

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of October 8, 2024**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse (7:24 p.m.), Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock (absent), and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Pierre Gomez (Chief, Northfield Police Department), Tim Swartz (Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force), Bill Clements (AWPS Task Force), Dan Anderson (AWPS Task Force), Delane McIlvene (AWPS Task Force), Kaitlyn Keating (AWPS Task Force), Carolyn Stevens (AWPS Task Force), Susan Stillinger, Gerard LaVarnway, 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. September 24, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

- VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. Approval of Warrant #07-25 & 07-25A-B.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #07-25 & 07-25A-B in the amount of \$1,106,402.80. Board member Stevens noted LED lights had been purchased for the Town Garage. Manager Schulz confirmed that the old lights were in bad shape and had to be replaced. We did receive an Efficiency Vermont rebate for the new LED lights. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

- b. Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through September 29, 2024.** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Petty, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$135,928.10. Manager Schulz said the payroll has increased in recent weeks mainly due to new full-time employees in the Highway Department and the Utilities Department. The personnel expenses for the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) also went up significantly for this payroll period. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

- VII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell noted a new ARPA fund request has been submitted by Board members Shernock and Stevens, who serve on the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee. The request is for \$22,000 to hire an architect to redesign the accessory building that houses the changing rooms, bathrooms, etc. at the Municipal Pool. The subcommittee met last week and members of the Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety [AWPS] Task Force attended and provided specific examples of the building's many deficiencies. They proposed changes that would make sure the building meets ADA accessibility requirements, install improved lighting, ensure fire code compliance, add family changing rooms, fix plumbing problems, etc. Manager Schulz noted that the AWPS Task Force members have provided design plans of the current facility with suggestions for these building improvements. He added that professional engineering plans will need to be drafted in order to obtain a state permit for the building renovations. Manager Schulz noted that there are several state grant programs that provide funds for outdoors recreation projects and he will work with Economic Development Director Tom Davis on locating and applying for them. Chair Maxwell asked if this was a building rehabilitation project or a complete rebuild. Manager Schulz said that would mainly depend on what the architect recommends. Board member Stevens thought that the architect should be able to make good use of the building improvement suggestions provided by the AWPS Task Force members. These proposals would maintain the building's current footprint and exterior configuration. He added that Pool Director Shannon Palone reported at the subcommittee meeting that this building hasn't seen major improvements for at least forty (40) years.

Chair Maxwell asked where the \$22,000 figure came from. Board member Stevens said he spoke informally to some architects he knows and that was the estimated cost. Chair Maxwell asked if the current plan is to cover the actual renovation costs with grant funds. Manager Schulz confirmed that was the idea. Board member Petty asked if the architect was limited to the suggestions provided by the AWPS Task Force members. Board member Stevens said the architect would be free to provide a different vision as well. It is possible many different alternative plans will be provided for this project. AWPS Task Force member Tim Swartz agreed that the suggested plans were one possible solution but not necessarily the only one. He added that in developing these plans, there was an intention to maintain the current building's exterior and footprint. Chair Maxwell asked if there was a timeline for this project. Mr. Swartz said there was no set timeline for the construction phase of the project but they would like to have the project architect hired soon so that definite plans with cost estimates could be developed. This would allow for grant applications to be submitted in the near future. Board member Petty noted the building now has designated changing rooms for male and females; she was hoping the redesigned building also would have gender-neutral options. Mr. Swartz thought the project architect might be find a solution for this. He noted that the building now has two (2) separate changing areas, which are now divided by gender. Board member Petty thought if this could not be resolved in terms of dedicated changing rooms, perhaps unisex bathrooms could be installed to allow for additional privacy options.

Board member Morse arrived at this time.

