

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of September 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, Mark C. Anarumo (President, Norwich University), Daphne Larkin (Director of Media Relations & Community Affairs, Norwich University), Jon Ignatowski (Economic Development Director), John Helfant (Police Chief), Kaitlyn Keating (Northfield Community Development Network), Carlos Pinkham (Northfield Community Development Network), Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), Catherine Johnston (Northfield Equality Awareness and Justice Group), Paulette Gagne, Deborah Zuaro, Jeff Ott, Mark Fournier, Scott Sabol, and Lynn Doney.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Members of the public had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Mark C. Anarumo, President, Norwich University (NU).** President Anarumo has addressed the Select Board members twice previously on NU's plans and procedures regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. He announced the most recent round of Coronavirus screening yielded zero positive tests. President Anarumo said NU has conducted 6,111 tests to date and there have been only five (5) positive results. There has been no evidence of any contagion. There is one current NU student with COVID-19 but that person is out-of-state learning remotely. Since the last time he spoke to the Select Board (09/08/20), the restrictions on dormitory-residing students leaving campus have been loosened. He said up to thirty percent (30%) of the student body can leave campus at one time (with permission) but they are restricted to travelling within Washington and Orange counties. 1,200 COVID-19 tests of NU students, faculty, and staff members are taken each week and the numbers are being watched to determine whether additional easing of current restrictions is possible. If all goes well with the next round of testing next week, the percentage of NU students permitted off campus might be increased as well as the range they are allowed to travel. However, President Anarumo would keep the Burlington area off-limits for the time being. As for Spring 2021 classes, the current plan is to repeat the procedures put in place for this year with early, staggered student reception with testing, quarantines, etc. However, this might change if there are significant changes in the COVID-19 situation before then.

Daphne Larkin, NU's Director of Media Relations & Community Affairs, added that there are four (4) temperature sensors located on the NU campus. One is designed to scan multiple persons at one time and is located by the NU dining halls. Chair Maxwell asked if the campus was still closed to visitors. President Anarumo said that was another matter that would be reconsidered after next week's round of testing. Ms. Larkin said allowing food delivery from local restaurants would be considered first. Carlos Pinkham said a number of NU emeritus professors and alumni would like to visit campus to see former colleagues, etc. Is there any plan to allow campus visits to those who have gone through the protocols and are virus-free? President Anarumo said there are plans to allow selected guests to enter campus by way of Roberts Hall. If this does go forward, it would be announced next week with other changes. Chair Maxwell and the other Select Board members then thanked President Anarumo and Ms. Larkin for being present tonight with the valuable information. They look forward to the next update.

- b. Jon Ignatowski, Economic Development Director.** Manager Schulz was pleased to announce that Mr. Ignatowski started work last week (09/15/20) as Northfield's first Economic Development Director (EDD). He spent his first week familiarizing himself with recent community history, the local economic situation, and developing preliminary plans for economic growth. Mr. Ignatowski said he was excited to be here as Northfield EDD and he has been researching state and federal funding sources for local economic projects. He also has been creating a database of current businesses as his responsibilities include helping existing businesses to expand as well as bringing new businesses to town. Mr. Ignatowski hopes to be able to present ideas for possible new businesses at the next regular meeting (10/13/20). Chair Maxwell said it was great to have Mr. Ignatowski here and it was good to see him hitting the ground running. Board member Morse was on the hiring committee that selected Mr. Ignatowski for the position and he also was pleased to see him at work. He added that the Farmers Market would be a good venue for Mr. Ignatowski to introduce himself to the community. Mr. Ignatowski plans to attend both of the remaining outdoor markets (09/29/20 and 10/06/20). The other Select Board members also expressed their good wishes to Mr. Ignatowski. Kaitlyn Keating from the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN), which spearheaded the effort to create this position, also welcomed him to Northfield and said several groups in addition to NCDN are interested in meeting with him soon to discuss their own suggestions for local economic growth. She noted it was a long process to first authorize and then fill this position. Carolyn Stevens from NCDN also is delighted to have Mr. Ignatowski here and is looking forward to working with him. Chair Maxwell said now that Mr. Ignatowski has assumed the EDD position, his future appearances before the Select Board will be included on the agenda as a "Department Head Report." He then thanked him again for tonight's presentation.
- c. Dufresne Group: South Main Street Stormwater Project.** Manager Schulz was hoping to have representatives from the Dufresne Group here tonight to discuss this future project but they were unavailable. He will put them on the next agenda. The goal of this proposed project is to replace storm drains on South Main Street and some side streets in order to divert stormwater into the collection facility at Holland Place behind the American Legion building. This would allow for the elimination of the last remaining CSO (combined sewer overflow) on East Street and also reduce the amount of stormwater reaching the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF). The State of Vermont is covering about half of the expense for engineering this project. The timing of the construction phase of this project depends on cost estimates and when additional state funding would become available. The State probably would provide up to thirty percent (30%) of the construction costs and the municipality therefore would have to bond for the balance. Board member Stevens asked if the project might still begin next year. Manager Schulz said this was unlikely unless all the funding came together in a real short amount of time. Board member Miller asked if some preliminary work (i.e. new catch basins, etc.) could be started on Slate Avenue now in order to allow the road to be paved next year. Manager Schulz said the engineer's updated plans might allow for this. Board member Morse hopes any road paving along South Main Street will occur after this project. He doesn't like to see new pavement torn up. Chair Maxwell believes most of the work will focus on the side streets on the eastside of the road (i.e. Slate Avenue, Elm Street, and Prospect Street) so damage to the main road will be limited.

