

[NORTHFIELD SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES]

November 21, 2023

Northfield Town Hall
69 Main St

Select Board Present: Sarah Kerns, Clerk; Barbara “Bee” Jacque; Heath Cummings, Chair Pro Tem

Select Board Absent: Alexander Meisner; Bernard Boudreau

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

Others Present: Grant Development Director Mallory Sullivan; Finance Director Jordan Burns, Pioneer Valley Regional School Superintendent Patricia Kinsella; Bernie Porada, Finance Committee

- Meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm
- **Scheduled Appointments**
 - Mallory Sullivan – Grant Development Director – Economic Development Community Survey and Distribution/Outreach Plan
 - Sullivan reviewed the Economic Development Community Survey
 - The survey is open to anyone but targeted to all residents including children and includes feedback from the Economic Development Advisory
 - Launch is scheduled for November 27 through January with an online version and hard copies available at Town Hall. A flyer advertising the survey will be distributed through town
 - The goal is to find out what people want in town and use as a tool to get grants
 - There is no plan to publicize the data as of yet
 - Sullivan will report back with a review of the outcome
 - Pioneer Valley Regional School District (PVRs)
 - Patricia Kinsella, Superintendent, Jordan Burns, Director of Finance & Operations gave an overview on the focus of programming included updating the auxiliary gym, in another space, a mini skateboard center and dance and fitness studio. Childcare center is being looked into.
 - Part A application for Career Innovation Pathway was accepted by the state for a chance of a \$125,000 grant. NorthEast Paving has agreed to be a lead partner in the effort
 - Discussions of a job incubator to teach students about earning a living and contributing to economic stability for the county
 - Kinsella believes PVRs could be the largest employer in the district and clarified these are planning ideas and directions
 - Burns describe the type of equipment for the gym replacing the old equipment. Physical Education teacher and state director for National High School Strength and Conditioning Association Nick Adams will run the facility. Community use will be discussed after the program has been established.
 - Burns did a review of the PVRs district fiscal year (FY) budget presentation
 - Summary of the 10/26/23 School Committee meeting-payoff of state note of \$198,000; Return funds to towns, total \$740,214 and make key investments at \$615,000
 - How assessments were reduced and money returned to member towns-increased state support; pandemic-related vacancies, which are close to fully staffed and a one time event; accurate/timely filing of reports; better return on investment; increased tuition revenue; responsible grant management; successful grant applications; spending based on educational merit rather than availability of resources, incorporating cultural change and to make the district fiscally sustainable; overall sound fiscal management of the district.
 - FY24 Operating Revenue Budget - lower assessments, state note paid off; impact from Warwick: tuition of \$300,000, less staffing needed at Northfield Elementary School
 - Capital Revenue Budget and Assessments- Town Capital Assessments-\$147,000 grant used for capital projects at PVRs saving the towns \$25,000 with additional savings for key job installations from \$39,000 in grant funds; state note paid off due to confidence and recommendation of the fiscal overseer to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) that the school is on better track to resolve financial issues. Burns explained the main contributors to the turnaround were Kinsella’s leadership, trying different models of financial management resulting

in having a full time finance position and having an overseer was a plus. Kinsella added a full administrative team allows her to hand off work allowing Kinsella to step back and focus on developing programming

