

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**BOARD OF SELECTMEN**  
**Minutes of January 24, 2017**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell (absent), Vice-Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, and Selectmen Lynn Doney, Nathan Freeman, and Matthew Gadbois. Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Highway Foreman Trent Tucker, Arlington Supplee (Board of Listers), Mary Hayden (Central Vermont Council on Aging), James Baraw, Elroy Hill, Judy Wright, Stuart Wright, and Steve Davis.

Acting Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 7:00 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.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)**

- a. Chris Loyer: Green Mountain Transit (GMT).** David Armstrong, the GMT Planning Manager, originally was scheduled to be here tonight but was unable to attend so his associate Mr. Loyer in here instead. Mr. Loyer provided the Select Board members with updated ridership statistics for the Northfield-Montpelier Commuter bus service that covered the sixteen (16) month period from July 1, 2015 through December 31, 2016. This showed a total of 8,692 total stops on the route during this time frame. The most popular stops were the Montpelier Shaw's supermarket (58.5%), Depot Square (45.1%), State Street in Montpelier (21.7%), and Norwich University (18.7%). Selectman Goslant was more interested in the average number of riders using the service each workday coming to and from Northfield. Selectman Freeman also would like to see the ridership broken down from the service's start on July 1, 2013 through end of the last fiscal year (06/30/16). Selectman Gadbois noticed that some of the columns on tonight's handout don't add up properly.

Selectman Goslant has the impression that about seventeen (17) people regularly use the commuter service each workday. This seems a bit low since Northfield taxpayers are paying \$21,000 each year to operate this bus route. Selectman Goslant also believes most Northfield residents use their own cars to get to work rather than rely upon public transportation. He was hoping to see numbers tonight that would contradict this but he hasn't seen any. Manager Schulz said that according to the material GMT provided earlier, there was an overall eleven percent (11%) decline in system-wide GMT ridership last year along with a fourteen percent (14%) decline in Northfield-Montpelier Commuter ridership. Nationwide, public transit ridership has declined by ten percent (10%) in the past year with most experts attributing this to relatively low gasoline prices. Mr. Loyer said GMT has seen a slight upturn in ridership over the past few months. He added that he can provide the Select Board members with ridership data in any format they would prefer.

Manager Schulz asked if eighty percent (80%) of the commuter service cost was still supported by grant funding. Mr. Loyer confirmed that there was an initial three (3) year grant period when federal funds covered the total amount but since this grant has expired, it now is being supported by a mix of state and federal funds. The \$21,000 Northfield residents pay covers the remaining twenty percent (20%). Manager Schulz asked what would happen if this local match amount was withheld. Mr. Loyer cannot say definitively but he would assume that the commuter bus service would be cancelled.

Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to place the \$21,000 local match amount as an article on the 2017 Northfield Town Meeting Warning. Selectman Freeman said he wished he had additional information tonight about ridership, etc. In addition, since Norwich University (NU) is one of the major bus stops, perhaps NU might be willing to share some of the route costs. Selectman Goslant believes more commuters use bicycles to get to and from work than use public transport. He still feels that given its apparent low ridership and the expense, continuing the commuter bus service is not cost effective. **Motion passed 3-1-0, with Selectman Goslant voting in the negative.** GMT will be asked to provide additional and updated ridership information at a future meeting.

## V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. **Highway Foreman Trent Tucker.** Selectman Goslant noted that with the recent snow/ice storms, Mr. Tucker and his crew have been putting in some long days and nights. Mr. Tucker confirmed that there has been a lot of plowing and sanding in the past couple weeks. He had to order another thousand yards (1000') of sand today but that should be enough for the rest of this winter. Manager Schulz announced the Highway Department has been awarded a \$56,000 grant in order to purchase a Hydro Seeder, which will be used to restore lawns, etc. after the earth has been exposed to put in culverts. This helps to mitigate erosion and stormwater concerns. Mr. Tucker confirms that it will be a very nice piece of equipment. Selectman Goslant asked if there were any recent highway concerns. Mr. Tucker said there have been some minor repairs, such as a flat tire, brake repairs, etc. but nothing major.

