

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of September 12, 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, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Mary Nadon Scott (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force), Tim Swartz (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force), DeLane McIlvene (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force), Carolyn Stevens (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force), Fred Nadon (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force), Dan Anderson (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force), Kaitlyn Keating (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force), Meggan McCusker (Chief, Northfield Ambulance Service), Daniel Dieringer (Northfield Ambulance Service), Stephen Demaio (Northfield Ambulance Service), Danielle Farnum (Northfield Ambulance Service), Caden Knox (Northfield Ambulance Service), Thomas Simon (Northfield Ambulance Service), Lynn Doney (Northfield Ambulance Service), Scott Bagg (Northfield Ambulance Service), Laurie Beth Putnam (Northfield Ambulance Service), Jos Aldsworth (Northfield Ambulance Service), Kaelee Bouleris (Northfield Ambulance Service), Lawton Rutter (Northfield Ambulance Service), Beverly Rutter, Bonnie Kim Donahue, Gerard LaVarnway, Jodi Leonard, Mick Leddy, 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):**

- a. Mary Nadon Scott (Co-Chair), Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force: ADA Compliance and Public Awareness.** About twenty (20) years ago, Ms. Scott was diagnosed with Friedreich's ataxia (FA), which is a rare degenerative disease of the nervous system that results in increasingly limited physical mobility. She now makes use of a wheelchair and a handicapped accessible van while serving as an "ambassador" for FA awareness and also as an advocate for greater ADA compliance for public facilities. Ms. Scott attended the Vermont Council for Rural Development (VCRD) community meetings earlier this year and participated in the establishment of a task force that would "work with municipal leaders and regional, state, and federal partners to improve the safety and accessibility of roads, paths, and village centers." Ms. Scott serves as co-chair of this task force and she recently took several photographs of public facilities in Northfield that she felt did not meet ADA compliance standards. She provided copies of these photographs with the Select Board members and now would like to explain her specific concerns. The first group of photographs involved the threshold to the door located at the Brown Public Library lower parking lot that provides access to the Community Room and the Northfield Historical Society. Ms. Scott said the entrance way is too narrow for proper wheelchair access and the outside area also is difficult to navigate in the wintertime due to eroding concrete. The doors themselves are quite heavy and difficult for a wheelchair user to pull out.

Ms. Scott then provided photographs of the US post office located on South Main Street. This building does have a ramp for disabled access and the iron guardrails on either side of the ramp have both vertical and horizontal bars so wheelchair users can pull themselves up and down. Unfortunately, there is no curb cut in front of the building and the door at the top of the ramp is quite heavy and pulls outward. It was suggested that a door apparently provided for disabled access should be automated with switches located properly for wheelchair users. This would be similar to the automatic handicapped-accessible doors located at the front of the Municipal Building. Ms. Scott noted that there is a parking area located at the back of the post office but it is unclear if that is available for public use or reserved for employee use only.

Ms. Scott then turned to Memorial Park, which currently doesn't have any parking spaces designated as handicapped parking. There also are some stone barriers, apparently intended to separate the parking lot from the playground area, and these can be difficult to navigate around in a wheelchair. The parking lot surface is crushed gravel, which also is difficult for wheelchair wheels to travel. Ms. Scott suggested that a paved parking area with designated handicapping parking spaces should be installed.

Without the extra space provided for handicapped spaces, it also is possible there would not be sufficient room for a wheelchair ramp to be lowered. Ms. Scott also provided photographs of the parking area at the Garvey Hill soccer field, which shares a lot of the problems of the Memorial Park parking lot. This includes stone barriers at the edge of the parking area and a crushed stone surface. There is a paved road adjacent to the field but it does not have sufficient clearance for her handicapped accessible van. Ms. Scott realizes this is school property but perhaps the municipality can work with the schools to obtain grant funds, etc. in order to fix the problems. She concluded with examples of accessibility problems at the Municipal Pool, such as the need for ADA compliant grab bars in the bathhouse, adjacent handicapped parking spaces, etc. Ms. Scott then thanked the Select Board for allowing her to present her concerns.

