

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING  
Minutes of January 9, 2025**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Susan Stillinger, Sarah Capron, and Elroy C. Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

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

**III. DISCUSSION**

**a. Proposed FY 2025/2026 Town Budget**

- 1. Economic Development.** Manager Schulz said this is the one departmental budget that the Select Board members have not yet reviewed in depth. The bulk of this budget is devoted to the salary and benefits for the full-time Economic Development Director (Thomas Davis), which rise from \$91,120 to \$96,810 in the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz did some research regarding how other Vermont communities compensate their economic development directors and found that although the job titles might vary, the position responsibilities are usually about the same. From what he has found, Manager Schulz believes Northfield is paying Mr. Davis a comparable salary. He has spoken to Mr. Davis about this and he has no objections regarding his current salary or the proposed budget for this department. Chair Maxwell would like to see figures regarding how nearby towns Randolph and Waterbury compensate their economic development directors. Manager Schulz then stated Mr. Davis performs commendable service to the community that has included locating and successfully applying for grant opportunities. The successful grant applications have provided lasting benefits for the community and Manager Schulz said Mr. Davis also serves as a valuable sounding board for him when potential civic improvement projects are first brought up for discussion. Board member Petty felt it was good to have someone on the municipal staff who can work with local business owners regarding their individual concerns. Chair Maxwell agreed and said that it was a good development for Northfield that Mr. Davis has brought his past experience and expertise to this position. Chair Maxwell added he has received several compliments from residents related to the many already completed and upcoming civic improvement projects that will result in the further development of our downtown area. He felt this has established important momentum for additional civic improvements. Manager Schulz said an unexpectedly high number of grant opportunities have become available during Mr. Davis's tenure so it has been very good to have a full-time EDD on board at this time. It then was noted that American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds were used to pay part of the EDD salary and benefits over the past couple of years. However, it was confirmed by Ms. Baroffio that with the next fiscal year budget, this position will be wholly funded out of the Town General budget. Chair Maxwell felt it was important to create a private space for Mr. Davis so that he can discuss potentially confidential business matters with local entrepreneurs. Mr. Davis currently shares an office with the part-time Zoning Administrator. Manager Schulz said we are looking at a number of possible options to achieve this in the Municipal Building. It has been suggested that a permanent wall be installed that would fully separate the Lister's Office and the Conference Room. This would allow Mr. Davis to hold private meetings there when needed. It was noted most line items in this budget are level funded in the next fiscal year and this concluded the discussion of the Economic Development budget.
- 2. Town Budget Recap.** A handout was distributed to the Select Board members that included recent revisions to the proposed budget. Some of these have been approved by Select Board consensus but some are still under consideration. For example, there were some adjustments in the revenue budget such as lowering the amount projected for Town Clerk fees from \$35,000 to \$30,000 based on past actuals. In addition, since it has been proposed to provide free swim lessons for Northfield residents this summer, the Pool Department line item for swim lesson revenue has been decreased from \$2,900 to \$500. Also based on past actuals, the revenue anticipated for income interest in the Town General Fund and the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budgets has been increased by a total of \$15,000.

In the municipal operations and maintenance (O&M) budgets, the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) has provided updated cost figures for its workers compensation, property insurance, auto insurance, liability insurance, etc. coverage for the 2025 calendar year. The overall impact is a \$11,180 budget increase that will be spread over multiple departments. In the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) budget, there was Board consensus that the amount budgeted for equipment recertification be increased from \$8,000 to \$10,000. The Northfield Police Department (NPD) personnel budget will increase by \$32,450 in order to fully budget for five (5) full-time officers. The proposed budget previously had taken into account that a full-time officer would be on military leave for at least part of the next fiscal year. In the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) personnel budget, there will be a \$1,610 increase to cover the extra cost of increasing the hourly wage of NAS paramedics from \$22.00 to \$23.00. In the Highway Department budget, \$500 was added to the Catch Basin Cleaning line item and the Cemetery budget saw an increase in the Tree Removal budget from \$1,500 to \$5,500. In the Pool budget, there will be a \$1,120 increase in the personnel budget to cover the additional cost of having lifeguards working theme nights and special events.

In the CIP budgets, the Brown Public Library CIP budget will be increased by \$5,000 in order to add additional funding for the future replacement of the library roof. This will supplement the \$25,000 already in this budget account. In the Highway Department CIP budget, \$5,000 was removed from the Water Street Footbridge account and \$6,000 was put into a new line item for the Vine Street Footbridge. In the Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budgets, the amount budgeted in the Pool CEP budget for new diving boards was increased from \$1,000 to \$2,000. In the Highway Department CEP budget, \$9,650 was added to the  $\frac{3}{4}$  Ton-18 Chevy account to cover the extra expense of purchasing a new plow for the replacement truck.

