

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of April 14, 2020**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, and Laura Hill-Eubanks (Chair, Planning Commission).

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. In keeping with Vermont Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held by teleconference.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

- III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. March 24, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #19-20.** The warrant was prepared this morning for distribution to the Select Board by email. Unfortunately, due to problems with the municipal email and internet system, the warrant could not be provided to the Select Board members in time for this meeting. At the previous meeting, the Select Board members provided Chair Maxwell with the authority to approve the warrant under such circumstances and he will do so. It was noted the warrant total amount was \$545,271.46, which can be broken down into \$77,682.05 for Town General; \$20,821.37 for Town C.I.P.; \$1,598.75 for Conservation Fund; \$324,092.47 for Electric Fund; \$51,688.28 for Water Fund; and \$91,808.66 for Sewer Fund.
- b. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through March 22, 2020.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$93,786.88. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through April 5, 2020.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$93,254.37. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. Northfield Town Plan.** Manager Schulz noted the Select Board has held two (2) Public Hearings and other public meetings at which the revised Town Plan presented by the Planning Commission was discussed by the Select Board members and by members of the public. In response to concerns expressed at these meetings, Manager Schulz worked in conjunction with Planning Commission Chair Laura Hill-Eubanks to create a five-page document that lists recommended changes. He felt the Select Board members, with minor revisions, have largely accepted these suggestions as indicated by the most recent discussion of this matter. Manager Schulz noted three (3) additional concerns have arisen that need to be resolved. First, there has been a request from a member of the public that the residential area east of South Main Street and bordered by Slate Avenue, Highland Avenue, and Prospect Street be rezoned as medium rather than high density. The second unresolved issue is whether development should be completely prohibited in areas above 1,800 feet in elevation or whether the Development Review Board (DRB) should decide this on a case-by-case basis.

The third matter was whether the Town Plan should include precise definitions of high, medium, and low density areas or if this should be left for the local zoning regulations. Manager Schulz said if the Select Board members accept the current document with some or all of the suggested changes, the next step would be to return it to the Planning Commission so that the document can be rewritten. It then would come back to the Select Board for a final public hearing. If the document is then approved by the Select Board members, it would be forwarded to the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) to confirm the plan conforms to state law, etc. If it passes CVRPC muster, it will go into effect.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the draft plan with amendments. Board member Morse is concerned that since the previous Northfield Town Plan (approved in 2014) has now expired, the municipality is now limited in its ability to apply for grant funds, etc. He then went through the aforementioned document listing suggested changes with his own recommendations. This often meant restoring the original language provided by the Planning Commission.

Board member Goodrich had difficulty following Board member Morse's suggestions due to a bad phone connection. She asked if he would submit his recommendations in writing and forward this to the other Select Board members and Manager Schulz prior to the next regular meeting (04/28/20). He agreed to do so. His motion to approve was withdrawn at this time.

Board member Goodrich asked if the lack of an approved Town Plan actually was a hindrance to future grant applications. Manager Schulz believes this would only affect planning grant applications. He doesn't think highway or other such grants would be affected but he will research this matter further. It also shouldn't endanger any COVID-19 stimulus federal grants. Board member Goodrich doesn't want to further delay this matter but would like to see and comment upon the revised document before providing preliminary approval.

Board member Miller believes the prohibition on development above the 1,800 foot elevation level was the result of public feedback hostile to wind turbines being situated along Northfield's ridgelines. He would like it maintained. Manager Schulz felt other forms of high-altitude development was possible that should be permissible. Ms. Hill-Eubanks doesn't believe such development is prohibited but merely discouraged. Board member Miller agrees "prohibition" is an incorrect term.

Board member Goodrich would like specific guidelines for minimum lot sizes in the rural areas in the document. In addition, since the new Economic Development Director would be a municipal employee covered by the current personnel policies, she doesn't see any need for the position to be specifically cited in the Town Plan. Ms. Hill-Eubanks would like to be kept informed of any proposed changes to the current draft Town Plan that would be discussed at future Select Board meetings. Manager Schulz will see to this.

VII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. COVID-19 Update.** Manager Schulz said all the municipal departments are functioning properly with rotating shifts during this difficult time with no major issues to report. All the municipal employees remain in good health and none have testing positive for COVID-19. He also hasn't heard of any positive tests for Northfield residents.

