

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of July 25, 2017**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, and K. David Maxwell. Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Arlington Supplee (Board of Listers), Brenda Cruickshank, Linda Barrows, Lindsay Cahill Lord (NCDN), Kaitlyn Keating (NCDN), Adam Crawford (NCDN), Annee Giard (NCDN), Carolyn Stevens (NCDN), Nate Freeman (NCDN), Steve Davis, John Stevens, Mary Higgins, Scott Higgins, Laura Hill-Eubanks (Conservation Commission), Pam Knox (Conservation Commission), Russ Barrett (Conservation Commission), Adam Evans, Connor Keating, Rob Higgins, Billi Higgins, Greg Giard, Will Eberle (Vermont Agency of Human Services), Elroy Hill, Pam Hepburn, Cara Gauthier, Ben Gauthier, Mary Dollenmaier, and Aaron Rhodes.

Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 7:03 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.** At the request of the Northfield Promise Community Steering Committee, the discussion of possible grant funds for playground equipment will be delayed until the next meeting (08/08/17).

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Arlington Supplee: 2017 Grand List Errors and Omissions.** Mr. Supplee asked the Select Board to correct the recently-filed Grand List to account for a change in a parcel's Current Use Program value. As a result of the change, the parcel's real value will increase from \$256,400 to \$259,200 and its Land Use reduction will change from \$28,900 to \$96,200. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the requested correction. As an aside, Selectman Maxwell asked if Northfield properties usually sold above or below their assessed value. Mr. Supplee said in his experience properties usually sold above their assessed value by an average of \$50,000. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. Linda Barrows: Barrows Road Tree Clearing.** Ms. Barrows provided the Select Board members with a series of photographs indicating various sections of Barrows Road where roadside trees have become overgrown. In fact, there are some areas where road signs cannot be viewed properly due to excessive vegetation. In addition, the spots where the trees have taken over the roadside proved to have been the most difficult to navigate this past Mud Season. Ms. Barrows has spoken to a few of her neighbors and all agree roadside clearance should be done as soon as possible. Chair Goslant said the Highway Committee will inspect the road, and if there is no objection from adjacent property owners the roadside clearing will be done later this year.
- c. Lindsay Cahill Lord: Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN).** Ms. Lord wished to provide the Select Board members with an update on NCDN's recent activities as well as its short- and long-term goals for the community. She reported NCDN members usually meet twice a month with larger community meetings held every six (6) months or so. NCDN was formed in January 2016 and now has 501(c)3 nonprofit status. Ms. Lord noted when entrepreneurs want to start or relocate a business in Waterbury, Barre, Montpelier, or Randolph, there is a professional economic development director on hand to assist with real estate options, local zoning regulations, etc. She said NCDN would like to fill this void in Northfield for the time being. As for its long-term goals, NCDN is looking to create one place for new businesses, recent residents, etc. to obtain information on what is available locally. Since NCDN is staffed by volunteers usually working outside of normal business hours, one of its long-term goals is to have an economic development director hired for Northfield who can interact during the workday with local business leaders, etc.

Ms. Lord said NCDN developed a new brand logo for Northfield based on feedback from its public meetings. This logo should be seen in more business windows as more community outreach is done. In addition, NCDN will be organizing a meeting with local small businesses soon to provide information on the potential benefits of the Village Center Designation the Northfield downtown currently enjoys and is now being sought for Northfield Falls. In addition, NCDN will hold another community outreach event on Tuesday, September 26, 2017, with its second annual Night on the Common. Ms. Lord said NCDN is asking at this time that the municipality work with its members to develop partnership opportunities.

Selectman Maxwell asked what would be the necessary qualifications for the economic development director and what would be the municipality's return on its investment should this person be hired. Ms. Lord said the directors were hired by the aforementioned Central Vermont communities and their achievements should provide models for the person Northfield would hire. The benefits would include increased outreach to existing businesses, promotion of Northfield to attract new businesses, etc. She added hiring this director would be considered a long-term goal and NCDN's immediate aim is to create a working partnership between itself and the Select Board.

Chair Goslant noted Nate Freeman, who recently resigned from the Select Board due to an upcoming job relocation, had been a founding member of NCDN and served as intermediary between both groups. In his absence, Chair Goslant recommended NCDN should work on a regular basis with Manager Schulz and the Economic Development Committee. He then thanked Ms. Lord for the informative presentation.

- d. Will Eberle: Northfield Promise Community Steering Committee CDBG Planning Grant.** Mr. Eberle is a Northfield resident who works as a field director for the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS). He is aware of a good number of grant opportunities for this community in areas which have been identified as local needs including affordable housing, child care services, mental health services, etc. Mr. Eberle would like the Select Board's authorization to apply for a planning grant on the municipality's behalf that would (if successful) provide funds (around \$30,000 to \$50,000) to identify how best these local needs could be met. For example, one possibility would be to purchase the Gray Building or other local underutilized properties which could be used to meet these needs.

