

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**BOARD OF SELECTMEN**  
**Minutes of January 10, 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, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Michele Braun, Chris Bradley (Chair, Water & Wastewater Commission), Steve Davis, Susan Stillinger, Elroy Hill, Jay Pedley, Nicolas Laskovski, Brad Denny, and Jane Pekol (Northfield Community Development Network).

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** David Armstrong from Green Mountain Transit Agency was unable to attend as had been scheduled. Selectman Freeman asked that Nicolas Laskovski be added to "Public Participation (Scheduled)" regarding a possible solar power educational grant. Chair Maxwell said that Mr. Laskovski could present information tonight but no action could be taken since this item has not been formally warned.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)**

- a. Michele Braun: Water Street Park Plans.** Ms. Braun said that the grant award for this project has a June 30, 2017 deadline. Unless the Select Board objects, she will present this proposal to the Development Review Board (DRB) at its January 26, 2017 meeting to obtain its approval. Once that has been given, the construction phase of the project will be put out to bid. The landscape architect has created plans based on the community feedback received at several venues over the past couple years. There remain a few minor points that have to be reconciled with the engineer's plans so the design map distributed tonight may change slightly. The current plan calls for open play areas, walking paths, an open air pavilion, etc. A Norwich University professor has donated two glacial erratics (boulders) that will be featured prominently with signposts explaining their origins, etc. Children also will be able to climb on them. The park will be ADA-compliant with hardpack walkways and other features. Ms. Braun added there would be an evergreen border separating the park from the neighboring properties while providing shade during the summer.

Selectman Gadbois asked what would be the annual cost to maintain the park, i.e. mowing, etc. Ms. Braun said that the area alongside Water Street already is being mowed but the rest of the park would have native vegetation planted and should require little maintenance. Only the grassy walking paths in that area would need to be mowed regularly. Selectman Gadbois is concerned that sunken remnants from the razed structures in the area might damage mowing equipment or create hazards for park users. Ms. Braun said that the park area on which the FEMA buyout houses were situated was close to the road and this area has been regularly mowed without any problems. It also was part of the demolition contracts that all foundation pieces and other materials had to be removed. However, if there really are buried items remaining from the demolition process or years past, they would be removed when the lower park area is lowered and graded as part of the flood mitigation phase of the project. However, she will bring this concern about possible buried hazards to the engineer's attention. The FEMA buyout grant requires that the area must be maintained as an open space. Brad Denny asked what would happen to the topsoil when the area near the river is lowered two feet (2') as flood mitigation. Ms. Braun said the plan is to set the topsoil aside and reuse it later for landscaping the site.

Selectman Doney asked if there would be any lighting installed for nighttime use, etc. Ms. Braun said there are no plans to install new lighting fixtures at this time. There already are streetlights along Water Street and the pavilion could be fitted with lighting at a later time. There is \$30,000 in the project budget to upgrade the utility poles in the area. Early during project development there was suggestion that the utility poles in the park area be relocated across the Dog River but this was found to be cost-prohibitive ( $\pm$ \$150,000). The park is purposely designed to be low-maintenance and easy to restore should there be another flooding event in the area. Chair Maxwell asked if there are restrictions on any permanent structures in the park. Ms. Braun said it would be the DRB that would make this determination based on Northfield's own zoning regulations. The pavilion would be situated close to Water Street in an area less prone to flooding (especially after the riverbank area has been lowered). In addition, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) floodplain coordinator already has reviewed the site and stated no objections.

Chair Maxwell asked if installing the pavilion and other structures would violate FEMA rules. Ms. Braun said the main focus for FEMA is to preserve the area as an open space so any structures that would facilitate this, i.e. learning centers, etc. actually are encouraged. The level of flood hazard also determines what is and is not allowed. Chair Maxwell noted a six-vehicle parking area in the plans. Ms. Braun confirmed this and added that this would be the main point of access for the park. Chair Maxwell feels that it might become necessary to establish new parking regulations for Water Street should there be some overflow from the off-street parking spaces. Ms. Braun said that the location and size of the parking area was based on the architect's judgement. Selectman Doney asked if the park would be used year-round or if it would be closed off during winter months. Ms. Braun said this would be the Select Board's decision. Residents may want to access the park during the winter for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, etc.

Manager Schulz noted that the installation of the proposed pavilion would not be covered by grant funding but would have to be funded through donations, etc. Jay Pedley said that the Northfield High School Class of 1957 and other classes have raised about \$9,200 so far that could be used for this purpose. The estimated cost of the pavilion is about \$31,000. He added that other local groups, i.e. Northfield Rotarians, have shown interest in becoming part of the fundraising effort. Ms. Braun added that prospective civil engineers at Norwich University may want help with the final pavilion design as part of a class project. Although one possible design is included with the current plans, many different versions are possible. Selectman Freeman asked if the pavilion would have ramps, etc. to make it handicap accessible. Mr. Pedley said that was the intention.