Selectman Goslant is very pleased with the work Mr. Tucker and his crew have been performing though he did suggest it might be wise to reduce the use of sand on straight roads. Mr. Tucker said he tries to conserve on road materials as much as possible without jeopardizing public safety. Selectman Freeman also complimented Mr. Tucker for his good work. Selectman Gadbois noted that the Town Garage building also houses the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) and he is concerned that low winter temperatures might damage sensitive medical supplies. He suggested that a backup heating source be installed to prevent this possibility. Manager Schulz confirmed there were funds in the Highway Department's CIP account for this. Selectman Gadbois inspected the Town Garage recently and found it both clean and well organized. Selectman Doney confirmed this good appearance. The Select Board members thanked Mr. Tucker for tonight's report.

## VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **January 3, 2017 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **January 5, 2017 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. **January 10, 2017 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- d. **January 10, 2017 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- e. **January 12, 2017 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

## VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #15-17.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve Warrant #15-17 in the amount of \$111,947.13. Selectman Goslant noted the warrant amount included salt purchases totaling over \$14,000. He then asked about a legal services payment. Manager Schulz said this involved an ongoing appeal of a local planning/zoning decision related to floodplain designation. He has asked the attorneys working on the Town's behalf not to file any new legal documents without his permission. In addition, since the State of Vermont now is taking the lead in this case, Northfield's own legal costs are relatively low. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through January 15, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$83,234.02. Selectman Doney asked about a line item designated "Grant Labor – Reimbursable." Manager Schulz said this covered the time police officers spent on work related to grant awards. The municipality later will be reimbursed with state grant funds. James Baraw works for the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and he confirmed that after paperwork is submitted, the reimbursement check usually is sent out within thirty (30) days. He added that if there is a local match amount, it sometimes can be covered by in-kind services, etc. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

## VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Appointment of Zoning Administrator.** Selectman Goslant noted that Stephen Hatch, who formerly served as Zoning Administrator for about seven (7) years, has submitted a letter of interest regarding this long vacant position. Manager Schulz said Mr. Hatch met with the Planning Commissioners during their meeting last week (01/16/17) and they recommended his appointment. Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to appoint Stephen Hatch as Zoning Administrator. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

