

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of November 12, 2024**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Pierre Gomez (Chief, Northfield Police Department), Mitch Osiecki (Zoning Administrator), Pam Ricker, Gerard LaVarnway, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those present were asked to join the Select Board members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

- IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None.

- V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. October 22, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. Approval of Warrant #09-25 & 09-25A-G.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to approve Warrant #09-25 & 09-25A-G in the amount of \$813,873.02. Board member Stevens asked about a \$4,000 payment for a "air purifier" for the Northfield Historical Society. Manager Schulz said this purchase was recommended to address problems with dampness, mold, etc. in the building's basement. This seems to be working and was a budgeted purchase. Chair Maxwell asked about a \$1,500 payment to Our House for "juvenile case work." Manager Schulz says Our House will provide investigative work on behalf of the municipality that will save the Police Department their own time and expense. Board member Shernock felt this was a good idea. Chair Maxwell noted a \$1,000 payment to Snapping Turtle for tree removal. Manager Schulz said Snapping Turtle did remove some trees on Hallstrom Road that were too large for the Highway crew to handle. Chair Maxwell noted several payments to the cemetery contractor for internments and asked why these payments varied in price. Manager Schulz said the cost of an internment can vary based on the timing (i.e., weekday or weekend), other services provided, etc. Chair Maxwell then asked about a \$15,946 payment to SLR International for Cross Brother Dam "removal design." Manager Schulz said this was a pass-through payment for which the municipality will be reimbursed at a later time. Chair Maxwell then noted the total cost of the new utility vehicle (\$22,660), which was split between the Electric, Water, and Sewer department budgets. He thought this was a pretty good deal. Manager Schulz said the vehicle was purchased by making use of the state bidding process, which lowers the purchase price. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through October 27, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$110,520.15. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- VII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell said an updated ARPA fund balance sheet was provided in the Select Board packets along with a draft resolution for the reallocation of ARPA funds as budget surplus funds. Manager Schulz said he was able to make adjustments to the ARPA fund balance sheet by including new payments made to groups that had applied for and received ARPA funds for various projects. In addition, RFPs for projects that had been awarded ARPA funds have been solicited and bids received so that work contracts can be finalized in the near future. This includes the \$22,000 in ARPA funds designated for the "architectural design" of the pool bathhouse. Today was the deadline for submissions and Manager Schulz is now reviewing those received. Bids for the sidewalk work on Vine Street and Cross Street are due next week (11/18/24) and Manager Schulz anticipates that the work contract will be signed soon afterwards. It was estimated by the project engineer that the cost of this work would be about \$400,000 and that is the amount of ARPA funds now allocated for this purpose.

Board member Petty asked if this amount included the cost of repairing deteriorating retaining walls on these streets. Manager Schulz confirmed that was the case. He added that we are hoping that the engineer's cost estimate was fairly accurate. Manager Schulz also believes the contract will be signed soon for the \$40,000 in ARPA funds designated for repairs to the Northfield Middle & High School (NMHS) trail systems and in the Town Forest. In addition, \$100,000 was allocated for the purchase of emergency generators for the Police Station, Fire Station, Municipal Building, and Ambulance Bay. Manager Schulz reported that the generators have been purchased at a total cost of \$83,700 and should be installed by the contractor within the next month. He noted that there might be some additional installation costs so there is no way of knowing the exact project costs at this time. Manager Schulz said there should be about \$200,000 remaining in unallocated ARPA funds by the end of this calendar year and in order to retain these funds, a resolution has been drafted that would reclassify them as "municipal workforce retention" funds. This way, they can be added to the Town General budget as surplus funds. Board member Petty had hoped the Select Board members would have been able to zero out the unallocated fund balance before the year's end deadline. Chair Maxwell said the process might not have been perfect but a lot of very good projects will be accomplished through the use of these ARPA funds. Board member Shernock agreed and noted that some of these projects will provide long-lasting benefits for the community. Chair Maxwell said a more accurate amount of unallocated ARPA funds should be available soon that will allow for this resolution to be updated and approved at the next regular meeting (11/26/24). Board member Morse would like some language included in the resolution to indicate how these surplus funds would be used, i.e. infrastructure improvements, etc. Manager Schulz said these surplus funds would be used primarily for proposed ARPA projects for which it was not possible to fully designate funding before the federal deadline. This will be further clarified when the budget for the next fiscal year is developed. Board member Petty noted there was a proposal from Economic Development Director Tom Davis to set aside \$200,000 in ARPA funds to be used as local match funds for future grant applications. Manager Schulz said that the language specifying that unallocated ARPA funds will be used for workforce retention was recommended by the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) in order to meet federal requirements for converting these funds into Town General surplus funds. He felt it might be possible to include an attachment to the resolution that would explain this better in the interest of greater transparency. Board member Shernock suggested that Chair Maxwell also could explain this in a future submission to the *Northfield News*. Chair Maxwell does believe that including an explanation of the boilerplate language used in the resolution would be helpful to letting residents know how the remaining ARPA funds would be spent.