V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. Police Chief John Helfant.** Chief Helfant said as with the general Northfield community, the Northfield Police Department (NPD) has been dealing well with the COVID-19 pandemic. The town has been mostly quiet as residents seem to have "hunkered down" during this crisis. The new cruiser purchased to replace the totaled 2017 Ford Explorer is now in service. Chief Helfant was very impressed with how the dealership (MHQ, Marlborough MA) put the vehicle together.

He also announced that the new body cameras have been purchased and are in use. The previous body cameras were outdated and could no longer be serviced by the supplier. As for personnel matters, Chief Helfant said full-time officer Levi Willey has been deployed to domestic duty in the armed forces with an expected return date of February 2022. Officer Logan Potkowski is in a similar situation with expected deployment in October 2020. He is expected to be gone for one year. Chief Helfant announced that a new part-time officer (Peter Vosburgh) has been hired and he will be expected to help fill some shifts in the absence of officers Willey and Potkowski. Board member Stevens is concerned that with two full-time officers in military service, the other full-time officers might try to fill too many shifts themselves and thus suffer fatigue. Chief Helfant said there is a limit on how many hours the officers can put in over a two-week work period. He also will try to fill shifts with part-timers as much as possible. He said the new police union contract is more flexible on this and has helped to reduce overtime costs. Chief Helfant also noted that federal law requires the deployed officers' positions be held until their return. Board member Morse noted the NPD officers have had to respond to some serious incidents recently and he was personally impressed with their efficiency and professionalism in handling such difficult situations. Chair Maxwell echoed this sentiment and said he is proud to live in a community with such an exceptional police department.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **September 8, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #06-21.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #06-21 in the amount of 72,462.86. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through September 6, 2020.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$92,289.77. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **2020 Grand List Errors & Omissions.** Manager Schulz said in the packets was a memorandum from Listers Chair Thomas Alsheimer asking that the 2020 Grand List amount be reduced by \$6,800. It seems the owner of an un-landed mobile home on Kirkpatrick Lane had it and two (2) small outbuildings demolished in November 2019 but failed to inform the Listers. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to reduce the 2020 Grand List amount by \$6,800. Board member Goodrich recused herself on this matter as she and her siblings used to own the parcel in question. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Goodrich abstaining.**
- b. **Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz said the contractor for this project (J. Hutchins, Inc.) has started work and provided a schedule for the next few weeks. Manager Schulz put this information on Front Porch Forum but will repeat it now. In the first week (09/21/20 through 09/27/20) J. Hutchins will install signage, mark out the project layout, and bring equipment and material to the work site. The following three (3) weeks (09/28/20-10/19/20) will see the installation of cross culverts. After this is completed, underdrains will be installed. Manager Schulz said another pre-construction meeting will be held later this week with more information provided. Manager Schulz has learned J. Hutchins finished one of its other jobs a little early so it will be able to devote more resources to this one sooner than expected. Manager Schulz will continue to provide weekly updates on Front Porch Forum as activity picks up. Board member Goodrich would like a running total kept of funds spent on the project. Manager Schulz will do this. Chair Maxwell thanked Manager Schulz for the update on this.

