

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of January 28, 2025**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Joe Wantuck (Chair, Northfield Energy Committee), Patrick Meehan (Northfield Energy Committee), Sheila Bannister, Chandler Murch, Manoj Path, Susan Stillinger, Gerard LaVarnway, Brian Massey, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those present were asked to join the Select Board members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

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

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. January 9, 2025 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. Board member Shernock found one typo that will be corrected. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. January 14, 2025 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Petty found two errors in the minutes that will be corrected. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #14-25 & #14-25A-B.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #14-25 & #14-25A-B in the amount of \$283,809.91. Board member Stevens asked about an engine replacement for the jetter/vacuum truck. Manager Schulz said the Town of Morrisville donated the vehicle to the Town of Northfield last year but the engine recently developed problems and had to be replaced. The expense will be distributed amongst several departments. Board member Petty noted the purchase of new roadside speed signs and hopes they will work better than the old ones. Manager Schulz confirmed the new speed signs are more sophisticated and can notify drivers when they are exceeding the posted speed limit, record data regarding traffic volume and speed, etc. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through January 19, 2025.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$127,452.96. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. Approval of 2025 Northfield Town Meeting Warning.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and sign the warning as presented by management. Board member Morse noted that the warning included articles that would ask voters if they would prefer in future that the municipal budget and all other "public questions" be voted on by Australian ballot rather than from the floor at the Town Meeting open session. He thought it would be good to clarify on the warning that should voters approve these two (2) articles, this new method of voting would go into effect starting in 2026. There was no objection to this suggestion. Chair Maxwell said the benefit of having the budget approved at the open session is that it could be revised at that time. However, he personally does support making the change to Australian ballot as many people who are physically or otherwise unable to attend the open session are currently excluded from the budget approval process. **Motion to approve the 2025 Northfield Town Meeting with the revisions indicated above passed 4-1-0, with Board member Stevens voting in opposition.**
- b. Tax Stabilization Policy and Application.** Manager Schulz stated the Select Board members drafted a tax stabilization policy for Northfield about ten (10) years ago. After two failed attempts in 2015 and 2016 to obtain voter approval for the new policy, which required a two-thirds vote, the policy was approved at the 2017 Town Meeting. However, it has been felt that the tax stabilization policy has been underutilized since its approval and thus due for a significant upgrade. Since Manager Schulz expects there to be new applications in the near future, he thought it was best to update the application form to more accurately reflect current economic development conditions.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the revised tax stabilization agreement application form. Board member Shernock was grateful that Manager Schulz had brought up this matter for Select Board review as much has changed in recent years regarding the use of alternative energy sources for new building construction or renovation projects. She would prefer that the application form be revised so that it would be required that tax stabilization agreement applicants confirm that their projects would make use of alternative energy sources, such as geothermal, rather than rely on fossil fuels. Board member Morse thought that the form could be revised so that the applicants could indicate whether or not they plan to use alternative energy sources in their development projects. Manager Schulz believes that when the tax stabilization policy was first drafted, the intent was to encourage local economic development in Northfield. He did not feel that there should be a firm requirement to use alternative energy sources on the application form. Board member Morse noted that heat pumps don't operate in extremely low temperatures and thus often require a backup heating service that requires the use of such fossil fuels as propane, etc. Patrick Meehan from the Northfield Energy Committee (NEC) said geothermal heat pumps do allow for heating in the winter and cooling in the summer regardless of the outside temperature. He and the NEC members would encourage the Select Board members to consider the construction of a central geothermal system that would service the community. NEC Chair Joe Wantuch felt the municipality certainly should incentivize new developments that make use of such alternate energy sources as geothermal. He also supports revising the tax stabilization application form to strongly favor use of cleaner and more efficient energy sources. Board member Petty would like the application form revised to better reflect the energy efficiency language contained in the Northfield Town Plan. She also would prefer that use of alternative energy sources should be encouraged but not a requirement in the approval process. Chair Maxwell also would not like such restrictive language included on the application form that would discourage local economic development projects. He then asked what the timeline was for approving the new application form. Manager Schulz would like to see the application form approved within the next month before new tax stabilization agreement applications are presented for approval. Chair Maxwell also would like the NEC members given the opportunity to provide their input on the application form wording. Mr. Wantuch noted that after tonight's meeting, the NEC, which has been short two members for quite some time, will be back to being a five-member committee as originally intended. This will allow the NEC to become more active in developing and promoting energy efficiency programs. Mr. Wantuch said the NEC members would like the opportunity to present such proposals to the Select Board members at a future meeting. Board member Petty then asked if the Town Attorney has reviewed the revised application form language to make sure it is in compliance with state law. Manager Schulz said a legal review of the original application form was done several years ago but another could be done to make sure there are no valid concerns about the recent revisions. Board member Shernock suggested that the NEC members might be included in the application approval process. Board member Petty noted these applications come before the Economic Development Subcommittee members at their open meetings so certainly the NEC members could attend and provide their views at that time. Board member Shernock felt having a properly written tax stabilization application form might be a very good way to encourage smart development in this community. After further discussion, there was Select Board consensus to table the motion to approve the application form until more information can be provided.