- Bernie Porada of the Finance Committee commented the overseer felt they were going in the right direction and asked her about the condition of the district and past problems; if she had confidence in the district administration; the issue of the bond and how long the overseer would stay in place. The overseer may stay on 1-3 years but did have full confidence in the administration in the district
- Burns continued with fund balances. 8.6% being returned to Warwick, \$500,000 returned to other member towns and investments of \$615,000 toward curriculum renewal, PVRS facility, staff compensation leaving 2 million for unanticipated expenses
- Financial Benefits to Towns- total benefit to Northfield was \$39,779.
- The \$615,000 investment towards curriculum renewal, PVRS facility and staff compensation, including staff promoting education, the central office and custodial/kitchen staff coming from fund balances and not assessments
- Cummings asked for clarification as to why the funds were returned as opposed to putting them into a revolving fund. Kinsella explained that they wanted to lead with their values with the student experience at the center. The money could have been banked but for honesty if something comes up and the school needs money for an emergency, they can come to the towns and the towns would know the district had been up front. Llamas noted the 3.2 million fund balance was too high and Kinsella said it was ethically the appropriate thing to give the money back to the towns. Burns explained the statutory is 5% for some accounts but revolving funds are left to a reasonable amount. The associate commissioner of finance has suggested the towns speak with the Department of Revenue about what to do with the money. The town will receive a check and the assessment will be reduced. Llamas will consult town counsel what can be done with the returned money. Kerns pointed out that the overseer had to give their approval and Kinsella confirmed this was the case
- FY25 Budget Process
 - Review of the meeting calendar. Meetings are open to the public except for executive sessions
 - Target assessment increase for FY25 is 3%. Burns gave an explanation for the difference in assessment percentages from the original February 2023 numbers to the October 2023
- Facilities Master Plan
 - Plan started in the beginning of August for a ten-year plan. Options being considered are keeping the configuration of buildings as is, reducing the number of buildings, or re-arranging classroom locations.
 - The Master Plan committee is looking at input, condition of the facilities and options
 - Kerns pointed out money will have to be spent. Kinsella agreed and stated the numbers from the draft ten-year plan will be significantly higher. The District has been shrewd with the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER). Towns will be notified of a meeting on December 14 with the lead project manager who will be available for questions. The School Committee will meet to discuss and possibly make a statement of interest that commits the district and towns to nothing but allows for a submission and acceptance of Massachusetts School Building Authority funding. Cummings explained how the process cuts down applicants on a continual basis to the point of not making the program and that there is no guarantee.

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- Use of ESSER funds was permitted for the facility review because only one of the three buildings is owned by the District. It could not be used for repairs
- Northfield Elementary School (NES) Capital Projects
 - The front entrance door is estimated at \$10-20,000, there are no formal quotes
 - Jacques asked if this was on the possible Special Town Meeting warrant. Kerns asked if the school could pay for the repair out of the returned assessment funds. Burns said they could by reducing the amount of money returned. Jacques stated town meeting allows residents to indicate where the money is spent. Llamas added it could be discussed but that there were other articles on the warrant.
 - Two grease traps need to be replaced. Jacques asked when the information would be needed for FY25 warrant articles. Llamas will ask for the schools capital project requests next week.
 - Freezer/cooler with a quote of \$32,000. Dishwasher, and carpeting/flooring
- Review of the Capital Assessments figures and Town Assessment figures
 - Burns started with the Total Operating Assessments for FY22, FY23 and FY24 showing the assessment being reduced by 3.45%
 - The Capital Assessments went from \$50,000 to \$30,000
 - The capital of the high school is built into the budget through the assessment, the elementary school items are one-time articles because they are not operating items
- Kinsella advised the Select Board that the committee working on the district agreement should have a draft ready in January for the towns to submit to their town counsel. Assessment for the towns is written in the district agreement. Jacques asked if the way members are elected was going to change. Kinsella said it is still the biennial election. Llamas explained changing from the regional system to a direct system and wasn't sure anyone had explored that change. Jacques commented on the lag when new members come in November/December and must play catch up on the budget.
- Cummings stated things appear to be more positive, transparent and on an upward trend.
 - School Resource Officer(SRO)- felt like work that went into the position was not wanted by the school district and a huge waste of time on our part. The current facilities plan has and community meetings, newsletter updates and surveys but the SRO process had none of those for something so important. People felt slighted not being surveyed asking how they felt. The way it was done was the opposite of what the position should have been intended for as a trusted person in the community. It showed the Select Board the school district did not have trust in us to manage the position. It showed the community their opinions didn't matter because they weren't surveyed.
 - Going forward the school district should look at it in a different way. It needed to go through the process. Open meeting laws were broken during the SRO discussions.
 - Would like the school district to look at the position again and get the community's input.
 - Kerns and Jacques added good schools are part of economic development and public safety
- **Review and Approval of Warrants**
 - Motion by Jacques, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve the 11/15/23 Payroll warrant \$75,458.59
 - Motion by Jacques, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve the 11/15/23 Vendor warrant \$162,265.95
- **Review and Approval of Minutes**
 - 10/3/23 Executive Session- tabled

