

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of December 13, 2022**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Tom Davis (Economic Development Director), John Helfant (Chief, Northfield Police Department), Andrew Bachand (Kittell Branagan & Sargent), Derek Hungerford (Kittell Branagan & Sargent), Merry Shernock, Stevie Balch, Russ Barrett, Carolyn Stevens, Erin Hicks-Tibbles, Nigel Hicks-Tibbles, Tim Swartz, and Elroy Hill.

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

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

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

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Andrew Bachand CPA and Derek Hungerford CPA, Kittell Branagan & Sargent (KBS): FY 2021/2022 Financial Audit Reports.** Mr. Bachand is a KBS Managing Partner and Mr. Hungerford serves as manager and, as Chair Maxwell noted, is a Norwich University (NU) alumnus. Mr. Hungerford was part of the KBS team that came to Northfield last August to examine the municipality's finances in person. He said it was a bit of a homecoming for him and he found it interesting how much the NU campus and the Northfield community has changed since his graduation. Mr. Hungerford said the audit produced an unmodified opinion, also known as a "clean" opinion, which in auditing terms means "the auditor concludes that the financial statements of a given entity are presented fairly, in all material respects, in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles." He said that a single audit, which is necessary when a "non-federal entity... expends \$750,000 or more in federal funds in one year," was not needed for this past fiscal year. However, it probably will be required in future years when Northfield's share of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds (\$1,900,000) is expended. He noted that ARPA expenditures must be designated before the end of 2024 and all funds must be spent before the end of 2026. Mr. Hungerford then provided examples of various local projects on which ARPA funds could be expended, such as infrastructure improvements, replacing municipal revenue lost due to the pandemic, etc. Chair Maxwell said that there will be a report later tonight from the outreach group that held numerous public forums in order to gauge local opinion on how the ARPA funds should be expended. Mr. Hungerford stated that only the first of two APRA payments was received by the end of the FY 2021-2022 fiscal year (June 30, 2022) and that is why the full amount is not included in this audit.

Mr. Hungerford then provided a brief overview of the municipality's financial situation, which he said had a healthy current balance. As for propriety funds related to the operation of the utility departments, which are supposed to be self-sustaining, Mr. Hungerford said the water and sewer departments both had a gain from operations but the electric department did show some losses. He then referred the Select Board members to the "Budgetary Comparison Schedule" that indicated actual expenditures broken down by department as compared to the FY 2021/2022 budget as approved by Northfield voters. Mr. Hungerford then asked if there were any questions. Board member Goodrich did not have any questions but thanked Mr. Hungerford and Mr. Bachand for attending tonight and providing such a favorable report. Board member Morse asked if it were possible in future to provide a double-sided audit report in order to cut down the paper used. Mr. Bachand said it is the municipality's report so it can be provided in any format the Select Board members prefer. Board member Morse then asked about an auditing line item that refers to "doubtful accounts." Mr. Bachand said this was the terminology used regarding uncollectable payments to the municipality. Board member Morse asked if ARPA funds are included in the listing of inter-government revenue. Mr. Hungerford said they were and they are indicated as "unearned revenue" until they are expended. Board member Morse would like references to the municipality's insurance coverage to indicate this is through VLCT PACIF. Mr. Hungerford said the wording can be changed in future.

Board member Morse then noted for the record the section entitled "Concentration of Revenue" that states "The Town receives a major portion of its revenue from Norwich University. For the year ended June 30, 2022, the Town received 25% of total water sales, 33% of total wastewater sales and 28% of total electric sales from Norwich University." Board member Morse felt it was important for community members to know how much NU contributes to the financial well-being of the municipality. The other Select Board members did not have any questions but also were grateful for the information provided tonight. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Hungerford and Mr. Bachand for the positive news about the municipality's financial situation.

