

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
TOWN SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of January 14, 2020

- 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, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, John Stevens, Dan Sivori, Charles Morse, Steve Davis, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLIEGENCE.** 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. FY 2020/2021 Town Budget Recap.** Manager Schulz said at the last budget meeting (01/09/20), the Select Board members completed their first review of all the proposed FY 2020/2021 budgets with a discussion of the Municipal Pool. The consensus afterwards was to review the budget, including any proposed changes from the Select Board members, in order to look for potential budget cuts. He noted the updated budget now projects a thirteen percent (13%) increase in spending over the current fiscal year. This would mean owners of a \$100,000 property would see a \$124 tax increase; owners of a \$150,000 property would see a \$186 tax increase; and owners of a \$200,000 property would see a \$248 tax increase. Chair Maxwell said this would be a 12.5¢ increase on the tax rate.

Chair Maxwell said he asked the other Select Board members at the end of the last budget meeting to prepare suggestions for this meeting regarding particular budget line items that could be reduced. He has prepared such a list himself and he will start the process. Chair Maxwell said one area of concern for several years has been the operation of the Municipal Pool, which operates for a two-month period each summer for total costs of about \$90,000. The Select Board members held a serious discussion of addressing this with massive cuts about ten (10) years ago but there were strong objections from the public at that time. Perhaps we should look for other potential budget savings in other departments before taking this step.

Chair Maxwell then turned to the Highway Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget, starting with the "Building Improvements" budget. The current balance in this account is \$69,774 and the proposed budget would add an additional \$2,500 in FY 2020/2021. He asked if the current balance was sufficient to cover any renovations, etc. planned over the next fiscal year so the \$2,500 can be eliminated. Manager Schulz has spoken with Board member Doney, who serves on the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee, and both agree the new funds can be eliminated. Chair Maxwell then pointed to the "Guard Rails" budget, which now has a ±\$18,000 balance with \$3,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. He asked if the addition was needed. Manager Schulz said there was a real need to replace guard rails on Lovers Lane and some other roads. However, the current balance should be sufficient to cover these expenses. Board member Goodrich thought at one time there has been a discussion of moving funds from the "Paving-Town Garage" CIP budget to the Guard Rails budget. Board member Doney did not think that was a good idea because the paving work really needs to be done in the next year.

Chair Maxwell then turned to the "Ledge Removal" CIP budget, which has a \$12,475 balance with \$4,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz said Highway Foreman Trent Tucker has identified a number of locations where roadside ledge should be removed this summer. Chair Maxwell asked if the additional funds were needed. Manager Schulz is not sure if the current balance is sufficient. He will check with Mr. Tucker and report back.

Another budget item on Chair Maxwell's list is "Sign and Post," which now has an \$8,700 deficit largely due to the cost of installing the new "Welcome to Northfield" signs. The Select Board members decided not to use economic development funds for this as had been suggested by members of the public. The proposed budget would have \$12,000 in new funding that would erase the current deficit and set funds aside for future road sign purchases. Manager Schulz noted the CIP account originally was set up when the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) informed municipalities that all their road signs would have to be replaced to meet new state specifications. Given the great expense this would be, VTrans later backtracked and said only new signs would have to conform to the new standards. Manager Schulz noted the municipality does have to periodically replace road signs that are lost, stolen, damaged, etc. Chair Maxwell would like the FY 2020/2021 budget addition to erase the deficit and allow for the purchase of some new signs. He asked Manager Schulz to determine if the \$12,000 could be reduced.

Chair Maxwell noted the Highway CIP budget for "Drainage" now has a \$22,392 balance with \$15,000 to be added in FY 2020/2021. He asked if the new funding really was needed since the State of Vermont will be paying for half of the current drainage project's engineering costs and the Northfield Sewer Department will cover half of the construction costs. Manager Schulz said he has looked into this with Finance Director Laurie Baroffio and determined there are \$116,000 in current grant funds for this project and \$30,000 will be needed from the Highway CIP "Drainage" account to cover project costs. Ms. Baroffio noted some funds in this account were used to cover the local match amount for the Barrows Road grant. There also are plans to apply for a similar VTrans drainage grant for Terry Hill Road. Given this, Chair Maxwell would like to hold off for now on any cuts in this budget.

Chair Maxwell said there now is an \$83,188 balance in the "Paving" CIP budget with \$156,000 to be added in FY 2020/2021. The current priority list of road paving (with estimated costs) is Central Street (\$140,000); Slate Avenue (\$90,000); and Summer Street and Western Avenue (\$16,000). Chair Maxwell suggested delaying the Central Street paving project for another year. There are several issues with this project such as sidewalk restoration, drainage, curbing, etc. that should be resolved first. He then suggested decreasing the new FY 2020/2021 funds from \$156,000 to \$96,000. Manager Schulz said some Central Street residents might be displeased with the delay as there are severe cutouts on the road that were left over from the water project a few years ago. However, Manager Schulz saw no urgency in this project and it might be good to keep extra funds on hand in case there are cost overruns in the other paving projects. Board member Goodrich noted before the water project when the road was smooth, some Central Street residents complained that many drivers exceeded the 25 MPH speed limit and suggested the addition of speed bumps. It could be argued the cutouts serve the same purpose. Chair Maxwell said that could be a good public discussion before the Central Street paving project is authorized. There appeared to be Select Board consensus to lowering the FY 2020/2021 addition to the paving budget balance to \$96,000.

