

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of May 28, 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, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Marie Chilson (Northfield Senior Center), Lisa Burr (Feed Every Need), Andrew Padilla (Norwich University [NU]), Mark Smith (Senior Center), Mike Kelley (NU/Senior Center), Mark Atwood (NU/Senior Center), Thelma Baroffio (Senior Center), Mark Fournier, Sharon Smith, Susan Stillinger, Gerard LaVarnway, Pam Ricker, Carolyn Stevens, 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. Marie Chilson, Northfield Senior Center: ARPA Fund Request Update.** Ms. Chilson said the Northfield Senior Center's original request for ARPA funds in order to help finance an expansion of the Senior Center building was presented to the Select Board members at their regular meeting of September 26, 2023. The amount requested at that time was \$500,000 but the current request is for \$250,000 as the Senior Center has been able to secure outside funding in the interim as well as find some project cost savings. Ms. Chilson then thanked Mark Smith and Mike Kelley for helping create visual depictions of how the expanded and renovated Senior Center would appear. The current plan is to expand the building's footprint by seven hundred and eighty feet (780') by adding an addition that is approximately twenty feet (20') by forty feet (40') wide. The additional space will allow for additional building storage and also will permit the Director's Office to be moved from the back to the front of the building. The current area used for the Director's Office would be turned into storage space. Ms. Chilson said there is now consideration of installing a folding wall in the large meeting room so that the room could be temporarily converted to two smaller ones. The creation of smaller meeting areas would allow for private spaces for their foot clinics, financial counseling, and other personal matters. She added that the proposed building expansion/renovation plans are not set in stone but are intended at this time to give a visual indication of how the enlarged building would appear. Ms. Chilson said one of the cost savings that has been found is to have Norwich University (NU) civil engineering students help design the building expansion as a class project. This should save considerable funds even though a professional architect still would need to review and approve the final design plans. Ms. Chilson noted the building was built in 1989 and its roof would need to be replaced as part of the expansion/renovation project. There also would be a need to improve the building's energy efficiency. This would build on previous building upgrades that included weatherstripping windows, bringing the kitchen fully up to code, installing a walk-in cooler, etc. As for financing the project, Ms. Chilson noted Jack and Thelma Baroffio have been able to raise over \$45,000 by overseeing the Senior Center's weekly bingo nights. In addition, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' office has promised \$151,000 in federal funds for this project. Ms. Chilson said they have been looking for additional outside funding including donations from local businesses, etc. She noted the Senior Center and its programs will be even more vital to the Northfield community in coming years due to its ever growing population of senior citizens. Ms. Chilson then recounted the services that the Senior Center provides to Northfield residents including Meals on Wheels delivery, weekday meals served in the Senior Center, takeout meals, etc. As the local senior population increases each year, it is very likely demand for these services will grow accordingly and that makes the expansion of the current facility even more necessary.

Ms. Chilson said that the Senior Center facility is available for use by outside groups, which includes rental for private events or free use for public gatherings. There are guidelines in place for public use of the facility but the general intention is to make it open to everyone. The current events schedule includes Bingo on Monday nights, painting classes on Wednesday afternoons, and various exercise classes at regular intervals. Ms. Chilson said the Senior Center Board Members now have a clear vision for expanding the facility and are asking for \$250,000 in ARPA funds to help expedite the process. She then asked if any of the Select Board members had any questions.

