

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN
BUDGET MEETING #9
Minutes of January 12, 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, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Josh Sanders, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

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

III. DISCUSSION

- a. SunShot Solar Energy Educational Grant Application.** At the last Select Board regular meeting (01/10/17), Nicolas Laskovski had requested a letter of support for this grant application. There was no objection from Select Board members as this grant would be no costs or obligations to the municipality. However, Selectman Gadbois felt this request first should go through the Electric Utility Commission. Manager Schulz will discuss this matter further with Stephen Fitzhugh, who is a technical advisor for the Northfield Electric Department as well as the chair of the Electric Utility Commission. It was noted that Manager Schulz had the authority to sign this letter on his own.
- b. Police Chief Search Committee.** Josh Sanders watched Tuesday night's Select Board meeting at which four (4) members of the public were appointed to this committee. Mr. Sanders has not submitted a letter of interest but he also would like to be appointed to the committee. Selectman Freeman noted that in the letters of interest, the committee applicants noted their backgrounds and the reasons they wanted to be involved with the search process. He asked Mr. Sanders why he wanted to be appointed. Mr. Sanders said that he was born and raised in Northfield and has returned to community after several years serving in the military. Lately he has seen some things going on in the Northfield Police Department (NPD) that has disturbed him so he would like to be part of the solution. Selectman Freeman is concerned that Mr. Sanders would be going on the committee with negative attitudes towards our local law enforcement. Selectman Doney had no problems appointing Mr. Sanders to the committee but does not want any additional applicants coming in after tonight. Selectman Freeman doesn't feel that it's right to impose an arbitrary cutoff point. Selectman Gadbois noted that Mr. Sanders is a taxpayer and he had no objections to his appointment. Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Doney, to appoint Josh Sanders to the Police Chief Search Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

Chair Maxwell would like to focus on what was discussed at the last budget meeting (01/10/17). He is not prepared to discuss whether the budget should be changed to provide for a sixth full-time police officer. We are now in the final negotiation stages for the NPD union contract and Chair Maxwell wants to delay discussion of the FY 2017/2018 NPD budget until this has been resolved next week. He therefore would like to schedule an additional budget meeting on Thursday, January 19, 2017.

Manager Schulz said the Highway Committee met earlier today and looked at various expenditure line items that could be reduced. For example, there was a consensus that the amount in the "Gravel/Stone" budget could be reduced from \$62,000 to \$56,000. There were no objections. Selectman Gadbois feels the "Chemicals/Chloride" line item could be reduced from \$15,000 to \$13,000. There were no objections.

Selectman Goslant noted the proposed FY 2017/2018 spending for "Gasoline/Diesel" is \$60,000 and since this line item has had surpluses the past couple years, he believes that this amount also should be reduced. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio noted that recent winters have been relatively mild with the Highway crew plowing less snow than in previous years. We don't know what next winter will be like. Manager Schulz also is reluctant to reduce this line item since in addition to the weather, we cannot predict when fuel prices might spike as they did after Hurricane Katrina, etc. Chair Maxwell would like some additional information regarding fuel consumption over the past five (5) years, etc. before the Select Board makes this decision.

Selectman Goslant added that the Highway Committee also discussed what to do with the street sweeper. Their previous recommendation was to keep running it until it could no longer be used and then subcontract the street sweeping to a private company. Chair Maxwell had suggested at a previous meeting that perhaps the sweeper could be sold while it still had some resale value and begin outsourcing sooner. Selectman Goslant said that it now was the committee's recommendation that the sweeper be kept as a backup but the subcontracting begin in the next fiscal year. The \$20,000 now projected for sweeper replacement could be used to cover this new expense. He believes a sweeper can be rented for about \$150 per hour (or perhaps less) that would be used for a few days in the spring and fall.

Ms. Baroffio said the current \$11,250 balance in the street sweeper replacement account could be transferred to the account to replace the dump truck. There also would have to be a new line item created in Highway Department Expenditures with a balance of about \$10,000 to pay for the contracted street sweeping. The Select Board can decide what to do with the street sweeper itself during next year's budget meetings. Selectman Goslant remains undecided whether it should be sold or kept as backup equipment.

