

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of January 10, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Tom Davis (Economic Development Director), Mitch Osiecki (Zoning Administrator), Carolyn Stevens, Gerard LaVarnway, Lois Melander, Merry Shernock, 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. Tom Davis, Economic Development Director.** Mr. Davis wanted to provide the Select Board members with updates on the various projects he has been working on since he last addressed them. He starting by announcing Northfield is now is an Act 250 ten (10) acre town. That means that any undeveloped site under ten (10) acres will not require an Act 250 permit when construction work, etc. is performed. Mr. Davis then noted he has been working with developers regarding a possible apartment complex to be located on the old Cetrangolo Lot (next to the Dollar General). He said a \$25,000 Phase II Grant has been awarded for this project and the apartments would be rented at market price. Mr. Davis then discussed Freight Yard Way, which is widely considered to be the most underutilized downtown site for development. He said between fifteen (15) and twenty (20) individuals have shown interest in various projects for this site. Mr. Davis is sharing any proposals brought to him with the property owner (Martha Mahan). He then said that he has been working with Manager Schulz in order to get the center of Northfield classified by the State of Vermont as a "Designated Downtown," which would provide additional access to economic development grant funds, etc. The Select Board members must approve this change of classification so he will keep them apprised of any developments. Mr. Davis said the whole process from beginning to end would probably take about nine (9) months and one condition is the formation of a downtown development committee. He is hoping members of the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) would be interested in serving on this committee. The initial outreach has been positive.

Mr. Davis also has been working with the new owners of the Margaret Holland Inn to obtain tax credits that would help offset the \$44,000 they have spent on a fire alarm system along with other fire safety investments. We are still waiting to see if the \$35,000 grant application he helped Chris Mureta (Mureta's Meat Processing & Smokehouse) submit has been successful. Mr. Mureta would use these funds to expand his operations. Regarding the Housing Task Force, Mr. Davis said they would be holding their third meeting this Friday afternoon (01/13/23) at 2:00 p.m. He has asked Planning Commission members to attend as they will be discussing a soon-to-be released Housing Needs Analysis, which hasn't been done here for several years. Mr. Davis has reviewed the preliminary draft and found numerous inaccuracies about the local housing situation. There also will be a discussion of expanding the task force's membership and how best to recruit interested residents. There also will be someone present from the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, as local affordable housing projects probably would be done in conjunction with them.

Mr. Davis said he will be submitting two (2) separate Recreational Trail Grant applications to the State of Vermont before the end of this month. One would be on behalf of the municipality and would be used to supplement the existing Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) grant funds being used to revitalize the public trail systems in the Town Forest. The other application would be on behalf of Northfield schools and would be used to rehabilitate old trail systems near the schools in the Garvey Hill area that the cross-country teams use and also are used for basic recreational and educational purposes. It is unlikely both applications will be successful but he was encouraged by state grant administrators to submit both. Mr. Davis also has been working with Norwich University (NU) regarding their Shaw Outdoor Center. There have been suggestions that VOREC grant funds could be used to expand the parking area there in order to improve public access to the Town Forest trail system. As the Select Board members were informed previously, the Vermont Council for Rural Development (VCRD) will be holding a Site Visit in Northfield this year. The initial step is the formation of a local organizing group, which will hold its first meeting on Monday, January 30, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Room. Mr. Davis has been helping plan this event by contacting potential attendees, etc. Mr. Davis also has been developing an RFP in order to hire a contractor to perform the Wall Street to Water Street Pedestrian Walkway Scoping project. He hopes that this can be done as soon as possible so it can be done in conjunction with the trail work being done to better connect the NU campus with the downtown area via Freight Yard Way.

Regarding the Northfield Community Revolving Loan Fund (NCRLF) program, Mr. Davis has sent out many letters to local businesses to see if any are interested in participating in the program. So far there has been no interest, which Mr. Davis attributes to federal interest rate increases that do not make this a good time to borrow money. Mr. Davis said it might be time for the Select Board members to consider other uses for these economic development funds. The Select Board members agreed that this turned out to be the wrong time to create such a lending program. Board member Petty suggested reaching out to potential applicants to see what changes to the program might make it more attractive. Mr. Davis then discussed the Community Recovery and Revitalization Grant program through which the State of Vermont provides funding to businesses in order to encourage local economic development. Unfortunately, the state grant requires an eighty percent (80%) match amount, which limits its usefulness. Mr. Davis said that because of this, he knows of only one possible Northfield applicant for this grant program. Chair Maxwell then asked if the Select Board members had any questions for Mr. Davis.

Board member Stevens had no questions but did commend Mr. Davis for the excellent work he has been doing. It is good to see all the successful grant applications. Board member Goodrich also appreciated what Mr. Davis has been able to achieve. She was especially pleased with his ability to obtain public feedback regarding various community proposals. Chair Maxwell also thanked Mr. Davis for all he does for Northfield. He does hope that the NCDN members will be interested on serving on the Designated Downtown committee. Mr. Davis then concluded his presentation by thanking NU President Mark Anarumo for his great support for the Northfield community. Mr. Davis has had nothing but positive interactions with NU staff and he felt that was in large part due to President Anarumo's leadership on such matters.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **December 27, 2022 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **December 27, 2022 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. Board member Morse noted that he raised a strong objection during the meeting since a proper tickler file was not distributed in the Board packets, which he felt was a violation of approved municipal policy. He would like this objection included as part of the meeting minutes. The minutes will be revised accordingly. **Motion to approve the amended minutes passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #13-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #13-23 in the amount of \$280,274.15. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through December 25, 2022.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$111,489.46. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Prioritization of Select Board List of Short-Term Goals.** Chair Maxwell said he and Manager Schulz went through the list of twenty-one (21) short-term goals discussed at the Select Board Retreat (09/01/22) and reordered them by priority. The list was distributed to the other Select Board members and Chair Maxwell now would like a discussion regarding whether it is felt some items should be moved up or down on the list. Board member Morse would like the creation of an "Electronic Tickler File" (now #6) moved up on the priority list. Manager Schulz said addressing many of the items on the list is the works. Some have already been fully or partially achieved. For example, the first item on the priority list is "Review and Update Municipal Policies" and this will be an ongoing process with the Municipal Purchasing Policy already revised. Board member Petty would like this list to become a "living document" that is updated to show when certain goals have been achieved, who is responsible for addressing their achievement, whether grant funds could be used to hasten the process on certain items, whether American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) could be used for others, etc. Board member Petty had no major issues with the current priority list but said it could be reordered should some items become more urgent than others. Manager Schulz said he is committed to creating and updating an electronic tickler file now that he understands which format the Select Board members prefer. This tickler file will include the progress of current projects, the timelines of current and future projects, etc. Board member Morse felt it was important to have such documentation in place for the long-term in order to eliminate the chance that work previously done isn't reduplicated at the expense of additional cost and time. Manager Schulz said he has been breaking down the municipal projects into subcategories in order to better track their progress. As for the priority list, Board member Petty suggested that Select Board members with special interest in certain items could assist with some of the background research, etc. Chair Maxwell noted that the list of goals arising from the retreat also had items indicated as medium- and long-term goals. Priority lists for these items will be discussed at future meetings as he would like some direction from the other Select Board members on going forward with this process.

Board member Stevens produced his own list of prioritized short-term items. The major differences between his list and the one now under discussion is that he felt there should be more urgency in addressing pedestrian safety concerns in Northfield Falls; establishing a Memorandum of Understanding between the Northfield Police Department (NPD) and NU Security regarding their respective roles on the NU campus; and developing a sidewalk inventory and planning for sidewalk replacement/expansion. Board member Goodrich asked why municipal sewer expansion northward towards Northfield Falls isn't considered a short-term goal as is southward expansion along the Vermont Routes 12 and 12A corridor. Manager Schulz said the southern sewer expansion was engineered several years ago but the construction work was delayed due to lack of funding. The northward sewer expansion would have to be engineering from scratch and that will take a much longer time period. Chair Maxwell believes that we are on the right track with this discussion. The prioritized list of medium-term goals will be discussed at the next meeting (01/24/23).

