

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

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell (absent), Vice-Chair Julie H. Goodrich, Board members Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Merry Shernock, Natasha Baning, Mary Donnelly (Central Vermont New Directions Coalition), Dave Hanna, and Mark Fournier.

Acting Chair Goodrich called the meeting to order at 7:02 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."** Ms. Shernock thanked the Select Board members for allowing a presentation tonight of one of the finest rhetorical speeches in American history. She noted Frederick Douglass was an escaped slave who was largely self-taught and became a leading Abolitionist thinker and orator. This speech was given in Rochester, New York on July 5, 1852 as part of Independence Day celebrations. Mr. Douglass began his speech by extolling the efforts of the Founding Fathers in forming a new nation to throw off the "tyranny of England." However, Mr. Douglass says he could not feel included in the celebrations himself due to the abomination of American Slavery, which he felt made a mockery of the "joyous anthems" then being sung. Mr. Douglass also noted that because of the Fugitive Slave Law passed two years earlier by Congress, he and other freed Blacks in the northern states were in peril of being taken by slave-hunters at any time and quickly returned to the slave states. Mr. Douglass did conclude his speech with a ray of hope, stating "...notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery." Ms. Shernock said a reading of the full speech was performed by a succession of speakers last year on the Common in conjunction with Farmers Market. The reading went so well it was felt it should become an annual event. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, this was not possible this year. Natasha Baning then read selected passages from Mr. Douglass' speech. The full text of this speech can be found online at: https://masshumanities.org/files/programs/douglass/speech_complete.pdf. The Select Board members thanked Ms. Shernock and Ms. Baning for their presentation. Ms. Shernock looks forward to providing a public recitation on the Common again next year should conditions allow.
- b. Mary Donnelly, Prevention Educator, Central Vermont New Directions Coalition: Anti-Smoking Signage for Municipal Parks.** Ms. Donnelly addressed the Select Board members earlier this year (01/14/20) in the company of some local seventh-graders known as the "Health Heroes." They had two requests at that time: permission to install some "Sidewalk Buttlers" around the community and to designate some (if not all) of our local municipal parks as smoke-free. Ms. Donnelly said seven (7) buttlers, which provide for proper disposal of cigarette butts, have been purchased through donations from local businesses. The buttlers will be adorned with the town seal, the logo of the sponsoring business, and contact information for 802Quits, which helps Vermonters end their tobacco addiction. Ms. Donnelly said the next step is to determine the best locations to site the buttlers, i.e. where smokers congregate. The Common Café has been suggested as one possibility and since the Falls General Store is one of the sponsors, at least one buttlers will be located in Northfield Falls. Other possibilities include bus stops, etc. The other requirement is to set up a system through which the buttlers will be emptied every six (6) weeks or so and the contents disposed of properly. Ms. Donnelly noted there is an Ohio business that recycles the butts, transforming them into common products. Board member Morse often takes in garden waste from around the Common but has been unable to compost much of it due to mixed-in cigarette butts. He therefore felt the Common would be a likely site for at least one buttlers. Manager Schulz said municipal employees would be able to collect the butts as well as ship them out for proper disposal. The details can be worked out.

Ms. Shernock asked how much the buttlers cost. Ms. Donnelly said about \$100 each and the expense was fully covered by donations. If the initial program is successful, additional businesses could be contacted to see if they would be willing to sponsor more buttlers. Mark Fournier said more businesses might be interested if the program was better advertised. Ms. Donnelly will work with Manager Schulz on this. She also will provide him with information regarding purchasing signage that will inform the public that the municipal parks are now smoke-free. Ms. Donnelly was thanked by the Select Board members for the update and valuable information presented tonight.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **June 23, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **July 8, 2020 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #01-21.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve Warrant #01-21 in the amount of \$1,501,356.77. It was noted of the total warrant amount, \$1,073,797.30 represented property taxes collected by the municipality and then forwarded to the Paine Mountain School District. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through July 5, 2020.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$89,541.60. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz said the Highway Subcommittee met last week (07/08/20) to discuss a number of topics but especially this one. He said Project Engineer Ron Lyon (DuBois & King) provided an update of the field work that had been performed in preparation for the construction phase of the project. The work has been finished, including a closer look at the "Big Dip." Mr. Lyon said the company looking into the "Big Dip" (Sanborn, Head & Associates) had their work slightly delayed due to COVID-19 issues at the laboratory. They have provided some options for resolving this problem such as an expensive one that would involve removing a lot of road material from the site. Mr. Lyon is aware of the budget limits in this project as specified by the approved bond amount (\$1,700,000) so he will provide some less expensive alternatives when the Highway Subcommittee meets again this Friday morning (07/17/20). The recommendations coming from this meeting (with cost estimates) will be presented to the full Select Board at the next regular meeting (07/28/20). Once the Select Board members have decided which path to take, the project RFP will be finalized and bids solicited. The start date for the construction phase should be no later than mid-August 2020. Board member Miller, who serves on the Highway Subcommittee with Board member Stevens, hopes many issues will be sorted out at Friday's subcommittee meeting. There are conflicting ideas regarding how much of the existing subbase can be reclaimed and how much new material would need to be brought in. If significant amounts of new material are required, this would increase project costs substantially. Board member Miller said it may not be possible to resolve the "Big Dip" this year so a temporary solution may be needed in the interim. Mr. Lyon will present at least four (4) alternatives at the subcommittee meeting. Manager Schulz noted state engineers usually estimate the cost of completely rebuilding a road at about \$1,000,000 per mile. If that were the case for this project, it would cost in the range of \$3,000,000, which is almost double the budgeted amount. Mark Fournier lives on Union Brook Road and said many residents who regularly use this road are very disappointed with the many project delays to date. He said some of these could be attributed to COVID-19 but not all of them. If this project cannot be completed this year, it might be a good idea to patch some of the worst areas on the road before winter.

Board member Morse said one option is to tear up the road pavement and leave it as a gravel road prior to the completion of road reconstruction. Manager Schulz said this could be discussed at the subcommittee meeting. He noted there could be a significant cost in tearing up the road and letting it sit unpaved for a while. Manager Schulz said the preparation for this project has taken some time since it is very expensive with significant local tax dollars involved. It has been considered a priority to make sure the project was done correctly the first time even if this prolonged the process.

- b. Town Plan Update – Schedule Public Hearing.** Manager Schulz said the Planning Commission met recently (06/11/20) to discuss integrating into the revised Town Plan the recommended changes from the Select Board members. The revisions then were forwarded to the planning consultant the Planning Commission members engaged to assist them with the process. The finalized plan now is ready for distribution prior to the final public hearing to be held before the Select Board members can formally approve the document. Since the public hearing has to be warned for at least fifteen (15) days in advance, Manager Schulz suggested it be held at the beginning of the August 11, 2020 regular meeting. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to schedule the third public hearing for the revised Northfield Town Plan on Tuesday, August 11, 2020. Acting Chair Goodrich asked if there would be a separate document that would list the changes made throughout the document. Manager Schulz said there would be. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. Brown Public Library (BPL) Front Steps Repair Bids.** Board member Stevens has received another bid proposal for this project from Ziter Masonry (Barre, VT) to repair the library’s two sets of granite front steps for a total amount of \$8,475, which is less than the previous two bids. He noted the CIP budget for this project has a balance of about \$15,000. Board member Stevens, who also serves as Treasurer on the BPL Board of Trustees, therefore recommends awarding this project to Ziter Masonry. Acting Chair Goodrich asked if we have had any examples of their past work experience. Board member Stevens said they had done a number of projects on the Norwich University (NU) campus such as the Sullivan Museum, the new civilian dorms, etc. He said NU Director of Facilities Operations Bizhan Yahyazadeh confirmed he had been very pleased with their work. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to award the Brown Public Library front steps repair project to Ziter Masonry for a total amount of \$8,475. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- d. Recreation Committee Appointment.** Manager Schulz said Bethany Drum, who has assisted with a good number of Recreation Department fundraising and other activities over the years, has submitted a letter of interest for appointment to the Recreation Committee. The current committee members recommend her appointment. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Bethany Drum to the Recreation Committee. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT

- a. South Main Street Sidewalk Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members awarded the bid for this project at the last meeting (06/23/20). In addition, since the winning bid was much lower than originally anticipated, the Select Board members authorized him to contact the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans), which will be paying for about half of the project’s costs, to see if they would allow the project area to expand southward to include the area between the Washington Street and Central Street intersections. Manager Schulz contacted VTTrans about this possibility and they were receptive provided an environmental study be conducted of the new project area. It was agreed the study would be completed within thirty (30) days. If this schedule is kept, the sidewalk contractor (Josh Fenoff Siteworks) will start construction in about a month with project completion by the end of September 2020.
- b. Highway Department Update.** Manager Schulz said extensive and expensive repairs (±\$10,000) to the grader kept it out of service for about a week and a half but it is now back in service. Since its return, the following roads were graded: Murphy Road, Wallace Road, McCain Road, Boardman Road, Bower Road, Water Street Extension, Dole Hill Road, Smith Hill Road, Lovers Lane, and portions of Terry Hill Road. Next up will be Stoney Brook Road, West Hill Road, and Hallstrom Road. In addition, a layer of gravel will be put down on about two (2) miles of Stony Brook Road.

The paving schedule will be finalized soon with the anticipated roads being Shaw Circle, Alpine Drive, Stagecoach Road, Winter Street, Fairgrounds Road, Summer Street, and Western Avenue. The total amount budgeted is \$140,000 and we have received a quote from Pike Industries. Other pavers will be contacted in case they can offer a lower price. Board member Miller noted paving work on Central Street is being postponed until after drainage issues are resolved. It is the same situation with Slate Avenue. Board member Stevens said a resident contacted him regarding the possibility of installing a bike lane on Central Street. Manager Schulz said we can look into this. Board member Morse felt that might affect roadside parking. Mr. Fournier agreed, saying the road is too narrow to support parking on both sides plus a dedicated bike lane. Mr. Fournier personally doesn't care much for such bike lanes as most bicyclists don't follow the rules of the road consistently, i.e. ignoring red lights and stop signs, etc.

- c. Norwich University (NU) Campus Reopening Update.** Manager Schulz included in the packets a memorandum from new NU President Mark C. Anarumo that provided the guidelines for reopening the campus to students for the Fall 2020 semester. This will include operating on-campus housing at reduced capacity; providing for a mix of in-class and remote learning; having regular COVID-19 testing in place for students, faculty, and staff; maintaining proper social distancing in classrooms, dining facilities, etc.; instituting campus-wide decontamination programs for all common facilities; mandating the wearing of face coverings/masks while on campus; etc. Since the NU campus will be at reduced capacity (50%-60%), Manager Schulz said this might cause some problems for the municipality since NU is the utility department's largest single customer. He added the Utility Commissioners anticipated this possibility when drafting the FY 2020/2021 utility budgets so the departments should be in fairly good shape in the near future. Another bonus is the State of Vermont has suspended the need to make payments on old utility bonds this year, which also should help in the short term. We will continue to monitor the situation. Board member Morse asked if President Anarumo had been in contact with Manager Schulz or other municipal officials before putting forth these guidelines. Manager Schulz said he has not spoken directly to President Anarumo but has been in contact with other NU officials. He hopes a future meeting of President Anarumo with Manager Schulz and/or Chair Maxwell can be scheduled in the near future. Board member Morse thinks the campus reopening plan should have been discussed with the municipality before it was released. He hopes there will be better "Town and Gown" communication in future.
- d. South Main Street Bump.** Manager Schulz said the bump in the road by Plumley Armory originally was scheduled to be repaired by the end of June 2020. However, Norwich University was unable to secure a contractor in time. He was contacted today and informed the work should commence early next week. When this is confirmed, public notifications will be made regarding detours around the work area, etc.
- e. Camp Wihakowi Dam Removal Project.** Manager Schulz said he and Highway Foreman Trent Tucker met with Michele Braun (Friends of the Winooski) and the contractor for this project earlier today. There was a discussion of the amount of material to be removed from the site and where it would go. The bulk of riverbed material will be trucked out of Northfield to an area off a state highway. A smaller amount (8,000 to 10,000 cubic yards) will be delivered to a private party on Winch Hill Road, where it will be used to enlarge a parking area. The project contractor (Hilltop Construction) will not subcontract the hauling but use its own vehicles. Manager Schulz felt this should lessen the impact on the project's access roads. There probably will be about thirty (30) daily trips up Winch Hill Road, which is much fewer than originally thought. Conditions will be included in the overweight permit to limit damage to the roads. Manager Schulz said the project is going forward with only a few logistical matters to work out. Board member Morse felt it was unfortunate that the riverbed material is being shipped out of Northfield when it could have been repurposed for use on our backroads. Manager Schulz said that possibility had been the topic of a long debate before Board member Morse joined the board this past March. The eventual consensus was that it would not be worth the time and effort to store and separate the material when the amount of usable road material was so uncertain. A lot of Japanese knotweed will be removed from the riverbed along with gravel and that requires special precautions for proper disposal.

Acting Chair Goodrich asked about the bridge that will be used to access the worksite. Manager Schulz said VTrans inspected the bridge and found no issues. The bridge is rated to handle the expected workload. This topic was brought up again at today's meeting and there was an assurance that the contractor's liability insurance would cover any damage to the bridge or any access roads. The present condition of the bridge and access roads will be fully documented before any work commences.

- f. **Stony Brook Road.** Board member Miller noted Stony Brook Road is scheduled to have a new layer of road gravel installed. He asked who would be bringing in the gravel and would a roller be rented. Manager Schulz said gravel bids are still being solicited and a roller would be rented. Board member Miller asked if the roller would be retained for work on other backroads. Manager Schulz said it depends on the future roadwork schedule. It could become expensive to have the roller sitting unused at the garage so it might be more cost effective to return the equipment and rent again at another time. Board member Miller felt this could be another topic for discussion at the upcoming Highway Subcommittee meeting.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Central Street Sidewalk Letter.** Acting Chair Goodrich asked if the letters to Central Street property owners regarding the eastside sidewalk and future drainage work have been sent out. Manager Schulz confirmed they were sent out last week.
- b. **Composting Locations.** Now that food waste can no longer be put in the trash, Acting Chair Goodrich asked about options for disposing of it properly. Manager Schulz said the primary location remains the Stump Dump located at the Randolph landfill, which is open every Saturday morning. He has been trying to find a local drop location but it has been difficult. He noted many municipalities that set up their own drop sites have had to backtrack as they have attracted bears, rodents, etc. Acting Chair Goodrich was relieved to learn that leftover meat and bones can still be put in the regular trash.
- c. **Municipal Pool Renovations.** Since the municipal pool was not opened this summer due to COVID-19 concerns, this was thought to be a good time to perform long-needed renovations. Acting Chair Goodrich asked about the status of this. Manager Schulz said it has been difficult to find contractors to perform some of the work. He has been able to hire someone to fix the back wall but not for the skimmer work, etc. However, Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi has been working on this project and he is confident all the renovations can be done this year.

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

X. EXECUTIVE SESSION Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss personnel and legal matters with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:45 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:25 p.m. No action was taken.

XI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

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 28, 2020.