

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of June 25, 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, Mitch Osiecki (Zoning Administrator), Pierre Gomez (Police Chief), Jeremy Whalen (Northfield Conservation Commission), Mariela Swiech (Northfield Conservation Commission), Judy Knapp (Northfield Middle & High School), Virginia Kunkel (Town Forest Stewardship Committee), Kaitlyn Keating (Northfield Community Development Network), Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), Susan Stillinger, and Gerard LaVarnway.

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):

- a. Jeremy Whalen and Mariela Swiech, Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC): American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Request.** The NCC and the Northfield Middle & High School (NMHS) are making a joint ARPA fund request in the amount of \$74,800 in order to restore trail systems located on Garvey Hill near the NMHS and in the Town Forest. This project would be in conjunction with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) and the ARPA funds would cover the expense of VYCC professional trail restoration work. Ms. Swiech, who is an NMHS student, said these trail systems were heavily impacted by the July 2023 flooding rainstorm and other severe weather events over the past few years. The VYCC charge about \$7,000 per week for their services and that is where the bulk of the ARPA funds would go. Mr. Whalen noted the Garvey Hill trails were included on the Northfield Town-Wide Recreation Map that was recently developed through the efforts of the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee. Board member Morse asked if NMHS submitted paperwork for FEMA reimbursement funds related to school property damage due to a declared natural disaster. Mr. Whalen does not know whether that occurred. Board member Morse would like to know this before providing ARPA funds in order to repair trails located on school property. Board member Shernock is very impressed by this collaboration between NCC and NMHS as she does like to see local youth involved in civic improvement projects. She thought that they might want to contact Sterling College (Craftsbury Common, VT) to see if their students would like to get involved with this project along with VYCC. This has been a feeder college for young people interested in careers in forestry service. Board member Shernock also would like maps, photos, etc. of the trails to be upgraded as well as a timeline for the project work. Mr. Whalen said they should be able to provide that information. Board member Shernock said the Select Board members would like to have periodic updates regarding how ARPA funds would be spent on this project. Board member Stevens noted the ARPA funds application did not indicate whether this proposal has the support of NMHS administrators. Mr. Whalen said they are supportive of this proposal but with recent end of the school year, it was not possible to get written endorsements in time for this meeting. He said those letters of support should be available soon and will be forwarded to the Select Board members. Board member Stevens asked about the length of the trails to be improved. Ms. Swiech said about three (3) miles of trails will be addressed by this project. Board member Stevens noted the proposal stated the VYCC workers would be housed in Northfield during the project. He asked where that would be. Mr. Whalen said that would need to be determined later but would either be on school or municipal property.

Board member Stevens would like to know what kind of specific trail restoration work would be done on Garvey Hill and in the Town Forest. Mr. Whalen said on Garvey Hill there is a lot of sawyer work that needs to be done to remove already downed trees and to remove other ones that are blocking the trail system. In the Town Forest, the focus will be on restoring trail bridges that suffered storm damage. These bridges often span muddy areas affected by nearby vernal pools, etc. Mr. Whalen noted some trails cannot be opened until late spring due to muddy conditions so restoring these bridges might allow for these trails to open earlier in the year. Board member Stevens would like to see a map indicating where the project work would take place. Board member Petty said it usually has been local volunteers who have helped with trail maintenance and restoration so it would be good to have professionally trained assistance from VYCC. They have helped out with our trail system previously and done very good work. Board member Petty also would like to see letters of support from NMHS administrators as well as some indication that the school will provide some contribution to this project either through school funds or in-kind services. Mr. Whalen said school employees have done some work already on the Garvey Hill trails and he will track the number of hours they have or will contribute to this project. Board member Petty noted ARPA funds need to be obligated by the end of this year and fully expended before the end of 2026. She asked if the plan is to perform this trail restoration work next summer. Mr. Whalen confirmed the current timeline is to make a commitment to the project this year and have the trail work done next year. If there are any cost overruns, they would be covered by other grant funds. Chair Maxwell asked if it were possible to open the restored Garvey Hill trails to the public. Ms. Swiech said when the trails were serviceable, they were open to all members of the community but this fact was not advertised widely. Board member Petty noted that when these trails were used for sporting events, such as cross country running, they were unavailable for public use at those times. Ms. Swiech said such usage is not possible at this time. She added that she did an informal poll of fellow students that indicated that many did not know about the Garvey Hill trail system but were interested in using it when restored. Chair Maxwell felt if ARPA funds are used to on the Garvey Hill trails, they should be made available to the public and he would like that permission provided in writing. He also would like to see the project costs for the various phases of the project broken down. Chair Maxwell then asked if any permits would be required for the work to be done. Mr. Whalen did not think so since they would only be restoring established trails rather than creating new ones.

