

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING**  
**Minutes of December 5, 2023**

- 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, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Shannon Palone (Pool Director), Dan Anderson (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force), and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

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

**III. DISCUSSION**

**a. Proposed FY 2024/2025 Town Budget**

- 1. Municipal Pool.** Manager Schulz reported the Pool operations & maintenance (O&M) budget for the next fiscal year will see no drastic changes from the current year's budget. The overall increase will be 4.7%. There will be increases for water, sewer, and chemical purchases in the Materials/Supplies budget. Pool Director Shannon Palone said we did well last year with our lifeguard staff. She will be holding certification sessions next year in February and March in order to increase the number of possible lifeguard applicants for the next pool season. There probably will be some losses amongst the more experienced lifeguards due to college graduations, etc. Last year some of the work schedules were readjusted to provide more work for the senior lifeguards but there weren't any real staffing problems. Manager Schulz asked if the compensation paid to Northfield lifeguards is comparable to that paid at other public pools in the region. Ms. Palone said it was but there will be problems with other public pools trying to "poach" our more senior lifeguards by paying a little bit more. She hopes that her certification classes will result in a larger number of potential lifeguards. In the Pool Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget, Manager Schulz noted the Paint/Repair Pool account has a \$70,000 balance with \$10,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz will be preparing an RFP to be sent out soon so that this work can be done next spring. There will also be plans to install new skimmers while this work is being done. He noted it has been difficult to find Vermont contractors to do this work so we may have to hire from out of state. Ms. Palone said the school where she works (South Royalton) had their pool redone recently and she will provide Manager Schulz with the name of that contractor. Board member Petty asked how many new skimmers would be installed at that time. Manager Schulz said as many as we can. Chair Maxwell noted the pool has thirty (30) skimmers installed and the CIP budget for their replacement has a \$31,139 balance, which should pay for about fifteen (15). Ms. Palone noted that some are failing at this time and they should be the ones replaced first.

In the Building/Facility Improvements CIP account, there is a \$2,563 balance with \$10,000 to be added in the next fiscal year from prior year surplus funds. Manager Schulz noted that ADA compliance issues have been found with the pool bathhouse and bathroom. There will be a professional inspection done next week and once we have received the results, we can start planning the needed renovations. Ms. Palone said the shower drainage also needs to be addressed. There also should be the creation of additional handicapped parking spaces near the pool. Chair Maxwell said there is consideration of using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for this purpose. Manager Schulz then turned to the Pool Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget. The major item here is filter replacement, which is scheduled for the next fiscal year. The current balance in this account is \$76,153 with \$7,500 to be added in the next fiscal year. The estimated cost of a new pool filter is between \$80,000 and \$100,000. Chair Maxwell asked if that purchase would be made before or after the next pool season. Manager Schulz said it would be done afterwards. He then asked about the status of the pool vacuum. Ms. Palone said it was in good shape but we may need to purchase additional vacuum bags, which are fairly inexpensive. Manager Schulz then asked about the two (2) diving boards. Ms. Palone said there are no issues with either one. However, the bases are getting rusty and a little unstable so this will need to be fixed before the pool reopens next June.

Manager Schulz asked if the Select Board members had any questions or comments about the municipal pool. Board member Petty believes the municipality should better market the pool in order to increase usage. This is a real community asset but many residents don't know much about it. Ms. Palone said grant funds were obtained last year that provided free family passes to eligible local families. She would like this done again next year. Ms. Palone also would like to expand the swimming lesson program as well as water aerobics programs this coming summer. Board member Petty would be willing to help locate grant opportunities that would provide free pool passes, swimming lessons, etc. for local youth. Northfield doesn't provide much for youth activities but the pool has become a popular destination during hot summer days. Ms. Palone would like to offer more special events at the pool such as Family Fun Nights. Unfortunately, such events can become quite expensive when refreshments are provided. Ms. Palone added that there has been a Brown Public Library summer program that provides free day passes for children who read a certain number of books. That is another program that she would like to see continued. Board member Morse asked about ice cream socials. Ms. Palone said that has been done in the past when Ben & Jerry's donated the ice cream. That is another possibility for next year. Movie nights are another possibility but there are concerns that the lack of nighttime lighting near the pool might create safety issues. Board member Petty asked if we could estimate the cost of four (4) special events at the pool next summer. Ms. Palone said that besides the cost of refreshments there would be additional staffing costs. However, she thought that could be worked out with donations from local businesses, etc. Manager Schulz said perhaps Economic Development Director Tom Davis could help with marketing the pool. It also is possible ARPA funds could be used to cover the additional expenses of special events. Board member Morse thought local merchants, including the new ice cream shop, might be willing to make donations in return for favorable publicity. Ms. Palone thought that distributing flyers at the local schools each spring could bring more awareness of the municipal pool, its services, and possible special events to local families. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Palone for her attendance tonight and for her long service to Northfield as Pool Director. Ms. Palone confirmed she has served as Pool Director for over twenty (20) years.

