

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of September 8, 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, Mark C. Anarumo (President, Norwich University), Daphne Larkin (Director of Media Relations & Community Affairs, Norwich University), Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Lynn Doney (Recreation Committee), Bethany Drum (Recreation Committee), Jeff Ott, Mark Fournier, Merry Shernock, Carolyn Stevens, Phil Susmann, William Clements, and Tim Swartz.

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. Mark C. Anarumo, President, Norwich University.** President Anarumo had addressed the Select Board members at a previous meeting (08/11/20) regarding the plans he and other Norwich University (NU) administrators had developed before the staggered return of NU students to campus. Now that the students are back and classes have begun, he would like to provide an update. President Anarumo said as of this past weekend, over 4,700 COVID-19 tests have been taken of NU students, faculty, and staff and there have only been five (5) positive results. Of these, four (4) have gone through medical clearance while one still is going through the protocols. There is no evidence that any of the persons testing positive infected anyone else. President Anarumo believes NU is doing extremely well, which is largely due to the procedures and policies put in place before the student arrival as well as the regular testing afterwards. The original plan was to perform seven hundred (700) tests per week but that has been increased to twelve hundred (1,200), which is about four times more than the state requires. Although there were some concerns about social distancing, etc. over this past holiday weekend, President Anarumo was pleased to see NU students performing their own internal patrols to prevent visitors from coming onto campus or students leaving campus. He noted the University of New Hampshire had a bad Labor Day weekend with no-mask gatherings, etc. so this is a real concern for colleges and universities. President Anarumo has gotten into the habit of taking neighborhood walks in the early evening and has been pleased to see off-campus students acting in full compliance with NU guidelines regarding mask wearing, social distancing, etc.

President Anarumo said the NU campus still remains closed and he plans to wait until Governor Phil Scott provides his recommendations for Vermont colleges and universities next Monday (09/14/20). It seems all the Vermont campuses have been doing well so it is likely there will be some easing of the current rules. President Anarumo plans to base his own decision on the state recommendation but also will check first with the Select Board members to see if they would be alright with NU students coming into the community to patronize local stores, restaurants, etc. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board could hold a special meeting on this topic next week (if needed). He asked President Anarumo how he envisioned reopening the NU campus. President Anarumo said there would be a gradual approach, starting with allowing local restaurants to make on-campus deliveries of pizza, sandwiches, etc. Then NU upperclassmen would be allowed to go off-campus. If this goes well, this program would be expanded to include the rest of the student body. Board member Morse noted there are some on-campus businesses that Northfield residents would like to patronize, especially the Dunkin' Donuts and the dry cleaners. Would that be possible in the near future? President Anarumo said he would defer to the Select Board members on this. It does seem to be fair to allow this if the students are permitted to use downtown services. Board member Morse then thanked President Anarumo for all his good work to date.

Board member Stevens said there is a plaque near the Engineering building that was supposed to have been dedicated last April but this was postponed due to the pandemic. There have been suggestions that it could be done during this fall's "virtual homecoming" but Board member Stevens is unsure how this could work. President Anarumo said it could be a remote event this fall or the faculty could decide to wait until next spring when an in-person event is more likely. He would leave the decision up to them. Board member Stevens will confer with his colleagues and let President Anarumo know their views on this. Board member Goodrich expressed her gratitude for the update. President Anarumo said he would be happy to address the Select Board members anytime they felt the need. He then asked them and community members to keep an eye on the NU website (www.norwich.edu) for up-to-date COVID-19 and other information. Chair Maxwell then thanked President Anarumo for the valuable information provided tonight.

