

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of January 25, 2022**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Jenna Koloski (Vermont Council on Rural Development), Nick Kramer (Vermont Council on Rural Development), Gary M. Laroche (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Lawton Rutter (Chief, Northfield Ambulance Service), Peter J. DeMasi (Chief, Northfield Fire Department), John Helfant (Chief, Northfield Police Department), Sara Lique (Northfield Police Department), Levi Willey (Northfield Police Department), Michael Gero (Northfield Police Department), Karl Bailey (Northfield Highway Department), Patrick Martin (Northfield Highway Department), Kaylan Sweet, Kierney Gabonault, Renée Beebe, Naomi Herring, Kathleen Morrow, Kathi Tarrant, Paul Abare, Cristie Arguin, Carolyn Stevens, Kaitlyn Keating, Jon Ignatowski, Cassie Morse, Susan Stillingner, Wally Reed, Nate Poe, Anthony Miller, Donald Doyon, Tim LaBombard (IBEW), and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Participants had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIENCE.** 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. Jenna Koloski and Nick Kramer, Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCDR): Community Visit.** Ms. Koloski said Paul Costello, then serving as VCDR Executive Director, addressed the Select Board members in 2019 about the potential benefits to Northfield of holding another Community Visit here. The previous Community Visit in Northfield was held over twenty (20) years ago. The visit's final report was issued in January 2002 and among the local "challenges" discussed were downtown development, Northfield Town and Village merger, improved facilities for the police and ambulance departments, expansion of the municipal water and wastewater systems, etc. Some of these matters have been resolved since then but others have not. Ms. Koloski said Manager Schulz did contact VCDR last year about scheduling a future Community Visit for Northfield. She confirmed Northfield is on the waiting list but she also wanted to take this opportunity to confirm that the Select Board members do want to proceed with the process. Ms. Koloski said VCDR's role would be to serve as a neutral processor of community interactions. It would facilitate local public meetings that would help determine what should be community goals. VCDR has performed this function for eighty-three (83) Vermont communities of varying sizes. Mr. Kramer said numerous community gatherings would be held over a three (3) month period. The initial meeting would try to develop a list of local concerns as well as identify community assets, etc. A survey would be distributed so those who couldn't attend these meetings would be able to provide their input. There also would be outreach to the local schools in order to get the perspective of local youth. As additional meetings are held and feedback collected, the list of local goals would be reduced to a number of priorities and experts provided by VCDR would be able to explain the best ways to achieve these goals, the state resources available, etc. A final report would be produced at the end of the process that could serve as the blueprint for future action. He then asked if the Select Board members had any questions.
- Board member Stevens has advocated for another VCDR Community Visit for some time and saw this as a great opportunity for Northfield. He supports this one hundred percent (100%). Board member Morse was Town Manager when the last VCDR Community Visit was held in Northfield. He said the visit provided much valuable information about reachable goals and how to best achieve them. Board member Morse then asked if local use of American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds could be a topic of discussion. Ms. Koloski said this issue is a new one but certainly could be considered. The steering committee that would be formed early in the process could help determine the extent of this particular discussion.
- Chair Maxwell also participated in the previous VCDR Community Visit as a Village Trustee. He said he was disappointed that some of the local goals included in the final report were not achieved. Mr. Kramer said VCDR now has sufficient follow-up resources to better assist communities with reaching their long-term goals.

Ms. Koloski said the VCDR Board of Directors will meet in a couple weeks (02/08/22) regarding scheduling future Community Visits. Northfield's letter of interest already has been submitted. She added that the municipality would be responsible for the initial outreach to community members about the process and for organizing a community dinner that would bring residents together. VCDR would handle the rest of the process. Ms. Koloski said VCDR already has made commitments to three (3) other communities so the earliest the Northfield's Community Visit could be scheduled is 2023. She then asked if the Select Board members were still interested. Chair Maxwell polled the other members and found unanimous support. Ms. Koloski will inform the VCDR Board of Directors of tonight's level of commitment. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Koloski and Mr. Kramer for the valuable information provided tonight and he looks forward to the next steps in this process.

