

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**BOARD OF SELECTMEN**  
**Minutes of September 12, 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, Pam Bailey (Northfield Promise Community), Briana Howard (Northfield Promise Community), Rebecca Pearish (Northfield Promise Community), Anne Toolan (Northfield Promise Community), Sue Toolan (Northfield Promise Community), Peter Evans (Northfield Promise Community), Bonnie Donahue (Northfield Promise Community), Jamie Cotton (Northfield Promise Community), Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Kenneth Hepburn, Kenneth Johnson, Raymond Pelletier, Gregory Sanders, John Sears, Don Wallace, Elroy Hill, Jamie Nair, Aaron Rhodes, Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), John Stevens, Brian Stringer, Christa Wells, 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. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. Bonnie Donahue, Northfield Promise Steering Committee: Playground Project Grant Funds.** Northfield is a Vermont Promise Community for 2017, having been awarded \$150,000 that must be used within the next year "to improve the educational and developmental outcomes for children" in the community. The Northfield Promise Steering Committee held six (6) public forums and distributed surveys seeking suggestions on how best to use these funds. The leading requests were: 1. A playground for children aged 0-6 years old; affordable local childcare facilities; and a community center. In addition, in seventy-five percent (75%) of the returned surveys (153), the residents asked whatever was done should be within walking distance of the downtown area. Ms. Donahue said based upon this feedback, the Steering Committee is asking for the Select Board's permission to build a playground on the municipal property behind the Northfield Police Station on Wall Street. The hope is this would be a location where families with young children can meet for unscheduled play. The playground area would be universally accessible; would promote Northfield downtown businesses and other facilities; etc. In addition, the site's proximity to the Police Station and the Senior Center might help to improve community relations with both law enforcement officers and senior citizens. Ms. Donahue added although Northfield has public playgrounds on King Street and in Northfield Falls, neither of them are universally accessible or within walking distance (for small children) of the downtown. The proposed playground site currently is underutilized and proper fencing and new parking spaces would be installed as part of the project. Out of the awarded grant funds, \$10,000 would be set aside in a future park maintenance fund. When this amount has been depleted, which should take several years, it would be replenished through fundraisers, etc.

Sally Davidson serves on the Recreation Committee and she asked if this should be seen as a rejection of Memorial Park. Rebecca Pearish said Memorial Park was still a valuable asset to the community but the survey respondents wanted a new playground geared towards younger children and closer to the downtown area. Ms. Donahue added the new park on Water Street would be a play area, not a play park, since playground equipment cannot be placed there. In addition, as a natural park, there would be no fencing installed to separate younger children from the adjacent street and riverbank.

Chair Goslant asked how many children six years old and younger were in Northfield. Peter Evans estimated about two hundred (200). Chair Goslant noted the proposed playground site is close to the railroad tracks. Ms. Donahue said appropriate fencing would be put in place. Chair Goslant noted this area is used sometimes to store snow removed from the Common area during the winter. Ms. Donahue thought the new park's plans would accommodate this.

Selectman Goodrich asked if this new playground might create liability issues for the municipality. Manager Schulz felt the park would fall under the coverage of the current insurance plan with little (if any) additional expense. Selectman Maxwell asked who would own the playground once it has been built. Ms. Donahue said since it would be located on municipal property, it would belong to the Town. Selectman Maxwell asked what was the timeline for the project. Mr. Evans said the grant has been secured but the Steering Committee would like permission from the Select Board as soon as possible so the project can go forward. He noted there is a September 20, 2017 deadline for the Steering Committee to notify the State whether this particular project can proceed.

Since this date is prior to the next regular Select Board meeting (09/26/17), Selectman Maxwell suggested holding a special Select Board meeting next week to discuss this further as well as gather more information before a decision can be made. Chair Goslant does has some concerns about using this specific property for this purpose. After some discussion, it was decided the special meeting would be held on Monday, September 18, 2017, at 7:00 p.m. in the Municipal Building (51 South Main Street).

**V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. **August 22, 2017 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

**VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. **Warrant #06-18.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve Warrant #06-18 in the amount of \$1,760,697.48. Selectman Goodrich asked if an employee was paid to shut off the municipal pool's water each night. Manager Schulz said Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi did shut down the pool's pumps each night as this was less expensive than an automated shutdown. Also, Mr. DeMasi did this on his own time and was only compensated for vehicle mileage. Selectman Goodrich noted the cost of outfitting the new Northfield Police Department (NPD) vehicle and asked if this amount was budgeted. Manager Schulz said the cost was covered in the CIP budget and state grant money also covered part of the expense. Chair Goslant noted of the total warrant amount, \$1,083,400 represented property tax money collected by the municipality being forwarded to the Northfield School District. In addition, there was a Flood Buyout Grant expense of \$245,021 to be later reimbursed by FEMA. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Bi-Weekly Payroll through August 27, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$88,950.51. Selectman Maxwell noted an increase in NPD overtime for this timeframe. Manager Schulz believed this was mainly due to police coverage for the Labor Day Weekend Festivities on and around the Common. Chair Goslant noted this was an annual anticipated overtime expense. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

