

[NORTHFIELD SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES]

April 2, 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
Finance Committee: Dan Campbell, Chair; Bernard Porada, Vice Chair, Gail Weiss, Sue Kaczinski, Tony Matteo & David McCarthy
Also Present: Andrea Llamas, Town Administrator; Sandra L. Wood, Town Secretary; Tyler Bourbeau, BNCTV
Others Present: Nathan L'Etoile, Moderator

- Select Board called to order at 6:00 pm
- Finance Committee called to order at 6:00 pm
- **Scheduled Appointments**
 - Joint Meeting with Finance Committee – 2025 Budget & Draft Warrant
 - Finance Committee Dan Campbell gave a review of the Finance Committee budget process as the recommending branch of government
 - Review of Budget
 - Salary increases are due to the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) set at 3% for fiscal year 2025 and step increases where applicable
 - Reserve Fund, controlled by the Finance Committee and used to cover unexpected expenses will be level funded. Votes to approve use are needed by the Finance Committee and Select Board
 - Changes in accounting department. Financial assistant will become in-house accountant when certified and takeover from the current accounting firm who will provide consulting during the change-over process. The Financial Assistant position hours will be reduced minimalizing the increase
 - Review of Town Administrator pay and COLA increases over three years
 - Review of Assessors items including maps, technical assistance and legal increases for expenses such as tax court and payment in lieu of taxes(PILOT)
 - Explanation of process to hire a consultant to quote a scope of work that is charged to the applicant under Massachusetts General Law chapter 44 to offset technical assistance cost
 - Increase of \$4,000 in the Town Hall and Dickinson Library elevator line for maintenance and services
 - Police education incentive item is required statewide
 - Discussion on where funding for fire department training is coming from, there is no specific line in their budget.
 - Building inspection services changes. Electrical, gas and plumbing are included in the Franklin Regional Council of Governments assessment.
 - Northfield Elementary School (NES) maintenance item of \$25,000 is the town's obligation under the lease to support maintenance of capital projects. Capital items are on the town meeting warrant. Discussion on the district line item for NES grounds maintenance of \$1,000 down from \$5,000 for maintenance. The ground maintenance for mowing the playing fields comes under the Recreation Commission plus the small mowing in front as agreed. The district lists \$30,000 for contracted services for maintenance of buildings of the elementary school. Suggestion from the Finance Committee to address during the regional agreement negotiations in the next year
 - Pioneer Valley Regional School increase of .064% is less than a 1% increase in the modified re-voted budget. The returned funding will not take affect until 2026 because it came in after the 2025 budget was set. The increase is based on 2024's voted budget of \$4,711,438 in 2023. The returned \$220,000 is subtracted from the \$4,711,438 and is the number used calculating the increase. The returned funds go into the general fund. Discussion on the process of the returned funds
 - Out of District tuition and transport item is the responsibility of the town. Currently there are no students signed up for out of district. They have until May to notify the town. Unused funds may be re-certified as free cash or transfer to another budget shortage.
 - Free cash must be certified. After June 30th, leftover budget funds are re-certified in the fall and used as appropriation in a town meeting vote. As an uncertain source of revenue it is not used for operating budgets but can be used for capital expenditures or put in a stabilization account.

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- Franklin County Technical School assessment is \$17,000 per student. Finance Committee noted the assessment is about the same as for more affluent towns in the state. Llamas added there is a state funding formula and the amount per student varies based on the community. Assessment is based on student education. Capital expenses are separate and appear as articles. Discussion on costs for virtual schools at \$10,000 per student, the high cost of rural schools and lower in the bigger school areas that may be poorer per capita. The Lieutenant Governor's office is looking into a better way to calculate the Chapter 70 funding formula
- Highway snow/winter rate is separated into another budget line item from the regular wages rate. This amount is an estimate. This is required and reported to the state and is allowed to be over-expended.
- Cost of materials driving Oil & Stone line item up.
 - Most jobs are done in-house with town owned equipment but some projects, such as tree work, are subcontracted for safety reasons and insurance costs.
- Transfer Station Tipping fee increasing due to hauling fees increasing. Transfer Station sticker fee goes into the general fund as a revenue source.
- Council on Aging request to increase the assistant's hours to help with programming
- Veterans Services is the assessment of the Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans Services and state relief benefit.
- Dickinson Library is expanding hours and needs to increase wages.
- Recreation is increasing wages for increased hours and programs
 - Discussion on the maintenance of the grounds. Looking for a maintenance person to do the grounds and cemeteries. Rebid for a vendor will be in the fall
- 8% increase on Health Insurance line. Other insurances include building, liability, property, vehicles
- Sewer budget and enterprise fund and controlled by the Sewer Commission
 - Discussion on the process for appointing 2 additional members to the Sewer Commission once it passes legislation. If increased the budget had to reflect the increase in stipend
- EMS is an enterprise fund approved at town meeting. Increase in wages to adjust a part-time personnel funding to full-time. They have a \$25,000 article on the warrant that includes the increase to create more coverage
- Review of Articles
 - Education budget has been separated from the omnibus as a separate article
 - Clarification from Moderator Nathan L'Etoile on requesting an item be taken out of the omnibus. The items are held, the omnibus is voted and then the excluded item is voted on. The town does not have to vote to remove an item from the omnibus
 - Discussion on PVRs Administrative staff salary increases in comparison to the teaching staff. Porada was told it was the market to retain staff. The School Committee would be the ones to reduce the cost. It would be the purview of the School Committee to research cost comparisons of administrators per number of students. L'Etoile clarified pieces of the school budget can be discussed but only one number is voted. Jacques explained the school budget is set before hiring. At the time of hiring, the asking salary and market is reviewed. If higher than the budget, the budget is raised the next year to reflect the experience.
 - Article 6 NES Capital project fund source, Free Cash \$55,000
 - Article 7 EMS fund sourcing from Enterprise fund and Free Cash, \$25,000, as previously discussed during budget
 - Article 8 Sewer Enterprise funded by the Sewer Enterprise fund
 - Article 9 Sewer capital expense source, Sewer Enterprise fund
 - Article 10 Revolving funds. Gas, plumbing & electrical inspections are still in process of transfer to FRCOG inspection services. To be removed if transfer is done before warrant has to be signed
 - Article 11 Grant Match source funding is Free cash \$30,000. To cover matching grant funds.

