

September 26, 2023

Northfield Town Hall  
69 Main St

## [NORTHFIELD SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES]

Select Board Present: Alexander Meisner, Chair; Sarah Kerns, Clerk; Barbara “Bee” Jacque; Heath Cummings (entered at 5:10 pm)

Select Board Absent: Bernie Boudreau

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

Others Present: Jeffrey Blake, KP Law Counsel

- Meeting was called to order at 4:07 pm
- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve the 9/27/23 Vendor warrant of \$1,000.00
- **Business**
  - **Select Board/Town Policies**
    - **Code of Conduct/Citizens’ Concerns**
      - Llamas referred to the Supreme Judicial Court decision and the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association Code of Conduct guidelines explaining participants can be asked but are not required to be civil.
      - Attorney (Atty) Blake added his office is going to communities to explain what this means.
        - Any regulation has to be content neutral
        - Orderly is different than civil
        - Under open meeting law, there is no requirement to allow people to speak
        - Public comment forums should be neutral and strike a balance
        - Policy can be set up to limit time
        - Committees/Boards should not respond to comments
          - Meisner asked if a member of the Select Board steps away to make a comment as a citizen, but uses “we” as a Select Board member in their comment, would it be a violation?
            - Atty Blake responded yes adding a Select Board member can make comments as a citizen but must be careful and can’t speak for the Select Board
          - Jacque asked about speaking about employees
            - Atty Blake referred to law M.G.L Chapter 30A Sec. 21(a)
            - Meisner commented on the line between professional competence and representation of character. Atty Blake added the insurance company would agree and it could become costly
          - Jacque added Select Board members commenting on planned topics as a citizen gets muddy.
            - Atty Blake recommended getting the topic on the agenda for debate
      - Meisner explained the time limit of three minutes per comment process
      - Jacque asked if the changes in citizen comment will apply to all boards and committees. Atty Blake said it could
        - Kerns gave an example of opening up comment on topics such as the Emergency Services Facility and if the Select Board sensed a large amount of people wanted to speak, they could make it an agenda item. Jacque added staying consistent helps. Atty Blake agreed from a legal point of view to head off complaints of favoritism.
        - Kerns asked, referring to Jacque’s comment, if they were going to have this policy for all boards, that they include a Citizen Concern on their agenda with the time limits proposed. Jacque said she put it out there for further discussion when Cummings a Boudreau were included to allow other boards/committees to use and follow, or they may choose to not allow citizen comment.
          - Llamas clarified elected boards cannot be forced to use the policy

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- Meisner asked how residents could be educated on these things. Atty Blake responded having open meetings and explaining why topics may get put on another agenda in order for the Select Board to continue with business
  - Kerns commented she has received good feedback from citizens, even from those who did not get the response they wanted, they appreciated the Select Board taking it seriously and the back and forth discussion. Jacque agreed and has also received good feedback
  - Llamas will update the Code of Civil Conduct to include comments from the Select Board and the attorney or remove items as advised
- **Electronic Mail**
  - Review of the existing E-mail policy
    - Example policy from Town of Townsend, section on discipline, not to be included in Northfield policy
  - Kerns explained her creation and use of a select board gmail account due to software conflicts with her work computer.
  - Atty Blake stressed the importance of using the town issued email for conducting town business.
    - Town business email is subject to public record and search.
      - The town keeps public records, not individuals
  - Kerns suggested editing a section of the policy on using external communications by removing “and answered from the official town email...”
    - Discussion on the wording for continuity of town business being conducted on the town issued email
- **Social Media**
  - Review of the draft policy on social media
  - Atty Blake explained members of boards and committees using social media, can lead to open meeting law violations and advised it is best not to comment.
  - Kerns asked if sending draft minutes to board/committee members was a problem.
    - Atty Blake warned it could lead to deliberations, violating open meeting law
    - Newsletters are not subject to open meeting law
- **Open Meeting Law Presentation – Attorney Jeffrey Blake, KP/Law**
  - Atty Blake gave a power point presentation on open meeting law covering:
    - Meetings
    - Deliberations through email and social media
    - Agendas
    - Conducting a meeting
      - Discussion on if and when the public is allowed to speak; discretion of the Chair
    - Minutes
    - Violation enforcement
    - Public records law
- **Recess**
  - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to take a recess at 6:07 pm
  - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to reconvene at 6:46 pm. Cummings, Meisner and Jacque in attendance. Kerns absent
- **6:00: Select Board Goals**
  - **2022-2023 Review**
    - The Select Board reviewed the 2022-23 Priorities/Goals

