

Town of Northfield, Vermont
Joint Meeting of the Northfield Electric
and Water & Wastewater Commissions
Minutes of November 4, 2024

Roll Call: Dennis Donahue, Steve Fitzhugh, John Stevens, and Charlie Morse(absent). Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz and Utility Superintendent James Russo.

The meeting started at 6:31 p.m.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting.

Motion by Mr. Stevens, seconded by Mr. Donahue, to approve the minutes of the October 7, 2024 meeting.
Motion passed 3-0-0.

Meeting of the Electric Commission

Northfield Electric Department (NED) Upcoming Projects.

Nantanna Mill Hydroelectric Facility. Manager Schulz said the Quebec-based company that purchased the mill about four (4) years ago really seem anxious to get this power plant back into operation. They still need to obtain a Certificate of Public Good from the Public Utility Commission (PUC) and reach a power purchase agreement with NED. Manager Schulz said this is a complicated process and Mr. Fitzhugh has been a great assistance in working this out. Mr. Fitzhugh noted that the plant can't be fully tested until it has been connected to the power grid and Green Mountain Power (GMP) will help with this. Manager Schulz added that the property on which the plant is located is now subject to tax sale as there are two (2) years of delinquent property taxes. He is hoping that this will be resolved before the tax sale is held (11/27/24). Manager Schulz said there will be a number of challenges before this facility is put back in operation.

Darn Tough Efficiency Upgrades. Manager Schulz said Darn Tough (aka Cabot Hosiery) has received a \$650,000 revolving loan from the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) in order to make their Northfield facility more energy efficient with a new roof and other upgrades. He noted that Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' office pushed this energy efficiency program.

Norwich University (NU) Cemetery Electric Service. Mr. Russo said the underground cable and conduit was installed along Scenic Drive Road from the Dole Hill Road utility pole to the cemetery. We now have to wait for GMP to set up the new transformer and complete all the hookups. Mr. Russo said it took about five (5) days to complete the work.

Main Street Bridge Replacement Project. Mr. Fitzhugh said we are still waiting for easement from Champlain Farms and the Fernandez Living Trust in order to complete the required utility relocation work. Manager Schulz noted that both parties are seeking concessions from the municipality before providing their approval. He will reach out to them again. Manager Schulz said the new apartment complex planned for the old Cetrangelo Lot is another new factor in this project. He added that the housing developers are hoping to break ground next spring. Mr. Russo said we still need an agreement with Dollar General to relocate their power lines.

King Street Battery Storage Project. Mr. Fitzhugh said that the private business Lightshift (formerly Delorean Power) pursuing this project has revised the interconnection agreement wording, which GMP is now reviewing as this facility would be connected to their power grid.

Smart Meters. Mr. Fitzhugh will be meeting with some contractors tomorrow (11/05/24) to discuss the proposed locations of the nine (9) Data Concentration Units (DCUs) that will be scattered around town. VPPSA will own the DCUs and charge NED a small monthly fee for using them.

Budget Status Reports. Manager Schulz did not have much to report as we are still fairly early into the 2024/2025 fiscal year. He did say that NED revenues and expenditures seem good at this time with no red flags.

Other Business.

Electric Abatements. Manager Schulz said Electric Utility Commissioner Charles Morse (absent tonight) has raised concerns about new state legislation that allows the Board of Abatement to abate delinquent utility accounts in addition to delinquent property taxes. He added that that a Board of Abatement meeting was held last month (10/01/24) and an NED customer requested a utility abatement in the amount of \$2767.49. It was noted that after some discussion, the approved abatement amount was \$300.00. Mr. Morse is concerned that the local utility commissioners have been excluded from the abatement process and would like the new legislation revised to include them.

Mr. Fitzhugh is planning to attend the next VPPSA meeting and he will bring this matter up at that time as VPPSA does lobby the state legislature on behalf of its member communities.

Meeting of the Water & Wastewater Commission

Northfield Water & Sewer Department Upcoming Projects.

Main Street Waterline and Reservoir Replacement Project. Manager Schulz has concluded the agreements with the contractors for these projects. The waterline work will be done by J. Hutchins, Inc. (Richmond, VT) for the low bid amount of \$3,968,000, which was a little more than the project engineer anticipated. The reservoir replacement work will be done by Preload (Louisville, KY) for the low bid amount of \$2,250,000. This was a little less than the engineer predicted. Manager Schulz added that the State of Vermont is subsidizing about half of the project total costs through a long-term no-interest revolving loan. Mr. Russo also would like to replace some waterlines on the west side of town (School Street, Pearl Street, and Vine Street) in the near future. Once those projects have been completed, there is additional waterline replacement work to be done in other neighborhoods.

Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) update. Mr. Russo said we are meeting the phosphorus treatment thresholds accruing to the current permit but he has concerns what will be required when that permit expires in 2026. He added that the building's heat pumps need to be replaced and the building is showing its age in other ways. For example, leaking valves will require the WWTF to be closed down for three (3) to four (4) hours so they can be replaced. Manager Schulz noted that the current permit required the last remaining Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) on the system to be closed out and testing to be done afterwards for any remaining bacteria. The testing has been done and it was found that some Highland Avenue abodes are now hooked up to the stormwater system and not the wastewater system. These hookups need to be changed as soon as possible. Mr. Russo said the timing depends on how quickly all the affected structures can be identified.

WWTF Twenty-Year Reevaluation. Manager Schulz said the report was completed last month and has been emailed to the utility commissioners for review. The report states that the condition of the WWTF will be considered acceptable for at least five (5) years but then significant upgrades will be required. Mr. Fitzhugh has looked over the report's recommendations and said this report will at least provide the municipality with a work plan for required improvements and allow for sufficient time to budget for them. Mr. Stevens and Mr. Donahue only received the report recently and haven't had the opportunity yet to fully review it.

Street Discountenance on NU Campus. Manager Schulz said NU withdrew its request to discontinue Park Avenue and University Drive just a few days before the required site visit and public hearing that were to be held on October 22, 2024. He is not fully sure why this has been delayed. Mr. Fitzhugh said it had seemed this road discontinuance would have benefited both parties. NU now will have to obtain setbacks for the proposed new structure as Park Avenue and University Drive will remain public roads for the time being.

Budget Status Reports. As indicated earlier, we are still in the early stages of the current fiscal year but Manager Schulz said the Water and Sewer Department budgets seem good at this time with no real concerns. Mr. Russo said the sludge management budget is going well and the first sludge shipment in several months happened earlier today. He added that chemical costs remain high but the prices are keeping steady at this time.

Public Participation (unscheduled): There was none.

Adjournment. Motion by Mr. Fitzhugh, seconded by Mr. Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 6:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk