slightly relocated. Board member Petty thought there might be federal grant funds available to cover the cost of relocating the safety gate. There then was a brief discussion of the proper location for the new paved path in the Dog River Park area. Mary Nadon Scott, who uses a wheelchair, prefers a more direct route that would be achieved by installing the new sidewalk along the roadside. Board member Petty would favor the more winding path within the park as that provides some separation from all the roadside noise, dust, and (sometime) rain puddles. Ms. Lewis then thanked all who attended this meeting and for all their helpful comments. This feedback will be included in the final project report, which should be available for distribution and full discussion in a few months.

## **V. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION**

- a. Liquor License Renewal: South Village Mobil.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve this liquor license renewal request. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

## **VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. February 27, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. These minutes had been further revised after the previous meeting when some concerns were expressed about possible factual errors. A couple more minor amendments were requested at this time and those suggested changes will be made. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. **March 12, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. A couple passages will be reworded and a couple typographical errors corrected at the request of the Select Board members. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #18-24.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #18-24 in the amount of \$190,388.89. Board member Morse asked about a legal services payment on behalf of the Planning/Zoning Department. Manager Schulz said this was to address an issue involving violations of the local zoning ordinance. Board member Morse asked about a payment regarding an electric project on Slaughterhouse Road. Manager Schulz said a resident paid in advance for electric service upgrades based on the cost estimates at the time. The cost of the work performed by Green Mountain Power (GMP) actually came in at a lower amount so the balance was refunded. Board member Morse said if this work was related to a new structure on this road, the Select Board members should be kept informed due weight limit concerns affecting the covered bridge there, etc. Board member Stevens asked about a \$7,457 invoice for a SCADA upgrade. Manager Schulz said SCADA is the specialized computer software required to operate the Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF). The software does need to be upgraded periodically. Board member Petty asked about \$1,773 payment to Otis Elevator Company for an "Elevator Violation." Manager Schulz said an elevator inspector found lighting issues in the elevator located in the Brown Public Library (BPL). Manager Schulz negotiated with Otis Elevator and they agreed to split the cost of this penalty. Chair Maxwell noted the high monthly cost ( $\pm$ \$10,000) of removing sludge from the WWTF. Manager Schulz agreed that the cost of this removal has increased significantly since Casella Waste Management refused accept Northfield sludge at its Coventry VT landfill. The sludge now has to be hauled to Canada, which is much more expensive due to the travel distance, etc. Manager Schulz plans to speak to Casella in the near future to see if they will reconsider their earlier decision. Chair Maxwell also noted the higher cost of the chemicals needed to operate the WWTF. Manager Schulz said this has become a real concern and will need to be taken in consideration when the Sewer Department's FY 2024/2025 operating budget is drafted. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through March 17, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$111,536.16. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Appointments of Various Town Officials.** Manager Schulz noted the terms of certain appointed municipal positions expire at the end of this month. There are also appointed positions that have been vacant for some time. These positions were advertised and the current office holders contacted to see whether they would like to be reappointed.
  - 1. **Conservation Commission.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint David K. Mears and Jeremy Whalen to the Conservation Commission. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  - 2. **Development Review Board.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint William S. Smith to the Development Review Board. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  - 3. **Dog River Park Committee.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint Russ Barrett to the Dog River Park Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  - 4. **Energy Committee.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint Patrick Meehan to the Energy Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** There were no applicants for the two (2) vacant positions that will be readvertised.



