

## [NORTHFIELD SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES]

February 22, 2022

Northfield Town Hall  
69 Main St

Selectboard Present: Heath Cummings, Chair; Barbara “Bee” Jacque, Vice Chair; Alexander Meisner; Bernard Boudreau, Clerk; Mary Sullivan-Bowen

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

Others Present: EMS Chief Mark Fortier, EMS Asst. Chief Camron Kennedy; Andrew Evans RCAP Solutions; Barbara Richardson, Friends of Schell Bridge; Julian Mendoza, The Recorder

- Meeting called to order at 6:00 pm
- **Scheduled Appointments**
  - EMS Chief Mark Fortier & EMS Asst. Chief Camron Kennedy/update & budget
    - Budget review
      - Explanation of enterprise budgeting
        - Based on call volume per year and average collectable rate
        - \$439,710 projected for next fiscal year collection
      - Review of budget plan: salaries with staffing plan explanation and issues associated with full-time staffing and full-time employment legal obligations
      - Changes to contracts or terms with other towns need to be addressed. Fortier has communicated with Erving’s EMS Chief Wonkka. The non-binding agreement with Bernardston’s renewal is due in June. Fortier is satisfied with the assessments but if the Selectboard feels there should be an increase they need to address with the Selectboards’ in Erving and Bernardston
      - Llamas has applied for a regionalization study grant to investigate the option of regional services
      - Fortier foresees the need of a written agreement with Bernardston
    - Meisner- Selling the product and getting support from the Finance Committee:
      - Fortier cited support from surrounding community
      - Advises towns get written agreement with an ambulance service, we have a service to sell
      - Finance Committee does not appear to have the confidence
    - Jacque- We have an obligation to understand numbers and this is a difficult model. Small towns don’t have good options and most want advanced service. Need better explanation. Most regional agreements have assessments. Need agreements in place for billing. More on Selectboard to help with employment model. Look at contracts, look at personnel model, look at regionalization to articulate the tradeoffs to other entities in town
    - Fortier calculates revenue to be higher this fiscal year
      - Increases in line-item Other Charges geared toward replacing pagers that can’t be repaired but waiting for upgrade in county radio system as new pager frequency would not be compatible with current system. Pagers with both frequency systems available at \$800 apiece and budget reflects increase to cover having to replace nonfunctioning equipment until county system upgraded.
      - Requesting take \$300,000 from excess revenue account to purchase ambulance to replace van ambulance. May propose repurposing as a transport vehicle
  - Andrew Evans RCAP/ Solutions East Northfield Water Co.
    - Llamas gave a presentation on a Transition from East Northfield Water Company to a New Water District
      - Background of the East Northfield Water Company (ENWC) as a private company incorporated in 1927
      - ENWC serves 283 accounts
      - Due to failed water test in 2018, Department of Environmental Protection required treatment enhancement of the Grandin Reservoir. ENWC lacked financial resources to comply. ENWC has

limited access to low-cost grants and loans. Transitioning to a water district would gain access to grants and loans.

- Partially due to the NMH campus closing in 2005, ENWC had been running at a loss. With a rate increase in 2021 and the addition of Thomas Aquinas College, ENWC is generating sufficient revenue to cover operating costs
- A committee was formed consisting of Llamas, President of ENWC Don Glascoff, Andrew Evans and Jim Starbard of RCAP Solutions, (a government funding consultancy), CFO Dennis McCarthy of Thomas Aquinas College and Thomas Baxter, resident, and experienced water operation administrator to investigate the feasibility and sustainability of moving ENWC to a water district operation
- KP Law and Senator Jo Comerford and other government personnel are providing counsel to the committee
- Creating a water district requires a home rule petition. The committee is drafting an “Act to Establish an East Northfield Water District” to create a Commission comprised of customers and Northfield representatives to supervise Water District employees
- Steps to create the water district include: Selectboard support, move forward and present the option to residents at a public meeting; include an article on the Town Meeting Warrant for approval; Obtain support from Mass DPU and DEP to resolve the waiver issue; submit a Home Rule Petition to the Legislature with legislative support and obtain approval by the House, Senate and Governor
  - Upon creation of the district, apply for government grants and loans to fund work with assistance of RCAP
  - Upon indication of funding, complete the transition of the assets into the new Water District
- Timing of process scheduled to be completed with this legislative cycle. If not, the process must start over for the next cycle
- Recent developments making the transition to a water district feasible
  - ENWC is generating higher revenue
  - As a water district some costs would be eliminated or reduced
  - RCAP Solution consultants, indicates other districts obtained funding with grants up to 75% with the balance in low-rate government loans
- Pro Forma projected operating results present the performance of the water district as if in operation from January 1, 2022, include the assumptions:
  - Revenues
    - Actual customer 2021 counts for hookups and hydrants for pro forma 2022
    - Actual water usage volume for 2020 assumed for 2021 and 2022
    - Step 2 rates for 2020-2022
  - Costs
    - 2020 and 2021 operating costs for ENWC
    - Staff hours and operations personnel assumed for 2022 but at current hourly rates
    - Pro forma estimates for full-time Superintendent at \$75,000
    - Legal costs for transition to water district
    - Projected income estimated at \$45,000 available for payment of interest on government loans or expenses
- Andrew Evans, RCAP Solutions presentation
  - Technical assistant provider for rural water and wastewater issues

