

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of October 27, 2020**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, 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, Mark C. Anarumo (President, Norwich University), Daphne Larkin (Director of Media Relations & Community Affairs, Norwich University), Jenn Wood (Public Affairs & Community Relations Manager, Green Mountain Transit), Bonnie Waninger (Vice-Chair, GMT Board of Commissioners), Colin Bright (Development Review Board), Kelli Cheney, Susan Stillinger, Sarah Wolfe, Catherine Johnston, Lydia Petty, Jeff Ott, Tanya Crawford-Stempel, and Lynn Doney.

Due to problems with the remote meeting audio, Vice-Chair Goodrich assumed the Chair for this meeting. Acting Chair Goodrich called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Members of the public had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely.

II. PUBLIC HEARING

- a. Water Use Regulations Ordinance.** Manager Schulz said he, Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi, and the Water & Wastewater Commissioners have been working for some time on an update of the municipality's water use regulations, which haven't been revised since the merger of Northfield Town and Northfield Village in 2014. Among other things, the ordinance would set standards for new pipes, backflow preventer devices, etc. It also would specify whether the municipality or the customer would be responsible for the repair of a waterline based on the location of the problem. Manager Schulz then asked if there was any public comment. Acting Chair Goodrich noted the Select Board members provided some suggestions for revised text at a previous meeting. Were these included in the current draft? Manager Schulz said they were. The document also was revised to indicate work within the State Highway right-of-way may require a separate permit from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans). There being no public comment, the hearing closed at 7:06 p.m.

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 said NU has administered 11,441 COVID-19 tests to students, faculty, and staff since August 2020. In this timeframe, there have been only seven (7) positive tests and there is only one (1) active case. President Anarumo said all is going well here but pointed to the cautionary tale of St. Michael's College in Colchester VT, which recently had twenty-eight (28) students test positive for COVID-19 and had to suspend in-person classes. President Anarumo believes some valuable lessons can be learned from this. As for the rest of the NU Fall 2020 semester, President Anarumo said when the students leave for the Thanksgiving holiday on Wednesday, November 25, 2020, they will not be returning to campus until January 2021. The remaining classes and examinations will be remote only. When the students start returning next year, the same procedures and protocols taken in August 2020 will be repeated with staggered campus reentry, a quarantine of arriving students, frequent testing, etc. The campus will be locked down for the first few weeks until circumstances warrant a partial reopening. In-person instruction will start on Tuesday, February 2, 2021 and there will be no Spring Break in March 2020. Commencement will be held on Saturday, May 1, 2021. The nature of the ceremony will depend on the COVID-19 situation at the time.

President Anarumo said NU students trekking off-campus on Paine Mountain and other wooded areas have been warned that this is hunting season and have been asked to stay on organized trail systems (when possible) and to wear bright clothing. President Anarumo then reminded the public that the Norwich University website (www.norwich.edu) maintains a "COVID-19 Reporting Dashboard" that updates each morning the number of COVID-19 tests administered to date, the number of positive cases, and the number of active cases.

President Anarumo said he was made aware early about the number of children who trick-or-treat in the Central Street area so he purchased a ten-pound bag of candy to distribute. He will set up some kind of chute system for safe distribution but would donate the candy to "Trunk or Treat" if the Select Board members think it best. He also cut down his Halloween yard decorations to about one third of what they would be normally. Board member Maxwell also lives in a high-traffic area for trick-or-treaters. He plans to donate his Halloween candy to "Trunk or Treat" this year but sees nothing wrong with President Anarumo personally distributing his candy provided proper precautions are taken.

President Anarumo hopes the Halloween situation will return to somewhat normal next year so he can go all-out on his decorations. He noted the St. Michael's College outbreak does show the importance of remaining diligent with mask wearing, social distancing, proper disinfection, etc. Acting Chair Goodrich thanked him for the update.