- c. **Northfield Cemetery Fee Adjustments.** Manager Schulz noted that during a recent budget meeting, Cemetery Maintenance Contractor Bruce Wright informed the Select Board members that many of the fees associated with the Northfield cemeteries are much lower than what comparable public cemeteries in this region charge. Mr. Wright then provided his recommendations regarding how these fees should be revised. This include raising the cost for the purchase of cemetery lots, for grave openings, etc. Manager Schulz reviewed Mr. Wright's suggested fee increases and subsequently revised some of these downward as he did not want to increase the fees too much at one time. For example, Mr. Wright wanted to increase the cost of a half lot (2 graves) for Northfield residents from \$1,200 to \$1,800 whereas Manager Schulz is recommending that the cost be increased to \$1,580. Manager Schulz did his own research on what other public cemeteries in the region are charging and felt this was a more equitable increase.

Chair Maxwell remembers Mr. Wright speaking of the great disparities between Northfield cemetery fees and what other communities charge. He then asked how these changes would affect the municipal budget. Manager Schulz said there would be very little impact as most of these fee payments go directly to Mr. Wright in his role as verger. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the cemetery fees adjustments as presented by management. The Select Board members then expressed their views that the fee increases proposed by Manager Schulz seemed very reasonable at this time. The new fees will be listed on the municipal website and printed in the next Town Report. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- d. **Northfield Energy Committee (NEC) Appointments.** Manager Schulz noted there have been two (2) vacancies on the NEC for some time. Fortunately, Sheila Bannister and Chandler Murch have submitted letters of interest for the vacant positions. These appointments also have been recommended by the current NEC members. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Sheila Bannister and Chandler Murch to the Northfield Energy Committee. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- e. **Appointment of Individual to Receive Municipal Code of Ethics Alleged Violation Complaints.** Manager Schulz said that as part of local compliance with the new state legislation that created the Municipal Code of Ethics, the municipality needs to appoint someone who is authorized to receive alleged Code of Ethics violation complaints. He recommends that Administrative Assistant Kenneth L. McCann be appointed to this role. Mr. McCann will receive the complaints, record them, and then provide them to Manager Schulz, whom the Select Board members have already appointed as the municipality's ethics liaison officer. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Mr. McCann as the person to receive Municipal Code of Ethics violation complaints. Board member Petty noted that Mr. McCann also would be responsible for tracking the online training that municipal officials are required to take as part of the new code of ethics legislation. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Northfield Town Report 2025.** Manager Schulz said the annual town report is scheduled to be delivered to the printer (Stillwater Graphics) next week. The report also will be put online on the municipal website even before the hardcopies are returned to Northfield for public distribution.
- b. **Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Historic Bridge Rehabilitation Funding.** Manager Schulz said he received a letter from VTrans stating that as the federal funds for their Historic Bridge Preservation program have been exhausted, municipalities now will be required to provide local matching funds for these bridge projects. The local match amount would be five percent (5%). The four (4) local bridges that had been targeted for this program are the three (3) covered bridges in Northfield Falls and the Rabbit Hollow Road Bridge.
- c. **Cross Brother Dam Removal Project.** Manager Schulz said the engineering plans for this project are now sixty percent (60%) completed and will be presented at the next Select Board regular meeting (02/11/25).
- d. **FEMA Reimbursement Funds.** The municipality is expecting the receipt of FEMA funds that would reimburse the municipality for repairs related to the local flooding events. Manager Schulz contacted FEMA to determine whether there would be any delay due to the recent freeze on federal grant payments but was assured that the funds were already in the pipeline and there should not be much further delay.
- e. **Pool House Renovations.** Manager Schulz said the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee held a kickoff meeting last week (01/22/25) with the hired project architects. The architects provided three (3) options for building renovations. Two (2) of these options included rather extensive reconfigurations of the building while the other was limited in scope and intended only to make sure the facility met ADA compliance guidelines. The architects were asked by Manager Schulz to provide cost estimates for the different options so the best way to proceed can be determined.