- b. Approval of Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) 2023 Certificate of Highway Mileage.** Manager Schulz said VTrans requires each municipality to confirm whether it added or subtracted any town highway mileage during the previous calendar year. Failure to approve and submit the form can result in delays in receiving state funding for local road operations, etc. Manager Schulz confirmed that there were no changes in local highway mileage in the past year so the mileage total of Class 1, Class 2, Class 3, and State Highway remains at 85.355 miles. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve and sign the VTrans Certificate of Highway Mileage. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Zoning Permit Fees Revision.** During the Special Select Board Meeting held earlier this evening, Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki discussed the budget for the Planning/Zoning Department. Included in this discussion was his request to raise certain zoning permit fees, most of which he said hadn't been updated for over a decade. The new fee amounts would not take effect until July 1, 2023, which would give residents the opportunity to start new projects and/or come into compliance with old ones at the current rates. Mr. Osiecki said he will provide public notification about the new fee schedule before it comes into effect. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the list of zoning permit revisions as presented. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. FY 2023-2024 Town Budget Process.** Manager Schulz said the next budget meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 17, 2023. Revised budget pages based on previous budget conversations will be distributed beforehand.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Vermont Department of Taxes 2022 Equalization Study Results.** Manager Schulz said the municipality received this document a couple weeks ago in the mail. As has happened in many Vermont communities, higher house sale costs over the past couple years have reduced Northfield's Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) to 79.21%. A local CLA amount lower than 85% necessitates a town-wide reappraisal and Manager Schulz said this probably will occur during FY 2024-2025. The main problem is that since many Vermont towns are in the same situation, it might become difficult to hire a professional appraising firm as soon as we would like. Manager Schulz said the Listers will try to avoid any delays by developing and distributing an RFP as soon as possible. They also will start making public announcements about the process and the timeline for home inspections, etc.

- b. **New NPD Cruiser.** Manager Schulz said the new NPD vehicle, after numerous supply-chain delays, is expected to be delivered by the end of the week.
- c. **Highway Backhoe Problems.** Manager Schulz reported the backhoe recently and unexpectedly developed serious transmission problems. Chair Maxwell thought the Select Board members were told during a budget meeting last month that this backhoe was in good condition. This really is an untimely development.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Northfield Transfer Station & Recycling Depot.** Board member Morse noted the facility now has a trash compactor, which required the installation of three-phase power. He asked who paid for this. Manager Schulz said the municipality paid for this upgrade using Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) funds.
- b. **Smith Hill Road Cracks.** Board member Stevens was disappointed the road cracks were not sealed this past year as had been anticipated. Manager Schulz said the work could not be done before the end of construction season but will be done as soon as possible next spring.
- c. **ARPA Funds.** Chair Maxwell said once the Select Board members have approved the budget for the next fiscal year, they will need to turn their attention to the big question of determining how the \$1,900,000 in Northfield ARPA funds will be spent on local projects, etc. This decision needs to be made before the end of the 2024 calendar year and the funds have to be completely disbursed within two (2) years after that decision. Chair Maxwell was grateful for the large amount of work Merry Shernock and her outreach group did in holding several public meetings, conducting surveys, etc. to obtain local feedback on this. The Select Board members now have to make use of this valuable information and start setting priorities over the next few months.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy Hill: Lovers Lane Problems.** Mr. Hill said the large pothole Lynn Doney reported at a recent meeting still has not been fixed. It needs to be filled as soon as possible as it could cause serious car damage. Manager Schulz will contact Highway Foreman Trent Tucker to address the immediate problem while also looking for a long-term solution.

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a legal matter, contract negotiations, and personnel issues with Manager Schulz present for some but not all of the discussion. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:05 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 9:43 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 9:45 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 changed and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of January 24, 2023.