Selectman Maxwell noted the Vermont Downtown Action Team (V-DAT) looked into similar concerns in its 2014 report and asked if Mr. Eberle had reviewed this information. Mr. Eberle stated the grant writing process would utilize this and other existing studies. The goal is to get Northfield into the pipeline for future community development block grants. Chair Goslant asked if Mr. Eberle would be willing to work with NCDN members on the feasibility studies. Mr. Eberle would be willing as there appears to be some overlap in terms of long-term goals. Chair Goslant would like to see the Select Board work with all interested groups and/or individuals to achieve these funding opportunities.

Selectman Maxwell would like to see the municipality partnered with Norwich University and local businesses (i.e., Northfield Savings Bank) to help address the local problems identified earlier. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to state the Select Board's support for and authorize Mr. Eberle to apply for a CDBG Planning Grant on the municipality's behalf. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

- e. Pam Knox, Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC): Land Conservation Project.** Ms. Knox, who serves as NCC Chair, reported there is an opportunity to purchase a parcel of land adjacent to the Town Forest from TDS Telecom. She would like the Select Board's authority to negotiate with TDS on this purchase. Ms. Knox said NCC would be working with the Vermont Land Trust on this and the plan is to fund the purchase through donations and other fundraising efforts. If the property is purchased, the expansion of the Town Forest would result in additional hiking trails, etc.

Selectman Goodrich asked if this purchase would take this property off the Grand List. Ms. Hill-Eubanks confirmed it would but there would be significant benefits to the community offsetting this loss of revenue. The current annual property tax for the parcel is about \$1786. Russ Barrett is a NCC member as well as the local Tree Warden. He said the parcel would be used to expand the existing recreational opportunities in the Town Forest. Chair Goslant asked if some of the trees on the parcel could be harvested to offset the loss of tax revenue (while also helping maintain the forest itself). Mr. Barrett said this was possible since the area hasn't been logged since 1991. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to authorize NCC to enter into negotiation with TDS Telecom on the purchase of this parcel. **Motion passed 4-0-0.** Ms. Knox confirmed NCC will keep Manager Schulz and the Select Board informed as the negotiations develop.

V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio.** Ms. Baroffio provided a preliminary report regarding the 2016-2017 fiscal year, indicating a final report would not be available until all pre-July 2017 invoices have been received and processed, the independent audit has been completed, etc. At this time she projected a \$104,000 surplus in the Town General budget and a \$5,000 surplus in the Town Highway budget. Ms. Baroffio attributed much of this budget surplus to increased revenue from the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) with a net increase of approximately \$76,000. As for expenditures, Ms. Baroffio noted personnel costs were over budget across the board due to new union contracts and telephone expenses similarly increased due to a new telephone system. The NAS operating budget went up considerably due to increased call volume but this added expense was more than compensated for by the aforementioned 25% revenue increase. The budget for the Municipal Pool had an approximate \$9,500 shortfall but Ms. Baroffio said this particular department was difficult to budget since the expenses for the operating season (i.e., summer) are spread over two fiscal years. The auditors will be in Northfield the week of August 21, 2017 and their first draft report should be available by the end of September. The finalized version should be ready for presentation to the Select Board at one of its November regular meetings. Chair Goslant noted when he began serving on the Select Board, one of the major concerns was the high deficits the NAS was running. He is glad to see this turnaround and expressed gratitude to all responsible. Manager Schulz added there was a great effort by all department heads to come within their projected budgets.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. July 11, 2017 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Goodrich, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Warrant #03-18.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve Warrant #03-18 in the amount of \$186,680.27. Selectman Doney noted an invoice to repair damage to the Mack truck; was this expense covered by insurance? Manager Schulz confirmed it was. Selectman Doney saw a bill for marking lime for the volleyball fields; is this an annual expense. Manager Schulz said it was. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Bi-Weekly Payroll through July 16, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$90,839.93. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Central Street Sidewalk Removal Project.** Manager Schulz noted the proposed removal of the asphalt sidewalks on the east side of Central Street was discussed at the previous meeting (07/11/17). In the interim, a second letter was sent to Central Street property owners informing them this matter would be on tonight's agenda and reiterating the reasons behind this proposal. The asphalt sidewalks are in very poor condition and since a new concrete sidewalk was installed on the west side of the street last year, it was considered cost-effective to have the asphalt sidewalks removed. In many places, this would extend the property owner's lawn. Given the high cost of sidewalk maintenance, Manager Schulz added it is a growing practice in many Vermont communities to have sidewalk on only one side of side streets. Selectman Maxwell would like any current or potential stormwater issues on Central Street addressed before this project proceeds. Chair Goslant also wants any pedestrian liability issues associated with the asphalt sidewalks researched.

