

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of June 9, 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, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Kaitlyn Keating (NCDN), Ron Lyon P.E. (Dubois & King), Carolyn Stevens (NCDN), Jean Kerner (NCDN), Mary Dollenmaier, Lydia Petty, and David Hanna.

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 has addressed the Select Board members previously regarding the creation of a new municipal position: Economic Development Director (EDD). Ms. Keating and other NCDN members have indicated their willingness to assist with this matter, which includes drafting a job description for the new position. Chair Maxwell said the Economic Development Subcommittee (Chair Maxwell and Board member Morse) met yesterday and this was one of the topics they discussed. This included a timeline for finalizing the job description, advertising the position, interviewing candidates, and filling the position. Ms. Keating said at the last meeting (05/26/20) the Select Board members were asked to provide suggestions regarding any revisions to the draft job description. Chair Maxwell confirmed he did receive some input, especially from Board member Goodrich. One of her concerns was that one of the position's responsibilities was to supervise an assistant. There was some question over whether an assistant was really needed and how it would be budgeted. Ms. Keating noted the original idea was the assistant be an AmeriCorps volunteer so there would be little or no cost to the municipality. Having an assistant in place is not a requirement in the job description but one possible scenario.

Board member Goodrich also would like enhancement of the municipal website as one of the position's responsibilities. In addition, she would like some clear guidelines for determining success or failure for the new position. This might include weekly or monthly reports to the Town Manager. Board member Goodrich also wondered why this position's responsibilities included overseeing administration of funds. Ms. Keating said this refers to economic development funds already authorized by the voters. Manager Schulz said this proposed responsibility might have resulted from examples in other communities in which economic development funds are kept separate from the municipal budget. This would not be applicable in Northfield. Ms. Keating understands that the EDD position would be overseen by the Town Manager.

Board member Goodrich said she also suggested the possibility that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it might be necessary for the new EDD to work remotely for the first few months. Ms. Keating said that might be difficult for someone not familiar with Northfield. Chair Maxwell asked if there was space in the Municipal Building to house an additional employee. Manager Schulz said the EDD probably would have to share an office with the part-time Zoning Administrator (ZA).

Board member Stevens had no additional suggestions as he is satisfied with the current draft and would like it adopted as soon as possible. Board member Miller thought the job description should include the number of work hours per week and the hourly compensation rate. Ms. Keating said the initial proposal was for a part-time position limited to twenty-three (23) hours per week in order to stay under thresholds for employee benefits, etc. However, it might be a challenge to find a qualified applicant willing to work so few hours.

Board member Morse would like to move forward tonight with the job search as the job description can be fine-tuned at a later time if needed. He did feel it might not be feasible for the EDD to share workspace with the ZA as there might be some confidentially matters when interacting with potential new businesses, etc. Ms. Keating said the NCDN originally envisioned the EDD position as being separate from the municipality so it would not be bound by open meeting laws when interacting with business owners, etc. This initial thought was dropped and the EDD was seen as a municipal employee. Manager Schulz doesn't feel the open meeting laws would be relevant when the EDD was holding discussions with individuals or small groups. It only would come into effect when meeting with the Economic Development Subcommittee or other municipal bodies. Manager Schulz said some private space in the Municipal Building probably could be created when the EDD requires some privacy. He added the ZA office is completely empty for several hours each week.

Board member Goodrich asked if the Select Board members would be able to see the finalized job description before it is distributed to potential applicants. Chair Maxwell said Manager Schulz can incorporate the various suggested edits and then provide to the Select Board members for review. Mary Dollenmaier is happy to hear the Select Board is moving forward on this. Ms. Keating asked if the aforementioned progress reports would be weekly or monthly. Board member Morse felt this should be the Town Manager's decision.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the proposed job description for the new Economic Development Director position with the amendments agreed upon by Select Board consensus. Chair Maxwell feels it is important for the new position to have verifiable and realistic goals. Perhaps the EDD would be expected to bring in at least one new business in the first year. Chair Maxwell also would like to see the EDD develop a feasible plan for increasing Northfield's tax base in the near future; implement those V-DAT goals not yet achieved; meet with local business owners on a regular basis and provide assistance when needed; develop an effective marketing program for Northfield; gather and incorporate local economic development feedback from community members; etc. Additional goals can be developed at a future Economic Development Subcommittee meeting.