- b. Gary M. LaRoche, Structures Project Manager, Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans): Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** Mr. LaRoche said he graduated with an engineering degree from Norwich University in 2009 and has been working for VTrans for the last thirteen (13) years. He then provided a visual presentation of the design features of the proposed replacement bridge. Mr. LaRoche noted that the current bridge originally was built in 1926 and reconstructed in 1958. The bridge has sidewalks on both sides, a crosswalk at its north end, and there are utility poles at the northeast and southeast ends of the bridge. The utility lines will need to be relocated during the bridge replacement. As for the timeline of the project, Mr. LaRoche said it began with the Project Definition phase when it was determined by VTrans and Select Board members that the bridge needed to be replaced (not repaired). This phase included public outreach in order to build a local consensus for this project. The current phase is Project Design and the first task, delivery of the conceptual plans to the Select Board members, has been done. This will be followed later this year by drafting preliminary plans, assessing the areas of impact, obtaining environmental permits, negotiating rights-of-way, etc. The final plans and cost estimates should be completed by February 2023, the construction phase advertised to potential contractors in September 2024, and the actual bridge removal and replacement should occur during the summer of 2025. The replacement bridge will have the same width as the current one with travel lanes, sidewalks, railing, etc. The new bridge will be single span so the existing bridge supports in the river will be removed. The replacement bridge should have a seventy-five (75) year life. Mr. LaRoche has reviewed the Northfield Town Plan (2020) and seen its emphasis on "Complete Streets" that make accommodations for non-motorized vehicles and pedestrians. He said the bridge width is sufficient to allow the installation of dedicated bicycle lanes should that be the Select Board's decision. The side railing would be forty-two inches (42") high and there are several design options. These include Four-Rail Box Beam Bridge Railing, Concrete Combination Bridge Railing, and Concrete Railing with Windows. His presentation included photo examples of these railing designs that have been installed around Vermont (Swanton, Jamaica, Woodstock, Barre, and Chelsea). Another consideration is light fixture installation, which can have a simple or decorative appearance. If it is desirable, the light fixtures could match the decorative ones installed around Depot Square. The actual mounting location of the light fixtures would depend heavily on the type of bridge railing selected.
- As for vehicular and pedestrian traffic detours, Mr. LaRoche said the Select Board members would choose the routes and VTrans would provide the signage. The current plan is for a twelve (12) week bridge closure in 2025 somewhere between Norwich University graduation (early May) and the Labor Day weekend festivities (early September).
- VTrans recommends that heavy trucks that would normally use the bridge to make local deliveries along the Vermont Route 12 corridor would be required to make use of interstate exit 5 (Williamstown) or exit 8 (Montpelier) and then use the sections of Vermont Route 12 north and south of the bridge. Cars and light trucks travelling northward from Vermont Route 12/South Main Street would be detoured along the south end of Depot Square and then to Wall Street and the northern end Water Street back to North Main Street. Drivers coming southward would use the same streets in the opposite direction. There would be temporary two-way traffic on the south end of Depot Square, which will require the removal of seven (7) parking spaces. The recommended walking route would be a bit longer and ask pedestrians to make use of Pearl Street and Vine Street, which both have good sidewalk. The upper end of Water Street, by contrast, has areas of poor or non-existent sidewalk.

There has been some Select Board discussion of installing a temporary pedestrian bridge parallel to the existing bridge during the construction phase. One rationale is to prevent people from taking the dangerous action of trying to use the railroad bridge as a shortcut. Based on a recent low bid for a similar temporary pedestrian bridge, Mr. LaRoche estimated the cost at about \$175,000. This did not include bridge design, permitting fees, etc. Additional concerns and possible costs would be obtaining rights-of-way from private property owners, installing adequate bridge lighting, possible soil contamination, etc. In addition, in accordance with Act 153, the municipality's local share amount for the bridge project would increase from five percent (5%) to ten percent (10%) if it chose to disregard VTrans' recommendation and install a temporary pedestrian bridge. The total bridge project cost is now estimated at \$6,200,000 so this would bring up the local share to \$620,000.

Mr. LaRoche said the next steps in the process would include developing preliminary project plans that would be widely distributed for comment, holding a public information meeting, processing local agreements that would include utility relocation and rights-of-way, obtaining environmental permits, and meeting with the adjacent property owners who would be impacted by the project. He then asked if the Select Board members had any questions.

