

Joint Meeting of the Northfield Electric and Water & Wastewater Commissions Minutes of September 8, 2025

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

The meeting started at 6:32 p.m.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting.

Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Kelley, to approve the July 7, 2025 meeting minutes.

Motion passed 3-0-1, with Mr. Fitzhugh abstaining.

Meeting of the Electric Commission

Northfield Electric Department (NED) Upcoming Projects

Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) Grant Opportunities.

Mr. Fitzhugh said that VPPSA is planning to purchase truck-mounted cameras that will be shared by its member communities for vegetation control and for asset management.

Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) Filing. Mr. Fitzhugh reported that NED's IRP has been filed with the Public Utility Commission (PUC), which is required every three (3) years. We will see if there is any feedback from PUC in coming months.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Rate. Mr. Fitzhugh said VPPSA is working on a "Smart Hours" pilot program that would try to shift EV charging times to off-peak hours. They are looking for local volunteers to test the program before expanding it to include other customers. Mr. Fitzhugh said this program could be further expanded in the future to include heat pumps.

Smart Meters. Mr. Fitzhugh said the meters themselves are expected to arrive in the next few weeks. Even though the Data Collection Units (DCUs) are in place and have been tested successfully, there still is some preparation work needed before they go online. Manager Schulz said we will need to provide utility customers about a month's warning before the system becomes operational.

NED Rate Case. Mr. Fitzhugh said the rate case has been filed and the PUC hearing will be held on Wednesday, September 24, 2025. The increase amount requested is 15.5% and this is the first rate increase NED has requested since 2011. The main reason for the request is the increased cost of mandated renewable energy purchases and higher transmission costs. We will find out in coming months how much (if any) of the rate increase has been approved.

King Street Battery Storage Project. Mr. Fitzhugh said all the required documentation is in place for this project so the developer (Lightshift) can start getting the storage facility in place. Manager Schulz has been working with them so that the King Street residents are provided sufficient warning before any substantial work is done on the street. Mr. Fitzhugh believes the facility should be operational early next year.

Grid Grant. A utility resiliency grant is now available through the State of Vermont. Mr. Fitzhugh, Mr. Russo, and Manager Schulz have been working on a proposal that would include spending grant funds on Turkey Hill tree trimming as well as cable/conduit projects on Terry Hill and Dole Hill. The details regarding this grant program are still sketchy. It is possible that this might become a 50/50 split grant with so much additional paperwork involved that it might not be feasible to pursue at this time.

Norwich University (NU) New Transformer Request. NU is asking for a transformer for its new building (Cyber Fusion Center) now under construction. The cost would be about \$93,000. In addition, Green Mountain Power (GMP) would like to test the new transmission lines before the current NU substation is shut down next year.

Main Street Bridge Replacement Work. Mr. Russo said all the new utility conduits but one are in place and GMP is preparing to install the new wire in the near future. Aaron Roux has been looking into attaching all the new services and will order the equipment required. Mr. Russo said that all seems to be moving forward albeit at a snail's pace. He did acknowledge that it is a very complicated process.

Burlington Electric Department. Mr. Fitzhugh noted the PUC sent a strongly worded letter to the Burlington Electric Department regarding alleged poor operating practices that may have resulted in a \$950,000 loss in revenue, including some funds that should have been shared with other Vermont public utilities. There will be an audit held and there is the possibility of a massive fine being imposed. Mr. Fitzhugh said there is a VPPSA concern that the PUC decided to investigate the largest public utility in Vermont first and may decide to expand its oversight of the smaller utilities at a later time.

Nantanna Mill Hydroelectric Facility. Manager Schulz said the owner of the facility still owes a large amount of current and delinquent taxes. In addition, there had been no communication from them for some time. There had been previous indications that power generation might have started up again this year but now there is nothing but uncertainty. Mr. Fitzhugh will try to reach out to the facility's owners to determine their current plans.

Meeting of the Water & Wastewater Commission

Northfield Water & Sewer Department Upcoming Projects

Main Street Waterline Project. Manager Schulz said the work on Main Street is nearly completed from the bridge to the southern intersection with Central Street. The next step would be installing new waterline from north of Main Street Bridge to Nantanna Mill. In addition, the new waterlines have been installed on Prospect Street that will connect to the new water tank on Cheney Field. The most recent project work schedule calls for a winter shutdown with the remainder of the project completed next spring. On South Main Street, the current plan is to completely repave the street this October rather than just patch where needed. There is about \$80,000 left in the project budget and this will allow for the curb-to-curb paving. Mr. Fitzhugh asked where the spring work would be done. Manager Schulz said mainly on the Hill Street, Byam Road, etc., as waterline is connected to the new reservoir on Cheney Field. All the work on Main Street (North and South) will be completed this year. Mr. Donahue asked if the project contractor will be penalized for not completing the project this year. Manager Schulz said that would not happen since the State of Vermont had allowed the work delays that led to the shutdown.

Cheney Field Water Tank Replacement Project. Manager Schulz said the project contractor is now preparing for the concrete to be poured for the new reservoir floor and walls. This work is about four (4) weeks behind schedule and this means that the site restoration work will have to be done next spring. Manager Schulz noted that one local group (the Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force) has been advocating for a small parking area to be established at the work site. Other groups associated with Town Forest protection do not support this proposal. Mr. Morse said this has been an ongoing discussion and the final decision now can be delayed until next spring. Mr. LaVarnway asked if the waterline to the new reservoir be in place before the winter shutdown. That waterline will go partly through his property. Manager Schulz was informed that the hookup will have to wait until next spring. Mr. Russo will speak to the contractor to get confirmation either way. Mr. LaVarnway also would like to be sure that his property and his neighbors will be protected from spring runoff next year. Mr. Donahue suggested holding a meeting with the project contractor on this specific topic. Mr. LaVarnway would like to be present for that conversation.

Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Update. Mr. Russo said the facility is running well recently. Manager Schulz noted that two (2) small motors and a pump had to be replaced recently but that is just part of general maintenance. Mr. Russo also noted that the phosphorous levels are again under control.

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

The Board adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk