

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of May 14, 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, Ronald Lyon (Norwich University), Bizhan Yahyazadeh (Norwich University), Kendall Manning (Norwich University), Josh Crandall (Freeman French Freeman), Mary Naden Scott (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Tim Schwartz (AWPS Task Force), Delane McIlvene (AWPS Task Force), Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network [NCDN]/AWPS Task Force), Kaitlyn Keating (NCDN/AWPS Task Force), Jeff Hatch, Lorna Doney, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 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. Bizhan Yahyazadeh and Ronald Lyon (Norwich University): Cyber Fusion Center Project Update.** Mr. Yahyazadeh is the Norwich University (NU) Vice-President for Facilities Operations & Conference Services and Mr. Lyon is the former Vice President and Director of Site and Land Development Division for the engineering firm DuBois & King and now provides engineering consulting services for NU. They last addressed the Select Board members about this project at their regular meeting of October 24, 2023. They are joined tonight by Kendall Manning, who is the NU Project Manager and Josh Crandall from the architectural firm Freeman French Freeman. Mr. Yahyazadeh said the final name of the building to be constructed has not been finalized but is currently known as the Cyber Fusion Center. This construction project will be funded by a \$16,400,000 federal grant that was spearheaded by former Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy. He added that there is a five (5) year deadline to complete the project. Mr. Yahyazadeh said many possible building configurations were considered but we are now looking at a single-story building with a floor area of 13,000 feet. The design development plans are now fifty percent (50%) complete but this should be one hundred percent (100%) by the end of this month. The current timeline would have the building completion in 2026. Mr. Yahyazadeh said this structure is intended to be used to host many different academic disciplines and would have classrooms, office space, and a large events center. The chosen location was intended to provide a new meeting location in the heart of the NU campus. Mr. Lyon said that since they last addressed the Select Board members on this, they have been working on completing the building planning as well as working on obtaining all required state and local permits. They will be having a hearing at the next Development Review Board meeting (05/23/24) for a Conditional Use Review, Site Plan Review, and a possible variance request. The building will be located on the east side of Park Avenue and this site will provide visibility from Vermont Route 12, which is the gateway to the university. The two (2) buildings now on the building site (Hassett House and Communications Building) have been determined not to have any historical significance and probably will be razed. At a future date, Mr. Lyon would like to discuss with the Select Board members the possibility of discontinuing the adjacent University Drive in order to construct additional pedestrian access to the building and to create a redesigned and straighter roadway. There also will need to be future discussions with Manager Schulz and the Utility Commissions about whether there is acceptable water/wastewater capacity at the site. Mr. Lyon noted that some nearby parking spaces would be removed by the building construction but he is hoping more pedestrian-friendly access can be established as a result. He felt there would be adequate off-site parking for special events. Mr. Crandall then showed an artist's rendering of how the completed building would appear from various angles. This would not be a particularly large building and would try to present a modernist look even though traditional materials would be used in the building process. The building will have four (4) classrooms, conference rooms, office space, and a large "event space." Some of the office space will host the current staff from the current buildings that will be removed by this project.

Chair Maxwell asked if any of the Select Board members had any questions. Board member Morse said he would like it clarified in the project documentation that this will be a one-story structure. He also believes that this project should be an opportunity to provide pedestrian improvements through the NU campus that would parallel Vermont Route 12, which currently has no sidewalks south of the NU campus. Board member Morse would like such pedestrian improvements included in the project's final design plans. Board member Shernock asked about the fate of the Hasset House. Mr. Lyon said after a historic preservation review, it was concluded that neither building now on the construction site had any historical significance so both probably will be razed. Board member Shernock noted that the Hasset House had been located elsewhere in the community before it was resituated on the NU campus. Mr. Yahyazadeh said it is possible someone will come forward and pay to have the Hasset House relocated another time. Board member Shernock felt the current building plans would produce a structure that did not face the greater Northfield community. She is hoping some NU architect would be able to find some way to reorientate the building. Board member Shernock also feels that sidewalk development should be an important part of this project as there seems to be a drive to make this a more pedestrian-friendly community. She hopes that the proposed road discontinuance could be accompanied by new sidewalk in its place. Mr. Yahyazadeh said there never was any intention for NU to turn its back on the community in constructing this new building. He added that the university needs to grow in order to offer additional educational opportunities for its students within a modern structure. Board member Stevens thought the large glass window that encloses and juts out from the event space stood out like a sore thumb to him. He hopes that it could be redesigned to make it a little more subtle from the outside. Board member Stevens then asked if there would be solar panels on the new building. Mr. Crandell confirmed that would be the case. Board member Petty then asked about the capacity of the event space. Mr. Crandall said there would be seating for one hundred and fifty (150) people. Ms. Manning said the room capacity would be similar to that currently in the Milano Ballroom. Tables and chairs will