

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of December 21, 2017

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich (absent), Kenneth Johnson, and K. David Maxwell (6:33 p.m.). Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Police Chief William Jennings, Chris Bradley, 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 Police Department (NPD).** Manager Schulz stated expenses for NPD Personnel Services would increase 12.9% in the proposed FY 2018/2019 budget. The bulk of the increase is in Technical Services, which would rise from \$265,460 to \$331,960 in order to hire a sixth (6th) full-time officer. Police Chief William Jennings said whether to fund this additional position is a decision for the Select Board and the Northfield community. Adding this position will allow a decrease in the amount budgeted for overtime (\$20,000 to \$15,000) but Chief Jennings noted overtime will not entirely disappear because the officers will continue to take vacations, parental leave, etc. If Northfield is to continue to have police coverage twenty-four (24) hours each day of the week, he feels hiring an additional officer is necessary. Chair Goslant asked if 24/7 coverage really was necessary. Chief Jennings believes it is since most of his officers reside out-of-town and he would not like to have to explain to someone why property damage or personal injury occurred because the responding officer took forty-five (45) minutes to arrive on scene rather than ten (10). Chair Goslant felt much of the current overtime expense is related to clauses in the NPD union contract. He asked if it were possible to maintain 24/7 coverage with a combination of part-time officers and overtime. Chief Jennings felt the contract makes this very difficult. He added that having six (6) full-time officers would allow for better scheduling of off-days and this would help reduce officer fatigue, etc. He added that community support has been an important factor in boosting the morale of his officers. Chair Goslant believes Chief Jennings' positive leadership qualities have played an important role in this as well.

Selectman Johnson asked what was the normal NPD call volume during early morning hours. Chief Jennings said this period usually was quiet but he is concerned that serious crimes could occur during any gap in coverage. A quick response can make all the difference in preventing a tragic outcome.

Chair Goslant said the new agreement between Norwich University (NU) and the Town of Northfield will result in a significant increase this year (from \$78,000 to \$200,000) in the amount NU provides as an annual donation to the municipality. This amount will increase each year by \$8,000 for the duration of the agreement. He asked if this new increase will properly cover the amount the NPD has to spend on responses on the NU campus or off-campus incidents involving NU students. Chief Jennings said NU-related incidents were responsible for about ten percent (10%) of NPD call volume this past year. There were 147 NU-related incidents and this figure included relatively minor offenses involving parking, public drunkenness, etc. He added NU Security does handle a number of minor on-campus infractions themselves. Chief Jennings believes there is a good relationship between NU Security and NPD when it comes to addressing more serious matters involving NU students living either on or off campus. Chair Goslant believes more on-campus incidents are being reported these days as society's views regarding inappropriate behavior have changed. Chief Jennings agreed that new requirements have led to an increase in such reports but he believes recent improvement in NU Security-NPD relations is another factor.

Manager Schulz asked if all NPD visits to the NU campus were recorded. Chief Jennings said they were not. He similarly doesn't record every visit to other parts of town considered to be higher risk for crime, etc.

Chief Jennings then discussed his thoughts regarding a possible grant application so that an additional (7th) full-time officer could be hired who would focus almost exclusively on matters concerning the public schools and Norwich University. This would be a three-year program with grant funds covering seventy-five percent (75%) of the officer's expenses the first year. The amount would decrease in the next two years. This possibility is not in the proposed budget but Chief Jennings would like to start a conversation to determine whether this is something the Select Board and the Northfield community would like to pursue.

Selectman Maxwell arrived at this time.

Chair Goslant asked how much of each officer's time is spent on the NU campus. Chief Jennings did not have an answer for this as the amount of time his officers spent on campus is so fluid. Chair Goslant is interested in the amount NU costs the Northfield taxpayer each year. Chief Jennings hadn't thought of NU's presence in the community in those terms. Chair Goslant felt if NU was not here, the NPD probably wouldn't need more than two or three officers. Chris Bradley noted FBI studies suggest that the optimal number of police officers for each community is one full-time officer for every 1,000 residents. [Since Northfield has a population of about 6,000 residents, subtracting the ±2,000 NU students, staff, etc. living in Northfield would still leave the need for at least four (4) full-time police officers.]

