

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**NORTHFIELD COMMON REHABILITATION**  
**PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Minutes of September 11, 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, Carolyn Stevens, Steve Davis, and Tammie Davis.

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

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

**III. DISCUSSION**

- a. Review of Conceptual Designs.** Ms. Lewis first wanted to thank Gail Hall, Sally Davidson, Merry Shernock, and Lydia Petty for help out with this project's informational booth that was on the Common over the Labor Day Weekend Festivities. They also helped out with helping people fill out the online and written conceptual design surveys. There was a strong rainstorm Saturday morning that limited public attendance but the weather the rest of the holiday weekend was good. Ms. Lewis said that even though the survey wording did try to inform respondents that they were not limited to picking either design Concept A ("Traditional"), B ("Meander"), or C ("Contemporary") but could favor elements of each, many respondents did choose one concept design as a whole. Ms. Davidson said it was good to have someone at the booth to help explain this. Ms. Lewis and Ms. Campbell are now reviewing and tabulating the survey results as well as noting specific comments. Ms. Lewis felt there were no real surprises in the survey results and design concept A seemed to have the most support. Ms. Campbell noted that of 302 responses, 63% had a positive reaction to Concept A, which would retain much of the Common's current features with a few upgrades for improved accessibility, etc. In addition, 25% had a neutral opinion of concept A and only 11% had a negative opinion. For Concept B, 32% had a positive opinion, 28% were neutral, and 41% expressed negative views. As for Concept C, 36% expressed positive opinions, 18% were neutral, and 45% had a negative opinion. Ms. Campbell noted that although Concepts B and C were less popular, many respondents did hold positive views of some elements of those designs.

Overall, respondents did favor making the Common more universally accessible and also wanted multiple seating options. Ms. Davidson said that it seemed to her that people who have lived in Northfield for some time did favor Concept A, which would retain most of its current features. By contrast, newer residents seemed to favor a more modern approach. Ms. Campbell said it was natural that people should have strong feelings for a shared spaces that they have frequented for several years. Some respondents indicated that they would like the Common's past history respected when plans for its rehabilitation are developed. As for establishing new seating areas on the east side of the Common, many felt this was too close to Main Street and there would be problems with traffic noise, etc. Ms. Campbell said now that the public have been provided these general design concepts for consideration, this might be time to start considering some project details, such as improved lighting, etc.

Steve Davis asked how people felt about the interactive water feature on the east side of the Common in Concept C. Ms. Campbell said many people did not like this possibility but others were exciting by the possibility. She added that ninety percent (90%) of respondents live in Northfield or have a strong personal connection to the community, i.e. owning a business here, etc.

Ms. Davidson then asked about the survey of local businesses on and around the Depot Square area. Ms. Campbell said the results of that survey would be distributed to the committee members over the next few days. Mr. Davis said he is more open to the possibility of an interactive water feature than he was when the idea was first brought up. He noted that there are many hot days each year in late spring and early fall when the municipal pool is not open and this might be a good place for residents to cool off.

Ms. Campbell said she has spoken to James Turner from Delta Fountains, who are the project's consultants regarding potential water features. She was informed that whenever an interactive water feature was installed, it came with the same health and safety requirements as a public pool. This would include having UV filters and there would be a requirement that there be nearby public restrooms. Ms. Lewis said these requirements would make this option much more expensive than rehabilitating the current fountain or installing a new traditional fountain. Mr. Davis agreed that requiring that new public restrooms be built on Depot Square probably makes an interactive water feature cost-prohibitive for this project. Ms. Campbell noted that a new or rehabilitated fountain also would come with some expenses, such as new waterlines, a water recirculating system, etc. If the interactive water feature is not a possibility, there might be other ways to provide some cooling features on the Common such as planting additional shade trees or installing movable shade sails. There also could be the installation of more user-friendly drinking fountains.

Ms. Campbell said there had been some concerns expressed in the surveys about focusing newer features including more seating on the eastern half of the Common, which many felt was too close to a major road. Ms. Lewis said it might be possible to install noise-dampening features to lessen the street noise problem. This could include moving the water fountain to this area, as the fountain noise could have a noise calming effect. This relocation also would free up some room on the western half of the Common for more open green spaces, including an entertainment area with raised stage. Ms. Campbell noted that a relocated fountain could be fitted with multi-colored lights with different color schemes displayed for different times of year or for special events. As for planting a permanent holiday tree on the Common, Board member Shernock did not favor this as it would prevent that area from being used for other purposes the rest of the year. Ms. Davidson then noted that she did not feel there was a sufficient and fully accessible power supply on the Common at this time. This often results in the need to use long extension cords in order to power holiday lighting, etc. Ms. Lewis felt a general improvement of the Common's power supply, including adding new outlets at more convenient locations, would also be a universal accessibility improvement with the elimination of power cords from walking paths, etc.

- b. Next Steps.** Ms. Lewis said she and Ms. Campbell would review the survey results further in order to develop a final design concept for the committee members and (later) the Select Board members to review. This final concept design would still be subject to further revision based on future public conversations, which would include consideration of cost estimates. For the presentation to the Select Board members, Ms. Lewis said her approach would be to include some extra features that could be eliminated at a later date due to cost considerations, etc. She thought that was preferable to adding additional features at a later time to a bare-bones version. In addition to adding an upgraded power supply, there was some discussion of perhaps adding solar-powered lighting around the Common to cut future energy costs. As for a future meeting schedule, Ms. Lewis said there was previous discussion of holding an additional committee meeting before the final design concept was provided to the Select Board members. That originally was targeted for their first meeting in October (10/08/24) but that could be postponed if the committee members thought this was too soon. After some discussion, there was consensus to hold the next committee meeting on Thursday, September 26, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. There also was agreement to postpone the presentation to the Select Board members until their regular meeting of Tuesday, October 22, 2024.

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

**V. ADJOURNMENT.** Without objection, the meeting was adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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