Judy Knapp is a local educator who was in charge of the STAR Program at NMHS. She said that about twelve (12) years ago, NMHS and Norwich University (NU) students helped build an outdoor classroom on Garvey Hill. Unfortunately, the structure was damaged by the July 2023 rainstorm and other storms, which made the trails leading to it inaccessible. School employees did their best to restore the area before the 2023-2024 school year started. STAR Program students used to help maintain the trail system but the program has been suspended since the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Knapp added that NU is interested in helping restore this trail system as an additional location where its cross country team could train. She also has met with VYCC representatives and they are excited about coming to Northfield to help restore the trail system while also interacting with local youth. There also are people associated with the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park willing to come in and assist with the project. Should a good work plan for trail restoration be developed, Ms. Knapp felt a lot could be accomplished over the next couple of years. The work experience for local youth would be an additional benefit. The restored Garvey Hill trail system would be accessible to NMHS students and staff as well as the local community. Chair Maxwell asked if school administrators have been involved in the planning for this project. Ms. Knapp said they have and they are very supportive, which should be evident in the forthcoming letters of support. This project also has support from the Paine Mountain School District Board members as they would like to have additional outdoor educational opportunities available for Northfield students.

Chair Maxwell said this matter will be discussed further as a possible action item later in the meeting.

- b. Kaitlyn Keating, Northfield Community Development Network: ARPA Fund Request.** Ms. Keating provided the Select Board members with the cost estimates Timber & Stone LLC developed as part of its initial study of the proposed Northfield Riverwalk project. Timber & Stone LLC has divided the proposed riverwalk path into four (4) segments, i.e. Sections A, B, C, and D. The cost estimate for Section A, which starts at the Northfield Senior Center parking area and ends near the pedestrian bridge, is \$41,812. Section B, which continues from there to the asphalt trail at the railroad crossing, would cost \$47,500. Section C, which is the longest segment, would proceed after the railroad crossing towards the parking area adjacent to North Main Street behind the DS Café. The estimated cost of this section is \$212,166. The final path segment, Section D, would continue from the North Main Street parking area across the Main Street Bridge and would travel along the north bank of the Dog River to a riverside location just behind the Dollar General store. The estimated cost of this final section is \$44,878. Ms. Keating noted there are upcoming grant opportunities that NCDN will explore for this project. One is through the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation and the application will be due this October. There also is a T-Mobile Hometown Grant that could provide up to \$50,000 with no local match. The deadline for this application is the end of this month (06/30/24) and requires a letter of support from the municipality. As for permitting concerns, Timber & Stone LLC suggested the path sections that travel close to the Green Mountain Apartments and the Dollar General store probably would require amendments to their existing Act 250 permits. Manager Schulz said the municipality certainly could work with the affected property owners on the permit amendments, which probably would not be expensive. Board member Shernock thought the pictures of the proposed path sections were very helpful. She asked if the Highway crew could provide some in-kind services for this project. Manager Schulz thought the crew members probably would have sufficient expertise to assist with some path work but given its current manpower shortage, it probably would not be good to take them away from their road maintenance duties. Ms. Keating said she already has spoken to the Vermont Housing Authority, which operates the Green Mountain Apartments, about the possibility of establishing a nearby accessible pedestrian path. They appear to be receptive to the concept. Board member Petty thought if the Cross Brother Dam removal project is delayed beyond next year, it might make better sense to start the project with Section A. Board member Morse felt it would be a good course of action for Manager Schulz to contact the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) as soon as possible to determine whether the municipality needs new Act 250 permits for this riverwalk project. Carolyn Stevens said NCDN members already have been in contact with state officials regarding any permitting concerns for this project. Board member Petty believes there should have been more coordination between NCDN and the municipality from the beginning of this proposal. That would have cut down on the confusion about whether new permits or permit amendments are required. Ms. Keating said their request for ARPA funds was based on local public interest in creating new universally accessible pedestrian and bicycle paths for the community. She added NCDN is perfectly willing to apply for outside grant funds but they did apply for these ARPA funds because the program is designed to encourage local civic improvement projects like this one. Chair Maxwell said this ARPA fund request will be discussed later in the meeting as a possible action item.