Mr. Bradley believes NPD officers have been much more visible in the community in recent months and asked if increased patrols have resulted in increased revenue in traffic tickets and other finable offenses. Chief Jennings noted much of the increased presence was in neighborhoods, such as Northfield Falls, where residents were convinced there was a higher incidence of speeding drivers, etc. Subsequent traffic studies, however, showed that most drivers were obeying the posted speed limits so increased presence did not necessarily result in additional revenues. On the other hand, Manager Schulz has looked at NPD revenues for the current fiscal year recently and, if current trends remain constant, there should be a significant increase in fines collected, etc. by the end of the fiscal year.

Selectman Maxwell is grateful to Chief Jennings for providing solid numbers regarding NPD overtime expenses. He hopes hiring the sixth full-time officer will mean the overtime line item can be reduced below \$15,000 in coming years. Chief Jennings is reluctant to put the number too low at this time because police work involves so many variables that it is difficult to plan too far ahead. For example, one or more officers being unable to work for an extended period would result in significant overtime expense. Selectman Maxwell understands this concern. Mr. Bradley noted the only recent year when NPD overtime expenses came under budget was when the detective was acting as a sixth officer.

Mr. Bradley asked why the higher amount NU is paying this year is not included as FY 2017/2018 revenue (even though the payment will be made in June 2018). Manager Schulz said the agreement had not been negotiated and the new donation amount was unknown when this budget was developed. Selectman Maxwell said the Select Board already has held several discussions on what can be done with this unanticipated windfall. These funds will be accounted for when the FY 2018/2019 is finalized. Manager Schulz said the Select Board has not made any decisions yet on how these funds will be used.

Returning to the NPD operations budget, Manager Schulz noted Contract Services will rise 10.1% mainly due to higher budgets for Professional Services and Dog kennel/Animal Control in order to better reflect actual costs in recent years. In Administration, a \$4,000 increase in police liability insurance costs is primarily responsible for an 8.7% increase in this budget. The Materials/Supplies budget will be level funded as a \$1,000 increase in the Department Supplies budget is cancelled out by a \$1,000 decrease in the proposed budget for gasoline purchases.

NPD Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Selectman Maxwell noted a \$15,509 balance in the CIP account for building improvements that will be used to repaint the Police Station this year. Selectman Doney felt some rotting wood boards also will need to be replaced. Manager Schulz confirmed the current balance is sufficient to cover these expenses. Chief Jennings said some other minor repairs would be covered by the operations budget. Manager Schulz said this is a very sound building overall. Chief Jennings has visited many police stations around the state and he felt this was one of the best in terms of layout, etc.

NPD Capital Equipment Plan (CEP). Chief Jennings said his plan is to replace the 2010 Dodge Charger next year with a 2017 Ford Explorer. The 2012 Ford Explorer would be retained as a backup vehicle with the new cruiser and the 2014 Ford Interceptor handling the bulk of the workload. Selectman Maxwell noted the purchase of the new cruiser is almost fully funded. Chair Goslant asked if the 2010 vehicle would have any significant resale value. Chief Jennings doubted it since it is in very poor condition.

Chair Goslant and the other Select Board members then thanked Chief Jennings for his presence tonight and wished him the best for the holiday season. Chair Goslant felt recent NPD improvements were prime examples of what happens when you have exceptional leadership. There also seems to be a whole new level of respect in the community for the NPD.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled).

- a. Chris Bradley: Zoning Permit Fees.** Mr. Bradley asked if the Select Board members has discussed the possibility of bringing in additional revenue by raising zoning permit fee amounts. Manager Schulz said a few adjustments were made a few months ago at the suggestion of Zoning Administrator Steve Hatch. However, there has not been a comprehensive study regarding whether our fees are too low, too high, etc. Selectman Maxwell said Mr. Hatch indicated at the time that Northfield's fee schedule is comparable to those in other Central Vermont communities. Mr. Bradley thinks that raising some fees might defray some of the costs incurred when Listers inspect new or renovated structures. An extra \$20 or so per permit might not bring in a lot of money but could help offset some expenses. Selectman Maxwell recalls Mr. Hatch also recommended not raising permit fees too high as this might cause undue hardships on developers, residents improving their properties, etc. Chair Goslant also remembers concerns that higher fees might lead some individuals to not file proper paperwork for new auxiliary buildings, new signage, etc. This would create more work for the Zoning Administrator and Listers later as violations eventually are discovered. Although the Select Board consensus at the time was that the fee structure was where it should be, Chair Goslant suggested Mr. Bradley could discuss this with Mr. Hatch and bring back any proposals they feel are appropriate. He then thanked Mr. Bradley for bringing this matter to the Select Board's attention and wished him a Merry Christmas.

VI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Doney, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 7:59 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 are subject to approval at the next regular Select Board meeting.