

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
TOWN SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of January 16, 2020

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth W. Goslant (absent), and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, John Helfant (Chief, Northfield Police Department), Peter J. DeMasi (Chief, Northfield Fire Department), John Stevens (Brown Public Library Board of Trustees), Scott Neun, Charles Morse, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 5:00 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.** Finance Director Laurie Baroffio provided the Select Board members with an updated "Summary of Changes" sheet that included the budget revisions that were approved by consensus at the last budget meeting (01/14/20). Chair Maxwell said before that meeting the Select Board members had been asked to bring suggestions regarding possible budget cuts. He himself provided \$127,000 in potential savings and of this amount \$115,350 were accepted by Select Board consensus. At that same meeting Chair Maxwell proposed taking a serious look at the Municipal Pool budget. He has estimated a net cost of \$70,000 to the taxpayers for a two-month operating period each summer. However, Chair Maxwell felt it now best to put this "on the back burner" for now and perhaps discuss at a later time.

Chair Maxwell then asked about the amount of debt that will be going on the municipal books in the next couple fiscal years. Ms. Baroffio said the Union Brook Road reconstruction project, for which Northfield residents already have approved a \$1,700,000 bond vote, would result in interest-only payments for the next fiscal year. She put \$56,100 into the FY 2020/2021 to cover these initial installments. Ms. Baroffio will need to know before July 1, 2020 the total project costs so the Bond Bank can be informed so the debt can be sold to a financial institution. The interest-only payments would be made in December 2020 and June 2021. In addition, the borrowing for the completed Cox Brook Road paving project will add another \$36,000 in FY 2020/2021 debt payments. The total cost of this project was \$287,000. The amount of debt taken on for the purchase of a tanker truck for the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) will depend on the total purchase price and the timing of the bond. Ms. Baroffio noted paying for the new Fire Station roof with cash on hand helped keep the municipality's debt load a little lower.

It was noted with the adjustments indicated in the current "Summary of Changes," the proposed FY 2020/2021 Northfield Town Budget would have a 9.5% spending increase from the current fiscal year. This increase had been about 13% prior to the changes approved at the last budget meeting.

At the last meeting, Board member Goodrich asked whether the \$70,000 budgeted for road salt in the FY 2020/2021 Highway operations and maintenance (O&M) budget was sufficient. The amount spend in the last completed fiscal year (FY 2018/2019) was nearly \$90,000. Since the last meeting, Ms. Baroffio has prepared tables that indicate the total amounts spend on both road salt and winter sand during the last eight (8) completed fiscal years. The tables indicate that use of winter sand has remained fairly constant at about five thousand (5,000) cubic yards each year. On the other hand, use of road salt has fluctuated from a high of 1095 tons in FY 2018/2019 to a low of 468 tons in FY 2015/2016. The average annual amount of salt used during this period was about seven hundred (700) tons.

Board member Miller feels the amount of road material on hand affects how much will be used on the roads after a winter weather event. He suggested that the municipality's Winter Road Maintenance Policy be updated to advise additional restraint regarding the use of sand and salt and it could then be consulted as such. Ms. Baroffio noted that while winter sand can be purchased in bulk and stockpiled for future use, due to the limited storage capacity of the current salt shed, road salt must be purchased and trucked in throughout the winter months. Manager Schulz said he has been working with Highway Foreman Trent Tucker on conserving use of road materials but this is difficult to accomplish when members of the public complain about icy roads, etc. Board member Miller believes reduced usage can be done without sacrificing public safety. Board member Goodrich agrees but at the same time doesn't believe the Highway Department has been deliberately wasteful. Ms. Baroffio said the spike in salt use last winter probably was an anomaly as there were a good number of snow events as well as several freezing rainstorms. It was noted the salt is sometimes mixed into the winter sand when temperatures are especially low. It was noted the proposed budgets for road salt and winter sand now are set at \$70,000 each. Board member Miller believes both budgets could be reduced based on past actuals. Board member Doney would like both budgets set at \$60,000 each. After further discussion, the Select Board consensus was to set these budgets at \$65,000 each. Elroy Hill suggested it might be necessary for the Select Board members to better educate Northfield residents on proper winter driving if the use of road material will be reduced. Chair Maxwell will defer that responsibility to another.