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. June 11, 2024 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #24-24 & 24-24C-F.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #24-24 & 24-24C-F in the amount of \$214,613.21. Board member Petty asked about additional spending on the Ambulance Bay bathroom. Manager Schulz said a toilet needed to be replaced and that should complete the project. Board member Petty asked about “re-gravel” work on Dole Hill. Manager Schulz said an engineer was brought in to help resolve road problems there due to poor drainage. Some preliminary work has been done but a long-term plan will be developed to provide a more permanent solution. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Warrant #01-25A.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #01-25A in the amount of \$45,090.39. It was noted this special warrant included two separate items: the first of two installments of Washington County taxes and the annual payment of an old water bond (West Phase). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Receipt of Biweekly Payroll through June 9, 2024.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to receive the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$99,918.09. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Town Zoning Bylaws Revisions.** Manager Schulz said a public hearing regarding proposed revisions to Northfield’s zoning bylaws was held in conjunction with the last Select Board regular meeting (06/11/24). At that time, the Select Board members requested a few minor amendments that Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki incorporated into the current draft of this document. Laura Hill-Eubanks, the former Planning Commission Chair, asked during the public hearing that three- and four-unit dwellings not be allowed in the low density residential districts and that change also has been made. The Town Attorney was consulted to determine whether these new changes were considered “substantive,” which would require holding an additional public hearing before the document could be approved. It was his legal opinion that this was not necessary. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Shernock, to approve the revised Northfield Zoning Bylaws as presented. Board member Stevens found a typo in the table on Page 51 that will be fixed. Board member Morse felt this whole process took a lot longer than it should have and he would have liked all changes from the zoning bylaws now in effect to have been tracked from the beginning. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund Requests.** Chair Maxwell would like to begin tonight’s discussion by going through the current list of potential ARPA funded projects to determine which should be eliminated from consideration and which should remain under discussion. The Select Board members then went over a number of items that will remain as medium- or long-term community goals but will be removed from the list of potential ARPA funded projects mainly due to time constraints. These include “Freight Yard Way Water Line Replacement...,” “Install Pedestrian and Bike Safety Improvements in [Northfield] Falls and from Falls to Downtown,” “Install Sidewalk and Pedestrian Amenities on Main Street from Central to Route 12/12A.” “Install Streetscape Improvements on East Street...,” “Develop a Community Center,” “Install an Off Road Multi-Use Path from Memorial Park to Falls Park,” and “Reduce Energy Use in Municipal Buildings and Vehicles.”

The Select Board members then discussed such ongoing projects as the “Common Update Project Study.” They previously authorized \$40,268 for a community outreach study to determine possible alternatives for Common rehabilitation and that study should be completed by this September. After some discussion, there was a consensus that additional ARPA funds might be designated for this project once the project options and cost estimates have been determined.

The Select Board members also authorized up to \$100,000 for the purchase of emergency generators for the Municipal Building, Fire Station, Police Station, and Ambulance Bay. Manager Schulz reported that bids for this are being solicited and the deadline for submissions is Monday, July 8, 2024.

Chair Maxwell then turned to the request from the Northfield Senior Center for \$325,000 in ARPA funds for a building expansion project. Chair Maxwell does not feel the Senior Center has provided a solid plan for this project with benchmarks, firm cost estimates, timelines, etc. He did feel the current building does need some specific upgrades that could be financed through ARPA funds, such as a new roof, a new air conditioning system, etc. Chair Maxwell thought it might be best for ARPA funds to be designated for such a building improvement project once cost estimates have been provided. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Petty, to reject the Senior Center request for \$325,000 in ARPA funds for a proposed building expansion and instead encourage that they apply for ARPA funds for a specific building improvement project with cost estimates. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Morse abstaining.** Manager Schulz will inform the Senior Center of this decision.