- b. Jenn Wood, Public Affairs & Community Relations Manager, Green Mountain Transit (GMT).** Ms. Wood met with the Select Board members last year (12/20/19) to discuss GMT's funding requests for Town Meeting Day as well as provide updates on GMT developments, ridership levels for the most recently completed fiscal year, etc. She will be addressing about fifty (50) Vermont communities in a similar manner. GMT also would like feedback from its served communities regarding what is working well and what needs to be changed. Ms. Wood says GMT now serves cities and towns in six (6) Vermont counties and operates downtown routes, commuter links, and specialized services for seniors and the disabled that allow access to medical facilities, department stores, grocery stores, etc.

As for Northfield, Ms. Wood is asking that an article be put on the 2021 Town Meeting Warning that would ask whether voters would authorize a \$21,000 appropriation that would be used to cover the twenty percent (20%) local match amount to operate the year-round Northfield-Montpelier commuter bus service. There is a separate request for a \$3,351 appropriation to cover the expense of the local shuttle bus service that serves Northfield's "Elderly, Disabled, and Medicaid" services.

Ms. Wood said GMT has implemented a number of technical improvements, including allowing potential riders to track on the GMT website the progress of the bus they are planning to board. There also will be a test program in Montpelier that will create an on-demand service, similar to Uber, in the place of fixed routes. There will be a specified service area and other Vermont communities will be observing this experiment to see if it would work for them. There also are plans to add additional electric buses into the GMT fleet in 2021. COVID-19 has affected GMT (like everybody else) and a number of protocols have been put in place to promote safety on the buses. Mask wearing is mandatory and to ensure proper social distancing, there is a limit on the number of riders at one time. Also, the buses are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected when not in service. To limit interaction between riders and the driver, fee collection has been suspended for the time being.

Bonnie Waninger is the Vice-Chair of GMT Board of Commissioners. She also serves as Executive Director of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC). As such, she is more than willing to serve as the municipality's conduit to GMT regarding local concerns. Acting Chair Goodrich thanked her for this. She also was very pleased to receive this presentation so early in the municipality's FY 2021/2022 budget process. Ms. Wood is willing to return in the near future if more information is needed before Town Meeting Day (03/02/21). Acting Chair Goodrich thanked Ms. Wood for appearing tonight and said the Select Board will be in contact with her should it require more data, etc.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. October 13, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Morse wanted it reflected in the minutes that there had been a change from the posted meeting agenda. **Motion to approve amended minutes passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #08-21.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve Warrant #08-21 in the amount of \$412,971.89. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Warrant #08-21A.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #08-21A in the amount of \$23,013.77. Acting Chair Goodrich noted this was a payment on an old loan for Depot Square reconstruction. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through October 18, 2020.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$88,549.81. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of Water Use Regulations Ordinance.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the Water Use Regulations Ordinance. There was no further discussion. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Unless there a petition is presented within forty-four (44) days to overturn the ordinance, it will go into effect in sixty (60) days.
- b. **Municipal Property Signage Placement Policy.** At the last regular meeting (10/13/20), Manager Schulz had presented a draft policy that would address the placement of unauthorized signage on municipal property. Based on comments Manager Schulz received at that meeting, he has redrafted the policy for the Select Board members' consideration. In fact, he has provided two different versions for discussion.

The longer version reads as follows: *"The purpose of this policy is to regulate the placement of signs and banners on municipal property and to limit the signs to those that serve a governmental purpose. No persons, groups, entities shall install, locate or place a sign or banner on municipal property without the approval of the Select Board or its designee. The Select Board or its designee in the review and consideration of requests to locate signs on municipal property shall only authorize signs or banners that serve a governmental purpose or for a Select Board approved event. The signs shall be limited to the advertisement of municipal or school projects or events, directional signs for traffic related purposes or to direct persons to municipal, cultural or historical facilities and Select Board approved events. Also, nongovernmental signs shall be limited to no more than five consecutive days."*