be situated in the room when needed for special events. Board member Petty is glad that the new building would be one story and therefore not block views of the Kreitzberg Library and other campus landmarks. She added that given the central location of the new building, she would prefer that it would become a gateway to the community with inviting green space, etc. Board member Petty also would like to see significant pedestrian and bicycle path improvements in the future. This could become an alternate walking trail that would be much safer than walking along Vermont Route 12 with its narrow shoulders and curves. Mr. Lyon said future plans for this campus center certainly could include these access improvements. Board member Petty felt that overall this is a very exciting project for NU and the Northfield community. Ms. Manning said that since federal funds are being used for this project and have been designated for building construction, the initial phase of the project cannot include funding for supplemental features such as new sidewalk, etc. However, she agreed with Mr. Lyon that subsequent campus improvement projects could include new sidewalks, bicycle paths, etc. Mr. Yahyazadeh said the university will consider any future changes to make this a more community friendly space. Board member Petty asked that nothing be done with the project that would preclude future sidewalk improvements. Manager Schulz then explained the road discontinuance process, which includes warning a site visit and public hearing before the Select Board members can take any action. If they do decide to discontinue the road, there will be a thirty-day appeal period afterwards. If there are no appeals by the deadline, then the road will revert to the adjoining property owner. Mr. Yahyazadeh said the eventual goal is to straighten out the access roads to the building site. Chair Maxwell said it appears that the Select Board members have a strong preference for establishing pedestrian paths through the NU campus so that pedestrians don't have to walk along Vermont Route 12. He then asked of the new building would be fully ADA compliant. Ms. Manning confirmed that would be the case.

Jeff Hatch asked if this new building would only duplicate the services now provided by Mack Hall, which is a fairly recently constructed building. He also is concerned that the road discontinuance might result in traffic jams after on-campus sporting and other events. Mr. Yahyazadeh said the purpose of this building is totally different from what Mack Hall now provides. He also said the on-campus access roads will always have sufficient capacity for special events traffic. The plan is to straighten out roads, not eliminate them. Carolyn Stevens asked if the new building would have a sufficient number of bathrooms. Mr. Yahyazadeh said the building would have one large unisex bathroom and a nearby single-user bathroom. Lorna Doney said the proposed building exterior appears very moderns and doesn't seem to fit it with the surrounding buildings. Mr. Yahyazadeh said the building was deliberately designed with a more modern look in order to show that NU is looking to the future. Mary Naden Scott asked is there would be handicapped parking spaces adjacent to the building. Mr. Yahyazadeh confirmed that would be the case as building permits would not be granted without this stipulation. Ms. Manning noted that the artistic depictions of the building are preliminary only and do not include all the building's final amenities. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Yahyazadeh, Mr. Lyon, Ms. Manning, and Mr. Kendall for the project update.

V. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. **Liquor License Renewals: Champlain Farms, Depot Square Pizzeria, Falls General Store, Good Measure Pub & Brewery, Northfield Country Club, O'Maddi's Deli & Café, and The Woods Lodge.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewals. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **April 23, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **May 7, 2024 (Board Retreat).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Shernock found some typos that will be corrected. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #21-24 & #21-24 A-F.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #21-24 & #21-24 A-F in the amount of \$652,576.05. Board member Morse wanted it noted that of the total warrant amount, \$396,700 represented power purchases for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). Board member Stevens believes the power charges for the Tucker Pit have increased in recent months. Manager Schulz believes those are just seasonal variations in billing charges. However, he will check on this. Board member Petty believes the cost of blazing the Town Forest trail was mistakenly charged to the VOREC grant account. Manager Schulz will adjust this entry so the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) operating budget will be charged instead. Board member Stevens noted a \$1,750 railroad crossing permit expense in order to repair a power line. Manager Schulz said this expense is actually less than he had anticipated because the railroad needs to have an employee on hand when the work is performed. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through April 28, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$98,357.48. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Review and Approval of FY 2024/2025 Water & Sewer Rates.** Manager Schulz said the Utility Commissions have been reviewing over the past couple of months the Water and Sewer Department budgets for FY 2024/2025. The water and sewer rates for the next fiscal year were based on those budgets. Manager Schulz noted that due to an old water bond coming off the books, there was no need to raise water rates in the next fiscal year. However, the average sewer customer will see a 4.9% rate increase. This will result in a combined water/sewer rate increase of 2.69%. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the water and sewer rates as presented by management. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. FEMA Buyout Property (491 Water Street).** Manager Schulz said the owner of a Water Street property has decided to participate in the FEMA buyout program. This property has been flooded a number of times and the property owner decided after the last flooding event earlier this year to go through the process. Manager Schulz noted that since Tropical Storm Irene, about twenty (20) structures in the general area have been purchased and razed. He contacted Vermont Emergency Management and it was confirmed that there still are funds available for the buyout program. He does need a Select Board motion to authorize him to sign a Memorandum of Agreement to begin the process. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize Manager Schulz to sign the Memorandum of Agreement for a FEMA buyout property located at 491 Water Street. Board member Shernock is pleased that Northfield has used this buyout process in order to create a new riverside park while also allowing flood mitigation measures to be taken in the area. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Community Garden Policy.** Economic Development Director Tom Davis said that the last time he addressed the Select Board members about establishing a community garden on Water Street, he was provided permission to move forward with the project provided that he develop guidelines for the operation of the community garden. He has created a draft document that was based on the rules developed by established community gardens in Vermont. Mr. Davis noted that a number of Northfield residents have already expressed their interest in participating in this community garden. Board member Morse would like to see some evidence of local public input before the proposed guidelines are approved by the Select Board members. Board member Petty feels the proposed guidelines are a good start but she would like to have a meeting held of those interested in establishing the Community Garden as this might result in someone coming forward to spearhead the process. Board member Morse said he would be willing to work with Mr. Davis to finalize the guidelines. Board member Shernock asked if there would be low income subsidies for those residents who would like to participate in the Community Garden but cannot pay for a plot purchase. Mr. Davis said such subsidies would be included in the application process, not in the guidelines. He said there already are plans to reserve some garden plots for low-income residents. Board member Shernock hopes that these guidelines, once approved, will be reevaluated again after the first growing season. Mr. Davis said it is common practice that Community Garden guidelines are reassessed on a regular basis. Chair Maxwell would like to move forward with establishing the Community Garden as soon as possible given that it is already mid-May. Mr. Davis noted that most community gardens have a June 30 deadline for new plantings. He is willing to attend the next Select Board regular meeting in order to finalize the community garden guidelines, etc. In the interim, he will work on preparing the site for this growing season if provided authorization to continue at this time. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize the development of a community garden on the specified corner of Water Street. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Chair Maxwell is pleased we are moving forward with this.
- d. Sidewalk Project Funding.** Manager Schulz noted that the Select Board members have included \$100,000 in the FY 2024/2025 Highway Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for sidewalk improvements. In addition, there is a request to allocate an additional \$400,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for sidewalk repairs. Manager Schulz would like the Select Board members to formally approve this ARPA funds request so that he can begin the process of soliciting bids from contractors for sidewalk work. The current plan is to install new sidewalk in sections of Vine Street and Cross Street. A quote has been received that would install concrete sidewalk for \$444,785 or asphalt sidewalk for \$354,038. Chair Maxwell asked if there were any earmarks for the CIP funds. Manager Schulz said there were none. Board member Petty said the RFP to be developed should contain the specifications of the proposed locations of new sidewalk to be installed on Vine Street and Cross Street. She noted that some sections of this sidewalk were in very bad condition. Board member Petty also would like to include in the RFP installing a section of new sidewalk on Water Street from the railroad tracks to where it intersects with North Main Street. She then suggested increasing the ARPA funds amount to \$500,000 in order to cover this additional section along with any needed engineering costs, etc. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Shernock, to authorize using \$500,000 in ARPA funds to install new sidewalk on sections of Vine Street, Cross Street, and Water Street. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- e. **Zoning Bylaws Update and Consideration of Bylaw Changes.** Manager Schulz noted that at the last regular meeting, the select Board members discussed the need to adopt the revised local zoning bylaws provided that further amendments were included in order to conform with the HOME Act that the Vermont State Legislature passed last year. Manager Schulz said a legal opinion about this from Town Attorney Michael J. Leddy and was informed that only minor changes need to be made to the current draft of the revised zoning bylaws. If the Select Board members accept the revisions suggested in Mr. Leddy's email, they can schedule the public hearing required prior to their approval of the revised zoning bylaws. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the recommended changes to the revised zoning bylaws and to schedule the public hearing. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** As the notice for the public hearing needs to be published in a newspaper at least fifteen (15) days in advance, the public hearing has been scheduled to occur in conjunction with the Select Board regular meeting on Tuesday, June 11, 2024.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Municipal Pool Renovations.** Manager Schulz noted that the painting and repairs of the municipal pool will start later this week. Board member Shernock asked if the recommendations from the AWPS Task Force for more accessibility at the pool will be followed. Manager Schulz said there was a recent on-site meeting where these recommendations were discussed. These will be implemented as soon as possible. Board member Stevens asked if additional handicapped parking spaces would be located near the pool. Manager Schulz confirmed that was one of the task force recommendations that will be acted upon. He will need to determine whether the work can be done internally or if a contractor will need to be brought in.