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- 10/17/23 Executive Session-tabled
- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve the 11/7/23 minutes as amended
- **Interim Selectboard Meetings**
 - Jacque, Kerns and Cummings attended the 6 Town Regionalization Committee meeting
- **Meetings/Events attended by Selectboard members**
 - Kerns: Sewer Commission; Grandin Water District; Conservation Commission; PVRs Environmental Education Advisory
 - Jacque: Community Preservation Commission; Community Preservation Forum; Emergency Medical Service Task Force
- **Town Administrator's update**
 - New Town Report/Budget Book – New book will be out for next year. It will contain:
 - Department report – mission statements
 - Budget information for all departments – and Town
 - Goals and objectives for all departments
 - Metrics (typically reported) chosen by the department to report annual budgets
 - Appendix will continue to include Committee/Board appointees and Town Meeting results.
 - New Organizational chart
 - Kerns asked if there could be a trend line comparison
 - Special Town Meeting
 - No longer need the prior Article 1 to purchase any property, the landowner has decided not to move forward with the sale
 - Article 1 – Overlay transfer for the Assessors Appellate Tax court invoice
 - FYI Free cash and the enterprise funds have been certified by Department of Revenue
 - Article 2 – Northfield Elementary School Doors- free cash has been certified. Also checking in to returning assessment funds
 - Article 3 – To join FRCOG Inspection Services for Plumbing, Gas and Electrical. Harder to fill these positions, we are subject to one person's schedule vs. an office with a staff person to assist residents if they go on vacation or get sick, etc. We have had times with a lapse before we could find a new inspector.
 - Kerns added there have been problems with projects being delayed. Llamas explained currently the town collects the fee and pays it back to the inspector instead of an assessment. It is a membership. A member will be appointed to represent the town.
 - Discussion on excluding article 2 with other payment options. Kerns stated the doors must be replaced so the townspeople are not going to weigh in whether or not the door is replaced. Jacque responded the town weighs in on the funds associated with it and where they come from and allow the Select Board make the transfer of the funds
 - Kerns wanted to know if there was an urgency for article 3. Llamas said the one time fee would be \$3,000 to convert Northfield but if we wait the fee will be higher
 - Article 4- funds from the Sewer Enterprise fund to pay for engineering
 - Free cash for the general fund has been approved at \$928,000
 - Sewer Enterprise fund was certified at \$284,887
 - EMS Enterprise fund was certified at \$323,000
 - Sewer Legislator Meeting – Grant Director Sullivan and Sewer Commission member Karen Boudreau discussed the history and next steps for Senator Comerford and Representative Whipps offices to assist us. Steps resolved:
 - Sewer Commission, Sullivan, Llamas, Tighe and Bond and RCAP along with legislators, who will reach out to Rep. McGovern's office to meet and focus on resources and necessary steps to avail ourselves of them – i.e. work with engineers, RCAP as well as Sullivan to expand what needs to be available to apply for grants, etc.