Chair Maxwell said a new feature of the Highway CIP budget is \$90,000 set aside for "Gravel Resurface." He wanted some clarification on how these funds would be used. Board member Miller had advocated for this change and he said the funds will be used to systematically resurface some of the backroads that have been in poor condition for some time. The priority list for this work will be developed using the Road Surface Management System (RSMS) plan recently updated with assistance from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC). Board member Miller feels making this investment in our backroads will result in long-term savings in road maintenance budgets. He noted the "Gravel/Stone" budget in the Highway Department's operations and maintenance (O&M) budget will be level-funded in FY 2020/2021. Chair Maxwell said he was not advocating any cuts in this budget but just wanted confirmation on how these funds would be spent. Board member Miller believes the amount in the O&M budget is the minimal needed for normal maintenance of the gravel backroads.

Chair Maxwell then looked at the "Traffic Light" account in the Highway Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget. He understands this covers the traffic signal at the intersection of North Main Street and Vine Street but asked if \$10,000 really is needed to supplement the current \$11,900 balance. Manager Schulz said the current traffic light is sixteen (16) years old and there are indications it will need to be replaced in six (6) to seven (7) years as repair parts are getting harder to find. The estimated replacement cost for the traffic light is \$50,000. The consensus was to leave this budget as is.

Regarding the "Vehicle Lift" CEP budget, Chair Maxwell thought last year the Select Board members had authorized the purchase of two (2) portable lifts during the current fiscal year. The current balance in this account is \$22,999 and this expense was estimated at \$22,000. Another \$3,500 would be added to this account in FY 2020/2021. Manager Schulz said Mr. Tucker did make this request but subsequently said it would take four (4) portable lifts to raise the larger municipal vehicles. He would like to keep using the current vehicle lift until all the new lifts are purchased at one time. After further discussion, the Select Board consensus to make no changes in this budget. Board member Goodrich would like some resolution in the near future on whether the Highway Department should purchase two (2), four (4), or zero (0) portable lifts.

Turning to the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) CEP budget, Chair Maxwell said he still was not convinced we need to purchase a new tanker truck in the next fiscal year, especially at the price (\$340,000) cited by NFD Chief Peter J. DeMasi. Manager Schulz said he searched online recently and was able to find a used recent model tanker truck that could be purchased for \$188,000. The current plan is to fund half of the vehicle's purchase price with cash on hand and borrow the balance. Chair Maxwell said there was a large discrepancy between \$188,000 and \$340,000. Board member Goodrich noted Chief DeMasi said the replacement tanker could be no longer than twenty-six feet (26') in length in order to fit into the Fire Station. She asked if the used tanker truck would meet this restriction. Manager Schulz is not sure but will check. A brief discussion followed on the other minimal requirements Chief DeMasi specified regarding pump size, etc. and whether these were worth the extra cost. Chair Maxwell felt this whole tanker truck replacement matter was a major issue that requires more information and further discussion before a final decision can be made.

Chair Maxwell noted in the NFD CIP budget there is a \$9,668 deficit in the "Building Improvements" account with \$16,000 in new funding in FY 2020/2021. Ms. Baroffio said the new funds were set at \$10,000 until the Select Board members added \$6,000 to cover the additional expense of snow guards for the new roof. Chair Maxwell asked if this estimate for the roof guards was accurate. Manager Schulz said the cost is probably closer to \$5,600 but he can confirm this.

Chair Maxwell said the Grounds/Parks/Facilities CEP account has \$5,000 budgeted for "Trash Cans" in FY 2020/2021. Board member Goodrich noted this budget currently has a \$3,847 deficit due to unbudgeted purchases of new trash cans around Depot Square, etc. during the current fiscal year. Manager Schulz confirmed the \$5,000 would cover the shortfall and provide funds for additional purchases. He already has been contacted by residents who would like more trash cans and recycling receptacles installed in the downtown area. Chair Maxwell would like to lower the budgeted amount to \$3,900, which would just cover the deficit. Additional purchases should be held off for the time being.

The Select Board members then took a brief dinner break.