Board member Morse asked for an estimate of the cost of commercial construction per square foot. Mark Fournier said you would probably be looking at \$400 per square foot. Board member Morse noted that would mean project costs of over \$300,000 for construction alone. That would not include the other building renovations that are being considered. Ms. Chilson said there was no expectation ARPA funds would cover the entire expense of the facility expansion/renovation project. However, those funds were provided to the municipality to encourage local improvement projects so it seems that this would be an appropriate use of them. She added that they are looking for additional financing sources but the infusion of ARPA funds in the near future would help get the ball rolling. Board member Morse does support this project in concept given the many vital services that the Senior Center does provide to Northfield residents of all ages. He hopes the Select Board members will authorize an appropriate amount of ARPA funding for this project. Board member Shernock asked how secure was the federal funding promised by Senator Sanders' office. Ms. Chilson said they have been repeatedly told the funds will be coming even though there is no firm timeline for their arrival. Mr. Kelley said there is no way to know the exact cost of this project at this time due to the number of project factors involved. That would include installing a new building roof, putting in new facility mechanics, hiring a professional architect for the final project design, etc. Mr. Kelley believes expanding the building's footprint probably will require improving its stormwater drainage at some point. Ms. Chilson said having the ARPA funds would be an important component of the project finances. Board member Stevens said he does support the project given the importance of the Senior Center to the community. Board member Petty asked about the timeline for the project. Ms. Chilson would like the project plans finalized by May 2025 with building construction to take place over the next couple of years. Board member Petty noted that the federal rules governing use of ARPA funds requires that they be fully expended before the end of 2026. Board member Petty then asked whether the expansion project would make the facility properly serviceable for many years to come. Ms. Chilson believes that it would. The building expansion/renovation would not only provide additional space but also would use that space much more efficiently. Chair Maxwell thought this was a worthy project but he is concerned about the timeline for this project as it seems that the bulk of funding will not be needed for several years. Ms. Chilson said that if it became necessary, this project could be done in stages. Chair Maxwell then asked about the Senior Center's current financial situation. Ms. Chilson said their finances are now in the black but part of that is because they do not have a Director hired at this time. She added that the \$25,000 stipend that the municipality provides the Senior Center each year is used to cover the expenses of the various programs it operates, including Meals on Wheels, and not for building maintenance. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members need to perform due diligence regarding this and other requests for ARPA funds. This particular request will be discussed later in the meeting as a possible action item. Board member Morse thought it would be very helpful if the Select Board members could get ballpark figures for the major components of this project, such as the new roof installation. Chair Maxwell asked if this could be a design-build project as that would provide considerable cost savings should this project require only one contractor. That also could provide solid numbers for total project costs. Ms. Chilson said the Senior Center does plan to provide a full accounting of the project costs when that information becomes available. However, they are applying for these local ARPA funds at this time while they are still undesignated for other projects. This is a multi-faceted project and they are well aware that ARPA funds will not cover all the costs. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Chilson and the other Senior Center representatives present tonight for the additional information regarding their ARPA fund request.

- b. Lisa Burr, Feed Every Need: ARPA Fund Request Update.** Ms. Burr said she has revised the ARPA fund request that she submitted earlier this year. The original request was for \$145,271 but this amount has now been lowered to \$42,372.20. The Select Board members at that time had asked Ms. Burr to approach the other municipalities in their service area to determine if they could provide some funding of their own. She has done this outreach and also has calculated that of the 38,400 meals Feed Every Need delivers statewide, about 5,964 of them go to Northfield locations. This is about 15.53% of the total amount. Ms. Burr has calculated that Feed Every Need now needs \$272,819 for capital equipment investments and for meal subsidies. 15.53% of this total amount is the aforementioned \$42,372.20. The \$272,819 figure is broken down with \$80,819 for capital equipment investments, i.e. increased food storage capacity; new coolers and freezers; a new ten-burner stovetop with two convection ovens; and a new delivery vehicle. The remaining \$192,000 represents a \$5 subsidy for each prepared meal delivered. Ms. Burr noted they also have obtained letters of support from the local recipients of their meals, such as CERV, Northfield Elementary School, the Another Way Community Center, etc. She added that when the local schools are on summer break, meals for local students will be made available at the Northfield Farmers Market. Ms. Burr also followed the Select Board members' advice to seek voter approval for annual appropriations from the Northfield Town Budget by circulating petitions so Feed Every Need will be added to the next Town Meeting Warning with other non-profits organizations seeking funds. Ms. Burr said there is clear support from the local community for Feed Every Need's activities as this has become an important resource for combatting food insecurity in Northfield.

Board member Morse felt that the new information provided tonight is very helpful. Board member Shernock asked about the request for ARPA funds for the purchase of a new delivery vehicle. Ms. Burr said the food delivery drivers now provide their own vehicles but she didn't feel this practice was sustainable in the long term. She said what they really need is a four-wheel drive vehicle that would allow them to make deliveries throughout the year on higher elevation backroads, etc. The budget for buying this vehicle is \$50,000. Board member Shernock asked about fundraising efforts in the other service communities. Ms. Burr has spoken to representatives of these communities to see if they might also be able to contribute some of their own ARPA funds to Feed Every Need. There also will be efforts to get onto their Town Meeting warnings by petition. Ms. Burr said such outreach efforts currently are hampered by a lack of sufficient workforce as most of their staff are kept busy producing and delivering the meals. She added that they have plans to expand Feed Every Need's governing board to include at least one person with grant-writing skills. Board member Stevens asked if the new cooking and freezer units would be energy efficient. Ms. Burr said that depends whether they are bought new or used. She noted Efficiency Vermont will only provide energy rebates for new equipment but it is possible Feed Every Need could obtain good used equipment at more reasonable prices. They do not need top-of-the-line equipment but they do need durable equipment that will meet their demands. Chair Maxwell recommended contacting Northfield Economic Development Director Tom Davis as he could be of great assistance with locating and then applying for grant funds. Ms. Burr thought that was a very helpful suggestion. They also have reached out to local elected officials to see if state and/or federal grant funds might be available in the near future. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Burr for the updated request and valuable information. This request will be discussed later in the meeting as a possible action item.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. May 14, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #22-24 & #22-24A-C.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #22-24 & #22-24A-C in the amount of \$188,440.30. Board member Stevens asked about the recent purchase of a new truck for the Sewer Department. Manager Schulz said the funds were appropriated by the Select Board members to be put into the Sewer Department Capital Improvement (CIP) budget for this purpose. In fact, the purchase of this replacement vehicle originally was planned for last year.

Board member Petty noted a \$11,294 payment for sludge management this month. Manager Schulz agreed the cost of sludge management has been increasing recently but should decrease over the next few months with the NU campus largely shut down for the summer. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Approval of Warrant #22-24D.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #22-24D in the amount of \$30,509.20. This is a bond note payment for the Cox Brook Road paving project. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through May 12, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$99,529.71. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. Resolution for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Allocation.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) has advised its member communities to pass resolutions that would allow them to allocate their remaining ARPA funds into their Town General Funds for "Workforce Retention." That would remove the need to designate the funds by December 31, 2024 and to fully expend them by December 31, 2026. Manager Schulz and Finance Director Laurie Baroffio have drafted a resolution that is based on the wording recommended by VLCT. As of May 22, 2024, the balance of local undesignated ARPA funds is \$1,552,163.76. The resolution would allow ARPA funds, here termed as the "Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund" (SLFRF), up to that amount to be transferred to the Town General Fund for "the purpose of municipal workforce retention to pay for the period 07/01/2023 through 06/30/2024." This transfer would create a surplus in the Town General Fund. The use of Town General Fund surplus would be determined through the following budget cycle and approved by the voters at Town Meeting. Reserve Funds could be created for future projects but they also would have to be approved by the voters. Manager Schulz said there is no need to approve the resolution tonight but we wanted to continue discussions on this matter. Board member Morse would like to see the various factors regarding this action provided in writing before he would approve this resolution. Board member Shernock thought it would be premature to sequester the full amount of designated ARPA funds at this time given that decisions about current requests could be made in the near future. Ms. Baroffio noted that designating ARPA funds for projects that the municipality would directly oversee doesn't fully meet the federal rules for obligating these funds in the absence of signed work contracts. That is why transferring these ARPA funds to the General Fund for workforce retention would protect them from possibly being returned to the federal government if the aforementioned deadlines are not met. Ms. Baroffio noted that the resolution authorizes putting ARPA funds "in an amount up to \$1,552,163.76" in the reserve funds so this could be a lesser amount if additional ARPA funds are committed beforehand. She added that once the ARPA funds are put into the General Fund, they are no longer considered ARPA funds and would be treated as surplus funds in future. There are advantages to approving this resolution during the current fiscal year. For example, if the resolution is approved during the current fiscal year, the full year of payroll expenses can be included in the resolution amount. After July 1, 2024, this amount would be lowered to only six months of payroll expenses. Ms. Baroffio added that if the surplus funds are put into reserve accounts for specific projects, that action would need to be authorized by Northfield voters at the annual or a special Town Meeting. Ms. Baroffio emphasized that the main reason for approving this resolution is to create a safeguard to prevent the loss of unobligated ARPA funds. Manager Schulz said that VLCT has encouraged smaller municipalities to approve this resolution as they might not have sufficient staffing to make sure all the ARPA fund obligation rules are completely followed by the 12/31/24 deadline.

Board member Morse noted that the Northfield Senior Center now has a request for \$250,000 in ARPA funds on the table. Ms. Baroffio said if the Select Board members decide to provide a specific amount of ARPA funds to a third party, the municipality's authority over and responsibility for those funds is ended. The third party would have no requirement to spend those funds by any federal deadline. Board member Morse feels this is a complicated matter and that perhaps the Budget & Financial Review Subcommittee (Board members Maxwell and Morse) should look into this first by meeting with Manager Schulz and Ms. Baroffio in the near future.