**VII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. **Town Select Board Vacancy Applicant Interviews.** Manager Schulz noted former Select Board member Nate Freeman resigned from his position a couple months ago to take an out-of-state teaching position. The municipality then advertised the vacancy and received seven (7) letters of interest by the deadline. One applicant (Pam Hepburn) has withdrawn her application but the other six are present tonight to answer any questions the Select Board members might have. Due to the number of applicants, Manager Schulz would like to keep the interviews brief so he will ask the applicants to provide some background information as well as the reasons why they would like to serve on the Select Board; whether the applicants can make the time commitment to attend the twice-monthly regular meetings, committee meetings, and the often twice weekly meetings during the budget season; and how the applicants feel about transparency in government and what improvements (if any) Northfield should make to provide better accountability to the public. He suggested the candidates should be interviewed in the order their applications were received beginning with Raymond Pelletier and followed by Gregory Sanders, Donald Wallace, John Sears, Kenneth Johnson, and Kenneth Hepburn.

Mr. Pelletier moved to Northfield four (4) years ago when his wife took a position at Norwich University. A Navy veteran, for the past twelve (12) years he has worked as the Administrative Director of the Internet Engineering Task Force but he will be retiring at the end of October. In his retirement Mr. Pelletier would like to get better involved in community affairs so he applied when he saw the vacancy on the Select Board. Given his past work experience and his public service in previous communities, Mr. Pelletier believes he can make a positive contribution to the Northfield community. As for time commitment, Mr. Pelletier does not feel this will be a problem as he will be retiring soon. As for transparency in local government, he has plenty of experience in balancing the public's need to know with confidentiality concerns as a member of an internet engine task force. He believes the municipality has done a better job lately by posting information on Front Porch Forum but there is room for improvement. For example, the municipality had not publicized the names of tonight's Select Board vacancy applicants.

Mr. Sanders is a lifelong Northfield resident who previously served on the Select Board for six (6) years. He is concerned about what has been going on in this community and would like to put his past experience to use. During his time on the board, the new police station was built so he is familiar with helping bring large projects to fruition. In addition, he has experience with municipal budget creation, with highway concerns, and would make a commitment to attend all scheduled meetings. As for transparency in local government, he has seen improvements in recent years as there no longer are any hidden agendas. Mr. Sanders currently does not see any major problem with this.

Mr. Wallace has been a resident of Northfield for over fifty-five (55) years, which is the same amount of time he was employed by Norwich University as Professor of Mechanical Engineering. He recently retired from this position. He previously served on the Select Board for eight and one-half (8½) years including five (5) years as Chair. Mr. Wallace now serves as a charter member of the Conservation Commission, was a volunteer for the Northfield Ambulance Service for several years, and as an early advocate for local recycling, was part of the effort to establish the Northfield Recycling Depot & Transfer Station. He would like to return to the Select Board because a number of issues concern him. For example, he believes municipal resources should be better allocated in order to maintain municipal facilities and equipment. As for time commitment, he did not have a problem with meeting attendance when serving as Mechanical Engineering Department Chair so it definitely should not be a concern now he is retired. As for transparency, he feels a number of things should be done better.

Mr. Sears is a Business Analyst for the State of Vermont and has been a Northfield resident for two (2) years. He did run for Select Board last March and received the most votes (421) of those candidates not elected. Part of his job is to bring new solutions to old problems and he would like to bring this expertise to the Select Board. As the father of a one-year old son, he also would like to bring the perspective of young families to the Board. This would mean trying to make the community more family-friendly by seeking state and/or federal grant funding for various educational, recreational, etc. projects. He also will make the time to attend all meetings. As for transparency in local government, Mr. Sears believes there is no excuse for the lack of it in this digital age. He would like the municipality to keep the public aware of upcoming events through social media.

Mr. Johnson has served the Northfield community for over thirty (30) years as a member of the Northfield Fire Department, the Select Board, Planning Commission, etc. He would like to serve on the Select Board on an interim status until Northfield voters can express their own preference at the next Town Meeting (03/06/18). His main concern is the upcoming budget process as he would like to see the municipality do a better job of setting clear priorities and using CIP funds to meet them. Mr. Johnson will do his best to attend every meeting. As for transparency, he admits he is not a social media person but also believes the interaction between local government and residents should be a two-way conversation. The Select Board cannot predict what everyone would like to see on the municipal website or social media. He believes there is not a problem with transparency at this time.