- b. Merry Shernock, ARPA Funds Outreach Committee: Public Feedback & Recommendations.** Ms. Shernock said in Fall 2021, she volunteered and the Select Board members authorized her to organize a series of community outreach meetings in order educate residents about the ARPA funding Northfield would be receiving, how these funds could be used, and to obtain public feedback on how they should be expended. Ms. Shernock then formed an ad hoc committee that held a series of weekly Friday evening meetings in February, March, and April 2022 in order to determine the best methodology for this outreach effort. Ms. Shernock served as committee chair and the other members were Carolyn Stevens, Anastasia Rhodes, Rebecca Pearish, Clare O'Shaughnessy, Mark Fournier, and Stevie Balch. Leslie Striebe, a teacher at the Northfield Middle/High School (NMHS), also attended a number of meetings and was very helpful with the outreach effort to local youth. The Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) also provided considerable assistance regarding the rules governing which potential projects would or would not be eligible for the use of ARPA funds. The committee then decided to hold a series of outreach meetings at locations spread throughout the Northfield community. The outreach meeting schedule was as follows: Tuesday, May 31, 2022 at the Woods Lodge; Saturday, June 4, 2022 at the Falls General Store; Tuesday, June 7, 2022 at the American Legion; Sunday, September 11, 2022 at the United Church; and Wednesday, September 14, 2022 at the Senior Center. An additional hybrid meeting with both in-person and remote capability was held in the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library on Thursday, June 9, 2022. The minutes of these organizational and outreach meetings are posted on the municipal website (<https://www.northfield-vt.gov/select-board-subcommittees>). In order to publicize these meetings beforehand, posters and pamphlets were generated and distributed including inclusion in utility bills. To include those who could not attend the meetings, a survey was created with hardcopies distributed around the community and also was available online through SurveyMonkey. Ms. Shernock then went through the survey questions, which also are available for view on the municipal website (<https://www.northfield-vt.gov/select-board>) in the appendices to the project report. Some survey questions were open-ended while others were forced-choice in order to receive specific responses such as the community's best current features and how Northfield could be improved through the use of ARPA funds. Ms. Shernock said the completed surveys indicated four major trends. 1. Investment in our People (improved walkability, connectiveness, gathering spaces, etc.); 2. Downtown Revitalization (Common rehabilitation, possible Amtrak stop, electric vehicle charging stations, commercial development, more dining options, etc.); 3. Investment in our Natural Resources (improved forest trail access, Dog River access, more outdoor recreational opportunities, etc.); and 4. Investment in Infrastructure (more affordable housing, job development, affordable childcare, expanded broadband internet access, etc.). As indicated earlier, Ms. Striebe assisted with getting NMHS students respond to the surveys on their laptops. Their responses largely mirrored those of the adults but there was somewhat more emphasis on local job creation, more entertainment and recreational opportunities, etc. In both cases, there seemed to be a desire for a number of smaller projects rather than sinking the bulk of funding into one or two major projects. Ms. Shernock then asked if the Select Board members had any questions. There were no specific questions but all were very grateful for the large amount of work that went into this opinion-gathering process. Chair Maxwell said the result was a very thorough and detailed overview of community feeling regarding priorities for the expenditure of these ARPA funds. The information gathered will be invaluable when the Select Board members start making decisions on behalf of the Northfield community.