- c. **Water Ordinance.** Manager Schulz said the Utility Commissioners have been working with him and Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi for some time on updating the old Village Water Ordinance. They now have a draft document ready for Select Board discussion and (hopefully) formal approval. It will be necessary to hold a public hearing prior to approval. As this requires a notice in the local newspaper at least fifteen (15) days in advance, the earliest the public hearing can be held in conjunction with a Select Board regular meeting is Tuesday, October 27, 2020. The proposed ordinance has updated regulations regarding new connections to the municipal water system with minimum pipe diameters, testing requirements, water pressure standards, etc. The ordinance also would clarify whether the municipality or the property owner will be held responsible for repairs to a failed waterline depending on the location of the problem, etc. The ordinance would set penalties for violations of its provisions and defines the rate system for municipal water users.

Board member Morse noted the ordinance requires the installation of backflow prevention devices on newly constructed waterlines. He asked if property owners would be required to install one if extensive rehabilitations are performed. Manager Schulz confirmed that was the case. Board member Morse asked if a renter left town before paying a water bill, would that become the responsibility of the landlord. Manager Schulz confirmed the water bill is tied to the property and not any one individual. Board member Morse would like that clarified in the section on user fees. Manager Schulz will review this to determine if this should be part of the ordinance or a separate policy statement.

Board member Goodrich noted the ordinance states, "Onsite wells will not be permitted for new construction where Town water supply is reasonably available, unless waived by the Select Board." She asked why the ordinance would allow case-by-case exceptions for this requirement. Manager Schulz said this was an attempt to create an appeals process if there is a disagreement between the property owner and the municipality. Board member Morse said a term like "reasonably" is often open to interpretation. He felt it was good to have an appeal process in case of special circumstances. Board member Goodrich said the ordinance would require permits to be obtained from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) if work is done within the State Highway right-of-way. Who would obtain the permit? Manager Schulz said it is the property owner's responsibility. Board member Goodrich would like that clarified in the ordinance. Chair Maxwell also had a few minor concerns he would like clarified with new language. Manager Schulz will make the requested changes and have a finalized document ready for public review prior to the public hearing (10/27/20).

