

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of October 14, 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, Pierre Gomez (Northfield Police Chief), David Mears (Northfield Conservation Commission), Jeremy Whalen (Town Forest Stewardship Committee), Mead Binhammer (Vermont Land Trust), Michael J. Leddy (McNeil, Leddy & Sheahan PC), Susan Stillinger (Northfield Conservation Commission), Debbie Zuaro (Northfield Conservation Commission), Bill Dell'Isola (Town Forest Stewardship Committee), Auditi Guha (VTDigger), Chris Bradley, Brian Massey Jr. (Planning Commission), Steve Korrow, Kristina Ward, Kristin Pollard, Lorna Doney, Theresa Elmer, Rodney Elmer, Sara Helfant, John Helfant, Kaylan Sweet, Bill Amell, Sarah Path, Gerard LaVarney, Carolyn Stevens, Matthew Romei, Greg Tessier, Darcy Grenier, Robert Doyon, 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. David Mears, Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC): Town Forest Land Conservation Opportunity.** Mr. Mears said about a year ago the NCC started a conversation regarding various means to protect the Town Forest from future development. There was some thought of working with the Planning Commission (PC) to revise local regulations to create special protections as well as the possibility of creating a conservation easement for the Town Forest that prohibit future development. More recently, there has been consideration of working with the Vermont Land Trust in conjunction with the Town of Berlin as their town forest adjoins ours. The goal would be to protect the Northfield-Berlin ridge. Mead Binhammer is from the Vermont Land Trust and he then showed maps of the Northfield and Berlin town forests that indicated the distribution of trees species situated there, locations of rare animal habitats (e.g., salamanders), etc. He added that Berlin recently obtained land that expanded its town forest and he showed topographical maps that showed where new trail systems could be established. Jeremy Whalen from the Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) said that a Town Forest Stewardship Plan was drafted by the NCC and approved by the Select Board members in October 2019 that provides guidelines for effective forest management. The TFSC holds monthly meetings in order to implement this management plan and achieve its goals for forest protection. Mr. Mears said there are various methods of protecting the Town Forest from future development that might include purchase of adjoining parcels, transferring the property to the Vermont Land Trust, or establishing a conservation easement. Mr. Mears said a conservation easement would mean that the municipality would continue to own the land but any future development would be prohibited for all time. Mr. Mears said there are some grant funds now available that could be used to preserve/expand the Town Forest and it might be a good idea to apply now as federal funds probably will be greatly reduced in future years. Earlier this year (07/22/25), PC Chair Royal DeLegge addressed the Select Board members of the possibility of establishing a "Forest Reserve Overlay District" for all or part of the Town Forest. This would provide protections for the Town Forest without the permanent restrictions of a conservation easement. Mr. Mears and the NCC members would like to meet with the PC members to discuss this possibility. He then noted that the NCC and TFSC members were very impressed with the work performed this summer by Vermont Youth Conservation Corps members on the trail systems located on Garvey Hill and the Town Forest. It is hoped that this can become a multi-year project. Since no longer available American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds paid for this first year of trail work, alternate funding sources will need to be found to continue this program. This could include working with the Vermont Land Trust if the Select Board members feel this is appropriate. Chair Morse then thanked Mr. Mears, Mr. Whalen, and Mr. Binhammer for tonight's presentation and looks forward to what appears to be an ongoing conversation especially since the Town of Berlin will be involved. Manager Schulz will be kept in the loop as the process develops.