Since the last meeting, Ms. Baroffio had two (2) additional budget adjustments that she would like to confirm with the Select Board members. First, the amount for the Washington County Tax paid by the municipality will be increased from \$26,570 to \$27,080 to match the amount recently invoiced. There was no objection. In addition, the Highway Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) sidewalks budget will be increased from \$70,000 to \$83,500 to cover overages from the East Street sidewalk project. Chair Maxwell confirmed the extra expense was due to a decision to install new light fixtures as part of the project. There was no objection to this.

Board member Goodrich had brought up the topic of the Elm Street retaining wall at the last meeting but there had been no resolution. Manager Schulz said the estimated cost of totally replacing the wall has been set at \$450,000. The cost of reinforcing the wall with "driven sheeting" would cost about \$157,000 (not including any utility work that might be needed). Less expensive alternatives also have been suggested but may not be feasible given the wall's poor condition. Chair Maxwell asked when would be the starting date for this project. Manager Schulz said nothing had been set due to inadequate funds in the Highway CIP "Retaining Wall" budget. The current balance is \$45,302 with another \$10,000 to be added in FY 2020/2021. Board member Doney asked if the wall is in imminent danger of collapse. Manager Schulz is unsure but said concerns over the wall's condition have been expressed over the past decade and further deterioration has occurred over this period. Chair Maxwell asked if this budget should be raised so the project can begin. Board member Goodrich asked if there were other retaining walls in Northfield that need attention. Manager Schulz said there is one overlooking the railroad tracks behind Central Street. For some time it had been assumed it was the railroad's responsibility to fix the wall but a recent investigation proved otherwise. There also are a couple other retaining walls in need of minor repairs. After further discussion, no changes were made to this budget.

Board member Miller asked if it were necessary to start budgeting in the next fiscal year for the eventual replacement of the 2011 Chevrolet truck the Maintenance Worker now drives. It was noted the truck has no immediate problems and could provide many additional years of service. It was decided to remove this \$2,000 from the budget.

John Stevens serves as Treasurer on the Brown Public Library (BPL) Board of Trustees. He now has a rough estimate of \$9,000 to fix the BPL front steps. Manager Schulz said the CIP budget for BPL building improvements now has a \$16,000 balance. There was to be \$2,500 added in FY 2020/2021 but this was eliminated at the last meeting. Chair Maxwell said the current balance should be enough for this and work needed on some of the BPL windows. Charles Morse noted the nearby Post Office also needs to have its front steps repaired. Perhaps if this work was coordinated with the BPL work there might be some cost savings. Manager Schulz will reach out to the Postmaster to see if this would be possible.

Ms. Baroffio asked if there would be any resolution regarding the possible purchase of portable vehicle lifts for the Town Garage. Manager Schulz said his recommendation is to purchase two (2) vehicle lifts in the current fiscal year and budget for two more in coming years. The current balance in this account (\$22,999) would pay for two. According to Mr. Tucker, two of these portable lifts would be sufficient for most of the municipal fleet but heavier vehicles would require four (4). Board member Miller suggested holding off any purchases until the current in-ground lift is inspected. If it can be used for another year or two, he would recommend delaying until four portable lifts could be bought at one time. Chair Maxwell agreed an inspection was needed to see if there are any immediate problems. He also suggested removing the \$3,500 that would have been added to this account in FY 2020/2021. Chair Maxwell believes any purchases in the next fiscal year should be funded out of the current balance. There was no objection. Chair Maxwell would like this whole matter revisited outside of budget season.