As he said at the previous regular meeting (05/14/24), Chair Maxwell said a number of complex issues regarding the designation of ARPA funds have risen recently and that is why he would like ARPA fund requests discussed at every Select Board regular meeting, not just the second one of the month (which had been the practice this past year). There is a lot to be discussed and we need to get moving along. Chair Maxwell also felt that the Select Board members probably should start focusing on projects that could have work contracts in place by the end of this year. Board member Morse asked if the bank interest accrued from these ARPA funds have any usage restrictions. Ms. Baroffio said there were none and the interest is not subject to the ARPA regulations or deadlines. After further discussion, there was consensus that this matter will be discussed again at the next Select Board regular meeting (06/11/24).

- b. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** The Northfield Senior Center request for \$250,000 in ARPA funds for building expansion was discussed first. For purposes of discussion, it was thought best that a motion be made. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to award the Northfield Senior Center \$250,000 in ARPA funds for the purpose of facility expansion/renovation. Board member Morse would like to table approval of this matter until more information about the project budget can be provided to the Select Board members. Board member Shernock would like to see the proposed project budget broken down into separate components, such as the roof replacement, with cost estimates for each. Board member Morse said this particular project has been under consideration for several years and there is no clear indication of the total project costs or timeline. Board member Stevens would like to award the Senior Center the entire \$250,000 fund request as he believes the funds would be spent wisely to enlarge and/or renovate the building. Board member Petty said there are a number of worthy local projects now under consideration for ARPA fund awards. She would also like to have more information before awarding the requested amount for this project. Board member Petty might favor awarding a lesser amount that would cover one specific part of the project, such as roof replacement. Chair Maxwell also would like to see a specific plan that broke down the project budget into separate components. He felt there remained too many unanswered questions to move forward on this request at this time. Without objection, the Select Board members decided to table the motion until additional information regarding this ARPA fund request has been provided. The tabling of this motion will expire on July 23, 2024.

Chair Maxwell then turned to the request from Feed Every Need for \$42,372.20 in ARPA funds. He noted the original request for \$145,271 has been reduced to \$42,372.20 in order to reflect the fact that only 15.53% of the ready meals delivered are designated for Northfield locations. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to award Feed Every Need \$42,372.20 in ARPA funds for the purpose of increasing its dry food storage capacity; increasing its fresh and frozen food storage capacity; purchasing a delivery vehicle; and providing a \$5 subsidy on each meal delivered. After first acknowledging that he has a personal relationship with Lisa and Jonathan Burr, Board member Morse said this request has changed considerably since it was first broached with the Select Board members. The revised request did take into account the concerns that had been raised at that time. He felt Feed Every Need is a valuable local resource that provides significant benefits to Northfield and its other service communities. Board member Shernock agreed this program does provide much needed assistance to Northfield residents of all ages. She felt the ARPA funds would be well spent and (as indicated in the letters of support) Feed Every Need has considerable local backing. Board member Stevens also supports this request. Board member Petty has some concerns whether this organization is sustainable in the long term.

Chair Maxwell also is concerned that a one-time infusion of ARPA funds might not be sufficient to guarantee Feed Every Need will obtain reliable sources of funding in future years. He would favor providing ARPA funds that would represent Northfield's share of the costs of Feed Every Needs' capital improvements budget. He does not favor providing ARPA funds to cover the meal subsidies. The capital expense portion of the request (i.e. increased storage capacity, new cooking and cold storage appliances, and delivery vehicle) is \$80,819 and 15.53% of that is \$12,551.19. Chair Maxwell feels that if Feed Every Need is to be awarded ARPA funds, that should be the amount. Elroy Hill noted Feed Every Need has been in operation for over four years and he felt that showed they have a good chance of continuing their efforts for several years to come. Mr. Fournier believes Feed Every Need should be awarded the full amount they requested as these funds will be well used for their intended purposes. **Motion passed 3-0-2, with Board members Maxwell and Petty abstaining.**

Chair Maxwell said Andrew Padilla, who manages the NU Shaw Outdoor Center, previously submitted a request for \$7,800 in ARPA funds for the professional design of a disc golf course that would be located on NU property near the Shaw Outdoor Center. Manager Schulz said the Select Board members had asked for some assurance, in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), that if these public funds were used for this purpose, the completed course would be open to all Northfield residents. He said that a MOU has been drafted and signed by NU Vice President for Administration and Finance James Dunkelman. Manager Schulz hasn't signed the MOU yet as he feels there are a couple clauses that might not meet the Select Board member's emphasis on full access. For example, it is stated that NU will "allow public access to the completed disc golf course on terms acceptable to Norwich University." Manager Schulz felt this qualification might mean public access could be restricted in future. Board member Petty also is concerned NU might at some time charge an access fee to Northfield residents unaffiliated with the university. Mr. Padilla said there are no plans to charge any access fee as such payments would make the university responsible for injury liability issues, etc. and that would not be feasible. Mr. Padilla added that he has been seeking outside funds for the course construction and felt much of the construction work could be done with volunteer labor, including willing NU students. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to award \$7,800 to Norwich University for the professional design of a disc golf course and to authorize Manager Schulz to sign the MOU as presented. Board member Petty also is uncomfortable with the current wording of the MOU and would like stronger guarantees the general public will be provided full access to the disc golf course once completed. **Motion passed 3-2-0, with Board members Petty and Stevens voting in the negative.**