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- Article 12 Energy Committee project for professional help to price projects to reduce energy costs. Fund source Free Cash \$33,000
- Article 13 Police Cruiser and Equipment to replace cruiser in rotation. Source funding Free Cash \$113,572.
 - Currently there are 4 cruisers each rotating on a three-year schedule. Takes about a year to get a vehicle once ordered.
- Article 14 Fire Department truck sourcing funds from Free Cash, \$225,000 and Whitney fund if needed for a used rescue truck.
 - Discussion on comparison of purchasing new, combination pumper/rescue truck and pricing with inflation. Fire Department preferred the used rescue truck for the equipment they own. The Finance Committee discussed with the Fire Department supplying supportive documentation for purchases as is provided by other departments.
- Article 15 Highway Truck and Equipment to replace a vehicle. Raise and Appropriate funding \$400,000
- Article 16 Highway radio equipment due to change in radio system. Source funding is Free Cash \$35,000
- Article 17 OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) funded from Free Cash \$100,000
- Article 18 Emergency Services Facility funding split from Raise and Appropriate, \$200,000, and Free Cash, \$300,000 to reduce borrowing
- Article 19 Opioid Account to comply with new state law to mitigate health and public safety risks associated with addiction.
 - Expenditures should come through the Select Board with Board of Health and Emergency Services making requests. Llamas to gather information for the Select Board to set up a process. Current amount in account is \$22,650 and the town can only expend what is in the fund. Expenses are controlled and have to be reported
- Articles 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 Community Preservation Funds
 - 20-percentage breakdown for administration, open space, historic preservation, affordable housing and reserve
 - 21-NES Pavilion \$15,000
 - 22-Northfield Historical Society \$5,000
 - 23-Library restoration \$21,523 paint restoration
 - 24-Dickerson Hall/VFW \$90,000 for repair
- The Finance Committee completed the money articles. Motion by Porada, seconded by Matteo the Finance Committee adjourned at 8:20 pm
- Article 25 Fire Chief Extension
 - Discussion as to why extend another year after last extension.
 - Select Board to vote at next meeting whether to recommend or not recommend the article
- Article 26 Battery Storage
- Article 27 Solar Petition
 - Difference between the two articles: 26 was written by Town Counsel specifically on Battery Storage. It was referred to in 27 but counsel felt it was not adequate. Counsel evaluation of the citizen petition, Article 27, was not optimistic for a moratorium because the town already has a Solar Bylaw and would be more optimistic if changes were made to the existing bylaw
 - Llamas to check with counsel if the article can be rewritten to express the intent
- **Citizens' Concerns (limit 3 minutes per speaker)**
 - Bernie Boudreau concern regarding flood plain bylaw and new solar field proposal. Updated Bylaw is located under zoning section on the town website
- **Review and Approval of Warrants**
 - Motion by Cummings, seconded by Jacque the Select Board voted to approve the 4/3/24 Payroll warrant of \$81,086.53

