

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of December 12, 2017

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Selectmen Lynn Doney (absent), Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth Johnson, and K. David Maxwell. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Liza Walker (Vermont Land Trust), Laura Hill-Eubanks (Northfield Conservation Committee), Jeremy Hansen (Central Vermont Internet), John Stevens, Carolyn Stevens, Richard Wobby, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 7:07 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.** Rosemarie Pelletier was to address the Select Board tonight regarding next year's ALARA World Congress at Norwich University but had to reschedule.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Liza Walker, Vermont Land Trust: Town Forest Conservation Easement.** The Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) has been working with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) to obtain funds to purchase the TDS property at the summit of Paine Mountain. If the purchase goes through, this parcel would be annexed to the adjacent Town Forest. As a condition for the VLT providing two-thirds of the purchase price, the municipality must grant the VLT and VHCB an easement over the entirety of the Town Forest (not just the new parcel). Although the Select Board has authorized NCC to engage in negotiations over the purchase price, etc., it was the consensus of the Select Board members to see the exact wording of this easement before endorsing it. The draft easement now has been prepared and distributed to the Select Board members.

Ms. Walker noted among the main restrictions are the property cannot be used for commercial purposes, no permanent structures can be built, and motorized vehicles would not be permitted. There also must be public access to the site in perpetuity. In addition, a Management Plan must be developed specifying how the forest's natural resources should be controlled through logging, etc. as well as forbidden practices. An interim plan needs to be prepared at the time of the property purchase but can be revised later. The VHCB will be meeting on Wednesday, January 24, 2018, and the property sale and easement approval must be completed by then so the land purchase funds can be released. Manager Schulz said the Utility Commissions met last evening and reviewed the easement language. The Commissioners expressed real concerns about the municipality ceding control over the Town Forest to an outside agency. There is water infrastructure in the area (Cheney Hill Farm Reservoir) and the Commissioners don't want to be restricted if it needs to be expanded, rehabilitated, etc. Ms. Walker said there would be an easement exclusion area created so there would be no impediments.

Selectman Goodrich asked what would occur if the Select Board did not approve the easement. Laura Hill-Eubanks, who serves on the Northfield Conservation Commission, said the VLT would not provide funds for the land purchase and alternative sources would have to be found if the sale is to go through. Selectman Goodrich doesn't want the municipality to surrender future control of the Town Forest since no one can predict what can happen in ten (10) to twenty (20) years. Ms. Walker noted the easement includes a proviso permitting non-anticipated future uses. The main issue is maintaining public access to the site and most of the other restrictions are negotiable. Selectman Goodrich also is troubled by language in the easement allowing for litigation against the municipality if easement terms are violated. Ms. Walker said such violations are extremely rare and VLT and VHCB would work with the municipality to avoid any legal action.

Chair Goslant shares the apprehension that the municipality would be forever giving up control over the Town Forest. He originally thought the easement would apply only to the forty-three (43) acres of the TDS parcel but then learned it would cover the entirety of the Town Forest (±350 acres). Ms. Walker said it made little sense to create a Management Plan applying to only the top of Paine Mountain with no reference to the surrounding forest. Selectman Johnson believes more public input is needed before any decision is made. Ms. Walker said the VLT is not trying to push anything on the community.

Selectman Maxwell asked Ms. Hill-Eubanks if the NCC members looked for alternate funding sources that would not require this easement. Ms. Hill-Eubanks said they did not. They did not want to ask taxpayers to pay the entire expense when grant money could cover most the cost. Selectman Maxwell believes Northfield residents may be willing to pay for the parcel purchase, now estimated at \$35,000, and increase the size of the Town Forest without any land use restrictions. He suggested Ms. Hill-Eubanks work with Manager Schulz on getting an article on the next Town Meeting warning seeking voter authorization for this purchase. Selectman Maxwell felt this might be a better alternative given the apparent resistance to the easement restrictions. Chair Goslant agreed with Selectman Maxwell that it seems the consensus of the Select Board and the Utility Commissions to oppose the easement restrictions. Given this, Ms. Walker and Ms. Hill-Eubanks felt it best to withdraw the application for VHCB funds and wait to see what happens on Town Meeting Day (03/06/17). If the proposed ballot article is not successful, Ms. Hill-Eubanks said the NCC members would look for other funding sources, i.e. donations, other grants, etc.

