

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of December 14, 2017

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth Johnson, and K. David Maxwell (6:30 p.m.). Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Peter J. DeMasi (Fire Department Chief), Lawton Rutter (Ambulance Service Chief), Stephen Tiersch (Fire Department/Ambulance Service), and Elroy Hill.

Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

IV. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- a. Northfield Fire Department (NFD).** NFD Chief Peter J. DeMasi said the proposed FY 2018/2019 budget for his department has operating expenditures rising 4.8%. Most of this increase is due to increases in dispatching costs (\$13,800 to \$15,460); insurance rates for vehicles, property, and liability coverage; and more money set aside for vehicle maintenance costs since the NFD fleet has some older vehicles. In addition, there is a slight increase for personal protection equipment (i.e. uniforms and safety gear). Manager Schulz asked how many officers and volunteers the NFD currently had. Chief DeMasi said about twenty-two (22), which is about normal. Chair Goslant asked if the NFD responded to every car accident. Chief DeMasi said it did as there was always a threat of fire due to gasoline leakage, etc. NFD responders also assist with traffic control. Chair Goslant asked if the municipality can charge for fire responses as he feels these frequent non-structure callouts are putting significant wear and tear on NFD vehicles. Manager Schulz doesn't think any Vermont fire departments charge for this. Selectman Doney believes the Berlin Fire Department does charge for car accident callouts by billing the insurance companies involved and he thinks they make a lot of money this way. Manager Schulz will check on this.

In the NFD Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) accounts, the annual amount designated for improvements to the Fire Station will increase in the next budget from \$2,000 to \$13,000 by using \$11,000 in prior year surplus funds. The current balance in the account is \$11,714. Manager Schulz noted the architect working on the study for a combined Fire/EMS facility found numerous problems with the building. When the new fiscal year begins on July 1, 2018, there will be about \$25,000 in this CIP account. Selectman Doney feels it will cost at least \$500,000 to bring the fire station up to standard. Chief DeMasi said the Fire Station was built about thirty (30) years ago on a shoestring with many features left unfinished. It was assumed at the time the building would be periodically upgraded but this was never completed. Immediate problems, such as rotting wood support beams, have been addressed but other long-term problems have not. Chair Goslant asked if there are any chances of getting state or federal grant funds to address the building's deficiencies. Northfield Ambulance Chief Lawton Rutter has looked into this and found Northfield was ineligible for most of these grants due to community size, its per capita income, etc.

Selectman Maxwell arrived at this time.

Chair Goslant believes the municipality needs to find a way to expand and/or update the Fire Station as a combined facility without saddling Northfield taxpayers with a multi-million dollar project. Chief Rutter said the architect's estimate was \$2,700,000. Selectman Johnson felt the building's problems were so extensive it made much more sense to obtain a bank bond of at least \$500,000 so everything can be addressed at one time. Rather than putting a little bit more in the CIP account each year, he believes the municipality should find out how much a twenty (20) to thirty (30) year bond would cost. Chair Goslant noted there already are plans to obtain a multi-year bond to fix the sidewalks. Selectman Maxwell doesn't think all these problems can be resolved at one budget meeting. A comprehensive study should be done presenting all options. He felt much more information is needed before any decision can be made. Manager Schulz felt the aforementioned \$25,000 would cover the most urgent building repairs. Selectman Maxwell would like all the building's deficiencies identified and the proper course of action determined before next year's budget is approved.

In the NFD Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) account, Chief DeMasi said the Equipment/Hose/Pumps account has a proposed increase from \$2,300 to \$2,600. However, he now is asking the amount be increased to \$3,500 so he can purchase some fire hydrant attachments on which he just received estimates. He added the amounts set aside for pagers, radio replacement, and air pacs are unchanged in the coming fiscal year budget. The 2000 aerial ladder truck is scheduled for replacement in FY 2027-2028 and Norwich University will provide \$80,000 over the next four (4) years towards replacement costs.

The 1993 tanker truck was to be replaced in the next fiscal year but this has been postponed to FY 2019/2020. Chief DeMasi said this vehicle goes out thirty (30) to forty (40) times each year when the call area is beyond the municipal hydrant system. The truck now is twenty-five (25) years old and has severe problems with overheating, rust, etc. Manager Schulz suggested perhaps a used tanker could be located. Chief Rutter said most fire department kept their tanker trucks until they were falling apart. Chief DeMasi said a demonstration model might be available from a dealer at a reduced price. He will check to see if any are available. Manager Schulz said it is possible to use prior year surplus funds to fill the gap between the amount currently in the tanker replacement CEP account (\$83,753) and the actual vehicle replacement cost (\pm \$250,000). Chief DeMasi said the two (2) pumper trucks (2007 and 2017) are in good shape and not scheduled for replacement for twelve (12) and twenty-two (22) years respectively. Sufficient funds are being set aside each year for their replacement.