2. **Brown Public Library (BPL).** Chair Maxwell noted that updated budget pages for BPL O&M were distributed for tonight's meeting. Board member Stevens, who also serves as Treasurer on the BPL Board of Trustees, said there was a real attempt to avoid an increase in the next fiscal year's budget so two (2) changes have been made. The first is to increase the amount used from the endowment account from \$20,000 to \$21,000. In addition, the amount allocated for new BPL furniture has been reduced from \$2,000 to \$0 as these purchases will be made from the Crain bequest. Chair Maxwell noted the BPL O&M budget therefore has been lowered by \$3,000. Board member Stevens confirmed this and also noted that about two-thirds of the BPL O&M budget covers the salary and benefits of the Library Director and other paid staff. Manager Schulz then turned to the BPL CIP budget. He noted that the Library Roof account has a \$20,000 balance with \$5,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. The Building Improvements account has a \$4,256 balance with \$2,500 to be added in the next fiscal year. There are no major purchases planned for either of these CIP accounts in the near future. Manager Schulz then noted that a new CIP account has been established to address problems in the basement of the Historical Society building. He had mentioned at previous meetings that this basement had severe problems with mold, etc. so \$5,000 has been put into this account using CIP surplus funds. Another new CIP account is Community Room Upgrade as the Select Board members have spoken about the need to upgrade the room, which is used for public meetings, etc. \$4,000 in CIP surplus funds have been put into this account and this will be added to \$2,577 in existing Community Room donation funds. Chair Maxwell asked if these CIP funds were unrestricted. Manager Schulz confirmed that they were. Board member Morse asked when the time came to replace the BPL roof, is there a requirement that it had to be a slate roof or could it be a metal roof. Board member Stevens said there were no restrictions. Board member Petty asked if the leaks in the kitchen adjacent to the Community Room had been fixed. Manager Schulz confirmed that they had. He then asked Board member Stevens if the building had any other issues. Board member Stevens said the exit lights needed new batteries but that was not a major expense.

Board member Shernock then returned to the BPL O&M budget and asked what the "Benefits" line item was for. Board member Stevens said this line item covered the health insurance, dental insurance, etc. for the Library Director. This amount has gone up in recent years due to health care rate increases.

- 3. Administration.** As he stated in his earlier budget overview, Manager Schulz said there aren't too many changes in these budgets from the current fiscal year other than personnel expense increases due to scheduled salary rises and higher health insurance costs. These increases vary between the various municipal departments but usually are in the range of five and seven percent (5-7%). In the Planning/Zoning budget, there will not be an increase in the cost for membership in the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) this coming year, which is unexpected but welcome. In the Economic Development budget, the primary expenditure is for the salary and benefits for the full-time Economic Development Director (EDD), which totals \$92,750. He added that the Dues, Meetings, & Subscriptions line item will increase from \$400 to \$1,000 in the next fiscal year. Chair Maxwell thought this might be the time to discuss whether the municipality should continue to use ARPA funds to fully cover the EDD salary and benefits. He believes having a full-time EDD in Northfield has provided real gains for Northfield in terms of grant funds received, assistance to local businesses that must result in increasing the Grand List, etc. Given that this position probably will be retained for some time, Chair Maxwell would like to phase out the use of ARPA funds and start budgeting the EDD position like other municipal employees. He would like this done over a three (3) year period. Board member Morse said everyone he has spoken with has been very pleased with this position and the person now holding it (Tom Davis). He also would like this position brought into the municipal budget slowly so there is no "sticker shock" when it is fully funded by the municipality. Ms. Baroffio noted there is approximately \$45,000 remaining from the \$100,000 in economic development funds that Northfield voters authorized in 2014. Manager Schulz said the Town Meeting article that authorized establishment of this fund was loosely worded so these funds could be used for EDD expenses. He noted some of the original funds were used to hire the first EDD (Jon Ignatowski), who served on a part-time basis. Chair Maxwell would like an accounting of what happened to these economic development funds over the past nine (9) years. Ms. Baroffio added that \$10,000 of these funds were used for the creation of the Northfield Business Guide. After some discussion, the Select Board consensus was to budget \$31,000 for one-third of the EDD personnel expenses in the next fiscal year and use ARPA funds for the balance. In the following fiscal year this will increase to two-thirds and by the third year, all EDD personnel expenses will come from the municipal budget without the use of ARPA funds. Ms. Baroffio noted that the \$31,000 spent in the next fiscal year will result in a one cent (1¢) increase in the tax rate.
- 4. Cemetery.** Manager Schulz said the bulk of expenditures in the Cemetery O&M budget is to hire the cemetery contractor (Bruce Wright) who maintains the municipal cemeteries and also performs sexton duties. This is an annual contract that has slight increases each year. Chair Maxwell asked if maintenance of cemetery property, i.e., mowing, weeding, etc. is something a current municipal employee could perform. Manager Schulz said there currently really is no excess staff time so adding these duties probably would require hiring an additional employee. Chair Maxwell asked if Manager Schulz was pleased with Mr. Wright's performance. Manager Schulz said that he was. It was noted that Mr. Wright also repairs gravestones as part of his duties. Accordingly, in the Cemetery CIP budget there is a \$6,145 balance in the Stone/Monument Restoration account with \$1,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. There are separate CIP accounts for the Mount Hope Cemetery, which includes funds for expansion, paving, and maintenance of the south gate, front wall, and road. Manager Schulz noted there now is a \$9,171 balance in the cemetery expansion account, which he felt really wasn't needed at this time as there now is enough space in this cemetery for interments in the next fifty (50) years. Board member Morse said if these funds are undesignated, perhaps they should be shifted into other CIP accounts where there are present needs. Chair Maxwell suggested Manager Schulz and Ms. Baroffio should look into some possible uses for these funds. Manager Schulz said the other CIP accounts for Mount Hope maintenance have sufficient balances to cover any needed work in the next year.