Selectman Goslant, who acts as the Select Board's liaison to the Recreation Committee, noted that Northfield already has two parks (Memorial Park and the Falls Park) that residents do not utilize to their full potential. He is concerned about maintenance costs for the new park, i.e. mowing, tree-trimming, etc. getting out of hand as time passes. Manager Schulz spoke to Highway Foreman Trent Tucker about this and he thought that it would be only an additional couple hours a week for one of his crew to get the work done. Mr. Pedley thought that the site might need to be brush hogged once or twice a year but regular maintenance shouldn't take a lot of time. Chair Maxwell shares Selectman Goslant's concern about maintenance costs increasing over time (i.e. "mission creep") especially if the pavilion and other structures are installed. Ms. Braun said the park project was designed to be as low budget and low maintenance as possible but there is no predicting the future. She added that she presented this information tonight in order to get Select Board feedback and its approval before going before the DRB in a couple weeks.

Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to approve the Water Street Park plans as presented tonight as well as the concept of building the proposed pavilion. Ms. Braun said that the design plans may change slightly as the project develops. Manager Schulz will try to get confirmation from Mr. Tucker that maintaining the park would not overburden his department. Chair Maxwell said that the Water Street residents and the greater community have been provided numerous opportunities to express their opinions on this proposal and the current plans seem to reflect their input. Mr. Denny said that when considering potential maintenance costs, the Select Board members should keep in mind that after this project is completed, both its flood mitigation and recreational components would likely result in a rise in neighborhood property values. He also agreed with Mr. Pedley that since the intention is to keep the bulk of the park as wooded and natural, maintenance costs should not be considerable. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Chair Maxwell and the other Select Board members commended Ms. Braun for her excellent work on this project.

- b. Nicolas Laskovski: SunShot Solar Energy Educational Grant.** Mr. Laskovski lives in Northfield Falls and would like a letter of support from the Select Board for his solar energy educational grant application. If the application is successful, the grant funds would be used to educate residents regarding solar energy and make Northfield a "Solar Smart Town." There are no local match funds required and the only risk is the application might be unsuccessful. Mr. Laskovski will donate his time on this and the application deadline is the end of this month. Since it will take him a couple weeks to fill out the paperwork, Mr. Laskovski would like to start working on this right away. Selectman Freeman said the short deadline is why he asked Mr. Laskovski to address the Select Board tonight rather than waiting for next month's Utility Commissions meeting. This would be an outreach program and is funded through the U.S. Department of Energy's SunShot Initiative. Chair Maxwell asked that this matter be put on the agenda for Thursday night's budget meeting and asked Manager Schulz to provide his recommendation.

#### V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. December 8, 2016 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Doney seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Selectman Gadbois abstaining.**
- b. December 13, 2016 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. December 13, 2016 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. December 15, 2016 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- e. December 20, 2016 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Selectman Doney abstaining.**

#### VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Validation of Warrant #13-17.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to validate the approval by signature of Warrant #13-17 in the amount of \$61,156.13. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Warrant #14-17.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve Warrant #14-17 in the amount of 410,518.65. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through December 18, 2016.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$89,727.97. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through January 1, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$96,921.11. Selectman Gadbois noted about \$2,000 in Northfield Police Department (NPD) overtime, which was a significant increase from the previous payroll period. Selectman Goslant felt the holiday season combined with provisions in the current NPD union contract were responsible for this. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**VII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. **Approval of Town Sewer Ordinance Amendment.** Chair Maxwell noted the Select Board held a public hearing on December 13, 2016 to obtain any feedback on this proposed amendment. At that time, a Select Board member asked that formal approval be delayed until he had time to fully review the lengthy document. If approved tonight, the amendment would take effect in sixty (60) days. Selectman Gadbois had some questions regarding how to determine responsibility should a sewer line fail. Water & Wastewater Commission Chair Chris Bradley said that should a sewer line fail under a customer's property, it has always been municipal policy that the customer is responsible for its repair. The amendment merely clarifies this point and provides different scenarios so that there is no confusion about this. Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to approve and sign the Town Sewer Ordinance Amendment. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Chair Maxwell thanked Mr. Bradley for all his due diligence and hard work on this.
- b. **Police Chief Search Committee Appointments.** Chair Maxwell stated NPD Chief James Dziobek indicated months ago his intention to leave his position no later than the end of April 2017. The municipality advertised its intention to form an eight (8) person search committee comprised of two (2) Select Board members, the Town Manager, a municipal department head, and four (4) members of the public. Letters of interest from private citizens were solicited and four (4) were received. The applicants are Christopher Alger, Gordon Bock, Rowley Brucken, and Ryan Parkman. All are Northfield residents except for Mr. Parkman who serves as Northfield Middle & High School Principal. In addition, Ambulance Chief Lawton Rutter has expressed interest in being the department head on the committee. Manager Schulz recommends that these five (5) individuals be appointed to the committee tonight so that he can begin scheduling meetings, drafting and advertising the job notice, etc. Select Board members Doney and Goslant already have volunteered to serve on the committee. Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to appoint Messieurs Alger, Bock, Brucken, Parkman, and Rutter to the NPD Chief Search Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Selectman Doney asked when the inaugural meeting would be held. Manager Schulz will contact the newly appointed committee members as soon as possible and would like to hold the first meeting sometime next week.
- c. **Rabbit Hollow Road Bridge Ownership Notice.** Manager Schulz said the bridge was closed recently after the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) discovered serious structural defects. There followed a dispute between the municipality and the New England Central Railroad (NECR) over who owns this bridge and therefore is responsible for its repair or replacement. Manager Schulz has researched this matter with Town Attorney William Smith and there is evidence that NECR maintained and repaired the bridge in the past. He has drafted a notice to NECR that provides documentation proving NECR owns and is responsible for the bridge. Manager Schulz now would like the Select Board's authorization to sign and send this notice. Should NECR fail to comply in a timely manner, he would petition VTrans to make a ruling. Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to provide this authorization. Selectman Gadbois wanted the notice sent right away and doesn't want Manager Schulz to wait too long for a response. Selectman Freeman would like a copy of the notice sent to VTrans so it is kept in the loop. Manager Schulz has received quotes for temporary fixes to the bridge but the state engineers believe it should be put on the priority list for future replacement. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **Warn Public Hearing – Zoning Regulations.** Manager Schulz said the Planning Commission has completed its revision of local zoning regulations and held its required public hearings. The Select Board now needs to hold two (2) public hearings of its own before it can formally approve the document. There is a fifteen (15) day public notification requirement so the first public hearing can be held in conjunction with the regular Select Board meeting of February 14, 2017. The second one can be held the night of the next regular meeting two weeks later. Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to hold public hearings for the revised Northfield Zoning Regulations on February 14, 2017 and February 28, 2017. Selectman Freeman asked if Planning Commission Chair Stephen Fitzhugh would be present to answer any questions. Manager Schulz confirmed that he would. Selectman Freeman would like the hearings well-advertised so that interested members of the public will be encouraged to take part and provide their input. He has some doubts himself about the document as it pertains to encouraging local economic development. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- e. **Recreation Committee Appointment.** Manager Schulz said that there now is one vacancy on the Recreation Committee and Rob Korrow has submitted a letter of interest. Selectman Goslant said Mr. Korrow has been attending the Committee's monthly meetings for some time and is well qualified to serve. Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to appoint Rob Korrow to the Recreation Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. **Northfield Economic Development Committee (NEDC).** Selectman Freeman said the NEDC would hold its annual meeting on Thursday, January 26, 2017. He asked that a Special Select Board meeting be warned if there is a possibility of a board quorum being present.
- b. **Combined Fire/Ambulance Facility.** Selectman Doney would like the project engineer to address the Select Board soon in order to go over all the possible options. There also is a grant opportunity that could cover half of the project's expenses.
- c. **Zoning Administrator Position.** Manager Schulz said the prospective candidate will meet with the Planning Commission at its meeting next Monday night. If all goes well, he then could be hired soon after.
- d. **Northfield Police Station.** Selectman Doney would like the Town Buildings & Energy Committee to meet soon to deal with the rotting wood in the building that Chief Dziobek has reported. He would like all problems with the building resolved this summer.
- e. **Highway Committee.** Selectman Goslant reported the committee met yesterday and plans to meet again before Thursday's budget meeting so that it can provide a recommendation regarding highway equipment.
- f. **Municipal Sewer System, etc.** Selectman Goslant was able to view a schematic of the municipal sewer system at the Utility Commissions' meeting last night and found it very enlightening. There remain a number of sewer pipes that are more than a hundred (100) years old and there is a long-term replacement plan. There also was a discussion of having the Utility Commission Chairs available at Town Meeting in order to answer any questions the public might have about the water, sewer, and electric departments. Mr. Bradley would like to keep this low-key so members of the public aren't confused into thinking that the utility departments are tax-supported. The commissions now are working on their budgets and should have information to share at that time.
- g. **Town Meeting Day.** Chair Maxwell noted that some Northfield residents have been requesting for the past couple years that the open session be moved from Tuesday morning to the night before so more people would be able to attend. Manager Schulz said there would be an article to this effect on the warning. There would be another article regarding the frequent request that in future all public matters be voted upon by Australian Ballot.
- h. **Christmas Decorations.** Chair Maxwell wanted to thank the Northfield Savings Bank for working with the Recreation Committee on the holiday decorations on and around the Common.

**IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT.** Manager Schulz had nothing to add to his written report.

**X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).**

- a. **Chris Bradley: NPD Staffing Levels.** Mr. Bradley noted that municipal representatives now are meeting with NPD union members in order to negotiate a new contract. The contract now in effect specified the employment of six (6) full-time police officers as well as a Police Chief. However, the Select Board in recent years has not adhered to this stipulation by refusing to fund the sixth officer. Should the new union contract contain the same language, Mr. Bradley hopes the Select Board will honor this commitment in the future. He believes that lack of appropriate manpower is one factor for what is perceived as serious NPD morale problems. Mr. Bradley also sees a link between insufficient law enforcement staffing and the recent rash of car break-ins and other petty crimes reported on the Front Porch Forum.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, 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.