

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of January 10, 2019

- 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, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Bruce Wright, and Elroy Hill

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

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

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- a. Cemetery Department Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).** Manager Schulz began with the Mount Hope Cemetery Expansion CIP account, which has a \$12,331 balance. He has spoken with cemetery maintenance contractor Bruce Wright who has said it is unlikely the cemetery will need to be expanded for at least twenty-five (25) years. With that understanding, there has been some consideration of transferring \$10,000 from this account into another CIP account, such as the one for a replacement tanker truck for the Northfield Fire Department. Mr. Wright doesn't object to this. Chair Goslant asked if increased use of cremation has adversely affected the sale of grave lots. Mr. Wright agreed it has since it is possible to intern up to five (5) cremains into one lot. He noted when the time has come to expand Mount Hope Cemetery, the usable space could be roughly doubled by clearing trees, etc.

Board member Maxwell asked if the cemetery's front wall was in good shape now. Mr. Wright said about ninety percent (90%) of needed repair work has been completed and the rest will be done next summer. This should provide another fifty (50) years of use. Manager Schulz noted the cemetery's south gate does need some work. Mr. Wright said one of its pillars was struck a few years ago by a vehicle and the whole gate could come down if it happened again. He said several cemetery visitors use this entrance. The balance in the "Mt. Hope - Fix So. Gate" CIP account is \$1,537 and the repair cost has been estimated at \$1,500. Board member Maxwell feels this work should be done as soon as possible. Mr. Wright said the whole gate would be taken down and put back together. Manager Schulz noted some work on the cemetery's road also is needed so \$2,500 will be added to the current \$557 balance in the "Mt. Hope - Road" CIP account. Mr. Wright confirmed the road needs to be built up so stormwater will flow into adjoining grassy areas rather than straight down into South Main Street. He said the roads in other cemeteries are in good condition.

As for the Falls Cemetery, Manager Schulz noted the CIP account for fence maintenance has a \$6,297 balance and another \$3,131 will be added in the next fiscal year. The estimated cost of currently needed repairs is about \$7,000. Mr. Wright confirmed the fence on the cemetery's southwest corner by the Falls Trailer Park is in bad shape with some sections lying on the ground. This work will be done next spring when time allows.

Finance Director Laurie Baroffio noted there is a \$19,229 balance in the General Cemetery Restoration CIP account with an additional \$2,500. She added previous Select Boards created this non-specific account so the cemetery maintenance contractor could spend funds where needed. Mr. Wright said the vault in Elmwood Cemetery needs repair and the estimated cost is about \$2,000. The nearby stairs are crumbling and need to be repaired or removed. Board member Maxwell said the Northfield Historical Society has expressed interest in taking charge of the stair restoration as a project. Mr. Wright has spoken to them about this but has no cost estimate for this work.

Mr. Wright reported over three hundred (300) monuments have been repaired/reset over the last couple years and another two hundred (200) require attention. He expects to have them all done within the next five (5) years. He said the public cemeteries overall are in good shape as he has worked to restore their borders and remove problem trees. One concern is the lack of up-to-date mapping for some of the smaller cemeteries such as Four Corners, West Hill, Robinson, etc. Ms. Baroffio said this might require some research in the Town Clerk's Office where the lot purchase records are stored.

Another issue is the lack of proper signage in most of the cemeteries. He noted the local Boy Scout troop did paint a new sign for the Loomis Cemetery off Berlin Pond Road. Mr. Wright felt simple metal signs would be sufficient for the smaller cemeteries but he felt Mount Hope Cemetery and Elmwood Cemetery should have something more prominent. It was thought between \$6,000 and \$8,000 would be enough to install this signage. Board member Maxwell noted there are ample funds in the General Cemetery Restoration CIP account to address this. Chair Goslant then thanked Mr. Wright for the valuable information present tonight and for his good work throughout the year.

After Mr. Wright left the meeting, there was a brief discussion of possibly increasing some of the cemetery fees (i.e., grave opening, setting markers, weekend/holiday burials, etc.) in order cover administrative costs with the added funds. These fees currently are forwarded to the cemetery contractor/verger and only lot sale amounts go directly into the General Fund. The Select Board will revisit this issue in coming months.

- b. Highway Department.** Manager Schulz said one unresolved issue in the proposed FY 2019/2020 Highway Department budget is the amount to be put in the gravel/stone line item. The draft budget put this amount at \$66,000 but Board member Miller proposed raising this amount to \$200,000 so the gravel roads most needing attention (according to the Road Surface Management System (RSMS) program) could be resurfaced over the next couple years. Manager Schulz said he met today with Highway Foreman Trent Tucker and Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) analyst Dan Currier and they inspected the backroads scheduled for resurfacing in the near future (i.e., Hallstrom Road, Loop Road, Chandler Road, Lovers Lane, and Berlin Pond Road). The plan is to add four inches (4") of new gravel surface and perhaps new culverts. Board member Miller noted the cost of this resurfacing would cost about \$22,000 per mile (not including the culverts). He calculated the lengths of the roads listed above and came up with a total length of about seven (7) miles. If this work was split over two (2) years, the annual cost would be about \$77,000. Chair Goslant felt Northfield's roads are not as good as they could be but really not as bad as some people would suggest. He felt in past years when municipal budgets were being developed, the gravel and paving budgets were among the first items cut in order to stabilize the tax rate. Chair Goslant believes our roads and sidewalks are no worse than those in Montpelier and Barre so there really isn't a crisis situation in Northfield. A lot of money has been invested in improving Berlin Pond Road and other backroads but Vermont winters and natural features still caused eventual deterioration.

