

**MINUTES OF 2009 TOWN MEETING
NORTHFIELD, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

The polls were open for voting at 10:00 a.m. March 10, 2009 by Moderator Scott McGuffin at the Pines Community Center. Voting was terminated at 7:00 p.m. with 330 ballots cast.

ARTICLE 1: To choose all necessary Town Officers, Tilton-Northfield Fire District Officers and Winnisquam Regional School District Officers for the ensuing year.

Results for Town Offices:

For Selectman: James Knowlton	192
Glen Brown	130

For Treasurer: Roland Seymour 289

For Trustee of Trust Funds: write-ins, Selectmen will appoint

Moderator Scott McGuffin called the Annual Town Meeting to order again at 9:00 a.m. March 14, 2009. Introduced Kent Finemore as Assistance Moderator. Police Chief Stephen Adams led the Pledge of Allegiance. Moderator requested a moment of silence for our Armed Forces currently serving. Moderator introduced Board members and Department Heads.

ARTICLE 2: To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$75,000 to be deposited in the SAR (State Aid Reconstruction Projects) Capital Reserve Fund for the purpose of making improvements to Bean Hill Road. The Budget Committee and the Selectmen recommend approval of this article. (Majority vote is required for adoption).

Moved by Dave Liberatore and seconded by Steve Randall.

Lisa Martin spoke to the motion. This is a town project partially funded by the State. The State will pay two-thirds of the cost, the Town one-third up to the budget amount. By having this fund we are securing our position for State money. Project would be under design this year and would go to construction next year.

Kevin Waldron questioned why the Town is being asked to spend funds on a state owned road. Steve Bluhm stated the fund currently has \$109,503 in the fund. Confirmed we do have to declare ownership of the road after construction. We should do it while the state will pay two-thirds and while funds are available. With State budget constraints there may be less funds available in the future.

Dave Coulter questioned if the Town currently maintains the road. Steve Bluhm replied the Town currently is required to take care of winter maintenance on the road, the State takes care of drainage, etc. **ARTICLE PASSED.**

ARTICLE 3: To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Selectmen to enter into a two (2) year lease/purchase agreement for the replacement of a 1990 8 yard International 4900 Truck in the Highway Department and to raise and appropriate the sum of \$75,000 as the first year's payment. The total cost of this equipment is \$115,047. This lease/purchase agreement contains a non-appropriation clause. (Majority vote required for adoption)

Moved by Dave Liberatore and seconded by Steve Bluhm.

Michael Summersett moved, seconded by Leif Martinson to amend Article to change wording on line four "is \$115,047" to read "shall not exceed \$120,000".

Discussion on Amendment:

Greg Hill asked why amount needs to be changed. Michael Summersett responded that amount submitted at the time of the budget process is no longer accurate, prices are fluctuating and dealers will only hold any price for thirty days. The best price is currently at \$119,000.

Leslie Keyser asked why there are not bids out on this and why we have not gone to other manufacturers. Mike responded the bid went out to three and they are all comparable.

Steve Bluhm stated the CIP committee met to discuss setting a schedule for equipment upgrades. We need to start replacing equipment before it all goes at once. Our trucks are all aging.

Mike Summersett states the price would be up to \$135,000 next year due to new emission regulations that will be taking effect.

Catherine Ferreira asked if the new emissions upgrade will have to be added if we buy the truck this year, will the July 1 new regulations apply to it if a proposed Federal Law passes? Mike stated he had not yet heard about this proposed change.

Kevin Waldron asked if are we open to buying anything but brand new, and stated that he came to support this purchase and wanted cost information to compare buying outright versus financing.

Lisa Swancott – the CIP committee capped out this purchase at \$75,000 per year for equipment. This keeps the CIP plan more level per year versus having some years with very high expenditures.

Richard Maher asked if the amended price includes the front plow and wing installed, will we use the old parts, and will the old truck be sold to help defray the expense? Mike responded the new truck would come fully equipped and ready to go.

Steve Bluhm replied to Mr. Waldron’s question, stating the current finance rate on this purchase would be 1.8%. The effect of the \$75,000 for first year payment would be twenty-one cents per thousand on the tax rate. The old truck would be put out to bid and money received would go to the General Fund.

Valerie Kehr asked for explanation of the “non-appropriation clause”.

Town Administrator Glen Smith explained that if the funds were not approved next year to cover the balance of the vehicle, the truck would go back. **AMENDMENT PASSED.**

Discussion on Article as Amended:

Catherine Ferreira asked what will appear on next year’s budget for the balance of the vehicle? Steve Bluhm responded there would \$45,000 in the 2010 budget for this vehicle.