- b. Sally Davidson, Recreation Committee: Park Use Application.** Ms. Davidson had earlier approached the Select Board members (07/28/20) regarding her proposal to change the current fee structure for reserving facilities in the municipal parks. Currently, those groups wishing to reserve the ballfields, pavilions, etc. are asked to provide a \$100 deposit. If there are no problems at the site due to the event, the \$100 would be fully reimbursed. Ms. Davidson would like to change this to a \$150 deposit with only half of this amount reimbursable. The other \$75 would be used as revenue for the Recreation Department to cover operating expenses. Ms. Davidson noted this charge is only for groups who want to reserve fields and/or facilities for their exclusive use. This does not affect those who want to have a family picnic in the park or hold a pick-up basketball game. A revised application form was in the Select Board packets and changes from the current form are highlighted in yellow. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the new reservation form with the new non-refundable fee. Board member Morse asked, for example, if a local group wanted to reserve the volleyball court in the Northfield Falls Park for weekly matches, would they have to apply and submit a \$150 for each match or would one payment cover the whole season. Ms. Davidson said the form allows for multiple days for the same event so only one application form and fee is required. Board member Goodrich would like this clarified on the form. Ms. Davidson will make the change. Board member Morse asked how the process works. Ms. Davidson said the reservation form is available on the Recreation Committee's webpage (<http://northfield-vt.gov/text/Recreation.htm>) on the municipal website. The form should be downloaded, filled out, and delivered to the Town Manager's Office with the deposit check. If there is no conflict with previously-scheduled events, the request is approved and the form returned to the applicant.

Board member Miller noted a ban on tobacco products in the parks and asked if this was new. Ms. Davidson thought that already was approved policy. Manager Schulz will check on this. Ms. Davidson noted there would be no charge for school-related activities. Board member Goodrich asked if a non-profit organization holding a fundraiser would be charged the fee. Ms. Davidson said that would be the Select Board's decision. Board member Goodrich would like some consistency regarding who is and who is not charged the fee. She also is surprised that the municipality rents out the pool for private functions. Manager Schulz said this has been done in the past in order to bring in additional revenue to help cover the costs of operating the pool in the summer. Whichever group does the renting must hire a sufficient number of lifeguards, have insurance coverage, etc. Ms. Davidson pointed out that the Recreation Committee has nothing to do with the operation of the municipal pool. Board member Morse asked what would happen if a group is denied a reservation. Is there an appeal process? Ms. Davidson said in the past the only reason to deny an application is that the field and/or facility already has been booked. Manager Schulz said he would review the situation if any group feels it is being treated unfairly. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. Sally Davidson, Recreation Committee: Trunk or Treat.** Ms. Davidson noted Halloween falls on a Saturday this year and she asked if the Select Board members would allow for Trunk or Treat to be held this year on the Common if social distancing, face covering, and other COVID-19 rules were observed. Chair Maxwell said he looks to the State of Vermont for guidance when it comes to allowing large groups of people to congregate. He asked how many participated in the event last year. Ms. Davidson estimated about four hundred (400) children over a three-hour period.

