

## Joint Meeting of the Northfield Electric and Water & Wastewater Commissions

### Minutes of January 12, 2026

**Roll Call.** Utility Commissioners Dennis Donahue, Steve Fitzhugh, Michael Kelley, John Stevens, and Charlie Morse. Also present were Town Manager Steve Mackenzie, Utility Superintendent James Russo, Heather D'Arcy (Vermont Public Power Supply Authority), and Gerard LaVarnway.

The meeting started at 6:33 p.m.

#### **Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting.**

Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Donahue, to approve the December 1, 2025 meeting minutes. Mr. Stevens had a correction regarding the repainting of the center line after the waterline project on South Main Street has been completed. **Motion to approve the revised minutes passed 5-0-0.**

#### **Meeting of the Electric Commission.**

Mr. Fitzhugh said Heather D'Arcy, the VPPSA Manager of Power Supply, will be present tonight to provide additional information regarding a couple of Northfield potential projects.

**Tier III Incentive for the Veterans' Place.** Mr. Fitzhugh said that the Vermont Legislature enacted the Renewable Energy Standard that created incentives for public utility customers to switch from using fossil fuels to electricity. The incentives are split into a tier system and each public utility company needs a sufficient number of each category each year. The Veterans Place has been planning to install energy efficient measures later this year and they have requested to become part of the Tier III program. Ms. D'Arcy said Tier III is different from the other tiers in that you cannot trade them outside of the VPPSA network. If a public utility has an insufficient number at the end of the year, it can convert Tier II credits, which are more expensive to obtain. She said the Northfield Electric Department (NED) has banked 1,500 Tier III credits and 1,900 are needed to fulfill the annual requirement. For a \$10,000 contribution, the Veterans Place project would generate 623 Tier III credits, which would fill the gap. In addition, Ms. D'Arcy noted that by switching the Veterans' Place building from fossil fuel usage in favor of electricity, NED will be increasing the amount of power sold to its customers. In addition, VPPSA has made a real effort in the past to assist Vermont veterans so helping their facility in this manner would provide additional benefits. Should NED not have sufficient Tier II or Tier III renewable credits at the end of the year, it could do an "Alternate Compliance Payment" and purchase Tier III credits at \$79 apiece. Manager Mackenzie asked what the Veterans' Place project. Ms. D'Arcy said an advanced heat pump would be installed that would make the facility's heating and cooling system much more energy efficient. NED would be subsidizing the cost of the project by purchasing the resulting Tier III renewable energy credits. Mr. Fitzhugh recommended a \$10,000 investment, which would provide NED with 623 credits at a reasonable cost. Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Kelley, to authorize \$10,000 to be used in the Tier III program for a project at the Veterans' Place. It was noted that the \$10,000 would be paid after the project was completed and NED has received the renewable energy credits. Ms. D'Arcy said she spoke to the Veterans' Place administrators and they will be pleased to receive the \$10,000 payment after the work is done. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**Fitchburg MA Landfill Gas Renewable Energy Availability.** Ms. D'Arcy said VPPSA member Barton Village Electric Department now has an excess amount of renewable energy sources but Swanton Electric has a real deficiency. VPPSA had a plan to allow Swanton to take a larger share of the 4.5 Megawatts of renewable energy that Fitchburg MA Landfill Gas produces to help with this. However, when the agreement was being drafted, it was discovered that NED and some other public utilities had the right of first refusal regarding the purchase of this renewable energy from this facility. Even though Swanton does have a greater need, NED does have a need for renewable energy credits in future. For example, Ms. D'Arcy noted that Swanton Electric's power supply budget went up sixty percent (60%) last year. Mr. Fitzhugh said that since NED does have more options for purchasing renewable energy than Swanton does, he recommends deferring to them at this time. Mr. Morse asked how long the Fitchburg facility has been in operation. Ms. D'Arcy said it started operations in 2009 and is a reliable source of renewable energy for VPPSA members. VPPSA purchases the power at market prices (\$95 per Megawatt Hour in 2026) and sells it to its members. Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Kelley, to have NED defer to Swanton Electric its right of first refusal for the purchase of renewable energy from Fitchburg MA Landfill Gas. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**Proposed Swanton VT Solar Farm Project.** Ms. D'Arcy noted that the state legislature has approved an updated version of the Renewable Energy Standard law that increase the amount of renewable energy public utilities must purchase each and also added a new category (Tier IV). MHG Solar is now planning a new 4.99 Megawatt solar farm in Swanton that could provide NED with much needed Tier II and Tier IV renewable energy credits. Ms. D'Arcy would like to see if NED would like to participate in this project. Its share of the renewable energy produced would be between fifteen and twenty percent (15-20%) and this could be up to eight percent (8%) of its total power load. She added that NED would not need to specify the amount of its participation at this time but just indicate that they are interested. Ms. D'Arcy said if NED bought into this solar project, it would be able to purchase renewable energy at fixed prices rather than have to rely on unpredictable market prices. Mr. Morse would like to hold off on a decision until the next meeting as he would like to see some information about the solar project in writing. Mr. Donahue is in favor of at least showing some interest in the proposal. After some discussion, it was decided that Ms. D'Arcy will work with Mr. Fitzhugh to provide a written proposal that the Utility Commissioners can review for their next meeting.