- b. **Chris Bradley: Highway and Water Project Concerns. (7:38 p.m.).** Although he has served in various municipal positions in the past (i.e. Select Board member, Lister, etc.), Mr. Bradley said until recently he had lost track of how the municipality operates its highway system and utility departments. Although there is a Select Board committee that is specifically dedicated to oversight of highway matters, it has only met once this year (08/01/25) and that meeting was solely dedicated to one issue: the Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge. At that meeting, a contract was approved to make repairs to the bridge that included the right of the contractor to submit change orders. However, there subsequently was a concern that this meeting was improperly warned and whether the contract approval was valid. Chair Morse said it was felt at the time that this was an emergency situation as the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) had abruptly lowered the bridge's maximum weight limit below what would allow for normal truck traffic, emergency response vehicles, etc. Mr. Bradley has understood that the bridge's maximum weight limit has been a problem for several years. He then noted the bridge contractor subsequently did additional work on the bridge and submitted a change order on September 11, 2025, which was after that work had been completed. Mr. Bradley feels the Highway subcommittee should meet more frequently in order to provide better oversight of Highway Department matters and prevent the possibility of such occurrences in future. Chair Morse said despite recognizable problems with the process, the repairs to Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge were well done and will allow for the Select Board to plan and budget for long-term solutions. Mr. Bradley then asked if the work on Hockman Hill has been completed. Manager Schulz said it was nearly completed. Mr. Bradley then expressed his concerns regarding the nearly-completed Main Street Waterline Replacement Project. He felt that the contractor had done a poor job in notifying residents beforehand when their water service would be disrupted, when there would be temporary road closures, etc. Mr. Bradley said the only time he was directly contacted by the project contractor (J. Hutchins, Inc.) was just before a large hole was dug in front of his house that disconnected his water service. In the end, Mr. Bradley had to contact a private contractor to have his service restored. Board member Shernock said she was sorry that he was inconvenienced in this manner.

IV. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. **September 23, 2025 (Regular Meeting). (7:56 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passes 5-0-0.**

V. **APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. **Approval of Warrant #07-26 & #07-26A-E. (7:58 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #07-26 & #07-26A-E in the amount of \$1,896,602.78. Board member Maxwell noted a \$5,835.50 Water Department payment to the Margaret Holland Inn to reimburse for overflow damage caused when new utility line was installed as part of the Main Street Waterline Replacement Project. He asked why our insurance company did not cover this expense. Manager Schulz said he has been working with our insurance companies but given possible delays, he decided to use utility funds to compensate the property owner while the process plays out. Chair Morse noted that this matter was discussed at last night's Utility Commissions Joint Meeting and this payment was authorized. Board member Stevens asked about a payment for the "Vault Bridge Project." Manager Schulz said this is a part of the Main Street Bridge Replacement Project and the underground relocation of some utility lines. Board member Stevens then asked about the purchase of "hoodies" for the Northfield Police Department (NPD). Chief Gomez said three (3) hoodies were purchased using donation funds and the officers wear them when exercising on the training range. This purchase had been approved beforehand by Manager Schulz. Chair Morse asked about an "Intern Borrowed from State" payment. Manager Schulz said this was an automobile insurance payment for an International truck that had been borrowed from the state. Chair Morse then asked about a \$3,705 payment to the state for "Stormwater 3 Acre Cabot." Manager Schulz this was a payment to the state to file a stormwater grant application on behalf of Cabot Hosiey, which will reimburse the municipality for the filing fee. **Motion passes 5-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through September 28, 2025.** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to accept the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$126,237.30. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. Proposed Norwich University Land Transfer.** At the September 9, 2025, Select Board regular meeting, Norwich University (NU) President John J. Broadmeadow provided a brief overview of upcoming NU campus renovations. As part of their effort to improve the traffic flow onto and within the NU campus, President Broadmeadow suggested a land transfer in which the university would obtain Center Park (the location of the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument) in return for NU property located adjacent to the municipality's wellfield. Manager Schulz said he did some research regarding the Center Park site and the utility lines located there. He also spoke with Utility Superintendent James Russo and they concur that if NU does take possession of the property, it would need to upgrade these utility lines and provide the municipality with an easement for future access. Chief Gomez said he drives through this area on a regular basis and agrees that it is difficult to drive there during high traffic situations. He would support any effort to readjust the campus roads to improve driving safety. Board member Shernock asked if the land NU is offering in the transfer is limited to the wellfield area parcels. NU owns some property near Cheney Field that perhaps could be used to improve Town Forest public access. Chair Morse would like to see a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) performed that would show whether or not the municipality would gain any advantage from this land transfer. This would include whether the municipality would gain or lose property tax payments as part of this agreement. In any case, much negotiation and due diligence needs to be done before any land transfer become reality. Board member Maxwell would like it stated definitely in the land transfer agreement that there would be no future development on Center Park. He felt that the Northfield-Norwich University Subcommittee should be involved in the initial negotiations and this should include full discussions of potential tax implications, any liability concerns related to the NU properties now being offered, etc. Board member Maxwell then asked about any public role in the process. Manager Schulz said a public hearing would need to be held before any land transfer could be approved. Northfield residents also would have the right to petition to have any land transfer approved by the Select Board members put to a public vote. Manager Schulz noted this suggested land transfer has not been submitted as a formal proposal. Chair Morse believes the idea was submitted as a trial balloon. Board member Petty thought it might be a good idea to hire an engineer to review the traffic safety situation near Center Park. Chief Gomez felt the Select Board members could determine this themselves by driving the area and thus save the expense of hiring a consultant. Manager Schulz will provide a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed land transfer. There also will be reviews of the tax implications, possible liability issues associated with the current NU property, and traffic engineering. Chair Morse said after that information has been received, the Select Board members will decide whether they want to initiate negotiations for this land transfer.
- b. Town Common Project: Establishing Project Phasing. (8:35 p.m.)** Board member Stevens would like to start installing some curb cuts and sidewalk extensions as the initial phase of the Town Common rehabilitation project. Chair Morse noted that the ad hoc committee that worked with DuBois & King on the project design did provide a list of project priorities and he would like to see this list again before proceeding further.
- c. Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge Repairs Change Order. (8:37 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the change order in the amount of \$65,000. Board member Petty was not been pleased with how this process has played out with this contractor and noted the bridge repairs were completed before the associated change order was approved by management. Board member Stevens said the bridge did need urgent repairs and the contractor did provide them at reasonable cost. Perhaps the change order amount could have been negotiated. Board member Shernock said this is an old bridge and it is not surprising that more problems were discovered during the repair process. As Manager Schulz has indicated, it is difficult to find bridge repair contractors so it might be best to maintain a good working relationship with this one. Chair Morse said the bridge is now in workable condition as quality work was done in an efficient manner. He believes the contractor should be paid for the work done. **Motion passed 3-2-0, with Board members Maxell and Petty voting in opposition.**