- Partners with USDA
  - Responds to needs: asset mapping and management; community development, compliance, and environmental health; facilities development; management and finance; technical, managerial, and financial capacity building; emergency preparedness, response and recover; source water protection
  - Priorities for assistance: restructuring or consolidating services projects (regionalization)
  - RCAP aims to accomplish outcomes designed to align with USDA Rural Development goals and community needs
    - Compliance with Federal and State regulations
    - Financial sustainability
    - Improved coordination among Communities
    - Improved public health
    - Increased managerial capacity
- Provide income surveys, trainings, community resources
- Explanation what to do after DEP sends an order of compliance
  - Service includes what is needed to comply
    - Asset management, capital improvement planning, operations and maintenance, emergency response plans/vulnerability assessments, general reporting and monitoring requirements, new requirements, and rate setting
- Definition of Public Water System (PWS)
  - Provision to the public of water for human consumption, through pipes or other constructed conveyances, if such a system has at least 15 service connections or regularly serves an average of at least 25 individuals daily at least 60 days a year
- Basic requirements for creating PWSs
  - Obtain MassDEP approval, PWS ID assigned
  - Hire/become a state -certified water operator of the appropriate grade
  - Test the water according to individualized sampling schedule using a state-certified lab
  - Report all lab results to MassDEP
- Basic requirements for PWSs
  - Install treatment if water quality requires
  - Report to Mass DEP any changes in ownership/management, water, and land use
  - Make improvements ad identified in the MassDEP sanitary survey
  - Restrict land uses around the body of water or well to prevent impairment of water quality
    - Each PWS is expected to own or control the “Zone I” area around the well with a radius of 100-400 ft.
- Water Quality: PWS Owners & Operators must:
  - Meet water quality standards
  - Meet monitoring and reporting requirements
  - Meet record keeping requirements, including preparing an emergency response plan, and an annual statistical report
  - Meet public notification requirements
  - Meet operator certification standards
- Emerging issues of concern include PFAs, medications, lead, water source and cyber security
- Cost-RCAP is a non-profit with no cost to the town
- Requirements: signed workplan (completed) and an initial and final technical managerial financial tool

- The tool highlights/identifies the needs of the community, track RCAPs performance and is a data driven way to show the impact RCAP is making
- Cummings: experience with other communities going private to public? Any locally to see how the change worked out?
  - No experience personally but has been done. Seen more regionalization rather than private to public. Agawam or Chicopee went private to public recently. DEP website has listing of private water districts with stories
- Meisner: Familiar with DEP? Does DEP look for issues towns can't afford or look for best interest of the environment
  - Familiar with DEP who are tasked with looking out for the environment. They are not a business to make money.
  - RCAP works with rural communities
- Jacque: Working with USDA, include meters, upgrading the entire infrastructure? MHI? Time needed for the tool? PER?
  - Yes, don't do anything less than \$750,000.
    - Preliminary engineering report (PER) has been created
  - USDA has a 40-year repayment plan
  - MHI is mean household income
  - TMF (tool) Needs financial and operations personnel to input data at the beginning and the end
  - Timing issue with USDA and MA legislature discussed
- Bowen: did NMH contact you?
  - Not directly, through channels
  - 2 work plans, ENWD and Town of Northfield
- Can rates be lowered?
  - Never seen rates decrease
  - Funding available now will be forwarded to make improvements
- ENWC gave CFO of Thomas Aquinas College a great amount of data
- Motion by Meisner, seconded by Jacque the Selectboard voted to recommend to the residents of Northfield to meet and discuss the creation of a Water District, and to support the placement of said District as an Article on the Town Meeting Warrant to transition from the East Northfield Water Company to the new East Northfield Water District with collaboration from RCAP Solutions Massachusetts
- Discussion on condition of water supplied by the current reservoir and the rates, interruption of service and possible resolves available.
- **Review and Approval of Warrants**
  - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Meisner the Selectboard voted to approve the 2/24/22 Payroll warrant of \$61,112.81
  - Motion by Meisner, seconded by Jacque the Selectboard voted to approve 2/24/22 Vendor warrant of \$1,377,988.79
- **Review and Approval of Minutes**
  - Motion by Meisner, seconded by Jacque the Selectboard voted to approve the executive session minutes of 1/11/22 as written
  - Motion by Meisner, seconded by Boudreau the Selectboard voted to approve the 1/25/22 workshop minutes as amended
  - Motion by Meisner, seconded by Boudreau the Selectboard voted to approve the 02/01/22 minutes as amended
  - Motion by Meisner, seconded by Boudreau the Selectboard voted to approve the 02/08/22 minutes as amended

