

[NORTHFIELD SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES]

February 6, 2024

Northfield Town Hall
69 Main St

Select Board Present: Alexander Meisner, Chair; Bernard Boudreau, Vice Chair; Sarah Kerns, Clerk; Barbara “Bee” Jacque; Heath Cummings

Also Present: Andrea Llamas, Town Administrator; Sandra L. Wood, Town Secretary; Otis Wheeler & Tyler Bourbeau, BNCTV

Others Present: Kel Sphon; Highway Superintendent Tom Walker; Karen Boudreau, Sewer Commission, Zach Chornyak, Tighe & Bond; Isaac Golding, Sewer Plant Supervisor; Steve Skowrya, Northeast Paving Plant Manager; Dan Darden, Northeast Paving District Manager

- Meeting called to order at 6:00 pm
- **Scheduled Appointments**
 - 6:00 pm Hearing: Eurovia/NorthEast Paving, Steve Skowrya, Dan Darden: request to amend license
 - Motion by Boudreau, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to commence the Public Hearing will be held at Northfield Town Hall, 69 Main Street, Northfield, MA in the Select Board meeting room on February 6, 2024, at 6pm to consider an application for license amendment (FP-2A) from Eurovia Atlantic Coast LLC dba Northeast Paving at 216 Mt. Hermon Station Rd, Northfield, MA requesting approval for increased storage capacity of liquid Propane, Class I liquid. Roll call vote Jacque yes, Meisner yes, Boudreau yes, Cummings yes and Kerns yes
 - Northeast Paving is replacing two tanks with one for efficiency and to reduce product delivery. The goal is to remove waste oil and invest \$7-\$8,000 to lower emissions. Long term goal to reduce asphalt.
 - Meisner stated citizens have the right to comment. There were no comments from the public present or in writing
 - Dead River will provide propane initially. Thereafter, supply will be put out to bid.
 - Chief Dunnell has signed off on the project
 - Long term fossil fuel projects include insulating throughout the plant. Solar is being worked on
 - There have been no workplace accidents at the Northfield plant
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the license amendment FP-2A from Eurovia Atlantic Coast LLC DBA Northeast Paving at 216 Mount Herman Station Rd, Northfield MA for increased storage capacity of liquid propane Class 1
 - Motion by Cummings, seconded by Boudreau the Select Board closed the hearing at 6:10 pm. Roll call vote Kerns yes, Cummings yes, Boudreau yes, Meisner yes and Jacque yes
 - Building and Grounds Maintenance Appointment – Kel Sphon
 - Meisner commented on Sphon’s strong application and interest to work for the department and invest his time and career in Northfield. He is a resident of the town.
 - Interested in learning additional tasks and to live and work in the same place
 - Boudreau asked if the length of time between applying and response was long. Sphon said no, it was a couple of weeks. Llamas reviewed the process
 - For tracking projects, Sphon was familiar with software from a previous job
 - Hobbies include culinary interests, fishing and music
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to offer Kel Sphon the position of Building and Grounds Maintenance effective immediately contingent on completion of paperwork with a rate of pay of \$21.67/hour at grade 5 step 5
 - 6:30 pm Tighe & Bond – Sewer Asset Management Plan
 - Sewer Commission called to order with Karen Boudreau and Tom Walker in attendance at 6:30pm
 - Zach Chornyak, Lead Engineer of Tighe & Bond presented the Asset Management Plan for the sewer department
 - In 2019, a wastewater management plan was done by another consultant identifying needs in the collection system and the plant. The Department of Public Utilities (DPU) turned the recommendations into a consent order focusing on the collection system.
 - Quality Assurance and Wastewater manuals have been updated.