Board member Petty is grateful for all the work the AWPS Task Force members have put into this proposal. Mr. Swartz said the Task Force members appreciate that the Select Board members have been receptive to this proposal as well as their previous suggestions. AWPS Task Force member Dan Anderson noted the plans submitted also call for a paved area in front of the building's entrances to make them more accessible to the public. This paved area would connect with existing sidewalks in the area. Board member Petty thought it might be best to set a cost ceiling for building renovations as it might be less expensive in the long run to raze the current building and start over again with a new structure. Board member Petty asked if the Town would need to accompany the draft concept drawings with a list of requirements for the proposed renovations, to make sure that all the goals of the design changes would be met by the architects. Mr. Swartz and the other AWPS Task Force members agreed that this was necessary, but that they have not yet prepared such a list. The Task Force members also said that they want to develop a similar design concept drawing to show improvements in the "staff" area of the pool building. Pool Director Shannon Palone has told the AWPS group that the existing areas for staff to use, and the storage provided is very poorly designed. The group would like to meet with Shannon Palone to come up with design changes that would better meet the needs of her and the other staff members. The Select Board members agreed with this approach. Motion by Board member Petty, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize up to \$22,000 in ARPA funds in order to hire an architect to redesign the Municipal Pool accessory building. Manager Schulz will follow the municipal purchasing policy and develop an RFP to hire the project architect. **Motion passed 4-0-0.** Chair Maxwell then thanked the AWPS Task Force members for all the good work they have done on this and other public accessibility projects.

Chair Maxwell noted updated ARPA fund balances were included in the packets. There had been \$74,000 in undesignated ARPA funds but that has just been reduced by \$22,000 (see above). Board member Petty said there still is a \$1,053,249 balance in unobligated funds, which includes ARPA funds that have been awarded but have not been expended and/or fully committed through project contracts, etc. Chair Maxwell then went through the list of ongoing ARPA-funded projects to determine which could be fully committed before the year's end deadline. It was noted at previous meetings that any remaining undesignated funds could be included in a Select Board resolution that would allocate them as "workforce retention" funds and thus be added to the Town General budget as surplus funds. The largest amount of unobligated funds is for the sidewalk work on Vine Street and Cross Street, for which \$468,300 in ARPA funds have been designated. Manager Schulz will soon be soliciting RFPs for this project and is fairly confident that a work contract can be signed within the next couple of months.

- b. Riverwalk Project Act 250 Permit Request.** Manager Schulz said there have been a few conversations regarding whether new Act 250 permits will be required for the Riverwalk project or whether existing Act 250 permits along the proposed trail route would suffice. He has contacted the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) about this and it was the opinion of CVRPC Planner Will Pitkin that the best course of action would be to request a jurisdictional opinion from the Natural Resources Board. Mr. Pitkin thought given the uncertainty over whether Act 250 permits really are required, submitting the jurisdictional opinion request would save time in the long run by deciding this question once and for all. Board member Morse favored moving forward on this question so that the Riverwalk Project Working Group could continue work on their own design plans. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to direct Manager Schulz to obtain a jurisdictional opinion from the Natural Resources Board regarding Phase D of the Northfield Riverwalk Project. Board member Morse feels that if we learn that Phase D, which is the shortest of the four (4) project segments, requires an Act 250 permit, then it is logical that the other trail segments also will require Act 250 permits. **Motion passed 4-0-0.** Board member Morse would like the progress of this jurisdiction opinion added to the Select Board's tickler file.
- c. Road Discontinuance Site Visit & Public Hearing: Tuesday, October 22, 2024.** The Select Board members will hold this site visit and public hearing in response to a request from Norwich University (NU) to discontinue University Drive and Park Avenue, which both are located entirely on the NU campus, in order to facilitate the nearby construction of a new building (i.e., Cyber Fusion Center). The site visit will start at 4:00 p.m. and attendees are asked to meet at the NU Communications Building, which is near the intersection of these two streets. The public hearing will be held at 7:00 p.m. at the start of that night's Select Board regular meeting. Board member Morse noted this proposed road discontinuance was discussed at last night's Utility Commissions meeting. It was felt that should the road discontinuance be approved, there should be some preconditions attached to ensure future protection of the public water supply. This could include new easements, etc. so that the waterlines in the area would remain accessible to municipal employees for needed repairs, etc.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Highway Paving Update.** Manager Schulz said the paving contractor would be in town starting this Friday (10/11/24) to commence the repaving of East Street, Doyon Road, and Dickinson Drive. He will have postings on local social media to keep residents informed of the project's progress.
- b. Roadside Leaf Collection.** Manager Schulz said the leaf picker will start collecting roadside leaves on Monday, October 14, 2024 and will operate through Friday, November 22, 2024. If there is a major snowstorm, the leaf collection could end early.
- c. Lead-Lined Pipe Inventory.** Manager Schulz said the utility crew has completed this survey for the State of Vermont, which will prove the municipality with \$60,000 in reimbursement funds for their workhours and other expenses related to this project.
- d. Smart Meters.** Manager Schulz said the local installation of smart meters was originally scheduled for this autumn but now the project has been delayed until next spring. However, the project is otherwise moving forward, which is a good development.
- e. Nantanna Mill Hydroelectric Facility.** Manager Schulz said a Quebec-based company purchased the power plant about four (4) years ago. After some delays, they now plan to start producing electricity in the near future. As the facility needs some updates, it probably will take a lot of work before it can be put back in operation.
- f. Proposed New Apartment Complex.** Manager Schulz noted that the proposal for the thirty (30) unit apartment complex to be built next to Dollar General will come before the next meeting (10/24/24) of the Development Review Board (DRB).

