

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of December 27, 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, Gerard LaVarnway, Carolyn Stevens, Bethany Drum, Sally Davidson, Lynn Doney, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:05 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):** None.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **December 13, 2022 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **December 13, 2022 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **December 20, 2022 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Petty wanted it clarified that during the discussion of the rising call volume for the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS), she mentioned three (3) possible factors: the aging of the local population, increased substance abuse, and mental health issues. The minutes omitted the last one. This will be corrected. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #12-23.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #12-23 in the amount of \$573,160.97. It was noted that of the total warrant amount, \$296,410 represented power purchased for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through December 11, 2022.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$118,272.77. **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 said this loan approval had been on the last regular meeting agenda (12/13/22) but had been tabled due to some questions from Select Board members. One was why the loan amount was listed as \$131,280 when over half that amount (\$74,640) has been "forgiven" and doesn't have to be paid back. Manager Schulz said that is how the paperwork for the state revolving fund is set up. Another question was how the repayment expense would be allocated amongst the municipal departments involved. Manager Schulz said the Utility Commissioners debated this matter and after some debate over whether the Highway Department should pay more since the stormwater runs down its streets or the Sewer Department since it would benefit by not having untreated stormwater reach its wastewater treatment facility, it was decided costs would be split evenly between these departments until a better solution could be found. He added that the first payment on this loan is not due until November 1, 2027 so there should be adequate time to make a final decision on this. The municipality already has approved this loan through another venue so this is merely a loan reallocation. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, 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 said he expressed concerns about this loan agreement at the last meeting but has been able to research this matter further since then. He still doesn't believe the even split is equitable but agrees that this can be worked out at a later time. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Chair Maxwell voting in opposition.**

- b. Appointment of Select Board Representative to Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) Community Visit Planning Committee.** As he reported at the last meeting, Manager Schulz said the VCRD will be holding a Community Visit in Northfield in 2023. As part of the preparation process, a local planning committee of about twenty-five (25) residents will be meeting at the end of January 2023 to discuss logistics and other matters. The VCRD would like to have one (1) Select Board member on this committee. Since Board member Petty has indicated interest, Manager Schulz suggests she be appointed. Board member Morse said the process seems to have changed since the last VCRD Community Visit was held here in late 2001/early 2002 while he was Town Manager. Board member Petty is willing to serve provided she is available on the meeting date. Manager Schulz will check on this. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Board member Petty to the VCRD Community Visit planning committee. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Petty abstaining.**
- c. Appointment of E-911 Coordinator.** Manager Schulz noted current E-911 Coordinator, NAS Chief Lawton Rutter, will be leaving to take another position in few weeks. Since Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki has expressed interest in serving as E-911 Coordinator, Manager Schulz recommends his appointment at this time. This is not a time-consuming position and should dovetail well with Mr. Osiecki's other responsibilities. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Mitch Osiecki as the interim E-911 Coordinator. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. FY 2023-2024 Town Budget Process.** Manager Schulz said the next budget meeting will be held on Thursday, January 5, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. here in the Community Room. The departmental budgets to be discussed will include the Ambulance Service and the Municipal Pool. The next budget meeting after that will be held at 6:00 p.m. prior to the regular meeting on Tuesday, January 10, 2023. This meeting will focus on a recap of the departmental budgets already discussed and other remaining issues.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Local Power Outages.** Manager Schulz said there were numerous power outages as a result of last Friday's storm (12/23/22) as high winds and downed trees brought down quite a few power lines. The outages affected residents living on Main Street, Garvey Hill Road, Colson Road, Vermont Route 12A, etc. Power to much of the downtown area was restored after about five (5) hours but it took a bit longer on certain backroads. Green Mountain Power (GMP), which provides line maintenance for NED, responded rather quickly and as a result Northfield fared better than other towns in the region.
- b. Highway Department update.** Manager Schulz said the Highway crew have been putting in a lot of overtime over the past few days cleaning up after the storm as well as regular winter road maintenance. They picked up a number of fallen trees from the roads and did a considerable amount of sanding and salting. Vermont Emergency Management is looking for affected communities to provide dollar amounts for local damage. If the total amount reaches a certain threshold, this storm could be declared a natural disaster and communities reimbursed for documented storm damage.
- c. TDS Telecom Fiber Optic Project.** Manager Schulz has been in contact with TDS Telecom about their upcoming fiber optic expansion project as some of the underground work will be done within the municipal right-of-way. The work will start next summer.
- d. Vermont Route 12 Paving Project.** The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) is planning to repave Vermont Route 12 North from the old Northfield Village line to Montpelier in 2024. Manager Schulz did ask about installing dedicated bicycle lanes during the project but the initial feedback was not positive. As this repaving project may get pushed back to 2025, there should be plenty of time for this conversation.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Tickler File.** Board member Morse is very disappointed the tickler file he has repeatedly requested was not included in the Select Board packets. He felt according to Board policy, an updated tickler should be provided in every packet. Board member Morse then raised his voice and said he would continue to yell about this until policy is followed. Manager Schulz said he did include a report in the packet that had updates on the following matters: Main Street Bridge Project; Main Street Water Line Project; Main Street Stormwater and CSO Project; Route 12 Cox Brook Road Pedestrian Improvements; Police Contract; Advanced Meter Infrastructure; and Stony Brook Bridge. Board member Morse said this document was not what he was looking for.

