

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of November 10, 2020**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller (absent), 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), Andrew M. Bachand CPA (Kittle Branagan & Sargent), Lynn Doney (Recreation Committee), Frank Hall (Recreation Committee), Amy Robertson, Bob Keeley, Paulette Gagne, Catherine Johnston, Cassie Morse, Dave Packie, Mark Fournier, Jeff Ott, and Elroy Hill.

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

**III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. Mark C. Anarumo, President, Norwich University.** President Anarumo began by stating how amazing the weather today was for November in Vermont (high of 72°). When Norwich University (NU) celebrated Veterans Day last year, the temperature was below freezing most of the day. President Anarumo said today's Veterans day celebration included a commemorative ceremony on the Upper Parade Ground, guest speaker Lt. Gen. John J. Broadmeadow (USMC), and in the afternoon low-level aviation training with four (4) US Army helicopters. Since the NU campus remains closed to visitors, the events were livestreamed. President Anarumo said it was an especially impressive sight to see the helicopters flying off into the sunset as they returned to base. As for the COVID-19 situation, President Anarumo said over 14,000 tests of students, faculty, and staff have been performed to date. There have been only ten (10) positive tests and both of the active cases are remote-learning students who are not on campus. This aggressive level of testing will continue through the time the students leave campus for the Thanksgiving holiday (and not return until mid-January 2021). President Anarumo wants to be sure that all NU students will test negative before returning to their homes for the holidays. Therefore, as there has been an uptick of COVID-19 cases nationwide and in Vermont, President Anarumo said the campus will remain on lockdown and students leaving campus for physical training, etc. will be required to wear masks and social distance. Food deliveries will be accepted but visitors cannot enter the dorms. Board member Morse noted last Friday night, he saw NU cadets engaged in a twelve (12) mile forced march, during which they were well-presented, well-lit, well-behaved, etc. It was an impressive sight. President Anarumo believes this march was a simulation of the annual march between Northfield and Norwich, VT. The actual march could not be done this year due to the pandemic but this reduced march was done as a fundraising effort. As for the Spring 2021 semester, President Anarumo said the students will start arriving in phases by mid-January and be subjected to COVID-19 testing and then put into quarantine until cleared of contagion. Due to all the pandemic testing and other precautions, President Anarumo said NU is currently running a revenue deficit but said it was more important to ensure the health and safety of the NU family. The campus wastewater recently was tested for any indication of novel coronavirus. Center for Global Resilience and Security Director and Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering Tara Kulkarni led this effort with the assistance of students collecting samples. Chair Maxwell said with the students leaving campus soon, there probably won't be the need for President Anarumo to address the Select Board members at their next few regular meetings. He then thanked President Anarumo for keeping the community so well informed over the past months. President Anarumo said he would keep in touch with the municipality and report back should changing circumstances warrant.