Kevin Waldron questioned how second payment would be presented to the voters. Response was that it will be listed within the budget to be voted on as a whole, but would not be listed as a separate warrant article.

ARTICLE AS AMENDED PASSED. Division of the House: Yes 67 No 24.

ARTICLE 4: To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Selectmen to replace a 2002 Ford Expedition 4x4 in the Police Department and to raise and appropriate \$27,900 for this purpose. (Majority vote is required for adoption).

Moved by Dave Liberatore and seconded by Steve Bluhm.

Chief Adams advised the Ford Expedition is seven years old, and was originally planned for five. Funds for this item were pulled from the budget last year, and the same vehicle is almost \$10,000 cheaper this year due to the economy.

Kevin Waldron asked if equipment will be moved from the old vehicle to the new one.

Chief Adams replied that most equipment will not fit due to body style changes.

Valerie Kehr asked the Budget Committee to explain what the \$75,000 in the CIP budget covers.

Lisa Swancott stated the \$75,000 previously discussed was only for major large equipment for the Highway Department, the total for all equipment averages \$250,000 per year. Chris Nutter asked about the two Harley Davidson motorcycles. Chief Adams responded that we only have one and it is leased. We save enough in fuel to nearly cover the lease cost which a Highway Safety Grant also offsets, and all maintenance is covered by the lease.

ARTICLE PASSED.

ARTICLE 5: To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Selectmen to replace a police cruiser in the Police Department and to raise and appropriate \$25,669 for this purpose. (Majority vote is required for adoption).

Moved by Dave Liberatore and seconded by Steve Randall.

Chief Adams stated this vehicle is to replace a 2002 Cruiser. Cars are rotated out of service. We currently have three vehicles with mileage close to or over 100,000 miles. They average 25,000 to 30,000 miles per year and run eighteen hours per day including idling time. It would be very expensive to replace a motor. As cars are rotated out they go for use by Highway Department and town office or to detectives who use fewer miles.

ARTICLE PASSED Division of House: Yes 63 No 27

ARTICLE 6: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$7,000 for repair of retaining walls and other stabilization work for the Island, such funds to be used as a local match to a Hazard Mitigation Grant. This is a special, non lapsing warrant article and the funds shall not lapse until the entire project is completed or by December 31, 2011 whichever is sooner. Total project cost is \$220,000; Northfield's portion of the local match is anticipated to be \$13,500, with the remaining funds to be requested in 2010. This appropriation is contingent upon the Town of Tilton raising and appropriating the same amount. The Budget Committee and the Selectmen recommend approval of this article. (Majority vote is required for adoption).

Moved by Steve Bluhm, seconded by Steve Randall.

Debra Shepard presented motion to Table the Article. Seconded by Paul Wilson

MOTION TO TABLE PASSED.

ARTICLE 7: To see if the Town will vote raise and appropriate \$900 to increase the Selectmen's annual compensation by \$300 per Selectman.

Moved by Dave Liberatore, seconded by Steve Randall.

Debra Shepard reviewed history of Selectman salaries: From 1998 to 2002 the salary for all three selectmen was \$9,000. From 2002 to 2006 it was \$9,360. In 2007 the 5% raise given to other town employees was mistakenly applied to Selectmen. In 2008 the Budget Committee attempted to correct the error by submitting a budget of \$9,000 for Selectmen salaries. The Selectmen later raised their salary to \$10,500.

Dave Liberatore spoke in favor of the increase and stated the Board puts in a large amount of time and he felt it was long overdue.

Catherine Ferreira stated she did not have a problem with the raise, but had a problem with how it was done.

Leif Martinson stated the Selectmen requested for the 2008 budget a salary amount of \$9,600. The Budget Committee reduced this to \$9,000 which is the amount voted at the 2008 Town Meeting. The Selectmen voted at a Select Board meeting to raise their salaries to \$10,500. This year the Budget Committee and Select Board agreed to submit \$9,600 as part of the budget, with

the understanding that the Select Board would present the additional amount to the voters, which the Budget Committee does not support.

Steve Randall stated he was at the Select Board Budget Meeting, and no one brought up the additional salary being sought. He reviewed the RSA covering this, which states that to move money within the budget it must be for a “necessary” purpose. He did not receive an answer from the Selectmen as to why this was considered “necessary”.

Greg Hill stated he was not in favor of the raise.

Kevin Waldron reviewed the salaries of other local boards and said he did not think this was the time for an increase.