- c. Russ Barrett: Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Update.** Mr. Barrett serves as Northfield's Tree Warden and also is a member of the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC), Town Forest Stewardship Committee, the Dog River Park Committee, and the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee. As Tree Warden and NCC member, Mr. Barrett has for the past couple years been leading the local effort to develop strategies to deal with the migration of the invasive exotic insects known as emerald ash borers that already have devastated large areas of ash trees since they were first found in the United States about twenty (20) years ago in southeastern Michigan. EABs were first detected in Vermont in 2020 and Mr. Barrett provided the Select Board members with an updated map that shows Washington County to be among the most severely infested areas in the state. Although EABs have not yet been discovered in Northfield, Mr. Barrett would like the Select Board's authorization to develop a strategy over the winter on how to best address this problem. He believes possible approaches fell into three (3) general categories. The first would be a very pro-active approach that would require removal of large numbers of ash trees to prevent the spread of infestation. The initial cost for this approach would be rather high. The second approach he called "selective management" and would involve the designation and protection of high-value trees in the downtown and other higher visibility areas. At-risk trees along roadsides and in close proximity to utility lines would be removed. This would be an ongoing process. The third possible approach would be wholly reactive with trees treated only after they became infected. This would have no upfront costs but could become quite expensive depending on how quickly and widely the infestation spreads and also could result in whole areas of dead ash trees littering our forested areas. Mr. Barrett does favor the middle approach and noted a number of at-risk ash trees already have been removed using funding from a successful NCC state grant application. He thought it possible that some ARPA funds also could be used to fund EAB response plans. Mr. Barrett then asked if there were any questions. There was an online question as to whether ash trees can survive EAB infestation without treatment. Mr. Barrett said currently 99.7% of infected ash trees will die of the infestation within five (5) years. He added that scientists now are looking at the possibility of introducing to infested areas predator insects (i.e., parasitoid wasps) that will feed on EABs. Board member Petty asked what should be the timeline for action. Mr. Barrett said since no EABs have been found in Northfield, we still have time to develop a response plan while still removing at-risk trees. It also might be a good idea to work with other regional power companies to coordinate on the best approach to deal with at-risk trees located near power lines. Chair Maxwell said this topic and the resources required will be discussed at the upcoming budget meetings. He asked if Mr. Barrett had any cost estimates for the next fiscal year. Mr. Barrett said that depended on the response time available after the first indication of local infestation. Board member Petty asked if removed ash trees should be replaced with other EAB-resistant trees. Mr. Barrett said that depended on the location as this would be desirable mostly in the downtown and other higher visibility areas but not on the backroads, etc. There now are fourteen (14) ash trees located in public rights-of-way. Manager Schulz asked if the inventory of local ash trees has been completed. Mr. Barrett said it has and he can provide the Select Board members with copies. There is a map that shows the locations of these trees and indicated which should be removed, which should be pre-treated, etc. The Select Board members indicated their interest in seeing this information. Board member Petty noted she has seen old photographs of Northfield with streets lined with elm trees that were lost over time due to Dutch Elm disease and other causes. Board member Petty asked if the NCC were investigating additional grant opportunities. Mr. Barrett said they are looking into one that would fund tree replacement. Chair Maxwell thanked Mr. Barrett for the EAB information provided tonight and looks forward to his next update.
- d. Russ Barrett: Vista Clearing/Invasive Species & Vegetation Removal Project.** Mr. Barrett said the VOREC grant did fund a project to remove invasives from a section of the Town Forest in order to create improved mountain views while protecting native flora. After soliciting bid proposals, John Fogarty of Fogarty Forestry was hired to perform the work and a couple weeks ago he was able to access the target area with heavy equipment by way of Kingston Road. The invasives were mowed down and Mr. Fogarty will return in the spring to treat the area with herbicides to prevent regrowth. Chair Maxwell thanked Mr. Barrett for the project update.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **November 8, 2022 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Petty abstaining.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #11-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #11-23 in the amount of \$1,654,467.10. Board member Goodrich noted that of the warrant amount, \$1,112,900 represented property tax payments collected by the municipality and then forwarded to the Paine Mountain School District. Board member Morse added that \$261,462.23 represented power purchases for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through November 27, 2022.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$120,348.17. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Vermont State Revolving Fund Loan Agreement (Public Wastewater/ Stormwater Improvements): \$131,280 at 0.0% interest.** Manager Schulz is asking for Select Board approval of this loan agreement that will cover engineering costs for this project. These were incurred prior to the state grant that paid for construction costs. Of the loan amount, \$74,640 will be forgiven. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and sign the loan agreement; approve and sign the general obligation note; and approve and sign the loan resolution and certificate. Board member Morse asked who would be paying back this loan. Manager Schulz said as with the overall project, there will be an even split between Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) accounts for the Highway Department and the Sewer Department. Board member Morse would like this matter tabled so that the Utility Commissions can review this cost allocation. Without objection, this matter was tabled until the next Select Board regular meeting (12/27/22). Board member Petty said the municipality did very well with this project with state grants covering almost all costs.
- b. **Select Board Retreat Follow-up: Goals Summary.** Manager Schulz and Chair Maxwell met recently to finalize the list of short-, medium-, and long-term community goals brought up at the Select Board Retreat (09/01/22). The list has been distributed to the other Select Board members and should serve as the roadmap for Northfield in coming years. Manager Schulz asked if anything had been left off this list. Board member Goodrich believes the installation of electric vehicle chargers in the downtown area had been discussed as a possible short-term goal. Also discussed were the purchase of emergency power generators for the Northfield Police Station and the Ambulance Bay. Board member Goodrich then asked why the extension of municipal sewerlines southward along Vermont Route 12 and 12A was considered a short-term goal but northward extension to Northfield Falls was a long-term goal. Chair Maxwell said the engineering for a southward sewer extension project was done years ago and just needs to be updated. Engineering for northward extension would have to be done from scratch. Board member Morse would like the creation of an "Electronic Tickler File," which is listed as a short-term goal, done as soon as possible. Board member Petty would like the list of short-term goals prioritized as it is quite lengthy. Chair Maxwell said this could be discussed at a regular meeting next month. At the same time, Select Board members could be tasked to focus on the optimal implementation process for specific goals. Board member Stevens would like the sidewalk inventory started in order to hasten the long-term goals of sidewalk expansion northward to Northfield Falls and southward along Vermont Routes 12 and 12A.
- c. **Town Budget FY 2023/2024 Process.** The Select Board members held their first budget meeting tonight at 6:00 p.m. before tonight's regular meeting. At that time, it was decided there would be three (3) additional special meetings dedicated to the proposed budget: Tuesday, December 20, 2022; Tuesday, December 27, 2022; and Tuesday, January 10, 2023. All meetings will start at 6:00 p.m. and held here in the Community Room.