Manager Schulz noted in Highway Department Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) there is an \$118,000 balance in the "Bridges" account. He would like to reduce from \$10,000 to \$5,000 the amount to be added to that account in the next fiscal year. There are some smaller bridges that require some deck work but this should cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000. Chair Maxwell thought there was the possibility that the Town would have to pay for Rabbit Hollow Road Bridge repairs if the railroad is able to evade any responsibility for this. Manager Schulz said the estimated repair cost was about \$31,000. Chair Maxwell still hopes that the railroad will pay some if not all of the cost of bridge repair and/or replacement.

Manager Schulz said the "Guardrails" CIP account has a balance of about \$20,000 so the recommendation is to eliminate the \$5,000 that would have been added. Similarly, the "Ledge Removal" CIP account has a \$24,000 balance so the \$1,000 in new funding would be removed from the proposed budget.

Also, the balance in the "Sidewalks" CIP account is \$56,000 so the new funding could be reduced from \$10,000 to \$5,000. Selectman Gadbois doesn't want this reduction. He noted that as part of its renovation project, the Northfield Savings Bank will be fixing some of the sidewalk on Main Street and East Street. Selectman Gadbois thinks the municipality should upgrade adjacent sidewalks at that time. Chair Maxwell said funding sources need to be found to complete the third and final phase of the Common Rehabilitation Project, which would address the sidewalks on North Main Street and East Street. Selectman Goslant feels the high balance in this account indicates these funds are not being spent. Chair Maxwell suggested that the municipality could work with Northfield Savings Bank to coordinate the paving and perhaps share some costs. Ms. Baroffio noted the sidewalks in front of the Municipal Building present a hazard to employees and residents alike. In addition, the sloping sidewalk between the Municipal Building and Brown Public Library acts to divert stormwater towards the building. Perhaps some Municipal Building CIP funds could be used to address this while the other paving in the area is being done. She added that there is about \$1,500 leftover from the last phase of the Common Project that could be used for sidewalks. Chair Maxwell then sees no problem in reducing the new funding to \$5,000. Selectman Goslant would not oppose borrowing funds to complete the Common Project if it means new sidewalks by the Common Café, by the East Street businesses, etc. Selectman Freeman would like a full discussion of the state of the sidewalks in this community at a later time. Selectman Gadbois agreed there are a number of sidewalks in poor condition that need to be fixed. Selectman Goslant felt that on some of the smaller streets, a good sidewalk on one side of the road should be sufficient. The final consensus was to lower the new funding to \$6,000.

Manager Schulz said the RSMS line item in Highway Department CIP would double from the FY 2016/2017 amount \$75,000 to \$150,000 in order to pay for a number of urgently needed paving projects. This would include Winch Hill Road, Cox Brook Road, and Slate Avenue. Since Cox Brook Road is a connector road to other communities, state grant funds should be available. In addition, since Slate Avenue has a number of drainage issues, there may be grant funding available for this as well. Selectman Freeman would like the Select Board to develop a long-term highway maintenance plan that would include cost projections and allow for better grant planning. Selectman Goslant felt this should incorporate long-term water and sewer line replacement plans so there is less chance that a new road will get torn up to put in new pipes. The consensus was to leave the \$150,000 amount and supplement it with surplus highway funds if necessary.

There followed a general discussion on whether it would be a good idea to borrow funds for needed projects while interest rates remain low. Manager Schulz felt that this was a good topic for discussion at a later time but not this late in the budget process. Chair Maxwell agreed and would like Ms. Baroffio to work with the Select Board on this. Manager Schulz asked if the Select Board members had any other suggestions. Selectman Freeman is satisfied with the proposed budget with the changes to date. He still would like a full discussion of the NPD budget. Selectman Doney also is satisfied with the budget as revised.

Selectman Gadbois added the annual cost of janitorial services for the Police Station, Municipal Building, and Brown Public Library and it totaled \$14,850. Manager Schulz has received a couple quotes from other cleaning services that should reduce this amount. Selectman Goslant would like the contacted service to include some building maintenance work in addition to basic cleaning.