- d. **Vermont Covered Bridge Society Patch Program.** Chair Maxwell received an email last week from the Vermont Covered Bridge Society (VCBS) asking for permission to put small tags known as "patches" on Northfield's covered bridges. They would display the society's website address and a "QR Code" for smart phones. The covered bridge visitor then would be able to access a dedicated webpage providing a brief history and other information concerning that particular covered bridge as well as other covered bridges in the area. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to allow the Vermont Covered Bridge Society to attach these patches on Northfield's covered bridges. Board member Morse reviewed the VCBS website and enjoyed viewing the images and other information on the area's covered bridges. He would like to see an expanded entry that would give the interesting background of the privately-owned Chamberlin Bridge off Stony Brook Road. The bridge is on the VCBS website but not listed alongside Northfield's five (5) other covered bridges. It is in a separate category along with other "Romantic Shelters." Board member Miller isn't too crazy about putting barcodes on our covered bridges but will not oppose the VCBS request.
Motion passed 5-0-0.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **South Main Street Sidewalk Project.** Manager Schulz said work began on this project last week. He was surprised the work began at the south end at the intersection with Central Street (rather than at Depot Square) but observed there has been good progress already. About six hundred feet (600') of old sidewalk has been removed along with the old curbing. New curbing is now being installed. The work will be done in 600'-700' sections and the project should be completed by the end of October. A letter was sent to South Main Street property owners in the project area informing them about the planned work and asking them to not disturb for several hours any newly-poured concrete at the end of their driveways.
- b. **Highway Paving.** Manager Schulz said the paving list for this year has been decided and will include Alpine Drive, Fairgrounds Road, Shaw Circle, Stagecoach Road, Summer Street, Traverse Street, Western Avenue, and Winter Street. The cost is in the budget and letters will be sent to property owners beforehand.
- c. **Covered Bridge Repairs, etc.** The Highway Department crew worked on all three (3) Cox Brook Road covered bridges last week. They also have been performing roadside mowing, especially along Union Brook Road in anticipation of the road reconstruction project. The resurfacing of gravel roads will begin soon starting with Stony Brook Road.
- d. **Property Tax Collections.** Manager Schulz said the first installment of 2020 property taxes was due last Friday (09/18/20). The collection rate seems to be about the same as this time last year with 34.97% collected to date compared to 35.35%. The remaining collection deadlines are November 13, 2020, February 12, 2021, and May 14, 2021.
- e. **Utility Department Revenues.** Manager Schulz said the water, sewer, and electric revenues through August 31, 2020 were a little lower than had been anticipated by the Utility Commissioners. He will keep the Select Board members informed on this.
- f. **COVID-19 Grant Funds.** The municipality received a \$14,560 grant from the State of Vermont for the digitalization of the last twenty (20) years of Northfield land records. The intent is to make the records available online and thus reduce foot traffic to the Town Clerk's Office. Manager Schulz also has applied for COVID-19 reimbursement funds from the State of Vermont and FEMA in order to cover additional costs related to the pandemic including masks, gloves, disinfectants, etc.
- g. **Main Street Bridge.** Manager Schulz contacted VTrans after the last meeting for an update on the timeline for the expected replacement/rehabilitation of this deteriorating bridge. He was informed VTrans is still conducting the first stage of the process (i.e. "scoping") but they hoped to have this completed within the next eight (8) to ten (10) months. There have been some delays due to COVID-19 concerns and Manager Schulz will keep in contact to make sure all stays on track.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Vermont COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program.** Board member Morse noted in the packets was a copy of an informational flyer regarding a state program that assists residents who have fallen behind in paying utility bills due to the pandemic. The same information was sent to all Northfield municipal water, sewer, and electric customers in their utility bills last week. The online application form is available at <https://publicservice.vermont.gov>

- b. Northfield Green Mountain Power (GMP) Customers.** Board member Morse said some Northfield residents who live outside the Northfield Electric Department (NED) service area and thus have their service power provided by GMP have seen frequent and lengthy power outages in recent years due to problems with GMP transmission lines. This mainly affects those living on or near Hallstrom Road. An agreement has been reached between GMP and NED that would allow these customers to receive temporary power from NED in case transmission line problems result in outages expected to last more than five (5) days.
- c. Northfield Emergency Services.** Board member Morse wanted to commend the members of the local emergency services who recently had to respond to a number of serious and troubling incidents, including a house fire on Route 12A that displaced a family. He also commended the Northfield community for rallying around the family by providing cash donations as well as clothing and other essentials.
- d. CERV Land Purchase Update.** Board member Stevens asked about the status of the land purchase that would allow for additional parking near the proposed new CERV building on Kent Street. Manager Schulz said he has signed the purchase agreement on behalf of the community and forwarded it to the CERV Board. He will contact them soon if he hears nothing in the next few days.
- e. Municipal Building Bathroom Renovations.** Board member Goodrich asked if the bathroom renovations have begun yet. Manager Schulz said he is still collecting quotes for the work.
- f. RSMS Program Updates.** Board member Goodrich asked if the Select Board members would have updated RSMS (Road Surface Management System) Program documents before the first FY 2021/2022 budget meeting. Manager Schulz said they would. The updates would reflect new paving, road resurfacing, new culverts, and other improvements done in the past year.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Carolyn Stevens: Upcoming Northfield Equality Awareness and Justice Group Event.** Catherine Johnston originally was going to address the Select Board members on this matter but had to leave the meeting early. Ms. Stevens said the Northfield Equity Awareness and Justice Group would be having a joint event with the Brown Public Library for a Vermont Reads Book Discussion at the Dog River Park next Tuesday night (09/29/20) starting at 6:00 p.m. The book under discussion will be *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. Those who haven't yet read the book but have seen the movie can also take part in the discussion. Participants are asked to bring their own chairs and masks. Most of the discussion will be in small groups in order to comply with COVID-19 social distancing requirements. The rain date is Sunday, October 4, 2020.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:35 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 October 13, 2020.