- b. **Highway Department update.** Manager Schulz said the contracted line striping and crosswalk painting is now ongoing. The contracted street sweeping should also be in town later this week. Board member Petty was grateful for the line striping. She also appreciated that the sidewalk work on Prospect Street has been completed.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Cross Brothers Dam Removal Project.** Board member Morse asked if this project has been delayed. Manager Schulz said there has been a suggestion that the project may be delayed until 2026. For now, we will still proceed on the assumption that the dam removal will take place next year as originally planned.
- b. **Memorial Park RV Park.** Board member Morse would like the establishment of an RV park in Memorial Park kept as a community goal as the funds for this have been authorized by Northfield voters.
- c. **Community Center Pop-Up Weekend.** Board member Shernock said that "a weekend of community events" will take place over this coming weekend. The flyer for this event will be posted on the local Facebook pages in the next couple of days.
- d. **Reserve Accounts for ARPA Funds.** Board member Shernock would like an update on whether the federal rules governing ARPA funds would allow them to be put into a reserve accounts for future projects. Manager Schulz has been working with Finance Director Laurie Baroffio on a plan for this that will be provided at the next regular meeting (05/28/24).
- e. **Post Office Handicapped Accessibility.** Board member Stevens asked when the curb cuts in from of the Post Office will be installed. Manager Schulz has contacted a contractor about this work and it should be done over the next couple of weeks.
- f. **ARPA Grant Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell thought it might be necessary to start discussing these requests at every Select Board regular meeting, not just the second one of the month. Board member Morse is unsure whether that is really needed but is willing to have that discussion. Chair Maxwell is concerned that too many of the grant applicants might want to address the Select Board members at the same meeting. He thought it might be more beneficial to stagger those discussions over several meetings.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Lorna Doney: ARPA Fund Request Questions.** Ms. Doney asked why the Senior Center was granted \$350,000 in ARPA funds for its planned expansion when it had other possible revenue sources. Chair Maxwell said that ARPA fund application is still under discussion and no funds have been allocated yet for this purpose. The Select Board members requested more information about this request and that should be forthcoming soon. Ms. Doney asked if the \$90,000 in ARPA funds provided to CVFiber really benefit Northfield residents. Board member Petty said this award was contingent upon a commitment that these funds would only be used to provide high-speed internet to underserved Northfield residents. Ms. Doney saw that the Select Board members are considering the purchase of emergency generators for the Fire Station, Police Station, and the Municipal Building. She thought that was a very good idea and hopes this will be done soon. Manager Schulz said he recently obtained quotes from generator dealers and hopes that this will be resolved at the next regular meeting when ARPA fund requests are considered.
- b. Jeff Hatch: Additional Northfield Police Department (NPD) Concerns.** Mr. Hatch addressed the Select Board members at a previous meeting (04/09/24) regarding a number of concerns he has about NPD officer behavior that he observed himself. He was promised Manager Schulz would look into his concerns and send him a letter with his conclusions. Mr. Hatch said it has been over a month and he is still waiting for this letter. Manager Schulz said a letter dated April 18, 2024 was mailed to Mr. Hatch and copies also were distributed to the Select Board members in their meeting packets. He regrets that the letter was not delivered to Mr. Hatch and said the letter will be sent again in tomorrow's mail. Mr. Hatch said he has seen additional disturbing behavior by NPD officers since he spoke to the Select Board members. For example, one Sunday he saw an NPD cruiser parked by the Northfield Transfer Station for over two (2) hours for no reason he could determine. He also believes some NPD officers have decided to intimidate him by running his license plates of his parked vehicle and by their general behavior in his presence. Board member Morse said any such concerns should be brought to the attention of the Town Manager as soon as possible, as that is the proper chain of command for these matters. Chair Maxwell noted that at last week's Board Retreat (05/07/24), there was a discussion of one of Mr. Hatch's recommendations when he spoke earlier to the Select Board members. That was to have a full discussion in the near future of the possible creation of a new civilian board with oversight of local law enforcement. Manager Schulz again stated that if Mr. Hatch has any future concerns about the local police department, he should contact Manager Schulz who will investigate and report back as soon as possible.
- c. Elroy Hill: Maintenance of Gravel Backroads.** Mr. Hill noted that the FY 2024/2025 Highway CIP budget includes \$90,000 so the Highway crew can resurface four (4) miles of gravel backroad this summer. Given the Highway Department's current workforce shortage, he suggested it might be better to use these funds instead to hire an outside contractor to resurface three (3) miles of backroad. Chair Maxwell said the Highway Subcommittee will look into this possibility.
- d. Mary Nadon Scott, AWPS Task Force Co-Chair.** Ms. Scott wanted to thank the Select Board members for the recent work done to make the Brown Public Library more handicapped accessible. It was noted that the push button switch to automatically open the lower outside doors is now operational.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:53 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 are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.