Board member Goodrich asked if the cost of utility relocation was included in the total project cost. Mr. LaRoche said it was. Board member Goodrich would like the new bridge to have more decorative railing and light fixtures than some of the basic designs presented tonight. Mr. LaRoche said that would add to the project costs but the additional expense would not be prohibitive. Board member Goodrich would like to have an attractive bridge in the town's center even if it costs a little more. Board member Miller agreed that decorative railing would be preferable. Board member Stevens is pleased that the proposed railing is higher than originally planned. He also would like the light fixtures situated on the bridge railing. Board member Morse asked about the different costs for the various types of bridge railing. Mr. LaRoche said the Four-Rail Box Beam would be less expensive and cheapest to maintain. The Concrete Combination is more attractive but would cost more to maintain. He added that the municipality could decide to have the railings painted in any color combination. This could include Norwich University's colors or any other local color scheme.

Board member Morse asked if the Northfield community would be able to decide the bridge's design or would VTrans make the decision. Mr. LaRoche said VTrans would accept whatever decision the Select Board members make. However, since the type of railing chosen is an important factor in the preliminary bridge design, the decision should be made soon so that project timeline is not disrupted. He hoped the decision could be made in the next few weeks. Board member Morse noted that the new bridge would be around for generations so he would like to obtain community input before any major decisions are made. He would like enlarged copies of the various design options displayed in the Municipal Building and other locations around town so members of the public can provide some feedback. Mr. LaRoche suggested that tonight's presentation could be made available online for public review.

Board member Stevens asked about the results of the environmental borings taken at onsite several weeks ago. Mr. LaRoche understands that high levels of contamination were not discovered but he is still waiting for the more detailed reports. Board member Stevens feels the pedestrian detour by way of Pearl Street and Vine Street is unrealistic as the extra distance and steep road inclines would cause difficulties for older and/or less able pedestrians. He felt using the automobile detour using the upper part of Water Street is preferable provided some sidewalk improvement can be done beforehand. This appeared to be the consensus of the other Board members. Board member Stevens asked if public parking spaces on East Street and by the Mayo Block would be affected by this project. Mr. LaRoche said this was unlikely.

Chair Maxwell then asked if members of the public present tonight had any questions. Carolyn Stevens asked if any of the existing bridge materials could be repurposed or just hauled away. Mr. LaRoche said the current plan is to remove and take away any broken-up concrete, etc. but the municipality could retain some of the current light fixtures, railing, etc. if it chooses. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. LaRoche for his presentation, which will soon be made available for public review.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. January 11, 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 Miller abstaining.**
- b. January 13, 2022 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #14-22.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #14-22 in the amount of \$100,404.43. Board member Stevens noted the recent purchase of more culvert. He asked where it would go. Manager Schulz said twenty (20) culverts were bought, totaling four hundred feet (400'). This about doubles our current inventory. Manager Schulz has spoken to Highway Trent Tucker who said there are a number of culvert replacement projects scheduled for this coming summer. Manager Schulz can provide Board member Stevens with information on how much culvert has been purchased in recent months and ultimate destinations. Chair Maxwell noted a no-lead gasoline purchase from the Evans Group and asked if this was a new vendor. Manager Schulz confirmed the company that had been supplying the municipality with no-lead gasoline for several years recently informed us that they would no longer be able to deliver to Northfield. Mr. Tucker solicited three (3) bids and went with the less expensive vendor. Chair Maxwell noted an invoice for building renovations at the Fire Station and asked if this work had been planned. Manager Schulz said that it was. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through January 9, 2022.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$109,756.50. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of 2022 Northfield Town Meeting Warning.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members are being asked to approve the warning tonight so that it can be posted before the weekend in order to meet state requirements, i.e., at least thirty (30) days before Town Meeting Day. As authorized by the Select Board members at their last regular meeting (01/11/22), due to COVID-19 safety concerns the Open Session has been cancelled and all voting will take place by Australian Ballot on Tuesday, March 1, 2022. The warning has twenty-six (26) articles. Article 1 is the election of Town officers, i.e. Town Moderator, Town Select Board members, etc. Article 2 is the approval of the proposed Town budget for FY 2022/2023. Article 3 asks for voter authorization to borrow funds in order to purchase a new highway loader. Article 4 is the annual request from Green Mountain Transit for twenty-one thousand dollars (\$21,000) to cover the expense of operating the Northfield-Montpelier Commuter Bus service. Articles 5 through 25 are funding requests from regional non-profit organizations. Article 26 would set the four (4) tax collection deadlines in the next fiscal year. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the 2022 Northfield Town Meeting Warning. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Discussion of Possible COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate for Municipal Employees.** Manager Schulz said at the request of the Select Board, he had drafted this policy for their review. The proposed policy would require all full-time and part-time Northfield municipal employees to be vaccinated for COVID-19. Those employees unwilling to be vaccinated would be required to submit to weekly COVID-19 tests, which are now available locally at the Northfield Ambulance Bay three (3) days a week. Unvaccinated employees also would be required to be masked when in municipal facilities or in the presence of others. Employees also would have the ability to apply for medical or religious exemptions. The policy also has procedures for when an employee tests positive for COVID-19 in order to ensure the safety of other employees. Manager Schulz said he was notified earlier today that the union representing Northfield Police Department employees and the one representing other union employees have requested that this policy should be subject to bargaining. Manager Schulz contacted the municipality's attorney on such matters and he advised that the proposed policy should be discussed with union representatives before going to the Select Board members for formal approval. At this point, the Select Board members need to decide if they would like to table the policy for now pending these conversations or whether to not proceed at all. If approved, the policy likely would have new language as a result of these union negotiations. There was a question regarding why this item was on tonight's agenda. Chair Maxwell said at the previous regular meeting there had been an indication that some members would like to discuss the possibility of creating such a policy. Board member Morse asked if there is a current COVID-19 policy covering municipal employees. Manager Schulz said there was. Employees are expected to monitor themselves for any COVID-19 symptoms and report any concerns to their supervisor. Any employee feeling unwell is expected to stay at home. Board member Morse had been under the impression that only one (1) municipal employee was unvaccinated. He recently learned that this was not the case. Board member Morse believes a COVID-19 vaccination policy should be adopted to ensure employee safety. He noted that the proposed policy does provide options for non-immunized employees and that any employee testing positive for COVID-19 would not lose any pay. He would like the policy's wording fine-tuned before going out to union review.