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- Economic Development review
  - Grants, Projects, Programs
    - Use of the Local Rapid Recovery Program, Division of Local Services, District Local Technical Assistance Program, One Stop, American Rescue Plan
    - Re-engagement of the Business Park Committee- committee has been dissolved
    - Pocket parks, storefront improvement program, working with MA Dept of Transportation, Schell/Pauchaug Bridge, Main Street study, Complete Streets
    - Engaging with Northfield Area Tourism and Business Association, storefront and other businesses- working with Grant Development Director Mallory Sullivan
- Mosquito Control
  - Joined Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District and referred to the Board of Health
- Public Safety
  - Site selection and building taken forward, continue on 2023-2024 list
  - EMS regionalization- presentation at next meeting with recommendations
  - Progress on police body cameras and policies including vehicular pursuit
  - Entering second year of Clinical Support Options program
  - Student Resource Officer and supporting schools- efforts made, on hold at this time
- Making the Town “Employer of Choice”
  - Llamas in process of for review/update of personnel salary grid/stipends using a Community Compact Grant
  - Town Clerk position implemented, voted and changed from elected to appointed with a goal of succession planning. Assistant Town Clerk position created and implemented creating more coverage of the department
  - Llamas to provide a policy & procedure for reviewing the Town Administrator performance evaluation
- Community Outreach Strategy
  - Heavy agendas have delayed inviting departments/committees to update the Select Board. Budget season will bring the school in for review with the Finance Committee. Suggestion for a Select Board crafted letter to boards and committees asking when they would like to come in for and update
    - Llamas working with a new format for a budget document to include department goals and the town report for better communication in town meeting. To be added to the 2024 list
  - “Ask a Select Board member” – has not been implemented
  - Recreational activity/block party- on success of Harvest dinner, a dialed down version and dialed up version of a block party. Coordinate with the Recreation Commission
  - Data collection on the town website- carry to 2024 list
  - Mailings- used for Highland Ave area on parade notification. Discussion on combining with Code Red and voting/town meeting notifications directing to the town website for budget and warrant details

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- Proactive relationship with Finance Committee and School Committee- Increased meetings with the schools and Finance Committee. Discussion on breakdown of district capital expenses and addressing input in the regional agreement. The current agreement does not allow input from district town members. Budgeted capital items paid for with grant money; mechanism to reimburse member towns may not be in place and needs to be addressed
- Other
  - Infrastructure: Water District & Sewer
    - Water District progressing with a separate commission
    - Sewer Asset Management plan coming soon with priorities, timing, and costs. Plan to be used for grants.
      - Discussion on having Sewer Commission come in for update after the Asset Management plan proposal; defining responsibilities and jurisdiction of the sewer department between the elected Sewer Commission and Select Board for better public understanding.
    - Traffic & Speeding- a grant for signage has been applied for by the police department
- **2023-2024 New Goals**
  - Combined responses read by Llamas
    - the most important job of the Select Board
      - instituting succession plans, identifying generation gap in the field of administration, institutional knowledge and longevity
    - Things the Select Board does well
      - Complexity, challenges and number of topics getting completed. Commitment to Northfield and the community
    - Things the Select Board can implement to be more effective
      - Discussion on special events permit process- to be revisited to possibly modify for events not affecting town resources
      - Clarifying topics spanning multiple boards/committees not under the control of the Select Board to move forward in the towns' best interests.
      - Training for Select Board for compliancy; powers and rights as an elected official; maintaining legal compliance- training sessions with town counsel
      - Performance review process adherence- in process; Llamas waiting on job description review but is dispensing performance review document next week
      - Bringing concerns for agendas as opposed to grandstanding and political theater.- recent processes not effective and may lead to legality issues. Reference the Massachusetts Municipal Association Select Board handbook addressing this issue. Goal to move agenda topics forward with solutions
    - Major accomplishments
      - Reviewing prior priorities document and Annual Report- done
      - Employer of choice- mostly stable and happy environments
      - New Police Chief and department changes- community policing
      - Higher sense of municipal morale
      - Transparency
  - Goals for the Town

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- Fire personnel beyond retirement age; bring fire department policies and practices up to current Massachusetts General Laws. Legal suggestions have been forwarded to the fire department for review
- Assess EMS regionalization-October 3 agenda
- Determine public safety facilities goals of committee and departments and make key improvements.
  - Discussion on making sure Select Board is in sync with priorities before adding members to the Emergency Service Facility Committee
  - Adding opponents of the past proposals to the committee to create more citizen involvement
  - Improve the roles between the committee and Select Board
  - Once new members are appointed, have ESFC meet and set goals. Figure out the project budget
- New/updated district agreement with Pioneer Valley Regional School District in collaboration with Bernardston and Leyden
  - Agreement needs updating to reflect Warwick no longer in the district; work with Bernardston and Leyden to work more efficiently with the school committee.
- Attend PVRs facilities master plan on November 2
- Increase employee retention and identify improvements to be made in departments
  - Clarification that sewer is a town department as there is no record of legislation creating a district but is funded by an enterprise fund
- Carry over from the previous goals
  - HUMAN RESOURCES
    - Employer of Choice - Continue to work on this goal by:
      1. Complete update to classification
      2. Complete Salary comparison
      3. Implementations annual evaluations
  - PUBLIC SAFETY
    - Continue to work on Emergency Services Building site selection
    - Set goals for new ESBC and add new committee members
    - Emergency Services (Ambulance) Regionalization
    - Continue work with Police Chief to update Police Policies
    - Continue work on update for Fire Department Policies and Procedures
    - Fire Chief Succession
    - Review Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (eCEMP)
    - More focus/training in Incident Management
  - COMMUNITY OUTREACH
    - Invite Town Departments for updates to Select Board Meetings
    - Town Meeting outreach
    - Work on encouraging/planning for Townwide activity(ies)
    - Town Website
    - Town Report / Warrant updates to format/presentation
  - INFRASTRUCTURE
    - Continue focus on Roads / Highway Department / Traffic

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## [NORTHFIELD SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES]

- Wastewater
- BOARD/COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT
  - MMA Selectmen's Handbook
  - On-Going Select Board trainings
    1. Employment Law – hiring, discipline, evaluations
    2. Employer – positive workplace
- Motion by Cummings, seconded by Jacque the Select Board voted to adjourn at 8:15pm

Recorded by Sandra L. Wood, Secretary

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Select Board Clerk

10/17/23  
Date Approved