

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**NORTHFIELD COMMON REHABILITATION**  
**PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Minutes of October 14, 2024**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Committee members Merry Shernock, John Stevens (absent), Sally Davidson, Gail Hall, and Dick Wobby (5:44 p.m.). Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Bethany Drum, Steve Davis, and Tammie Davis.

The meeting was called to order at 5:06 p.m.

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

**III. DISCUSSION**

- a. Review of Finalized Conceptual Plans.** Manager Schulz noted Emily Lewis (DuBois & King) had emailed DRAFT finalized conceptual plans for this project to the committee members last Friday and hardcopies also were made available in the Municipal Building that same day. The plans also included an explanatory memorandum and project cost estimates for the construction phase. These documents will be forwarded to the Select Board members for discussion at their next regular meeting on Tuesday, October 22, 2024. Ms. Lewis will be present then to answer any questions. Tonight's meeting is being held so the committee members can review these materials beforehand. Ms. Hall said the construction phase cost estimates, which Mr. Wobby requested at the last committee meeting (09/26/24), are new element for the committee members to consider. The document is broken down into several categories and line items. If all the proposed project components are completed, the total estimated cost is \$2,073,362. There are several parts of the project that could either be delayed or not pursued. Manager Schulz said the Select Board members will review the project cost estimates and determine how much in municipal funds and/or outside funding that they would like to designate for this project. These cost estimates, although they are preliminary, will assist greatly should the municipality decide to apply for grant funds or bond to pay for this project. The Select Board members also could consider whether to use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds either to help pay for the project itself or to use as local match funds for a grant application. It also is possible that a decision could be made to spread the construction phase of this project over several years. Ms. Davis noted there had been discussion at one point of future fundraising efforts to pay for some parts of the project, i.e. new benches, bike racks, etc. Such efforts could help lower the cost of this project. Ms. Davidson said the Select Board members probably will need some time to consider all aspects of this proposal. She added that some residents might object to the sweeping nature of the proposed project when all they wanted in the first place was for the current water fountain to be fixed. Ms. Shernock said the cost estimates do provide some guidance regarding possible project phases. She felt the priority should be the refurbishment and relocation of the fountain. Ms. Davidson asked if six (6) curb cuts installed around the Common really were necessary. Manager Schulz said one of the major goals of this project was to make the Common interior more accessible to those with mobility issues. Ms. Hall wanted to know what the other committee members feel about including the bus kiosk as part of the Common landscape. Ms. Davidson felt the final destination of this kiosk should be a separate discussion as there are no current plans to site the kiosk on the Common itself. It also was noted that there are several locations in relatively close proximity to Depot Square where there is room to resituate the kiosk. Ms. Shernock suggested that the committee members could attend the public meeting where the Select Board members will review the conceptual plans, cost estimates, etc. and bring up any remaining concerns that they might have. Manager Schulz said should the Select Board members decide to go forward with some or all of the project proposals, an engineer would have to be hired to help develop the project RFP.

*Mr. Wobby arrived at this time.*

Mr. Wobby said he was very disappointed with the way DuBois & King pursued this project and with the very process. He felt the committee members should have been provided with project plans that were readily achievable without the great expense now projected. Mr. Wobby cannot support presenting this proposal to the Select Board members in its current form. Ms. Hall noted that Ms. Lewis and DuBois & King built this project plan based on local public feedback. Ms. Shernock said she and the other Select Board members wanted to know what the local population felt about the proposed rehabilitation of the Town Common and what new or upgraded features should be included in this redesign. She does favor a good amount of what has been incorporated in the current draft proposal. Mr. Wobby feels there are too many unanswered questions about this project, such as whether the suggested benefits of relocating the water fountain would justify the additional cost. He felt the whole process is now being rushed when many such concerns still remain. Ms. Shernock said if she and the other Select Board members are disappointed with what has been proposed, they will not hesitate to share their viewpoints. Mr. Wobby would like to hold another committee meeting with DuBois & King so the questions he and other committee members have raised can be addressed. Ms. Hall felt that any such questions could be asked at the upcoming Select Board meeting. The estimated construction costs were a surprise but whether to pursue this project in whole or in part will ultimately be the decision of the Select Board members. Motion by Ms. Shernock to submit the draft conceptual plans to the Select Board members with the recommendation that a new committee be formed to assist with setting out the “phases of development” and using DuBois & King’s proposal as a guideline. Ms. Davidson doesn’t feel it is the role of this committee to suggest to the Select Board members that this project should necessarily be done in phases. She believes the Select Board members should be able to reach such a conclusion on their own. Mr. Wobby feels this outreach project was a waste of \$40,000. Manager Schulz disagreed, feeling this use of ARPA funds was worth it to determine public consensus regarding how to proceed with the Common rehabilitation project. The original motion died for a lack of a second. Motion by Ms. Shernock, seconded by Ms. Hall, that the committee members recommend that the Select Board members accept the Dubois & King proposal and authorize engineering expertise so that the project can move forward. **Motion passed 3-1-0, with Ms. Davidson, Ms. Hall, and Ms. Shernock voting in favor and Mr. Wobby voting in opposition.**

Manager Schulz said he has made a list of the committee concerns and questions raised tonight and will present them to the Select Board members. The committee members also are encouraged to attend the meeting themselves and directly address the Select Board members with any of their concerns. Ms. Davidson thought it should have been determined earlier in the process that putting splash pads on the Common would entail such state and/or federal requirements as installing nearby bathrooms, etc. that made this a moot issue due to the great expense involved. Mr. Wobby noted that public feedback showed no great support for putting splash pads on the Common. Ms. Davidson said she and many residents have maintained from the beginning that any such interactive water feature would be more appropriately located at Memorial Park.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled).** There was none.

**V. ADJOURNMENT.** Without objection, the meeting adjourned at 6:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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