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Utility Bill Abatements.** Board member Morse said another item discussed at last night's Utility Commissions Meeting was that utility bill abatements now are decided by the Board of Abatement, which consists of the local Justices of the Peace, Select Board members, Listers, Town Treasurer, Delinquent Tax Collector, and Utility Office Manager. He felt it was wrong that the Utility Commissioners are excluded from this process. Chair Maxwell believes the Select Board members should have the final authority on this matter but also felt the Utility Commissioners should be included in the initial discussion of abatement requests.

Manager Schulz said the current process is the result of a new state legislation designed to protect delinquent utility customers from severe penalties for unpaid bills. This law made the Board of Abatement the sole authority for approving abatements for unpaid utility bills and delinquent property taxes. Manager Schulz will reach out to the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA), which lobbies the state legislature on behalf of its member communities, to see if this new legislation could be revisited. Chair Maxwell also feels the members of the Board of Abatement should take Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) training (when available) on the abatement process so they can make better informed decisions in future.

- b. Town Budget Surpluses.** Board member Morse noted the municipality has seen significant budget surpluses at the end of the past few fiscal years. He would like the Town Budget & Financial Review Subcommittee (Board members Maxwell and Morse) to meet before the next fiscal year budget is drafted in order to take steps to try to limit future budget surplus amounts. Manager Schulz noted that a good part of last year's budget surplus was due to personnel savings in the Northfield Police Department (NPD) and the Highway Department with some full-time positions remaining unfilled for most or all of the fiscal year. Board member Petty doesn't believe having these budget surpluses should be a major concern as the budgets are developed based on projections derived from recent years' actual expenditures. There always seem to be unanticipated developments, such as material cost increases, personnel shortages, etc. that can result in budget surpluses or shortfalls. Chair Maxwell said the budget subcommittee should meet soon in order to fully discuss the budget surplus situation and other matters.
- c. Energy Audit Results.** Board member Stevens asked if the energy audit of the Municipal Building and the Brown Public Library has been completed. Manager Schulz said he just received the results and will provide summary copies to the Select Board members. Now that the audit has been completed, the municipality will be able to apply for energy efficiency project grants.
- d. Municipal Culvert Inventory.** Board member Stevens believes the local inventory of municipal-owned culverts needs to be updated as many new ones have been installed over the past couple of years. Manager Schulz said CVRPC did the field work for the most recent inventory and he will check to see if they are interested in doing it again.
- e. Kiosk Relocation.** Board member Petty would like a new location found for the kiosk/bus stop as soon as possible so the structure doesn't spend another winter in outside storage. There had been a proposal to place the kiosk on the south side of Depot Square by the NU-owned armory building but an engineer has recommended against this due to the spacing constraints and accessibility concerns. Board member Petty felt there no longer was an obvious location near the Common but some decision should be made soon. Chair Maxwell felt the kiosk's future should be fully discussed as a warned topic on a future meeting agenda. We also should get input from many informed sources including Green Mountain Transit. The ultimate solution might be to find a location a little further from Depot Square than has been considered in the past. This could include by the Dollar General store and the proposed new apartment complex.
- f. Select Board Appreciation.** Chair Maxwell wanted to thank the Northfield Farmers Market, which held its final outdoor market today, all their good work this past year. The final market saw the judging of a Scarecrow Contest, which proved to be very popular event and a fitting climax for the market's autumn season. Chair Maxwell also wanted to thank Mayo Healthcare for all they provide for the community throughout the year, which included providing transportation for its long-term residents so they also could enjoy the most recent (as well as upcoming) celebrations on the Common.

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

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

The Board adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/qhUsqBq3GJ4>

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of October 22, 2024.