- b. Andrew M. Bachand CPA, Kittle Branagan & Sargent: FY 2019/2020 Financial Audit Reports.** Mr. Bachand provided a brief overview of the recently completed professional audit of the fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2020. He said there had been some concerns beforehand about conducting an on-site audit during the COVID-19 pandemic but Finance Director Laurie Baroffio and her staff did a great job of preparing for and working with the auditors so that all work could be done in an efficient and safe manner. Mr. Bachand said the submitted Northfield financial statements resulted in an unmodified (or “clear”) opinion with no material misstatements found. He commended Ms. Baroffio and her staff for their excellent work and said the pro-active manner in which they keep the auditing firm informed of developments throughout the year made the on-site audit run very smoothly. There were no difficulties or disagreements during the process. Mr. Bachand then directed the Select Board members’ attention to the pages in the audit that indicate which departments finished the fiscal year with surpluses or overages, comparisons with the previous fiscal year, levels of long-term debt, etc. He then asked if the Select Board members had any questions. Board member Morse asked why the finances of the Brown Public Library (BPL) were not in the document. Mr. Bachand said the BPL is considered a separate entity for auditing purposes. Since the municipality has received glowing audits in recent years, Board member Goodrich asked if it were necessary to have a professional audit each year. Mr. Bachand said it was standard policy for municipalities and he believes it is necessary for communities like Northfield that operate municipal utility departments. He added it was a benefit to the municipality in order to confirm there are no problems with its standard financial procedures, etc. Chair Maxwell thanked Mr. Bachand for the positive report and he looks forward to more good news in the future.
- c. Lynn Doney & Frank Hall, Recreation Committee: Christmas on the Common, etc.** Mr. Doney first reported on the Halloween 2020 “Truck or Treat,” which saw candy being distributed to over 350 children in a setting that ensured COVID-19 safety. The event was set on the Common and one-way traffic was established so that proper social distancing could be maintained. Despite some concerns beforehand, the event was very successful and everyone had a good time. As for this year’s planned “Christmas on the Common,” Mr. Doney said due to a number of issues with the event in recent years, the Recreation Committee has decided not to be in charge of the festivities this year. One major concern has been the serving of alcohol at the outdoor farmers market that has operated in conjunction with the holiday tree lighting in recent years. Mr. Doney and other Recreation Committee members do not feel it appropriate to serve alcohol at family events where so many children are present. Mr. Doney personally observed unattended alcoholic beverages at last year’s market and felt this was unacceptable. If the Northfield Farmers Market wish to take control of the event, the Recreation Committee will not object. Board member Morse is surprised that this action is being taken as it means there might not be a “Christmas on the Common” this year. Mr. Doney said there was an email exchange today that led to this decision but he did not want to elaborate further. Board member Morse believes this type of decision cannot be made in the absence of a public meeting that has been warned properly. After further discussion, there appeared to be a consensus that the Recreation Committee would hold a special meeting in the near future so this matter can be fully discussed in a public forum.
- d. Amy Robertson: Materials used for Resurfacing Stony Brook Road, etc.** Ms. Robertson and her husband have owned a home on Stony Brook Road for the past six (6) years and since the road was resurfaced last month, they have had three (3) flat tires between their two cars. Ms. Robertson believed they were not the only ones to have this experience and this was confirmed when she posted on Front Porch Forum and six (6) residents contacted her with stories of similar problems with the material put on the road. Ms. Robertson said something needs to be done to prevent this happening again and she felt the municipality should reconsider the type of crushed stone used in the road resurfacing process.

Manager Schulz said when putting together this year's highway budget, the Select Board allocated additional funds to address problems on the backroads. Funds were set aside so about four (4) miles of backroad would have four inches (4") of road material put down. The material used was 1½" crushed ledge, which works best on muddy roads like Northfield's. Manager Schulz said it is important to have the ledge further crushed by a roller as soon as it is put down. Unfortunately, this product will produce larger pieces of stone on occasion. Ms. Robertson has travelled on the backroads of other Central Vermont towns and has not had any problems so she doubts that it really is standard practice for municipalities to use such material. She said it was a great financial burden on residents to replace their tires as sometimes the dealership will recommend replacing all four if one goes bad. Ms. Robertson also spoke to someone who has lived on Smith Hill Road for over forty (40) years and they have had this problem for only the past two years so something must have changed recently. There should be some consideration of the impact on residents when such road material is purchased. Paulette Gagne lives on Hallstrom Road and she agreed the problem started a couple years ago. She believes the crushed ledge used is much larger than 1½". Ms. Gagne said the material creates such a difficult road surface that she cannot ride her bike or walk her dog on it. She felt the Select Board members should look at other road material options as this is not a problem in other towns. Ms. Gagne also believes the material was allowed to sit for about five (5) days before the roller came by her road. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members will consider these comments going forward as they will soon begin their deliberations on the budget for the next fiscal year. He himself has received sixteen (16) phone calls about this over this past weekend. It is clear that a different product must be used in the future. Board member Morse also lives on a backroad and he agreed the municipality must create a safer travelling surface for its residents. He added the Board has a Highway Subcommittee and it should meet soon with Manager Schulz and Highway Foreman Trent Tucker to devise an alternate approach for next year. Board member Goodrich appreciates all the public feedback that has been received and said the municipality will have to use another road material in the future. It was confirmed that road resurfacing has concluded for this year. Elroy Hill suggested that the municipality should rent a more heavy-duty roller next time to make sure the road material is crushed down properly. Manager Schulz will look into this.

#### **IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. **October 27, 2020 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **October 29, 2020 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

#### **V. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. **Approval of Warrant #09-21.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #09-21 in the amount of \$596,023.65. Board member Stevens noted Town CIP expenditures were over \$400,000 and asked if most of this was related to the Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project. Manager Schulz confirmed it was. Board member Stevens also saw that a "Leaf Blower" had been purchased for \$5,299. Manager Schulz said this equipment was purchased through a state grant that paid eighty percent (80%) of the purchase price. The equipment can be viewed at the Town Garage if the Select Board members would like to inspect it. Its main function will be to clear out culverts and it will not be used to blow material onto private property. Board member Goodrich asked about \$9,022 spent to replace a blower at the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF). She asked if this was a planned expense. Manager Schulz said a state inspector came in and it was his recommendation that the blower be replaced. This was somewhat unexpected but the purchase was made to make the WWTF more efficient. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through November 1, 2020.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$87,307.83. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

## VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. **FY 2021/2020 Budget Process.** Manager Schulz said this was the time of year when the municipal budget for the next fiscal year begins to come together. He anticipates that the initial draft budget will be ready for distribution to the Select Board members the first week of December. The first public budget meetings usually have the department heads come it to discuss their proposed budgets, etc. In recent years, there have been about ten (10) budget special meetings spread over December and January before the budget that will go before voters is approved by the Select Board members. There has been some talk of streamlining the process but Manager Schulz has seen no specific suggestions to date. Board member Morse said there is a Budget & Financial Subcommittee on which he and Board member Goodrich serve. Perhaps the subcommittee could lead the way on this and thus reduce the number of public meetings involving the full Select Board. Board member Morse personally feels no line item should increase above five percent (5%) and that all personnel and benefit expenses should be limited to COLA. Board member Goodrich isn't sure if she would want that much responsibility for deciding on budget decisions that used to be made by the full Board. Board member Morse said the other Select Board members would be kept informed at subsequent regular meetings. Chair Maxwell thinks Board member Morse's goal to streamline the process is admirable but he is not sure if he would want to give up his own ability to comment and perhaps revise the proposed budget through collective decisions. Manager Schulz agrees that among the Select Board members' most important duties is to create the municipal budget and it also is important to keep the public as part of the process. Chair Maxwell said perhaps the Select Board members could be better prepared before the budget meetings this year in order to keep them down to reasonable lengths ( $\pm 2$  hours). Chair Maxwell would like to see a written proposal for streamlining the budget process. Perhaps the Budget & Financial Subcommittee could have a draft that the Select Board members could review at the next regular meeting (11/24/20).
- b. **Main Street Bridge Scoping Report.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has decided that the Main Street Bridge is in poor condition and requires either extensive rehabilitation or replacement. This scoping report was the first step in determining which approach should be taken as well as such considerations as possible traffic detours should the bridge be out of commission for an extended period. VTrans' recommendation is that it would be best in the long run for the bridge be replaced. The construction phase would be a couple years so traffic would have to be diverted by way of Wall Street and Water Street during this timeframe. Truck drivers would be discouraged from going through the downtown area and instead asked to use Interstate 89 whenever possible. VTrans representatives would like to address the Select Board members in January 2021 to formally present this report and the alternatives found within. VTrans would like a decision from the Select Board members regarding which approach to take: replacement of rehabilitation. Once this decision has been made, the next steps would be engineering and construction phases. Manager Schulz believes it would probably take at least three (3) years to engineer this project so construction wouldn't start until 2024 or 2025. There also will have to be a public outreach effort to inform residents of the decisions that have been made and how they will be affected. Chair Maxwell asked how much of the engineering and construction costs would the municipality be expected to cover. Manager Schulz said for such projects, the State would pay between 90% and 95%. The actual amount would depend on how closely the municipality decides to follow the VTrans recommendation. If the Select Board members agree to bridge replacement, the local share amount would be about five percent (5%). Board member Stevens sees no reason for debate. The bridge needs to be replaced. Board member Morse noted this bridge was built in 1926 and went through reconstruction in 1958. It probably has reached its end of the line. Mark Fournier felt the lack of a bridge at that location for two (2) years would be a great burden for pedestrians. Perhaps a temporary footbridge could be installed. If not, some determined walkers might try the dangerous alternative of using the nearby railroad bridge.