Selectman Goslant noted that in the Lister Expenditures budget, the budgeted cost of professional services will rise from \$11,000 to \$27,000 in the next fiscal year. He knows this amount will increase but this seems rather steep. Chair Maxwell noted the Listers budget has the highest department increase by percentage (68.8%). He would like to phase in this increase over the next couple years. He added that this is not a denigration of the valuable work the Listers perform but this is a big increase in one year. The total proposed increase in this budget is \$21,400 and he would like it lowered to \$16,000 this coming year with the balance included in the FY 2018/2019 budget. Chair Maxwell would like Manager Schulz to work with the Listers to work out the distribution of this increase between the Listers themselves and their contracted employee. There were no objections to this suggestion. Selectman Gadbois would like zoning permit fee amounts reviewed to see if some could be increased to provide additional revenue for this department. Chair Maxwell agreed, saying that a revenue increase might cover the increase planned for FY 2018/2019.

Selectman Goslant noted the large number of outside agencies seeking funding on the draft 2017 Town Warning. The Green Mountain Transit Agency (GMTA) alone is asking for \$21,000 for the Northfield-Montpelier Commuter Bus service. Chair Maxwell said a GMTA representative will come before the Select Board in order to provide hard numbers regarding ridership, etc. to help determine if this expense is justified. Selectman Freeman felt GMTA could do a better job for promoting this service. Selectman Doney also would like some sheltered bus stops provided at the more popular locations. Chair Maxwell noted that the Select Board is not obligated to put the funding article on the warning in the absence of a petition. This commuter service began with a three-year trial period about four (4) years ago and perhaps it hasn't proven its worth.

Manager Schulz said the \$6,000 for postage machine replacement in the Administrative Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) can be removed as he and Ms. Baroffio have found other options. The \$600 for a laptop computer in the same CEP account also can be removed for the same reason.

In Grounds and Parks Expenditures, Manager Schulz recommends removing the \$5,000 line item for a part-time employee to mow lawns, playing fields, etc. He has been assured by Highway Foreman Trent Tucker that one of his employees would be able to do this as part of his summertime duties. Selectmen Doney and Goslant did not think this was a good idea. Selectman Doney felt that park maintenance has declined the past couple years and did not want things to get worse. Selectman Goslant does not want a Highway employee taken away from road maintenance. Chair Maxwell felt that perhaps better oversight of park maintenance is needed. Selectman Goslant suggested that the \$5,000 could be used to subcontract out the mowing, etc. Ms. Baroffio said the \$5,000 now in the part-time employee account could be shifted to professional services. The municipality would save about \$900 in related employee costs by outsourcing. Chair Maxwell would like a recommendation on whether to do this at the next budget meeting.

Manager Schulz said at a previous budget meeting, there was a suggestion that the amount in the Listers CIP for tax maps be lowered from \$2,500 to \$2,000. Lister Chair Arlington Supplee did not object to this.

In Fire Department Expenditures, Manager Schulz recommends that the line item for vehicle maintenance be increased from \$2,800 to \$3,700. Due to his aging fleet, this is what Fire Chief Peter J. DeMasi has requested. Selectman Gadbois suggested that since there already is a \$9,000 balance in the Fire Department's building improvements CIP account, the amount to be added this year should be reduced from \$2,000 to \$1,000. Selectman Doney would like this amount kept as is. There is a proposal to renovate and expand the current Fire Station to accommodate the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS). If this does not happen, the building has other problems that need to be addressed.

As regards NAS Revenue, Ms. Baroffio said that Ambulance Fees had been estimated at \$450,000 for FY 2017/2018. However, due to a higher projected number of ambulance calls (based on more recent figures), she feels this number should be increased to \$480,000. With the increased call volume, she added that there would be more bill abatements but this would be a relatively minor expense.

In Town General Revenue, Manager Schulz said the "Railroad Tax" would increase from \$1,900 to \$3,750 in the next fiscal year. He explained that the State of Vermont imposes a tax on railroads operating in the state. It keeps half the money and distributes the rest to municipalities through which railroads run.

In Fire Department CEP, Selectman Goslant would like to extend the projected life of the pumper trucks by two (2) years each. He also would like the municipality to look harder for grant money to fund their replacements. Selectman Gadbois believes that the expected life of all the Fire Department vehicles could be extended by five (5) years. Ms. Baroffio noted that vehicle replacement in this department is never fully funded. The practice has been to raise about half the purchase price and then borrow the rest. Chair Maxwell would like to see how extending the projected life of these vehicles would affect the scheduled replacement amounts put in each fiscal year's budget.

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

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

The Board adjourned at 8:15 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.