Dan Anderson is the co-chair of this task force and he believes addressing these concerns really is an urgent matter. He noted that although Ms. Scott is a Northfield taxpayer (along with other less abled residents), she is in effect excluded from using those non-ADA compliant public facilities that she is financially supporting. Mr. Anderson noted currently there is only one handicapped parking spot near the Municipal Pool and that is usually occupied by a less abled pool employee. He felt at least one additional handicapped parking space is needed there to meet ADA requirements. Mr. Anderson said the task force is requesting that the municipality commission a professional study in order to retrofit the pool for less abled patrons.

Chair Maxwell and the other Select Board members complimented Ms. Scott and Mr. Anderson for opening their eyes to these local problems now impacting our less abled residents. Board member Morse said Ms. Scott in particular has been opening eyes to such concerns for quite some time. He added that the library has a \$250,000 elevator to assist with handicapped access but apparently there are problems for less abled persons to even get into the building. This needs to be addressed as soon as possible. As for the post office, this might be a federal facility but there should be something the municipality could do to encourage the needed public access upgrades. Although public use of the back parking lot is now discouraged, Board member Morse felt if there is good evidence that the post office is not in ADA compliance, perhaps there can be some persuasion to site at least one handicapped parking space there. Installing a proper automatic door for disabled patrons at the top of the ramp also should be on the priority list for facility improvements. As for Memorial Park, Board member Morse said he has called for measures that would make the park more accessible for all Northfield residents as well as out-of-town visitors. This should include adding proper washroom facilities, including showers with hot water, so that the park can be enjoyed year round. Even though the Garvey Hill soccer field is located on school property, Board member Morse believes this is a Northfield problem that should be resolved quickly if we all can work together on this.

Board member Shernock believes upgrading the Municipal Pool, including the bathhouse, to make it more handicapped accessible is the right thing to do. She felt such upgrades would make the pool more welcoming to all residents and thereby increase the number of pool users each summer. Board member Stevens is very thankful that Ms. Scott and Mr. Anderson have brought these problems to the Select Board members' attention and they should be addressed as soon as possible. Board member Petty believes the problems highlighted tonight are only a snapshot of the many issues this community has to confront regarding local non-compliance with ADA guidelines. There are some matters that can be resolved relatively quickly, such as library access, while others will take more time and effort, such as the myriad of problems at Memorial Park. Board member Petty hopes Ms. Scott and the other task force members would be willing to work with the Select Board members to implement all the needed changes. As for the post office, although the Select Board members can only encourage needed upgrades to the facility itself, there is no reason the municipality itself can't install the needed curb cut on the street.

Chair Maxwell agreed that there are a good number of accessibility problems around Northfield that need to be fixed. He did note that the Select Board members do try to do the right thing in this regard when new facilities are created. For example, when the Select Board members authorized the installation of two (2) EV chargers on Depot Square, it was with the provision that both be handicapped accessible.

Chair Maxwell said the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee (Board members Shernock and Stevens) certainly can do its own evaluation of the specific concerns discussed tonight. Board member Shernock would like to see a timetable developed for resolving these issues. Chair Maxwell suggested that the subcommittee members could do this at their next meeting. Board member Morse noted that since the pool has been shut down for the season, fixing all the issues there can be fully investigated over the coming months and implemented before the pool reopens next summer.

**V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. **August 22, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Some minor typos will be corrected. **Motion passed 3-0-2 with Board members Petty and Stevens abstaining.**

**VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. **Approval of Warrant #05-24.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #05-24 in the amount of \$1,794,457.98. Board member Stevens asked about the portable speed bumps that were purchased for Central Street. Manager Schulz said the two (2) sets have been delivered and should be installed soon. Board member Stevens asked about a payment for a new "loader." Manager Schulz said this was the budgeted purchase of a new mower. The total cost was about \$66,000 and this was split evenly amongst the utility departments. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through August 20, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$110,507.37. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through September 3, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$99,287.35. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**VII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. **Public Safety Oversight & Planning Subcommittee Recommendation regarding Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Fleet.** Manager Schulz said this subcommittee (Board members Petty and Shernock) has met in recent months to evaluate the NAS request to fully equip the used ambulance unit that was purchased last year when one of the two main NAS units was sent out of state to be remounted. NAS Chief Meggan McCusker and other NAS members have said that having a third fully equipped unit on hand would provide coverage protection in case one of the other units is out of service for a prolonged period. The third unit also could be used for non-emergency transfers (aka facility-to-facility transports), which can bring in considerable NAS revenue, so that the other two units are available for emergency callouts. This matter was fully discussed at the August 16, 2023, subcommittee meeting where four (4) distinct options regarding the third unit were brought up. The first was to sell the third unit and perhaps use the proceeds to hasten the purchase of a replacement ambulance unit; to retain the third unit as a backup unit but don't fully equip it; use \$66,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to fully equip the third unit for a trial period of as yet undetermined length; or go forward and commit to having three (3) fully equipped ambulance units without this trial period. After considerable discussion, the subcommittee members decided to recommend the third option, the trial period, to the other Select Board members. The length of the trial period and the criteria for determining the success or failure of this experiment would have to be resolved. Board member Petty noted if the trial period is not considered successful, Chief McCusker has said \$50,000 of the funds spent could be recouped by either selling the new equipment or repurposing it on one of the other units. Board member Petty said the monetary risk of this experiment would be thus limited.

If the full Select Board decides not to proceed with a trial period for a third fully equipped unit, it was the consensus of the subcommittee attendees that the only other feasible option would be to sell the third unit. In that case, the debate over whether NAS needs a third fully equipped unit could be resurrected at a future time when perhaps the need for it could be better demonstrated, etc. Board member Morse said he is strong supporter of the Northfield emergency services but would prefer to see a business plan that would show that this expansion of the NAS service fleet and the increased number of non-emergency transfers would provide genuine benefits to the community. Since having this business plan would also be a good way to justify this extra expense for Northfield taxpayers, he cannot support this proposal at this time.

Board member Shernock favors having this fully equipped third unit and increasing the number of non-emergency transfers as a way of strengthening the municipality's relationship with Norwich University (NU). A good number of the NAS volunteers who would participate in these transports are NU students, whose flexible work hours make them often available for these assignments, which often occur on nights and weekends. Board member Shernock also believes that should this come to pass, it might be necessary to rewrite the NAS mission statement to acknowledge its growing commitments beyond basic emergency coverage for the Northfield community. She also feels that due to the aging of the local population, it probably is inevitable that the NAS service fleet will have to expand at some time.

Board member Stevens believes there is a good argument for Board member Morse's request for a business plan to justify this fleet expansion. He then asked if the remounted unit had been put back into service. Chief McCusker confirmed it was on August 3, 2023. Board member Petty wished that the other Select Board members could have participated in the subcommittee discussions on this matter. At that time, Chief McCusker did provide data that showed the increased call volume in recent years, her plans for proper staffing for the expected increased workload, etc. She added that the NAS providing non-emergency transfers for regional medical facilities is not a new phenomenon, even though the number of them did decrease during the pandemic when many non-emergency medical procedures were postponed. Board member Morse said the fact that these transports are a revenue source for the municipality is not generally known by the public. This should be fully explained to them and having a proper business plan that can be publicly disseminated and reviewed. Board member Morse does want the NAS to generate revenue but would like to see the numbers that would back up any decision to expand the NAS service fleet. He would like to see evidence that the additional expense, work hours, etc. would provide real benefits.

