

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN
BUDGET MEETING #5
Minutes of December 20, 2016

- I. **ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Selectmen Lynn Doney (absent), Nathan Freeman, Matthew Gadbois, and Kenneth W. Goslant. Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Highway Foreman Trent Tucker, Pamela Knox (Conservation Commission), Laura Hill-Eubanks (Conservation Commission), Nathaniel Miller (Conservation Commission), Karen Grace (Brown Public Library Board of Trustees), and John Stevens (Brown Public Library Board of Trustees).

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

II. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):**

- a. **Pam Knox, Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC): Paine Mountain Trail Improvements.** Ms. Knox is the NCC Chair and she announced that Northfield received an \$11,000 grant to install improvements on the Paine Mountain Trail. Among other items, an outside agency will come in and install four "bridges" that will span wet areas along the trail. Selectman Gadbois asked if the trail had been GPS mapped. Ms. Knox said it had and there were plans to have print copies available at various locations around town. Chair Maxwell asked if this project would have any impact on the municipal budget. Manager Schulz said there was no local match amount for the grant but there would be future costs to maintain the improvements. Ms. Knox noted that there is a grant stipulation that if the trail should be shut down within ten (10) years, the grant monies would have to be returned. She doesn't anticipate this happening. Ms. Knox then requested that the NCC be budgeted \$200 each year to cover the cost of photocopies, attending conferences, etc. The NCC members have been covering these expenses themselves. Manager Schulz and the other Select Board members thought this was reasonable. There already is a \$100 annual NCC operating expenses budget so this account will be increased to \$200 in the next fiscal year.

Ms. Knox also would like the Select Board's assistance in creating a Conservation Fund. NCC member Nathaniel Miller explained that the plan is to have an article on the Town Meeting warning to have Northfield voters authorize its establishment. If approved, the Conservation Fund would be used to solicit private donations and apply for grant funds. The long-term plan is to expand the Town Forest by purchasing adjoining (and perhaps non-adjoining) properties. The funds also could be used to help maintain the existing Town Forest. Chair Maxwell asked if it might not be better for the NCC to set up a 501 (3)(c) nonprofit so that donations would be tax-deductible. NCC member Laura Hill-Eubanks noted that most Vermont conservation commissions have set up reserve fund accounts in order to solicit and expend funds. She also felt that setting up a 501 (3)(c) would create a lot of administrative work as well as liability issues for the NCC. Ms. Hill-Eubanks also believes that since the Town of Northfield is an established non-profit organization, any donations to the Conservation Fund should be tax-deductible. Chair Maxwell asked about the process for getting this article on the warning. Manager Schulz said there were two options: the Select Board could put the article directly on the warning or a petition could be circulated. There was no objection from the Select Board members to putting the article on the warning without the need for a petition.

III. **BUDGET WORK SESSION**

Brown Public Library (BPL) Operations. Present tonight are BPL Board of Trustee members John Stevens (Treasurer) and Karen Grace (Chair). Mr. Stevens said that the amount provided in recent years to fund library operations has been set at about \$103,100 but the BPL Trustees are asking for an additional \$2,262 in the coming fiscal year, which would bring the amount to \$136,680. He added that the BPL Trustees have made every effort to reduce expenses in the past year, such as reducing the number of staff paid hours from 36 to 28 each week. Volunteers have made up the shortfall. Selectman Gadbois asked what the revenue source "Annual Appeal" was. Mr. Stevens said that at the end of each year, the BPL send out fundraising letters seeking donations to help fund operations. In past years, the BPL estimated the amount to be received at about \$10,000 but now are anticipating a more accurate figure of \$5,000. Mr. Stevens added that the BPL lost one of its more generous supporters when Barry Chouinard passed away a couple months ago. Each year, Mr. Chouinard would make a \$5,000 individual contribution. Chair Maxwell asked other steps have been taken to reduce expenses. Mr. Stevens said that the new computers that had been purchased require far fewer service calls than the old ones.

