

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD MEETING
Minutes of August 28, 2018

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, K. David Maxwell, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Thomas Alsheimer (Board of Listers), Robert Lindefjeld, Unni Lindefjeld, Linda Barrows, Greg Sanders, Karen Gillespie Korrow, Chandler Stowell, Conrad Motyka, Peter J. DeMasi, Steve Davis, Jodi Payette, Andrew Beaudette, Cary Halsted, Gilbert Knapp, Steve Clough, Brenda Chamberlin, Randy Chamberlin, Ken Johnson, Mukam Harsenski, Sandra Davis, and David Whaley.

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. PUBLIC HEARING

- a. Road Discontinuance (Bellemore Road, Kingston Road, Apple Lane, Thrush Lane, and Tracy Hill Road).** Prior to the meeting, the Select Board members and Manager Schulz attended site visits starting at 5:30 p.m. at the roads under discussion tonight. Manager Schulz said the Select Board members have been discussing possible discontinuance of several Class 3 roads currently serving one or two homes. He said these roads serve more as driveways than as public thoroughfares. It was the decision of the Select Board to pursue the possible discontinuance of fifteen (15) of these roads this year with the potential of another fifteen (15) going through the process next year.

Robert Lindefjeld is a Norwich University graduate and practicing attorney. He also is the son of Ole and Unni Lindefjeld who are a retired couple on a military pension owning a home on Tracy Hill Road. He commended the Select Board members for looking for ways to save taxpayer money but he has a number of concerns about the road discontinuance process as well as the ramifications should any of the targeted roads be privatized. For example, he feared the municipality could be held civilly liable should any accidents occur on these discontinued roads or if emergency services are unable to access homes on these roads. Mr. Lindefjeld also sees a fairness issue as his parents pay taxes on this property and should expect to receive municipal services in return. He doubts it costs the municipality too much to plow the 240' of roadway to his parents' house. Mr. Lindefjeld noted his parents have provided economic benefits to the community since they purchased the property in 1984 by only patronizing local businesses and hiring only local service providers. He is worried his parents might have to sell their Northfield home if they become personally responsible for their road's maintenance. Mr. Lindefjeld asked the Select Board members to consider all these factors before making any decisions on this matter.

Conrad Motyka lives on Apple Lane and has been a Northfield resident since 1970. He has paid local property taxes since then and expects this town road to be publicly maintained. Mr. Motyka also would like to see details regarding any potential savings this road discontinuance process would achieve, which have been estimated at about \$100,000 for the thirty (30) roads proposed for discontinuance over the next two years. He would like the Select Board members to find another way to save taxpayer money.

Chandler Stowell lives on Jerry Road and he also believes there are fairer ways for the municipality to save taxpayer money. For example, there might be savings if the winter maintenance of backroads were outsourced to local plowing businesses. However, should the Select Board decide to discontinue these roads, Mr. Stowell believes there should be a "grandfather clause" so current property owners are not affected.

Sandra Davis also would like detailed information on all the roads considered for discontinuance over the next couple years including estimated costs savings. Although originally the number of roads was given as thirty (30), she has heard higher figures cited. Manager Schulz said potentially there are fifty (50) to sixty-five (65) one-, two-, and three-house roads that might be under consideration for discontinuance in the near future so creating an accurate list is not easy. He doesn't want false information to circulate.

Board member Maxwell would like this list available for public view by the next regular meeting date (09/11/18). Brenda Chamberlin attended the previous public hearing and she thought there was a commitment to provide this information tonight. She also wants to know the criteria for choosing the fifteen (15) roads targeted for discontinuance this year and those considered for next year.

Steven Clough lives in the downtown area and is worried once this first set of roads are discontinued, the floodgates will be opened and there will be a rush to privatize other roads with one or two houses. He is especially concerned about School Street Extension, which has a church as its only structure.

Randall Chamberlin lives on Smith Hill Road and is disappointed the Select Board members are considering this action as many of the people who would be directly affected are older and on fixed incomes. He is suspicious that "backroom politics" are being employed here. Chair Goslant disputes this implication as he felt the whole process from the beginning has followed state statute and all meetings where this matter has been discussed have been warned and open to the public. He noted there are many Northfield taxpayers who have driveways as long as (or longer than) the roads now being considered for discontinuance and they do not expect other taxpayers to maintain them. Chair Goslant felt a lot of people are jumping to the wrong conclusions based on bad information. The Select Board members are trying their best to keep tax rates level while also treating all Northfield residents in an equitable manner.

Linda Barrows lives on Barrows Road and attended the previous public hearing. She also would like to see a full list of the roads under consideration of discontinuance. Ms. Barrows personally would not like to see any of these roads discontinued. Board member Maxwell repeated the full list would be available for public inspection before the next public hearing (09/11/18). There being no other questions or comments, the public hearing closed at 8:02 p.m.