ARTICLE DEFEATED. Division of the House: Yes 34 No 49

ARTICLE 8: To see if the Town will vote to modify the income limit for an elderly exemption (RSA72:39-b) effective April 1, 2009 to reflect increases in Social Security benefit payments awarded since the limits were last modified in 2005 as follows:

	Increase From:	To:
Single Persons	\$28,500	\$31,800
Married Couple (combined income)	\$38,500	\$43,000

Article moved by Dave Liberatore, seconded by Steve Randall.

Debra Shepard explained this affects elderly residents on fixed incomes and is to reflect the increase in Social Security benefits so those who currently qualify will still qualify.

Wes deSousa asked what the current credit is for elderly exemption?

Debra Shepard advised both current and proposed amounts are listed in Article 9. These are deducted from the homeowner’s assessed value of the property for those who qualify within limits on both income and assets. This Article will increase their ability to qualify.

Cindy Caveney explained that this definitely helps the elderly. Many were hurt by the new assessments in 2008, and had higher tax bills than anticipated.

Bill Dawson requested clarification of the qualifications of income and assets.

Debra Shepard explained that both income and asset limits must be within limits to qualify. The residence and up to two acres of land are exempt from the asset limits.

Cindy Caveney explained that only the income level is being addressed in this Article. The current asset limit of \$50,000 will remain the same.

David Court asked where this Article originated and who makes the determination as to who receives the exemption.

Debra Shepard responded that the Selectmen brought the Article forward after review of data provided by the Town Administrator. The determination of qualification is made by the Assessors and approved by the Selectmen. **ARTICLE PASSED.**

ARTICLE 9: To see if the Town will vote to modify the exemption amounts for elderly and disabled residents meeting the established income limit effective April 1, 2009 to reflect changes in property values reflected in recent assessments as follows:

	Increase From:	To:
Elderly 65-74	\$50,000	\$ 75,000
Elderly 75-79	\$60,000	\$ 80,000
Elderly 80+	\$90,000	\$115,000
Disabled	\$50,000	\$ 65,000

Moved by Dave Liberatore, seconded by Debra Shepard
Debra Shepard explained that the Town follows the determination of “disabled” by Social Security. **ARTICLE PASSED.**

ARTICLE 10: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the budget committee recommended sum of \$3,303,041 for general municipal operations. This article does not include special or individual articles listed above. (Majority vote required).

Moved by Dave Liberatore and seconded by Steve Bluhm.

Steve Bluhm advised that per the NH Department of Revenue we are no longer allowed to add any previously voted warrants to the budget amount. This Article is to vote on the budget only and will not include amounts from other articles.

Leif Martinson advised that the actual total including Articles previously voted on today is \$3,506,610.

Wes deSousa questioned the budget line item on page 13 for Tax Collector Salary as there was no amount listed for 2008 but there were amounts previously in the 2007 budget.

Town Administrator Glen Smith responded this was due to a re-organization of the budget to make it easier to administer. The former department of “Finance & Accounting” has been separated to lines under Tax Collector, Town Administration and General Building. On page 15 the bottom line for General Government shows the total including all lines where funds shifted from one category to another.

Lisa Swancott pointed out that the budget amount is \$125,619 less than last year’s budget.

Joseph DeMello questioned a line in the “Annual Audit” report that indicated the Auditors reviewed but did not comment on a particular report in their audit.

Glen Smith advised we received over a thirty-page report on revenues and expenses. This report is available for review at the Town Hall. We now have a three-year contract with the firm of Melanson, Heath and Company. The overage in the budget for this item is due to the transition to the new company from Plodzik and Sanderson.

Roland Seymour, Treasurer further clarified that the last paragraph of the Auditor Report that refers to a “Management Discussion & Analysis Report” is a separate report that has come out in the last couple years and many municipalities do not even prepare one. The Auditors did review this report but did not offer any opinion on this report only. The first part of the Auditors Report states that all financial statements were audited and present fairly in all material respects the financial position of the government activities. That is the basic audit statement. This firm does a very good job, we are getting a certified audit from this firm.

Kevin Waldron noted the bottom line of the budget includes a 3.5% salary increase for Town employees. He questioned if this is the time to give out raises with the poor economy we are experiencing. He stated the unemployment rate has gone up, many are out of work and there have been many foreclosures in our area. Municipal employees enjoy guarantees and benefits others do not.

Leif Martinson responded that originally a 5% raise was presented at the beginning of the budget process in late October. The Selectmen and Budget Committee reduced this to 3.5% later in the process. Merit increases have been held for several years at 2 to 2.5% per year, which was below the average in this area and across the country. The Budget Committee felt that 3.5% was not out of line, though the economy has worsened since the finalization of the budget.