In order to hasten the process, department heads will be asked to attend the meetings only if they have suggested deviations from the draft budget proposed by management. Members of the public are encouraged to attend these meeting. The first draft budget is available on the municipal website (<https://www.northfield-vt.gov/select-board>). The first draft budget envisions an 8.1% in the amount of revenue to be raised by taxes.

- d. **Declaration of Inclusion.** After researching the matter, Board member Petty is now asking the Select Board members to approve and sign a Declaration of Inclusion on behalf of the community. This resolution was written by those seeking to make Vermont a more welcoming place to current residents and those who might plan to move here. This declaration already has been adopted by seventy-three (73) Vermont communities and the hope is to have all approve it. It was noted that the Select Board members have approved a Statement of Anti-Racism (October 2020) and approval of this Declaration of Inclusion would supplement that action. The declaration reads as follows, "The Town of Northfield, Vermont condemns racism and welcomes all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, age, disability, or socioeconomic status, and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community. As a town, we formally condemn all discrimination in all of its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community, and will strive to ensure all of our actions, policies, and operating procedures reflect this commitment. The Town of Northfield, Vermont has and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions." Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and sign the Declaration of Inclusion for the Town of Northfield, Vermont. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Chair Maxwell thanked Board member Petty for bringing this to the Select Board members' attention for action.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **South Main Street Stormwater Mitigation/CSO Elimination Project.** Manager Schulz said this project has shut down for the winter. The affected section of road has been repaired and the disrupted sections of sidewalk have been restored. The repaved section of road will be restriped later this week on Thursday (12/15/22) when warmer weather returns. The contractor will return in the spring to complete the work on South Main Street and then start working on the side streets.
- b. **Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans) has completed its preliminary plans for the project. It was hoped that VTTrans representatives would be here tonight to present them but this has been postponed to next month.
- c. **Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) Community Visit.** Manager Schulz said VCRD has committed to holding a Northfield community visit next year and the process will begin with a planning meeting held by the end of January 2023. We will need to appoint a Select Board member to this planning group beforehand.
- d. **Wintertime Electric Rolling Blackouts.** Due to an anticipated shortage of natural gas in southern New England, Vermont utilities are developing contingency plans for possible rolling blackouts this winter. Board member Morse noted the blackouts would be preceded by advanced warning and would last only a few hours. Board member Goodrich thought this was a very concerning possibility. Chair Maxwell said the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) will provide periodic updates.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Northfield Police Department Concerns.** Board member Morse saw a Vermont Public report stating that nearly fifty percent (50%) of NPD officers are subject to a Brady-Giglio letter, which can limit their ability to provide court testimony and generally impair their ability to serve as police officers. This letter is issued by prosecutors and Board member Morse would like to see the Washington County policy regarding this "scarlet letter." He would like to see this practice either revised or eliminated as it invites abuse by the State Attorney's Office.
- b. **CERV Food Shelf.** Board member Morse asked if the CERV Food Shelf volunteers, who operate out of the Northfield Ambulance Service's section of the Town Garage, now had access to bathroom facilities. Manager Schulz confirmed this matter has been resolved.

