

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of February 14, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Sarah Wolfe (Northfield Energy Committee), Donald Doyon, Merry Shernock, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

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

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. January 24, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #15-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #15-23 in the amount of \$736,372.05. Board member Morse noted that of the total warrant amount, \$329,585.73 represented power purchases for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). Board member Goodrich noted the monthly rental payment for a portalet at the Transfer Station. She asked if it might be less expensive in the long run to install a nearby bathroom. Manager Schulz will look into this possibility. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through January 22, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$119,318.98. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through February 5, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$125,092.89. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. Road Reclassification and Discontinuance Policy.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members have asked for a clear local policy regarding road reclassification and discontinuance that could be used in order to end municipal maintenance of certain roads that fit the criteria. He found a model policy that he adapted for Northfield and then forwarded to the Policy Review subcommittee (Board members Morse and Stevens) for their input. Manager Schulz said the goal is to develop a policy that would be fair and equitable while also following established state law. He noted that Section 4.1 of the proposed policy sets the conditions for road reclassification or discontinuance. These include that the road is not required for general public use; does not serve a "year-round residence;" does not provide "historic, economic, environmental, or community benefit to the municipality;" has two or fewer residences and is less than five hundred feet (500') in length; is abutted by a single property owner; and/or that single abutting property owner has made a request for the road to be reclassified or discontinued. Board member Morse asked if the model policy was developed by the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT). Manager Schulz said it was not. He found it through an internet search. Board member Morse noted that on some single-house roads, the sole structure is not occupied by the property owner most of the year but instead rented out through Airbnb or similar leasing services. He did not feel it was proper for such a road to be publicly maintained in order to benefit (or "subsidize") a private business.

Board member Goodrich said establishing a local policy would not preclude the need to follow state rules regarding road reclassification or discontinuance. Site visits and public hearings still would have to be held before the Select Board members take any action. Board member Morse would favor prioritizing road reclassification or discontinuance when an applicable property changes hands so that the current owner is not affected, i.e. "grandfathered.". He then noted that some single-house roads originally were publicly maintained because they provided transport access to a farm. Most of those farms are no longer in existence and Board member Morse felt we need to move with the times and no longer publicly maintain those particular roads. He noted that should a road be reclassified or discontinued, the municipality would no longer be required to plow snow, etc. but still would need to maintain any roadside culverts. Board member Morse says he knows of at least one property owner who would like their abutting road privatized. Manager Schulz said that person should contact the municipality so the process can commence. There was a similar situation on Bellemore Road over a year ago and that road was successfully discontinued at the property owner's request.

Chair Maxwell asked about the next step in the process. Manager Schulz said the proposed policy could be finalized and prepared for formal approval at the next regular meeting. Board member Goodrich asked why there was an emphasis in the policy on roads with single property owner abutters. Board member Morse said a single home access road with only one abutting property owner is more like a driveway than a public highway. If the road is reclassified or discontinued, the property owner would be able to take complete control of its future maintenance. This would be much more difficult if two or more property owners shared the road and therefore would have to reach an accommodation regarding who would pay for what, etc. Board member Morse doesn't want to antagonize neighbors in this manner. Board member Goodrich asked why the Vermont Department of Parks and Recreation would have to be notified beforehand of any potential changes in road status. Board member Petty said the State requires this notification in case the road in question provides access to public lands used for recreation. Board member Morse said this was similar to the ancient roads process, which happened about a decade ago. This was a state effort that allowed municipalities to keep some old trails open to the public if they served a community purpose. Board member Stevens noted the current version of the proposed policy had some typos that needed to be fixed but overall he was pleased with the document. He added some driveways are plowed by the Highway Department because they serve as turnarounds when maintaining a narrow road. Board member Stevens would like that practice reviewed as well. Chair Maxwell would like this matter on the next regular meeting agenda so that the finalized document can be approved by the Select Board members.

