

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD MEETING
Minutes of November 13, 2018

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Board members Lynn Doney (absent), Julie H. Goodrich, K. David Maxwell, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Casey Scandore (Kittle Branagan & Sargent), Richard Matheson (DeWitt Clinton Masonic Lodge), David Pierson (DeWitt Clinton Masonic Lodge), Matt Gadbois, Ken Hepburn, and Elroy Hill.

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. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Representatives from the Northfield Farmers Market were to address the Select Board tonight but had to postpone due to today's inclement weather. They will be rescheduled for the next regular meeting (11/27/18).

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Casey Scandore CPA, Kittle Branagan & Sargent: FY 2017/2018 Financial Audit Reports.** The Select Board members were provided with copies of the audit beforehand so Ms. Scandore was present tonight to provide a brief overview and answer any questions. She made it clear the audit was an "unmodified" (or "clean") opinion and no problems had been encountered in the process. Ms. Scandore then discussed various matters of interest pertaining to the audit, including increased payments from Norwich University as part of a new agreement as well as grant funds received related to the Water Street Park project. She noted the year-end balances for the Town General Fund and for the utilities were positive and fairly consistent with those of the previous fiscal year. Ms. Scandore concluded by saying there was nothing unusual regarding the audit process and the municipal staff were very helpful throughout the process. Chair Goslant thanked Ms. Scandore for tonight's positive report.
- b. Sally Davidson: Recreation Committee Update.** Ms. Davidson reported the renovations at Memorial Park such as the new bathrooms were nearly complete with the exception of new signage. The park pavilion still needs to be painted (or stained) and power still needs to be hooked up. Inscribed paving blocks will be put in place at the park next spring.

Ms. Davidson said this year's "Trunk or Treat" went very well with over five hundred (500) children taking part despite the rainy weather on Halloween night. The Recreation Committee now is focused on Christmas celebrations such as workshops where residents can create their own "Star Sticks" for placement in their front yards over the holiday season. The first workshop will be held in the Community Room on Monday, November 26, 2018 and the second the following Saturday (12/01/18). Please contact Ms. Davidson at 485-5211 to sign up in advance.

The annual Common Christmas Tree Lighting will be held on Friday, December 7, 2018. There will be a Winter Farmers Market held that day starting at 4:00 p.m. followed by Christmas caroling at 5:45 p.m. and the tree lighting itself at 6:00 p.m. Recreation Committee members will be on hand throughout the event selling hot chocolate as well as Christmas wish ribbons. There also will be horse-drawn carriage rides and story time at the American Legion for children waiting for the arrival of Santa Claus.

Ms. Davidson said there is one vacancy on the Recreation Committee but she believes there already is someone interested in filling it. She said this person has been very helpful with matters related to the Northfield Falls Park and organized sport activities and would be a valuable addition to the Committee. Ms. Davidson added the current Committee members have been working on their budget requests for the next fiscal year and she looks forward to working with the Select Board members when the budget meetings commence at the end of this month.