- b. **Brown Public Library (BPL).** Board member Morse commended the new BPL website, which is much more user-friendly. He added that there is an AmazonSmile program that allows buyers to designate 0.5% of their purchase amounts to be provided to the library of their choice, which could be our Brown Public Library.
- c. **Select Board Retreat Municipal Goals.** Board member Petty received the finalized list of short-, medium-, and long-term community goals that emanated from the retreat held back in September 2022. She asked why the list of short-term goals had not been prioritized as requested. Chair Maxwell said this will be on the next regular meeting agenda (01/10/23).
- d. **Local Storm Response.** Even though it did not prove necessary for last week's storm, Board member Petty thought the municipality should be prepared to open warming shelter locations in case of prolonged power outages. Chair Maxwell said the local Emergency Management Director, currently Lawton Rutter, would make that decision in conjunction with the Town Manager. Manager Schulz said this information is contained in the Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP), which is updated annually and available on the NAS webpage (<https://www.northfield-vt.gov/ambulance-department>). Board member Petty asked if the LEMP specifies the conditions that would result in the opening of emergency shelters. Manager Schulz said it did not. This would be a judgement call based in part on consultation with state emergency management. Chair Maxwell has attended an emergency management training session that clarified the process and recommended other Select Board members should do the same.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Lynn Doney: Municipal Operations Concerns.** Mr. Doney had a number of concerns about municipal operations that he would like to share with the Select Board members.
 - 1. **Christmas Tree on the Northfield Common.** Mr. Doney said Eric Prior will be retiring soon from TDS Telecom so the municipality might no longer have access to a bucket truck for siting and decorating a temporary holiday tree on the Common. He said a resident has offered to provide a living tree that could be planted on the Common and Mr. Doney feels the Select Board members should take up that offer. The tree itself would be free but the installation cost would be about \$1,400. Board member Morse doesn't believe in putting another tree on the Common. Placing a growing evergreen tree on the east side of the Common would block scenic views for people driving by, etc. Mr. Doney said the permanent tree could be located at the center of the Common between the water fountain and the Civil War monument. Board member Morse believes the suggestion that the possible future lack of a TDS Telecom bucket truck to site a temporary holiday tree requires putting in a permanent tree is specious. If indeed a permanent tree is planted, some kind of conveyance still would be needed to decorate its higher levels as well as the light fixtures surrounding Depot Square. Board member Morse felt if a traditional Christmas tree cannot be obtained for temporary placement on the Common, perhaps a more modern alternative could be installed for the holiday season. People did seem to enjoy the decorations that were put on the water fountain for the Winter Market.
 - 2. **South Main Street Road Situations.** Mr. Doney is very displeased with the condition of South Main Street after the contractor for the stormwater mitigation project shut construction down until next spring. Mr. Doney felt the repaved sections are unacceptable and was very disappointed that the center line was repainted one day but gone the next. Manager Schulz also was disappointed with the delays in this project that led to the road and other site restoration to be done so late. The line striping was done on the one day that week when the temperature was appropriate but unfortunately the next day's snowstorm negated the work. Mr. Doney would like better oversight of this project when it starts up again next spring. Manager Schulz said the project engineers, The Dufresne Group, were the primary project overseers but necessary project re-engineering and labor shortages did lead to unavoidable delays. Manager Schulz said he had numerous conversations with the construction contractor, Courtland Construction, about these work delays but since the State of Vermont is paying for almost all of this project, this is little the municipality could do to force the situation.

