

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of June 13, 2017

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Nathan Freeman (7:52 p.m.), Julie H. Goodrich, and K. David Maxwell (absent). Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, William Veve (VWSD), Victor Veve (VWSD), Shannon Palone (Pool Director), Russ Barrett (Tree Warden), Christine Barnes, Gordon Perkinson, Thaddeus Severy, John Stevens, Carolyn Stevens, Mary Dollenmaier, Fred Nadon, and Steve Davis.

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. SELELCT BOARD CHAIR STATEMENT OF APPECIATION.** Chair Goslant believes Northfield is well served by its municipal employees; its elected and appointed officials; and all the other volunteers who dedicate themselves to the community. He wanted to publically acknowledge this at this time by reading a list of the current municipal employees and their department heads. Chair Goslant wanted to especially thank the Ambulance Service and the Highway Department for their outstanding efforts in recent months. He then thanked all the elected and appointed officials, reserving special gratitude for Lister Chair Arlington Supplee who has been working very hard lately with his fellow Listers to finalize the 2017 Grand List. Chair Goslant concluded by saying that this is a very positive community and many people do their very best every day to make it even better.

- V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. Carolyn Stevens: Select Board Rejection of Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, & Recreation (FPR) Roadside Vegetation Assessment.** Ms. Stevens remains concerned about the Select Board decision earlier this year (03/28/17) to reject a proposed FPR roadside vegetation survey that had been offered to Northfield and nine (9) other Vermont towns free of charge. She then read the three-page "Letter of Collaboration" drafted by the FRP that spelled out the scope and purpose of the project. Noting that the project was free and non-binding, Ms. Stevens asked again why the Select Board members objected to it.

Chair Goslant said the municipality has its own roadside vegetation clearance program in place that is based on recommendations developed by the Vermont Local Roads Program. He added that he contacted FPR himself about this vegetation assessment and learned that so far none of the other communities have asked FPR to participate in the program. He also felt many Northfield backroads require tree clearing and ditching as soon as possible in order to resolve serious safety and erosion concerns. Chair Goslant doesn't expect to change any minds tonight and appreciates Ms. Stevens' strong feelings about this but believes it is now time to move on.

Since she is new to the Select Board, Selectman Goodrich hasn't said much on this matter to date. Based on the information presented at the March 28, 2017 Select Board meeting by both Laura Hill-Eubanks and Selectman Maxwell, it seemed the municipality has an established process and therefore Selectman Goodrich personally decided that there would be no need to move forward on the FPR assessment. Selectman Goodrich added at this time all that can be done is to agree to disagree on this matter and go forward with the municipality's roadside program.

Ms. Stevens still does not see a direct conflict between the municipality's roadside clearance plans and accepting a free vegetation assessment from the State. This assessment would provide further information that would assist the municipality with its long-term plans. Selectman Goodrich noted there are concerns the state program might have a delaying effect on any local road maintenance plans. There is work that needs to be done as soon as possible. Chair Goslant added that Ms. Stevens is welcome to attend any future Highway Committee meetings and see how difficult it is to keep Northfield's roads safe while staying within the budget approved by its residents.

Russ Barrett has served as Northfield's Tree Warden for several years. He spends the winter months out of state so he has not been able to comment on this matter before. He agrees with Ms. Stevens that once it is completed, the FPR assessment would provide valuable information to the municipality which would assist with its long-term planning without impeding its immediate road maintenance plans.

Chair Goslant said the Select Board wants to work with its Tree Warden regarding roadside clearance but would rather adhere to Vermont Local Roads standards than wait for this assessment to be completed in a couple years. The fact that none of the other targeted communities have agreed to take part in the FPR assessment should be considered a red flag. Chair Goslant added that Highway Foreman Trent Tucker has been working alongside Mr. Barrett to ensure adjacent property owners are kept informed and provide their consent before any roadside trees are removed. The residents living on the roads already cleared (i.e., Winch Hill Road, Bull Run Road, etc.) have clearly expressed their appreciation for the work done. Mr. Barrett confirmed he would continue to work with Mr. Tucker on this.

Mary Dollenmaier believes the Select Board members appear to have fear of the State getting involved that is based on emotion and not facts. Since the vegetation assessment is at no cost to the municipality and is not binding, Ms. Dollenmaier believes the Select Board should follow Mr. Barrett's recommendation to participate in it.