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- The Asset Management Plan looked at the condition of the collection system and identified the major needs and implementation schedule.
- Review of in process items, manhole rehabilitation, sewer pipe replacement, color coding process piping
- Tighe & Bond does not think sonar testing or replacing the 6” gravity sewers with 8” is essentially needed. Karen explained the Sewer Commission and Isaac are setting priorities with what the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) wants with Chornyak negotiating with DEP.
 1. A camera scope is used to check pipes
- A spreadsheet has been created of assets and rated on level of failure. A study on the Dickinson St pipe through the wetlands to possibly pump around the area included
- A rate study has been done. Grants are being looked into to offset increases
- DEP is happy with the progress
- Next phase is to do an asset plan for the physical plant
- Meisner said he was on the Sewer Commission when the consent order was served and asked if it was his fault for the past 50 years. Karen Boudreau apologized to Meisner for the “cheap shot” she made to Meisner at the Special Town Meeting and that it was not his fault.
- Estimated cost is \$11,346,000 with \$8,503,000 at the rate study to be broken down depending on what the town can afford, grants available and when critical upgrades are needed. A loan could be 30 years with a 20-to-30-year lifetime on equipment and 50+ years on the building.
- Tighe & Bond can work with the Sewer Commission to apply for grants. The biggest grant funding pool would be USDA (Department of Agriculture), MassWorks, Municipal Vulnerability
- Kerns spoke about getting away from EDU (equivalent dwelling unit) and changing to use based billing. Tighe & Bond is working with Grandin Water District and East Northfield Water District. Jacque added data from those districts depends on their improvements needed in the water billing system
- Next steps include engineering for grant deadline in August; budgeting for CCTV, easement and clearing; get details on recommendations for the plant; look at the plans for the next 20-30 years
- The cost and usage of the 2019 report will be built into the proposal
- Karen reviewed the implementation schedule with DPU and the March 1 deadline.
- Discussion on next update. Chornyak suggested when final report is ready
- Sewer Commission adjourned at 7:19 pm
- **Review and Approval of Warrants**
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the 2/7/24 Payroll warrant of \$ 79,136.48
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the 2/7/24 Vendor warrant of \$108,905.13
- **Review and Approval of Minutes**
- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve the minutes of 1/23/24 as written
- **Interim Selectboard Meetings**
 - January 24, 2024 Special Town Meeting
- **Meetings/Events attended by Selectboard members**
 - Boudreau: Sewer Commission; Finance Committee
 - Jacque: Franklin Regional Counsel of Government Council; Finance Committee; Pioneer Valley Regional School (PVRS) Budget Sub Committee; PVRS District agreement meeting
 - Cummings: Emergency Services Facility Committee

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- Kerns: Emergency Services Facility Committee; Economic Development Advisory Committee; citizen re: food truck; Sewer Commission
- Meisner: Hiring interview; Chief Hall
- **Town Administrator's update**
 - Business Park Feasibility Study - Westmass
 - Met with and interviewed
 - non-profit company focused on economic development.
 - provide "targeted innovative development strategies and guidance"
 - Met to discuss their openness to ideas for development park, management and ownership options
 - contracting to get project started
 - Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) Annual Business Meeting Update
 - Governor and Lt. Governor focused on:
 - Housing initiative to increase access to affordable housing.
 - The Municipal Empowerment Act –changes to current state laws making it easier on local communities.
 1. Local Option tax incentive increases –the Town currently collects .75% on meals tax. The bill would allow this to go to 1%
 2. The town can vote to add a 5% local option on Motor Vehicle excise. Currently all the MV excise goes to the state. The local option would be to support funding for local road work. Based on volume of vehicles
 3. Addressing double poles – will allow enforcement with penalties if left up after 90 days
 4. Making permanent changes to some remote meeting participation.
 5. Reforms to procurement laws – to allow some flexibility with awarding through collectively bid contracts and some new thresholds for municipal purchases.
 6. State will create a central valuation of telecom and utility property. It is more cost-effective if the state pays the specialist costs and is more uniform. Less likely to see the utilities file at Appellate Tax Board. Does not affect valuation of highly special utilities.
 - Budget priorities announcements
 1. Commitment to growing Unrestricted General Government Aid at 3%
 2. Fully funding Student Opportunity Act
 3. \$15 million in Rural School Aid
 4. Tripling funding for Community Compact programs
 5. \$100 million supplemental Chapter 90
 - Changes to state laws now in effect:
 1. Special purpose funds (i.e. capital stabilization accounts) which formerly needed a 2/3 vote to spend funds from is now 50%
 2. New way to structure OPIOD legislation receipt funds –to be held in a special account that will not need Town Meeting approval to be expended for their intended purpose
 - MMA Business Meeting on 2 resolutions voted
 1. Supporting fiscal partnership between cities and towns and the commonwealth
 2. Supporting a local-state-federal partnership to address climate change, enhance resilience and bolster adaptation initiatives
 - MIIA
 1. Elections to the MIIA Board
 2. MIIA rates and incentives
 3. Health & Wellness and Risk Management