IV. SET/ADJUST AGENDA. There were no changes to the posted agenda.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

- a. **Thomas Alsheimer, Board of Listers Chair: 2018 Grand List Errors and Omissions.** Mr. Alsheimer said the value of a Donahue Drive parcel originally was assessed at \$410,400 because (in part) the Listers believed there were two (2) septic tanks on the property. However, during the grievance/appeal process the Listers learned there was only one septic tank on the property servicing both the main and guest houses. The Listers now are asking the Select Board members to approve a \$10,000 reduction in the assessed property value. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve the request to lower the parcel's assessed value to \$400,400. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **August 14, 2018 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Doney seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #04-19.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve Warrant #04-19 in the amount of \$100,698.84. Board member Maxwell noted it cost the municipality about \$11,000 to crush gravel in the Northfield Falls pit. He would like to know the cost savings achieved for doing this rather than purchasing the material elsewhere. Manager Schulz will get this information. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Warrant #04-19A.** Motion by Board member Doney, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to approve Warrant #04-19A in the amount of \$92,138.50. Manager Schulz said this warrant amount was to pay off and old bank note so it could be refinanced at a lower interest rate. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through August 12, 2018.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$95,443.98. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Road Discontinuance.** Manager Schulz said this item was on the agenda in case any follow-up action was required after tonight's public hearing. He added many of the public comments tonight requested specific information and he will be working to get all this ready for the next public hearing. Chair Goslant doesn't think this is the only Vermont municipality trying to save taxpayer money by discontinuing public maintenance of one- and two-house roads. Board member Maxwell looked into this and found sixteen (16) other Vermont municipalities have been through this process. Chair Goslant also wanted to dispel the suggestion the Select Board members have engaged in dirty politics while this matter has been under consideration. Board member Goodrich said when the possibility of road discontinuance was first brought up during a Select Board meeting she was adamant the process should be open and as fair to the Northfield community as possible. She originally proposed having all the roads under consideration for discontinuance be addressed in a single year but on learning the complex process involved she agreed on the need to split it over two years.

Administrative Assistant Kenneth McCann remembers about five (5) years ago former town manager Rob Lewis had letters sent to residents of one- and two-house roads asking if they would volunteer to have their roads thrown up in order to save taxpayer money. There was a feeling then on the Select Board that some landowners might be interested in taking full control over their access roads (as well as gain some additional acreage). There was little feedback to these letters and no volunteers. Almost all the residents who were sent letters then are now a part of the current road discontinuance process. Therefore, Mr. McCann feels the fact the Select Board members decided to pursue this course of action at this time cannot be considered a total surprise. Chair Goslant would like to know when these letters were sent out as well as their wording.

Steve Davis believes these roads should be discontinued as a cost saving measure. He thinks the residents who showed up tonight to oppose this were thinking only of their own interests instead of the whole community. Mr. Davis believes homeowners should be able to maintain their own driveways without burdening other taxpayers. He hopes the Select Board members won't back down but instead complete the process and discontinue these roads.

- b. **Norwich University Homecoming 2018 Street Closure and Parking Ban Lifting Request.** As the bicentennial of Norwich University (NU) will be celebrated in 2019, NU administrators have been in contact with the municipality about the logistics of hosting far greater numbers of Homecoming attendees over the next couple years than in recent years. In fact, the amount is expected to roughly double to 5,000 this year and then double again to 10,000 in 2019. David Whaley is NU's Vice-President of Development & Alumni Relations and he is present tonight to make a couple requests. The first is the annual request to have the parking ban on Crescent Avenue lifted over the weekend. In addition, as many NU visitors will be staying in Montpelier hotels and bussed to campus over the weekend, Mr. Whaley is requesting Central Street be closed to through traffic from Washington Street to its intersection with South Main Street so this area can be used for dropping off or picking up passengers throughout Homecoming Day (09/15/18). Mr. Whaley would like this parking ban to start Saturday morning at 7:00 a.m. and end later that night at 8:00 p.m. He added there had been some discussion of perhaps closing the section of South Main Street adjacent to the NU campus and diverting traffic around Crescent Avenue on Homecoming Day but it was decided to postpone this request until next year when the even larger crowds might require it. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the lifting of the parking ban on Crescent Avenue and the temporary closure of a section of Central Street as indicated above. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** It was noted a separate fireworks display request for dusk on Friday, September 14, 2018, has been approved by the municipality and NU will do public notices to the Northfield community.
- c. **Northfield Transfer Station Agreement.** Manager Schulz said the business currently operating the transfer station (Earth Waste & Metal, Rutland VT) has indicated it is no longer interested in providing this service. As this matter involves possible contract negotiations, Manager Schulz would like to hold this discussion in executive session. There was no objection.

