

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of May 26, 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, John Helfant (Police Chief), Peter J. DeMasi (Fire Chief), Timothy Davis (Northfield Fire Department), Kaitlyn Keating (NCDN), Carolyn Stevens (NCDN), David Feinauer (NCDN), and Merry Shernock (Mutual Aid Task Force).

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).** Ms. Keating had distributed to the Select Board members a draft job description for the new Economic Development Director (EDD) position at a previous meeting (04/28/20). She asked about the status of the proposed job description and the hiring process. Board member Morse serves on the Select Board's Economic Development Subcommittee with Chair Maxwell. He said action on this matter has not progressed much due to COVID-19 restrictions on group meetings, etc. Board member Morse also would like to create a package of local information that would be available to applicants during the interview process. Ms. Keating thought that was the sort of project the EDD would take on once hired. Board member Morse felt the subcommittee could work with the Listers, Zoning Administrator, Town Clerk's Office, etc. to put this information together. He felt it would be good that the new employee would have some familiarity with economic and other local concerns unique to Northfield (including Norwich University) before taking on the responsibilities of the position. Board member Stevens felt there could be state resources available to help fund this project. However, he did not want to draw out the hiring process by delaying recruitment. The Select Board members will be forwarding their final comments regarding the job description in the next few days. Chair Maxwell is trying to come up with at least three (3) ways to measure success or failure for this new position. This matter will be discussed again at the next regular meeting (06/09/20) and it is possible the subcommittee will meet beforehand to finalize its recommendations.

NCDN member David Feinauer noted there will be COVID-19 recovery funds able soon. Perhaps the ability of the EDD to successfully apply for such grant funds would be one measure of success (or failure). Mr. Feinauer also would like the initial interviews to begin before the local information package is completed. Manager Schulz confirmed the federal government has forwarded COVID-19 recovery funds to the states, which are developing guidelines for local distribution. Manager Schulz has been monitoring the situation in Vermont so possible grant opportunities won't be missed. NCDN member Carolyn Stevens noted the website for the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development has valuable information about recovery funding. Manager Schulz doesn't believe the formal application process has been developed yet but he will review the website to see if there have been any updates. Chair Maxwell would like anyone with suggestions to contact Manager Schulz with them prior to the next regular meeting.

IV. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. Police Chief John Helfant.** Chief Helfant first would like to thank Northfield community members for their overall compliance to COVID-19 social distancing guidelines. The Northfield Police Department (NPD) has been able to keep a low profile in response to these concerns due to vast majority following the new rules. In the period since January 1, 2020, NPD officers have made twenty-seven (27) arrests, which led to fifty-one (51) charges being filed. The charged offences (and breakdowns) were Driving under the Influence (5); Driving with a Suspended License (13); Simple Assault (6); Aggravated Assault (3); drug charges (2); Disorderly Conduct (5); Violations of Court Orders (9); Theft (6); and Resisting Arrest (2). Chief Helfant said COVID-19 established guidelines have been followed in the Police Station, which was pretty much shut down during the months of April and May. Some building closure restrictions have been eased recently and now residents can enter the building to have their fingerprints taken, drop off expired prescription drugs, or pick up DMV forms provided they call ahead.

Chief Helfant said the state's new E-ticket system, which eliminates paper ticketing, is now up and running. He said the local transition was funded through grant funds so there was no cost to the municipality. One bonus is the clerk no longer has to manually type in handwritten tickets into the system, which saves a lot of time. Related to this development will be the NPD's transition to individual laptop computers for the individual officers rather than desktop computers that remain in the station. The officers will have their laptops with them 24/7 so the information they require will always be available to them.

