

[NORTHFIELD SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES]

January 9, 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: Sandra L. Wood, Town Secretary; Tyler Bourbeau, BNCTV

Others Present: Karen Boudreau, Sewer Commission; Tom Walker, Highway Superintendent; Joanne McGee; Police Chief Jon Hall

- Meeting was called to order at 6:06 pm
- **Scheduled Appointments**
 - **6:00 pm**-Karen Boudreau, Sewer Commission warrant article
 - Karen addressed the Select Board and stated the Sewer Commission and Sewer Department will communicate with the Select Board Chair via email to answer questions
 - She reviewed the history of the formation of the Sewer Commission in the 1970’s as a three-member commission and due to changes over the years, including regulations, would recommend adding two more members by election for the people to have their voice. If the seats are not filled the positions could be appointed by the Select Board.
 - Meisner referred to the Special Town Meeting warrant with the article for elected positions.
 - Jacque inquired if there would be further discussion later. Meisner noted the topic would come under “Sign Special Town Meeting Warrant”
 - Karen recommended a book on the water reclamation epidemic titled “The Conversation on Water” and see if the library can get a copy
 - Jacque asked for clarification if Karen was speaking on behalf of the Sewer Commission or as a citizen who happens to be on the Sewer Commission and if the Sewer Commission took a vote for her to come and ask the Select Board. Karen responded she was speaking as a Sewer Commissioner and they voted on moving forward with two elected seats
 - **6:05 pm**– Tom Walker, Highway Superintendent: Department Update; “Fair Share” Chapter 90 funds; School Street Bridge Closure; New flashing traffic signs
 - Department Update
 - Walker reported the department is doing well but could use one more person
 - Waiting for job applications for the Building Maintenance position to be set up for interviews
 - Brush from last year’s storms is being collected. The crew is prepping the roads for today’s storm and came in prior to the storm to get ready
 - Kerns asked for clarification on the positions of Building Maintenance and an additional plow driver. Walker added there is a Foreman’s position open that he is hoping someone from within the department will take. If that position is filled he would look for another truck driver laborer. The Foreman’s position would fill in if Walker was out. Walker explained the complications of the cemeteries has stopped a couple of employees from taking the position
 - Kerns asked if there was a way to streamline the use of hired trucks for plowing only. Walker explained they are not plow and sand trucks and if sanding is added it costs a different rate
 - Meisner asked if the state could be blamed for how complicated it is to get involved in trucking. Walker has not spoken to anyone but could check
 - Chapter 90
 - Waiting on a sidewalk project if the culvert goes and if there is a match for engineering on the School St. bridge. Money has not been allocated until percentages are known. Jacque clarified the project as Highland Avenue and School St bridge are what Walker was referring to for design engineering. Walker continued to explain about grants applied for and possible funding shortfalls along with matching percentages. He is trying to do the culvert project once everything is ripped up. The design grant has been approved but Walker did not know how much the School St bridge would be covered.

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- School St Bridge
 - Joanne McGee talked about the Millbrook Trails access being blocked by the School St bridge closure and asked if there was some way to move the barriers so people could pass through. Walker explained the barriers are connected for safety and have jagged edges and would need shoveling and sanding creating a liability to the town. He looked into temporary barriers but decided to put the \$30,000 toward design. The bridge beams are rotted along with other deficiencies. McGee asked about adding a temporary bridge. Walker suggested the trail committee investigate and that it would be no part of the town. Meisner added the Conservation Commission would need to be involved for work around the brook. Conversation continued on a timeline for completion based on funding and engineering
- New Flashing Traffic Signs
 - Chief Hall joined the conversation.
 - Kerns explained she spoke to Walker and Chief Hall for the idea of having flashing digital speed signs as opposed to the portable style to enforce speed limits. The portable style becomes a problem for plows if they become frozen in the ground. The batteries need charging along with other maintenance. Permanently installed signs would not have to be moved and Kerns referred to the units installed above the actual speed limit sign.
 - Meisner asked how many would be reasonable. Chief Hall explained part of the department budget excess due to an open position could go towards the signs. He could not commit funds every year for maintenance and why the project involves Walker. Walker is for the permanent version and has tried to talk to other towns that have them. He suggested creating a maintenance account for them. Boudreau clarified the signs are solar. Walker suggested once a Building Maintenance person is hired, the signs could be part of their responsibilities.
 - Chief Hall listed possible locations, Main Street, Maple Street, Gulf Road, Millers Falls Road, and Route 142.
 - Kerns asked Walker what he thought of for a budget. He would like some time to talk to other towns that have the signs to see what their budget is and what kind of problems there may be but would start off with \$4,000 and add a few hundred dollars a year. Jacques suggested staggering the installation, so they don't all need maintenance at the same time.
- Walker asked the Select Board to put out an announcement to those who have portable basketball hoops located near the road to relocate them, so the plows do not get caught in them.
- **6:30 pm** – Jon Hall, Police Chief: Police Policies
 - Chief Hall will update the policies with the suggestions he has received from members of the Select Board and invited the Select Board to ask questions.
 - Criteria for designee- Chief Hall uses the term designee in reference to an employee of the department to fill in depending on policy and procedure needs
 - Kerns asked if there were packets for victims' resource. Chief Hall has DVIP (Domestic Violence Intervention Program) trainings once a month and the cruisers are supplied with packets for victims and offenders
 - Anticipate hiring a Sergeant- would consider but will need different parameters and budget
 - Suggested topics to bring before the Select Board to discuss for people to be aware of what the policies include with an example of free speech- Chief Hall has purchased software to publish the policies online.
 - CEMP(Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan) with Chief Dunnell
 - Can complaint procedures and forms, information on domestic violence be put on the Police webpage- Chief Hall suggested scheduling a time to speak with him about what types of information would be useful