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. FY 2025/2026 Municipal Budget.** Manager Schulz said work on the draft budget has been ongoing but there have been some delays due to some complications regarding the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) budget, municipal bridge maintenance costs, etc. Chair Maxwell would like the Budget & Financial Review Subcommittee (Board members Maxwell and Morse) to meet this coming Friday (11/15/24) at 8:00 a.m. to review the initial draft budget.
- b. Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Twenty-Year Evaluation Report.** Manager Schulz noted that copies of this report were included in the Select Board packets. The good news is that the report does not call for any costly facility improvements for the next five (5) years. Unfortunately, some significant upgrades probably will be required in subsequent years in order to meet new federal and state operating requirements.
- c. Main Street Waterline and Reservoir Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz has signed the agreements with the contractors for these projects. The waterline work will be done by J. Hutchins, Inc. (Richmond, VT) for \$3,968,000, which was a little more than the project engineer had anticipated. The reservoir replacement work will be done by Preload (Louisville, KY) for \$2,250,000. This was a little less than the engineer predicted. Fortunately, the State of Vermont will be subsidizing about half of the total project costs and the work is expected to start next April.

- d. **Municipal Culvert Inventory.** Manager Schulz reached to the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) about updating this inventory and learned Northfield is on their list for this work to be done next spring. This will be at no cost to the municipality.
- e. **Covered Bridges Proposed Repainting Project.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members have spoken in the past regarding the need to improve the appearance of the covered bridges by repainting them so he obtained some informal quotes from local contractors. These were in the range from \$180,000 to \$200,000. Board member Morse noted that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) is planning to rehabilitate these bridges in about five (5) years so perhaps, given this great expense, it might be more cost-effective to just patch them for the time being. Board member Petty said the Select Board members will need to determine how to budget for this expense whenever the work is done. Board member Morse felt it would be necessary to create a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) account in the Highway Department budget to set aside funds over several years for this project. He has asked some locals about this and it was his impression that a complete repainting job hasn't been done for at least twenty-five (25) years. Board member Shernock felt these covered bridges are a great tourist attraction, especially during foliage season, so they should be maintained properly. Board member Morse suggested that a charter change might be needed to impose higher penalties on those drivers found responsible for bridge damages, etc.
- f. **FY 2023/2024 Auditor Report.** Manager Schulz said the auditing firm (Kittell Branagan & Sargent) that reviews the financial statements from the previous fiscal year will be at the next Select Board meeting to present their findings.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Skateboard Park.** Board member Stevens would like to know whether NPD Chief Pierre Gomez would have any objections to siting a skateboard park in the vacant space behind the Police Station. Chief Gomez was present remotely at the start of this meeting but is no longer attending so Manager Schulz will contact him about this.
- b. **Revised Disorderly Conduct Ordinance.** Board member Stevens noted that the revised ordinance went into effect over the weekend and asked whether it is now being enforced. Manager Schulz reported that there had been excessive noise complaints on Washington Street on Sunday and those responsible were issued warnings by the responding officers.
- c. **Riverwalk Project Update.** Board member Stevens asked if there was any update on the progress of this proposed project. Manager Schulz stated that Mr. Davis has been in contact with Dollar General about obtaining their permission for the trail work that would impact their property. In addition, an Act 250 permit opinion has been received. Copies of the opinion will be provided to the Select Board members but the basic message is that the work to be done on municipal property would not require a new Act 250 permit but the work to be done by the Dollar General might require that their existing Act 250 permit be revised.
- d. **Central Street Temporary Closure for Trick-or-Treaters.** Board member Shernock thought that closing this street to through traffic during Halloween night worked very well. She suggested that the closure period should be extended to 9:00 p.m. next year, when Halloween will fall on a Friday night. Board member Shernock then thanked Chief Gomez for proposing this safety measure in the first place. Board member Petty has heard nothing but positive feedback for this temporary nighttime street closure and agrees that in future it should be extended later in the evening.
- e. **Rustic Restaurant Parking Lot Improvements.** Board member Shernock wanted to thank Matt Goslant for improving the Rustic Restaurant parking lot with the installation of permeable surfaces. This will help to considerably reduce the amount of stormwater runoff going straight into the nearby Dog River.
- f. **Main Street Speeding Concerns.** Board member Shernock would like Chief Gomez to look into the possibility of installing speed cameras along Main Street in order to identify and arrest speeding drivers. Chair Maxwell felt this possible purchase should be discussed in full during the upcoming budget meetings.