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- Motion by Jacque, seconded Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the 4/3/24 Vendor warrant of \$979,556.96 4 yes/1 abstain
- **Review and Approval of Minutes**
 - 03/06/24- tabled for edits to be submitted
 - Motion by Cummings, seconded by Jacque the Select Board voted to approve the minutes of 03/19/24 as written. 3 yes/1 no/1 abstain
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the 2/20/24 Executive Session personnel minutes
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to approve the 2/20/24 Executive Session real estate
- **Meetings/Events attended by Selectboard members**
 - Meisner: 3 town meeting; non-partisan caucus; met with Templeton Administrator for a tour; Easter Egg Hunt
 - Boudreau: met with Tighe & Bond, treatment plant upgrades; Franklin Regional Council of Government (FRCOG) community public health update on mandatory mask wearing
 - Kerns: met with local town Select Board member to discuss school proposals; with citizen concerned about solar and farmland resources being bought by outsiders; Conservation Commission; School board meeting as collective bargaining rep; called PVRS superintendent and Finance Director; got information on school board election procedures; Fire Chief for policy & procedure and building site update; Northfield Water District meeting; Town Administrator re: electric rates
 - Jacque: Emergency Services Facility Committee; Friends of Schell Bridge; calls on First Light Motion to Intervene and Declaration
- **Town Administrator's Update**
 - Schell Bridge
 - Did not receive funding through the Reconnecting Federal Grant. Reaching out to our federal delegation and in the process of filing an application for congressionally directed spending as an earmark due this Friday. Grant Developer Leslie Roberts has quickly initiated in reaching out to all the supporting entities as well as our federal Senator's office staff.
 - Reached out to MassDOT to help with the budget portion
 - Goal is to have everything in by the deadline for our Senate delegation on Friday the 5th.
 - The House process hasn't begun. We will pursue that as well to get both house and senate on board.
 - Annual Report/Budget Book
 - The new Annual Report/Budget Book is finalized and went to the printer. Includes calendar year 2023 annual information, Town Meeting and the proposed FY25 budget
 - printing limited copies as it is over 200 pages. Printing is much more expensive than the smaller Town Report in the past. Encouraging people to view it electronically.
 - Contains a lot of information to help understand Town Departments, the budget, and the budget process. On 4/3 it will be available on the website.
 - The website home page will have a section for Town Elections, the Town Report and Town Meeting materials along with the Town Election Warrant and Town Warrant when available.
 - Received the \$220,800 return funds from Pioneer Valley Regional School District. Funding for the new dishwasher and main entry door repair we retained by the school. The dishwasher is done, but the door is not, bids have come in high and need discussion as to where further funds can be obtained.
 - Awarded \$134,984 Community Compact Efficiency and Regionalization grant.
 - This grant award is less than applied for meaning slightly less toward transition costs. Does not eliminate them all together while it fully funds the cost of the consultant to do the work with the Task Force.
- **Business**
 - Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game: Purchase of property – letter of support

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- The Mass Department of Fish and Game requested a letter of support to purchase about 12 acres of land to add to the surrounding land that they already own to preserve open space. Land is in West Northfield off West Rd
- Motion by Jacque, seconded by Boudreau the Select Board voted to approve a letter of support to the Department of Fish and Game for the purchase of property
- Schell Bridge letter of support
 - Summary of the letter of support for the Pauchaug Schell Bridge to be sent to Senator Warren and Senator Markey for the earmark application read
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to accept the letter and send to our Senators as part of an earmark
- Firstlight Motion to Intervene / Declaration
 - Motion to Intervene allows the town to be involved legally
 - The Declaration is a statement to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to establish Town Administrator Andrea Llamas as point of contact
 - Motion by Cummings, seconded by Boudreau the Select Board voted to support the motion to intervene, for the Chair to sign the motion to intervene and the Town Administrator to sign the declaration
 - With this the town can be recognized as a stakeholder
- Reimburse \$4,504.00 to Loaves & Fishes for emergency funding requests approved by the Trust Fund Committee
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Boudreau the Select Board voted to approve the request to Reimburse \$4,504.00 to Loaves & Fishes for emergency funding requests approved by the Trust Fund Committee
- Accept resignation of Susan Space from the Open Space Committee
 - Motion by Jacque, seconded by Cummings the Select Board voted to accept with regret the resignation of Susan Space from the Open Space Committee
- **Proposed Agenda Items**
 - Follow up on FERC & FirstLight
- **Announcements**
 - Solar eclipse viewing April 8 at Pioneer Valley Regional School; 2:30 – 4: 15p; Senior fundraiser
 - April 4 Tick Talk @ Dickinson Library; 6pm
 - Town Election May 7; noon to 8pm
- **Recognition for Service**
 - The Finance Committee
- **Executive Session**
 - Motion by Cummings, seconded by Jacque the Select Board went into **Executive Session at 9:11 pm for Boyer Litigation under M.G.L. C.30A, Sec.21(3)** To review request to release executive session minutes **AND**
 - **For Executive Session:** 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. The chair declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body. The Select Board will not return to open session. Roll call vote: Cummings yes, Kerns yes, Jacque yes, Boudreau yes and Meisner yes
- **Meeting adjourned at 9:37 pm**

Recorded by Sandra L. Wood, Secretary

Select Board Clerk

Date Approved