

**Town of Northfield, Vermont**  
**Joint Meeting of the Northfield Electric**  
**and Water & Wastewater Commissions**  
**Minutes of October 7, 2024**

**Roll Call:** Dennis Donahue, Steve Fitzhugh (absent), John Stevens, and Charlie Morse. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz and Utility Superintendent James Russo.

The meeting started at 6:32 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting.**

Motion by Mr. Donahue, seconded by Mr. Morse, to approve the minutes of the May 6, 2024 meeting. One typo will be fixed. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

**Meeting of the Electric Commission**

**Northfield Electric Department (NED) Upcoming Projects.**

**Smart Meters.** Manager Schulz said he has been working with the Vermont Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) on this project. The municipality has budgeted \$500,000 for smart meter purchases and installation and VPPSA will provide another \$500,000 from state American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Manager Schulz had hoped that meter installation will start this fall but we are now looking at next spring for this. He said it is a positive development that the project is going forwards even with delays.

**Nantanna Mill Hydroelectric Facility.** Manager Schulz said the Quebec-based Charbone Corporation purchased this facility about four (4) years ago with plans to restart it and produce electric power. These plans appear to be ongoing so Manager Schulz will work with Green Mountain Power (GMP) and other power companies to make sure proper preparations are made before the facility goes online. He added that this project will require some riverbed cleanup as well as some upgrades to the facility itself.

**Norwich University (NU) Cemetery Electric Service.** Mr. Russo said his utility crew have begun installing underground electric service along Scenic View Drive in order to provide power to the cemetery as NU has requested. This will be a two-inch (2") conduit with the required cables already installed. Mr. Russo said this could be a trial run for future power upgrades on Water Street Extension, etc. He noted that GMP now favors burying single-phase power lines in the ground along backroads. The work should be completed within the next couple of weeks.

**Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said the utility crew also has been kept busy burying power lines in the East Street area for this project. The street has been milled down by the contractor for repaving within the next week. Additional powerline work has been done in the area of the Dollar General store. Mr. Russo is hoping all the work can be completed before winter sets in. He added that having a fourth crew member on hand has been a great assistance.

**Budget Status Reports.** Manager Schulz noted the current budget status report covers only the first quarter of the new fiscal year. However, he could say that revenue receipts are on target and expenses are well under budget. He did note that there is some lag time for bill payments for power purchases, etc. Manager Schulz noted that due to new state legislation, it is now possible for utility customers with delinquent accounts to have them abated by the local Board of Tax Abatement. This happened at such a meeting last week where \$300 in utility bills were abated. Mr. Morse is concerned that the Utility Commissioners have been excluded from this abatement process as they help develop recommendations for utility department budgets, etc. Manager Schulz said the old policy was to seek repayment agreements from the customers or, if that failed, seek a lien on their properties until payment had been made. He added that it might be necessary to budget funds in future for such abatements if this becomes a common practice. Mr. Morse would like Manager Schulz to work with VPPSA to perhaps persuade the state legislature to amend this new law and provide a role for local utility commissioners. Mr. Stevens agreed with this, saying that the Utility Commissions should have the initial input regarding utility bill abatements. Manager Schulz will work with VPPSA on this.

## Meeting of the Water & Wastewater Commission

### Northfield Water & Sewer Department Upcoming Projects.

**Lead-Lined Pipe Inventory.** Manager Schulz reported that the inventory, which was conducted by our utility crew, has been accepted by the State of Vermont. The municipality will receive \$60,000 in reimbursement funds to cover the expense of employee time, etc. Manager Schulz said this unanticipated revenue is a very good development. Mr. Russo said no lead-lined pipes were found in the areas they surveyed but some might be uncovered when the Main Street Waterline Replacement project begins next spring.

**Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Twenty-Year Reevaluation.** Manager Schulz said the report should be completed before the end of this month. The document will be provided to the Utility Commissioners at their next meeting (11/04/24) and afterwards distributed to the Select Board members. Mr. Russo is very interested in what facility upgrades the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) might require as a result of this reevaluation. Manager Schulz hopes whatever upgrades are required will not be too expensive. Mr. Russo noted that recently the ANR informed Barre City that it would need to double the number of operators at its wastewater treatment facility. Barre City now is pushing back on that requirement as far too costly.

**Street Discontinuance on NU Campus.** Manager Schulz noted NU has requested the municipality discontinue Park Avenue and University Drive in order to facilitate its construction of a new building (i.e., Cyber Fusion Center). Plans for the site indicate the existing municipal utility lines in the area. Mr. Russo confirmed the municipality did install an eight-inch (8") water main from South Main Street to the University Drive area. There also is a six-inch (6") line connected to the Communications Building that will be removed as part of the construction process. Mr. Russo said ownership of some of these waterlines is uncertain as NU has made a number of upgrades in recent years, such as adding new sprinkler systems, etc. Mr. Morse felt that there should be a full review of any existing easements in the project area. He felt that there should be enough information at the time of road discontinuance so that the municipality will be able to secure its utility-work access rights in future through new easement agreements, etc. Mr. Russo noted that there is a mix of new and old waterlines on the NU campus. There will be a site visit and public hearing regarding this road discontinuance request held on Tuesday, October 22, 2024.

**Budget Status Reports.** As indicated earlier, we are one-quarter into the new fiscal year so it is difficult to make sweeping statements at this time. Manager Schulz did report that Water Department revenues are on track at about twenty-five percent (25%) of the projection for the full fiscal year. Departmental expenses are now underbudget. Manager Schulz said Mr. Russo is doing everything in his power to help keep chemical expenses under control while still meeting state and federal requirements. Mr. Russo noted that the WWTF is running well with no major problems to report. Manager Schulz added that Sewer Department revenues also are on track and expenses also remain underbudget. Mr. Russo is concerned that the ANR may require additional chemical purchases after it reviews the WWTF reevaluation. There are other new state mandates that also might require additional spending. Mr. Morse then commended Mr. Russo for his important role in helping to keep utility expenses as low as possible.

**Public Participation (unscheduled):** There was none.

**Adjournment.** Motion by Mr. Morse, seconded by Mr. Donahue, to adjourn. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk