

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of July 11, 2017

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Nathan Freeman, Julie H. Goodrich, and K. David Maxwell. Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Brenda Cruickshank, Robert Cruickshank, Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Mary Comiskey, Jane Bryant, Denise MacMartin, Richard Wobby, Albert Robitaille, Janet Robitaille, Elroy Hill, Debra Ryan, Laura Ranker (CVRPC), Rebecca Trower, 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.** Finance Director Laurie Baroffio was scheduled to provide a department head report tonight but was unavailable. She will attend the next meeting.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Jane Bryant: Concerns about using Center Park for Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Siting.** At the previous Select Board meeting (06/27/17), Richard Wobby asked the Select Board to authorize the placement of a Gold Star Families Memorial Monument on municipal property (i.e. "Center Park") adjacent to Norwich University (NU). The Select Board members appeared to favor the proposal at that time but final action was postponed until tonight's meeting. Ms. Bryant now asks the Select Board reject this request as she doesn't feel this is an appropriate location. She would prefer Center Park to remain open space for public use. Ms. Bryant added the site was rehabilitated for Vermont's statehood bicentennial in 1992 and this has been "common ground" open to all Northfield residents since the 1800s. She also feels the limited parking in the area makes it an unsuitable monument site. Ms. Bryant does not oppose siting the monument in Northfield, just not at this location. She also submitted letters from Lauren D. Howard, Jeanne L. Cook, and Mary Comiskey sharing this opinion. In her letter, Ms. Cooke suggested the Vermont Veterans Cemetery in Randolph would be a better location for the monument. Chair Goslant would really like to see the monument in Northfield.

Selectman Freeman said he favored the proposal when it was first brought up but now sees some residents have concerns about using the Center Park site. He felt this area was largely used by NU students for recreation. There also are questions over whether the municipality should retain the parcel or sell it to NU. For these reasons, Selectman Freeman feels this decision should not be rushed. Selectman Doney added the Select Board only learned of this proposal when Mr. Wobby presented it two weeks ago. Selectman Doney suggested the monument should be moved southward and closer to the NU information center. Selectman Maxwell noted he asked this matter be put on tonight's agenda so public comment on the proposal could be solicited before any decision was made.

Chair Goslant doubts most members of the public even know Center Park is municipal property. He felt since the monument would cost taxpayers nothing and would bring visitors to town, it would be a great honor and a boon to the community. Chair Goslant recently spoke with NU President Richard Schneider about the monument and reported President Schneider is enthusiastic about the proposal and willing to consider other locations on or adjacent to the NU campus such as the Crescent.

Mr. Wobby said Governor Phil Scott tasked him with finding the optimal location in the state for this monument so it really isn't appropriate for Select Board members to negotiate with NU on this. He added the monument originally was destined for Colchester but Mr. Wobby advocated for a more central location in Northfield. Mr. Wobby also recommended Center Park as it has fallen into some disrepair since the bicentennial refurbishment twenty-five years ago. If the monument is placed there, the benches surrounding it would be upgraded. If this site is not available, Mr. Wobby believes he would be able to find another willing host town very easily. He repeated what he said at the last meeting about the Crescent not being a suitable location for a memorial monument since students use it for organized recreation, etc. Ms. Bryant again stated she doesn't oppose siting the monument in Northfield but in a different location than Center Park. She also disputed Mr. Wobby's contention that the park is in poor condition. The Select Board will decide on this matter later in the meeting (see below).

- b. Sally Davidson: Recreation Committee update.** Ms. Davidson reported the water fountain at Memorial Park has been fixed but some other minor repairs are still needed. For example, there is a non-working light tower at the Northfield Falls ballfield. Also, the benches there are in poor condition. At Memorial Park, some of the hillside steps need to be replaced, part of the entrance gate is lying on the ground, and the granite monument needs a better foundation. The Recreation Committee will meet next Monday (07/17/17) to work on a complete list of repairs needed. She added the Highway Department crew and Selectman Doney have been very helpful in fixing problems and installing new equipment this summer. Selectman Goodrich noted there seems to be a lot of trash left on the ground after ballgames. Ms. Davidson agreed and suggested the coaches could direct their players to perform some post-game cleanup. She added some dog owners don't act responsibly and clean up after their pets when visiting the municipal parks. Chair Goslant agreed and felt people should have more common sense about this given the number of small children using the parks. He then thanked Ms. Davidson for the update.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. June 27, 2017 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the minutes. Selectman Maxwell noted action was taken after the executive session held at the end of the meeting but this is not reflected in the minutes. This was an approved motion to authorize Chair Goslant and Vice-Chair Maxwell to negotiate with Manager Schulz on a one-year extension of his employment contract. The minutes will be revised to include this. **Motion to approve the amended minutes passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Warrant #02-18.** Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve Warrant #02-18 in the amount of \$555,174.65. Chair Goslant asked about some money the Highway Department spent on ledge removal. Manager Schulz said some ledge recently was removed on Little Northfield Road. There are plans for similar work on Turkey Hill in the near future. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Approval of Bi-Weekly Payroll through July 2, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Freeman, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$88,526.58. Selectman Doney asked if the Northfield Police Department (NPD) was fully staffed at this time. Manager Schulz said the NPD was short one full-time officer since the one planning to leave for military service did so in early June. Selectman Doney asked why NPD overtime was so high for this time period. Manager Schulz said a full-time officer's wife had a baby recently and he was taking paternal leave. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. Proposed Siting of Gold Star Families Memorial Monument on Municipal Property.** Selectman Maxwell said he supports this proposal in concept but is concerned it may cause parking problems in the area. He asked Mr. Wobby how many people are expected to visit it each year. Mr. Wobby said a similar monument in Kentucky attracts 30,000 visitors each year but there is no way to accurately predict how many the Vermont monument might attract. He expected there to be a good number of visitors following its installation but this should decline to about a dozen or so each week. There would be attendance spikes around the patriotic holidays (i.e. Memorial Day, Independence Day, Veterans Day, etc.) as well as during organized events. Mr. Wobby believes a few new parking spaces could be added adjacent to Center Park and there is a seventy-five (75) space parking lot on the other side of Vermont Route 12 that could be used for high attendance days. He added most of these spike days would occur on weekends and at the times of the year when NU classes are not in session (i.e. mid-May to late August). Mr. Wobby still feels Center Park is the best location but added he doesn't have a personal stake in this matter (unlike the Gold Star Families).

Selectman Maxwell asked if the municipality would need to do anything regarding zoning issues before the monument is installed. Manager Schulz doesn't believe so since the site would be non-commercial but he can confirm this. Selectman Maxwell said he would favor the proposal if his parking concerns were addressed. Selectman Goodrich asked if Mr. Wobby had considered other possible sites in Northfield. Mr. Wobby said he felt Center Park was the best location with its tree canopy, tranquil setting, etc. He added the monument site would be made handicapped-accessible. If this request is denied, his next step would be to look for another Vermont community to site the monument. Other towns already have expressed strong interest. Selectman Goodrich said she toured Center Park today and agreed it would be the ideal location for the monument.

Chair Goslant believes this monument would be good for the Northfield community and bring in a number of first-time visitors. He asked Ms. Bryant if any of the information presented tonight has changed her position. Ms. Bryant still opposes installing the monument on Center Park as its large size (24' x 8') would completely change how the park is used. Rebecca Trower is a retired military service member and she supports the monument as she feels fallen soldiers should be respected and honored. Brenda Cruickshank also is retired from the military and she asked who would own and maintain the monument. Mr. Wobby said the municipality would own the monument as it owned the property. The private organization soliciting donations for the monument itself would set aside funds for its future maintenance. The park itself would be maintained (mowing, etc.) by NU employees as in past years.

Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to authorize the siting of the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument on Center Park with the following conditions: six (6) new parking spaces will be added adjacent to the park; Norwich University will provide additional parking spaces on special events; and Norwich University will continue to maintain the park itself.
Motion passed 5-0-0.

- b. Approval of 2017/2018 Town Tax Rates.** Manager Schulz said the proposed tax rates are as follows: the residential tax rate will increase from 2.3669 to 2.4040 and the non-resident rate will increase from 2.3936 to 2.4148. Manager Schulz added this increase is less than had been anticipated earlier this year. Chair Goslant noted the proposed tax rates are lower than they were from 2009 through 2014. He added the Select Board members did their very best to keep tax rates as low as possible considering the relatively limited amount of taxable property in Northfield compared to other Vermont communities. Selectman Freeman felt the expansion of Northfield's Grand List through property development, etc. really should be a Select Board priority in the coming year. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to set the 2017-2018 Homestead (i.e. Residential) Tax Rate at 2.4040. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to set the 2017-2018 Non-Residential Tax Rate at 2.4148. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. Central Street Sidewalk Removal Project.** Manager Schulz noted at a previous meeting that there was a suggestion that on some of the side streets sidewalk should be limited to one side of the street. This is due to the high expense of installing and maintaining sidewalks. For example, on Central Street new concrete sidewalks were installed a couple years ago on the west side of the street as part of a water main replacement project. The asphalt sidewalks on the east side of the street remain in very poor condition. The current proposal is for the Highway Department crew to remove the east side sidewalks with the freed up space reverting to the property owner for lawn extension, etc. Once remaining issues involving drainage, driveway access, etc. have been resolved, the demolition work should take about three (3) weeks. Letters recently were sent to Central Street property owners informing them of this proposal and seeking their feedback.

Chair Goslant confirmed the Central Street asphalt sidewalks are in very bad condition and dangerous to pedestrians. Given there is not a lot of money in the municipal budget for sidewalks, it seemed better to focus resources on maintaining the new concrete sidewalk and demolish the asphalt sidewalk. Selectman Doney agreed, saying most landowners probably would welcome extra lawn in front of their houses. Selectman Maxwell said it would appear to be a prudent option given the municipality's limited resources for sidewalks. Selectman Goodrich understands some landowners would like the sidewalks retained and/or repaired (as indicated in the letter from Scott and Mary Higgins). Selectman Freeman suggested tabling any action on this matter until the next meeting since the Central Street residents only received Manager Schulz's letter in the past couple days. Chair Goslant noted there is no money in the municipal budget to fix the asphalt sidewalks.

Albert Robitaille is a "civil" engineer who does not oppose the removal of sidewalk in front of his home since it is in very bad condition. Should the municipality not install new curbing when the sidewalk is removed, he would be willing to pay for his own.

Janet Robitaille doesn't understand why anyone would want to retain the old sidewalk rather than putting in more grass. She favors the municipality's proposal provided the issues with drainage and driveways are worked out. This would make the street look much better.

Robert Cruickshank agrees the sidewalk is in bad condition but if it is removed, he would like curbing installed to separate his yard from the street. Like Mr. Robitaille, he would be willing to contribute to the cost. He also would like any decision postponed until more residents can provide input.

Debra Ryan said grass doesn't grow in front of her house, which might be partly due to the road salt dumped there every winter. To her, extending the lawn really isn't an option. Brenda Cruickshank feels new curbing would be needed should the sidewalks be removed in order to keep stormwater from running through the front lawns. Rebecca Trower agreed as she already has flooding in her basement every spring. Elroy Hill doesn't like the idea that children and older persons will be expected to cross the street to use the new sidewalk. Laura Ranker would like all project costs identified before the project is authorized. Manager Schulz said the Highway Department would be performing the physical labor so this should keep costs down.

As previously suggested, action on this matter will be tabled until the next regular meeting. Chair Goslant would like the Highway Committee to meet beforehand to address the concerns raised tonight.

- d. Municipal Paving Projects.** Manager Schulz said now the new fiscal year has begun, there is \$161,000 in the paving budget available for summer paving projects. The priority areas previously identified are Winch Hill Road, Cox Brook Road, Union Street, and Slate Avenue. He already has received a \$120,000 estimate to pave Winch Hill Road. Chair Goslant is concerned about the drainage issues on Slate Avenue. Manager Schulz would like to spend about \$3000 on an engineering report on how to best fix this. The actual work would be done by the Highway Department. Chair Goslant would like part of Central Street repaved. Selectman Maxwell would like to address the curbing issues there first. Selectman Goodrich asked how the priority list was developed. Selectman Maxwell said the RSMS (Road Surface Management System) program is used to flag problem areas. The program data is entered by the Highway Department based on observation and other factors. Manager Schulz added any visual inspection of Winch Hill Road would confirm it needs work. Steve Davis asked why the work on Winch Hill Road would cost so much more than the paving of a similar stretch of road on Union Brook Road last year. Manager Schulz said the work on Union Brook Road was only a shim coat whereas Winch Hill Road will need to be ground down to its base. Chair Goslant confirmed the very poor condition and steepness of this road does require a different treatment. Selectman Freeman added a shim coat is a temporary solution. He would like the work on Winch Hill Road to last several years.
- e. Approval of 2017 Local Emergency Management Operations Plan.** Manager Schulz said this plan has been updated to reflect changes in municipal staffing, local officials, etc. Chair Goslant found a couple of typos that will be corrected. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the 2017 Local Emergency Management Operations Plan as amended.
Motion passed 5-0-0.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Select Board Resignation.** As he is planning to leave soon to take a teaching position in Alaska for the next two years, Selectman Freeman announced he will be resigning from the Select Board. He hopes a qualified person will be chosen as his successor. Chair Goslant thanked Selectman Freeman for bringing his unique perspective to the Select Board and wished him well in his future endeavors.
- b. **Local Economic Development.** Before he leaves the Select Board, Selectman Freeman wanted to strongly recommend the municipality hire an economic development director in order to (among other projects) grow the Grand List. Expanding the Grand List would be the best way to keep property taxes low. There already are funds set aside for economic development and perhaps these could be used to hire someone with a track record of success in this field.
- c. **Municipal Pool.** Chair Goslant noted the municipal pool was closed for a few days when the underground power lines feeding it were damaged. A generator has been installed so the pool will reopen tomorrow. Green Mountain Power (GMP) will be repairing the underground lines but it will take some time as GMP is still dealing with the statewide damage caused by recent storms.
- d. **Recent Storm Damage.** As previously indicated, there were a couple of strong rainstorms over the past two weeks. Manager Schulz said there was no structural damage but some flooding along Water Street and backroads damage estimated at about \$14,000. The Highway Department now is making repairs. Laura Ranker from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) said the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) now estimates \$22,000 of storm damage in Northfield, which includes the cost of labor and equipment. Washington County may or may not be declared a federal disaster area as FEMA still is onsite collecting information.

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

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Laura Ranker: Rail Car Incident Response Training.** Ms. Ranker reported the Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium (RDPC) will be providing an eight-hour course in Berlin, Vermont on Saturday, October 7, 2017 focusing on how to best respond to railroad accidents. The course is free and this is training Northfield first responders have requested in the past. She hopes members of our local fire department and ambulance service will be able to attend.

XI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Freeman, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:50 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 July 25, 2017.