- c. Northfield VT Social Media Policy.** Manager Schulz said some Select Board members have asked for a review of the municipality's Social Media Policy as it was approved in July 2015 and is probably outdated due to new technology, etc. Included in this week's packets was a Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) document that indicates the benefits of adopting such a policy and also provides a model policy that can be revised to suit local conditions. The new model policy has provisions that seem to address recent concerns expressed by Select Board members. Board member Morse believes the current policy is sufficient with only a few minor changes. Manager Schulz agreed the current policy does allow the municipality to punish employees who misuse social media in a number of specified ways. Chair Maxwell felt a thorough review of the current policy is needed. Perhaps aspects of the more extensive VLCT model policy could be added if the need is felt.
- d. Northfield Conservation Commission Appointment.** Manager Schulz said there have been a couple vacancies on the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) for a few months. Northfield resident David Packie has submitted a letter of interest and the NCC members recommend his appointment. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint David Packie to the Northfield Conservation Commission. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- e. Northfield Snowmobilers Inc. (NSI) Trail Requests (Well Field, Fairground Road, and South View Road).** Manager Schulz said NSI has made its annual request for the municipality's permission to connect its trail system by permitting snowmobile use through the Well Field and along short sections of Fairground Road and South View Road. Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi has comprised a list of conditions for allowing the trail to go through the Wellfield. These conditions have been followed in the past with no problems. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to permit snowmobile use through the Well Field, Fairground Road, and South View Road. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- f. Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz said the construction phase of the project is winding down for this year as all the work prior to paving has been completed. The five (5) rebuild areas will be patched/paved and allowed to settle over the winter. The final paving will be done next year in the late spring or early summer. Manager Schulz is unaware of any major issues with the work done so far. Board member Morse is pleased that the work was performed in a safe manner and there have been no injuries. Chair Maxwell revisited the worksite yesterday and said all was looking good. He would like to know how much has been spent on this project to date. Manager Schulz will have this information for the next meeting. Mr. Fournier felt a great job has been done overall but thinks the work on the problem area near the intersection of Union Brook Road and Bean Road did not go far enough on the road. Manager Schulz will speak to Project Engineer Ron Lyon about this in the next couple days and report back.

## **VII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. COVID-19 Relief Funds.** Manager Schulz noted the State of Vermont already has provided a relief program for residents who have fallen behind on their electric bills. This program recently was expanded to include water and sewer customers with arrears. There will be information flyers included in the next utility bills.
- b. Winter Parking Ban.** As stipulated in the Northfield Traffic Ordinance, the winter parking ban will start on November 15 and end April 15 of next year. Vehicles cannot be parked on town streets between the hours of midnight and 6:00 a.m.
- c. Cross Brothers Dam Removal Project.** Manager Schulz said the thirty percent (30%) engineering study for this project is nearly complete and will be presented to the Select Board members when done. The next step would be secure the funding for the construction phase of the project. It might be possible to apply for federal hazard mitigation funds as it has been indicated that removal of this dam would lessen the chance of downtown flooding during a major storm event.

- d. **Highway Department.** Manager Schulz said there were issues with the grader this year but it has been working steadily on the backroads over the past few weeks in preparation for winter. The recent snowy weather has delayed roadside leaf collection but the leaf picker will be operating through Friday, November 20, 2020.
- e. **Emerald Ash Borer Webinars.** The NCC will be holding two webinars on the emerald ash borer on Thursday, November 12, 2020 and Wednesday, January 13, 2021. The full contact information has been posted on Front Porch Forum and participants are asked to pre-register.

#### **VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. **General Election 2020.** Board member Morse wanted to commend Town Clerk Kim Pedley and members of the Board of Civil Authority for how well run this election was despite the global pandemic.
- b. **New Benches and Bicycle Racks.** Board member Morse noted new benches and bike racks have been sited on and around the Depot Square area. He thanked the Northfield Ridge + River Routes Steering Committee for securing them. Manager Schulz added the equipment was purchased with grant money at no cost to the community.
- c. **South Main Street Sidewalk Project.** Board member Stevens asked if this project would be completed this year as promised by the contractor. Manager Schulz said he has been frustrated with the project delays but he has spoken to the contractor and been informed that a subcontractor has been hired to install the remaining curbing and this will be completed within three (3) days. The concrete will be poured soon after. The contractor is still confident all the work can be completed this year. Jeffrey Ott asked if the old curbing was in such bad condition that it needed to be fully replaced. Manager Schulz said the low bid for this project allowed for the purchase of all-new curbing while remaining within the project budget. The old curbing will be retained by the municipality and repurposed on other streets during future sidewalk projects. Chair Maxwell also has been disappointed by the recent delays in the construction phase.

#### **IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. **Mask Mandate.** Mr. Ott has noticed that many residents are still going into local businesses, restaurants, etc. without face coverings. Perhaps it is time to mandate mask use in Northfield. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members discussed this matter a couple months ago and decided against it. With the recent uptick in COVID-19 cases in the Central Vermont area, perhaps this matter should be revisited at the next meeting. Board member Goodrich saw Governor Scott's press conference today and it was announced that the State will be sending out plain clothes inspectors to make sure stores, hotels, restaurants, etc. are in full compliance with Vermont's COVID-19 stipulations.
- X. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a personnel matter and a legal matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:30 p.m.

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

The Board came out of executive session at 10:05 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 10:10 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 amended and approved at the regular Select Board meeting of November 24, 2020.