In the Grounds/Parks/Facilities O&M budget, Chair Maxwell would like the "Garden Supplies" line item reduced from \$1,500 to \$1,000. There were no objections. In the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) CEP budget, Chair Maxwell said there had been some discussion over whether to purchase a PowerLoad stretcher in the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz said the current plan is to purchase one when the 2014 ambulance unit is replaced in FY 2022/2023 and a second when the 2017 ambulance unit is replaced in FY 2026/2027. After a brief discussion, the Select Board consensus was to adhere to this schedule. Chair Maxwell asked why an additional \$900 is being sought for the NAS CEP budget for "Radio Replacement" when the balance in this account is \$3,823. Board member Doney, who serves as a NAS EMT, said the current radios are in good shape but don't have the capacity for encrypted communication. As more emergency services make the transfer to secure communication, NAS will have to replace some radios sooner than expected.

Chair Maxwell noted a \$25,084 balance in the Administrative CEP budget for "Computers/System" with an additional \$7,460 to be added in FY 2020/2021. He asked how these funds would be used. Manager Schulz said this account is mainly used for replacing the computer servers, which are quite expensive and need to be replaced every four (4) years or so. The budgeted amount is based on the replacement costs the last time this was done. Ms. Baroffio noted this account also covers all the computers connected to the server in the Municipal Building. She noted this expense is shared with the utility departments in accordance with the Inter-Departmental Charges Policy.

In the Recreation CIP budget, Chair Maxwell recommends reducing the "Holiday Enhancements" FY 2020/2021 budget from \$1,800 to \$800. He feels that amount should be sufficient. Manager Schulz will work with the Recreation Committee to help keep these costs under control. Also in this budget, Chair Maxwell would like to eliminate the \$2,000 addition to the "New Pavilion Match" account, which already has a \$2,452 balance. There was no objection.

In the Library/Historical Society CIP budget, there is a \$15,953 balance in the "Building Improvements" account with \$2,500 to be added in FY 2020/2021. Unless there are expensive and urgent repairs needed, Chair Maxwell would like to eliminate the \$2,500 addition and fund any work done in the next fiscal year from the current balance. He was told some work is needed on the windows and front entry but there was no objection to his suggestion. Chair Maxwell also would like to eliminate the \$5,000 addition to the "Library Roof" account for the coming year as the roof is fairly new. There was no objection.

In the Cemetery CIP budget, Chair Maxwell noted \$2,000 would be added to the "Stone/Memorial Restoration" account that already has a \$5,845 balance. These funds are used to repair damaged grave markers, etc. After further discussion, the Select Board consensus was to remove the \$2,000 and fund any work done next summer from the current balance. Chair Maxwell then asked about the "Tax Maps" account in the Listers CIP budget. Manager Schulz said the Listers receive updated tax maps periodically and it is important that up-to-date maps are available for public review. It was decided to leave this budget as is.

Select Board member Goodrich would like to see if there are any possibilities of reducing the line items in the Northfield Police Department O&M budget that relate to overtime expenses. Manager Schulz said this probably wasn't possible due to provisions in the new NPD union contract. He does believe the new contract will result in overall overtime cost reductions in the long-term. Board member Goodrich felt the NPD electric charges budget seemed rather high compared to past actuals. After further discussion, it was reduced from \$2,500 to \$1,800.

Board member Goodrich then asked about the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) O&M budget, which has a line item "Rent" now set at \$10,610. Ms. Baroffio said this is what the NAS is charged for its use of part of the Town Garage. The amount is based on the Inter-Departmental Charge Policy, which she will update for Select Board approval after the budget has been approved. Chair Maxwell suggested this issue can be revisited at that time.

In the Highway O&M budget, Board member Goodrich noted the road salt budget is set at \$70,000 even though the actual expense in FY 2018/2019 was almost \$90,000. Manager Schulz felt that overage was the result of an unusual winter and \$70,000 should be sufficient. Chair Maxwell felt it was best in such cases to look at five-year averages. Under Highway O&M "Contracted Services," Board member Goodrich asked if the \$8,000 budget for line marking needed to be so high. Manager Schulz said the Select Board members had spoken earlier about installing enhanced markings on high-volume crosswalks and this will add to the total cost. In the Highway CIP budget, Board member Goodrich feels not enough money is being set aside to finally deal with the deteriorating condition of the Elm Street retaining wall. This budget now has a \$45,302 balance with \$10,000 to be added in FY 2020/2021. Manager Schulz has received varying estimates for the cost of fixing this wall depending on the approach taken. We are now looking at the "driven sheeting" method and the estimated cost is \$157,000. This amount doesn't include any needed utility work. Board member Goslant believes a less expensive way to fix this problem should be possible. Manager Schulz said an engineer will have to look at this in any case. It is possible the wall may be too dilapidated to allow for one of the less costly alternatives that have been suggested, such as the method used to reinforce the retaining wall at the United Methodist Church parking lot.

The next budget meeting will be held on Thursday, January 16, 2020, starting at 5:00 p.m. in the Municipal Building. Ms. Baroffio will prepare an updated "Summary of Changes" for the meeting that will include the decisions made by Select Board consensus this evening.

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

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

The Board adjourned at 6:50 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 28, 2020.