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- Property & Casualty – avg. rate increase 2-4%
 - Workers Comp – avg. rate increase 2-4%
 - MIIA Credits to reduce cost of assessments
- Three Town Joint Finance/Select Board Meetings (Northfield, Bernardston, Leyden) – Finance Committee asked to start up these meetings again.
- January 24, 2024 Special Town Meeting Results
 - Speed Signs – need a Select Board member to work with Police, Highway and Llamas to discuss signs and locations
 - Sewer Commission – emails sent notifying legislators offices and certified copies and request to file mailed.
 - Franklin Regional Council of Government contacted – they are reaching out to their software vendor and will be back in touch with transition info and timeline
- Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Process Update
 - Finance Committee finished meeting with all Town Departments
 - Schools start next week with PVRs
 - Franklin County Tech will be in on March 4th
 - Will begin discussion of their recommendations starting next week
 - Discussion on the use of the overlay account and transferring money to pay invoices
 - Verification on working as a three-town school district, formerly four town
 - Review of Northfield Elementary School maintenance projects. Specific items were not included on the warrant due to lack of required information. Replacement dishwashers will be included on fiscal 2025 budget as a capital item
- Food Truck Update – Based on concerns by neighbors, the Food Truck is working with a business owner in town Moving temporarily to the back of the Bible Church, with the ability to go inside to eat during the hours the church is open.
- **Business**
 - Direct Local Technical Assistance Projects Requests - (Franklin Regional Council of Governments)
 - Kerns requested for the Conservation Commission: Culvert Assessments (wait list), Water & Sewer Operator training, Brownfields Redevelopment support.
 - Kerns requested for the Open Space Committee: Solar Bylaw, Roadway Speed Study, Pollinator Habitat
 - Kerns requested for Economic Development Advisory: Water & Sewer Operator training, Brownfields Redevelopment Support, Abandoned & Distressed property inventory
 - Kerns Select Board choices: Solar Bylaw, Water & Sewer Operator training, Brownfields Redevelopment Support
 - Boudreau requested Municipal Planner services, Well head protection plan, Water & Sewer Operator training
 - Meisner requested Municipal service for regionalization of emergency services, Business & Industry sector assistance, strengthen Emergency Preparedness
 - Jacque requested Battery Storage bylaws, Accessory Dwelling unit bylaw, Pollinator Habitat
 - Draft Flag Policy-
 - The Town received a request to fly a flag for a private group.
 - it is advisable to have a policy regarding flags on Town property
 - The recommended policy from Town legal counsel is the Town restrict the flying of the flag to US, State, Town, Armed Forces and Missing in Action/Prisoner of War
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to adopt the Town of Northfield flag policy as written

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- Meisner commented that the freedoms we are given in this country are owed to our military services of the United States and to those lost in combat; to other individuals working to keep us safe and protected so we may live the way we do in this country
- Emergency Services Building Committee Update
 - Chief Hall and Cummings have withdrawn from the committee. Officer Cobileanschi will fill Hall's position.
 - Kerns expressed interest but did not want to be Chair. She mentioned a resident, who is an architect, would be a good member for the committee and is acting as a consultant. Kerns added the new members are just coming up to speed
 - Llamas received the minutes of the meeting with tasks assigned to her and referred to a previous soil sample boring map and test pits done in 2019 at the current fire station. There were no determinations but did show the wetlands and sewer easements. Llamas has contacted three or four geotechnical environmental engineering companies and will send them the material to ask for quotes. No structural analysis has been done. The building will need to be brought up to code if renovated for use. A brownfield study will need to be done and will involve phases. Grants through the FRCOG are available but competitive.
 - Jacque spoke about running parallel studies for the needs of fire and EMS if a full engineering study of the building determines if it can be used for public safety or not.
 - Llamas said the studies done on the location were discouraging enough to determine it would not be viable for housing all three public safety departments. Llamas to forward the studies to the committee
 - Cummings felt the public was told it couldn't be done based on those reports. Jacque and Llamas added it was based on having all three safety departments it was too small, expensive and difficult
 - Jacque would serve on the commission on the condition for a certain period of time to explore viability and whether or not a realistic picture can be presented to the town and be accepted by the Select Board
 - Discussion on re-assigning the chair of the committee citing the Fire Chief's possible retirement so he can focus on department issues in process. Kerns clarified it was not the intent to remove him as chair until the term expired. She requested John Bezzant be appointed based on his architecture experience
 - Cummings clarified that if a Select Board member was coming off, one should be on the committee and concurred with Kerns that it was not the intent to remove the current chair.
 - Motion by Cummings, seconded by Boudreau the Select Board appointed Jacque as Select Board representative to the Emergency Services Facility Committee
- 6 Town Regionalization Planning
 - Cummings reviewed his notes on meetings attended in the last three years
 - The committee is moving forward to create a district agreement to present for town votes
 - Cummings feels there is a misconception that this is a done deal. They can vote no. It must be unanimously agreed upon by all 6 towns. Concerns have not been addressed by the committee. Jacque added the administrative piece did not have enough information and confused the discussion by having two reports, one including Warwick and one without Warwick. Kerns attended the last meeting and felt they were solving problems already solved by PVRS. Jacque disagreed and thought they were talking about creating a larger school to increase academic and extracurricular opportunities. Kerns and Cummings added with changes PVRS is making in curriculum in economic and educational programs it does not make sense to change. Jacque felt the goal of the Six Town Regionalization Committee model looks to be more academic and extracurricular activities for the same money putting the two districts together. The overseer has said the reporting is better and the report on transfers has solidified. Both districts have declining enrollment.
 1. Cummings addressed the cost for Northfield with increased staff and health insurance with the two districts combined versus hiring additional staff at the present schools

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- 2. The two districts together could not support a football team.
 - 3. Possible salary increases would be \$202,000, insurance increases of \$401,000
 - 4. The central office plan would be to double the workload
 - 5. Transportation costs have not been calculated
- Meisner and Boudreau agreed with Cummings points. Meisner added he was for regionalization of emergency services but not for education
- Jacque suggested PVRs and the Six Town Regionalization have more discussion with people who have other opinions. Some of the process is showing declining student numbers is a rural problem in general and needs a solution
- School Resource Officer (SRO)
 - Meisner stated the safety and education of the children in a public environment would be highly beneficial with a role mode of security and safety background
 - Cummings spoke with Chief Hall on the statistics of Pioneer and was surprised the district felt there was no need of an SRO
 - Review of meetings held and possible open meeting violations
 - The recommendation of the subcommittee was to have an SRO
 - Public forums were held for the master facility plan and a survey for child care. No community forums were held for the SRO position
 - Cummings would like the School Committee to revisit the SRO position due to the recent calls including a threat to the elementary school Principal, traffic enforcement and other community policing, bullying, assault and battery. The only interaction the students have with the police is when they are in trouble. The point of the SRO was to develop positive relationships with police
 - Kerns commented that members of the Select Board went to the meeting, said their piece, and left. It did not foster open communication.
 - Jacque explained the different approaches that have been taken over the years to communicate.
 - Llamas gave a perspective as Town Administrator the cost and manpower it takes for the town to support the school. No other town is supporting the calls and investigations. It takes a toll on the department. There was a financial portion from the school that was shared by other towns with Northfield taking the burden to pay more to invest in the position
 - Cummings added the cost for security would be worth it for every parent. Better response time and better relationship with police
 - Meisner felt all the effort was brushed to the side and those that spoke talked about events that go on in other parts of the country and are not applicable to our area. Community policing keeps students out of the system. The police department does outreach programs
 - Jacque suggested the next steps would be attend the budget hearing to reinstate the line item and to adopt a statement to be sent requesting re-engagement. Llamas suggested speaking to Chief Hall for additional points
 - Cummings was told by several school employees they did not attend because they felt the decision was already made and their jobs would be in jeopardy.
 - Cummings to produce a document for the next meeting agenda
- Pioneer Valley School District Regional Agreement – tabled
- **Committee/Board Appointments**
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to appoint Amy Grover and Misha Storm as Election Officers; term expires 8/15/24
 - Motion by Kerns, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to appoint Patricia Young to the Economic Development Advisory Committee; term expires 6/30/24
- **Proposed Agenda Items**

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- PVRs District agreement; crosswalk signs
- **Announcements:** School Committee Budget 2/8; PVRs presentation to Finance Committee 2/12; 2/15 PVRs District budget vote
- **Recognition for Service:** Town Secretary; Sewer Commission for investigating pay by use
- **Executive Session:** Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to go into executive session at 9: 20pm under M.G.L. c.30A, Sec.21(a)(6) Emergency Services Location - Real Estate: To consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real estate, if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body and not to return to open session. Roll call vote: Kerns yes, Cummings yes, Boudreau yes, Meisner yes and Jacque yes
- **Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm**

Recorded by Sandra L. Wood, Secretary

Select Board Clerk

2/20/24
Date Approved