

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of December 19, 2017

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth Johnson, and K. David Maxwell. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Shannon Palone (Pool Director), Trent Tucker (Highway Foreman), Steve Davis, 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. Recreation Committee.** Sally Davidson, who has served on the Recreation Committee for several years, said the Recreation Committee would like an increase in their Department Supplies budget from \$400 to \$1,500. She said she has purchased items herself on several occasions and would like funds available to purchase Christmas lights, etc. Chair Goslant asked why the Recreation Committee has a budget separate from Grounds/Parks/Facilities. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio said there was a decision under a previous Municipal Manager to split the Recreation budget three (3) ways into the Grounds/Parks/Facilities, the Recreation Committee, and the Pool. The reasoning was this would provide for greater accountability. The Recreation Committee budget was designed to be used for special projections and not for general maintenance, etc. There was no objection to the \$1,500 request as no one wants Ms. Davidson or the other Recreation Committee members spending their own money. Chair Goslant then complimented Ms. Davidson for doing a "fantastic job."

Grounds/Parks/Facilities Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The Recreation Committee is asking for \$10,000 towards a new pavilion in Memorial Park. There is an existing balance of \$3,133 which can be used for this purpose. The estimated total price for the pavilion and related work is about \$25,000 and Ms. Davidson feels donations and grant funds should cover the shortfall. She also is asking for an additional \$5,000 to construct new bathrooms near the park's ballfields. The estimated price for this project is about \$10,000 and Ms. Davidson said donations should fund the balance. Northfield Rotarians already have promised some money.

Selectman Johnson noted the public parks require a lot of work to bring them up to standards. He suggested dedicating one cent (1¢) of the property tax rate to park restoration/improvements. This would provide a set amount each year going towards Northfield's recreation facilities. Ms. Baroffio estimated this amount at about \$32,000. Selectman Maxwell also favors creating a dedicated account for the public parks but feels \$32,000 a year probably is too much. Chair Goslant noted the municipality now is responsible for the new park on Water Street. Manager Schulz said Ms. Davidson has been good in the past in bringing to him specific requests on how to improve the parks. He added there are several types of grant opportunities for local recreation.

Selectman Goodrich asked how the pavilion would be used. Ms. Davidson said it could be used for birthday parties, family reunions, etc. It also will provide shade and shelter that doesn't now exist in Memorial Park. Chair Goslant felt this could be a good way to get more families involved with Memorial Park and also suggested it could be used as a staging ground for winter activities.

Selectman Maxwell favors the pavilion proposal provided taxpayer funds are supplemented by donations and grant money. Ms. Baroffio noted the \$10,000 requested will come from prior year surplus funds. Chair Goslant believes the Northfield Promise Community group, which recently was successful in obtaining a \$150,000 grant for playground equipment for younger children, could be a valuable resource in coming years in bringing in outside money for Northfield's recreational facilities. Selectman Maxwell felt if private events are held at the pavilion, the municipality should develop a donation policy for such usage.

Ms. Davison said the Recreation Committee would like an additional \$2,500 to install permanent power to the Northfield Common to be used to light the Christmas Tree and other holiday decorations. She added this improved power access would be employed throughout the year for such regular events as the Northfield Farmers Market, the Labor Day Weekend Festivities, etc. Chair Goslant thinks the proposed cost might be a little high and would like local electricians contacted for estimates. Manager Schulz noted if the fixtures are permanent, they would need to be in compliance with all safety codes. Selectman Goodrich asked how this would be funded. Manager Schulz said there were sufficient funds in the Grounds/Parks/Facilities budget. Ms. Davidson also would like power run to the Main Street Bridge for additional holiday lighting. Selectman Maxwell said this proposal was discussed at a recent Select Board meeting. The consensus was since this bridge was on the state's priority list for major repair, it probably was best to postpone any other upgrades for the time being.

Chair Goslant and the other Select Board members then thanked Ms. Davidson for her presentation tonight and for the good work she and Recreation Committee do throughout the year.