The Select Board members then discussed the Community Garden, for which there is an outstanding request for \$15,000 in ARPA funds. Board member Morse noted a \$5,000 grant was received that was used for garden startup costs. He doesn't see the need for the additional \$15,000 at this time. This item will be removed from the list of potential ARPA projects. There is another request for \$275,000 in ARPA funds in order to "Install Enhanced Pedestrian Amenities on Wall Street from the Common to Dog River Park." Manager Schulz noted a scoping project is now underway for this project and the current plan is to use ARPA funds to cover the local match amount for an already submitted grant application. We should know whether the grant application has been successful by this September. Board member Shernock suggested lowering the requested amount to \$150,000 as that would more accurately reflect the amount needed for the local match. There was no objection. Chair Maxwell noted there is a \$20,000 ARPA fund request from management to update the "Clerk and Utility Billing System." Manager Schulz said the plan is to allow customers to make credit card payments for payments to the Town Clerk and/or the Utility Office. Currently, utility customers can only make credit card payments online and the Town Clerk's Office only accepts checks or cash. Manager Schulz has worked on this possibility with Finance Director Laurie Baroffio and Utility Office Manager Doug Reed and the current plan is to use the \$20,000 for needed software upgrades. Once the new payment system is in place, customer will be charged a \$5.90 transaction charge for each credit card payment. Chair Maxwell would not be in favor of charging customers this "convenience fee." Ms. Keating said such a fee is now standard business practice and the vendor has the option of either absorbing the cost or passing it on to the customer. Board member Petty doesn't like the idea of charging this fee but believes customers should have the payment option. Chair Maxwell said this item will remain on the potential ARPA project list pending additional information regarding less expensive software options, etc. Chair Maxwell said there had been previous Select Board discussion of hiring a professional planning consultant to further refine the local zoning bylaws once the version under review earlier tonight had been adopted. He suggested ARPA funds could be used for this in order to hasten the process. Board member Petty thinks that would be a good idea. She would like to see the current zoning maps revisited and perhaps some zoning bylaw revisions that would encourage "smart development" in the low density residential districts in order to create much needed affordable housing. There also have been requests to add provisions to protect the Town Forest from future development. Chair Maxwell asked Manager Schulz to develop cost estimates for hiring this consultant. The \$200,000 in ARPA funds that Economic Development Director Tom Davis requested for matching grant funds will be left on the list. Board member Petty thought that amount could be increased at a later time as there are a good number of grant-funded projects coming up that could make use of these matching funds.

The Select Board members then turned to the ARPA fund requests that were discussed earlier tonight under “Public Participation.” Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize \$50,000 in ARPA funds for the proposed River Walk project on the condition that a subcommittee be formed consisting of two Select Board members and at least one NCDN member that would be charged to recommend whether those ARPA funds should either be used for a grant match amount or to fund Section A, B, or D of the proposed path. Board member Petty supports the idea of forming this subcommittee but does not favor committing the \$50,000 in ARPA funds at this time. She would like to see more information regarding the overall feasibility of this project before obligating these funds. Board member Morse felt it would be beneficial in the long term to the community to provide needed access to our underutilized riverfront areas. He believes that the subcommittee members should be able to address any and all of the potential obstacles that have been suggested for this project. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Petty voting in opposition.** Board members Shernock and Stevens subsequently volunteered to serve on the new subcommittee. Board member Petty said she does appreciate all the work NCDN members put into this proposal but she just could not support it at this time given the number of still unanswered questions. As for the ARPA fund request submitted tonight on behalf of the Conservation Commission and the Northfield Middle & High School, it was the consensus of the Select Board members that they would like additional information regarding the project’s timeline, how projected expenses will be broken down amongst the project components, etc. There also was a request for a map that would clearly indicate where the trail improvements will take place. Board member Petty also wanted it confirmed that the improved trails would be fully accessible to the general public. Manager Schulz will send a letter to the applicants requesting this additional information.