Chair Maxwell asked if this event really could be held this year in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions. Ms. Davidson said she hoped the Select Board would authorize blocking off all of Depot Square to vehicle traffic during the event. This would allow for proper social distancing between participants and the vehicles where candy is distributed. In addition, children taking part would be required to wear face coverings. Those handing out the candy would also be required to wear face coverings as well as gloves. They would hand out the candy rather than have the children reach into the bag (as before). Board member Morse feels this could work but he doesn't agree with the need to close off all of Depot Square. He believes the south side should be sufficient. Board member Stevens agrees with this. Chair Maxwell asked how many vehicle occupants took part in the distribution last year. Ms. Davidson said about fifteen (15). Chair Maxwell said if the vehicles angle parked in the spaces by the Common interior, they should all fit with proper distancing. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to allow the Recreation Committee to hold a "Truck or Treat" event on the Northfield Common on Saturday, October 31, 2020 and to close off the south side of Depot Square from through traffic during the event. The Recreation Committee will work with Manager Schulz on any further logistics needed to conduct this event in a safe and healthy manner. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IV. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. Trent Tucker, Highway Foreman.** Mr. Tucker said the department has been operating well recently and there had been considerable road grading, roadside trees trimmed, and other work done in the Union Brook Road area in preparation for that project. Mr. Tucker said the Second and Third Covered Bridges on Cox Brook Road would be under repair over the next couple days. The road will be closed to through traffic on Wednesday and Thursday but there will be appropriate signage to reroute traffic to the detour using Aseltine Road. In fact, a special electric sign has been rented for this purpose. In addition, winter sand has been stockpiled and is ready for the first snowfall. Manager Schulz said Northeast Material Group will be delivering the crushed stone to the Falls Pit soon. He asked them if they could deliver material to Stony Brook Road for the resurfacing work there but the additional delivery cost did not make it feasible. Manager Schulz contacted Pike Industries and they will deliver the road material to Stony Brook Road at a lower price. He and Mr. Tucker also agree the Pike material is better suited to this type of project than what would be available from Northeast Material Group. Mr. Tucker confirmed the Pike road material does better for dust control and thus would require less calcium chloride. Chair Maxwell asked how much material would be purchased from Pike Industries. Mr. Tucker said about four thousand (4,000) yards. Board member Miller noted the Select Board dedicated about \$90,000 for gravel road resurfacing so this should be well within budget. He also noted the Highway Subcommittee discussed this matter earlier and agreed the Northeast Material Group's crushed gravel would be better suited for winter and Mud Season use rather than for this resurfacing project. Manager Schulz confirmed the subcommittee reached this conclusion after some discussion. Manager Schulz then stated the Camp Wihakowi Dam removal project is just about completed (as indicated in a recent *Times Argus* article). The amount of riverbed material transported to a business on Winch Hill Road was much less than originally planned.

Board member Stevens asked about the purchase of 224 yards of gravel from McCullough Crushing. Mr. Tucker said this material was crushed by members of the Highway crew at McCullough's pit right off Interstate 89 Exit 6. The crushed material then was transported in municipal trucks and delivered to the Falls Pit stockpile. Board member Stevens asked if the crushed stone to be purchased from Pike Industries and Northeast Material Group will meet the municipality's specifications. Mr. Tucker said it would if it were tested. Board member Stevens would like this done. Manager Schulz will have this done and will forward the results to the Select Board members.

Chair Maxwell asked if there were any problems with the Highway vehicles and/or equipment. Mr. Tucker said the roadside mower was acting up today but he did not think it was anything serious. It can be a temperamental machine on occasion. The MV sidewalk sweeper has been in the Milton VT repair shop for a couple months but should be back in time for the snow removal season. Mr. Tucker said a discussion was needed regarding which sidewalks will not be plowed by the MV this winter as some are in such poor condition that they actually damage the machine.

Chair Maxwell asked if there were any other challenges for the Highway Department before winter set in. Mr. Tucker said he didn't see any. In fact, the new salt truck should be delivered in the next month or so. Manager Schulz thought that was good news. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Tucker for tonight's positive report.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **August 25, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **September 3, 2020 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #05-21.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #05-21 in the amount of \$545,214.72. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through August 23, 2020.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$94,243.63. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz said all has been going well since the Select Board authorized him at last week's special meeting (09/03/20) to execute the project contract with J. Hutchins, Inc. He has been working with J. Hutchins management and he anticipates signing the contract tomorrow and issuing the Notice to Proceed this Friday (09/11/20). A prestart meeting will be held on site next week and such issues as staging areas, material stockpile locations, etc. will be discussed. Construction will commence soon after. Board member Morse looks forward to the project starting but hopes all safety measures will be taken throughout. Board member Stevens asked who would oversee the contractor's work. Manager Schulz said Project Engineer Ron Lyon will have DuBois & King staff members on site a couple days each week. Manager Schulz also has asked Mr. Tucker to keep an eye on things and immediately report any concerns. The DuBois & King team will be present for all new stages in the project such as the start of paving, etc. Board members Miller and Goodrich were pleased with the updated information. Chair Maxwell looks forward to future reports as the project develops. Mark Fournier lives on Union Brook Road and he appreciates all the work done so far and looks forward to construction starting.
- b. **Northfield Mask Requirement Discussion.** At the last regular meeting (08/25/20), a couple Select Board members asked Manager Schulz to look into the possibility of the Select Board taking action that would encourage/compel/mandate local compliance with the State of Vermont's face mask directive. Board member Morse noted Vermont has become a shining example for the nation on how taking proper action can drastically reduce the number of positive COVID-19 tests. Although he would like one hundred percent (100%) local compliance, Board member Morse knows some people are unable or unwilling to wear masks for medical reasons, etc. He also sees no reason for a local resolution that would have "no teeth" or an ordinance with penalties that could not be enforced. As an alternative, Board member Morse suggests installing signage around town, including perhaps a banner over Main Street, that would remind people of the need to wear a face covering and take other precautions when in public. This gentle reminder would be a good way to promote and encourage local mask use.

