

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of June 25, 2019**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth W. Goslant and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Steve Davis, Gary Davis, Eric Davis, Mark Fournier, Jeffrey Ott, Kelli Cheney, Denise MacMartin (Northfield Energy Committee), Joe Bosley, Kelli Sutton-Bosley, Jane Pekol (Northfield Energy Committee), Dave Hanna, Bonnie Hanna, Sonya Rhodes, Gail Hall (Northfield Energy Committee), and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell 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.** A representative from Green Mountain Transit (GMT) was scheduled to attend the meeting to provide an update on the Northfield-Montpelier Commuter Bus Service. That person was unable to attend so this presentation will be postponed to a future meeting.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)**

- a. Steve Davis: Road Concerns.** Mr. Davis attended the previous Select Board regular meeting (06/11/19) and expressed his disappointment with the apparent inability of the Northfield Highway crew to repair potholes in a timely manner. He said he never received a satisfactory answer to his questions and is further disappointed that the contactors brought in to repair the worst potholes on Union Brook Road did not complete the job before leaving town. Mr. Davis' main reason for speaking out tonight is to encourage the Select Board members to confirm tonight that they will hold a bond vote later this year for the purpose of reconstructing and repaving Union Brook Road in its entirety. He isn't sure former Northfield Village residents will support such an expensive paving project on the backroads but he is hopeful those who either live on Union Brook Road or drive on it regularly will come out and support the project.

**V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. June 11, 2019 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve the minutes. Manager Schulz would like the section regarding municipal bonds (Page 3) reworded. **Motion to approve revised minutes passed 5-0-0.**

**VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. Warrant #24-19.** Motion by Board member Doney, seconded by Board member Goslant, to approve Warrant #24-19 in the amount of \$128,750.18. Board member Goslant would like it clarified that the \$37,000 paid to Davey Tree Services was for trimming tree limbs, etc. adjacent to power lines for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). This was not normal roadside clearance. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Warrant #01-20A.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve Warrant #01-20A in the amount of \$42,226.72. It was noted this payment had two components: paying half of Northfield's annual tax bill from Washington County and a payment on a water project bond. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through June 16, 2019.** Motion by Board member Doney, seconded by Board member Goslant, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$92,840.03. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**VII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. Union Brook Road Paving Project.** Prior to the Select Board regular meeting, the Select Board member held a site visit on various parts of Union Brook Road in order to evaluate the road's condition. Board member Miller said he made a motion at the last regular meeting to start the process for holding a bond vote to fund the reconstruction and repaving all of Union Brook Road. That motion was tabled until tonight's site visit could be held.

Based on information he has reviewed several times, his own observation of the road, and public interaction, Board member Miller would like to take action on this tonight. Motion by Board member Miller, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to bond for the complete reconstruction and repaving of the full length of Union Brook Road.

Board member Miller said the total cost of this project is estimated at \$1,700,000. He doesn't favor breaking up this project into segments and would prefer having all the work completed in one construction season. Board member Goslant still has some reservations about spending all this money on a single highway project. He added the State of Vermont has not been very supportive of such paving projects so it is likely Northfield taxpayers will pay for all of it. Board member Goslant felt there were too many uncertainties regarding local and state tax rates to proceed with much confidence on this expensive project. He also is upset that the Select Board members have been accused of "back room deals" when there has been a real effort at transparency in this matter with the timely posting of agendas, minutes, etc. on the municipal website and other locations. Board member Goslant does favor grinding down and repaving the worst sections of the road but feels it is too expensive to repave the entire road at one time. He added there are other paved and gravel roads that are in real need of serious attention. As for the criticism of the contractors now fixing the potholes, Board member Goslant said they would be returning to Northfield soon as they just had to leave for a short time in order to perform some previously-scheduled work in other communities.

Board member Doney would like to get the whole road paved as soon as possible. He felt there already had been enough talk about this and something needs to be done. Board member Goodrich asked if ditching work was included in the current estimate. Board member Miller said it was. He said the only possible extra cost was fixing the big dip in the road by Hockman Hill Road. There is no way of telling how extensive the repairs to fix this will be until construction begins. As a result, this work will be bid separate from the rest of the project. Board member Goodrich favors proceeding with the bond vote and allow Northfield residents to decide the matter.