V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. Laurie Baroffio, Finance Director.** Ms. Baroffio had provided current fiscal financial statements (07/01/17 through 11/30/17) to the Select Board members at their first budget meeting (12/05/17). She now wanted to highlight the budgets performing differently than expected. Ms. Baroffio warned it is difficult to accurately project some budgets since the current fiscal year is less than half completed. This is especially true for the Highway Department since we just had our first winter storm this week.

On the revenue side, Ms. Baroffio noted cemetery rates were increased earlier this year but since many of the fees go directly to the maintenance contractor, significant new revenue should not be expected. Selectman Maxwell asked if it was possible to put the perpetual care funds into bank accounts bringing in higher returns than at present. Ms. Baroffio said there are options but higher risks would be involved. She will investigate this further and come back to the Select Board with recommendations. Selectman Maxwell is concerned about the declining number of available burial lots in the public cemeteries and would like to ensure long-term grave maintenance expenses are covered.

Ms. Baroffio then noted a couple income sources that will be down. The Equipment Rental account will be down \$11,250 because the Water/Sewer Department purchased its own backhoe and no longer will be renting the Town's. Also, the School built its own salt storage shed so the Town's sale of road salt to the School will be down. On the bright side, the state will be sending the municipality \$7,626 more in current use funds than had been budgeted.

As for expenditures, the Fire Department's Vehicle Maintenance account probably will be over budget due to \$2,830 in repairs to the aerial ladder truck. The overtime budget for the Northfield Police Department (NPD) is projected to be about \$30,000 over budget. However, due to significant health insurance savings for this department, the total overage for personnel costs will be reduced to \$4,000. Selectman Maxwell would like to hear from Police Chief William Jennings how hiring an additional full-time officer will affect these overtime costs. The Vehicle Insurance accounts for the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) and Highway Department will be over budget due to accidents resulting in \$1,000 deductible payments. Due to staffing changes in the Highway Department, there might be \$15,000 in savings for personnel expenses. However, as indicated earlier, it is difficult to make any projections for this department until winter road maintenance expenses come in.

In the Cemetery Department, tree removal costs are \$3,100 over budget. Also, the Water Department now is charging the cemeteries for water usage; this expense was not budgeted. In the Brown Public Library budget, the expense for Elevator Maintenance will be about \$1,000 over budget. Manager Schulz has been trying to reduce the cost of this by reducing the frequency of elevator inspections from four times a year to twice. In addition, due to many recent repairs, sixty-nine percent (69%) of the Brown Public Library's Building Maintenance account already has been spent. In the Municipal Building's budget, the cost of janitorial services will be \$1,200 over budget. Chair Goslant would like to see this put out to bid to see if there can be any cost savings. There should be savings in the building's heating fuel account when the new furnace is installed. Manager Schulz has received some bids and will present them at the December 28, 2017 special meeting.

Due to staffing changes, personnel costs for the Grounds/Parks/Facilities Department are projected to be \$9,000 under budget. However, the accounts for water usage and facility maintenance both will be over budget. The mileage reimbursement account for the municipal pool is \$410 over budget as no funds were set aside for this. Manager Schulz explained Utility Supervisor Patrick DeMasi agreed to shut down the pool every night on his own time if his travel expenses were covered. He also does safety checks at that time. The pool's water/sewer expenses are expected to be \$6,000 over budget but the exact amount is uncertain since the pool will reopen before the fiscal year ends. In Management Support, the cost of the independent audit was \$1,000 less than expected. In Planning/Zoning, personnel costs will be about \$3,700 since the Zoning Administrator position was vacant when the current fiscal year's budget was prepared.