Chief Helfant said the body cameras, budgeted for replacement in the next fiscal year, are in bad condition and cannot be repaired. All will be replaced when the new fiscal year begins July 1, 2020, although he may have to order one or two early if there are further breakdowns. The Board members thanked Chief Helfant and the NPD officers for protecting the community. Chair Maxwell asked about the status of the NPD vehicle fleet. Chief Helfant said they have three (3) cruisers in operation now. He had hoped the replacement vehicle for the 2017 Ford Explorer totaled last November would in service by now but output at the Ford factory was slowed due to the pandemic. He does expect the vehicle to be here in the next couple months, which would be good because the 2014 Ford Explorer is having issues that the Town Mechanic could not resolve, so it was sent to an outside repair shop. Chair Maxwell thanked Chief Helfant for the updates and all of his good work.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. May 12, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the minutes. Board member Goodrich had one correction: it was Utility Commission member Dennis Donahue who addressed the Select Board members regarding the proposed water and sewer rates (not Stephen Fitzhugh). **Motion to approve the amended minutes passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #22-20.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #22-20 in the amount of \$91,202.71. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Warrant #22-20A.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #22-20A in the amount of \$10,702.24. It was noted this was a payment on an old RSMS note. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through May 17, 2020.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$100,368.06. Board member Morse said he had been confused by the approach management took regarding social distancing over the past couple months. He thought employees would be alternating work days rather than alternating work weeks. Manager Schulz said he thought he had communicated to the Board members that he was following Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations when developing the schedule for alternating work weeks in order to meet social distancing guidelines. He also followed the examples of other Vermont communities and what was permissible under the municipality's union employee contracts. The union representatives were especially concerned about employees being put at risk so the alternate work week schedule was developed. The union contract also made it impossible to reduce pay in accordance with reduced work hours. In addition, if employees were laid off the municipality would have to reimburse the state for any unemployment benefits they might receive. Manager Schulz said the major goal was to keep the employees safe while keeping vital services in operation. Board member Morse thought it would have been better to have had employees put in a few work hours each week. Manager Schulz feared that would have resulted in layoffs. In any case, we hope the conditions that led to these decisions will not be repeated for some time. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Fire Department Tanker Truck Bids.** Manager Schulz said during their budget deliberations the Select Board members did authorize the purchase of a new fire tanker truck in the next fiscal year. In addition, Northfield voters authorized borrowing funds for this purchase on Town Meeting Day (03/03/20). Bid proposals were solicited in March 2020 and three (3) submissions from qualified bidders were received before the April 6, 2020 deadline. There have been some delays in the purchase process since then due to COVID-19 concerns. The three (3) bids were from: Desorcie Emergency Products (St. Albans, VT) for \$349,429; New England Fire Equipment & Apparatus (North Haven, CT) for \$407,531; and Rosenbauer South Dakota (Rindge, NH) for \$339,857. Although the price is slightly higher, Fire Chief Peter J. DeMasi recommends purchasing from Desorcie as their submission meets all the bid specifications and their vehicle would come with a stainless steel body. Their vehicle would be manufactured in Hamburg, New York (near Buffalo) and there are service locations in Vermont. The Rosenbauer tanker would be built in South Dakota and their closest service location is in Massachusetts. Chief DeMasi believes these advantages more than makes up for the slightly higher price. If the Select Board members authorize the purchase tonight, the new tanker truck could be manufactured and put into service within ten (10) months.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to authorize the purchase of a fire tanker truck from Desorcie Emergency Products for a total purchase price of \$349,429. Board member Stevens remembers a lot of discussion during the budget meetings about whether the replacement tanker truck would be able to fit into the Fire Station. Chief DeMasi said the Desorcie and Rosenbauer tankers would be able to fit; the New England Fire Equipment tanker would not. Chair Maxwell thanked Chief DeMasi and the NFD officers and firefighters for their excellent service. Once the new tanker truck is put into service, the NFD will be a very well-equipped department. Chief DeMasi hopes the COVID-19 situation does not result in manufacturing delays. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Brown Public Library (BPL) Front Steps Repair Bids.** Manager Schulz said these steps have been given temporary fixes over the years but now is the time for resolving the problem with total replacement. Board member Stevens, who also serves as Treasurer on the BPL Board of Trustees, advertised for bids on Front Porch Forum. Although three (3) contractors were initially interested, only two (Grandfield Masonry and BW Masonry) submitted written proposals. BW Masonry would install a six-inch (6") concrete slab and use epoxy and granite chips to rebuild the threshold for a total cost of \$7,500. Grandfield Masonry would install a twelve-inch (12") slab while removing the existing threshold and replacing it with a new piece of granite. The cost of this would be \$11,800. Board member Stevens feels a six inch (6") slab probably would be sufficient but favors the Grandfield Masonry bid due to the more extensive threshold work. Chair Maxwell asked if there were sufficient BPL funds to cover this work. Manager Schulz said there was over \$20,000 in the BPL's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for building improvements. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to hire Grandfield Masonry to repair the Brown Public Library front steps for a total cost of \$11,800. Board member Goodrich asked Board member Stevens since he feels a 6" slab would be sufficient, perhaps he could ask Grandfield Masonry if it could reduce its bid price by installing the smaller slab. After some discussion, there was a consensus amongst the Board members that the bid submissions had such different approaches to repairing the stairs that they couldn't be considered on an "apples to apples" basis. The motion was withdrawn and Board member Stevens was asked to contact both bidders to get them to submit proposals that could be better compared in terms of work provided, project cost, etc. This matter will be reconsidered at the next regular meeting (06/09/20).

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Municipal Building Reopening.** Manager Schulz said there would be a partial reopening of the Municipal Building tomorrow (05/27/20). COVID-19 protocols will be put in place with only six (6) visitors allowed in the building at one time and they must wear protective masks. Anyone exhibiting signs of respiratory illness will not be allowed in the building. Those wanting to meet with the Zoning Administrator or Listers are asked to make phone appointments beforehand. In addition, the Town Clerk's vault and records will be open to researchers by appointment only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.
- b. Property Tax Collections.** Manager Schulz said the municipality collected 94.7% of the property tax amount due by the May 15, 2020 deadline. This percentage doesn't differentiate much from the amount collected in recent years.
- c. April 2019 Rainstorm FEMA Reimbursements.** Over a year ago, there was a severe rainstorm that washed out a few local backroads. The event was declared a federal disaster with FEMA reimbursing the municipality for ninety percent (90%) of the costs of road material, equipment expenses, personnel costs, etc. The total reimbursement amount was \$56,400 and receiving these funds will be good for the municipality's balance sheet.
- d. Highway Department.** The recent good weather has resulted in a lot of grading work on the backroads. The Highway Department also is looking ahead to its next road drainage project on Terry Hill Road. The total project cost is estimated at \$30,000 and the State of Vermont will cover about eighty percent (80%) of this. This project follows similar projects on Barrows Road, Dole Hill Road, and Colson Road that addressed drainage issues in order to meet new state standards. Board member Miller had been concerned the Terry Hill Road project might take the Highway Department employees from their regular duties for a prolonged amount of time but he has been reassured the project should only take about a month and shouldn't disrupt normal Highway Department operations.

- e. **Stony Brook Road Bridge.** Manager Schulz submitted a grant application to the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) to repair this bridge, which is in poor condition. VTrans has acknowledged receipt of the application but also informed Manager Schulz that grant awards probably will be delayed by a month or two due to the COVID-19 situation. Board member Morse feels the bridge may need to be widened during the repairs as two-vehicle traffic now is not possible.
- f. **Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** As authorized by the Select Board members, Manager Schulz has signed off on the request from Project Engineer Ron Lyon (DuBois & King) for funds for additional services in preparation for the larger project. Mr. Lyon has hired a subcontractor and this additional work is now underway. The project RFP should be ready for release by the end of next month. Despite some project delays due to COVID-19 social distancing concerns, etc., it still seems likely the construction phase of this project will start later this year.
- g. **South Main Street Sidewalk Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz plans to send out the RFP for this project in the next few days. When the project is completed, he thinks it will be good to have one good sidewalk on the west side of this well-travelled street.
- h. **Northfield Electric Department (NED) Budget.** Manager Schulz said the Northfield Utility Commissions have completed the NED budget for FY 2020/2021. The Utility Commissioners saw no need for a rate increase.
- i. **Pleasant Street Waterline Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said the Water Department employees will be replacing old waterlines on Pleasant Street starting next week. The material already is on hand and the residents have been sent notifications by mail as well as hand-delivered. Due to the many side streets in the area, traffic detours shouldn't be too much of a problem.
- j. **Northfield Little League.** Manager Schulz the Northfield Little League Board of Directors have created a detailed COVID-19 Action Plan that would allow baseball practice that would not violate social distancing strictures. He would like the Select Board members to fully review the document prior to the next meeting, at which time they would be asked to accept it (perhaps with revisions) and thus allow this outdoor activity to recommence.
- k. **Northfield Ridge + River Routes Project.** Manager Schulz said there was a project update included in the packets. The report indicates the outreach phase has been concluded so the next step is to develop a plan that identifies drainage problems in the target area and possible remedies. Manager Schulz feels that the produced report could be very useful in developing plans to fix that drainage problems on Slate Avenue that have delayed road and sidewalk work there. Board member Morse would like the work on Slate Avenue to begin as soon as possible as the road is in very bad condition.
- l. **Green Up Day 2020.** Manager Schulz said this year's Green Up Day will be held on Saturday, May 30, 2020. Participants are asked to meet behind the Northfield Fire Station (128 Wall Street) to receive their work assignments and collection bags. A dumpster has been ordered for the collected trash and a portable toilet will be situated outside the Fire Station since the building will be closed due to COVID-19 concerns. Social distancing rules will need to be followed throughout the event.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Highway Subcommittee Meeting Update.** Board member Stevens said the subcommittee (Board members Miller and Stevens) met remotely this morning with Manager Schulz and Highway Foreman Trent Tucker. One topic of discussion was the deteriorating sidewalk on the east side of Central Street. It seems to him the general consensus of Select Board members is that the great expense of fixing this sidewalk makes the project untenable, especially since there is relatively new sidewalk on the other side of the street. Board member Stevens would like Manager Schulz to reach out to affected Central Street residents to let them know that any future sidewalk work is unlikely to happen for some time (if at all). Board member Miller remembers there was some resistance from the residents when it was suggested the old sidewalk could be removed, which would increase their front lawn area. Board member Goodrich recalls there were concerns about drainage issues should the sidewalk and curbing be removed. She felt it might be best to address the drainage issues but also let the residents know new sidewalk is unlikely. Manager Schulz has discussed this with Mr. Tucker and areas where some drainage work is needed have been identified.