The second and shorter version has the following text: *"The purpose of this policy is to regulate the placement of signs and banners on municipal property. No persons, groups, entities shall install, locate or place a sign or banner on municipal property without the approval of the Select Board or its designee. All nongovernmental signs shall be limited to no more than five consecutive days."*

Board member Morse is not sure any Select Board policy is needed since the Northfield zoning regulations put restrictions on the posting of off-premises signage. Although the current regulations are vague on a number of signage issues, Board member Morse feels the best course would be to update these regulations to include penalties for violations. This would make Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki the enforcement officer, which is the role he has for other zoning regulation violations. It was stated at the previous meeting that the zoning regulations focus solely on commercial signage. Board member Morse said that view had been the consensus at a recent Development Review Board (DRB) meeting but he didn't agree with this. Manager Schulz believes when signs are placed without permission on municipal property, that is a matter for the Select Board (or its designee). He believes having a separate Select Board-approved policy would clarify the rules in the zoning regulations and allow municipal employees to act in case of a violation. Acting Chair Goodrich has read the zoning regulations and agrees there is considerable ambiguity regarding off-premises signage. Board member Stevens agrees the Select Board should have the authority to approve or disapprove of signage on municipal property. However, there may be some temporary signage, such as for yard sales, wedding directional signs, etc. that fall between the cracks. There also might be a problem with roadside political signs located within the municipality's right-of-way. Board member Miller said there would never be a perfect policy on this but we should try to cover as many bases as possible.

Colin Bright is a DRB member and he noted that since the Planning Commission earlier this year achieved approval of the new Town Plan after several years of hard work, it next will turn to a revision of the local zoning ordinances. Since this also will be a long process, he felt it best for the Select Board to adopt a signage policy in the interim. He also agrees that the Select Board members should be the ultimate authority regarding municipal property. After further discussion, it was consensus of the Select Board members that the longer version of the proposed signage policy was preferable. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the aforementioned version of the Policy Regulating the Placement of Signs on Municipal Property. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Municipal Social Media Policy.** Manager Schulz noted this policy was approved by the Select Board over five (5) years ago (07/14/15) so it probably is in need of revision due to new technology, etc. He will make some adjustments and submit them to the Select Board members at their next regular meeting (11/10/20). If any of them have any suggestions before then, please email them as soon as possible. Board member Morse believes the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) could be a big help as they maintain a number of model policies for their member municipalities. Board member Maxwell agrees the policy needs to be updated.