Manager Schulz said as a result of these budget revisions, the change to the tax levy is an additional \$61,910, which will result in an estimated tax rate increase of 9.3%. All of these aforementioned revisions were approved by consensus by the Select Board members at previous budget meetings. He then noted that another item that needs to be approved is to determine how unallocated ARPA funds will be incorporated into the proposed budget. At the last regular meeting (12/10/24), the Select Board members approved a resolution that would redesignate unallocated ARPA funds as Town General surplus funds. Manager Schulz will explain this process and the reasoning behind it in his annual report to be included in the 2025 Town Report (and also distributed on local social media). However, he and Ms. Baroffio are still working on the best way to include these funds in the proposed FY 2025/2026 budget. This would not affect the overall budget figures or the estimated local tax rate. Manager Schulz added that there now are \$35,000 in former ARPA funds that are not linked to any specific project and the current plan is just to indicate them as surplus funds. They could be linked to a specific purpose at a later time. Ms. Baroffio said these funds could be included in the Highway CIP accounts for bridge maintenance, etc. It was requested that management provide a recommendation regarding these former ARPA funds for the next budget meeting.

Board member Petty noted there has been some discussion over the last year for using the interest income generated from banked ARPA funds (and possibly other ARPA funds) in order to create a local match fund for future state/federal grant applications. Ms. Baroffio noted that as of December 5, 2024, the total amount of ARPA interest income was \$130,424. This amount has increased in the interim and is expected to further increase in the next year. The amount of the increase will diminish over time as those banked funds are spent on designated projects. Manager Schulz felt state grant opportunities should remain fairly constant in the coming year even if federal grant opportunities decrease due to the incoming administration. He would recommend that should a reserve fund be created for this purpose, there should be some flexibility how its establishment is worded so that future use of these funds is not too restricted. Board member Morse suggested adding an article on the 2025 Town Meeting Warning as follows: "Shall the voters authorize the Town of Northfield to establish a reserve fund for the purpose of funding matching grants?" There were no objections to this. Board member Petty thought it would be very good to have this reserve fund in place as grant opportunities often arise without much advance notice. Also, indicating on the grant application form that local match funds are already on hand improves the chances of a successful grant application.

Manager Schulz noted that in recent years, a good number of local civic improvement projects have been largely funded through state and/or federal grant monies including the Stony Brook Bridge project, South Main Street sidewalk improvements, etc. Board member Petty noted that several of these projects were urgently needed and the availability of these grant funds certainly hastened the process. She then asked how much should be put into this new reserve fund. Chair Maxwell said management should be able to provide a recommendation on this. Ms. Baroffio noted about \$44,000 remains from the original \$100,000 in the Economic Development Fund that Northfield voters authorized at the 2014 Town Meeting.

Chair Maxwell said in the NAS proposed budget, there is an increase in the school/training line item from \$4,000 to \$6,000. However, the NAS Chief (Meggan McCusker) had asked that this line item be raised to \$11,000, which Manager Schulz felt was too much of an increase in one fiscal year. Board member Petty suggested raising this line item to \$7,000. In addition, Chief McCusker had asked the overnight standby duty stipend be increased from \$3.00 to \$5.00 per hour in the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz said paying the stipend itself is a relatively new development. Ms. Baroffio said the proposed NAS budget does increase this stipend to \$3.50 per hour. There was no objection to leaving the stipend amount at that figure.

3. **Other items.** Board member Morse noted Economic Development Director Davis had provided the Select Board members with a proposal to form a non-profit organization in order to build affordable housing in Northfield. Board member Petty felt since this was not really a budget matter, this discussion should not be held tonight as not properly warned. Chair Maxwell agreed and said that this matter would be added to the agenda for next week's regular meeting (01/14/25). There was no objection to this. Board member Morse said he would have a number of questions for Mr. Davis at that time regarding the feasibility of his proposal.

#### **IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).**

- a. **Elroy Hill: Future Dump Truck Purchases.** Mr. Hill asked when the municipality started purchasing tandem dump trucks rather than the less expensive single-axle dump trucks. Board member Morse thought this happened when he was Town Manager about twenty-five (25) years ago. Mr. Hill thought the extra expense ( $\pm$ \$75,000) of the tandem dump trucks was not really justified in terms of timely road material delivery, fuel consumption, etc. Board member Morse believes the reason for the switch to tandem trucks was in order to get more material on the backroads early in the morning before the school buses starting running. However, due to the ever increasing costs of heavy trucks in recent years, Board member Morse would not oppose revisiting this preference in order to save money in future. He added that there are some steep roads, such as Turkey Hill Road, that the tandem trucks cannot navigate. Chair Maxwell also would not oppose researching this matter further but added that in the last twenty-five (25) years, residents seem to have developed less realistic expectations about having their backroads cleared and prepped in time for their early morning commutes. Chair Maxwell agreed that the cost of new highway equipment has been increasing out of sight so he would welcome any feasible option to lower future costs.

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

The Board adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

A video recording of this meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/piQ9IzS2X6U>

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of January 28, 2025.