#### Northfield Electric Department (NED) Upcoming Projects

**Smart Meters.** Mr. Fitzhugh said Utility Superintendent James Russo will be installing some test meters in the near future to make sure the system works before the full installation starts. There will be a stuffer in the next utility bills mailed out that will explain the installation process.

**Integrated Resource Plan.** Mr. Fitzhugh said this plan needs to be updated every three (3) years so he will start working on a NED update soon.

**Utility Pole Realignment Project.** Mr. Fitzhugh said a Certificate of Public Good has been filed with the Public Utility Commission (PUC) so that some poles located in the flood zone near the Norwich University campus can be relocated. He received a \$15,000 quote for an aesthetic study so he hopes that the PUC will not require one.

**Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** Mr. Fitzhugh said all underground services will be installed by March 15, 2026. Although the project itself has been delayed to 2027, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) wanted all this work completed in advance.

**Grid Resiliency Grant.** Mr. Fitzhugh has been working on the grant documents and will update Manager Mackenzie on the grant application. If the application is successful, NED would have funds to bury powerlines located in flood-prone areas, i.e. Water Street.

**NED Power Outage.** A couple of weeks ago, a windstorm caused a prolonged power outage in Northfield when a substation recloser was damaged. Green Mountain Power (GMP) came in and replaced the recloser and we will not know until we are billed how much this service call will cost.

**King Street Battery Storage Project.** Mr. Fitzhugh thanked Mr. Morse for signing the financing documents (as Select Board Chair) that will allow for this project to proceed.

#### Meeting of the Water & Wastewater Commission

**Reimburse Water Utility Customer for Contractor Costs related to a Waterline Problem.** Mr. Donahue said a waterline failure on Vermont Route 12 resulted in a Northfield resident being billed for numerous plumber calls. Eventually, the problem was discovered to be a leaky pipe and the Water crew repaired it. The customer (Mark Finch) would like to be reimbursed for the final plumber bill, which is \$437.35. Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Fitzhugh, to reimburse Mark Finch for a plumber bill in the amount of \$437.35. Mr. Donahue said there was precedent was reimbursing customers this way when the utility's faulty waterline was responsible for the problem. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### Northfield Water & Sewer Department Upcoming Projects

**New Water Pipe Installation.** Mr. Russo said he would like to install some new waterline this summer on Pearl Street and School Street. The total amount of new pipe would be about sixteen hundred feet (1,600 ft.). He also would like to install new pipe on Vine Street eventually.

**Main Street Waterline Installation and Cheney Field Water Tank Replacement Projects.** Mr. Kelley asked what work remained for these projects. Mr. Russo said the installation of new waterline on Main Street has been completed and the lines on the side streets have been connected to it. In the springtime, the twelve inch (12") waterline from Hill Street to the new water tank has to be installed. This will replace the current eight inch (8") pipe. In addition, the new water tank needs to be painted and the work site has to be restored to its original condition.

**Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Update.** Mr. Russo said the WWTF is in good shape.

**Other Business.** Mr. Russo said a sewer line at the Northfield Savings Bank has become plugged. The situation will be monitored until this can be addressed this spring.

**Adjournment.** Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Kelley, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk