

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of July 22, 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, Ron Lyon, PE (DuBois & King), Steve Davis, Dave Hanna, Mark Fournier, and Jeff Ott.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

III. DISCUSSION

- a. Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Board member Miller, who serves on the Highway Subcommittee with Board member Stevens, said at the subcommittee's last meeting (07/20/20) Project Engineer Ron Lyon presented five (5) alternative project scopes with cost estimates. The options range in scope and cost from just installing a two-inch (2") overlay (\$1,976,400) to total roadway reconstruction (\$4,364,900). Board member Miller said the consensus of those attending the meeting was to recommend Alternative 1 to the Select Board members. This would entail "two-inch (2") coarse milling with two-inch (2") overlay (1.5" and 0.5" lifts), emulsified asphalt, and aggregate shoulders" for a cost estimate of \$2,148,800. When the estimated cost of repairing the "Big Dip" area (\$400,000) is omitted, the cost estimate is very close to the voter-approved bond amount (\$1,700,000) for this project. The project also would have engineering costs of about \$39,000. Since these figures were estimates, Board member Miller said actual project costs might be lower based on bid results. It was noted the reasoning behind postponing the "Big Dip" work is that the recent detailed engineering study determined its causes and possible solutions, making it now more feasible for the municipality to apply (successfully) for state grant funds to cover some if not most of the expense.

Board member Morse feels the project cost estimate should include a contingency amount of at least ten percent (10%) because a project of this size can be expected to have cost overruns after ground is broken. Mr. Lyon said he usually does include contingency funds but, in this case, he instead chose to err on the side of caution by estimating the cost of various project aspects at the high end. There also are a number of uncertainties regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic might affect the current bidding climate. It is possible that the bid amounts could be lower than expected due to construction companies needing the work. There also is the chance the bid amounts could be higher than expected with construction companies tied up with projects previously delayed by COVID-19 concerns. Mr. Lyon said he would work with Manager Schulz and the Highway Subcommittee on the RFP document. It might be necessary to cut back on some project features as non-vital.

Board member Stevens doesn't feel the 2" milling would be sufficient to survive Vermont winters. He felt 4" milling would be much more effective in the long run. Board member Miller agrees 4" milling would be preferable but the recommendation ultimately came down to cost. Doubling the milling depth would add about \$500,000 in project costs. Board member Miller felt additional layers of pavement could be laid down later where needed. Board member Goodrich also had wondered if additional layers of pavement could be added later at a lower cost.

Dave Hanna said the road area by his house (on Hallstrom Road near the Union Brook Road intersection) already has such thin pavement that the 2" milling wouldn't be sufficient. In addition, his house is so close to roadway that he is concerned his foundation might be damaged by heavy construction. Board member Miller said the stretch of road by Mr. Hanna's house was one of four (4) identified problem areas that would receive full depth road reconstruction. Mr. Lyon confirmed this and added there also was consideration of installing a road underdrain at that location that would address the drainage issues. He said the construction methods used in this area certainly would take into consideration the proximity of Mr. Hanna's house to the roadway. There also would be regular communication with Mr. Hanna during the construction process to address and allay any concerns he might have.

Mark Fournier is concerned about the number of delays this project has had already. He noted the bond vote was held last September and the longer the process goes on, the more the costs keep rising. If the project is delayed another year, the price might become prohibitive. He suggested there might be some cost savings during the construction phase if the Town Highway crew could assist with such tasks as trucking road material to work sites, etc. Mr. Fournier feels the construction phase needs to get started this year even if that means putting off the "Big Dip" fix, especially if grant funds are possible. Chair Maxwell confirmed that with a "Big Dip" engineering study in hand, a successful grant application is more likely.

Jeff Ott believes he heard numerous times over the winter that the approved bond amount would be more than sufficient. It now seems the Town Manager and Select Board members are not so sure and the project might need to be postponed or scaled back. Chair Maxwell said this is a big project so an engineer was hired early in the process to make sure everything was done correctly from the start. Unfortunately, during this engineering phase a lot of new problems were discovered, which resulted in higher cost estimates.

Manager Schulz said the next step is for him to work with Mr. Lyon in finalizing and distributing the project RFP in order to determine actual project costs. As indicated earlier, Mr. Lyon did use higher cost evaluations for some parts of the project so it is likely contingency funds are already spread throughout the current cost estimates. The Select Board members now need to decide which alternative project scope should be used when the RFP is drafted. Chair Maxwell felt it might be best to obtain a separate estimate for fixing the "Big Dip" even if the current consensus is to postpone this work. Manager Schulz said this could be included as an addendum to the RFP.

Regarding the aforementioned uncertain bid climate, Chair Maxwell noted the recent winning bid for the South Main Street Sidewalk Project was much lower than had been expected. This allowed for the project area to be expanded southward by six hundred feet (600'). Therefore, nothing is certain at this time. Board member Goodrich asked if some of the more expensive alternatives could be added as bidding options in order to obtain actual costs. Mr. Lyon said it was possible to include 4" pavement as an option (rather than just the anticipated 2" pavement). However, due to complexity of the "Big Dip" problem, he felt it best to exclude this from the RFP for now as drafting this option might delay putting the RFP out.

Steve Davis said this whole project originated about four (4) years ago when he circulated a petition among residents who regularly drive Union Brook Road asking that something be done to address its deteriorating condition. He felt we really can't get too concerned about possible cost overruns until the bids are in hand. Whichever project alternative is chosen, Mr. Davis believes Northfield will get a much-improved road when construction is done. He also felt some frost heaves were inevitable unless total road reconstruction is done and the cost estimates indicate this to be too expensive. Mr. Davis does feel once the work is completed, there will need to be regular maintenance and road resurfacing in order to keep it in good condition for years to come. He felt delayed maintenance and neglect were responsible for its current condition.

Board member Stevens asked if reducing the milling to one inch (1") might significantly cut project costs. Mr. Lyon said there really are no "good" areas over the four-mile length of Union Brook Road but some areas are better than others and might need less work. Perhaps he could work with Highway Foreman Trent Tucker on a list of such road segments. Board member Miller felt not doing a full job on the whole road would only be putting off needed work to a future Select Board. He also felt it would be unfair to road residents expecting significant improvements.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to authorize Manager Schulz to put the construction phase of the Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project out to bid. The RFP would focus on Alternative 1 and exclude the "Big Dip" repairs. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled): There was none.

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

The Board adjourned at 4:52 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.