- b. Appointment of Town Health Officer and Deputy Health Officer.** Manager Schulz noted that the Town Health Officer position became vacant last month when Lawton Rutter resigned as Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Chief. Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki previously had agreed to serve as Deputy Health Officer and was appointed in November 2022. However, since the Vermont Health Department requires both positions be filled, it recently appointed Chair Maxwell as Health Officer without any advanced notice. It is Manager Schulz's recommendation that Mr. Osiecki be elevated to the Town Health Officer position and Manager Schulz be appointed Deputy Health Officer on an interim basis. It is possible the new NAS Chief, Meggan McCusker, will agree to serve in one of these positions once she has become more acclimated with her new responsibilities. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to appoint Mitch Osiecki as Town Health Officer and Jeff Schulz as Deputy Health Officer. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Approval of Grand List Certificates of No Appeal or Suit Pending (2021 & 2022).** Manager Schulz said this is internal paperwork to be filed in the Listers' Office that confirms the 2021 and 2022 Grand Lists have been finalized. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve and sign these certificates. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- d. Electric Vehicle (EV) Charger Installation in Downtown Northfield.** Manager Schulz said Northfield Energy Committee (NEC) Chair Sarah Wolfe addressed the Select Board members at their last regular meeting (01/24/23) about the possibility of siting two (2) EV chargers on the south side of Depot Square. There had been some questions about the process at that time and also at the Utility Commissions Joint Meeting that Ms. Wolfe attended last week (02/06/23). Ms. Wolfe has updated her previous report to try to answer these unresolved issues. She first noted that the company that she recommends contracting with for the charging service, SemaConnect, recently rebranded as Blink Charging. A new service quote has been provided and actually is a little lower than the previous one. There had been a question about safety concerns associated with the charging cord. Ms. Wolfe reported Blink Charging would provide a retractable cord that would be hazard-free. There also were questions about whether the charging stations would be fully ADA-compliant. Ms. Wolfe researched this further and found although there is no specific requirement for the stations to be ADA-compliant, she felt it would be best practice that at least one of the stations do meet this criterion. Therefore, the revised plan would require the use of three (3), not two (2), existing parking spaces to accomplish this. As for the cost to customers using this service, Ms. Wolfe said Blink Charging would work with her on determining the optimal amount in order to cover most if not all of the ongoing costs. A time limit for chargers also could be determined at the same time. In addition, if the system is set up to accept credit card payment, Blink Charging would deduct a five percent (5%) credit card processing fee for such payments from the amount sent to the municipality each month for the generated revenue. In addition, the chargers themselves are expected to function for between ten (10) and fifteen (15) years. Ms. Wolfe noted another concern the Select Board members had was how the nearby businesses would feel about the EV charger installation and the loss of the parking spaces for potential customers. She said NEC member Gail Hall did the outreach on this and found there was no real objection provided that the parking spaces located directly in front of the businesses were not affected. Another select Board concern was the electrician who provided a power installation quote (Collins Electric) was not local. There were hopes a Northfield electrician might be able to provide a competitive quote. However, Ms. Wolfe was unable to find a local contractor capable of doing this work. She did confirm the EV charger installation would not require a zoning permit and the municipality's existing insurance policy from VLCT should provide sufficient liability coverage.

Board member Morse feels Ms. Wolfe has improved on what was already a well-organized and informative report. He did note during the upcoming Main Street Bridge Replacement Project, now scheduled for 2025, the planned traffic detour on Wall Street might require two-way traffic on the south side of Depot Square. This could lead to the loss of some parking spaces. Manager Schulz believes some parking spaces nearer to the Main Street intersection would be retained so it is likely the EV charging location would not be affected. Board member Morse said he has favored such a project for some time. Despite his urgings, it now seems the other Utility Commission members don't like the idea of NED taking direct ownership of the EV charging stations. It probably will become the municipality's responsibility. He does hope the project will bring in some municipal revenue over time. Board member Goodrich noted there will be an annual service charge payment to Blink Charging in order to become part of their charging system. Board member Petty believes the plan is to set the charging fees at a sufficient amount to cover this expense. Board member Morse also thinks the basic goal is to have the system pay for itself. Chair Maxwell asked who would determine the correct pricing to make sure ongoing costs are covered. Ms. Wolfe said Blink Charging would help determine this. Board member Petty asked what remains to be resolved before moving forward. Manager Schulz said there needs to be a decision on whether American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds would be used to cover some of the EV charger equipment purchase and installation expenses. The NEC was able to obtain a \$4,000 Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) grant along with \$500 Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) rebate. However, this leaves a \$5,450 shortfall in the current installation budget. Board member Petty thought it also might be a good idea to have an engineer review the proposed site for ADA-compliance issues, etc. That might add to the project budget. Manager Schulz thought some of this cost could come out of the Highway Department budget. This also could include any curb cuts needed.