- c. **Common Water Fountain.** Board member Morse noted during the recent Common Spirit Holiday Market (12/02/22), LED lights powered by a nearby stationary bicycle decorated the water fountain. The display was very popular and he felt there should be a renewed discussion of how to rehabilitate the water fountain area. Board member Morse feels there is adequate room to combine a traditional fountain with a splash pad.
- d. **Cabot Hosiery Stormwater Grant Application.** Board member Morse asked about the status of this project. Manager Schulz said this was a successful grant application submitted jointly with the municipality. The engineering needs to be done next.
- e. **Lovers Lane Safety Grant.** Board member Morse asked about the state grant that will fund the installation of new guardrails and other safety improvements on Lovers Lane. Manager Schulz said the Highway Subcommittee will need to meet in order to discuss implementation of the grant funds. Chair Maxwell said the estimated cost of the improvements is about \$700,000.
- f. **Northfield Zoning Regulations Revision, etc.** Board member Morse noted the Planning Commission have been working on this for several months. He asked when this will be completed. Manager Schulz said there is a May 2023 deadline. Board member Morse then noted a number of zoning regulations on the backroads. Manager Schulz said the Zoning Administrator and the Health Officer have been working on these and progress is being made.
- g. **New State Grant Program.** Board member Morse noted there is a new state grant program that will financially assist homeowners with failing septic systems. Board member Goodrich said there also are funds to fix failed wells. Northfield residents who are interested in the program should contact Economic Development Director Tom Davis at 802-485-9835 or at tdavis@northfield.vt.us.
- h. **Freight Yard Way Walking Trail.** Board member Stevens reported NU engineering students have constructed a bridge on this trail that connects Freight Yard Way to the NU campus. They will be installing a guardrail later.
- i. **Local Aesthetic Improvements, etc.** Chair Maxwell felt the appearance of the community really has improved in recent years and especially during the holiday season. He commended all those who have helped to decorate the community for the holidays as well as everyone who helped with the recent holiday events on the Common.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Erin Hicks-Tibbles: Town Budget Process, ARPA Funds.** Ms. Hicks-Tibbles noted many are predicting there will be a economic recession before the end of 2023 and she hopes this will be a consideration when the FY 2023-2024 budget is developed. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles also asked who should be the contact person should someone want to discuss additional possible uses for ARPA funds. Manager Schulz said at this point any recommendations should be directed to him

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss contract negotiations, legal matters, and personnel issues. Manager Schulz and NPD Chief Helfant will be present for some but not all of this discussion. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:15 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 10:35 p.m. No action was taken.

XII. ADJOURNMENT.

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

The Board adjourned at 10:36 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 approved at the Select Board regular meeting of December 27, 2022.