- g. Community Capital of Vermont MOU update.** Board member Shernock asked if there has been any update regarding the legal opinion for this proposed MOU. Manager Schulz said the attorney recommended only minor changes and Chair Maxwell already has signed the revised document as previously authorized by the Select Board members.
 - h. Post Office Curb Cut.** Board member Shernock asked when the curb cut in front of the building's handicapped ramp would be done. Manager Schulz said Nutbrown Construction will be in town soon to finish the Northfield Falls pedestrian safety improvements and will install this curb cut as soon as that work has been completed.
 - i. Engine Brake Signage.** Board member Shernock asked if the requested signs that would bar the use of engine (or "jake") brakes in town have been ordered. Manager Schulz confirmed that they have. He also is getting legal opinion regarding whether the signs would be advisory only or if the prohibition would be enforceable.
 - j. Recognition of Local Volunteers.** Board member Shernock would like some local volunteers identified for special recognition soon so that this honor could be publicized in the next Town Report. There still remains some debate amongst the Select Board members about how the initial class of honorees should be chosen. As the next Town Report will not go to print until early February, it was thought that this issue should be resolved before then.
 - k. Roadside Leaf Collection.** Chair Maxwell wanted to thank the Highway crew for the outstanding job they have done in gathering these leaves in a timely manner.
 - l. Town Common Art Display.** Chair Maxwell wanted to thank Tossy Garrett, the local artist who created and installed the sculpture located on the Common, for fixing what had been vandalized several months ago.
 - m. Lynn Sanders Recognition.** Chair Maxwell noted the recent passing of Lynn A. Sanders at the age of 96. Mr. Sanders was a longtime employee of TDS Telecom and also served as a Select Board member for several years. Chair Maxwell noted that his son Gregory S. Sanders, who predeceased him, also served as a Select Board member.
- X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**
- a. Elroy C. Hill: ARPA Fund Allocation Process.** Mr. Hill, who has attended nearly every Select Board meeting in recent years, said he was very pleased with the manner in which the Select Board members conducted the process of awarding ARPA funds for various local civic improvement projects. Chair Maxwell said this was a group effort.
- XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss legal matters and contract negotiations with Manager Schulz present. Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki also will be present for part of the discussion. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:40 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Petty, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:38 p.m. No action was taken.

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

The Board adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at https://youtu.be/QWdQ1vOSe_o

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of November 26, 2024.