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- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve the thorough police policies and procedures effective January 9, 2024
- Chief Hall needs to update the town bylaws as they are not utilized by the police department or the town and need a fresh eye to bring them up to date
- **7:00 pm –Fire Department Policies and Procedures**
 - Cummings and Kerns said they needed more time and spent several hours on the policies and procedures, but they were making headway
 - The policies are different from the internal department procedures. The fire department needs to transition and needs a policy list that governs the department. Procedures for job descriptions need to be updated and passed on to Llamas. Currently there is only one position listed in the personnel policy and several other stipend positions. Fire Chief is the only position listed
 - Jacque asked to clarify that the department head would need to work with the chief personnel officer to create descriptions and run them by the Select Board. Kerns explained they are separating the running of the department and items relating to them as town employees
 - Cummings noted positions listed with grades and steps do not include firefighter personnel other than the Chief. Jacque clarified this would be part of classification in which each department had to go through all of their job descriptions and get them approved and was curious if this was supposed to be done by the department head a while back. With that removed it would make a short list of policies and procedures.
 - Chief Dunnell will bring a short list of policies and procedures, the job descriptions for Llamas, and an association book
 - Jacque asked if there were specific procedures documented for firefighting. Cummings didn't think there would be one as detailed as the police. They did see what trainees are allowed to do, not do, equipment they can run and not run. They are not all the way through and are not writing their procedures
 - Cummings and Kern will meet with Chief Dunnell again to finish and bring the cleaned-up version back to the Select Board and fire department for review. If the Select Board has changes, it needs to go back to the fire department for final review.
 - Jacque commented that this has been discussed for some time and the goal three weeks ago was to have something to vote for at this meeting, but the task is taking months. She trusted Kerns and Cummings' work and was not anticipating major changes. She stated this needs to be done by all departments, particularly public safety and asked if they could stick to a timeline and if there are no major changes does it have to go back and forth one more time.
 - Kerns summarized they had a meeting and made a lot of progress and will have a second meeting to make additional progress and didn't feel someone who wasn't at the meeting to pass judgement. They were unable to finish at the first meeting and will finish and bring it back.
 - Boudreau wanted it done right and if it took another meeting, he backed them to get it done
 - Jacque said she backed them also and was not criticizing them but criticizing the length of time from the department head which is not consistent with other departments and apologized if it came across in a way to cause a reaction.
 - Kerns hoped to have a draft for the next meeting prep
 - Jacque voiced her concern for the town and the way departments work in general and the urgency to get this wrapped up for the fire department annual meeting at the end of January
 - Cummings summarized the next steps to meet, finalize and bring forward a draft to review and possibly vote on if there are no changes. If there are the department would get the opportunity to look at the changes and discuss with the Select Board
- **Citizens' Concerns (limit 3 minutes per speaker)**
 - Kerns asked about setting a time for Citizens Concerns after having a discussion with someone who felt they missed it. Meisner said he would use good faith as Chair to acknowledge someone. It was noted the top of the

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agenda says, "Topics may start earlier than specified unless a hearing is scheduled" There was a request to update the line to "start earlier or later than specified..."

- **Review and Approval of Warrants**

- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Boudreau the Select Board voted to approve the 12/27/23 Payroll warrant of \$75,040.61
- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the 12/27/23 Vendor warrant of 252,635.
- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Boudreau the Select Board voted to approve the 01/10/24 Payroll Warrant of \$80,397.15
- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the 01/10/24 Vendor Warrant of \$971,487.95 Discussion if the \$971, 4987.95 reflected the money the school was giving back. Jacque thought she understood the assessment was reduced.