Mr. Hepburn has been a Northfield resident since 2005 and owns several properties in addition to his own residence. He works fulltime for GE Healthcare mainly working out of his own home. He is used to working long hours coordinating with others and also is a soccer coach at Northfield Middle/High School. He believes Norwich University has a vital role in this community and would like to ensure NU and the municipality maintain good relations. Since his evenings are free and he mostly works from home, Mr. Hepburn believes he would be able to meet the time commitments associated with serving on the Select Board. He feels local government has had a lack of transparency on several occasions and would like to see some improvements with more local voices taken into account. Mr. Hepburn also would like to see better communication with neighboring municipalities as many of them share the same problems as Northfield.

Selectman Maxwell thanked the applicants for coming forward tonight and bringing up several important issues. Chair Goslant also thanked them and said they would be informed in a timely manner should a decision be made later tonight in executive session. As previously indicated, the successful candidate will hold the position until Town Meeting Day at which time he may seek to run for a Select Board seat through election.

- b. Town of Northfield-Norwich University Agreement (possible executive session).** Selectmen Maxwell and Goodrich serve on the committee meeting with Norwich University (NU) representatives regarding an extension of this agreement, which expires in 2017. As this involves contract negotiation, Selectman Maxwell would like to discuss this matter later in the meeting in executive session. There was no objection. Chris Bradley asked how many of these meetings have been held to date. Selectman Maxwell said there have been six (6). As this agreement concerns NU's annual contribution to Northfield emergency services and because he feels these services now are understaffed, Mr. Bradley would like to be sure the amount NU will provide is sufficient to cover municipal expense of providing emergency coverage to the NU campus (as well as students living off-campus). Mr. Hepburn suggested the new agreement could include more public access to NU facilities and equipment. Carolyn Stevens asked how many NU students volunteer their time to the emergency services. Selectman Doney estimated about seventy-five (75) NU students split between the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) and Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS). Selectman Maxwell noted this is a vital contribution. Selectman Doney is a NAS member and he agreed there sometimes are some staffing shortfalls when NU students leave for the summer.

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

- a. **Labor Day Weekend Festivities.** Chair Goslant reported all seemed to go well except for the Sunday rainstorm that caused the cancellation of the Classic Car Show. This annual event always brings outsiders to Northfield and is a very good showcase for the community.

**IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. **2014 Ford Truck Insurance Claim.** Selectman Goodrich noted the dealership is still fighting the municipality over the damaged vehicle. Manager Schulz confirmed the dealership is adamant the damage was caused by unauthorized equipment being installed. He doesn't believe this is a valid complaint but noted this particular dealership has used this on other municipalities. Manager Schulz will keep up the effort and will contact the State's consumer protection agency to see if it can help. Due to the potential of high legal expenses, seeking redress through the court system should be the last resort.

**X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. **Sally Davidson, Recreation Committee: Halloween "Truck or Treat."** Ms. Davidson said the Recreation Committee will be organizing candy distribution to children on the Common on Tuesday, October 31, 2017, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. This will be a volunteer effort with no cost to the municipality. In addition, the committee is looking at a possible "Pig Man" haunted ride along Devil's Washbowl. Chair Goslant noted Ms. Davidson was one of the organizers of the "Haunted Hayride" held on the NU campus for several years until the vacant area used was lost to campus expansion, etc. If not this year, he would like to see the Pig Man event put in place in the future.
- b. **Sally Davidson, Recreation Committee: Christmas Activities.** Ms. Davidson said last year's successful "Stick Star" displays would be done again this year. Workshops will be held on November 7, 11, and 15, 2017. In addition, there would be another contest to recognize the best Christmas home decorations.
- c. **Carolyn Stevens, Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN).** Ms. Stevens announced NCDN would be holding its second "Night on the Common" event on Tuesday, September 26, 2017 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. There will be free food and other refreshments available and a community photograph would be taken at 6:15 p.m.
- d. **Kenneth Hepburn: Smith Hill Road Tree Trimming.** Mr. Hepburn is a Smith Hill resident and he already has marked the trees adjacent to his property he does not want removed. He asked when tree removal on this road is scheduled. Manager Schulz said tree trimming along Smith Hill Road and Stony Brook Road probably would be done within the next couple weeks. The affected property owners already have been contacted for their permission. Chair Goslant added trees along Barrows Road will be trimmed if there is sufficient time.

**XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Selectman Doney, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a personnel matter (Select Board vacancy) and contract negotiations (Northfield-Norwich University Agreement) with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:10 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 11:20 p.m.

Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to appoint Kenneth Johnson to fill the vacant position on the Select Board through Town Meeting Day 2018. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

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

The Board adjourned at 11:25 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 September 26, 2017.