- d. **Current Municipal Staffing Levels. (8:48 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said he is still looking for a replacement for Financial Director Laurie Baroffio, who retired in June 2025 but has been willing to work parttime until her replacement has been hired. Manager Schulz said there have been qualified applicants for this position but their compensation requests have been above the budgeted amount and/or they would like to work remotely. Manager Schulz doesn't feel a remote employee would be appropriate for this position. Board member Maxwell said many accounting managers do work remotely so it might become necessary to change our approach to find a qualified financial director. Manager Schulz said there is one vacancy for a CDL driver in the Highway Department. Fortunately, we will have a sufficient number of part-time drivers for snow removal this winter. The Utility Department is fully staffed at this time. At Chair Morse's request, discussion of Northfield police Department staffing was postponed for the time being.
- e. **Public Hearing (Code of Ethics Investigation & Enforcement Ordinance): Tuesday, October 28, 2025, 7:00 p.m. (8:56 p.m.)** As part of the newly adopted Vermont Municipal Code of Ethics, the Select Board members are required to approve an ordinance to "enact procedures for the investigation of complaints that allege a municipal officer has violated Vermont's Municipal Code of Ethics, or the Town's Conflict of Interest Policy, and the enforcement in instances of substantiated complaints, including methods of enforcement and available remedies." Holding this public hearing is part of the ordinance approval process and interested members of the public are encouraged to participate.