Manager Schulz then noted the CIP account for the Falls Cemetery Fence has a \$5,897 balance. Work on this fence probably should be done in the next fiscal year and the estimated cost is between \$3,000 and \$4,000. Therefore, the current balance should be sufficient. Board member Shernock asked if \$1,000 should be removed from the Stone/Monument Restoration account. Manager Schulz did not think this was a good idea as there is a lot of work to be done fixing old headstones, etc. The only impediment is the amount of time this takes, which can conflict with the cemetery contractor's other required duties. Board member Shernock thought it might be useful to have an inventory done that indicated which monuments were in most need of attention. Chair Maxwell believes the members of the Northfield Historical Society (NHS) have been doing this for several years. They also helped raise donation funds to cover the expense of restoration work at the Elmwood Cemetery a few years ago. Board member Shernock thought it might be useful to include NHS members in any future discussion of cemetery maintenance and monument restoration. Chair Maxwell thought that was a good idea.

5. **Miscellaneous.** Board member Morse wanted to discuss Planning/Zoning projected revenue at this time. He noted Norwich University (NU) is planning to construct a new 25,000 square foot building in the next year. The local zoning permit fee for this should be about \$5,000 and Board member Morse felt this should be reflected in the anticipated amount of Planning/Zoning permit fee revenue in the next fiscal year budget. It was noted that if the fee was paid prior to July 1, 2024, the revenue would be received during the current fiscal year and need not be included in the projected revenue for FY 2024-2025. Manager Schulz will check with project consultant Ron Lyon about the anticipated timing of this fee permit payment. If it will be paid after July 1, 2024, the affected revenue line item for the next fiscal year will be adjusted appropriately.

#### IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Dan Anderson (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force): ADA Compliance Questions.** Mr. Anderson missed the earlier part of this meeting and asked if previously acknowledged ADA compliance problems at the library and municipal pool will be budgeted for in the next fiscal year budget. Board member Morse confirmed that was the case. It is also possible ARPA funds will be used as well in order to expedite the process. Manager Schulz said the access improvements for the BPL doors will be funded through the current fiscal year budget. The actual timing of this project is unclear but should commence within the few weeks. Mr. Anderson asked if there would be additional handicapped access actions taken regarding the new electric vehicle (EV) charging stations on Depot Square. Manager Schulz said the installation site will be reviewed again next spring to determine what additional steps could be taken to make it more handicapped accessible. Mr. Anderson then asked about the status of the sidewalk survey that the municipality was conducting. Manager Schulz said the inventory has been completed and will be discussed at the next special meeting (12/07/23) when the Highway Department budget is reviewed. Mr. Anderson is grateful for the philosophical support and the municipal actions taken to date to address these issues. He noted that much more will need to be done. Chair Maxwell said there also are plans to use ARPA funds to improve public accessibility.

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

The Board adjourned at 7:25 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 approved at the Select Board regular meeting of December 12, 2023.