- b. Purchasing Directive.** Due to uncertainties regarding the municipality's financial future due to the Coronavirus pandemic, Manager Schulz has asked the department heads to postpone any purchases above \$500 for the time being. If the department head feels the purchase is necessary, he/she will get Manager Schulz's approval before ordering. The only major purchase now going forward is the police cruiser replacement as this was authorized several months ago. Manager Schulz felt we should have a better picture of our financial situation when the final payments of 2019 property taxes are made. The due date for the fourth and final installment is Friday, May 15, 2020.
- c. COVID-19 Federal Funds.** Manager Schulz said the federal government has declared the Coronavirus pandemic a national disaster with seventy-five percent (75%) reimbursement of local government costs reimbursed.
- d. Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS), etc.** Manager Schulz said NAS is in good shape with sufficient supplies and personnel. He noted some Norwich University (NU) students have returned to the area and are helping to cover work shifts. He added the Police and Fire departments also are operating properly. The Highway Department has been working on the roads, replacing signs, etc. Manager Schulz said it probably won't be necessary to rent a second grader this spring as Mud Season hasn't been too bad.
- e. Fire Tanker Purchase.** Manager Schulz said several proposals regarding this proposed fire equipment purchase were received before the deadline. However, due to the municipality's uncertain financial situation, it might be necessary to postpone the purchase for now.
- f. Utility Commissions Joint Meeting.** Manager Schulz said the Water & Wastewater and Electric Commissions met remotely last night (04/13/20) and discussed possible utility revenue losses due to the pandemic with the NU campus and Cabot Hosiery temporarily closing, etc. The commissioners also started work on the FY 2020/2021 utility budgets. Manager Schulz added the Bond Bank has postponed payment deadlines for old water project bonds, etc. This will free up some funds in the short term but those payments will have to be made eventually.
- g. Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz has been in contact with project engineer Ron Lyon (DuBois & King) regarding whether to conduct such preliminary work as core borings at this time or to postpone due to social distancing and other COVID-19 concerns. This project may have to be put on hold if the state government doesn't consider it essential. Board member Stevens believes this project is essential and feels the preliminary work could be done without violating any current sheltering-in-place or other restrictions. Board member Miller feels it may be difficult to hire a contractor for any project that isn't considered an emergency. Manager Schulz was asked by the engineer to write a letter that would affirm the preliminary work would not violate the COVID-19 sheltering order but did not feel comfortable doing so. He believes the state is granting exemptions only for emergency repairs, etc. He will research this matter further to determine if it would be appropriate to move forward on this. Board member Morse would like this project kept on schedule as much as possible given the extraordinary circumstances.
- h. Northfield Mutual Aid Task Force (NMATF).** Manager Schulz has been in contact with this group of volunteers who have been assisting Northfield residents in obtaining needed information and services during these difficult times. For contact purposes, NMATF has a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/northfieldmutualaidtaskforce), an email address (northfieldmutualaidtaskforce@gmail.com), and can be reached by telephone through CERV (802-485-4293).

- i. **VLCT COVID-19 Webinar.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) held a webinar recently that went over such issues as how to address the situation should a municipal employee be directly impacted by the pandemic. That has not become an issue yet but it is good to have the information just in case.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Road Grading.** Board member Goodrich heard a complaint that the grader hasn't been operating in recent days. Manager Schulz has kept in contact with Highway Foreman Trent Tucker and it was his understanding that the roads have been graded recently. He will call him tomorrow to confirm. Board member Miller noted we had a big rainstorm yesterday and that might have kept the grader off the backroads.
- b. **CERV Relocation Project.** Board member Stevens asked if there was any new information regarding the proposal to purchase some land adjacent to the proposed CERV structure on Kent Street in order to provide additional parking. Manager Schulz has been working with Town Attorney William Smith on this and should have an update for the next regular meeting.
- c. **COVID-19 Local Response.** Chair Maxwell wanted to thank the municipal staff for keeping the municipality operating under difficult conditions. He also thanked Northfield residents for doing their bit to contain this pandemic by sheltering in place, social distancing, wearing face covering and gloves when making necessary public purchases, etc.
- d. **Northfield Farmers Market.** Board member Morse and his wife Cassie are organizers for the Northfield Farmers Market. He said Cassie would like to address the Select Board members at a future meeting regarding future indoor and/or outdoor markets.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

X. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a personnel matter without Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:15 p.m.

Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 8:45 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:45 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 April 28, 2020.