Board member Petty asked if there would be an attempt to restore the center line before spring. Manager Schulz said he has spoken to this contractor about trying again with more lasting material. Board member Petty believes the current situation is unsafe and needs to be resolved. Board member Morse said after the stormwater project has been completed next year, the road will be properly and fully restored and all will be back as it was.

3. **Downtown Sidewalk Concerns.** Mr. Doney has made a previous request that the sidewalk located between the Common Café and the Main Street Bridge be repaired as its current condition is a hazard to pedestrians. Manager Schulz said he inspected that section of sidewalk with Highway Foreman Trent Tucker and neither felt it constituted a dangerous situation. An engineer also was brought in who also didn't see a safety issue. Manager Schulz can have an engineer brought back for a reevaluation. A patch job will be done if needed.
 4. **Union Street Pothole.** Mr. Doney said there is a serious pothole near the intersection of Union Street and Water Street that has been there for some time. He would like it fixed. He also would like the municipality in future to focus as much (or more) attention to the paved roads as it now does to the backroads. Manager Schulz said this pothole has been filled several times and he now believes it is in good shape. Chair Maxwell felt a proper long-term solution would be to cut out the area and repave. Manager Schulz said this will be a priority when road repaving recommences next spring.
 5. **Lovers Lane Road Problems.** Mr. Doney said this road has too many potholes. The paved section of this road needs to be ground down to the base and repaved for a permanent solution. Temporary fixes are not working. If the paved section cannot be improved, perhaps the paved sections should be torn up and the whole road graveled. Manager Schulz said in recent years a lot of road material has been put down on Lovers Lane, which gets a lot of traffic throughout the year. As discussed earlier tonight during the budget meeting, the municipality did obtain a \$200,000 VTrans grant that will be used to dig up and repave Lovers Lane. This project will be done next summer. Sally Davidson lives on the west end of Lovers Lane and said the paved section now looks like two (2) strips of blacktop with the middle section causing most of the problems.
 6. **Depot Square Light Pole Fixture Problem.** Mr. Doney said there is a light pole fixture by the TDS Telecom office that has an open access cover. It has been this way for some time and wonders why it hasn't been addressed since there is an electrocution risk. Manager Schulz has asked Acting Utility Superintendent James Russo to fix this. He will contact Mr. Russo for an update.
- b. **Sally Davidson: Town Budget Process Questions.** Ms. Davidson, who is a member of the Northfield Activity Group (NAG) and Northfield Gardeners, asked if she could be present when the proposed FY 2023-2024 budgets for holiday decorations and garden supplies are discussed. Chair Maxwell said if Ms. Davidson has concerns about these proposed budgets, they can be discussed at the budget meeting scheduled for Tuesday, January 10, 2023. She is welcome to attend at that time and share her views on this.

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

The Board adjourned at 8:07 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 with changes at the Select Board regular meeting of January 10, 2023.