Board member Shernock would like to discuss at this time the proposal from municipal management to use ARPA funds to purchase emergency generators for the Fire Station, Police Station, and Municipal Building. Manager Schulz said the Select Board members would need to formally authorize the use of ARPA funds for this purpose before he can go out to bid for these purchases. He did request quotes from generator dealers last year and the total cost of these generators was estimated at \$75,000. However, since costs probably have increased since he obtained these quotes, he now feels the ARPA fund request should be increased from \$75,000 to \$90,000. Chair Maxwell noted at a recent Select Board meeting, Northfield EMT Lynn Doney suggested that a generator also be purchased for the Ambulance Bay located in part of the Town Garage. Manager Schulz is not opposed to adding this additional generator to the RFP. However, he suggested raising the fund request by an additional \$10,000 to cover this. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to authorize up to \$100,000 in ARPA funds for the proposed purchase of generators for the emergency services and the Municipal Building. Board member Shernock would like to be sure the RFP requires all installation costs be included in the bid amounts. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

Board member Petty noted that there is an outstanding request from management for \$10,000 in ARPA funds to update the billing systems for the Utility Office and the Town Clerk's Office. The suggested upgrades would allow for bill payments to be made with credit cards, debit cards, etc. She asked about the status of this request. Manager Schulz said he is still gathering more information about this. He will provide an update on this soon.

- c. **2024 Memorial Park Pool Schedule & Fees.** Manager Schulz said he recently discussed the proposed pool schedule and fees with Pool Director Shannon Palone. The pool is scheduled to open on Saturday, June 22, 2024 and close on Saturday, August 17, 2024. The fees for season passes, daily passes, and swim lessons would remain the same as last year. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the 2024 Memorial Park Pool Schedule & Fees as presented. Board member Petty noted the Select Board members did authorize using \$2,000 in ARPA funds to lower the cost of swimming lessons for Northfield residents. Manager Schulz will meet with Ms. Palone to determine how this fee reduction should be implemented. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **Public Hearing (Zoning Bylaws Updates).** The Select Board members will hold their second public hearing regarding revisions to the local zoning bylaws on Tuesday, June 11, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. The revised zoning bylaws are available for review on the municipal website at <https://www.northfield-vt.gov/zoning>

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT. Manager Schulz had nothing to add to the written report he had provided the Select Board members.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Public Trash Removal.** Board member Shernock thought the removal of trash from the receptacles in the parks and in the downtown area has been rather slow recently. She asked if it might be possible to subcontract this work. Manager Schulz said that was a possibility due to the current workforce shortage in the Highway Department. Some of the receptacles in the downtown area do fill up quickly with some residents appearing to make use of them to improperly dispose of household trash. Manager Schulz plans to put a notice on Front Porch Forum to discourage this practice. Board member Shernock thought installing new trash can lids might help resolve that problem.
- b. **Retaining Walls Future Discussion.** Board member Petty would like to fully discuss the problem of crumbling retaining walls, including those on the Vine Street sidewalks, at a future meeting.
- c. **Sally Davidson Letter Response.** Chair Maxwell said Northfield resident Sally Davidson recently sent a letter to the Select Board members that raised a number of concerns about the public parks, etc. He would like Manager Schulz to draft a response letter to Ms. Davidson addressing these issues as soon as possible.
- d. **Memorial Park Vandalism.** Chair Maxwell said the Memorial Park bathrooms and basketball courts were vandalized in recent days. He would like to cut down on this nighttime activity by installing a new gate that would automatically close at night. He also would like surveillance cameras installed in order to catch whoever is doing the damage. Mr. Hill said he has travelled throughout this country and he believes Vermont has the most per capita vandalism than any other state. He also suggested unbreakable stainless steel bathroom fixtures should be installed in future.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

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

The Board adjourned at 10:20 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 June 11, 2024.