

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN
BUDGET MEETING #6
Minutes of January 3, 2017

- 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 and Finance Director Laurie Baroffio.

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

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

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

Town General Revenue. There was a discussion of raising the per capita charge to Berlin and Roxbury for ambulance coverage, which currently is \$17 per resident. The initial proposal was to raise the rate to \$28 for Berlin and \$24 for Roxbury, with the latter rate raised to \$28 in FY 2018/2019. After some Select Board members expressed concerns that these communities might seek less expensive coverage elsewhere, Chair Maxwell recommended raising the per capita charge for both Berlin and Roxbury to \$25 per resident. This would bring in an estimated \$8,000 in additional revenue in FY 2017/2018. This issue would be revisited next year with the expectation that the per capita charge would be raised again to \$28. As for ambulance fees themselves, there is an increase in projected revenue from \$412,000 to \$450,000 due to last year's revised fee schedule, expanded call volume, etc. Selectman Goslant suggested that the charge for stand-by services (\$75) be increased. Chair Maxwell would like additional information on this before making any changes to the fee schedule approved last summer.

Chair Maxwell asked what the mechanic fees were. Ms. Baroffio said that is what the municipality changes the various departments with vehicles for the mechanic's services. Selectman Goslant felt that now that the municipality has merged it might be a good idea to phase this out and reduce bookkeeping costs. Ms. Baroffio said having this provided the ability to track the mechanic's work across departments. This number has fluctuated in recent years due to turnover in this position.

Chair Maxwell asked if the municipality was charging enough for residents and non-residents to use the municipal pool during the two months it operates each summer. Manager Schulz said the fee schedule is evaluated each year before the pool opens to make sure it is comparable to what is being charged in neighboring communities. Selectman Goslant said that Northfield's pool is of such exceptional quality that perhaps we should charge a little bit more. He still is upset that there is a sizable sewer bill when the pool is drained at the end of the season. Chair Maxwell would like the Pool Director to look into developing additional programs that could generate additional revenue. At present, the revenue generated through daily and season fees covers only about twenty percent (20%) of the operating costs and he would like this to change. Selectman Goslant said the Recreation Committee has plans to upgrade Memorial Park and if more people make use of it during the summer, they might decide to take advantage of the nearby pool as well.

Manager Schulz noted that the bookkeeping fee has gone up slightly. Ms. Baroffio said that this was because the inter-company charges policy has not changed since last year. Selectman Gadbois wants to know if the municipality is charging enough for cemetery lots. Chair Maxwell recently learned that the municipality charges about sixty-three percent (63%) less than what Norwich University does for its cemetery on Dole Hill. Manager Schulz felt Northfield's rates are about the same as those of surrounding communities. Selectman Goslant noted cemetery revenue in general has gone way down in recent years as cremation has become a more common option. Chair Maxwell thought it would be a good idea to look at raising the cemetery plot and internment rates at some point. This may become more crucial as available cemetery space decreases. Selectman Goslant believes that there is room for some expansion in the public cemeteries. He also would some maintenance issues addressed this coming year, i.e. overgrown trees, etc.

The Select Board then discussed the amount charged to the Water Department for using the Highway Department's backhoe and dump truck. Chair Maxwell said that the question of whether the proper amount was being reimbursed has been around for some time and he would like it finally resolved with a management recommendation. He felt that the same rate should be charged as if the Water Department rented the equipment from a private company. Selectman Goslant also does not believe that the School District is being charged enough (\$1,500) for the amount of salt it takes from the Town's salt shed. Chair Maxwell would like the amount taken each time well documented in order to ensure that there is no discrepancy. Manager Schulz has been working with the School Superintendent in order to establish some accountability in this matter.

Support Services Expenditures. Manager Schulz said this department includes the funding of outside agencies as well as the amount the municipality pays for legal services. Selectman Freeman noted that the amount budgeted for legal services had been exceeded repeatedly in recent years. He asked if this budget should be increased above the proposed \$15,000. Manager Schulz noted tax sales of foreclosed properties generated legal bills that were offset later when the properties were sold. Chair Maxwell agreed that some years will be worse than others and there is no predicting when expensive legal issues will arise. Selectman Freeman wondered if the current dispute with the Central Vermont Railroad (CVRR) over ownership of the now-closed Rabbit Hollow Road Bridge would result in hefty legal bills. Manager Schulz doubted this would happen as the final decision would be made by the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) rather than through the court system. Chair Maxwell would like some confirmation at the next budget meeting on whether the \$15,000 figure is acceptable or if it should be raised to \$20,000 or \$25,000.

Manager Schulz noted that the cost of producing the Town Report has stabilized since the municipality no longer delivers a copy to each household and thereby has reduced the number of copies ordered from the printer. He added that the municipality also is saving a considerable amount in the operation of the Transfer Station/ Recycling Center due to rescinding its membership in the Mad River Resource Management Alliance (MRRMA) and joining the Mountain Alliance.

Chair Maxwell would like someone from Green Mountain Transit Agency (GMTA) to come before the Select Board and defend the annual \$21,000 funding article on the Town Warning in order to support the operation of the Northfield-Montpelier Commuter Bus. He wondered if the average ridership is sufficient to justify the taxpayers subsidizing this service. There is a separate \$3,350 payment to GMTA that covers the cost of providing public transportation for senior citizens, the disabled, etc. and Chair Maxwell has no problem with this expense.

Planning/Zoning Expenditures. Manager Schulz noted that the Zoning Administrator position has been vacant since Michele Braun resigned almost two years ago. He has been serving in an interim capacity since then. However, there now seems to be a qualified candidate who is interested in filling the position. Selectman Freeman felt it was important to have someone in place. Manager Schulz said that this is a part-time position without benefits so it has been difficult to attract a qualified candidate. Selectman Freeman would prefer someone who can work on economic develop issues with planning and grant-writing experience. Chair Maxwell felt that might not be possible but having a Zoning Administrator on board would at least free up some of Manager Schulz's time so he perhaps can work on economic development matters himself.

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

V. ADJOURNMENT. Without objection, the Board adjourned at 7:55 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 24, 2017.