- b. Highway Department.** Manager Schulz said the Highway Department's Personnel Services budget would go up two percent (2%) in the budget due to scheduled wage and benefit increases. In addition, overtime expenses will rise in order to better reflect actual costs in recent years. Chair Goslant believes overtime expenses have risen because VTrans send its crew out as soon as the first snowflake drops. As a result, residents now expect the local highway crews to do the same and drivers complain if paved and unpaved roads aren't in perfect condition both during and after major winter storms. Selectman Johnson would prefer highway crews to err on the side of caution. Selectman Maxwell noted there are highway overtime expenses other times of the year when heavy rainstorms bring down trees, damage the roads, etc.

Manager Schulz said the Contract Services budget is proposed to rise 15.5%. One factor is the tree removal budget has been increased from \$5,000 to \$7,500. Highway Foreman Trent Tucker confirmed there are a number of large trees along Main Street requiring attention. Since this work is not related to power lines, it cannot be charged to the Northfield Electric Department. Manager Schulz noted the contracted sweeping budget will decrease from \$10,000 to \$7,000 as Mr. Tucker has found less expensive options. Mr. Tucker confirmed the sweeping now will be done twice a year in the spring and fall. Manager Schulz said there would be a major increase in the Permit Fees budget (\$200 to \$3,000) because, as he warned at previous meetings, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) will be issuing new blanket stormwater permits to municipalities as part of its expanded program of protecting Lake Champlain from contaminants. The exact fee amount has not been determined but is expected to be about \$2,500. Local governments are not happy about this.

The Highway Department's Administrative budget is proposed to rise 4.7% with slight increases in telephone expenses, insurance coverage costs, etc. Ms. Baroffio noted the higher telephone costs are due to the updated system and this line item also covers Mr. Tucker's cell phone service. The landline to the Town Garage must be retained to keep the fire alarm and security system operational. The School/Training line item will remain at \$500 as VLCT and other membership organizations provide good training sessions at low costs.

Manager Schulz said the Materials/Supplies budget would decrease 5.7% due to proposed cuts in the gravel/stone, gasoline/diesel, and culverts accounts. Mr. Tucker said of the \$50,000 budgeted for gravel/stone, about \$30,000 of this material would be used during Mud Season. If possible, he would prefer keeping this budget at the old amount (\$56,000) or perhaps a slight increase. Selectman Johnson also doesn't want to see a reduction in this line item. After further discussion, the gravel/stone budget was increased (tentatively) to \$60,000. Manager Schulz said road salt and sand prices have remained fairly stable in recent years so no changes are proposed for these budgets. Mr. Tucker has changed the type of chemicals put on the backroads so this line item will be reduced.

The budget for culverts will be reduced from \$10,000 to \$7,500 as the municipality has a good inventory already and Manager Schulz is fairly confident grant applications to the Vermont Better Roads program (for work on Dole Hill Road and Barrows Road) will be successful. The grants would provide over \$20,000 to be used to purchase road materials. Selectman Maxwell felt the Highway Department's operations budget has seen major reductions in recent years. At this point, he does not believe there are any areas left to cut.

Highway Department CIP. Manager Schulz said there was a \$10,000 balance in the Building Improvements CIP account and he would like to add another \$5,000 in the coming fiscal year to address problems with the Town Garage's heating system. A new furnace may be required along with work on the building's insulation, etc. Selectman Maxwell would like an energy audit of the building done to determine the level of heat loss, etc. Selectman Doney felt replacing the windows was needed as the heat goes right through them. Selectman Maxwell asked what a new furnace would cost. Manager Schulz received a \$10,000 estimate for a furnace that would run on propane. Selectman Maxwell would like a plan put together, including a cost benefit analysis, so the work can get done. Manager Schulz would like to start with the energy audit and see if any of the work can be spread out over time.

