

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of September 23, 2025

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Charles Morse, Board members K. David Maxwell (absent), Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock (absent), and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Robert S. Young (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Stephen Coley (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Sally Davidson (Northfield Community Flag Project), Audi Guha (Vermont Digger), Kristina Ward, Sonja Rhodes, Pete Gove, Shawna Foran, Kris Matheson, Lorna Doney, Kristina Ward, William Wakefield, Joseph Pekol, Bethany Drum, Carolyn Stevens, Gerard LaVarnway, Sarah Path, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Morse called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Robert S. Young (VTrans Project Manager) & Stephen Coley (VTrans Resident Engineer): Sunny Brook Retaining Wall Replacement Project. (7:04 p.m.)**
Mr. Young said this would be an unusual project for VTrans as it would be the restoration of a retaining wall rather than bridge work. The project area is just south of Lovers Lane and there is a serious dip in Vermont Route 12 at this location due to the collapse of a riverside retaining wall. He added that this is an emergency recovery project and preliminary engineering plans have already been developed. This presentation is to inform Northfield residents that the project plans are being finalized and that the construction phase of the project will be advertised next spring so that it can be completed over next summer. Mr. Coley said just over nine hundred (900) vehicles pass by this location each day and temporary traffic signals will be put in place during the project to create alternating traffic along this section of state highway. No utilities will need to be relocated and VTrans will work with the nearby property owners to limit any inconvenience to them. Mr. Coley said there is a short bridge in the project area and VTrans isn't sure how old it is. Part of the nearby retaining wall failed in 2023 but the dip in the road was the result of an even earlier wall failure. A stability analysis of the bridge was conducted and the safety rating is between 1.0 and 1.3, which is marginal. The bridge will be left in place as the new retaining wall is installed in bedrock, which should eliminate the dip in the road. New guardrails will be installed along the roadside and some drainage improvement measures also will be put in place. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$3,500,000 and the State of Vermont will pay the full amount. The construction period should be about six (6) months (April-October 2026) and the new retaining wall should be good for about seventy-five (75) years. Board member Petty felt it was good that the dip in the road would finally be addressed and at no cost to Northfield taxpayers. Joseph Pekol lives near the project site and asked if local water sources would be affected by the project. Mr. Young said nearby residents would be contacted before the work begins and their wells would be monitored throughout the project. He did not anticipate any problems. Chair Morse asked about private septic systems in the area. Mr. Coley didn't think they would be impacted either as there are no plans to employ heavy equipment in this project. There would only be limited earth excavations in order to improve drainage near the new retaining wall. Board member Stevens said VTrans has found the current bridge to be somewhat deficient and he asked what should be done about this. Mr. Young said this particular bridge is owned by the Town of Northfield so it would be the municipality's responsibility to determine what should be done and how to pay for it. Board member Stevens did not see how the new retaining walls could be installed without adversely affecting the bridge abutments. Mr. Coley said the project engineering will try to minimize the impact. Mr. Young said this project's planning never included any intention to improve the existing bridge. The scope of this project is limited to installing the new retaining walls, some road drainage work, etc. Chair Morse expressed his gratitude for tonight's presentation and he looks forward to additional updates as the project progresses.