5. **Planning Commission.** The Planning Commission now has two (2) vacant positions that will be readvertised.
  6. **Town Forest Stewardship Committee.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint Nelson Hoffman and appoint Virginia Kunkel to the Town Forest Stewardship Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  7. **First Constable.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint Richard Wobby as First Constable. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  8. **Grand Juror.** There were no applicants for this position.
  9. **Tree Warden.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint Russ Barrett as Tree Warden. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  10. **CVFiber Delegate.** There were no applicants for this position.
  11. **Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) Representative.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint Royal DeLegge as the CVRPC Representative and reappoint Jeff Schulz as the alternate representative. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  12. **CVRPC Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Representative.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reappoint Tom Davis as the CVRPC TAC Representative and Jeff Schulz as the alternate representative. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell noted the list of ARPA fund request applications has been revised since the last meeting and two (2) new fund requests have been received. The first is from Elroy Hill and is for \$500,000 in ARPA relief funds to “update existing sidewalks.” Chair Maxwell believes that the Highway Planning & Project Oversight Subcommittee (Board members Shernock and Stevens) have been working with the Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force members to develop a priority list for sidewalk work. Board member Shernock said the subcommittee met last Thursday (03/21/24) and there was a discussion that included the Task Force members on improving the sidewalks located on the walk-to-school routes on Vine Street and Cross Street. Mr. Hill believes there also needs to be a plan to upgrade the sidewalk on North Main Street from the Vine Street intersection to Cumberland Farms. Chair Maxwell said sidewalks now seems to become the number one candidate to receive sizable amounts of ARPA funds. There is a separate ARPA funds request to install new sidewalk along Vermont Route 12 from Cumberland Farms to the Tops Market for about \$350,000. Board member Petty noted federal grants are usually available for installing new sidewalk but not for fixing existing sidewalks. Therefore, she felt it might be better to use ARPA funds to fix identified sidewalks with problems and also apply for federal grant funds to install the new sidewalk on Vermont Route 12. Board member Morse would favor a focus on repairing existing sidewalks rather than putting in new sidewalk where it doesn’t now exist. Board member Petty strongly supports using ARPA funds to fix the aforementioned sidewalk on Vine Street and Cross Street. She also felt some sidewalk along upper Water Street should be fixed as that will be a pedestrian and vehicular traffic detour route during the Main Street Bridge Replacement project. Manager Schulz has spoken with Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) officials about the possibility of using ARPA funds to set up a reserve account that could be used for local match funds for grant applications. When he receives a written recommendation about this, he will share it with the Select Board members. Board member Morse thought it might be best to put these funds into a voter-authorized reserve fund. However, that action would require a Special Town Meeting if it is to be done before March 2025. Board member Petty would favor using between \$400,000 and \$600,000 in ARPA funds to start working this year on sidewalk repairs. Chair Maxwell said the recently completed sidewalk inventory indicated it would cost about \$4,000,000 to fully address all the problem sidewalks in the community. He feels raising that amount probably would require holding a bond vote but he did support starting the process sooner by making use of ARPA funds. There then was consensus on the Select Board to suspend further discussion of using ARPA funds for sidewalk work until a future meeting (04/23/24).

The second new ARPA funds request was from Town Clerk Kim Pedley who was requesting \$20,000 in order to digitalize eight (8) years of land records. The Board members felt this was a reasonable request and there were no real questions or concerns about this. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the request from Town Clerk Pedley for \$20,000 in ARPA funds in order to digitalize land records. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Ms. Pedley will be informed in writing of this decision.

In the Select Board packets were price quotes from three (3) water pipe suppliers. There is a current request for ARPA funds to replace and upgrade the waterlines in the Freight Yard Way area in order to encourage local economic development there. Manager Schulz thought the total cost of this project would be about \$90,000, which would include engineering costs. Board member Morse is concerned that due to this morning's bridge collapse in Baltimore, the closure of that port might lead to supply chain issues. Perhaps this purchase should not be delayed much more. After further discussion, it was decided that this matter will be put on the next regular meeting agenda (04/09/24).

#### **IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. Northfield Common Cleanup, etc.** Manager Schulz announced that Norwich University (NU) students have volunteered to conduct a cleanup of the Town Common on Sunday, April 14, 2024. A few days later on Friday, April 19, 2024, NU students will be holding a late night vigil on the Common in order to raise awareness of the nationwide problem of US veterans facing homelessness due to the lack of affordable housing.
- b. Upcoming Projects Out to Bid.** Manager Schulz noted the Northfield Falls sidewalk installation and other safety improvements project is now out to bid. Submissions from qualified contractors are due by Friday, April 5, 2024. Also out to bid is the Footbridge repairs project and those submissions are due by Monday, April 15, 2024.
- c. Northfield Common Rehabilitation Project Steering Committee.** Manager Schulz noted that the committee will be meeting again this Thursday night (03/28/24). Among other items, there will be a discussion of establishing a schedule of public meetings in order to obtain local feedback on the Town Common rehabilitation process.
- d. Main Street Waterline and Reservoir Replacement Project.** Now that the water project bond has been approved by Northfield voters, Manager Schulz has been in contact with Project Manager Naomi Johnson (Dufresne Group) about working with the State of Vermont to get this project moving forward as soon as possible.
- e. July 2023 Flood Damage FEMA Reimbursement update.** In the Select Board packets were copies of an updated summary of FEMA worksheets indicating how much in local funds were spent fixing repairing flood damage. The total amount to date is about \$780,000 and the municipality will be seeking FEMA reimbursement funds to cover these documented expenses.

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

- a. ACT 250 Update.** Board member Morse attended an Act 250 webinar this past week. The information he gathered probably will be of great use when the proposed waterfront pedestrian trail is under discussion again. He would also like Manager Schulz to look into whether this proposed project actually would require Act 250 permits before further discussion on this proposed project takes place.
- b. Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations on Depot Square.** Board member Morse would like Manager Schulz to make sure that these new EV charging stations are included on online mapping websites so that visitors to the area can be made aware of their existence. He has found some online maps that only show the EV chargers on the NU campus. Board member Stevens asked if the funds generated from these EV chargers goes into the municipality's General Fund. Manager Schulz said that was the case after the cost of electricity and the fee charged by the company that operates the EV chargers' computer software system has been deducted.

- c. Northfield Transfer Station.** Board member Morse has learned Casella Waste Management, which is under contract with the municipality to operate the local transfer station, soon will no longer be accepting cash payments. In future, they will only accept checks and credit card payments. Board member Morse would like to have Casella representatives attend a future Select Board meeting to explain the reasoning behind this decision. Manager Schulz has already invited them to attend a regular meeting next month. Board member Shernock believes Transfer Station customers should be able to make cash payments if they choose.
- d. Public Works Superintendent Proposal.** Board member Morse noted the number of major construction projects that will be occurring in Northfield over the next few years and wondered if this might be the time to hire a Public Works Superintendent to assist the Town Manager throughout the process. Chair Maxwell said such a hiring would require a restructuring of the municipal employee organizational structure. It also was noted there is no approved budget in place for this new position. Chair Maxwell suggested as an alternative a project manager could be hired for these upcoming projects to work with the Town Manager on a limited basis for a limited period of time.
- e. Select Board Meeting Motions.** Board member Shernock believes there should be a formal motion recorded whether the Select Board members make decisions on action items. This would make it far easier to determine at a later time what decision was actually made. Chair Maxwell said he would try to do a better job in future to make sure all proper public meeting procedures are followed.
- f. Northfield Middle/High School (NMHS) Spring Musical.** Board member Petty wanted to spread the word that NMHS will be presenting a production of The Addams Family (School Edition) musical comedy early next month. The performances will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 4, 2024 and Friday, April 5, 2024. There also will be an afternoon performance on Saturday, April 6, 2024 at 2:00 p.m. The tickets are \$10 each. Board member Petty encouraged her fellow Select Board members to attend.

**XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).** There was none.

**XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 10:35 p.m.

*Manager Schulz left the meeting at 10:40 p.m.*

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

The Board came out of executive session at 10:52 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 10:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of April 9, 2024.