Board member Maxwell than thanked Ms. Davidson for all she does for the Northfield community. Ms. Davidson was grateful for the recognition but stated nothing could be done without the assistance of the other Recreation Committee members as well as all those volunteers who helped this past year with park cleanups, playground equipment installations, etc.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **October 23, 2018 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to approve the minutes. Board member Miller asked that a statement attributed to him related to the feasibility of hiring an Economic Development Director be stricken as inaccurate. The correction will be made. **Motion to approve revised minutes passed 4-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #09-19.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve Warrant #09-19 in the amount of \$374,459.93. Board member Goodrich asked if the stone/gravel purchased from Newton Construction for \$6,500 had already been used. Manager Schulz said it had been added to the existing stockpile and has been set aside for future use. Board member Goodrich then asked about the purchase of a used sander (\$2,500) for the new Chevrolet pickup truck. Manager Schulz said the Select Board did authorize buying used equipment for the new vehicle and the purchase price was in the current Highway budget. Board member Goodrich noted a \$5,000 payment from the "Flood Buyout Grant" fund to local residents for "rental assistance." Manager Schulz said these "pass-through" funds went directly from FEMA to the residents so no municipal funds were expended. He added this payment was related to one of the last flood-damaged structures to be demolished so he doesn't expect any more in the future. Chair Goslant asked about the abandoned structure on Union Street and whether this might become part of the FEMA buyout process. Manager Schulz said he has not been contacted by anyone yet about this. Chair Goslant noted a \$250 water bill for the Northfield Falls Park. He felt this a lot of money for one month's usage at this time of year. Manager Schulz will check into this and report back. Ms. Davidson could not explain this charge either since the park's bathrooms were shut off in early October. Chair Goslant then noted several "Green Lantern" payments to various department. Manager Schulz said these were solar credits from the Bull Run Solar project. He added there will be net savings for all affected accounts. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through October 21, 2018.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$85,260.25. Board member Goodrich was surprised to still see Northfield Police Department (NPD) overtime charges since the NPD now is fully staffed with six (6) full-time officers. Manager Schulz said the full staffing has significantly reduced overtime amounts but there would always be some overtime expense due to officers taking vacation time, going on sick leave, etc. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through November 4, 2018.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$85,868.66. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Northfield Snowmobilers, Inc. Trail Requests (Well Field & Fairground Road).** Manager Schulz noted NSI has made its annual request for a snowmobile trail through the Wellfield. In addition, NSI would like to traverse the end of Fairground Road in order to connect their trail system. In his memorandum, Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi has listed stipulations that must be accepted before allowing the Wellfield trail, which include proper marking, no refueling on site, etc. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goodrich, to approve the NSI request for a snowmobile trial through the Wellfield (provided the conditions in Superintendent DeMasi's memorandum are followed) and also allow a snowmobile trail at the end of Fairground Road. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations.** Manager Schulz said that as part of settling the lawsuit filed by the State of Vermont over rigged emissions tests, the Volkswagen Group has paid over \$3,600,000 into the state's general fund. Of that amount, \$2,000,000 has been set aside and will be dedicated to helping Vermont municipalities establish electric vehicle (EV) charging stations within their communities. The funds are distributed through a grant process and there is a November 30, 2018 deadline for funds to be released in January 2019. This matter has been discussed by the Northfield Utility Commissioners and it is their recommendation Northfield submit a grant application with the proposed charging station sited off Wall Street near the Northfield Police Station. Manager Schulz noted the grant would pay for ninety percent (90%) of the cost of establishing the charging station. He now is asking for the Select Board's authority to move forward on this and submit the grant application. He added the EV users would pay for the power as well as a processing fee. Manager Schulz said this would not be a big revenue source as the intent is to cover expenses. Board member Miller has never understood the practicality of EVs in such a cold climate as he understood cold weather depletes the electric charge sooner and cuts down on driving ranges. Manager Schulz said there is new technology that cuts down on this power loss and thus maintain acceptable driving ranges. Chair Goslant felt it should be a municipal goal to make Northfield's downtown area a destination location and having this charging station there could help with this. Chair Goslant also would like to see an increase in downtown parking opportunities over the summer months. After further discussion, there was a Select Board consensus to favor this project and to authorize the grant application.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **FY 2019/2020 Town Budget Process.** Board member Goodrich noted the Select Board's first budget meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 27, 2018, at 6:00 p.m. With the exception a two week break over the Christmas/New Year's Day holidays, the Select Board members will meet each Tuesday and Thursday night until the FY 2019/2020 is finalized in mid-January 2019 for voter approval on Town Meeting Day. She encouraged interested members of the public to attend the meetings in order to provide input during the budget creation process (rather than waiting until the end of the process). Manager Schulz said the first draft budget is now being prepared and will be ready for distribution at this first budget meeting.
- b. **Recent Select Board Subcommittee Meetings.** Board member Maxwell said the subcommittee that focuses on the interactions of the municipality and Norwich University has met twice in the past month. Another meeting will be scheduled for next week and Norwich University President Richard Schneider has been invited to attend. In addition, Board member Maxwell said the Labor Agreement & Bargaining Subcommittee met for the first time this morning with a representative of the NPD Union in order to begin negotiations on the contract that will expire next June. Board member Maxwell expects this to be a lengthy process and will provide more information later in the meeting in executive session. Chair Goslant is hoping to schedule another Highway Subcommittee meeting soon.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Elm Street Retaining Wall.** Manager Schulz said the project engineer now is preparing cost estimates for fixing the wall. He expects hard numbers will be ready for discussion during the budget process.
- b. **Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD).** As requested by the Select Board members, Manager Schulz has reached out to VCRD regarding the services they provide and how Northfield might benefit from them. A VCRD representative has been invited to attend the next Select Board meeting (11/27/18) to provide this information as well as the possibility of scheduling a VCRD "Community Visit" in Northfield within the next couple years.
- c. **Property Tax Sale.** The tax sale on delinquent properties was held last week (11/08/18). Manager Schulz said it was a successful event and some headway has been made on collecting back taxes from mobile home owners.
- d. **Northfield Rising.** Manager Schulz said the local group "Northfield Rising" has been holding several meetings recently to discuss community concerns. One focus lately has been expanding the local trail system on Paine Mountain and beyond. For example, grant opportunities are available that could be used to create paths linking Memorial Park and Northfield Falls Park. Chair Goslant said such trail systems are big economic drivers so it would be good to expand and connect the existing trail system to bring more people into the community.
- e. **Vermont Village Cannery.** In the Select Board's packet was a letter from Manager Schulz to Vermont Village Cannery, which operates bottling and repackaging operations at the former Chouinard facility. In the letter, Manager Schulz said the municipality will work with Vermont Village Cannery on the slow release of stored wastewater from the facility into Northfield's sewage system. This would spare the business the great expense of hauling the material off-site. Board member Miller asked about the composition of the stored material. Manager Schulz said it was mainly cleaning supplies as there is no physical production at this facility. Although the material isn't hazardous, it is rather acidic so some treatment of it will be necessary in order to achieve neutral PH levels. Manager Schulz will be monitoring the situation with Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi to make sure all goes well. Chair Goslant felt it was good for the municipality to assist local businesses on such matters whenever possible.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Richard Matheson, DeWitt Clinton Masonic Lodge: Request for Property Tax Exemption.** Mr. Matheson is the current "Worshipful Master" for Northfield's DeWitt Clinton Masonic Lodge, which is located on South Main Street. Mr. Matheson said in past years the Masonic Lodge has had partial property tax exemptions approved by Northfield voters. Unfortunately, last year this exemption expired and the attempt to put the request on the Town Meeting warning by petition fell a few signatures short. Mr. Matheson said it has been difficult for the Masonic Temple to pay its full tax bill this year, which he doesn't consider fair since this is a registered non-profit organization that provides many services to the greater community. He now is requesting the Select Board put an article on the 2019 Town Meeting warning that would provide the Masonic Temple with a complete exemption from local property taxes for the next five (5) years. The cost to the municipality would be about \$8,000 per year. Board member Goodrich asked if there was a requirement for organizations to petition to get such requests on the warning. Manager Schulz said the Select Board has the authority to waive this requirement. Mr. Matheson said it was difficult for lodge members to obtain the required number of signatures last year because of declining membership and the fact that the average age of current lodge members is over seventy (70). There is a drive to increase membership by working with Norwich University to make students aware of this fraternal organization and the rewards associated with lifelong membership.

Fellow lodge member David Pierson explained freemasonry is open to all male applicants and there is a \$125 initiation fee followed by \$60 annual fees. A background check is required of all applicants since lodge members do extensive interaction with the greater community, including children. For interested females, there is an adjunct organization known as "Eastern Star." Chair Goslant thanked Mr. Matheson and Mr. Pierson for the information provided tonight and the Select Board members will consider this request.

- b. Matt Gadbois: Street Crosswalk Lighting.** Mr. Gadbois is concerned there is insufficient nighttime lighting for the crosswalks in the downtown area. He feels the streets are too dark at night for proper pedestrian safety and that the flashing yellow light at the Main Street/Depot Square is wholly inadequate. Chair Goslant has similar concerns about the two (2) designated pedestrian crossings near the Norwich University campus. Mr. Gadbois doesn't want the Select Board to wait until there is a fatal (or serious) accident before addressing this. Chair Goslant felt the recent increase in nighttime business around the downtown area make this a more urgent problem. Board member Maxwell would like Manager Schulz to bring a proposal forward within the next two (2) regular meetings.
- c. Ken Hepburn: "Welcome to Northfield" Signs Update.** Mr. Hepburn said both new signs at the south and north ends of town have been installed but some work still needs to be done. For example, although the southern sign now is lit at night, the installation of rock landscaping around its base will have to wait until next spring. The other sign sited in Northfield Falls has had light standards installed but the power has not been hooked up. This also will have to wait until spring along with the flower beds planned there. Manager Schulz said there have been some concerns expressed about the exact location of the Northfield Falls sign but is hopeful these can be resolved. Board member Maxwell added that since this sign is located in a residential area, there should be care taken to insure the lighting isn't too obtrusive to the neighbors. Mr. Hepburn thanked all those who donated funds and helped with sign installation. He added about \$4,500 in donation money was received and about \$10,000 has been spent on the project so far. It was noted at the last Town Meeting Northfield voters authorized the expenditure of \$15,000 in existing economic development funds for the purchase and installation of these new signs. Although there were plans to refurbish and relocate the old signs to new locations on Cox Brook Road and Vermont Route 12A, Mr. Hepburn reported these signs were in much worse condition than anticipated so it might be more cost-effective to purchase and install smaller, less expensive signs. Chair Goslant thanked Mr. Hepburn for his efforts and for tonight's update.

- XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Miller, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss possible contract negotiations with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:30 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 9:05 p.m. No action was taken.

- XII. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:05 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.