- b. Sally Davidson: Northfield Community Flag Project. (7:35 p.m.)** Ms. Davidson is co-chair (with Bill Passalacqua) of the Northfield Community Flag Project Committee. She spoke with the Select Board members last May (05/27/25) about a fundraising drive to purchase and install two hundred (200) US flags along Vermont Route 12 from South Northfield to Northfield Falls. Their original goal was to raise \$15,000 in private donations this year and they now have \$12,000. As for the remaining \$3,000, Ms. Davidson asked if the Select Board members would be willing to put some or all of this shortfall into the next Town Budget. Chair Morse said that certainly is a possibility. Another option would be for a special article could be added to the 2026 Town Meeting Warning so that Northfield voters could decide this matter themselves. Ms. Davidson said the ultimate goal of the committee is to become self-sustaining. Chair Morse said this matter will be discussed further during the upcoming budget sessions.
- c. Kristina Ward: Municipal Budget, Stony Brook Road Covered Bridge, etc. (7:42 p.m.)** Regarding the investigation into the April 16, 2025, employee complaint of discrimination and retaliation based on race, Ms. Ward asked how much the municipality spent on this investigation. Chair Morse said about \$16,000 not including legal expenses. Ms. Ward asked how this will be paid for. Manager Schulz said the bulk of the expense will be covered by property taxes. Ms. Ward then noted that the Stony Brook Covered Bridge is in need of some minor repairs. Manager Schulz said he has received some quotes for repairs to all the covered bridges but has been having a hard time finding a contractor to perform the work. Returning to the investigation, Ms. Ward asked how the private investigating firm (Queen City, P.I.) was chosen. Chair Morse said the Select Board members asked the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) for recommendations. One firm VLCT that recommended was unable to perform the work themselves but did provide a referral to Queen City, P.I., which has had a considerable amount of experience in such investigations. Chair Morse believes they did a good job in this matter. The specifics of the investigation itself will remain confidential. Ms. Ward then asked why Lynn Doney, who was dismissed from the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) after directing public remarks deemed racist at Police Chief Pierre Gomez at a Select Board meeting (04/08/25), was recently allowed to take part in Labor Day Weekend activities in conjunction with NAS members. Manager Schulz said Mr. Doney is no longer a municipal employee but he does remain a member of Northfield Ambulance Volunteers, Inc. (NAVI), which is a non-profit organization that provides support to NAS. Manager Schulz said this matter is being reviewed by attorneys in order to resolve this and thus eliminate any future public confusion on this matter. Ms. Ward said there is another part-time NAS member who has posted racist material on a social media website. Manager Schulz asked Ms. Ward provide him with additional information and he will determine whether this is something the municipality should address.
- d. Sonja Rhodes: Central Street Halloween Night Closure. (7:59 p.m.)** Ms. Rhodes wanted to thank the Select Board members for closing Central Street from through traffic last Halloween night from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. She felt this worked out very well in protecting the younger trick-or-treaters but Ms. Rhodes also believes this might work better if the closure was extended until 8:00 p.m. They usually get over three hundred (300) trick-or-treaters and she is especially concerned about the smaller ones as the night gets darker. Board member Petty heard a lot of compliments after last year's event and she would support extending the road closure for another hour. Ms. Davidson helps run the Trunk-or-Treat on the Common each Halloween night and she agreed that the Central Street road closure did a great deal to promote pedestrian safety in and around the Common last year.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. September 9, 2025 (Regular Meeting). (8:07 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #06-26 & #06-26A-C. (8:08 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #06-26 & #06-26A-C in the amount of \$2,194,532.35. It was noted that of the total warrant amount, \$1,462,500 represented property taxes collected by the municipality and later forwarded to the Paine Mountain School District. Board member Stevens asked about a “grit pump” purchase for the wastewater treatment facility. Manager Schulz said a pump did fail after about twenty (20) years of service and had to be replaced. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**
- b. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through September 14, 2025. (8:12 p.m.)** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$114,492.98. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge Repairs Change Order. (8:13 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said a bridge repair contractor (Vermont Heavy Timber) has been making repairs on the Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge over the past few weeks. He was recently informed by email that the contractor was proposing a change order in order to address a significant amount of support beam rot that had been discovered during the repairs. Unfortunately, the contractor went forward with the additional work before Manager Schulz had the opportunity to either approve or reject the change order. The added cost of the new work is \$65,000 and there is some question whether the municipality should be held responsible for this added expense. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the change order in the amount of \$65,000. Board member Petty is not pleased that the contractor performed the additional work without expressed permission from the municipality. This is the result of very poor communication. Board member Stevens felt the additional work on the bridge was perhaps necessary in the long run. He felt it might be useful to negotiate with the contractor regarding the additional cost. Chair Morse would like the original work contract reviewed as well as the normal process for unauthorized change orders. The motion then was tabled until the next meeting (10/14/25) when it is likely the full complement of Select Board members will be present.
- b. **Code of Ethics Ordinance Enforcement. (8:25 p.m.)** Manager Schulz noted a local ordinance was required in order to enforce the Municipal Code of Ethics that came into effect earlier this year. As part of the ordinance approval process, a public hearing will need to be held beforehand. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize warning a public hearing in order to approve a Code of Ethics Ordinance. Board member Petty noted the document now under review is based on a VLCT model policy and some changes will need to be made to have it conform to Northfield conditions. In addition, the role of “Designated Complaint Recipient” needs to be further clarified as some confusion remains regarding that position’s actual responsibilities. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**
- c. **Dollar General Land Donation. (8:38 p.m.)** Manager Schulz has been working with Dollar General in order to obtain either an easement or a land donation in order to facilitate the Cross Brothers Dam Removal as well as the proposed creation of a Riverwalk path along the Dog River. After much conversation and legal delay, Dollar General has decided to donate the property and has provided a “Real Estate Donation Agreement” for Select Board approval. Manager Schulz has no objections to the agreement wording and is now asking for Select Board authorization to sign it. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to authorize Manager Schulz to sign the land donation agreement. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

