

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD RETREAT
Minutes of June 3, 2026

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Tim Davis, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Mary Smith, Katie Whitney, Curtis Dudley, Amie Dudley, Kristin Pollard, Melinda Davis, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the Board Retreat to order at 4:30 p.m.

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

III. DISCUSSION

Chair Maxwell said that the latest version (11/26/26) of the Board-generated list of community goals (see attached) had been distributed to the Select Board members beforehand for review. This list is broken down into annual goals/activities, short-term goals (16 months), medium-term goals (2-3 years), and long-term goals (4years plus). Manager Smith has asked Katie Whitney to serve as a facilitator for this meeting in order to assist the Select Board members in prioritizing these lists and to create a mechanism for future planning. Ms. Whitney is a lifelong Northfield resident and for the past fifteen (15) years has worked for the Vermont Agency of Human Services as the Director of Organizational and HR Development. She supports the state's workforce internally to further professional development, set personal work priorities and goals, assist with professional recruitment and retention, etc. Ms. Whitney has volunteered to help the Select Board members move beyond the written list of community goals in order to help identify shared visions for the community, which would allow for setting desired local outcomes for the future. Ms. Whitney has reviewed the current list of community goals and would like to encourage the Select Board members to move beyond this basic list and create the procedures required to reach common goals. Board member Petty said that in the past the Select Board members would go through the most recent list of community goals to discuss which have been fully or partially achieved and perhaps reorganize the priority list. Ms. Whitney said she would ask the Select Board members to go through a few exercises in order to identify community priorities as well as strategies to achieve them. She said not everything could be labeled as a priority but the Select Board members should be able to recognize the most pressing issues in this community. Board member Petty said the current list are items that individual Select Board members asked to be included but she doesn't believe there was ever a true consensus regarding whether certain items are true priorities.

Ms. Whitney said there is a need to develop a Northfield strategic plan. She then distributed erasable paddles to Manager Smith and the Select Board members on which they can write their views. Instead of starting with the current list of community goals, she asked them to imagine it is June 2031 and Northfield has become the community they want it to be. Manager Smith and the Select Board members then wrote down what they would like to see in Northfield. Board member Davis wrote that he would like Northfield to be a better place for people to come to. Chair Maxwell wrote that he would like a vibrant downtown, a strong school system, a strong municipal relationship with Norwich University, and one community. Board member Shernock would like a compact walkable community including Northfield Falls as well as a community that provides services to all residents. Board member Stevens would like a vibrant downtown, an expanded public sewer system, fixed covered bridges, and revived municipal pool. Board member Petty would like a vibrant walkable village that is welcoming to all ages, bustling storefronts, good sidewalks, inviting public spaces, and a well-maintained infrastructure including roads and bridges. Manager Smith would like community focused growth development and improved public safety.

Ms. Whitney put down that she would like Northfield to be vibrant and connected. This would include being a community that was accessible and welcoming. She then asked the Select Board members to focus less on specific projects and more on a grand vision for the future. One issue that arose consistently was economic development. Chair Maxwell felt Northfield would very likely remain a “bedroom community” as it is unlikely that it will ever become a shopping destination or industrial center. Board member Petty said when the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) held its community visit here in 2023, a number of key local concerns were identified and task forces were formed to address them.

This included plans to develop a community center; to improve accessibility, walkability, and pedestrian safety; improve the relationship between Northfield and Norwich University; and the promotion of Downtown Development. Some of these groups have been much more active than the others in the time since. Ms. Whitney said government effectiveness probably should be added to the list of general goals. Chair Maxwell agreed that making things happen is the main function of the Select Board and it is best to have tangible goals that they have the ability to make happen.

Ms. Whitney then asked the Select Board members to review the list of community goals last revised in November 2024 and note which items had been fully achieved or some progress made. Starting with the list of short-term goals, Chair Maxwell said the Common and Fountain haven’t been rehabilitated but there was community engagement on this and a plan was developed based on this public input. Board member Shernock said the municipality doesn’t currently have the funds to fully implement the rehabilitation plan. Chair Maxwell said it might be desirable to fully review the plan again and identify actions that could be taken over time to address the most pressing concerns. Ms. Whitney said the Select Board members would need to decide at some point what success would look like for this project. Board member Shernock believes significant progress has been made to achieve a long-term PILOT agreement with Norwich University. Chair Maxwell believes an agreement should be finalized in the next month or so. Board member Shernock added that the sidewalk inventory has been completed. Chair Maxwell noted that a major sidewalk project was completed last year on Vine Street. Board member Shernock said the goal of new sidewalks in Northfield Falls has not been pursued but there have been a number of pedestrian safety improvements installed there including a flashing crosswalk sign. Board member Petty noted that the municipality received a grant to update its zoning maps, which are now out of date. Although the restrooms there still are not fully ADA-compliant, it was noted that a number of accessibility improvements have been installed at and around the municipal pool. There also are designs now available for a fully-accessible new bathhouse. The riverwalk project will be significantly facilitated by the removal of the Cross Brothers Dam, which is now scheduled for later this year.