Ms. Baroffio noted the municipality's new agreement with Norwich University (NU) will have NU making its next annual payment in the current fiscal year (June 2018). The payment will be \$200,000 and \$20,000 of this will be set aside for future replacement of the aerial ladder truck. Of the balance, about \$101,000 will be in undesignated/unbudgeted funds so the Select Board should discuss what to do with this during budget deliberations. Chair Goslant and the other Select Board members thanked Ms. Baroffio for her informative presentation.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **November 28, 2017 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Johnson, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-1, with Selectman Goslant abstaining.**
- b. **December 5, 2017 (Budget Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Johnson, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #12-18.** Motion by Selectman Goodrich, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to approve Warrant #12-18 in the amount of \$1,805,332.92. Chair Goslant noted of the total warrant amount, \$1,053,600 was for property taxes collected by the municipality and then forwarded to the Northfield School District. He added an additional \$200,000 was spent to purchase power for the Northfield Electric Department (NED), which is then sold to its customers. Manager Schulz noted another major expense was the NED purchase of TRANSCO stock in the amount of \$268,980. This stock usually provides returns of about twelve percent (12%) so it is a good investment. In addition, the remaining balance for the remount of the Ambulance unit (\$88,560.50) is on this warrant. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through December 3, 2017.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$101,829.33. Manager Schulz said the amount was higher than last time in part because NAS responders received their annual payments based on the number of training sessions they attended in the past year. In addition, NPD overtime expenses were higher due to coverage around the Thanksgiving holiday. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Letter of Support: Town Forest Conservation Easement.** As indicated earlier in the meeting, the Select Board will not be supporting this easement request.
- b. **Town of Northfield/Northfield Savings Bank (NSB) Sidewalk Agreement.** Chair Goslant would like to table this agreement for now. Since NSB has put off the sidewalk work until next spring, there is no urgency. Selectman Maxwell agreed with this. Since there is no longer any danger of delaying the project, he would like further research on the cost estimates.
- c. **Use of Remaining Water Street CDBG Funds.** Manager Schulz said there were \$24,000 in grant funds left over from this project. The funds must be used before the end of this calendar year and must be used on this property. Selectman Goodrich asked if the funds could be set aside to cover future park maintenance costs. Manager Schulz will look into this. Selectman Maxwell suggested the purchase of additional benches, trash receptacles, etc. Manager Schulz will explore this as well.

Carolyn Stevens noted a posting on the Front Porch Forum suggesting the creation of a dog park in the area. Selectman Johnson did not believe the required fencing would be allowed on the park site. Selectman Maxwell noted the Water Street neighborhood had been surveyed regarding possible park uses and there was little support for a dog park. Chair Goslant suggested Manager Schulz should work with Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee) and Sally Pedley (NHS Class of '57 fundraising group) regarding use of these funds.

- d. **Police Union MOU: Health Insurance Opt-out Clause.** As this matter involves an employee union contract, it will be discussed later in the meeting in executive session.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Snowstorm Response.** Chair Goslant asked how well the Highway Department was able to respond to today's snowstorm, which was the first for this winter. Manager Schulz said the snowfall was constant throughout the day and the Highway crew did the best they could. There was an issue with a plow on one of the trucks that took it out of service for a while. The new truck will be here any day and this will help considerably.

X. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Slate Avenue/Main Street Drainage Improvements.** Manager Schulz has sent in the reimbursement form so the state will cover fifty percent (50%) of this project's engineering costs.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Jeremy Hansen: High-Speed Internet Access.** Mr. Hansen is a Berlin Select Board member and a computer science professor at Norwich University. He has been approaching local governments to see if there is any interest in forming Central Vermont Internet, which would be a community-run internet service designed to reach areas now without access to high-speed internet. This service would not compete with existing internet providers as these would be new customers. Mr. Hansen would like the Select Board to put an article on the next Town Meeting warning to determine if Northfield residents are interested in this. Richard Wobby is concerned the municipality might face liability issues if the new company puts its infrastructure on NED poles. He also suggested the Utility Commissions should have some input if utility poles are used. Selectman Maxwell felt there should be a petition circulated to put this on the warning as a way of gauging local interest in this possibility. Mr. Hansen will work on this.

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

The Board went into executive session at 9:15 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 9:35 p.m.

Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to authorize Manager Schulz to negotiate an amendment to the Town of Northfield's contract with the New England Police Benevolent Association adding a health insurance opt-out clause. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

- XIII. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Selectman Johnson, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:36 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 January 9, 2018.