

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN  
BUDGET MEETING #4  
Minutes of December 15, 2016**

- I. **ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Nathan Freeman, Matthew Gadbois, and Kenneth W. Goslant. Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Fire Chief Peter J. DeMasi, and Ambulance Chief Lawton Rutter.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

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

III. **BUDGET WORK SESSION**

**Fire Department Expenditures.** Fire Chief Peter J. DeMasi briefly discussed the proposed FY 2017/2018 budget for his department, which is 6.6% higher than last year's. The main increases are for dispatching costs and building maintenance. Selectman Freeman noted that the department's vehicle maintenance budget has been exceeded in recent years and asked if it should be increased. Chief DeMasi thought this might be a good idea. There also was a suggestion to split off the funds allocated for chemical purchases from the account for general department supplies. Chief DeMasi also would like to reinstate the account that covers the cost of firefighters getting preventative shots for hepatitis, etc. Manager Schulz asked how many Fire Department volunteers there were there at this time. Chief DeMasi said about twenty-three (23). This number has proved fairly steady in recent years.

**Fire Department Capital Improvement Plan.** Chief DeMasi noted that there is about \$10,000 in the building improvements account with \$2,000 to be added each coming year. Selectman Goslant asked what repairs were needed. Chief DeMasi said some windows needed to be replaced and there were some rotting wood issues. Selectman Goslant felt that some of the current account balance should have been used to address these concerns earlier. Chair Maxwell would like a repair priority list developed and the problems solved. Selectman Gadbois suggested that there might be grant funds available to help maintain fire stations. Chair Maxwell noted that there is a proposal to expand and renovate the Northfield Fire Station to create a consolidated facility for the Northfield Fire Department and Ambulance Service. It should be decided soon whether or not this actually will occur. If not, there should be no delay in addressing the Fire Station's deferred maintenance. Selectman Goslant asked if grant money was available for this proposed consolidation. Manager Schulz said fund funds already had been awarded for a feasibility study. The engineer now is completing his report, which should be available before the end of this budget process. Ambulance Chief Lawton Rutter said that there were further grant opportunities available through USDA Rural Development and these have sliding scales for amounts and local matches based upon local population, median income, etc.

**Fire Department Capital Equipment Plan.** Chief DeMasi noted there were accounts for the scheduled replacement of hoses, pumps, pagers, two-way radios, air pacs, etc. There also are separate accounts for the scheduled replacement of the thermal imaging camera and each of the department's vehicles, i.e., brush truck, aerial ladder truck, and pumper trucks. He doesn't believe the projected vehicle lifespans can be stretched much further. Chief DeMasi does explore all grant opportunities for vehicle replacement but has not been too successful in the past because the Northfield community often doesn't meet grant criteria for population size and fire call volume. Selectman Goslant is disappointed that providing fire coverage to a local university doesn't help with securing grant funds. Selectman Gadbois believes that fire trucks are being built much better in recent years so we might be able to get an extra year or two out of them. Chief DeMasi noted that it is very difficult to certify fire trucks that have been in service for more than twenty (20) years.

Chair Maxwell and other Select Board members then commended Chief DeMasi for his budget presentation tonight and his continued excellent leadership of the Northfield Fire Department.

**Ambulance Service Revenues.** Chief Rutter said he anticipates steady increases in the Ambulance Service's revenue stream in coming years. The FY 2017/2018 budget expects \$450,000 in revenue from emergency and non-emergency calls. Another \$16,400 comes from the per capita amounts charged Roxbury and Berlin for ambulance coverage. Manager Schulz felt this amount could be raised slightly. Chief Rutter agreed but cautioned that if the per capita amount was set too high, these communities might seek cheaper options. He added that coverage of Roxbury and West Berlin provided a low percentage of the total call volume. Chair Maxwell asked if the fee schedule for ambulance responses, stand-by coverage, providing oxygen, etc. was where it should be. Chief Rutter said that the schedule had been revised fairly recently and believes that it is accurate. However, he will be keeping track of the revenue stream in case further revision is required.

**Ambulance Service Expenditures.** Chief Rutter said there would be a slight increase (11.1%) in personnel costs mainly due to the recent increase in the state minimum wage, which will affect part-time pay. There are other compensation increases as he doesn't want to lose some of his better trained EMTs to other regional services. The current roster is about forty-five (45) but a number of these responders also have other employment with other ambulance services. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio does not feel there should be an expectation that the Northfield Ambulance Service must be entirely funded by its revenue. She felt that it is important to have this service in place for the community as it protects each and every individual whether or not he/she personally uses it or not. Ms. Baroffio thus has no objection to local taxes being used to support its continued operation. Chief Rutter believes his department can be largely (but not completely) self-sustaining. He added that dispatching costs through Capital West have gone up again but nothing that can be done about this. Chief Rutter believes paramedic intercept expenses are under control even though a large bill from Barre Ambulance recently gave the Select Board a bad impression. This invoice covered a three (3) month period so it seemed worse than it was. Chief Rutter added that the outsourcing of ambulance billing has been in place less than a year but already is showing benefits. There is a new Medicaid tax in the budget but this should be offset by revenue. The costs of medical supplies does go up each year as do vehicle maintenance expenses as the fleet gets older. Selectman Goslant looked at budgets from previous years and thought that these increases were a bit lower than in the past.

**Ambulance Service Capital Improvement Plan.** Chief Rutter said that the monies in the building improvements funds were being used to maintain the current facility on Dog River Road, which is shared with the Highway Department. There are a number of problems with the building so regular maintenance is required. The volunteers do much of the work themselves in order to keep costs down. There also is an account for the local match amount for the feasibility study for the proposed combined Fire-Ambulance facility on Wall Street.

**Ambulance Service Capital Equipment Plan.** Chief Rutter noted there are various accounts for the scheduled replacement of equipment (defibrillators, two-way radios, stretchers, jaws-of-life, etc.) as well as for the vehicle fleet. He would like to see the expected lifespan for ambulance units set at eight (8) years rather than ten (10) because of much higher maintenance costs the final two years, lower trade-in value, etc. Chief Rutter also recommends an earlier remount than had been planned of the 2008 ambulance unit for the same reasons. Selectman Goslant asked if the old chassis could be reused by another department. Chief Rutter would advise against it due to recent costly repairs. Selectman Goslant asked if earlier replacement of the ambulance units might increase revenue with a higher call volume. Chair Maxwell did not see a correlation between the two. Chief Rutter said that might be a reduction in the number of days an ambulance unit might be out of service and therefore made unavailable for non-emergency transfers, stand-by coverage, etc. Selectman Doney, who serves as a Northfield Ambulance EMT, noted that mileage readings are not always the best measure of an ambulance unit's usage as there are many idle times when the unit is kept running at the side of a road during an emergency call. He felt that it might be a good idea to also track usage hours in the future.

Chair Maxwell and the other Select Board members then thanked Chief Rutter for his budget presentation and for the good work that he provides throughout the year.

The Select Board confirmed the upcoming budget meeting schedule. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 20, 2016 at 6:00 p.m. However, the meeting that had been scheduled for Thursday, December 22, 2016 has been cancelled. The budget meetings will resume in early 2017.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled).** There was none.

**V. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Jeffrey Schulz*

Jeffrey Schulz, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 10, 2017.