- b. Water Street Stormwater Retention Basin.** Manager Schulz announced that the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC), working on behalf of the Town of Northfield, received a state grant for about \$130,000 to construct the proposed stormwater retention basin at the intersection of Water Street and Union Street. This was discussed fully at an earlier Select Board meeting (10/11/16) and no action is required at this time. The next steps are to contract with the State of Vermont and hire a project engineer. When the engineering plans are seventy-five percent (75%) complete, they will be presented by the project engineer to the Select Board members for their final approval. Selectman Doney asked if this retention basin would resemble the eyesore on Central Street. Manager Schulz said it would not since the new one would be mostly underground due to its proximity to the river. In addition, the installation of culverts and catch basins in the area will require some coordination between the Highway and Water/Sewer departments. Selectman Goslant serves on the Water and Wastewater Commission and he added that there are a number of one hundred year plus pipes in the area that are scheduled for replacement in the near future. Manager Schulz said this would be factored into the engineering designs.
- c. Approval of FY 2017/2018 Inter-Departmental Charges Policy.** Selectman Goslant said this policy clarifies how shared expenses are distributed among the various municipal departments. He added that the policy first was developed before municipal merger in order to split costs between Northfield Town and Northfield Village. Manager Schulz said the latest version of this policy was fully discussed at a recent budget meeting (01/10/17) and some minor changes were made. This included increases in the amounts the Water Department compensates the Highway Department for use of its backhoe and dump truck during the summer months. Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the FY 2017/2018 Inter-Departmental Charges Policy as presented. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- d. Approval of FY 2017/2018 Town Budget.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board provided general approval for the latest revised FY 2017/2018 Town Budget at its last budget meeting (01/19/17). The budget has been updated by Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, printed copies distributed, and is ready for formal approval by the Select Board before going to Northfield voters for approval on Town Meeting day (03/07/17). Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the FY 2017/2018 Town Budget with total fund expenditures of \$4,032,540, of which \$2,693,760 shall be raised by property taxes and \$1,338,780 by non-tax revenues. Selectman Gadbois suggested some minor changes including increases in the Northfield Police Department (NPD) overtime and part-time expenses. Since the proposed budget doesn't include a sixth full-time officer, Selectman Gadbois expects these expenses to rise in the coming fiscal year. Selectman Freeman had favored funding this additional full-time officer but his opinion was not shared by the majority of the Select Board. Given that, he feels that a lot of effort was put into the NPD budget and it should be left as is. Selectman Doney also doesn't want to make any changes at this time. He added that there will be a new Police Chief in place when the next fiscal year starts (07/01/17) and he is confident that the new chief will be able to work within the proposed budget. Manager Schulz believes the \$20,000 allocated for NPD overtime in the next fiscal year is sufficient. Selectman Goslant is confident the proposed NPD budget is financially sound while sufficient to keep the community safe. In addition, since the Select Board has held five (5) budget meetings this month alone, he doesn't want to see any additional changes at this time. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- e. Approval of DRAFT 2017 Town Meeting Warning.** Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the DRAFT 2017 Town Meeting Warning. Manager Schulz noted that there are some questions regarding some of the warning articles that need to be resolved prior to formal approval. For example, the Central Vermont Council on Aging (CVCOA) was informed by the Town Clerk's Office that they would need to circulate and file a petition this year but CVCOA has asked to be placed directly on the warning without petitioning. Mary Hayden is representing CVCOA tonight and said she was unaware that Northfield requires petitioning for three (3) years after the article amount has been increased. Ms. Hayden said CVCOA did not have reasonable advanced notice of this and asked this requirement be waived. There was no objection from the Select Board members for putting the CVCOA request for \$3,000 on the warning. There was a similar request from OUR House of Central Vermont to have its \$250 request put on the warning without petitioning. There was no objection.

Manager Schulz added there were two (2) new articles on the draft warning that were the result of sentiments expressed at last year's Town Meeting. One would move the Annual Town Meeting's open session from the morning of Town Meeting Day (Tuesday) to the previous evening (Monday). There was no objection. The other article would seek voter approval for having all public questions, including approval of the Town Budget, decided by Australian Ballot in future years. There was no objection to this article either.

Another new article would seek voter authorization for the establishment of a Conservation Fund. The Northfield Conservation Commission made this request as a way of better soliciting donations, applying for grant funds, etc. The Select Board already gave its approval at a budget meeting (12/20/16) to have this article placed on the warning and Manager Schulz is finalizing the article wording.

Manager Schulz said a couple of years ago, the Economic Development Committee recommended Northfield should have a tax stabilization policy in place in order to attract new businesses to the community while encouraging existing ones to expand. However, since state law requires that tax stabilization policies involving commercial properties require a two-thirds affirmative vote, voter approval has fallen short on three (3) previous occasions (November 2014, March 2015, and March 2016 with 62%, 58%, and 62% support respectively). He asked if the Select Board would like this placed on the warning again given the unlikelihood it would ever reach the necessary 66.6% approval threshold.

Selectman Freeman suggested that since voter approval for tax stabilization agreements for non-commercial properties require only a simple majority, perhaps the article should be rewritten to focus on multi-unit residential properties. There is a real need for additional housing in Northfield so the municipality should encourage the development of more apartment buildings. Selectman Doney would like the article wording left as is since there also is a real need to encourage businesses to establish themselves in Northfield. Selectman Gadbois suggested that there be separate articles on the warning for commercial and for residential properties. Selectman Goslant thought this was a good idea since the NU student body has become too large to house on campus so there will be additional students seeking off-campus accommodations. Manager Schulz will work on the wording for these two separate articles. The Select Board members will be advised when the finalized warning is ready for their signatures. **Motion to approve the DRAFT 2017 Town Meeting Warning as revised passed 4-0-0.**