As regards the medium-term goals, it was noted that with a new Police Chief and Deputy Police Chief starting next month, the goal of Northfield Police Department (NPD) officer recruitment and retention should be within reach. As indicated earlier, there have been some safety improvements and new signage installed in Northfield Falls to deter speeding and promote pedestrian safety. Elroy Hill, who lives in Northfield Falls, felt that an improved police presence was necessary for real safety improvements there. Chair Maxwell said that increased law enforcement presence should be coming soon. One medium-term goal was to extend the municipal sewer system southward along Vermont Routes 12 & 12A. Chair Maxwell said the engineering plans for this project were developed several years ago and are now being updated. Therefore, there has been some progress on this and additional funding options for the construction phase of this project have been identified.

As for improving opportunities for housing developments, it was noted that Economic Development Director Thomas Davis has been working with several potential housing developers with some success to date. This includes the apartment conversations at

the former Masonic Temple, the Habitat for Humanity project on North Main Street, and six (6) housing units to be built on Freight Yard Way. Manager Smith said Mr. Davis is now involved with some additional potential housing projects and soon will provide the Select Board members with updates. As for upgrades to the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF), Chair Maxwell said the planning now is underway after the completion of a full engineering inspection. There also have been some developments regarding a potential trail connecting Memorial Park to the Northfield Falls Park as new property owners seem more amenable than the previous ones.

Turning to long-term goals, Board member Shernock said not much had been done on these. Some renovations have been made at the Municipal Building but nothing major. The task force that was created to explore the possibility of creating a community center is no longer active. As for annual goals/activities, it was noted that the drive for DEI training for all employees, board members, etc. has lost much of its initial momentum. However, there have been a number of joint board meetings with school board members and other committee members. Northfield's state legislators also have been invited to attend Select Board regular meetings in order to hear the concerns of Board members and the general public. Chair Maxwell felt scheduling these meetings would be the Town Manager's responsibility.

Board member Petty would prefer that all municipal board members, not just those that are required to do so, should attend training sessions regarding the Open Meeting Law and the Municipal Code of Ethics. She added that expanded marketing of our outside recreational facilities has been partly successful. In addition, local volunteers have been honored but perhaps not to the extent that the Select Board members originally envisioned. Ms. Whitney said it appears that a good amount of progress has been made on a number of the community goals and she asked how Northfield residents are kept informed of such developments. It was noted that in the Annual Town Report, municipal officials and board chairs provide summaries of their activities/achievements from the past year. Board member Shernock thought that in her brief time here, Manager Smith has already done an admirable job of keeping Northfield residents, board members, and municipal staff informed of what has been going on through her weekly reports. In addition, Chair Maxwell has provided a monthly column in the *Northfield News* regarding what the Select Board members have done recently and what they plan to do. Board member Shernock felt it might be good to hold some staff appreciation events in future. It was noted that the past year saw various special challenges for several municipal departments.

Ms. Whitney asked what the concept of a "Community Center" meant to the Select Board members. Board member Petty said there is the Community Room but she also envisioned a much larger public meeting space that is fully accessible and available for a wide variety of larger scale events. As the Select Board members learned recently, the only large fully accessible spaces are located on the Norwich University campus, i.e. Plumley Armory. The task force that was working on developing a community center lost its momentum when disputes arose over the size and purpose of the new community center as well as questions about how the construction would be funded. Ms. Whitney said if Northfield residents are not ready for the process of creating a new community center, there might be other, less comprehensive options available.

