

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of January 7, 2025**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Susan Stillinger, Danielle Farnum, Matthew Romei, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

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

III. DISCUSSION

a. Proposed FY 2025/2026 Town Budget

- 1. Town Budget Recap.** Manager Schulz would like to use this meeting for a general overview of the proposed budget and to address any unresolved issues arising during the initial review of the departmental budgets. This would include two issues in the Northfield Police Department (NPD) budget: whether to budget for five (5) or six (6) full-time officers and whether to budget for three (3) or four (4) NPD patrol vehicles. The proposed budget currently has funding for five (5) full-time officers and for three (3) vehicles. There also is the possibility of including funding for sign-up bonuses for new NPD officers. It was noted some Vermont communities have paid up to \$10,000 in sign-up bonuses for qualified law enforcement officers. In addition, in the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) budget, there are modest hourly pay increases for the EMTs. However, there has been a suggestion that these increases should be higher based on how much other ambulance services in the area are paying their employees.

Another unresolved issue is the per capita fee for NAS emergency coverage charged to the towns of Roxbury and Berlin (for West Berlin only). The current per capita fee is \$35.00 and Manager Schulz has suggested raising this by \$3.00 to \$38.00 in the next fiscal year. This is the amount now included in the proposed budget but there have been suggestions this increase should be higher. Board member Morse had asked how many times each year NAS responds to emergencies in Roxbury and West Berlin. Manager Schulz obtained the figures for the 2024 calendar year and there were 61 emergency callouts to Roxbury and 79 to West Berlin. Chair Maxwell calculated that this was about thirteen percent (13%) of all NAS emergency responses that year. Board member Petty noted this per capita fee is intended to cover the extra "wear and tear" on NAS vehicles travelling to a neighboring community. She added that NAS does collect fees from the individual(s) treated during a callout and thus expanding the NAS coverage area does bring in additional fee revenue. Ms. Baroffio said the per capita total revenue amount is based on 678 Roxbury residents and 285 West Berlin residents in the NAS coverage area. Manager Schulz said he has given Roxbury and Berlin administrators notice that the per capita rate probably would increase by at least \$3.00 in the next fiscal year but could be higher. Board member Shernock favored increasing the per capita rate even higher as the additional funds perhaps could be used to help cover EMT pay increases. She noted the cost of most supplies and services have increased sharply over the past couple of years so such an increase should not be too unexpected. It was noted that should Northfield try to raise the per capita rate too high and too quickly, it was possible that Berlin and Roxbury could explore other options for their medical emergency coverage, i.e. Barre Town Ambulance, White River Ambulance, etc. After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Select Board members to increase the per capita rate to \$38.00 as recommended by management. However, there will be notification to Berlin and Roxbury administrators that there probably would be additional rate increases in coming years. As for proposed hourly wage increases for Northfield EMTs, Board member Petty first provided a review of the summary sheet indicating how much ambulance services in the Central Vermont area pay their employees. The figures are broken down by EMT certification level, i.e. Basic Life Support (BLS), Advanced Life Support (ALS), Paramedic, etc.

There appeared to be general agreement that Northfield pays an equitable rate for BLS and ALS EMTs but not for those with Paramedic certification. After some discussion, it was Select Board consensus that the hourly wage be raised from \$17.00 to \$18.00 for BLS EMTs, from \$20.00 to \$21.00 for ALS EMTs, and from \$22.00 to \$23.00 for Paramedics. Board member Morse then suggested that the planned closure of several Vermont medical facilities in the near future could result in more opportunities for NAS EMTs to provide non-emergency transport services, thus bringing in additional NAS revenue over time.

In the Town General revenue budget, Manager Schulz said there has been a suggestion to increase the amount budgeted for interest income from \$30,000 to \$40,000 based on past actuals. He thought \$40,000 would be an acceptable figure but did not believe it should be raised any higher due to uncertainty about bank interest rates, etc. There was no objection to making this revision.

As indicated earlier, management has recommended two (2) major changes in the proposed NPD budget for FY 2025/2026. The first would reduce the number of budgeted full-time officers from six (6) to five (5). The second would reduce the number of budgeted patrol vehicle replacements in the NPD Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget from four (4) to three (3). Ms. Baroffio said should budgeting for the sixth officer be reinstated, this would add about \$150,000 to the NPD personnel budget. Should funding be restored for the fourth NPD patrol vehicle, this would add about \$15,000 to the NPD CEP budget for the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz said given current NPD staffing levels, there really is no need to budget for four (4) patrol vehicles for the foreseeable future. Board member Petty said she would support this change provided NPD Chief Pierre Gomez has no objections. Manager Schulz confirmed that Chief Gomez supported this change as it would have no impact on NPD emergency coverage. Ms. Baroffio then noted that the number of full-time officers in the proposed budget is actually a little less than five (5) as one current full-time officer will be on military leave for three (3) months in the next fiscal year. Board member Petty then suggested adding about \$35,000 to the NPD personnel budget in order to provide full funding for five (5) full-time officers. She noted Chief Gomez has expressed a preference for the NPD having six (6) full-time officers on staff but has acknowledged that is probably not possible at this time due to officer recruitment difficulties. As for sign-up bonuses, Manager Schulz said such bonuses would be spread over a few years rather than be provided in a single lump payment. Therefore, he thought that these bonuses could be funded out of the proposed NPD personnel budget for the next fiscal year. Chair Maxwell has learned that enrollment at the Vermont Police Academy has nearly doubled in the past year, which should increase the number of certified law enforcement officers in the state. That might reduce the need to “poach” officers from other police departments through sign-up bonuses, inflated salaries, etc.

The next budget meeting will be held on Thursday, January 9, 2025 starting at 6:00 p.m. There will be a discussion of the Economic Development budget as well as another budget recap including the revisions agreed upon tonight. Ms. Baroffio will provide updated budget sheets to reflect these changes. She noted that based on these revisions, the estimated tax rate increase will be 8.5%. This is a slight increase from the 7.7% that had been projected before the revisions accepted at this meeting.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

V. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Shernock, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Morse voting in opposition.**

The Board adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/e87HMFYwLw>

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of January 14, 2025.