Thaddeus Severy doesn't care much for government so this is the first Select Board meeting he has attended. He has followed this matter on Front Porch Forum and agrees with the Select Board members who have expressed concerns about getting the State involved in local backroads maintenance concerns. Mr. Severy believes the problems with overgrown brush are clearly visible to the naked eye so there is no need for a government study to prove what's already known. He added Lovers Lane is a much better road due to the tree trimming there and he doesn't want the Select Board hindered in its plans to address other problem roads.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **May 23, 2017 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #24-17.** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve Warrant #24-17 in the amount of \$1,496,212.28. It was noted that of the total warrant amount, \$1,045,826 represented property taxes collected by the municipality and then forwarded to the Northfield School District. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**
- b. **Warrant #24-17A.** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve Warrant #24-17A in the amount of \$16,541.58. Manager Schulz said this payment was to refinance the bank note secured to purchase a new ambulance unit. The note will be fully paid off in FY 2018/2019. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

- c. **Approval of Bi-Weekly Payroll through May 21, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$80,810.75. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**
- d. **Approval of Bi-Weekly Payroll through June 4, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$84,576.39. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Review of Contract for Tree Service (Limlaw Pulpwood Inc.).** Motion by Selectman Goodrich, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve and authorize Manager Schulz to sign a new contract with Limlaw Pulpwood to "remove marked trees and wood debris from the Town of Northfield's highway right-of-way from designated areas." Limlaw's only compensation will be "the cut wood and wood debris." Selectman Goodrich asked if it would be the Tree Warden (in conjunction with the Highway Foreman) who would be marking trees for removal. Manager Schulz confirmed it would be. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**
- b. **Review and Approval of 2017 Memorial Park Pool Schedule and Fees.** Manager Schulz worked with Pool Director Shannon Palone on setting the pool opening and closing dates as well as adjusting the pool fees to make them more in line with what neighboring communities charge. There will be overall fee increases of about twenty percent (20%) across the board in order to help offset higher operating costs. For example, the cost of a family season pass for Northfield residents will increase from \$100 to \$125. An adult season pass increases from \$50 to \$75. It was noted this is the first fee increase in four (4) years and Northfield's pool fees still remain lower than the regional average. Chair Goslant noted it is expensive to operate the municipal pool for the two summer months but this is a very important community resource. Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the 2017 Memorial Park Pool Schedule and Fees as recommended by management. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

Selectman Freeman arrived at this time.

Ms. Palone thanked the Select Board members for approving the fee increase. She added even with the additional revenue this summer, it is becoming difficult to recruit experienced, qualified lifeguards to Northfield since almost all are paid the Vermont minimum wage (\$10 per hour). Nearby communities with public pools, such as Randolph, pay as much as \$13 per hour for experienced lifeguards. Ms. Palone noted Northfield used to pay a competitive rate but has fallen behind in recent years. Selectman Doney asked how many lifeguards were employed each summer. Ms. Palone said there were ten (10) including herself. A minimum of three (3) need to be on duty when the pool is open. On hot days, five (5) or more might be on duty to handle the larger crowd. She added since the pool opens mid-June, its budget is split between two fiscal years. In past years, there have been sufficient funds at the end of summer to pay for opening the pool the next year but Ms. Palone is worried this might not happen this year. She would like the Select Board to address these budget concerns if the pool is to retain its current operating hours as well as continue to hire experienced lifeguards.

Chair Goslant did not realize that the pool budget was so problematic. He asked if it were possible to bring in additional revenue beyond the user fees charged. Ms. Palone noted some communities in the area charge good prices for private swimming lessons. Chair Goslant would like this possibility explored. Selectman Freeman would like these concerns kept in mind when the FY 2018/2019 pool budget is put together later this year. Chair Goslant will discuss this and other pool-related matters further with Manager Schulz.

- c. Review and Approval of Revised Cemetery Fees.** Chair Goslant noted the rates for purchasing lots, burials, and other services in Northfield's public cemeteries have not been increased in almost ten (10) years. They now are far lower than those in neighboring communities or in Norwich University's private cemetery. Manager Schulz worked with Cemetery Maintenance Contractor Bruce Wright to develop updated rates that better reflect actual maintenance and material costs. For example, the cost of a full lot (4 graves) would increase from \$1200 to \$1600 for Northfield residents and \$1800 for non-residents. There are similar increases for cremations, burials, setting markers, etc. The increased rates would take effect on July 1, 2017. Chair Goslant noted the local cemeteries need a lot of maintenance as well as some expansion as space is running out. The increased rates would help with this expense. Selectman Freeman felt the increases seemed reasonable given it has been ten (10) years since they last went up. Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to approve the revised Northfield Cemetery Rates as recommended by management. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- d. Approval of Private Street Name (Prior Drive).** A resident has asked that the driveway off Berlin Pond Road serving his and another house be given the name Prior Drive. Manager Schulz said it is the Select Board's responsibility to name (or rename) public and private roads. There are no roads with similar names in this community. Selectman Freeman noted since this is a private road, the municipality will not be responsible for its maintenance. Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the private street name Prior Drive. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- e. Capital Expense Note (2014 Ford Ambulance).** Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the Capital Expense Note in the amount of \$31,195.91 at 2.15% interest; to approve and sign the Capital Expense Borrowing Resolution; and to approve and sign the No-Arbitrage and use of Proceeds Certificate. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- f. Bull Run Solar Farm Project.** Manager Schulz said he put this matter on the agenda as he had assumed that the agreement with the site developers (Will Veve and Victor Veve from VWSD) would have been finalized by now. However, there still are a couple issues to be resolved. Will Veve said he and his brother Victor will be meeting with the local Electric Utility Commission regarding any remaining concerns. This includes the percentage of the renewable energy credits generated by the new solar farm that the Northfield Electric Department (NED) will retain. The initial offer from VWSD was ten percent (10%) but after negotiation this has been increased to fifteen percent (15%). Chair Goslant also serves on the Electric Utility Commission. He noted that NED will be paying to purchase this solar energy at a higher rate than its other power sources in order to meet Public Service Board (PSB) renewable energy requirements. Because of this higher cost, he would like NED to retain twenty percent (20%) of the credits. Will Veve said this was too high a number for a project of this size so further negotiation probably is needed. He added the solar farm project would provide other benefits to the community, including the upgraded power lines in the vicinity, at no additional cost to NED customers. Chair Goslant noted NED rates are among the lowest in Vermont but this may change as it is required to purchase more and more renewable energy in coming years. Mr. Severy has worked in nuclear energy for several years and he felt neither solar power nor wind energy have lived up to expectations in providing public power at competitive prices. Chair Goslant said the PSB is requiring electric companies get more of their power portfolios from renewable sources in coming years so cost is no longer the only factor in power purchases.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Town Highway Department.** Selectman Doney noted the Town Mechanic has left for other employment. He hopes his replacement will be as qualified and skilled. He also wanted to thank the Highway Department employees that transported mulch to the parks. More work needs to be done but a good start has been made.
- b. Northfield Police Department (NPD).** Selectman Doney was grateful to see that Manager Schulz has sent a letter of appreciation to new NPD Chief William Jennings and his officers for their outstanding performance. He repeated his earlier statement (at the last meeting when he requested this letter be sent) that there has been a marked improvement in NPD performance recently and that the new Police Chief has been a major factor. Chair Goslant agreed that hiring Chief Jennings has proved to have been a good decision.

X. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Rabbit Hollow Road.** Selectman Goodrich noted in Manager Schulz's report that the bridge repairs on Rabbit Hollow Road are nearly complete and the road will be reopened in a week or so. Manager Schulz confirmed a lot of work has been done on the bridge decks, supports, etc. He is hopeful the road will be reopened soon.
- b. Water Street River Park Project.** Chair Goslant noted there already will be additional costs in the project with utility poles relocated from the project site to the east bank of the Dog River. Manager Schulz said this was under consideration from the beginning and it was recently determined by the engineers that it would be best to move all the poles out of the floodplain. There already was \$30,000 in the project budget to move one pole and it will cost an additional \$50,000 to move the rest. There are NED surplus and CIP funds that will cover the extra expense. Selectman Doney is disappointed this decision was not made sooner when the project budget was being developed. Manager Schulz will provide additional information about this at an upcoming meeting.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Select Board Meeting Attendance.** Mr. Severy noted Selectman Freeman has missed a few Select Board meetings and was late again tonight. He felt this was unacceptable behavior for an elected official. Chair Goslant said Selectman Freeman informed him beforehand that he had another appointment tonight that he could not reschedule and that he would be a little late.

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

The Board went into executive session at 8:55 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 9:35 p.m. No action was taken.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:35 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 revised and approved at the regular Select Board meeting of June 27, 2017.