Board member Morse believes if we can get a "hot runner" to fill the position, there could be such visible local improvements as filling some of the vacant storefronts around Depot Square with new businesses. However, expanding the Grand List would require new construction. Board member Stevens would like the EDD to meet with at least eighty-five percent (85%) of local business owners within the first year. Lydia Petty likes the idea of having the EDD contact existing businesses to determine what assistance the municipality can provide, such as helping them adapt to the new normal in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Ms. Petty feels unrealistic goals should not be set given the recent economic downturn related to "stay at home" directives.

Ms. Keating noted when the first EDD proposal was brought to the Select Board last year it was envisioned there would be a three-year trial period for the position as that was considered the shortest amount of time feasible for measuring success or failure. However, when the EDD position became a budgeted expense, it became more likely that achievements would be measured on a year-to-year basis. Ms. Keating hopes if the first person hired for this position is considered unsuccessful, that would not mean the end of the position itself. Chair Maxwell believes the Select Board members do want the position to be successful so the goals developed will be realistic. Board member Morse believes the community will let the Select Board members know whether having this person on board is working out or not. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

Chair Maxwell said the next step would be to establish the hiring committee. He suggested himself, Board member Morse, Manager Schulz, Ms. Keating, and Ms. Stevens. Board member Morse thought alternate NCDN members could attend in place of Ms. Keating or Ms. Stevens if they are unavailable for a meeting. Chair Maxwell would like the job posting no later than Monday, June 22, 2020 with the deadline for applications three (3) weeks later. Unless there are any delays, the EDD position should be filled before the end of July.

- b. Ron Lyon P.E., Dubois & King: Union Brook Road Project.** Manager Schulz said this major road project was undertaken because significant deficiencies in the road were brought to the Select Board members' attention by Northfield residents who drive Union Brook Road on a regular basis. After numerous public meetings and an informational hearing, Northfield voters approved a \$1,700,000 bank bond (09/17/19) for road reconstruction. The Select Board members then engaged Ron Lyon, P.E. of Dubois & King as Project Engineer in order to perform preliminary work and assist in the preparation of an RFP for the construction phase. Now that the initial data collection and soil borings have been performed, the engineering study has entered its next phase with more detailed data collection and work site inspections. Special attention has been provided to the area known as the "Big Dip," which includes engaging Sanborn, Head & Associates, Inc. for geotechnical services. Mr. Lyon said COVID-19 social distancing regulations have somewhat slowed progress on the project but he has been meeting regularly with Manager Schulz, Highway Foreman Trent Tucker, and Board member Miller and this has been very helpful in keeping things on track. Twenty-eight (28) borings have been taken at various locations in order to "define pavement depth, base material and depth, subgrade material, and groundwater conditions." There also have been site inspections to determine which of the forty-nine (49) culverts in the project area will need to be replaced. During this process, numerous concerns have been raised regarding poor roadside drainage, which probably is an important factor in the road's significant deterioration at several sections. Three (3) borings done in the "Big Dip" area indicated a prevalence of compressed clay subbase. Mr. Lyon said heavy traffic in this area, including logging trucks, was another factor in the road's poor condition. He should have some recommendations for solving these problems in the next week or so. The solutions may turn out to be simple or could be more complicated.

In addition to the "Big Dip," four (4) other road segments with significant problems have been identified. The worst section probably is near Union Brook Road's intersection with Hallstrom Road. The borings taken there showed a lot of subbase water so this area might require more extensive reconstruction. Mr. Lyon noted Dave Hanna's home overlooks a particularly bad section of road and he has been very helpful in providing input on the road's long-standing problems. The next step is for Mr. Lyon to determine the best approaches to address all these problem areas and then provide recommendations with cost estimates to the Select Board members.

Board member Miller thanked Mr. Lyon for his work to date and he looks forward to receiving his recommendations. Board member Stevens asked about the width of the road shoulders and the road itself. Mr. Lyon said the shoulders are basically non-existent. The road itself averages about twenty-two feet (22') wide. Board member Stevens asked if the road project would extend the shoulders. Mr. Lyon said it probably wouldn't as this is not in the current project budget. Board member Stevens feels it would be best that all current culverts less than eighteen inches (18") wide should be replaced no matter their condition. Mr. Lyon believes this is a good idea since they would be more expensive to fix later should they develop problems.

Board member Morse noted the project's great cost and asked if spending \$1,700,000 will result in a perfect road. Mr. Lyon said some drainage problems will remain since addressing all the problem roadside swales probably would double the construction cost. The heavy traffic on the road also will cause some damage over time. Board member Goodrich has no questions at this time as she feels the project is in good hands. Chair Maxwell asked about the current project timeline. Mr. Lyon would like to discuss this matter further with Manager Schulz and Board member Miller but he feels it is realistic to expect construction to begin in early August 2020. Given the great public interest in fixing this road, Chair Maxwell thinks it would be very good to have ground broken this summer. However, he understands such special concerns such as the "Big Dip" may result in delaying project completion into next year.

#### **IV. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT**

- a. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio.** Included in the Select Board packets were financial statements covering the first eleven (11) months of the current fiscal year (07/01/19-05/31/20). Ms. Baroffio also enclosed a memorandum summarizing the municipality's current financial situation and projecting to the end of the fiscal year, which will be in three (3) weeks. She is anticipating the Town General and Highway funds will have a combined surplus of \$117,830. The main reasons for this were personnel changes, unfilled positions, and unpaid absences. Not opening the pool this summer will result in \$24,000 in current budget savings but also a \$7,500 loss in revenue. The Select Board decision not to borrow to fix the Fire Station roof resulted in \$22,250 in debt budget savings. The Northfield Police Department (NPD) will see about \$15,000 in health insurance savings due to numerous officers participating in the buyout program (i.e. obtaining health insurance from another source in return for cash payments). The Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) will have additional personnel costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic however grant funds already have covered some of this extra expense and future federal COVID-19 reimbursement funds are expected in the near future. The Highway Department ran a deficit the previous fiscal year but should have a positive balance this year mainly due to personnel savings.

Ms. Baroffio then notified the Select Board members that since the State of Vermont will not set the Education Tax Rate until around August 1, 2020, local property tax bills will not be going out mid-July as normal. The first installment tax payment due date will have to be pushed back to mid-September 2020 but the other three (3) installment dates probably won't be affected. Ms. Baroffio said the municipality's capital fund does have a healthy balance so the delay in collecting property tax revenue should not have a major impact. She added some minor adjustments might have to be made, such as delaying transfers into CIP accounts, in order maintain sufficient cash on hand. The Select Board members expressed appreciation to Ms. Baroffio for the favorable report. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Baroffio and her employees for doing such an outstanding job under the current difficult situation.

**V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. **May 26, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. **Approval of Warrant #23-20.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve Warrant #23-20 in the amount of \$438,755.72. Board member Goodrich asked about a \$285 payment for "line maintenance reimbursement." Manager Schulz said last autumn some asphalt got into a sewer line and caused a sewage backup in someone's home. Fortunately, the damage was limited. This payment reimburses the homeowner for plumber costs. Chair Maxwell noted several tree trimming invoices for work done last fall. Manager Schulz said the invoices were received recently and were processed as soon as they arrived. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through May 31, 2020.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$106,826.52. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**VII. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION**

- a. **Liquor License Renewals.** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, liquor licenses that would have expired April 30, 2020 were automatically extended by the Vermont Division of Liquor Control to June 30, 2020. As there have been no further extensions, the license renewal requests below must be approved now.
1. **Cumberland Farms.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  2. **Depot Square Pizzeria.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  3. **Falls General Store.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  4. **Good Measure Brewing.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  5. **Rustic Restaurant (1<sup>st</sup> Class).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
  6. **Rustic Restaurant (3<sup>rd</sup> Class).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

Board member Morse thought it might save time if Manager Schulz were authorized to approve liquor licenses in future. There was no objection. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to authorize the Town Manager to approve liquor licenses. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**VIII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. **Brown Public Library (BPL) Front Steps Repair Bids.** Board member Stevens, who serves as Treasurer on the BPL Board of Trustees, was to contact the two bidders for this project (Grandfield Masonry and BW Masonry) in order to clarify proposal specifications. As he has not heard back from one of them, he asked this matter be deferred to the next meeting. There was no objection.

- b. **Highway Paving Note (Cox Brook Road).** Manager Schulz said the Select Board authorized borrowing funds in order to pave Cox Brook Road last summer. This is the first payment on a ten (10) year note and we were able to obtain a very favorable interest rate. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve and sign the Highway Paving Note for \$271,809.69 at 1.25% interest; to approve and sign the Highway Paving Borrowing Resolution; and Approve and sign the Non-Arbitrage and Use of Proceeds Certificate. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### **IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. **Highway Department Update.** Manager Schulz said the Highway crew now are finishing up the drainage work on Terry Hill Road. They should be done in the next week or so. The balance of the crew have been working on road grading and other regular maintenance.
- b. **Municipal Pool Closure.** Now that the decision has been made to keep the pool closed this summer, there will be an opportunity to work uninterrupted on a number of improvements, such as the installation of new skimmers, etc.
- c. **Cross Brother Dam Removal Project, etc.** The Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) has sent out the RFP for engineering services for this project. The State of Vermont will cover this expenses and there will be no direct cost to Northfield taxpayers. The Camp Wihakowi Dam Removal Project also is moving forward with the RFP sent out for the actual dam removal.
- d. **Potential Sites to Receive Vermont Development Soils.** The State of Vermont sent out requests to municipalities to help identify possible locations where "development soils" from state construction projects could be deposited. Manager Schulz replied with a suggestion that the town-owned parcel between Garvey Hill Road and Fiske Drive now used as a gravel pit was one possibility. Board member Miller doesn't think this is a good idea because the nearby residential areas would be disturbed by the extra traffic, etc. He felt this site would be better used to address local needs. Manager Schulz said he only informed the State that this site was a possibility. Allowing the State to use it for construction debris disposal would require Select Board approval.
- e. **Better Connections Grant.** Manager Schulz said the group administrating this grant are moving forward with seven (7) self-guided walking tours, which would take place from Monday, June 22, 2020 through Tuesday, June 30, 2020. Most of these tours will be in the downtown area but one will start at the Northfield Falls General Store and another at Norwich University's Shaw Center.

#### **X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. **East Street Project.** Board member Morse said the Economic Development Subcommittee met yesterday to discuss a proposal to close off part of East Street so the restaurateurs there will be able to install additional outside seating to meet COVID-19 social distancing requirements. Chair Maxwell believes the initial expenses undertaken by the municipality would be reimbursed later through state and federal COVID-19 Restart funds. Board member Morse said the project would involve repainting the affected parking spaces white (to cut down on reflected heat and glare), installing barriers, picnic tables with ballasted umbrellas, traffic safety devices, etc. Local artists will be asked to paint the area create a garden theme assisted by local gardeners who will help install cattle tanks with edibles. The hope is to assist local restaurant owners who have been badly impacted by closures and/or reduced services as a result of the pandemic. These improvements will be phased in over time (i.e. "soft opening") and will be left in place until snowplow season.

Board member Morse suggested taking photographs of various phases of the project that could be converted to a time-lapse YouTube video that would demonstrate the Northfield municipality's commitment to local businesses. Board member Morse said the Depot Square restaurants were contacted but expressed no interest on a similar project there as they already have sidewalk seating or the nearby Common for outside dining. The owners of the Rustic Restaurant also have no interest at this time in similar municipal assistance.

Board member Stevens asked about open container laws. Manager Schulz believes Cornerstone Burger already has an outside consumption permit and the other affected restaurant can apply for one as well. Board member Morse believes the restaurateurs will be so grateful for the assistance that they will police themselves in regards to parking issues, closing hours, patron noise, etc. Board member Goodrich asked if the owners of the Common Café and China Star were contacted about the East Street Project. Chair Maxwell confirmed they were. Board member Goodrich asked how many parking spaces would be lost on East Street. Chair Maxwell said there were sixteen (16) parking spots on the street and the restaurateurs would like to use six (6) of them.

- b. COVID-19 Webinar.** Chair Maxwell recently took part in a VLCT webinar regarding COVID-19 reimbursements, remote meetings, etc. He noted that once the current state of emergency is lifted, the municipality will have to go back to holding its meetings in public places to allow for citizen participation. When the Select Board resumes its meetings in the Brown Public Library's Community Room, accommodations will have to be made for those still reluctant to attend in person.
- c. Northfield High School Class of 2020.** Chair Maxwell wanted to give congratulations to the NHS Class of 2020, which missed out on its graduation ceremony due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Select Board members wish them all success in the future.

**XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).** There was none.

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

The Board went into executive session at 9:30 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 10:31 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 10:32 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 23, 2020.