

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of April 28, 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, Kaitlyn Keating (Northfield Community Development Network), and Cassie Morse (Northfield Farmers Market).

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

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

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Kaitlyn Keating, Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN).** As authorized by the Select Board members at a previous meeting (03/24/20), Ms. Keating and other NCDN members have drafted a job description for the new municipal position of Economic Development Director. The document was emailed to Manager Schulz and the Select Board members last night. Ms. Keating understands the current COVID-19 situation might make recruitment difficult but felt it best to have the document in place to expedite the process. Chair Maxwell said he hasn't had the opportunity to fully review the document but he and the other Select Board members will do so over the next few days. Any feedback from the Select Board members should go through Manager Schulz. Ms. Keating said she and the other NCDN members are willing to assist the process in any way, including attending future meetings of the Economic Development Subcommittee, etc. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Keating and the other NCDN members for their assistance to date.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. April 14, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. April 21, 2020 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #20-20.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #20-20 in the amount of \$251,970.84. It was noted of the total warrant amount, over \$200,000 represented power purchases for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). Board member Morse wanted to thank Manager Schulz for helping control spending. Manager Schulz has been working with the department heads to reduce discretionary spending at this time of financial uncertainty. He noted the Town General payments are about one-third ($\frac{1}{3}$) of what they were this time last year. When the situation returns to some level of normalcy, he will discuss deferred purchases with the Select Board members before authorizing. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through April 19, 2020.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$94,233.36. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. Approval of Local Emergency Management Plan.** Manager Schulz said Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) requires each municipality to update its Local Emergency Management Plan each year. If this is not done, the municipality could become ineligible for state and federal natural disaster reimbursements, hazard mitigation grants, etc. The Select Board members were provided with the updated plan, which has only minor changes from last year. The Select Board members found some typos that will be corrected. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the Local Emergency Management Plan for the Northfield municipality with needed corrections. Chair Maxwell believes the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) offers workshops on local emergency planning. Manager Schulz said VEM and CVRPC coordinate to put on these workshops. He will reach out to determine when the next will be held in case any Select Board members would like to participate. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT. Manager Schulz had additions to his written report.

- a. Municipal Financial Situation.** Manager Schulz said the municipality's non-property tax revenues remain steady. The final installment of 2019 property taxes is due Friday, May 15, 2020 and the number of early tax payments received is less than a year ago at this time. As he said previously, the municipality will have a better picture of its financial situation after the deadline has passed. Manager Schulz added that updated financial statements will be distributed to the Select Board members in the near future.
- b. Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** As previously reported, Vermont Governor Phil Scott has relaxed some "stay at home" restrictions that will allow contractors to start working on outdoors projects under certain conditions. In light of this, Manager Schulz contacted Project Engineer Ron Lyon and authorized the required soil borings to be held. They are scheduled to be completed by next week. Once the borings and other site inspections have been done, Mr. Lyon will be able to produce the final engineering study. Soon afterwards the project RFP will be prepared and distributed for Select Board review. Some additional pre-construction work may need to be done that would cost about \$2,000 more. Manager Schulz will keep the Select Board members informed about this. He felt it was positive that the project is moving forward despite unforeseeable obstacles now in place.
- c. COVID-19 FEMA Reimbursements.** Manager Schulz said with the declaration of a national disaster, FEMA is reimbursing municipalities for seventy-five percent (75%) of COVID-19 related costs. In addition, \$11,000 in federal stimulus will be used to offset higher Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) personnel costs due to the hiring of additional EMTs. Manager Schulz is not sure how much additional federal funding will be coming our way but he is keeping on top of the situation. He recently attended a Vermont Leagues of Cities & Towns (VLCT) webinar on available federal funding that can be used to offset losses in municipal revenues. He noted municipal groups are lobbying the federal government to increase the grant amounts available. Manager Schulz will watch for any new grant opportunities.
- d. VOSHA Required COVID-19 Training.** Manager Schulz said as part of the process of reopening businesses, all employers are required to train their employees in proper procedures on social distancing, disinfecting common areas, posting proper building signage, etc. This training must be tracked and completed by May 4, 2020. Manager Schulz said the municipality is on schedule to meet this deadline. He added the municipality was able to purchase protective masks for all the employees from a local supplier.

Board member Goodrich asked if the employees would be required to wear the masks at all times. Manager Schulz believes wearing face coverings is only required when within six feet (6') of another person or in a group meeting. The employees will be required to have one on hand if needed.