Chair Maxwell also strongly supports the local emergency services but he always has said their financial requests must be justifiable to Northfield taxpayers. He has asked Manager Schulz for (but has not received) a NAS fleet utilization report, which would show how many hours the units are used for emergency callouts, non-emergency transfers, etc. This report would indicate whether the NAS really needs an additional ambulance unit to properly function. Chair Maxwell then asked where the third unit would be stored when not in use. Chief McCusker said there needs to be a discussion about this involving NAS personnel. Chair Maxwell said even though the proposed trial period for a third fully equipped third unit is presented as "low risk," he still would like additional supporting documentation before the Select Board commits to this action.

Board member Petty said the subcommittee brought this proposal and their recommendation to the other Select Board members tonight because a decision on this matter needs to be made soon. She also believes that formulating the success/failure criteria for the trial period would best be done by the full Select Board. NAS EMT Scott Bagg said that seemed reasonable since it would be the Select Board members who would make the final decision regarding the success or failure of this experiment.

Manager Schulz will meet with NAS members over the next few days in order to address the questions raised tonight. Chair Maxwell believes that solid data is still needed before an intelligent decision can be made on this matter. He then thanked all those who have been working on this proposal and looks forward to the additional information that will be soon provided.

- b. Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Questionnaire on Cox Brook Road Covered Bridges Concerns.** Manager Schulz said VTrans has asked for a local analysis of the three (3) covered bridges on Cox Brook Road as a prelude to its scoping project of the bridges. Northfield has been awarded a VTrans grant for the upgrade of these historic structures and this scoping project will help determine how these funds would be best spent. Manager Schulz provided the Select Board members with copies of the survey and wanted them to be made aware of the process. Once the survey data has been collected, VTrans will probably address the Select Board members with the results as well as explore the project options available.

Board member Morse thought it might be good to put the survey online through SurveyMonkey in order to receive a higher amount of public feedback. This was done regarding the possible use of ARPA funds and there was significant participation. Board member Shernock hopes this survey also has been sent to West Berlin and Moretown residents as many of their residents use these bridges on a regular basis. Chair Maxwell would like the survey distributed as widely as possible.

#### **VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. July 2023 Flooding Damage Update.** Manager Schulz said he has been meeting regularly with FEMA representatives in order to provide full documentation on local flood damage and resulting municipal spending in order to receive federal reimbursement.
- b. FEMA Buyout Property.** Manager Schulz reported that the FEMA buyout for the structure located at 310 Water Street has been fully approved. He is now soliciting proposals from qualified firms for a real estate appraisal of the property.
- c. New Northfield Police Department (NPD) Chief.** Manager Schulz said the new NPD Chief (Pierre Gomez) is expected to arrive in Northfield later this week and will officially start his duties on Monday, September 18, 2023. Manager Schulz already has mentioned to him some upcoming events, such as the "Night on the Common" (09/19/23), where he can properly introduce himself to the public.
- d. NU Rugby Field Flood Damage.** Manager Schulz said NU has been working on repairing its rugby field, which was heavily damaged by the July 2023 flooding. There were some questions about whether this work included some bank alterations to the adjacent Dog River so Manager Schulz reached out to NU to make sure they had the proper state permits for this. He was informed that their previous state permit was renewed. Manager Schulz is now working with Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki to make sure all their local permitting is in place. Consideration of NU's conditional use permit application for the work is on the agenda of the next Development Review Board meeting (09/28/23).

#### **IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. Various Road Concerns.** Board member Morse said the roadside on Turkey Hill is showing additional erosion. In addition, there is a bad culvert on West Hill Road that keeps washing out and Old Road needs to be graded soon. Board member Shernock noted that some of the pavement on West Hill Road is crumbling. Chair Maxwell noted that this road is on the paving list for this autumn. Cherry Street should also be done this year as well as Dickinson Road (if time and weather allows).
- b. Cox Brook Road Covered Bridge Repairs.** Board member Morse noted that, as indicated in Manager Schulz's Front Porch Forum posting yesterday, repairs will be made to the Third Covered Bridge on Cox Brook Road starting on Monday, September 18, 2023. The repairs will take two days (2) and require the closing of the bridge to traffic from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. with traffic detoured to Aseltine Road and Chandler Road.
- c. Berlin Resident Survey.** Board member Shernock saw a survey that was distributed to Berlin residents in order to determine what are their individual concerns in case there was another natural disaster in the near future. This includes specific medical issues. Board member Morse thought there might be some HEPPA medical privacy concerns if names are attached to the surveys.
- d. Northfield Falls Pedestrian Safety Grant.** Board member Stevens asked what the timeline was for performing safety upgrades in Northfield Falls now the state grant has been awarded. Manager Schulz said we still need to receive the signed grant agreement from the grant administrator. He is uncertain of the timing but hopes it will be soon.
- e. Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.** This plan was discussed at the last regular meeting (08/22/23) and Board member Stevens asked when it will be presented again for Select Board approval. Manager Schulz said at that meeting Board member Morse requested a number of changes. Some were to correct misspellings, bad punctuation, etc. and these revisions were included in the latest draft version. Some of Board member Morse's requested changes were more substantial, such as eliminating use the use of "Northfield Village" for geographic purposes, and Manager Schulz would like to discuss these with him before providing another updated version for Select Board approval.

- f. **Pedestrian Safety Project Scoping.** Board member Petty said the engineering firm DuBois & King is performing a scoping project on Wall Street and Water Street in order to provide options for improving pedestrian safety for those attempting to access the Dog River Park from the downtown area.
- g. **Labor Day Weekend Festivities.** Chair Maxwell would like to thank all those who contributed their time and labor to make this year’s community celebration such a success. Chair Maxwell did attend the Northfield Observances organizational meeting afterwards and there was some concern expressed about the possible impact the scheduled replacement of the Main Street Bridge in 2025 might have on that year’s festivities.
- h. **ARPA Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell noted that this matter will be on the agenda of the next regular meeting (09/26/23). He also would like a discussion of the current list of short-, medium-, and long term municipal goals to determine which might benefit from the use of ARPA funds, which ones have already been achieved, etc.

**X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. **International Ataxia Awareness Day Reminder.** Acting in her aforementioned role as FA ambassador, Ms. Scott informed the Select Board members that Monday, September 25, 2023, is International Ataxia Awareness Day. Those seeking more information should go to the website [www.ataxia.org/advocacy](http://www.ataxia.org/advocacy)
- b. **Central Street Speed Bumps.** Ms. Scott asked if there really are plans to install speed bumps on Central Street. Chair Maxwell confirmed that since the residents there have repeatedly requested this in recent years, two (2) movable speed bumps have been purchased and will be installed on the street soon. Ms. Scott said that since her handicapped accessible van has low clearance, she probably will have to avoid that particular street while they are in place. Chair Maxwell said these speed bumps are being installed for a trial period to see if they really are effective in lowering the speed cars travel on the street. Since they would need to be removed for snow removal, the initial test period should only be a couple months. Board member Morse said this is another example of decisions being made that do not include possible impacts on our less abled population. Tim Swartz said a common learning exercise is to have able bodied persons try to navigate in wheelchairs around their own neighborhoods in order to see how the lack of proper accommodations for the less abled can limit their opportunities. Carolyn Stevens asked if other traffic calming measures, such as additional crosswalks, were considered before these speed bumps were purchased. Chair Maxwell said speed bumps were what the street residents requested so it was thought best to install some moveable ones for a trial period. If this trial period yields no benefits, the speed bumps could be relocated elsewhere in the community. He did note that a new crosswalk was added on the street fairly recently but complaints about excessive driver speed still come in. Chair Maxwell added that traffic studies conducted by the NPD in recent years using speed counters have not documented that excessive speed really is a problem on this street. It is possible that because some Central Street houses are very close to the street, there might be a false perception that speeding drivers are much more common than they actually are.

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

The Board went into executive session at 9:41 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 10:11 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 10:12 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 revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of September 26, 2023.