#### **IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) Annual Meeting.** Selectman Freeman said the first NCDN annual meeting will be held on Thursday, January 26, 2017 in the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library (93 South Main Street). There will be a mixer with dinner buffet starting at 5:30 p.m. followed by the meeting itself at 6:00 p.m. The guest speaker will be Kawha Douogih PhD, who serves as Chief Operating Officer for access.mobile, Inc. Since a quorum of Select Board members may be present, as a precaution this meeting has been warned as a Special Select Board Meeting to satisfy the Vermont Open Meeting Law.
- b. NPD Chief Search Process.** Selectman Freeman noted the job advertisement in the packets had a Friday, February 10, 2017, deadline for submissions. He asked if this was enough time to attract qualified candidates. Manager Schulz believes it is and he added that the position already is being advertised online and will be in various print editions soon. Selectman Freeman asked if the search was being confined to Vermont newspapers and websites. Manager Schulz said NPD Chief James Dziobek has been very helpful in directing the notice to various police forums that have nationwide circulation. Selectman Goslant serves on the Search Committee and noted their first meeting was held last week (01/18/17) and progress was made. The goal is to have chosen a new Police Chief by Town Meeting Day (03/07/17).
- c. Town Budget Process.** Selectman Goslant wanted to thank his fellow Select Board members, Manager Schulz, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, and the various department heads for all their hard work and long hours that resulted in the FY 2017/2018 budget approved tonight. He said that this budget process was the most difficult and time-consuming one he has gone through in his years on the Select Board. However, the accomplishment of completing it has made him more proud to be a member of this community.

**X. TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT.** Manager Schulz had nothing to add to his written report.

**XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).**

- a. Judy and Stuart Wright: Safety Concerns, etc.** Ms. Wright and her husband have lived on Pleasant Street for over twenty-five (25) years, raising three (3) children, and getting along well with her neighbors for most of that time. However, within the past few years three (3) individuals moved into an apartment building directly across from the Wright’s home. The Wrights have had problems with them almost from the minute they moved in with excessive nighttime noise, vehicles arriving and leaving all times of the day and night, etc. In the past few months, however, the problem has escalated to include verbal threats and other extreme forms of intimidation directed at the Wrights. The NPD has been contacted on numerous occasions but this seems to have had little to no effect. One of the individuals has a state court order that forbids her from harassing the Wrights but this has not been a deterrent. The latest and most serious confrontation occurred last week (01/18/17) and so concerned the Wrights that they contacted the Vermont State Police at 6:00 a.m. They were informed a NPD officer would contact them soon but the return phone call did not happen until 11:00 a.m. Ms. Wright spoke to the NPD officer and she felt the officer was not only unsympathetic but actually rude. The Wrights no longer feel safe in their home, have difficulty sleeping, and feel the local police department has not been responsive to their requests for protection. After speaking with and meeting Chief Dziobek and his officers on several occasions, the Wrights felt the need to contact the Select Board members directly and publicly with their concerns tonight.

Selectman Goslant said that the Select Board definitely will look into this matter as it raises questions about the municipality’s ability to provide adequate police service to its citizens. Selectman Doney asked if the Wrights have considered seeking restraining orders against these individuals. Ms. Wright said she and her husband had assumed the court order would have been sufficient. They also are very worried about the safety of their grandchildren, who visit often. Selectman Freeman is troubled by what the Wrights have gone through and recommended that since this matter touches on various legal (and perhaps personnel) issues, the Select Board should discuss this later tonight in executive session. Selectman Goslant thanked the Wrights for addressing the Select Board tonight, as difficult as this must have been for them, and assured them this matter will be fully investigated.

**XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a legal matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:30 p.m.

Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Doney, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 10:00 p.m. No action was taken.

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 10:01 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 February 14, 2017.