- e. **Department Head Reports.** Manager Schulz said the department heads again will be attending Select Board meetings (albeit remotely for the time being) in order to provide departmental updates and answer any questions. This will restart with the next regular meeting (05/12/20).
- f. **Randolph Stump Dump.** Manager Schulz announced the Mountain Alliance will be opening a "Stump Dump" for residents of its member communities (Randolph, Braintree, Brookfield, and Northfield) so yard debris can be disposed of properly. The Stump Dump is located at 250 Landfill Road and will be open Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. starting May 2, 2020 and closing November 7, 2020.
- g. **Municipal Employee Harassment Policy.** The municipality's policy on employee harassment is an appendix to the Northfield "Personnel Policies and Procedures" document distributed to all new employees. At the Select Board members' request, the policy will be sent as a separate document to all current employees as a refresher. Each will need to sign an acknowledgement form that confirms they have received and read the policy and they will comply with all its provisions. When social distancing rules allow, Manager Schulz plans to have an attorney address a gathering of employees regarding the need for full compliance. Board member Goodrich would like a deadline set for the return of acknowledgement forms. Manager Schulz will include this in the cover letter.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Municipal Project List.** Board member Morse was very pleased with the "tickler list" Manager Schulz drafted and distributed to the Select Board members. He feels much more informed on the status of current and future municipal projects. Board member Morse did ask what happened to the Smith Hill Road drainage project. Manager Schulz said state grant funds were received for this project in the amount of \$175,000. However, the project engineer provided a much high cost estimate (\pm \$250,000) for the construction phase so it was decided to hold off on this project until additional funding could be obtained.
- b. **Municipal Bond Payments.** Board member Morse said at last night's Utility Commissions meeting it had been noted that due to the current COVID-19 crisis municipalities have been given greater access to no-interest loans to help with revenue shortfalls. Board member Morse would like Manager Schulz to look into the possibility of taking advantage of this in order to refinance our current bond payments. Board member Goodrich thought this was a good idea but it might not be permissible.
- c. **Fire Tanker Purchase.** Board member Stevens noticed this proposed purchase on the tickler list and asked why the RFP had not been reviewed by the Select Board members before it was sent out to dealers. Manager Schulz said this was an oversight that would not be repeated. Due to the current financial uncertainty, this equipment purchase has been put on hold. The bids received will be distributed to the Select Board members for discussion when appropriate.

- d. Town Plan Approval Process.** At the last meeting (04/14/20), Board member Miller believes there was a consensus that any additional document revisions proposed by any Select Board member would be put in writing and distributed to the other members for discussion. He has not seen anything since then. Board member Morse said he was working on this and will have his own written comments ready for the next meeting.
- e. Backroad Maintenance.** Board member Goodrich asked if there still are no plans to rent a second road grader this spring. Manager Schulz does not believe it is necessary because of a relatively easy Mud Season. In addition to the mild weather, he thought reduced car traffic due to the “stay at home” directive might be a factor. Manager Schulz has received compliments on how good West Hill Road has been this spring. There usually are a number of complaints about this road during Mud Season.
- f. CERV Clothing Shelf Property Purchase.** Board member Goodrich asked about the status of the property purchase. Manager Schulz said the municipality’s attorney had completed the purchase document so it next needs to be forwarded to the current property owners for their approval.
- g. Food Scraps Recycling Requirement.** Chair Maxwell noted the state requirement that all food scraps either be composted or recycled goes into effect on July 1, 2020. He asked if there was any local drop-off location. Manager Schulz said he is looking to find one, hopefully in proximity to the Transfer Station. He said the new Randolph Stump Dump would be one option in the interim.
- h. Municipal Pool.** Chair Maxwell asked what the current thinking was regarding when or whether the municipal pool will open this summer in light of the COVID-19 situation. Manager Schulz said a number of pool physical improvements need to be done beforehand in any case. Unless the situation improves dramatically in the next few weeks, Manager Schulz suspects the pool probably won’t open this year. He has kept Pool Director Shannon Palone aware of this. Should the State of Vermont issue any directives regarding public pools, Manager Schulz will keep the Select Board members informed. It is very possible the final decision will be made at the state level and not locally.
- i. Tree Trimming.** Chair Maxwell asked if Highway Foreman Trent Tucker has kept in contact with Limlaw Pulpwood about possible tree trimming in the near future. Manager Schulz believes he has with Turkey Hill Road as the next target area. Unfortunately, the price of wood chips has dropped so it might not be economically feasible for Limlaw to trim the trees with just the downed brush as compensation. Should Limlaw indicate it is ready to start work on Turkey Hill, Mr. Tucker is prepared to conduct adjacent landowner notifications, etc. Chair Maxwell felt tree trimming should be added to the tickler file.
- j. Municipal Building Reopening.** Chair Maxwell asked if there is a timeline for reopening the Municipal Building to the public. He noted a number of attorneys have been requesting access to municipal records and some Vermont towns already have a procedure in place for this. Manager Schulz said he also has heard requests for records access. He spoke to Town Clerk Kim Pedley about this and it is her opinion that any public access to the building be delayed until at least May 15, 2020 so proper precautions can be taken. This date also is when Governor Scott’s current “stay at home” directive will expire.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Cassie Morse: Northfield Farmers Market.** Ms. Morse is the Market Manager for the Northfield Farmers Market. She said the State of Vermont issued guidelines last week for reopening farmers markets. Ms. Morse said the weekly Northfield Farmers Market on the Common will start operations on Tuesday, May 12, 2020 with a few changes to comply with these requirements. These break down into four (4) basic categories: 1. Food vendors only will be allowed for the time being (no crafts) and they will provide pre-packaged goods; 2. All vendors must accept online and/or phone orders with goods to be collected on site with customers strongly discouraged from lengthy browsing; 3. There will be one-way traffic at the market with an entrance and exit clearly marked; and 4. Proper hygiene and social distancing will be strictly enforced with disinfectant stations at the entrance and exit. All vendors and customers will be required to wear protective face coverings and gloves. The new requirements will be properly publicized before the first market is held. Ms. Morse noted that since the public restrooms adjacent to the Common are closed at this time, it will be necessary to rent a "porta potty" for the first month or so. She added the Northfield Farmers Market did receive a grant to cover the costs of the new restrictions, etc. Chair Maxwell and the other Select Board members thanked Ms. Morse for her efforts in restarting this community asset. She will keep the Select Board members informed of any new developments.

- X. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

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

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

The Board came out of executive session at 8:35 p.m. No action was taken.

- XI. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, 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 were revised and approved at the regular Select Board meeting of May 12, 2020.