Chair Maxwell asked about the insurance commercial package. Mr. Stevens said this covers all the books and other library materials as well as worker's compensation. Chair Maxwell asked if the BPL could be included in the municipality's insurance coverage through VLCT. Manager Schulz will check on this. Selectman Gadbois asked if the BPL staff have been applying for grant funds. Mr. Stevens said that this has not happened in the past but Library Director Sherri Brickey recently took part on a grant-writing workshop so there should be grant applications in the future.

Chair Maxwell then asked about the library's endowment fund. Mr. Stevens said the endowment was about \$100,000 in 1990 and is now at \$206,000. There was a stipulation that the principle could not be touched and the fund could only be used for library operations. The BPL Trustees plan to use \$15,500 from the endowment in the next fiscal year. These funds cannot be used for major building renovations. Chair Maxwell asked how the new roof over the library extension was holding up. Mr. Stevens said it is in great condition. He added that an expert came today to look over some areas with suspected mold problems. He said that the problem wasn't serious as it looked. He did recommend having a dehumidifier run during the summer months to prevent future troubles. Selectman Freeman asked how the heating/cooling system is working. Mr. Stevens would like someone to work on it as it is not operating as designed. Manager Schulz said he has been working with Control Tech to develop a maintenance schedule for all the municipal facilities.

Library/Historical Society Building Expenditures. Manager Schulz said every effort has been made to keep any budget increases to a minimum. As requested, he contacted the elevator maintenance company to cut the number of inspections from quarterly to semi-annual. Heating fuel has been a major expense in the past but these costs seem to have stabilized. Manager Schulz said he will be working next on reducing janitorial expenses by going out to bid for a new contract. Chair Maxwell had mentioned at a previous meeting that he may want to consider bring this in-house

Library/Historical Society Building Capital Improvement Plan. Manager Schulz noted there is about \$8,500 in the building improvements account with additional funding of \$2,500 in coming years. There are no major plans to use these funds in the near future except for painting the building exterior and repairing any problems found in the process. The roof repair fund was depleted by the work done recently so this fund will need to be replenished in future years. There will be a grant application to the state's historic structure program but there is a lot of competition for these monies.

Highway Department Expenditures. Manager Schulz said a 2.6% increase in Personnel Services was in the proposed FY 2017/2018 budget due to scheduled pay and benefit rises in the municipal employee union contract. Chair Maxwell asked Highway Foreman Trent Tucker if he was satisfied with the current level of staffing. Mr. Tucker said he was. As for Contract Services, Manager Schulz proposes an increase in the tree removal budget from \$2,000 to \$5,000. There are a number of problem trees in the downtown and former Village area that need to be addressed. Selectman Goslant hopes that Tree Warden Russ Barrett will be a part of this process since he was very helpful when the backroads were trimmed last year. Manager Schulz confirmed that Mr. Barrett would be involved. He added that contracted mowing has been removed from the budget since that has been brought in-house. Mr. Tucker verified that someone in his department would be available to do this when needed. Selectman Goslant still has concerns about taking a highway employee away from regular road maintenance. Mr. Tucker said this wasn't a problem this past summer. As for Administrative costs, Manager Schulz said there would be 5.7% increase that was mainly due to the installation of a new phone system. Otherwise, costs have been stable. Chair Maxwell noted the municipality gets its vehicle insurance through VLCT and asked if this was a competitive price. Manager Schulz said that he had priced this out a few years and found that their rates have remained steady over time. The Materials/Supply account projects a 4.2% increase that is largely due to raising the amount for sand/gravel from \$54,000 to \$62,000. Mr. Tucker feels the latter amount more accurately reflects the cost of gravelling thirty-eight (38) miles of backroads. Selectman Goslant thinks the sand budget could be reduced in coming years. Manager Schulz said the Road Culvert account would be increased from \$6,000 to \$10,000 as there are plans to install about fourteen (14) culverts next summer. Chair Maxwell asked if spare culverts were kept on hand in case of emergencies. Mr. Tucker said there usually were about four (4) spares at the Town Garage but added that ordering new ones can be done rather quickly. Manager Schulz stated that about \$3,500 was being put into the small tools account so that the new mechanic could purchase some needed items.