- c. **Development Review Board (DRB) Appointment.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Kevin Pecor to fill the vacant DRB position. Mr. Pecor is a state employee and former owner of the Knotty Shamrock restaurant, which is now the Good Measure. His appointment has been endorsed by DRB Chair William Smith. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **Revolving Loan Fund Committee Appointments and Procedures.** Given the lateness of the hour, Board member Petty suggested postponing this discussion until the next regular meeting (07/09/24). There was no objection.
- e. **Select Board Community Goals update.** An updated list of Community Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Goals was developed in the wake of the Select Board Retreat held earlier this year (05/07/24). Board member Petty has further revised and reorganized that list to reflect more recent Select Board member comments. She then asked if there were any suggestions for further revisions. Board member Shernock would like exploration of the possible establishment of a Community Center added to the list of medium-term goals. Board member Stevens is working on the possibility of creating a skateboard park so perhaps that also could be added to the list of medium-term goals.
- f. **Volunteer of the Year Designation.** One of the Annual Goals/Activities on the list of Community Goals is to “Honor Volunteers Annually.” Board member Shernock asked that this item be included on tonight’s agenda in order to start the process. Board member Morse is concerned that singling out specific groups or individuals might be a slight to others who might also be worthy of the honor. Board member Petty suggested the Select Board members could create a list of eligible groups or individuals from whom there could be a random drawing to determine the first set of honorees. Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Petty, for the Select Board members to annually select five Northfield volunteers to be honored and provided with citations, publicly displayed photographs, and \$50 gift certificates. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Morse voting in opposition.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Main Street Waterline and Cheney Farm Tank Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz is still waiting to receive from the State of Vermont the formal letter of approval for this project. The State will fund fifty percent (50%) of the project costs and the remainder will be financed through a zero interest long-term bond. Manager Schulz believes the project should go out to bid later this summer.
- b. **Highway Department update.** Manager Schulz said the Highway crew has been kept very busy lately with roadside mowing, etc. Their next big project will be on Hallstrom Road where there will be ditching, culvert replacement, etc. Some trees located in the municipal right-of-way will have to be removed.
- c. **Highway Paving Bids.** Manager Schulz said three (3) bids were received by last week's deadline to perform the paving work on Dickinson Drive, Doyon Road, and East Street. \$200,000 was budgeted for this work and the bids averaged \$185,000.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **CVFiber update.** Board member Morse would like an update from newly appointed CVFiber Delegate Tom Davis regarding the status of CVFiber's plans to provide broadband internet service to Northfield's "underserved" locations. He also would like to know if CVFiber's planned merger with NEK Community Broadband would have any impact on its agreement with Northfield to use the \$90,000 in local ARPA funds CVFiber was awarded to expand high-speed internet to more rural areas.
- b. **Municipal Pool Parking Lot Expansion.** Board member Stevens asked about the status of this project. Manager Schulz said three bids were received for this project. However, Utility Superintendent James Russo has recommended postponing the work until the pool closes for the year (08/17/24).
- c. **Outdoor Recreation Activities.** Board member Petty reported that several VOREC grant funded outdoors activities are ongoing or will be starting soon, including yoga hikes in the Town Forest, Story Walk displays at the Dog River Park, etc. Residents should keep an eye out for notices on local social media, etc. for the full schedule of upcoming activities.
- d. **Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** As was announced at the last meeting, Chair Maxwell noted this project, which was originally scheduled for next summer, has been postponed until 2026.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Kaitlyn Keating, NCDN: T-Mobile Hometown Grant Application.** Ms. Keating asked if there was any objection to NCDN applying for these grant funds. The grant application needs to be submitted by June 30, 2024. There was no objection. Due to the short deadline, Manager Schulz suggested NCDN work with Economic Development Director Tom Davis on this as he would be able to provide considerable assistance with the application process.

XI. ADJOURNMENT.

Motion by Board member Shernock, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Morse voting in opposition.**

The Board adjourned at 10:47 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.

A video recording of this meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/a5kvpAkyhhc>

These minutes are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.