- d. **Adoption of Extra-Mile Proclamation.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the proclamation stating November 1, 2020 is Extra Mile Day in Northfield, Vermont. This matter had been on the previous agenda but Board member Miller had objected due to some reservations after performing an internet search of the organization behind this. Although he still has some concerns and will not support this, he will not stand in the way if the other Select Board members feel different. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Miller voting in the negative.**
- e. **Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz reported the project contractor has made significant progress as all the new culverts and underdrains have been installed. The next phase was to address the five (5) locations determined to be in such bad condition that they require total rebuilds. This work started last week and is expected to be completed in the next couple weeks. These areas then will be provided with a new coat of asphalt. The project areas then will be allowed to set over the winter and the whole road will see new layers of paving put down next year in the late spring or early summer. Manager Schulz said the contractor did request that the road be closed to through traffic this week so work could continue uninterrupted on the rebuild areas. Detour signs are in place and the road should be reopened by this weekend. Board member Stevens viewed some of the work this past week and agreed the project seems to be going pretty well. Acting Chair Goodrich thanked Manager Schulz for the project update.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Highway Department update.** Manager Schulz said the Town's grader has had major issues this year and had to go into the shop for repairs. The cost was about \$14,000 but the grader now is back in service. Another grader had to be rented in the interim.
- b. **VTrans Town Highway Grant.** As Manager Schulz reported at the last meeting, due to state budget concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State Legislature did not authorize VTrans to award any Class II Highway and Structures grants this year. However, there was an agreement for a \$7,000,000 addition to the Town Highway Aid fund allocated to municipalities each year. Manager Schulz has learned Northfield will receive an additional \$39,500 from this fund.
- c. **South Main Street Stormwater Project.** Manager Schulz said there has been some discussion of having the Water/Sewer crew performing some of this project's side street work in order to reduce project costs by about \$25,000. They would start with Slate Avenue next spring and this would allow the road to be repaved next summer.
- d. **Northfield Ridge + River Routes Plan.** Manager Schulz said the initial draft plan was forwarded by the project's Steering Committee last week and it has been distributed to the Select Board members. It is a quite lengthy document (125+ pages) so the formal presentation to the Select Board members won't be until the November 24, 2020 regular meeting. Board member Morse has looked through the document and found it to be very impressive and a credit to the Steering Committee.
- e. **Composting Bin Discounts.** At the previous meeting, Board member Miller noted the Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District (CVSWMD) was offering composting bins at reduced prices to residents of its member communities. Board member Miller asked if our solid waste management district, Mountain Alliance, could do something similar for Northfield residents. Manager Schulz has spoken to them and they probably will have some proposal he can announce at the next meeting.
- f. **FY 2019/2020 Financial Statements.** Manager Schulz said preliminary year-end statements for FY 2019/2020 were in the Select Board packets. He noted the municipality ended this fiscal year with sizable surpluses in both the Town General and Highway Funds. There was a FEMA reimbursement for past storm damage that contributed to the healthy state of the Highway budget. Both budgets benefited from a reduction in discretionary spending due to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic uncertainty associated with it. The contracted auditors are still working on their report but it should be available for review soon.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **New Addition to Northfield Municipal Family.** Board member Morse noted Assistant Town Clerk Janel Doney earlier this month (10/06/20) gave birth to a son, Calvin Warner Doney. Both mother and baby are doing well.
- b. **Trunk or Treat: Saturday, October 31, 2020.** As indicated earlier in the meeting, Board member Maxwell noted the Recreation Committee will be holding the annual "Trunk or Treat" Halloween candy distribution on the Common from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. COVID-19 safety precautions have been put in place to make this a safety-first event. Please check the municipal website or Front Porch Forum for more detailed information.
- c. **Northfield Fire Department (NFD) Aerial Tower Truck.** Acting Chair Goodrich noted NFD Chief Peter J. DeMasi reported earlier this year (07/28/20) that the aerial tower truck had been sent out-of-state for minor repairs. She asked if it had been returned and put back into service. Manager Schulz confirmed that it had.
- d. **New Road Materials and Tire Damage.** Acting Chair Goodrich has seen numerous postings on social media from residents complaining the material put down when the backroads were resurfaced this year had sharp edges that damaged their tires. Manager Schulz said the Highway Department did resurface about four (4) miles of backroad this year and used crushed ledge. This material does have sharp edges on occasion but the crew made every effort to reduce any hazard to tires by crushing the material with a roller as soon as possible after it was laid down. The material also will be crushed down by traffic over time. Manager Schulz has heard about some punctured tires but the age and condition of these tires might be another factor. He added that crushed ledge is an especially effective material for Mud Season. Acting Chair Goodrich asked if the material was crushed by the roller as soon as it was put down. Manager Schulz said this was the intent but there may have been some road sections that weren't treated for a few days.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Lydia Petty: Northfield Ridge + River Routes.** Ms. Petty is Co-Chair of the Steering Committee and she said the draft plan tried to identify local objectives that can be achievable at little or no additional cost to the municipality and in a timely manner. She is pleased to hear that the Select Board is anticipating repaving Slate Avenue next summer as this will dovetail with suggestions in the plan for new trailheads, etc. to be sited there. Ms. Petty also announced that due to a recently awarded grant, new benches and bicycle racks have been purchased and will be arriving in Northfield this week.

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a personnel matter and contract negotiations with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:25 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 9:45 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:45 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 are subject to approval at the next regular Select Board meeting.