Brenda Cruickshank lives on the east side of Central Street and she has detected a definite slant in the road towards her side. This was evident during the most recent rainstorm and she felt this provides further evidence curbing should be installed along the east side of the road to keep stormwater from flowing into residents' lawns and houses. Ms. Cruickshank then presented a signed petition from seventy-one (71) Northfield residents asking these asphalt sidewalks be repaired and not removed. Of the signatories, twenty-five (25) identify as Central Street residents.

Scott Higgins also lives on the east side of Central Street and he doesn't believe it is appropriate to have this street restricted to one sidewalk. He felt there is a lot of foot traffic on Central Street especially when Norwich University (NU) is in session. Mr. Higgins added the road itself needs to be repaired after the Water Project work as there remain a number of cutouts along it.

Robert Higgins felt Central Street is a heavily travelled road and agreed with his father one sidewalk was not enough. His wife, Billi Higgins, noted many motorists exceed the 25 MPH speed limit and she thought it unsafe to expect children to cross the street to use the granite sidewalk. Ms. Cruickshank added a number of joggers, especially NU students, use the concrete sidewalk so a second sidewalk on the other side of the street is needed.

Chair Goslant noted the asphalt sidewalk in its current condition is not safe to walk upon and therefore unusable. He added there is not enough money in the budget to put in a replacement sidewalk, especially when there is a new one on the other side of this street. He would like Manager Schulz to obtain cost estimates on proving temporary fixes to the asphalt sidewalk. He also would like to have a comprehensive review of all sidewalks in Northfield to determine which ones should be removed, repaired, or replaced.

- b. **Town Select Board Vacancy.** As indicated earlier, Nate Freeman recently resigned from the Select Board as he will be taking an out-of-state teaching position soon. His resignation leaves the Select Board short one member and this vacancy has been advertised. Interested Northfield residents are asked to submit a letter to Manager Schulz as soon as possible. Once a sufficient pool of applicants has been gathered, Manager Schulz will present the names to the Select Board members for their consideration.
- c. **Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Billing Abatements.** Finance Director Baroffio noted those who have received a NAS bill for services are contacted a minimum of three (3) times before payment is turned over to a collection agency. If the collection agency is unable to get payment after a year, the standard practice is to ask the Select Board to abate the bills in order to take them off the books. Ms. Baroffio said the amount being abated this year (\$17,934.55) is about average compared to recent years and a little less than last year's amount (\$19,304.08).

Chair Goslant hopes with the new out-sourced billing system, the number of unpaid bills will go down. Ms. Baroffio noted this is an unfortunate part of this business and sometimes the individuals involved have gone through very trying times and just cannot pay. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the NAS billing abatements. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Bull Run Road Solar Farm Project.** Selectman Goodrich asked if all the funds due the municipality before the project proceeds have been received. Manager Schulz has been told "the check is in the mail" but will hold off signing the net metering agreements until it has been received and cashed.
- b. Water Street River Park Project.** Selectman Goodrich asked if the construction phase was proceeding properly. Manager Schulz said Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi and the project engineers from W.B. Rogers have been very helpful in getting this project started. He added there have been some construction delays due to the recent heavy rainstorms.
- c. Rabbit Hollow Road Bridge.** Chair Goslant wanted to clarify the bridge repair took a while not due to the obvious deck repairs but because of the extensive work done to the supporting structure.
- d. Pedestrian Safety.** Chair Goslant would like the crosswalks striped as soon as possible. He also would like the pedestrian safety sign put back in the middle of the Depot Square intersection. Manager Schulz will speak to Northfield Police Chief William Jennings about increasing the police presence around this potentially dangerous intersection.
- e. Northfield Police Station.** Selectman Doney noted the outside of the station really needs some work including some repainting. Selectman Maxwell suggested the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee (i.e., Selectmen Doney and Maxwell) should meet soon to discuss this. Manager Schulz added he does have a draft plan regarding a maintenance schedule for all the municipal buildings.
- f. Household Hazardous Waste Collection.** Chair Goslant noted Mountain Alliance and Casella Waste Management will be holding the second of three collection events this year behind the Northfield Fire Department (128 Wall Street) on Saturday, July 29, 2017, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This event is open only for residents of Randolph, Braintree, Brookfield, and Northfield. The final collection event of the year will be held in Randolph at the end of October.

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

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Richard Wobby: Gold Star Families Memorial Monument.** Mr. Wobby announced there would be an on-site presentation with updated information at the memorial monument's proposed location (Center Park) next Tuesday night (08/01/17) at 6:00 p.m.

XII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:28 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 August 8, 2017.