Chair Goslant asked what happened to the sale of the out-of-service 1996 pumper truck. Chief DeMasi said it has been advertised for sale for over a year. The initial asking price was \$28,000 and there was an offer for \$24,000 but it turned out the proposed buyer did not have authorization from his local government to complete the purchase. The advertised price then was dropped to \$20,000 but there has been no interest at that price. There had been a creditable offer at \$15,000 but the Select Board felt at the time this was too low a price and rejected it. Chair Goslant thought the Select Board was told when the 2017 replacement pumper truck was authorized the old truck could be sold for about \$45,000. Chief DeMasi said he told the Select Board some fire departments had advertised similar trucks for as much as \$45,000 but a more realistic selling price was always in the \$15,000 range. He now would like to re-advertise the truck for \$15,000 and perhaps get about \$10,000. Chair Goslant still has a different recollection regarding what he was initially told regarding the old truck's possible resale value.

Chair Goslant and the other Select Board members then thanked Chief DeMasi and the other firefighters for all the good work they do throughout the year.

- b. Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS).** Chief Rutter said the proposed FY 2018/2019 NAS budget has a slight increase in part-time personnel services as he would like to make the responders' hourly wage more competitive with what other ambulances services in the area are paying. Chair Goslant asked how many were on the current NAS roster. Chief Rutter said there were forty-six (46) but some were more active than others. He estimated about twenty (20) were regular, productive NAS responders. Chair Goslant suggested raising the hourly rate to \$13.00 per hour rather than the \$12.00 Chief Rutter is proposing. Manager Schulz noted this would add another \$5000 to this line item. Chief Rutter said there still would be a gap with what Barre Town Ambulance pays (\$17/hour). Selectman Maxwell would like to bring NAS up to the local market price but doesn't want to do it all in one year. Chair Goslant suggested lowering the training stipend in order to increase the hourly wage. Chief Rutter was concerned this might reduce the number of NAS responders attending the training sessions. Selectman Maxwell felt proper training was important and should not be cut.

Chief Rutter noted the proposed budget for NAS Contract Services has a 22.8% increase mainly due to higher dispatching costs as well as budgeting the actual cost of paramedic intercepts and ambulance billing services. The Administrative budget would rise 8.7% due to higher costs for the telephone system, office supplies, and bill collections. He noted since every ambulance run needed to be fully documented, this requires a lot of copy paper.

Chief Rutter said the Materials/Supply budget would increase 10.1% due to increases in spending for medical supplies and uniforms. The Vehicle Maintenance budget will remain at \$5,000 because the vehicle causing overages in this account in recent years has been replaced. The cost of uniforms will increase because the local business supplying them in recent years has closed and other sources are more expensive.

In the CIP budget, the amount set aside for Building Improvements would increase from \$500 to \$2,500 as Chief Rutter would like to upgrade the sleeping quarters, modify a bathroom to install a shower, and add a washer/dryer for uniform cleaning. A new outside light needs to be installed for employee safety. In addition, Chief Rutter would like to install a new door locking system, exterior surveillance cameras, etc. He added the available space in this building, which is shared with the Highway Department, is limited but he is making the best use of it.

In the CEP budget, Chief Rutter believes the amounts set aside each year for new defibrillators and vehicles are sufficient to meet the replacement schedule. He said the amount proposed for radio replacement (\$500) has not increased from last year. Should the State of Vermont require all radios be upgraded to digital in the next fiscal year, grant funds would be available to cover the added expense.

Chief Rutter said Norwich University's Center for Civic Engagement has committed funds (±\$20,000) for the replacement of the NAS ATV and Boggin provided they are stored in the Shaw Outdoor Center at the foot of the Paine Mountain recreation area. He is waiting for all the paperwork to be completed so the exact amount can be determined as well as getting Select Board approval of this proposal.

The proposed CEP budget will start setting aside \$6,710 each year for the purchase of a PowerLoad that would lift stretchers to be loaded in the back of the ambulance unit. This would reduce the back strain on NAS responders, enhance patient safety, and are required for all new ambulance units. Chief Rutter said NAS has avoided this requirement by remounting existing units rather than purchasing all-new vehicles in recent years. However, he would like to start setting money aside now because NAS will need to purchase an all-new unit at some time.

Chief Rutter said it is important to visualize where NAS should be in five (5) to ten (10) years so he kept this in mind when helping management develop the proposed budget. Selectman Maxwell appreciated this focus and added Chief Rutter has been doing a fine job. He then asked how much Northfield Ambulance Volunteers, Inc. (NAVI) fundraisers realized each year. Chief Rutter said there is a \$9,000 IRS threshold NAVI tries to stay just under (or much more paperwork would be required). The annual Christmas tree and wreath sales net about \$3,500 and other events are held throughout the year. NAVI donations have been funding the NAS trailer in recent years. In addition, NAVI now is looking to make Northfield a "HEARTSafe Community" by providing free CPR training to community members and having portable defibrillators available at various site around town such as the municipal pool, the public parks, etc.

Chair Goslant then thanked Chief Rutter for his report and for his good work.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

VI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to adjourn.
Motion passed 5-0-0.

The Board adjourned at 8:47 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.