Chair Maxwell agrees \$1,700,000 is a lot of money. With a twenty-year loan, the increase on the municipal tax rate should be about four cents (4¢). However, he noted the municipality now has a long-term plan for maintaining its highway infrastructure with the updated RSMS (Road Surface Management System) plan developed by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) in junction with the Highway Subcommittee (Board members Goslant and Miller), Manager Schulz, and Highway Foreman Trent Tucker. As a result, the municipality will be pro-active in addressing prioritized road repairs. For example, the next fiscal year's budget will see a significant increase in spending on road gravel.

In addition, Chair Maxwell noted a considerable amount of municipal debt will be coming off the books in the next few years (from the current \$230,000 to \$100,000 by fiscal year 2023/2024). He felt all that has to be said about Union Brook Road has already been said. Now that the municipality is in a better position to take on additional debt to fix a major problem, this is the time to proceed. He also agrees with Board member Goodrich that the voters will have the ultimate say in this matter and should be given the opportunity. Chair Maxwell said there now is a solid plan for future highway maintenance and fixing Union Brook Road would be a good start. He added the Select Board members also will have a fallback plan should the bond voter be unsuccessful.

Mark Fournier lives on Union Brook Road and he is tired of hearing about how former Northfield Village residents won't support a bond in order to fix a backroad. He felt that sort of division ended with merger and this project should have the support of the whole community. Mr. Fournier noted residents living on the backroads regularly provide their financial support to downtown upgrades such as sidewalks, etc. He knows there are other bad roads in Northfield but he also felt Union Brook Road needs to be fixed as soon as possible.

Steve Davis noted most Select Board members live just off of state-maintained roads so they might not see the urgency of this project compared to those residents who drive Union Brook Road on a regular basis. Jeffrey Ott lives on Bear Farm Road and he is concerned the bond vote to pave the entire road might fail and result in the paving project being broken up with some parts of the road ignored for some time.

Board member Miller confirmed the Highway Subcommittee would develop a backup plan if the vote fails. He noted many Northfield residents who don't live directly on Union Brook Road still drive it regularly to get to their homes on other backroads. Chair Maxwell estimated about two hundred (200) residents are directly affected by the poor condition of Union Brook Road.

Sonya Rhodes asked about the RSMS plan and whether it can be reviewed by the public. Board member Miller said the plan is a set of data that evaluates the importance of certain local roads (based on traffic load, etc.), their current condition, etc. This creates a guideline for prioritizing spending in future highway budgets. The plan is available for public review on request. Ms. Rhodes felt the emphasis for past highway budgets seemed to be on saving money rather than addressing serious road problems. She saw this as "penny wise and pound foolish." Board member Goslant said the RSMS plan was introduced in 2010 but due to turnover in the municipal manager and highway foreman positions, it wasn't really implemented in a consistent manner for some time. A major upgrade of the plan was done during the last budget sessions and he now feels there will be a new commitment to it under the guidance of Manager Schulz, Highway Foreman Trent Tucker, and the Highway Subcommittee. Ms. Rhodes also doesn't like high taxes but feels some road improvements are sorely needed and should be budgeted. Board member Miller said the proposed project would completely rebuild Union Brook Road and thus eliminate any road problems for several years.