Board member Stevens feels a number of local businesses have not been as rigid as they should be in requiring their employees and patrons to wear masks. It might be a good idea if Health Officer Lawton Rutter (who also serves as Emergency Management Director) would go around to recalcitrant businesses and remind them of their obligations to the community. Board member Stevens feels the City of Montpelier has been more pro-active in confronting non-compliant businesses and this has shown considerable results.

Board member Miller is skeptical of ordinances that cannot be enforced. However, he would like steps taken to encourage local businesses to require mask use by whomever is on their premises. Manager Schulz doesn't feel Mr. Rutter could compel compliance by business owners in the absence of a strong health order. He thinks Board member Morse's idea of putting up signs and banners to better educate the public is a good idea. Board member Goodrich believes anyone who doesn't know the health benefits of mask wearing and social distancing by this time must be "living in a foxhole." Unfortunately, there are some people who will refuse to wear masks in public no matter what the Select Board says or does. She doesn't believe a resolution or ordinance is needed. Chair Maxwell said that appears to be the Select Board consensus at this time. Instead, there seems to be support for a campaign of local awareness making use of municipal resources and property. Board member Morse noted Stowe, Vermont has put up such signage and the compliance rate there is very good.

Carolyn Stevens is disappointed the Select Board members will not make a stronger statement regarding the need for full compliance with the statewide mask mandate. She feels some residents might be swayed to make a better effort if such a statement was made. Chair Maxwell took some exception to the perception that the Select Board members have been inactive during this pandemic. He himself has made numerous postings on Front Porch Forum and other sites stressing from the beginning the seriousness of this crisis, the need to take proper precautions, and specifying what municipal and other local assistance is available to Northfield residents. Mark Fournier agrees with the Select Board decision not to issue a local resolution or ordinance as he feels it is not local government's responsibility to force compliance with the state mandate. It is one thing to encourage people to wear masks in public, etc. but Mr. Fournier doesn't feel people's behavior can be changed in this manner.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Economic Development Director.** Manager Schulz reported that after a long search and several interviews with qualified candidates, the municipality has hired an Economic Development Director (EDD). The position was offered to Jon Ignatowski and he has accepted. Mr. Ignatowski has considerable experience in community organization and local economic development and will start working for the municipality on Tuesday, September 15, 2020. Lists of guidelines and local goals will be developed that will help determine what Mr. Ignatowski will be expected to accomplish as the Northfield's first EDD. Carolyn Stevens from the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) is very pleased with this hiring and pledged NCDN will do all it can to assist Mr. Ignatowski with his new responsibilities.
- b. COVID-19 Grant Applications.** Manager Schulz has applied for several COVID-19 state and federal grants in order to obtain reimbursement for municipal expenses related to the pandemic. This includes an application to FEMA for \$40,000 to cover past and future coronavirus-related expenses. Unfortunately, even if the FEMA application is successful, it probably will be some time before the funds reach Northfield. Another grant he has applied for is a state program that would provide \$16,000 to cover the expense of digitalizing Northfield's land records. This would allow these records to be accessed remotely and result in less foot traffic to the Town Clerk's Office. Manager Schulz said he is taking advantage of every grant opportunity he has found. Board member Stevens, who serves as Treasurer on the Brown Public Library (BPL) Board of Trustees, asked if it is possible for BPL to apply for such a grant to cover its COVID-19 expenses, i.e. face masks, hand sanitizers, disinfectants, etc. Manager Schulz didn't see any reason why they couldn't work together on this. Board member Stevens will create an itemized list of past and future expenses.
- c. Cross Brothers Dam Removal.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) continues to look for state and federal funds to cover the expense of this project. If the funding comes together soon, it is possible the actual dam removal would take place next summer.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Brown Public Library Front Steps Repair.** Board member Stevens said Ziter Masonry started work on the repair job last week. They have accomplished much already but still have some work left to do.