Board member Goodrich doesn't know why the Select Board members are discussing this policy as there has been no request from municipal employees for it. She doesn't believe the municipality should be telling people what to do regarding their own health concerns. Board member Goodrich felt imposing such a policy might result in municipal employees going to work elsewhere and there is no reason to drive them away for no cause. She also believed it would be a lot of work for management to oversee the documentation for vaccination compliance, weekly testing, etc. Board member Stevens felt it shouldn't be too difficult to maintain these records. He also believes that if such a policy was adopted by the municipality, it also should cover elected and appointed board members. Board member Morse noted that board members don't receive compensation or health insurance coverage from the municipality. Board member Stevens said board members do come into contact with municipal employees on occasion. Manager Schulz said there is an existing policy that unvaccinated individuals must wear masks when visiting municipal facilities.

Chair Maxwell said Manager Schulz was tasked to draft this policy for discussion tonight but there doesn't seem to be any desire to adopt it tonight. He asked if the policy should be tabled for now. Board member Goodrich is strongly opposed to such a mandate and doesn't see the need for any future discussion. Chair Maxwell said this matter would have to go on a future agenda should a Select Board member request it. Manager Schulz said there is no way to predict how this pandemic will develop in the future. Board member Morse is concerned that the municipality might be subject to significant health insurance costs and other disruptions should a number of employees be infected by COVID-19 at the same time. He believes it would be a good idea for the municipality to have a pandemic response policy in place and he thanks Manager Schulz for drafting the proposed policy for discussion.

A number of Northfield municipal employees, residents, and other interested parties wanted to comment on the proposed vaccination mandate. Sara Lique is a Northfield resident employed as Dispatcher for the Northfield Police Department (NPD). She doesn't believe the municipality has the authority to compel its employees to undergo medical procedures or force them to wear face coverings. The NPD union already has expressed its concerns about imposing any such mandate on its members. Ms. Lique doesn't believe this matter should have been contemplated in the first place.

Kaylan Sweet is not a Northfield resident but does spend most of her days in town as owner-operator of O'Maddi's Café. A month ago (12/14/21), the Select Board discussed and then rejected a proposed mask mandate for Northfield residents. That was the right decision then and although the Select Board members choose not to proceed with a vaccination mandate tonight, she agrees with Ms. Lique that the possibility should not have been brought up at all. Ms. Sweet is unconvinced that COVID-19 vaccinations really work and doesn't feel any entity should be able to compel use of experimental drugs. She also feels government should make every effort to leave people alone and not force its views on them.