Gary Davis is not enthusiastic about spending \$1,700,000 on this one road. He felt the potholes on the road were the major problem and they could all be fixed for much less money. Kelli Sutton-Bosley lives on West Hill Road and drives on Union Brook Road on a regular basis. She agrees this is a lot of money and would like to see a clean plan of action with project scope, firm deadlines, etc. before the public vote is held. Board member Miller asked if project bids could be solicited before the bond vote is held. Manager Schulz said this was possible. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. **Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Bike & Pedestrian Grant Application.** Manager Schulz said VTrans recently announced a new grant program that would provide funds for bicycle and pedestrian projects. He has prepared the grant application paperwork but this needs to be accompanied by a letter of support from the Select Board. Manager Schulz said the application would seek funds to replace the sidewalk on the west side of South Main Street from the Common to Norwich University. The cost of this project is estimated at \$200,000 and this grant application (if successful) would provide \$75,000. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Goslant, to support the VTrans grant application and authorize Chair Maxwell to sign the letter of support on behalf of the Select Board. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Bond Anticipation Note (2017 Fire Pumper Truck).** Motion by Board member Doney, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Note for \$222,385 at 2.02% interest; to approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Borrowing Resolution; and to approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Tax Certificate. Manager Schulz said this was the refinancing of a bank note at a lower interest rate. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Brown Public Library (BPL) Repairs.** Board member Goslant asked if the BPL elevator had been repaired yet. Manager Schulz said it had along with other minor repairs. The only thing that still needs to be fixed are the front steps.
- b. **Material Bids.** Board member Goslant would like the bid forms for heating fuel, gasoline, diesel, and sand & gravel sent out as soon as possible to take advantage of current low prices. Manager Schulz will take care of this.
- c. **Basketball Court Rehabilitation, etc.** Board member Doney said the proceeds from the Recreation Committee's Spring Chicken Barbeque will be used next month when the basketball court at Memorial Park will be resurfaced, repainted, etc. In addition, new hoops and night lighting will be installed. As a result, the courts will be closed for a couple weeks in the middle of July. Additional work in the park, such as painting the new baseball dugouts, will be done as soon as weather permits.

- d. **Cox Brook Road Repaving Project.** Board member Goodrich asked if the paperwork has been completed for borrowing the funds to repave Cox Brook Road this year. Manager Schulz said it is in process. It would require a special bank note for the first year only.
- e. **Longtime Employee Retirement.** Chair Maxwell noted Denise Gabaree will be retiring tomorrow (06/26/19) after working in the municipality's Accounting Department for more than twenty (20) years. The Board members wished Ms. Gabaree well in her retirement.

#### IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **FEMA Disaster Funds.** Manager Schulz reported Washington County has been declared a federal disaster area due to the heavy rainstorms and flooding in early May. Northfield did not suffer as much damage as other communities but should be in line for about \$21,000. This amount covers damage to Lovers Lane and other roads. Some of the funds would be used for additional culvert work.
- b. **Norwich University (NU) Bicentennial Celebration.** Manager Schulz said NU officials will be present at the next regular meeting (07/09/19) to discuss its bicentennial celebration plans in conjunction with this year's homecoming events. About 8,000 additional visitors will be expected to attend the celebrations and NU will ask for parking bans and other accommodations to handle this large gathering.
- c. **Union Street/Water Street Stormwater Project.** Manager Schulz said the project is well underway even though recent rainstorms did cause some delays. The work probably will continue for another five (5) to six (6) weeks.
- d. **Water Department Consumer Confidence Report.** Manager Schulz said the annual report is nearly complete. The report will show there were no permit violations in 2018.
- e. **Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Sludge Management.** Manager Schulz said the WWTF sludge is still being transported to Barre City where it will be stored until it is shipped to its final destination in Canada. There will be attempts to change the dewatering process in the future in order to reduce the odor factor. If the new sludge passes Casella's smell test, they might start accepting it again at the Coventry landfill.
- f. **Northfield Falls Crosswalk.** Board member Goslant asked if improved pedestrian signage will be installed at the Northfield Falls crosswalk (in addition to the new signage on Depot Square). Manager Schulz noted this is a state highway so VTrans would have to provide permission. Chair Maxwell saw a posting on Front Porch Forum indicating VTrans will not oppose the new signs but also will not pay for them. Manager Schulz will need to look into this. Board member Goslant believes this crosswalk has a dangerous curve north of it so better signage is a needed improvement.
- g. **Stony Brook Road Bridge.** Manager Schulz should find out within three (3) weeks whether VTrans will provide funds to fix the bridge.
- h. **Pleasant Street Bridge.** Manager Schulz said VTrans said at one point the bridge would have to be replaced as soon as possible. Manager Schulz was able to get VTrans to re-inspect the bridge and subsequently allow the Northfield Highway crew to replace the deck themselves. He said this work should be completed within the next couple months and should delay the need to totally replace the bridge for a few years.

X. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).** There was none.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:35 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.