Manager Schulz noted the Guardrails CIP account has a \$20,000 balance and the proposal is to add another \$3,000 this year. Mr. Tucker added new guardrails really are needed on Dole Hill Road and Little Northfield Road. Chair Goslant believes Lovers Lane could use some new ones as well. He would like these funds used so residents can observe that the municipality is serious about road safety. There is about \$6,000 in the Town Garage CIP paving account with another \$2,000 added this year. Mr. Tucker said increasing the current balance will get us closer to the goal of paving the area around the Ambulance Bay. This area sees much heavy equipment traffic and the dirt road gets torn up a lot as a result.

There is a \$121,891 balance in the Bridges CIP account with another \$29,000 added for the coming fiscal year. This includes about \$19,000 in transfers from other accounts. There are quite a number of bridges requiring maintenance work. Chair Goslant would like this money spent so the bridges don't deteriorate further. Selectman Maxwell would like to see plans developed including a priority list. Manager Schulz noted the Ledge Removal CIP account has a \$17,000 balance and it is proposed to add another \$4,000 in the next fiscal year. Mr. Tucker would like to rent heavy equipment, which would cost about \$9,000 per month, to address the worst problem areas.

The Sign and Post CIP account has a balance of about \$20,000 but about \$9,000 of this will be transferred to Bridges CIP account. Manager Schulz said this balance was allowed to accumulate so high because of fears the state would require all road signs to be updated to new standards simultaneously. This did not happen and the remaining balance is sufficient for replacing damaged or stolen signs. The Retaining Wall CIP account has a balance of about \$25,000 and these funds have been set aside to address the deteriorating wall separating Elm Street from Elm Street Extension. Another \$10,000 will be added to this account in the coming fiscal year so the work can finally get done. Manager Schulz said there is \$10,000 in grant money on hand for an engineering study. The estimated cost of the construction phase is \$40,000 and he would like it done during the next fiscal year. Chair Goslant is not sure all this money should be spent on one wall if there are alternatives.

Manager Schulz said the Sidewalks CIP account has a \$63,610 balance with another \$7,500 budgeted for the next fiscal year. The planned sidewalk work on South Main Street should cost about \$40,000. After speaking to a few people, Chair Goslant feels the estimated cost (\$46,000) of the municipality's portion of the paving around the Northfield Savings Bank (NSB) has been inflated. Manager Schulz said NSB has been informed the municipality will be putting this work out to bid separately.

The Drainage CIP account has a balance of \$26,214 with another \$20,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz said the stormwater problems on State Avenue and at its intersection with South Main Street (near the Post Office) need to be addressed before repaving the road and sidewalks. The project engineer will provide cost estimates and Manager Schulz hopes the project can be completed in the next fiscal year. If the project costs exceed what has been budgeted, the Select Board will need to decide whether to borrow funds or deficient spend. The Northfield Center Drainage account has a \$16,000 balance with no new funds proposed and no immediate plans to spend any money on this.

The paving CIP account has a \$161,333 balance with \$150,000 in additional funding proposed for the coming fiscal year. \$50,000 of this would come from prior year surplus funds. Chair Goslant noted the municipality spent over \$100,000 on a shim coat for Union Brook Road alone last year. In addition, repaving Winch Hill Road cost over \$140,000. Manager Schulz said the municipality is applying for grant funds to repave Cox Brook Road. Selectman Maxwell asked how much, in a perfect world, the municipality should budget to pave all the roads in need. Manager Schulz said it depends on how you define "need" but added the municipality would be in good shape if it budgeted between \$350,000 and \$400,000 each year for this purpose. Chair Goslant would like a priority list from Mr. Tucker regarding which roads should be repaved as soon as possible to prevent further deterioration. Mr. Tucker said there were several in this category but reminded the Select Board members the expense is about \$180,000 per mile. Chair Goslant felt fixing the dip on Union Brook Road should be done as soon as possible.

Due to the lateness of the evening, the discussion of the Highway Department's Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) will be postponed for another budget meeting.

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

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

The Board adjourned at 9:04 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.