

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
NORTHFIELD COMMON REHABILITATION
PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of September 26, 2024

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board members Merry Shernock and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Emily Lewis (DuBois & King), Cait Campbell (DuBois & King), Sally Davidson, Bethany Drum, Dick Wobby, Gail Hall, Dan Anderson, Steve Davis, and Tammie Davis.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: September 11, 2024.** Motion by Mr. Wobby, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **The minutes were approved without objection.**

IV. DISCUSSION

- a. Review of Conceptual Plans.** Ms. Lewis said the committee members were provided with two (2) conceptual plan options: Final Concept Sketch version A and version B. These plans were the same for the east side of the Common but there were major differences for the configuration of the west side. The east side will have new seating with a shrub border installed that would be intended to reduce the amount of street noise coming from nearby Main Street. There also would be new shrubbery and seating installed around the Civil War Monument and space would be left open for the annual holiday installments of the Maypole, Christmas Tree, etc. Ms. Campbell said the public feedback received in the surveys indicated Northfield residents did want additional seating options on the Common, especially in covered or shaded areas. The new seating would be focused on the east side of the Common in order to leave open space in the middle of the Common for the Farmers Market, the Labor Day Weekend Festivities, etc. On the west side of the Common, a pergola (i.e., a structure usually consisting of parallel colonnades supporting an open roof of girders and cross rafters) would be installed as a raised stage area to facilitate public performances. This structure would take up less room and would be less expensive than installing a gazebo. The pergola would not be fully covered but would provide some shading for nearby seating. In version A, the pergola would be installed in the middle of the west end of the Common and in version B would be situated at the Common's southwest corner. Ms. Campbell noted the survey respondents favored the idea of having a dedicated performance space on the west side of the Common. She added that the final locations of any shade trees to be added will be fully explored and determined at a later time in the project engineering process.

Board member Shernock has looked into the possibility of installing permeable surfaces on the Common that would help with greater accessibility to those using wheelchairs, walkers, etc. while still allowing for groundwater to seep through the surface without puddling. Ms. Campbell said there are many options for what are called "grass savers" that also would allow for universally walkable paths with interlocking plastic grids through which grass would grow. This would eliminate the need for designated paved walkways in the Common interior. Ms. Lewis noted that there would be paved walkways on the Common's edges. Ms. Davidson noted that this approach would allow for more open space in the Common interior. Mr. Wobby said this also would allow for meandering paths rather than straight ones. It also was noted that permeable surfaces and grass savers would have much lower maintenance costs than paved pathways. Ms. Davidson asked if the shrubs installed on the east side would block views of the Common interior from Main Street. Ms. Lewis did not think that would be a problem as the proposed shrubs or walled seating would not be particularly high, probably no higher than three feet (3'). In addition, the Civil War Monument could be framed by trees in order to emphasize its central location on the Common. Ms. Davidson thought that it would require regular maintenance to keep the shrubs from growing too high. Ms. Lewis thought that low-growing shrubs could be planted that would not grow above a specific height. Mr. Wobby would like the optimal Common footprint established and afterwards such details as the proper number of trees, shrubs, etc. and their proper height could be finalized. Ms. Lewis said this has been the outcome she and Ms. Campbell have been seeking from the beginning of this project.

Ms. Lewis then noted that in both concept versions, the water fountain would be refurbished and slightly raised for more visual prominence. The committee members then discussed the relative merits of the two concept versions provided for this meeting. Most like the idea of more open space and more shaded seating locations. Mr. Wobby was not enthusiastic about the pergola concept. Ms. Lewis said there are many options for pergola size and configuration. She thought it best that the pergola concept be included in the final concept design presented to the Select Board members as it could be easily removed from the final design if there are objections. That would be preferable at this point of the design process to having to start over and design something entirely different to be included in that space. Mr. Wobby noted several people who filled out the survey favored installing a gazebo in the open space. Ms. Shernock said that would be an expensive purchase with high maintenance costs. Its presence also would limit the amount of truly open space. Ms. Lewis said people might think that a gazebo would allow for more shaded seating and a performance space but there are much less expensive options that would serve the same purpose. Ms. Davis noted that many people filling out the survey did express a preference for an upgrade of the current fountain as opposed to an interactive water feature. She noted both of the options under consideration would keep the fountain much as it is now if it is slight relocated from its current position.

Ms. Lewis has the impression that the committee members would favor version B but perhaps without the pergola. Mr. Wobby agreed with this assessment and said he would like to see alternative shading options for the seating areas. Ms. Davidson believes there already are sufficient trees on the west side of the Common for proper shading. Ms. Lewis will revise version B to suggest possible shading options on the west side of the Common other than new trees. Mr. Wobby also would like some cost estimates for various new features to be installed. If funding becomes a concern, it might be necessary to phase in these new features over a few years.

Ms. Lewis had thought that this would be the last meeting of this subcommittee before the final design concept is provided to the Select Board members for review at their October 22, 2024 regular meeting. She suggested that the committee members could be provided with the revised final concept design by email for their feedback beforehand. Mr. Wobby doesn't think the Select Board members should be provided with a final design concept that hadn't been approved by this steering committee. Ms. Davidson also would like to see the final design concept before it goes to the Select Board.

- b. Next Steps.** After further discussion, it was decided that the committee will hold one additional meeting on Monday, October 14, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. Ms. Lewis will email the final design concept to the committee members by the previous Thursday (10/10/24) and also leave hardcopies for pick up in the Municipal Building.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

VI. ADJOURNMENT. Without objection, the meeting was adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes are subject to approval at the next committee meeting.