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- **Meetings/Events attended by Selectboard members**

- Jacque: ARPA; Finance Committee; Energy Committee
- Meisner: 350<sup>th</sup> Parade Committee; Finance Committee
- Cummings: Finance Committee; PVRs executive session negotiation
- Bowen: PVRs Committee; resident Bill McGee
- Boudreau: Atty General office presentation at the Senior Center

- **Business**

- Review & approve job description(s): Assistant Town Clerk (Substitute Circulation Assistant tabled)
  - Position of Assistant Town Clerk approved at Town Meeting
  - Motion by Meisner, seconded by Jacque the Selectboard voted to accept the Assistant Town Clerk job description for the Town of Northfield with an efficacy date of 2/22/22
  - Bowen to be on the classification team
- COVID / Mask Update
  - A review of the data showing high rates in Franklin County and Northfield at 12%. The Selectboard maintained the municipal building mask mandate and will take under review at the next regular meeting to see if the percentage has dropped back to 2021 levels and would like an update from the Board of Health on a town-wide recommendation.
- Schell Bridge Project
  - In a letter from MassDOT, bids from the project exceeded the funding the state earmarked due to the high cost of steel.
  - A value engineering study (VES) will be done to explore reducing the overall cost sometime in April-June
    - Design analysis, materials, modifications to the design, alternate design, construction processes part of the study by a committee
  - The town has ownership of the bridge until project is finished
  - Barbara Richardson, Friends of Schell Bridge, addressed the Selectboard and read a statement requesting answers to questions or to forward questions to MassDOT.
    - Current design being abandoned or modified?
      - May be no changes to the current design. To be determined after the VES
    - Will the project maintain its place in line?
      - No indication money earmarked for the project is going anywhere. Projects don't usually get moved lower unless a major design flaw is discovered. Project still going on. The situation automatically triggers a study
    - Will written statements with MassDOT be public and status updates provided?
      - Until VES is done there will be possibly no updates. Once received, update will be made public
    - Who oversees the study?
      - Jim Dalton, MassDOT Project Manager. Updates have been given by the Town Administrator regularly as non-discussion topics. They can then be added to a future agenda for discussion.
    - Point person from Selectboard to liaison with groups, DCR, citizens?
      - Usually, Llamas is the liaison. Updates have been given regularly by Llamas under Town Administrator Updates at Selectboard meetings. Since updates are non-discussion topics, Jacque suggested the Selectboard periodically move updates onto future agendas as discussion topics. May also revisit a member of the Schell Bridge Advisory as a liaison
    - Is there a designated person from MassDOT to communicate with the Selectboard and would they attend a meeting to explain how the project will proceed?

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- Jim Dalton (Project Manager) is point person. It may be helpful to have him speak with the Selectboard when he has information
- Role and involvement of state representatives and senator?
  - Llamas has communicated directly with Senator Comerford who is aware. Information received by Llamas was forwarded to all of them. Representative Mark is very active in the project
  - Funding is coming from several programs including the Congestion Mitigation and Air quality Program
- Minutes postings – reminder to Boards & Committees to turn their minutes into the Town Clerk for posting in a timely manner
- **Town Administrator's update**
  - Town Clock repairs have been made and operation to resume in the spring
  - Wastewater Treatment Facility received a grant to pay for development of a comprehensive asset management plan
- **Committee/Board Appointments**
  - Motion by Meisner, seconded by Jacque the Selectboard voted to appoint Amy Neil, Recreation Commission Program Director; Grade 5 step 3 @\$18.45/hour up to 30hrs per month
- **Proposed Agenda Items**
  - Town Caucus process
  - Board of Health mask mandate
  - Recreation Commission update including Amy Neil and Summer program
  - Alexander Hill/North Lane & Gulf Rd tree cutting
- **Motion by Cummings, seconded by Meisner the Selectboard voted to adjourn at 9:25pm**

Recorded by Sandra L. Wood, Secretary

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Selectboard Clerk

3/8/22

Date Approved