- b. Free Face Mask Distribution.** Board member Stevens asked if the free face masks provided to the municipality through the Masks on VT program have been distributed. Manager Schulz said nearly all of the masks allotted for Northfield have arrived and Mr. Rutter has distributed some already to state-housing residents at Dogwood Glen, to senior living facilities, etc. He next will work with other groups, such as the Northfield Mutual Aid Task Force, to make sure the rest of them are distributed properly.
 - c. South Main Street Sidewalk Replacement Project.** Board member Goodrich asked when this project, which was originally scheduled for the beginning of this month, would begin. Manager Schulz spoke to the contractor (Josh Fenoff Siteworks) and was told they were just finishing up another job but should be here by the end of this week.
 - d. Main Street Bridge.** Chair Maxwell asked for a status report regarding the proposed rehab/replacement of this deteriorating bridge. Manager Schulz said the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has already started the first phase of this project, which is planning and scoping. This includes determining the impact on the community should this bridge be out of service for some time, possible detour routes, a community needs assessment, etc. When this has been completed, VTrans will present the municipality with four (4) or five (5) alternate ways to proceed. These options probably will include doing nothing (unlikely), total bridge replacement, and some forms of partial bridge rehabilitation. VTrans will ask the Select Board members what the community's preference would be. VTrans usually accepts the local decision but can try to influence it by adjusting the local match amount based on how extensive the work would be, etc. Once the decision has been made, engineering plans will be developed. Manager Schulz said the planning/scoping phase usually takes from ten (10) months to a year and it started here this spring. He will contact VTrans about the current timeline and report back to the Select Board members at the next meeting.
 - e. Household Hazardous Waste Collection.** Chair Maxwell said Mountain Alliance and Casella Waste Management will be holding the second of two (2) collection events this year behind the Northfield Fire Department (128 Wall Street) on Saturday, September 19, 2020, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This event is open only for residents of Randolph, Braintree, Brookfield, Roxbury, and Northfield. The full list of materials that will and will not be accepted is on the municipal website and posted on Front Porch Forum.
 - f. First Installment of 2020 Northfield Property Taxes.** Chair Maxwell noted the first installment of local property taxes is due Friday, September 18, 2020. He would like Manager Schulz to keep the Select Board informed regarding the collection rate as this will have a big impact on the municipality's revenue stream in coming months.
 - g. Northfield Utility Departments Status.** Chair Maxwell would like a report at the next meeting regarding how well the utility departments are faring during this pandemic.
 - h. Next Select Board Regular Meeting.** Chair Maxwell said the next regular meeting (09/22/20) will be a hybrid meeting held in the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library. Those who want to attend in person can do so but there also will be accommodations for those who would prefer to attend remotely through Go-to-Meeting.
- X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).** There was none.
- XI. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:55 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 September 22, 2020.