The Select Board members then took a brief dinner break. Ms. Whitney took this time to draft a vision statement based on tonight's discussions. After the break ended, Ms. Whitney read the following statement, which was subject to Select Board wordsmithing: "Northfield is a vibrant, welcoming, connected community that balances small town character with opportunities for housing, recreation, economic vitality, and effective infrastructure." She felt this statement included public safety and effective government. Ms. Whitney then asked the Select Board members to think of four (4) to six (6) priorities that would accomplish this vision. Chair Maxwell said continued economic development, which could cover a lot of broad developments including additional affordable housing opportunities, etc. Board member Petty would like more effective maintenance of our infrastructure through a comprehensive plan that allows for proper annual budgeting. Board member Davis said the Town of Berlin has such a plan that does allow for proper long-term planning of its highway system. Chair Maxwell thought that the Select Board members need to identify reliable funding mechanisms to pay for both major projects as well as regular maintenance. Board member Petty thought keeping municipal policies up-to-date is important to her. Manager Smith felt the municipality should invest properly in public safety. Board member Petty felt local education was a major concern even though the Select Board members don't have a direct role in this. However, the Select Board could assume a more active role if plans are developed to close some educational facilities by merging class levels, etc. Board member Petty also believed it would be good for the Select Board to work closer with local public interest groups, such as the Accessibility, Walkability, & Pedestrian Safety Task Force, in order to achieve common goals.

Ms. Whitney then presented a priority list containing five (5) items: 1. Continued Economic Development; 2. Infrastructure Plan; 3. Operations Plan; 4. Public Safety; and 5. Community Connections. She believes all the major concerns that the Select Board members brought up today could be directly linked to an item on this list. Chair Maxwell felt this was a very strong list that represented about ninety percent (90%) of what the Select Board members are trying to achieve. Board member Shernock agreed that what was emphasized today fell into at least one of these categories. Ms. Whitney said the next step in this process is to break down these priorities in order to create a viable process for achieving these goals, i.e. "take to the granular." This could help develop a strategic plan for the next five (5) years. She felt that perhaps the Select Board members could incorporate such a discussion as a regular feature of their future meetings. This could result in a framework for future action.

Manager Smith said it probably would be useful to hold another retreat session in a couple of weeks. It was decided that the Select Board members will hold an additional meeting on Wednesday, June 17, 2026 in the Municipal Building starting at 4:00 p.m. Manager Smith felt tonight's meeting was a good move in the right direction.

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

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

The Board Retreat adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at: <https://youtu.be/NorL0hGmFA0>

These minutes are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.

Town of Northfield, Vermont

Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Community Goals

(11/26/24)

Annual Goals/Activities

Open Meeting Law Training offered to all committees/commissions and SB
DEI Training- in person preferred
Honor Volunteers Annually
Joint Meetings with School Board and others
State Representative Updates
Review and Update Municipal Policies and Ordinances
Northfield Representation on the CVRPC TAC
Update Employee Succession Plan
Maintain Electronic Tickler File
Marketing of Town Parks, Pool, Trails (Events)

Short-Term Goals (16 Months)

Subcommittee Reclassification & Refine Duties
Rehabilitation of Town Common and Fountain
Address Municipal Building Deferred Maintenance Issues
Refine Town Policy for Road Discontinuance Process
Explore Options for Screening Junk Vehicles
Add Steel/Street Turnaround Slaughterhouse Bridge
Add Zoning Categories – Engage Professional
Paint/Clean Bridges – Develop Maintenance Plan
Refine costs/Sidewalk need (possible bonding)
Bridge Inventory/Repairs (Develop Capital Plan)
Work with NU on Long-term PILOT Agreement
Address Housing Issues (Task Force)
Support Working Groups (update) Reach out
Update RSMS
Recreation Vision 1-3-5 Year Combined Effort by Various Groups
Finish Covered Bridges Assessment
Create Social Infrastructure/Park Rec. F.T.

Town of Northfield, Vermont

Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Community Goals

(11/26/24)

Pool & Sitework ADA Compliance

Complete Phase I of Riverwalk (Cross Bros. Dam)

RSMS Training for Highway Subcommittee Members (through VLCT)

Medium-Term Goals (2-3 Years)

Bonding/Funding Sidewalks Repair/Maintenance

Install New Sidewalk to Tops Market

Learn about Short Term Rentals in our Community

Redefine/Make Clearer Working Groups/Committees

Develop River Access in Falls

Help with Police Department Recruitment

Consider Community Oversight of Law Enforcement

Reduce Speed in Falls, Signage/Other

Skateboard Park- Possible location near Police Station

Connector Trails - Memorial Park to Falls

Construction of 12-12A Sewer Extension

Conduct Study – Sewer to Falls

Emergency Services Location Flooding Mitigation Steps

Pool House Renovation

Develop Opportunities for Housing Developments

Continue Engineering/Planning for Upgrades to Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility

Explore Possibilities for Public-Private Development Opportunities

Long-Term Goals (4 Years Plus)

Improvements/Renovations Municipal Building

Extend Municipal Sewer to Northfield Falls

Extend Sidewalk along Route 12 to Northfield Falls

Extend Sidewalk Southward along Vermont Routes 12 and 12A

Explore possibilities for a Community Center