Board member Miller noted the municipality probably will be advertising for a new Grounds/Equipment Operator in the next couple weeks. Also discussed was the Elm Street Retaining Wall. Mr. Tucker estimated the least expensive approach to fixing this would cost about \$90,000, which is about \$46,000 more than is now budgeted for the project. It is therefore likely this work will be delayed another year as this will need to be discussed at the next budget meetings. Board member Miller said a priority list for summer road paving will be developed over the next few weeks. He added Limlaw Pulpwood is now working on Hallstrom Road. There will be an effort for them to do some tree removal work on Turkey Hill Road afterwards but it is hard to get a commitment from them.

- b. Community Garden Update.** Board member Morse said he is still waiting for the soil sample results from the proposed site near the Northfield Fire Station. If no problems are found, he will start work on the site right away.
- c. East Street Restaurants.** Board member Morse feels the Economic Development Subcommittee should address the concerns of these restaurateurs who will need to install outdoor seating to conform to new social distancing requirements. Other considerations would be the installation of decorative barriers as well as the possibility of repainting the parking areas to be used in order to reduce the impact of reflected heat, etc. Board member Morse also suggested the municipality could provide these restaurateurs with no-interest loans to cover these reconfiguration costs.
- d. Northfield Municipal Pool.** Board member Goodrich asked about how should the Select Board members proceed in making a decision whether or not the municipal pool should be opened this summer. Manager Schulz said a decision does need to be made soon. He has looked into this and found that some municipalities have definitely said their public pools would remain closed due to COVID-19 concerns. A good number of other communities seem to be holding off on a decision until state guidelines have been made clear. Chair Maxwell said the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development has developed a list of twenty-nine (29) criteria that need to be met before reopening public pools. He would like Manager Schulz to review this list to determine whether reopening the Northfield municipal pool is feasible.

- e. **Pleasant Street Bridge.** Chair Maxwell said this bridge's deck planks are in very bad condition. Manager Schulz said the repair materials have been purchased and he has asked Mr. Tucker to start this repair project as soon as possible.
- f. **COVID-19 Update Letter.** Unless there are any objections, Chair Maxwell would like to write an open letter to the Northfield community that would inform them of the current situation and also thank those who have made a special effort during this difficult time. There was no objection.
- g. **Future Select Board Meetings.** Since the size limit on public gatherings has been raised from ten (10) to twenty-five (25), Chair Maxwell asked if this was the proper time to discuss whether the Select Board should resume holding public meetings in the BPL Community Room provided proper social distancing can be achieved. Board members Morse and Stevens had no objections provided seating arrangements were altered to allow for social distancing. Board member Miller has no intention of participating in group meetings for the foreseeable future. He felt there remain too many uncertainties so he would like to keep meeting remotely. Board member Goodrich also has concerns and would not feel comfortable going back to the old system of holding public meetings.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).

- a. **Merry Shernock, Northfield Mutual Aid Task Force.** Ms. Shernock said the Task Force helped draft a handout to help local businesses to reopen but has not seen it distributed yet. Manager Schulz said the document was slightly revised with input from Northfield Ambulance Chief/Health Officer Lawton Rutter. Copies then were made so NPD officers could distribute to local businesses while making their rounds in the downtown area, etc. The copies were picked up at the Municipal Building last Friday so the distribution should be ongoing. Ms. Stevens said Ms. Shernock has been doing great work with the Task Force's "Mask Brigade" in creating masks and then making them available in public places. However, there is a problem with some people in the community refusing to wear masks while in public. Ms. Stevens felt this was a matter of public safety and asked if the Select Board members would be willing to make a statement endorsing mask usage. Unless there is any objection, Chair Maxwell intends to include such language in his aforementioned open letter to the Northfield community. Both Ms. Shernock and Ms. Stevens would like to have a strongly worded statement encouraging mask use in public. Chair Maxwell said he will do his best to convey these concerns.
- b. **Patricia Coppolino, Dynamos Youth Soccer.** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Dynamos cancelled their spring soccer session and will cancel their summer soccer camp scheduled for July 2020. However, Ms. Coppolino said the soccer players would like an area where they can practice individually or in small groups. She asked if soccer nets and a kickboard could be installed at Memorial Park for those interested. Manager Schulz will work with the Recreation Committee on this.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:20 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 June 9, 2020.