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- Senator's office to reach out to MVP regional representative Andrew Smith, to see what funding/grants through MVP might be applicable.
- Meeting is scheduled for Monday the 27th at 3pm
 - Kerns requested to attend the meeting
- Emergency Services Regionalization Task Force
 - Agenda is posted for third meeting that will take place on November 29th.
 - Committee has worked with consultant on progress toward the January grant deadline.
 - Grant Director Sullivan has attended and will be working with the consultant and committee on the grant.
 - The Select Board will be updated on the grant specifics.
 - The Emergency Management Director requesting an assessment for each town to consider
 - The group consists of safety officials and Select Board members. They asked Chief Fortier what he needed to be sustainable from a capital and personnel standpoint. The consultant is coming back with personnel models and looking at the budget.
 - Discussion of volunteer members working full-time, receiving retirement benefits but has not been hired as full-time needs to be worked into the budget to develop stability. The service cannot operate on a completely volunteer model at this level. Some volunteer can be included. The balance needs to be shifted between staff and volunteer.
 - The study will show what is needed to become more stable, how to justify cost to the participating members and a capital plan.
 - The grant will assist in the model studies
- FY2025 Capital Article – Select Board Technology
 - Llamas requested the Select Board consider moving to tablets for meeting materials.
 - the cost of printing and the wear and tear on the copier is tremendous as well as the waste of the paper.
 - This would allow for keeping previous meetings material for reference.
 - working on what the process would look like. Haven't narrowed down the exact tablet – but most cost in the \$300-\$400 range. Estimated \$400 but this can be adjusted during the budget process.
 - As you all have emails with full apps (i.e. access to Windows, Excel, etc.) we will load that on the tablet so you can get your email and have the ability to use those programs to review your "homework" etc.
 - Finance Committee Capital request deadline
 - Kerns asked to have the consumables fleshed out
- Kinsella Dog Appeal
 - The court affirmed the Select Board determination that Rio is a "dangerous dog"
 - They reversed the euthanization order placing 4 conditions to be met by 12/15/23 or the dog will be euthanized
 - Full vaccination
 - Licensed in city where will be kept
 - City where going must get 14 days notice prior to being allowed to go
 - Proof of \$100,000 insurance -ensuring the owner and the owner of the premises the dog will be housed at
 - Met with ACO Dragon today to discuss how to proceed:
 - Get Mr. Kinsella's address and phone number; Mr. Kinsella's landlord's phone number and verify that he is currently a tenant
 - verify Mr. Kinsella has the valid insurance policy
 - Once completed, the Regional Shelter and Animal Control Officer Dragon will:

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- Work with Mr. Kinsella to vaccinate, chip and register the dog at its new address before they release the dog.
 - Currently working with him on verifying the insurance.
- **Business**
 - Building and Grounds Maintenance Job Description
 - Position to include other town buildings and assist the Recreation Commission maintaining fields, plowing
 - Need to approve now and move forward due to winter weather
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve the Building and Grounds Maintenance job description for the Highway Department
 - Jacque will be on the classification team
 - Assistant Wastewater Superintendent Job Description
 - Motion by Kerns, seconded by Jacque the Select Board voted to approve the job description for an Assistant Wastewater Treatment Superintendent
 - Jacque will be on the classification team
 - Review and Adopt Select Board Policies: -tabled
 - Public Participation at Town of Northfield Select Board Meetings
 - Citizens' Concerns Protocol
 - Electronic Mail
 - Town Lawyer Access
 - Vote to Close Cemeteries
 - Motion by Kerns, seconded by Jacque the Select Board voted to close the cemeteries from December 1, 2023 to April 15, 2024 weather permitting
 - Read Winter Parking Ban/Snow & Ice removal Notice- notice read
 - Vote approval for reimbursement filing to Department of Environmental Protection for Asset Management Plan
 - Vote to authorize Llamas to sign reimbursement paperwork for Tighe & Bond service
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to allow Andrea Llamas to sign as the Select Board designee the reimbursement filing to the Department of Environmental Protection for the Sewer Asset Management Plan
 - Motion by Kerns, seconded by Jacque the Select Board voted to approve the request from the Trust Fund Committee to reimburse Loaves and Fishes \$2,941.46 for emergency funding
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve the 350th surplus to Recreation Department - Two tents and a marquee sign
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve the Time Off Request
- **Topics not reasonably anticipated by the chair 48 hours in advance of the meeting**
 - Legislation on Chief Dunnell's retirement has passed. He has been notified the Select Board will vote to reinstate him as Chief on the next agenda along with the Fire Department Policies.
- **Proposed Agenda Items**
 - Community Survey; 6 Town Regionalization; Fire Dept. policies
- **Announcements**-Community Survey available on the town website and in Town Hall
- **Recognition for Service**
 - Karen Boudreau for her work on the sewer department
 - Mallory Sullivan for her work on the Schell Bridge presentation with Senator Markey
- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to adjourn at 9:03 pm

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Recorded by Sandra L. Wood, Secretary

Select Board Clerk

12/5/23_
Date Approved