- f. Wall Street Pedestrian Improvement Project.** Manager Schulz has prepared and begun distributing the RFP for engineering services for this project. Even though the formal state grant agreement has not yet been provided, Manager Schulz was encouraged by state administrators to move forward at this time on the project.
- g. Contract Street Sweeping and Line Marking.** As requested by the Select Board members. Manager Schulz has already hired contractors for this annual work so that it can be completed much earlier than it was last year.
- h. DEI Training Sessions.** Manager Schulz said state officials will be coming to Northfield soon to discuss options for holding in-person DEI training sessions for municipal officials and employees. It is possible to do this training online but the Select Board members have expressed their preference for in-person training as more effective.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Zoning Regulations Consultant.** Board member Shernock asked about the status of hiring a zoning regulations consultant who could assist the municipality in revising the local zoning bylaws to encourage smart development. Manager Schulz said there are state planning grant funds that are now available and he is working on the grant application form that is due by the end of February 2025.
- b. Covered Bridge Damage Update.** Board member Shernock asked if there are any developments regarding the recent damage to the Slaughterhouse Road Covered Bridge and the Moseley Bridge located on Stony Brook Road. Manager Schulz said he got in contact with Daniels Construction, which is a bridge repair specialist, about fixing the damaged bridges. He also is looking into installing steel bars in the covered bridge interiors that would prevent oversized vehicles from accessing them. Manager Schulz added that it has become difficult to get our insurance company to provide sufficient funds to cover the repair costs. Board member Shernock then thanked Manager Schulz for sending out a letter to residents living near Slaughterhouse Bridge in order to obtain information regarding who might have been responsible for the recent damage.
- c. Riverwalk Project Working Group Update.** Board member Shernock reported that this working group met a couple weeks ago (01/15/25) and it was decided at that time to publicly display both large and small visual depictions of how the initial phase of this project would appear once completed. The large displays have been installed at the Brown Public Library (upper floor) and in the Municipal Building. Smaller printouts will be delivered and put on display at other various locations throughout the community including shops, restaurants, service stations, etc.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Elroy Hill: Heat Pump Electric Usage.** Mr. Hill stated that even though heat pumps have been lauded for their energy efficiency, he warned that they do consume a lot of electricity in the winter months. He is aware of someone who saw their electric bill increase by twenty-five percent (25%) after installing a heat pump. Mr. Hill also is concerned that the growing popularity of heat pumps might require extensive and expensive upgrades of the local power grid in order to create sufficient electric capacity.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/4bbzL6-37Hk>

These minutes are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.