

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of June 23, 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, Trent Tucker (Highway Foreman), Merry Shernock, Carolyn Stevens, Chandra Blackmer, and Steve Davis.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:04 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. Merry Shernock: Readings from Frederick Douglass – "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro."** Since COVID-19 social distancing requirements means Ms. Shernock will not be able to provide a public reading of Mr. Douglass' speech on the Northfield Common (as in years past), she asked the Select Board members for their permission to read excerpts of the speech at the next regular meeting (07/14/20). There was no objection. The presentation should last no more than nine (9) minutes and Ms. Shernock will have others on hand to share the reading.

IV. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. Trent Tucker, Highway Foreman.** Mr. Tucker said the Highway crew have been working on a drainage project on Terry Hill Road over the past two and a half weeks. During that time, fifteen (15) culverts have been replaced, thirty (30) loads of ledge have been removed, and sixty (60) loads of dirt taken out. There remains one (1) culvert to be replaced as well as some ditching so the project should be completed in a couple days (depending on the weather). Chair Maxwell asked how long was the road. Mr. Tucker said it was eight-tenths (8/10) of a mile. There are three (3) homes, one camp, and one vacant lot. Manager Schulz said the state has classified this as a hydrologically-connected road and this project's expense (i.e. labor, materials, etc.) will be covered by two (2) separate state grants. Mr. Tucker said the next highway project is clearing a clogged drainage ditch near the Northfield Falls Post Office, which has resulted in the parking lot being flooded after heavy rainstorms. Board member Goodrich said many people will be pleased by this. Manager Schulz said this would not entirely eliminate the problem as there are a couple spots along the state highway contributing to it. He has contacted VTrans a few times about fixing this but it has not yet been done. Mr. Tucker said the new wooden deck on the Pleasant Street Bridge was installed today. The bridge approaches were cut back and will be repaved tomorrow. The Highway crew next will be putting down gravel on the backroads including Stony Brook Road, Little Northfield Road, Clark Road, and Rabbit Hollow Road. In addition, there will be considerable ditching along Clark Road and Berlin Pond Road.

Chair Maxwell asked if Mr. Tucker has been in contact with Limlaw Pulpwood & Chipping about the possibility of performing some roadside trimming along Turkey Hill Road. Mr. Tucker said pulpwood prices are so low the moment that Limlaw is holding off on some projects until the market improves. This also might be a difficult job for them since the road is steep and winding in places. Since Limlaw wouldn't charge the municipality for the work (just taking the downed brush for processing), Mr. Tucker said it is difficult to exert any pressure on them. Manager Schulz said a notice letter to Turkey Hill property owners has been prepared and will be sent out when a timeline is confirmed. Board member Goodrich asked why Limlaw was in town recently. Mr. Tucker said they were doing a private job for a landowner on Hallstrom Road.

Board member Goodrich asked if the roadside mowing has started yet. Mr. Tucker said some was done earlier but the machine is now in the shop. It has been in the shop for about a week and should be back soon. Mr. Tucker also would like to hold off on some of the roadside mowing until some of the spring weeds have died off otherwise the mowing might be a good way to spread their seeds.

Board member Stevens complimented Mr. Tucker on the grass seeding job on Smith Hill Road. Mr. Tucker said the hydro feeder was used, which makes the completed work look much better. Board member Stevens has heard some complaints about the shale used on Hallstrom Road. Residents have complained about sharp rocks damaging their tires. Board member Stevens has noticed similar material on Stony Brook Road and Smith Hill Road but hasn't heard any complaints about those roads. Mr. Tucker said a sharp rock now and then is unavoidable. He said the material used is crushed ledge, not shale, which is the standard road material now. Real gravel isn't used much these days. Chair Maxwell said he received complaints this past spring from Frost Road and Loop Road residents regarding the same issue. Mr. Tucker said when Pike Industries rebuilt Route 12A a few years ago, they had to carry \$100,000 in liability insurance to cover claims for tires punctured by road material used. They did have to pay out a lot of money to angry drivers.

Chair Maxwell asked if the Highway Department was back to full staffing. Manager Schulz said he recently started advertising for a replacement Grounds Maintenance/ Equipment Operator and already has received a few applications. He had delayed recruiting for the vacant position due to uncertainty about the municipality's finances in light of the COVID-19 pandemic but the picture is much more optimistic now.

Chair Maxwell asked about there were any concerns about Highway equipment. Mr. Tucker said the grader was used heavily this spring and this resulted in some issues, such as oil in the transmission. The machine now is in the Nortrax shop but should be back in service in the next week or so. The machine was rebuilt last year so some of the current work may be covered by warranty. Mr. Tucker will check on this. Board member Goodrich asked if we should consider renting a replacement in the interim. Mr. Tucker said most of the roads are now in good shape so there's no real need. Manager Schulz noted there has been reduced traffic on the backroads due to COVID-19 "stay at home" directives. Chair Maxwell said if the grader remains off the road for more than two (2) weeks, he felt renting another grader might be unavoidable. He noted there are funds in the FY 2020/2021 budget for renting equipment. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Tucker for the information provided tonight and hopes to see him back again in a few weeks for another update.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **June 9, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **June 17, 2020 (Special 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 #24-20.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #24-20 in the amount of \$152,273.22. Board member Stevens noted some expensive repairs to the 2014 Police Cruiser. Manager Schulz noted this particular vehicle does have high mileage and therefore a lot of issues recently. The plan is to purchase a replacement vehicle in the next fiscal year, which starts next week (07/01/20). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Warrant #01-21A.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve Warrant #01-21A in the amount of \$9,027.00. It was noted this warrant solely covers the one of the biannual tax payment to Washington County. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through June 14, 2020.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$94,024.87. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **South Main Street Sidewalk Project Bids.** Manager Schulz said four (4) bids were received by yesterday's deadline for submissions. This project would have 1600 feet of new sidewalk installed on the west side of South Main Street from Depot Square to Washington Street. The bid form asked for two separate bid amounts: one that included installing new concrete curbing and a second quote for using the existing curbing. The bidders (with split quotes) were Avery Excavation (\$198,500/\$194,000); Josh Fenoff Siteworks (\$118,750/\$79,000); Dale E. Percy, Inc. (\$227,400/\$211,400); and United Construction (\$210,966/\$198,966). Manager Schulz noted the bid from Josh Fenoff Siteworks was considerably lower than the others, which usually is a red flag. However, he discussed this with Mr. Tucker and VTrans officials and the consensus was that the other companies might have other projects lined up and weren't overly anxious to do this job. In addition, Josh Fenoff Siteworks performed the sidewalk work on East Street and the Mayo Block last year and everyone seemed to be pleased with the work done. Therefore, Manager Schulz recommends hiring Josh Fenoff Siteworks for the South Main Sidewalk Project using new curbing for a cost of \$118,750. The existing curbing considered serviceable could be reused at another location, such as Central Street. The original estimate cost for this project was \$150,000 and this was the amount cited in the VTrans grant applications. Therefore, the State of Vermont will pay for half of the total project costs to a maximum of \$75,000. In light of this, Manager Schulz has reached out to VTrans about the possibility of extending the project area southward towards Norwich University (i.e. the intersection of South Main Street and Central Street adjacent to Plumley Armory). However, this possibility is only in the early discussion phase at this time. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to award the South Main Street Sidewalk Project to Josh Fenoff Siteworks for a total amount of \$118,750, which includes new granite curbing.

Board member Morse said he also is concerned when one bidder is considerably less expensive than the others but agreed with Manager Schulz that Josh Fenoff Siteworks has done good work here before. Board member Stevens says it sounds like a good deal and it would be great if the new sidewalk could be extended southward. Board member Miller agreed. Board member Goodrich noted how much traffic goes down South Main Street each day and wanted assurance that the bid amount included the cost of sufficient traffic control. Mr. Tucker said the bid proposal didn't specifically state this but he will reach out and confirm the price includes flaggers, etc. Chair Maxwell asked how much additional sidewalk was being considered. Manager Schulz said about six hundred feet (600'). He added the initial decision to stop the new sidewalk at the Washington Street intersection was due to the higher initial estimate for the project. Chair Maxwell asked about the timeline for the project. Manager Schulz said the bid documents specified all work must be completed by October 15, 2020. Josh Fenoff Siteworks is aware of this deadline and will comply. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. **Postponement of Property Tax First Installment Due Date.** Manager Schulz said there was a memorandum from Town Clerk Kim Pedley in the packets requesting a one-month delay for the due date for the first installment of 2020 property taxes. Since the deadline for US taxpayers to file their income tax forms was extended to July 15, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State of Vermont will not be forwarding homestead declarations to municipalities before August 2020. Therefore, local property tax bills that would have gone out mid-July with the first installment due one month later will instead be mailed in mid-August. Ms. Pedley is asking for the new due date to be Friday, September 18, 2020. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to postpone the due date for the first installment of 2020 property taxes to September 18, 2020. The remaining three (3) installment due dates (11/13/20, 02/12/21, and 05/14/21) will not be affected. Board member Morse noted the Northfield voters set the property tax collection dates on Town Meeting Day and asked if the Select Board members has authority to override this. Manager Schulz said the state legislature passed a law (Act 102), which Governor Phil Scott later signed, that gave this authority to municipal governments. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Brown Public Library (BPL) Front Steps Repair Bids.** Board member Stevens, who also serves as Treasurer on the BPL Board of Trustees, has been working on this project with Manager Schulz. He reported he has not yet heard back from one of the bidders for this project so he would like to postpone consideration of this matter until the next regular meeting (07/14/20). There remain some questions regarding the work scopes of the two bids provided and Board member Stevens would like this concern resolved before awarding the project. Chair Maxwell said the repairs will need to be addressed soon. Board member Stevens would like the work completed by October 15, 2020. He will discuss this matter with Manager Schulz over the next couple days. It may become necessary to rebid the project with more detailed work specifications.
- d. **CERV Building Project.** Manager Schulz said the CERV Board have been looking for new locations to house its food and clothing shelves for some time. The Clothing Shelf, which previously had been located at a site inaccessible in winter, now operates out of the Municipal Building basement. The Food Shelf still is located in the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) section of the Town Garage but NAS eventually would like to use the area for storage, etc. The current plan is to build a new structure on Kent Street municipal property that would host all CERV activities. The Select Board members have been involved in the relocation process for some time and have encouraged the CERV Board to proceed with the planning phase. CERV was assisted in this by Norwich University engineering students. One early conclusion was there would not be sufficient parking space for CERV operations and for Municipal Building staff and visitors. Therefore, the CERV Board approached the adjacent Kent Street property owner regarding the possibility of purchasing a strip of land next to the new building. A land purchase agreement has been formalized and is ready for Select Board discussion, which Manager Schulz feels should be done in executive session. There was no objection.
- e. **Bond Anticipation Note (Union Brook Road Reconstruction).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Note in the amount of \$1,700,000 at 1.19% interest; approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Borrowing Resolution; and approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Borrowing Tax Certificate. Manager Schulz confirmed Finance Director Laurie Baroffio contacted several local banks regarding this and the following note for the best terms available. Although there was some consideration of getting multi-year notes, the accompanying higher interest rates made this less attractive. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- f. **Bond Anticipation Note (2017 Fire Pumper Truck).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Note in the amount of \$194,587 at 1.24% interest; approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Borrowing Resolution; and approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Borrowing Tax Certificate. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz noted project engineer Ron Lyon (DuBois & King) gave the Select Board members an update at the previous regular meeting (06/09/20) and the project remains on schedule. Mr. Lyon will present his recommendations to the Highway Subcommittee at their next meeting, which will either later this or next week. The agreed-upon recommendation then will be provided to the full Select Board at its next regular meeting along with a draft RFP for the construction phase of the project.
- b. **Economic Development Director.** Now that the new position's job description has been finalized, the job advertisement will be circulated by the end of the week.
- c. **Central Street Sidewalks.** Manager Schulz said a draft letter has been prepared for Central Street property owners informing them that the municipality plans to remove the deteriorating sidewalk on the east side of the street. Provisions will be made during this for addressing road drainage issues as front lawns are extended to the street, perhaps using the old curbing from South Main Street. The letter will be sent out this week if there are no objections. Board member Morse would like the letter to include the possibility the eastside sidewalk could be rebuilt at a later time should sufficient funding become available. He remembers the topic of sidewalk removal was highlighted at a Select Board regular meeting a few years ago and most of the Central Street residents present were opposed to the proposal.

- d. Town Plan Update.** Included in the packets was a memorandum from Planning Commission (PC) Chair Laura Hill-Eubanks. The PC members had reviewed the Select Board members' suggested Town Plan revisions at a recent meeting and there were no objections. The approved changes are being forwarded to the PC's planning consultant (Brandy Saxton) so they can be incorporated into the full document. After the finalized document has been approved by the Select Board members, it will be sent to the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) for its approval. If the CVRPC confirms the document is in compliance with state law and doesn't conflict with the plans of neighboring communities, it will go into effect. Manager Schulz said once Northfield has an approved Town Plan, it will be able to apply for planning grants and the PC members will be able to focus on their next task, which is to revise the local zoning regulations.
- e. Camp Wihakowi Dam Removal Project.** Board member Stevens saw in Manager Schulz's written report that this planned dam removal will result in a lot of riverbed material leaving the site. Manager Schulz said the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) and the Friends of the Winooski (FOW) have been spearheading the dam removal project. They bid out the project and provided potential bidders the authority to decide where the removed material will be deposited. The contract was awarded last week and the current plan is to transport the material to a private residence on Winch Hill Road. The property owners operate a flower farm and their plan is to repurpose the material in order to expand their existing parking area. Manager Schulz said some local permits still need to be worked out and he has been in contact with FOW Executive Director Michele Braun about this. Board member Goodrich remembers Select Board discussions on the possibility of the municipality taking some or all of the removed material as potential road material. Board member Miller said there were several discussions but as a member of the Highway Subcommittee he recommended against this as there was no way to ascertain beforehand how much (if any) of the riverbed material would be suitable for roadway use. Although it was argued that this could be a great cost saver, Board member Miller didn't want the municipality to make itself responsible for properly disposing of the material (which would include knotweed, etc.) without any assurances. There ultimately was consensus that the disposal process should be handled by another party. Board member Goodrich asked what would happen if Winch Hill Road or the access bridge adjacent to the dam were damaged during the removal process. Board member Miller said the municipality could require the company involved to have sufficient liability insurance to cover any damage reimbursement. This topic probably will be discussed at the next Highway Subcommittee meeting.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. East Street Project.** At the previous regular meeting (06/09/20), Board member Morse presented a comprehensive plan for helping East Street restaurateurs by installing outdoor seating on current parking spaces in order to meet COVID-19 social distancing requirements. Although some of the project has been completed (parking spaces painted white; tables and barriers installed; etc.), he is disappointed some aspects were not done, such as having local artists decorate around the dining areas with non-stick paint. Board member Morse believes this decision was made by the Select Board Chair and Town Manager without sufficient communication with the other Select Board members. Manager Schulz did not believe there was a clear Select Board consensus at that meeting for the full proposal. He thought some of it was more hypothetical and full implementation would be subject to cost and feasibility. Manager Schulz said due to the significant expense of painting the parking spaces white and other paintwork in the area, concerns about additional cost meant the outreach to local artists was not done. Chair Maxwell said he did provide Manager Schulz his opinion on this matter when asked but he certainly did not "spike" the project. In addition, in Board member Morse's presentation he made clear that the adjoining business owners would be provided significant input as the project developed. Chair Maxwell said one of them approached him and expressed real concerns about painting over the white paint. That person was thinking of asking permission to install a deck so the dining tables would be elevated from the pavement.

Board member Goodrich said she had a difficult time following the presentation but she certainly doesn't remember the suggestion that the municipality should pay an additional \$2,700 for artwork at the site. Board member Morse said he listened to the audio recording of the meeting and he clearly heard the proposal include artistic renderings at the site. He is mainly disappointed that his proposal was changed so much without further communication with the other Select Board members. Chair Maxwell asked if Board member Morse is pleased with the work done so far. Chair Maxwell feels that it looks pretty good. Board member Morse agreed it looks fine but he believes it could look a bit better. Manager Schulz said he also reviewed the audio recording and still doesn't fully understand what parts of the proposal were authorized.

- b. **Food Waste Recycling.** Chair Maxwell noted a new mandate of the Vermont Universal Recycling Law will go into effect on July 1, 2020, that will require that all food scraps be either be recycled or composted and not put into regular trash containers. The goal is to keep foodstuffs out of landfills where it would decompose slowly, releasing methane gas in the process and thus contribute to global warming. He asked if the municipality has contacted community members about their options for properly disposing of foodstuffs. Manager Schulz said he has not been able to find a local disposal location but residents are able to use the "stump dump" in Randolph that is open every Saturday morning from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Manager Schulz said he will compose a communication for Northfield residents that will inform them of current options.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).

- a. **Carolyn Stevens: Remote Select Board Meetings.** Ms. Stevens finds it very helpful to see the faces of those participating in these meetings and hopes all those who are able to install webcams on their computers will do so.

XI. 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 legal issue, personnel matter, and contract negotiations with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:50 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 9:25 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:25 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 July 14, 2020.