Chair Maxwell noted a new Highway CIP budget for "Gravel Resurface" was created for FY 2020/2021 and \$90,000 put in as the initial installment. He asked if it was realistic that all these funds could be used in the next fiscal year. If not, perhaps a lower figure is more suitable. Board member Miller believes the Highway crew should be given the chance to put down this much material as some of the backroads are in very poor condition. If all these funds aren't used, they would roll over to the next fiscal year. There next was a discussion of the Highway CIP budget for paving, which was reduced by \$60,000 at the last meeting as Chair Maxwell recommended delaying Central Street repaving for another year. He felt there were some questions about this project that should be resolved first. After further discussion, the FY 2020/2021 addition to the Highway CIP paving budget was set at \$94,000. In addition, the Highway O&M budget for "Hot Mix/Cold Patch" was increased from 4,000 to \$6,000 to address any problems with potholes, etc.

Chair Maxwell then thanked NFD Chief Peter J. DeMasi for attending so that any remaining questions regarding the proposed purchase of a new tanker truck (hopefully) can be resolved tonight. Chief DeMasi said the main reason he is seeking to purchase new rather than used is the difficulty he has encountered in finding a good used tanker of the proper length (less than 26') to fit inside the Northfield Fire Station. In addition, he is looking for a special pump that would allow the water tanker to be refilled from natural water sources at or near the callout site. Chief DeMasi said the pump he is looking at would refill the 2,000 gallon tank within five (5) minutes. The tanker truck now in service also has 2,000 gallon capacity but cannot be refilled on site. It also has two-wheel drive so there are some higher-elevation parts of town that cannot be accessed. This is why he has requested that the replacement truck have four-wheel drive. The estimated total cost of the new vehicle according to Chief DeMasi's initial specifications is about \$380,000. This price could be reduced by removing the special pump (\$30,000) or four-wheel drive (\$15,000). It also is possible to receive a lower price when the finalized specifications are sent out and bids are received from qualified dealers. Chair Maxwell asked how many fire tanker manufacturers Chief DeMasi has contacted to create this initial cost estimate. Chief DeMasi has spoken to two (2) local dealers. When the bid process begins, he will send the specifications and bid documents out to all qualified dealers.

Ms. Baroffio said the current proposed budget has the borrowing amount for the new tankers set at \$182,000. This is the amount that would be specified in the Town Meeting article seeking voter approval for bond authorization. The normal practice when purchasing such heavy equipment is to budget half the purchase price and borrow the remaining amount over a ten (10) year period. Chief DeMasi said it probably would take over a year for the truck specifications to be finalized; the bid awarded; the truck ordered and built; and final delivery to Northfield. If built properly, he felt the new tanker truck should provide thirty (30) years of service.

Board member Goodrich would like to move forward on this tonight. She would like to accept the funding mechanism Ms. Baroffio has put together for this purchase as she would like the purchasing process to begin as soon as possible. Board member Doney agreed, saying there are many Northfield taxpayers who live outside the municipal water system and they cannot depend now on receiving proper fire responses since the current tanker is in danger of breaking down at any time. As indicated earlier, since it only has two-wheel drive there are some structures it cannot reach in any case. Ms. Baroffio noted the bond authorization article will specify an amount "not to be exceeded" so the final purchase price is a decision that can be made later. The Select Board consensus was to proceed with the tanker truck bond authorization vote on the 2020 Town Meeting Warning.

Ms. Baroffio then asked if the Select Board members wanted to provide any directives on how surplus funds from the current fiscal year should be used in the next one. Chair Maxwell said the current projections indicate there would not be much surplus so there is no real need to specify how it would be used. Ms. Baroffio noted with the revisions in the proposed budget made to date, we are looking at a 9.2% spending increase over the current fiscal year.

Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the proposed FY 2020/2021 Northfield Town Budget as updated this evening. Ms. Baroffio said she would prepare a finalized version of the proposed budget early next week for distribution to the Select Board members. This document will indicate the differences between the first version of the budget presented to the Select Board members in November 2019 and the one approved tonight. She noted the final approval of the budget will occur when the Select Board members approve and sign the 2020 Town Meeting Warning at the next regular meeting (01/28/20).
Motion passed 4-0-0.

Chair Maxwell then thanked all those involved in the budget process for their hard work. He felt quite a lot had been accomplished over the past three (3) months.

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

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

The Board adjourned at 7:20 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.