Chair Maxwell feels that only a few minor issues remained before the Select Board members can decide whether to authorize the use of some ARPA funds. At the last meeting, Ms. Wolfe indicated that the ARPA funds could be reimbursed at a later time if additional grant funds are received. The Select Board consensus does seem to favor moving forward with the EV charger installation once all the remaining issues have been resolved. Ms. Wolfe agrees that having a professional engineer review the proposed site would be a good idea. Board member Goodrich then said her preference for hiring a local electrician was only if this was feasible and should in no way delay the project. Chair Maxwell agreed hiring local would have been nice but not vital. Ms. Wolfe will check with Collins Electric to see if their previous quote is still good. She will keep Manager Schulz aware of this and any other developments. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Wolfe and the other NEC members for all the hard work they have put into this proposal. If all goes well, we should be moving to the next steps in the near future.

- e. **Public Hearing (Australian Ballot Town Meeting Articles): Tuesday, February 28, 2023.** Manager Schulz said this public hearing is a requirement as it allows residents to ask questions or make comments on the items to be voted upon by Australian Ballot. It also provides an opportunity for the non-profit organizations seeking public funds to provide additional information or answer questions. All the groups with funding requests on the warning were sent a letter that strongly encouraged them to attend either in person or remotely. Chair Maxwell said attendance at this public hearing declined significantly over the past couple years due to the pandemic. It will be interesting to see how many participate this time.
- f. **Northfield Police Department Union Contract.** Manager Schulz said that since this is a contract negotiation, it will be discussed later in the meeting in executive session.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Northfield Town Report 2023.** Manager Schulz reported that the report was delivered to the printer last week and hardcopies should be returned for local distribution next week. In the meantime, the Town Report is available for viewing on the municipal website along with reports from recent years at www.northfield-vt.gov/town-reports.
- b. **Municipal Building Improvements.** Manager Schulz said the recent bid submission process has resulted in a contractor hired to perform the upgrades, which will focus on structural improvements to the building. A meeting will be held with the contractor before the work begins and CERV, which operates a clothing shelf on the bottom floor, has been informed of the upcoming work.
- c. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Employee Training.** Manager Schulz has contacted several firms about providing these training sessions for the municipal employees. These training sessions should last several hours, which might require the Municipal Building to be closed for the bulk of the chosen date(s).
- d. **Smart Meters.** Manager Schulz said the installation of smart meters for our utility customers should start later this year. The State of Vermont has allocated funds to VPPSA member communities for this purpose. The process will be time consuming but will provide long-term benefits for public utility companies and their customers. There will be public notification before installation begins so residents will be made aware.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Open Session of the 2023 Northfield Town Meeting.** Board member Morse noted the open session will start at 6:30 p.m. in the Mary Granai Auditorium in the Northfield Middle/High School on Monday, March 6, 2023. The open session was cancelled the last two years due to the pandemic. However, this year free child care will be provided in the school gymnasium (reservation required) and the Northfield Student Leadership Club will be holding a soup and sandwich benefit dinner starting at 5:00 p.m. in the NMHS lobby. Proceeds will fund the group's field trip to New York City later this year.

- b. **VCRD Community Visit.** Board member Petty recently attended (01/30/23) the initial organizational meeting that determined dates, locations, topics, etc. for the VCRD Community Visit public meetings later this spring. The first one will be held on Tuesday, March 21, 2023 at the Northfield Middle/High School and the second on Tuesday, April 18, 2023 at Norwich University. A third meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 15, 2023 with the location to be determined. Free community meals will be provided at these meeting and interested residents are strongly urged to attend. There will be widespread public notification of these events once all the details have been worked out.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy Hill: Appreciation for Board member Julie Goodrich.** Since Board member Goodrich is not running for reelection this year, Mr. Hill would like to thank her for outstanding service on the Select Board over the past six (6) years. Chair Maxwell noted Board member Goodrich still has one more regular meeting ahead of her.
- b. **Carolyn Stevens: Planning Commission Status.** Ms. Stevens asked if there would be any public discussion tonight regarding the status of the Planning Commission given several letters of resignation have been sent to the Select Board members. Chair Maxwell said the letters have been received but since this matter involves personnel issues, this matter will be fully discussed later in the meeting in executive session.

- XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss legal issues, personnel matters, and a contract negotiation with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:11 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 9:50 p.m.

Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to formally accept the letters of resignation from Planning Commission members Chandra Blackmer, Laura Hill-Eubanks, Nancy Peck, Aaron Rhodes, and Ruth Ruttenberg. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

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

The Board adjourned at 9:55 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 February 28, 2023.