VII. TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT

- a. **Main Street Waterline Replacement Project. (8:43 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the waterline installation on South Main Street is nearly complete. The work north of the Main Street Bridge also is progressing and an additional crew was brought in for the work beyond Prospect Street on Byam Hill, Hill Street, etc. The contractor is confident that the new waterline to the Cheney Field reservoir will be finished this year.

- b. **Cheney Field Reservoir Project. (8:46 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the cement has been poured for the floor and side panels for the new reservoir. The new reservoir tank should be in place this fall but the construction site restoration probably will not be done until next spring.
- c. **Lovers Lane. (8:50 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said some ledge was found where the road was being reconstructed for better drainage and had to be removed. State grant funds are paying for this project and it should be completed within the next couple of weeks.
- d. **Norwich University Land Swap. (8:50 p.m.)** The deeds are now being reviewed for a possible land switch involving Center Park and a parcel near the wellfield. This matter will be further discussed at the next regular meeting.
- e. **Roadside Leaf Collection. (8:50 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said the roadside leaf collection will start on Monday, October 13, 2025 and will conclude the week before Thanksgiving.
- f. **Northfield Public Water Supply. (8:51 p.m.)** Manager Schulz said that due to the three (3) wells located in our wellfield off Vermont Route 12A, the Northfield water supply is not in any real danger despite statewide drought conditions. Some moderate water conservation measures have been taken, such as turning off the Common Fountain and postponing hydrant flushing until next spring, and residents are asked to make voluntary water use reductions themselves, i.e. shorter showers, etc.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Culvert Inventory. (8:52 p.m.)** Board member Stevens asked about the culvert inventory to be conducted by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC). Manager Schulz will contact CVRPC and try to get an update about the timing.
- b. **Vine Street Pedestrian Bridge. (8:54 p.m.)** Board member Stevens asked about the planned repairs for this footbridge. Manager Schulz has not heard back from the company that provided the original estimates for the work to be done so he will contact other potential contractors.
- c. **Dole Hill Road Condition. (8:55 p.m.)** Chair Morse would like this road graded as it is in very poor condition. Manager Schulz said the work would be done over the next couple of weeks.
- d. **"Night on the Common." (8:59 p.m.)** Chair Morse said a lot of useful information was provided during tonight's event. He was particularly impressed by a new weatherization program that could provide great benefits for Northfield residents.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy Hill: Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge Change Order.** Mr. Hill was very disgusted by the behavior of the Vermont Heavy Timber contractor in going forward with the additional repair work before the change order request had been approved by the municipality. He felt the contractor certainly should have known better not to proceed like this and Mr. Hill doesn't feel the municipality owes them another nickel.

X. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a personnel issue without Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:15 p.m.

Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:34 p.m. No action was taken.

XI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to adjourn. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at: https://youtu.be/3VC_J0Lygu0

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of October 14, 2025.