Kathi Tarrant believes such mandates are violations of the U.S. Constitution and an employee could sue the municipality if compelled to get the vaccination and then suffered severe side effects. Kathleen Morrow said there have been numerous injuries resulting from this vaccine and this includes persons who only have been in close contact with vaccinees.

John Helfant is the NPD Chief and he had prepared to strongly defend his department members regarding the proposed vaccination mandate. He is pleased that the Select Board members have decided not to pursue this matter as it could have cost the municipality a number of valued employees. Chief Helfant also said recent reports, including a case study in Provincetown, Massachusetts, have indicated immunization is no certain guarantee against contracting COVID-19. He felt the best action to be taken in this pandemic is to encourage employees who are not feeling well to stay home and not come to work.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Northfield Town Report 2022.** Manager Schulz said the report is nearing completion and should be delivered to the printer next week for publication. The report also will be put online as soon as it is ready. The cover photo will be a collage of the twenty-four (24) community banners that were put on display on and around the Common last year.
- b. South Main Street Stormwater Abatement/CSO Elimination Project Grant.** Manager Schulz said the municipality received a grant from the State of Vermont that will cover one hundred percent (100%) of the costs associated with this project. There is a lengthy engineering services agreement document for this project. The Select Board members were provided with this document in their meeting packets and this matter will be discussed at the next regular meeting (02/08/22), which should allow sufficient time to review it beforehand.

- c. **Possible Extension of Municipal Water and Sewer Systems.** With the expected influx of federal and state infrastructure improvement funds, Manager Schulz feels this is a good time to update existing engineering plans to extend the municipal water and sewer systems southward along Vermont Routes 12 and 12A. These plans were developed about fifteen (15) to twenty (20) years ago and shouldn't require too much effort to update and complete. Such a project would focus on wellfield protection as well as providing homeowners in this area the opportunity of hooking up to municipal water and/or sewer.
- d. **Northfield Electric Department (NED) Power Outages.** Manager Schulz said there have been a number of NED power outages in recent weeks. Most have been of short duration and caused by problems with outside power transmission lines. Manager Schulz has been working with members of our Utility Commissions regarding this problem and plans to have a member or two present at the next regular meeting to explain the issues involved.
- e. **"Public-Private Partnership for Stormwater Management" Grant.** Manager Schulz said the municipality and Cabot Hosiery made a joint grant application for state stormwater management funds. He was informed last week that there has been a grant award of \$115,788 in ARPA funds.
- f. **VLCT Grant Applications.** Manager Schulz has applied to the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) for grant funds that would be used to purchase a PowerLoad system for the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS). He also applied for funds that would help cover the additional expense of paramedic training for NAS EMTs.
- g. **CERV Clothing and Food Shelves Update.** Manager Schulz will be meeting with NU engineering students and CERV representatives to discuss plans to redesign the Municipal Building's basement in order to house the CERV Food Shelf. This would be in addition to the CERV Clothing Shelf now in residence. Board member Stevens asked if Manager Schulz has received the environmental report regarding the basement. Manager Schulz said he received the report today but hasn't had a chance to review it. He will forward it to interested parties.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Common Fountain Redesign.** Board member Stevens said NU students are continuing their project to redesign the fountain so that it can recirculate the water it uses. He has been reviewing the history of the fountain and found that it has been installed, removed, and reinstalled several times based on evolving local opinion regarding public fountains.
- b. **ARPA Funds Community Outreach.** Board member Stevens asked if Chair Maxwell has been in communication with Merry Kay Shernock regarding her proposal to schedule several community meetings in order to obtain public feedback on how best to use Northfield's share of these ARPA funds. Chair Maxwell has spoken to Ms. Shernock and learned that she has been in contact with several community groups and is reviewing possible locations for these meetings. He is pleased to report that the process is indeed moving forward.
- c. **Economic Development Director (EDD) Hiring Process.** Chair Maxwell reported that initial interviews have been held remotely with the EDD candidates and follow-up meetings will be held soon. The exact dates and times have not yet been determined.

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

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a contract negotiation and a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:25 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 9:43 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:43 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 February 8, 2022.