- d. **Bond Anticipation Note (FY 2010/2011 RSMS).** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Note in the amount of \$60,000 at 2.20% interest; to approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Borrowing Resolution; and to approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Tax Certificate. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Annual Fire Training Requirement.** Board member Goodrich noted the new agreement between Norwich University and the municipality require a minimum of one (1) Northfield Fire Department (NFD) on-campus training session employing the aerial ladder truck each year. She asked if this year's training session has been done. Manager Schulz said NFD Chief Peter J. DeMasi is working on scheduling this soon. Board member Maxwell believes Norwich University wanted to delay this training session until after all the construction work being done on campus has been shut down.
- b. **Municipal Pool Closure.** Manager Schulz confirmed the municipal pool closed for the season on Saturday, August 18, 2018. It now is being prepared for winter. He also is looking to schedule the installation of five (5) new skimmers before the pool reopens next summer. According to Pool Director Shannon Palone, the hot summer we had this year resulted in heavy turnout. Manager Schulz soon will have the final revenue and operating expense figures for the Select Board members to review.
- c. **Building Renovations.** Manager Schulz also confirmed the projects to paint the Municipal Building roof and the Police Station exterior have been completed and the invoices have been paid. In addition, the heating system was replaced at the Town Garage. Chair Goslant noted there still needs to be some work done at the Police Station as there are rotting exterior wall boards, etc.
- d. **Labor Day Weekend Festivities.** Chair Goslant noted the big Northfield holiday weekend is nearly upon us and asked if the preparations were on schedule. Manager Schulz said he has been working with the Highway and Water/Sewer crews to make sure the Common has been cleaned up, all the mowing has been done, etc. In addition, the contracted street sweeper will be in town to clean the downtown streets.
- e. **CERV Relocation.** Chair Goslant asked if there still are plans for CERV to move all its operations from the Town Garage into the storage building on Kent Street. Manager Schulz has contacted several possible contractors about the possibility of rehabilitating the building for this purpose but hasn't had much luck yet. Chair Goslant would like this done so more space can be cleared at the Town Garage for ambulance and/or highway usage.
- f. **Highway Grading.** In response to Chair Goslant's inquiry, Manager Schulz said the municipality's grader has been working on the backroads a minimum of three (3) days each week. Use of the grader focused on the main arteries earlier in the summer but recently it has been working on some of the side roads. Chair Goslant wants to be sure all the road grading is complete before winter sets in.
- g. **Recent Narcotics Seizure.** As seen in a recent edition (08/20/18) of the *Times Argus*, the Northfield Police Department (NPD) executed a search warrant on a Vermont Route 12A home on Friday, August 17, 2018, and discovered "drug paraphernalia, a digital scale and a white powdery substance." A New York resident in the home also was searched by NPD Officer Karie Tucker and found to have over \$3,500 in cash on his person. A couch was searched next and 134.4 grams of heroin were found inside. Chair Goslant wanted to commend Officer Tucker and the other NPD officers involved for their good work as this incident involved significant detective work beforehand, many hours of overtime, etc.
- h. **Slaughterhouse Road Railway Crossing.** Board member Doney would like the safety of this crossing addressed soon as there has already been one very serious accident there due to poor visibility, etc. Manager Schulz plans to hold a meeting on this soon. Board member Doney would like all the residents in the area informed of the meeting beforehand in case they'd like to attend.

- i. **Police Chief Search Process.** Board member Doney asked when the NPD Chief Search Committee would hold its initial meeting now that the deadline for applications (08/17/18) has passed. Manager Schulz would like to hold the first meeting next Wednesday night (09/05/18) if this is acceptable to the other committee members.

X. TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT

- a. **Union Street Stormwater Project.** As Manager Schulz reported at earlier meetings, the project engineer’s estimated cost to complete this project increased significantly (\pm \$500,000) after the decision was made to situate the stormwater treatment structure underground. The new estimate was much more than the \$175,000 awarded to Northfield by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) for this project. Work on the project was suspended until additional funds could be located. Manager Schulz met with ANR representatives recently and, as he had hoped, ANR will release additional funds so the project can be completed. He added the ANR representatives expressed great enthusiasm about this project as it will treat a considerable amount of stormwater coming down Union and other streets in the area. Manager Schulz said it was unlikely the whole project will be completed this year but the disrupted paving would be repaired before wintertime. The underground structure would be constructed next year. Board member Doney commended Manager Schulz for securing the additional grant funds.
- b. **Cheney Farm Solar Project.** As authorized by the Select Board members at their last regular meeting, there will be a non-binding article on the 2019 Town Meeting Warning asking if Northfield residents would like to pursue this project. In the meantime, Manager Schulz has reached out to some private property owners to see if they would be interested in either hosting solar farms themselves or leasing some of their property to the municipality for this purpose. There already has been some positive feedback and Manager Schulz will work with Electric Utility Commission Chair Stephen Fitzhugh on the best way to proceed on this.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Steve Davis: Roadside Clearance and Mowing.** After all the kerfuffle regarding the contract the municipality had with Limlaw Pulpwood & Chipper over the clearing of overgrown backroads, Mr. Davis had assumed the municipality would have a set policy to address this problem. In fact, Mr. Davis feels the roadside clearing and mowing has been “hit or miss” with some roads done properly each year while others seem to be ignored for several years. He noted this problem is especially bad on Hallstrom Road. Chair Goslant asked Mr. Davis to contact Manager Schulz right away whenever he sees a roadside problem so Manager Schulz can work with the Highway Foreman and have it resolved as soon as possible.

XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a legal matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:05 p.m.

Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:40 p.m. No action was taken.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:40 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.