VII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Main Street Waterline Replacement Project. (8:56 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said now that the waterlines have been installed, Main Street south of the bridge to the Central Street intersection will be repaved starting on Monday, October 20, 2025. New waterline is now being installed north of the bridge to Nantanna Mill. He has reminded the contractor of the importance of notifying residents of any planned water outages or traffic delays. In addition, new waterline is being installed along Byam Hill and Hill Street in order to connect to the new water tank on Cheney Field.
- b. **Water Tank Replacement Project. (8:58 p.m.)** Manager Schulz reported that this project also is on schedule for completion this year.
- c. **Dollar General Land Donation. (8:59 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the land donation agreement has been signed. Once the land deed has been finalized, the land transfer will be completed.
- d. **Lovers Lane Road Repairs. (9:00 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said all the subbase work on this road has been completed and the next step is to install new guardrails.
- e. **Municipal Culvert Inventory. (9:01 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) completed the inventory of Northfield culverts this summer and the information is available on the state's database (www.vtculverts.org). He was surprised to learn that Northfield has the most municipal culverts in Washington County.
- f. **Smart Meters. (9:02 p.m.)** Manager Schulz reported that the smart meters should be operational by January 2026. There will be public notices provided to Northfield utility customers before the system goes live.
- g. **Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Collective Bargaining Unit. (9:02 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said negotiations with the new union should start soon as there will be a number of issues that need to be reviewed in the near future.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Waterline Replacement Project Change Orders. (9:03 p.m.)** Board member Maxwell asked if the concrete on South Main Street will be dug up as part of the project. Manager Schulz said the current plan is for curb-to-curb paving south of the bridge to the Central Street intersection. This is a farther distance than originally envisioned and the estimated cost will be \$250,000. VTrans will cover half of this cost and the remaining cost is covered in the bond approved by voters.
- b. **Habitat for Humanity. (9:06 p.m.)** Board member Petty noted there will be a community meeting tomorrow night (10/15/25) at 7:00 p.m. in the Northfield Middle & High School Cafeteria that will provide information on an upcoming Habitat for Humanity project in Northfield that will construct two (2) affordable residences in a duplex.

- c. **Municipal Culvert Inventory. (9:07 p.m.)** Board member Stevens noted that the inventory indicates that some Northfield culverts are in need of repair. Manager Schulz said either our Highway crew will make the repairs or the work will be subcontracted.
- d. **Stoney Brook Road Covered Bridge (AKA Moseley Covered Bridge) update. (9:10 p.m.)** Board member Stevens asked about the status of planned repairs for this covered bridge. Manager Schulz said he has been in contact with Daniels Construction about this and the bridge should be repaired by December 15, 2025. Board member Stevens felt it would be better to install additional warning signs near the bridge approach in order to discourage heavy vehicles from using it.
- e. **Municipal Culvert Inventory (cont.). (9:15 p.m.)** Chair Morse thought the culvert inventory would be more useful if it included Town Highway numbers. Manager Schulz said CVRPC can provide this update.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Kristin Pollard: Public Information Requests. (9:19 p.m.)** Ms. Pollard said she has made multiple requests for access to public records regarding local law enforcement but these requests have been either delayed or ignored. She also is dismayed that the municipality has a police budget of over \$1,500,000 but there no longer is any local law enforcement coverage. Northfield residents now must rely on Vermont State Police or other regional agencies for protection. Chair Morse said he will review the emails that Ms. Pollard sent and will make sure that all public information requests will be addressed. Manager Schulz also will look into what information has not been provided.
- b. **John Helfant: Public Records Requests. (9:26 p.m.)** Mr. Helfant, the former Northfield Police Chief who retired in June 2023, said Ms. Pollard made a request for an NPD Facebook posting but was refused access by the computer administrator for reasons that turned out to be false. It was said that Mr. Helfant created the Facebook page himself, that he served as the website administrator, and that he deleted the requested posting himself. Mr. Helfant said all these statements are untrue. Chair Morse said he had no information about this matter so he would like Manager Schulz to review this and then report back to the Select Board members. Chief Gomez said he would provide any information that they would require.
- c. **Lorna Doney: Select Board Subcommittees. (9:34 p.m.)** Ms. Doney asked if there were any guidelines in place that required these subcommittees to meet at regular intervals. Manager Schulz said there were not.
- d. **Elroy Hill: Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge Change Order (9:35 p.m.)** Mr. Hill said he was very disappointed that the Select Board members did authorize payment of this additional cost of this change order. He felt that the contractor acted in an unprofessional manner and that taxpayer money has been wasted.

- X. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Shernock, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a personnel issue, legal matter, and contract negotiation with Manager Schulz and Town Attorney Michael Leddy present for some but not all of the discussion. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:30 p.m.

Manager Schulz left the executive session at 10:30 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 11:55 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 11:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of October 28, 2025.