Board member Maxwell still doesn't feel Board member Miller's proposal is either advisable or affordable. He also doesn't believe our roads are in such poor condition to justify such an expense at this time. He does think a lot of road material could be reclaimed if proper ditching and other roadside work was performed in a timely manner. This could help cut down on expenses. Board member Miller said the original \$200,000 figure was floated for discussion purposes only. He now proposed a new figure of \$118,400, which would be \$88,400 for gravel road resurfacing and another \$30,000 reserved for Mud Season road maintenance. He felt this amount might be more palatable to the other Select Board members than his initial proposal.

Ms. Baroffio noted the RSMS line item in the Highway Department CIP budget used to include funding for paving and for the mat and gravel program on the backroads. In recent years, however, it has been used for paving only. Chair Goslant would like to update the Highway Department line items by creating a dedicated account for Mud Season expenses. He also would like to separate the amounts to be spent on road paving and gravel road resurfacing. Manager Schulz said the RSMS program does inform Select Board members on how much it would cost to address specific road problems but it does not commit them to spending a certain amount. Board member Maxwell has advocated for a comprehensive municipal infrastructure plan and he feels the updated RSMS program shows movement in the correct direction. In the absence of any emergency conditions, he would like the municipality to adhere to the plan as much as possible over the next few years. Board member Miller feels having this information on hand would make it easier for the Select Board members to explain to Northfield residents both the level of highway spending and the roadwork priority list.

Board member Maxwell believes there appears to be Select Board consensus that the amount to be spent on road rehabilitation needs to be increased. Specific recommendations regarding which roads should be done first can come from the Highway Subcommittee at a later date. Manager Schulz said the question now is with what level of spending for gravel/stone in the FY 2019/2020 budget are the Select Board members comfortable. Board member Miller suggested the \$118,400 figure he brought up earlier. Chair Goslant would like to increase the amount set aside for Mud Season to \$40,000, which would increase the amount to \$128,400. After a brief discussion of past levels of highway spending, Ms. Baroffio noted prior to the 2014 municipal merger the Town Selectmen and Village Trustees developed separate highway budgets. Chair Goslant felt, in retrospect, the Village Trustees did a better job of maintaining their paved roads than the Town Selectmen did on the backroads.

The Select Board consensus was to create separate line items for Mud Season road maintenance, other gravel usage, and for paving. Board member Maxwell also would like a comprehensive sidewalk policy developed that would specify which streets would have sidewalk on both sides, which would have only one sidewalk, which would have concrete sidewalk, which would have asphalt, etc. A brief discussion then followed on the proposed paving project on East Street.

It then was noted some long-term borrowing bonds would be coming off the municipality's books over the next couple years. It was felt this could provide the Select Board with more flexibility in highway spending on both general maintenance and road reconstruction. Ms. Baroffio would like the RSMS program to be followed for the next few years as an alternative to new borrowing. Board member Maxwell agreed the RSMS program should be given this opportunity. If there is no progress, then perhaps bond financing should be considered. Chair Goslant also would like the RSMS program recommendations followed as much as possible.

Manager Schulz said a firm figure for the gravel/stone line item was needed before the Select Board could move onto other matters. There was no objection to the \$128,400 amount. Manager Schulz also felt an amount for paving expenses is needed. Board member Maxwell would like to postpone this discussion for a future budget meeting. Board member Goodrich noted there also remain some unanswered questions in the Highway Department's Capital Equipment Program (CEP) budget. These include the possible lease/purchase of a road roller, Chair Goslant's proposal to decrease the service lives of Western Star dump trucks from twelve (12) years to seven (7), etc. Board member Maxwell would like Mr. Tucker present when these matters are discussed.

- c. Future Meeting Schedule.** After some discussion, it was decided the Select Board would hold budget meetings on Monday, January 14; Tuesday, January 15; Thursday, January 17; and Monday, January 21, 2019. All these meetings will be held in the Municipal Building. In addition, a Highway Subcommittee meeting will be held at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, January 14, 2019. It was noted the Highway Department budget was not the only one with outstanding issues. There are unresolved questions involving the Northfield Fire Department (i.e., tanker truck purchase, etc.), Northfield Police Department (i.e., Taser purchase, etc.), and Northfield Ambulance Service (i.e., PowerLoad purchase, Jaws of Life rehabilitation, etc.). Board member Maxwell would like the respective department heads on hand for these discussions.

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

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

The Board adjourned at 8:21 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 22, 2019.