Highway Department Capital Improvement Plan. Chair Maxwell noted there is \$10,400 in the buildings improvements fund with an additional \$2000 each coming year. He asked if this was used for general maintenance. Manager Schulz confirmed that it would be along with any minor repairs that might come up. Mr. Tucker suggested that some of the funds could be used to replace some of the old insulation in order to cut down on heating costs. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio added that should the Ambulance Service move out of their section of the building (as has been proposed), the structure could be reconfigured to cut heating costs.

Manager Schulz said the guardrails account now has a balance of about \$20,000 with plans to add another \$5,000 each year. There are a number of steep roads that should have guardrails either installed or replaced. There also are state grant funds available that CVRPC can help acquire to install guardrails on high risk roads. Mr. Tucker said it would cost about \$16,000 to put new guardrails on Lovers Lane alone. Selectman Gadbois noted \$118,000 in the bridges account and asked if that could be used for repairing/replacing the now-closed Rabbit Hollow Road Bridge. Manager Schulz already has received proposals to provide temporary fixes to the bridge. Mr. Tucker would like to hold off on this until the ongoing dispute with Central Vermont Railroad (CVRR) over bridge ownership has been resolved. Manager Schulz said local attorney William Smith is researching this matter further. Selectman Goslant noted that CVRR has funded bridge repairs in the past so this should not be too complicated a decision. Manager Schulz said CVRR now denies any ownership or responsibility. Chair Maxwell would like bridge ownership determined before any negotiations with CVRR about who will pay how much for bridge repairs or replacement. Selectman Goslant does not want this dragged out forever but added that CVRR apparently has nothing to lose by further delay.

Chair Maxwell noted that Northfield has a number of historic covered bridges and asked about their condition. Mr. Tucker said sometimes heavy trucks going through them causes some minor damage but otherwise they are in good condition. Selectman Goslant asked if there were grant programs available to preserve such historic structures. Manager Schulz said there were but there was a lot of competition and not a lot of funding available. There is about \$24,000 in the ledge removal fund and Manager Schulz has been working with Mr. Tucker to develop a priority list on possible sites such as Turkey Hill, Winch Hill, etc. Mr. Tucker said special ledge removal equipment would have to be rented but once in Northfield could be used to address any concerns. Chair Maxwell saw there was about \$20,000 in the sign and post account. Manager Schulz said that the municipality has enough funds on hand to meet current needs. When road signs are damaged or disappeared, they are replaced with new ones that meet the updated VTrans requirements. Wholesale replacement is not required.

Manager Schulz said there is about \$15,000 in the retaining wall budget but this will not be enough to fix the deteriorating wall on Elm Street. Mr. Tucker suggested that it might be possible to install steel sheeting there at a lower cost than wall replacement. It would not be very attractive but it would last a long time. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board was waiting for Manager Schulz to provide quotes for this project as well as the financing options. Selectman Goslant noted that there are other retaining walls around town that also need some attention including the one on Pearl Street.

Manager Schulz said the sidewalks on a number of streets are in bad condition. There is about \$56,000 in the current account and he is proposing to add \$10,000 each future year. Chair Maxwell said there needs to be a discussion sometime on whether to repair or remove the crumbling sidewalk on the east side of Central Street. There is a new sidewalk on the west side that was part of the latest water main replacement project so perhaps the street does not need sidewalks on both sides. Selectman Goslant felt there was a need to better maintain sidewalks throughout the year. Selectman Freeman believes good sidewalks made for a more attractive and vibrant community. There should be state or federal grant money available to repair or extend our sidewalk system. He would like to see the sidewalks eventually extended northward towards Northfield Falls and southward towards Norwich University. Chair Maxwell would like a detailed plan for the municipal sidewalks in the near future.

Manager Schulz said there is about \$17,000 in the drainage account with plans to add another \$10,000 the next fiscal year. There are bad drainage problems on Slate Avenue that need to be resolved soon. The plan is to redirect stormwater into the drain system leading to water retention structure behind Hollard Place. Chair Maxwell noted there is \$17,000 in the account for Northfield Center draining project, which is not planned at this time. He wanted to know if this project ever would get done and if it will not, he would like to seek voter authorization to transfer these funds elsewhere. Manager Schulz said that the municipality received a \$175,000 grant for the Smith Hill Culvert project so the \$20,000 local match amount has been set aside in this budget.

Manager Schulz said the proposed budget would raise the amount for the RSMS program from \$75,000 to \$150,000 in the coming fiscal year. Most of this amount would be spent on paving so a priority list will need to be drawn up. Selectman Goslant noted that it cost \$100,000 this year to repave only one-third of Union Brook Road. Selectman Freeman thought it might be a good time to consider a major overhaul of roads in Northfield. Selectman Goslant feared this might put Northfield back at the top of the heaviest taxed communities in Vermont. Chair Maxwell thought we were now eighth on the list.

Ms. Baroffio noted there were three (3) past loans for the RSMS program that would be coming off the books in the next few years. Perhaps another large note could be obtained as these are paid off. She added that much of these loan amounts were spent building up the backroads through the mat and gravel program. Selectman Goslant thought that it might be a good idea to revive the idea of privatizing some of the one-, two-, and three-house roads. Chair Maxwell would like the Highway Committee to discuss this first.

Selectman Freeman left at this time.

Highway Department Capital Equipment Plan. Manager Schulz said the proposed budget would have an increase of about \$14,000 in order to maintain the previously agreed upon vehicle maintenance schedule. He added that whether to replace the street sweeper remains a hot topic. The Highway Committee had discussed the possibility of sub-contracting out street sweeping after the current vehicle wears out. Chair Maxwell favors this plan in general but would like some evidence that it really would be cost-effective when the time comes. Ms. Baroffio noted there were shortfalls in some of the vehicle replacement accounts and suggested that some of the Highway Department surplus operating funds could be used to bridge the gaps. There followed a brief discussion over whether the vehicle replacement schedule should be kept as is. No changes were made at this time. Selectman Goslant noted that Mr. Tucker has been Highway Foreman for less than a year so he might have a better picture of his departmental needs once he has a full year under his belt.

Grounds/Parks/Facilities Expenditures. Manager Schulz said that the only change was to include \$5,000 in order to hire a part-time summer employee to mow the fields, etc. Mr. Tucker believes that one of the Highway Department crew might be able to do this. Chair Maxwell wanted to defer a final decision on this.

Grounds/Parks/Facilities Capital Improvement Fund. Manager Schulz said the proposed budget would add \$2,000 to the Equipment/Facility Repair account. There also would be \$3,880 in the budget to pay for the new waterline from King Street to the municipal pool. There already is about \$7,000 in the account for designing/updating the parks and Manager Schulz would like a proposal from the Recreation Committee on how best to use these funds.

Grounds/Parks/Facilities Capital Equipment Fund. Manager Schulz said there were no new funds proposed in the next fiscal year budget but money will need to be set aside in future years to replace riding mowers, etc. Selectman Gadbois asked if funds should be put in the Picnic Tables account, which now only has a \$3 balance. Ms. Baroffio noted that there are sufficient funds in the aforementioned CIP account for park updates and new picnic tables could come out of this. She doesn't want to create another separate account if not needed. Selectman Goslant, who serves at the Select Board's liaison to the Recreation Committee, said the Committee would be working on a priority list in the near future.

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

V. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to adjourn. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:23 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.