- **Review and Approval of Minutes**

- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the minutes of 12/19/23as written

- **Meetings/Events attended by Select Board members**

- Kerns: Fire Chief Dunnell; Sewer Commission; Tax Collector
- Cummings: Fire Chief Dunnell
- Meisner: Police Chief Hall
- Boudreau: Friends of Senior Center; Federal loans and state revolving funds webinar
- Jacque: Franklin Regional Council of Government (FRCOG) Finance Committee; Northfield Finance Committee

- **Business**

- Sign Special Town Meeting Warrant
 - Meisner explained there were two versions of the warrant, one for elected Sewer Commissioners and one for appointed Sewer Commissioners for the Special Town Meeting being held on January 24, 2024, at 6:30pm at Pioneer Valley Regional School, 97 F. Sumner Turner Road
 - Kerns asked about an edit previously discussed for article 3 to remove the number. Jacque reviewed the article and noted it said "up to 8" in the newest version. Kerns asked to have the "up to 8" removed and add "for purchase and maintenance". Meisner suggested the maintenance was more policy for Select Board discussion. Jacque added for maintenance they would need more information from Highway Superintendent Tom Walker and would become an appropriation in a budget. Boudreau noted including the number helps with an estimate of the cost
 - Boudreau started a motion to sign the warrant. Jacque asked if the sewer article was going to be discussed. Meisner stated it had been discussed with Karen Boudreau earlier and the Sewer Commission requested the elected version. Kerns added there was an agreement before the last Select Board meeting and understanding that the Sewer Commission had made this request. Boudreau said the Town Administrator had helped them draft the elected version. Jacque commented that the Select Board was responsible for what went on the warrant and the discussion three weeks ago was a benefit of having two appointed positions to add them sooner because they need more people, and it is a department. Kerns was in the camp of the people doing the work requested it be elected. Jacque pointed out this was a technical area and Karen has advised the Select Board on getting more involved, and adding more elected versus mixing like the water district is going to be a challenge. Kerns did not feel it was going to be a challenge and the water district is not a good exemplar and a vote is important. Boudreau noted for future discussion the water district once established should be a separate district.
 - Jacque thanked Karen Boudreau for what had fallen on her shoulders. She did not dispute the need for five members for more help but elected had its own challenges. Cummings commented they were proposing this as their solution and if it fails it's on them, it's what they wanted. Jacque summarized the request three years ago from the Sewer Commission to stay out of their business, it was determined to be

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a department, not a separate district and chastised over the last year for not paying enough attention so Jacque was trying to pay attention beyond face value based on problems historically plaguing the sewer and if anything goes wrong the Select Board can wipe their hands because Sewer recommended it but it has been pointed out on numerous occasions in public settings, the sewer is important to the town. Jacque thought appointed was a good position to put to the public, but the majority prevails. Cummings said he would agree but did not agree the Select Board would have to wipe their hands of whatever happens, but if the Select Board goes with appointed, and not what Sewer is recommending and something goes wrong the Sewer Commission will say the Select Board didn't listen to them, we are giving them the opportunity of what they voted. Meisner added that Karen went on record tonight of behalf of the Sewer Commission. Jacque thanked Cummings. Boudreau said it is a democratic society to let the people vote, right or wrong, good or bad; the people can vote it down if they don't like it

- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Kerns the Select Board voted to approve and sign the Special Town Meeting Warrant for January 24, 2024
- Warrant signed
- Vote to Update Town Personnel Policy revised Sexual Harassment Policy
 - This version mirrors the police department policy
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the updated Town Personnel Policy revised Sexual Harassment Policy
- Efficiency Regionalization Grant Application-Ambulance services
 - Meisner read and summarized the grant application
 - The vote is to support the submission of the grant application for services the towns will be receiving and figure out the appropriate model. The commitment is to get a consultant to help with the groups and towns come up with an appropriate model, support for legal review, and dollar support for public outreach
 - Each town would pay \$25,000 for the Emergency Medical Service
 - Kerns clarified one of the main discussions on regionalization was area towns getting service hadn't been evaluated and the main goal was to have it evaluated so everyone was paying their fair share
 - A key component is to evaluate and pay for support to help with the personnel model because EMS is people who volunteer and sign up for shifts
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted for the Northfield Select Board to support the submission of the grant application for the Regional Emergency Medical Services fiscal year 2024 Efficiency and Regionalization Grant
- **Committee/Board Appointments**
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Boudreau the Select Board voted to appoint Debbie Frechette to the Agricultural Commission; term expires 6/30/2025
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Boudreau the Select Board voted to re-appoint Don Campbell to the Historical Commission; term expires 12/31/26
- **Proposed Agenda Items**
 - Fire Department Policy & Procedures
 - Recreation Commission update
 - Water District
 - Six Town Regionalization
 - Pioneer Valley Regional School District agreement
 - Kristen Elechko
 - Kerns suggested she be available January 21 Town Hall Auditorium for Special Town Meeting warrant questions
- **Announcements**

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- Request for residents with portable basketball hoops to please move them back from the road to avoid damage by and to the plows
- **Recognition for Service**
 - To the Highway crew for service during weather events and the Police.
- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to adjourn at 8: 03 pm

Recorded by Sandra L. Wood, Secretary

Select Board Clerk

1/23/24
Date Approved