Catherine Ferreira questioned if the reduction in the budget is due to removal of the 2% discount that was discontinued last year. Also asked how savings from contracted services come back to the taxpayers in the budget.

Debra Shepard responded that contracts are usually multi-year, so if a contract savings is quoted it may be realized over those years. We do put everything out to bid whenever possible.

Kent Finemore suggested committees might be used for the process of reviewing and awarding contracts.

Steve Bluhm pointed out that the Town is saving interest by not having to borrow as much money in anticipation of taxes and to cover the discounts previously given.

Cindy Caveney advised that collection of taxes were minimally affected by the removal of the 2% discount. As of December 31, 2008 collections were within two tenths of one percent of the total warrant as compared to the same period in 2007.

Wes deSousa asked for total impact on the budget for salaries and benefits.

Steve Bluhm responded that the total of proposed salary increases for all employees is \$27,661.

There was a decrease of 0.8% in health insurance costs and a small increase in dental, overall no additional expense to the Town for benefits.

Catherine Ferreira asked the impact of the new budget on the tax rate.

Leif Martinson responded that since the total appropriation is down, as long as your evaluation remains the same you should see a reduction in the tax rate for the town portion only.

Valerie Kehr asked with the 3.5% raise to town employees, what is the increase to the budget for employee retirement benefits.

Glen Smith calculated the increase in retirement benefits to be \$1398 for Group 1, which is everyone except Police, and \$1537 for Group 2, for a total of \$2,935. **ARTICLE PASSED.**

ARTICLE 11: To see if the Town shall vote to elect members of the Budget Committee, commencing with election to staggered terms in March 2010 pursuant to RSA 32:15III and to authorize the Moderator to appoint budget committee members to serve until the annual meeting of March 2010, pursuant to RSA 32:15III.

Moved by Dave Liberatore, and seconded by Steve Bluhm.

Wes deSousa moved to Table, seconded by Steve Randall.

MOTION TO TABLE PASSED. Division of House Yes 64 No 15.

ARTICLE 12: To see if the Town will vote to discontinue and relinquish all interest therein a 0.058 mile Class V Road known as Old Rt. 3B, located off of Concord Road. (Majority vote required for adoption.)

Michael Summerset explained this is a short piece of Route 3B that was cut off when the highway came through, it is effectively a long driveway. There is no advantage to the Town to keep this road. There will be an agreement with the two homeowners that they will assume all responsibility and it will become a private road.

Paul Wilson asked who will own it and will they pay taxes on it?

Debra Shepard responded that the land of the road is split up between the two abutters and they would pay taxes on it. **ARTICLE PASSED.**

ARTICLE 13: To transact any other business that may legally come before this meeting.

Richard Maher stated that he has been a Planning Board member for some time, and through the Lakes Region Planning Commission a questionnaire was sent to residents of Northfield. The results indicated that residents want to protect the Aquifer and are also interested in completing Exit 19. We need to increase the tax base in the town – perhaps we can go after some of the Federal Stimulus money. He would like to see some organized development to bring some industry to town and increase our tax base.

Steve Bluhm advised we submitted requests for approximately \$500,000 in stimulus funds. We could not put in request funds for Exit 19 because it is a State road.

Dave Coulter asked everyone to continue to recycle. He thanked Peg Shepard and Mike Summersett for their work.

Dave Liberatore commended the Highway Department for doing a great job in a tough winter. He also extended thanks for the professionalism of our Fire and Police departments in the way they conduct their business. He thanked the Selectmen, Town Officials and Committee members for a job well done.

Moderator Scott McGuffin presented Steve Randall with a Certificate of Appreciation for his fifteen years of service, 1994-2009, on the Budget Committee and Capital Improvement Program Committee.

Moderator also read Certificate of Appreciation to be presented later to Glen Brown for his twenty years of service, 1988-2009, as Selectman and on Boards and Committees including Budget Committee, Capital Improvement Program Committee, Planning Board, Zoning Board and Post Office Study Committee.

Cindy Caveney thanked Stephanie Giovannucci for doing a great job on the Town Report. Additional thanks to the Highway Department, Police Department, staff at the Pines Community Center, the Friendship Grange, Selectmen, Town Hall employees and the many volunteers for their assistance and teamwork on the four elections held during 2008.

Bill Rand asked if there was any information regarding the relocation of the Northfield Post Office.

Steve Bluhm replied we have not received any news as to whether we will be getting another Post Office.

On behalf of the Budget Committee, Leif Martinson thanked Town Administrator Glen Smith for his outstanding support during the budget process this year.

Steve Bluhm thanked Moderator Scott McGuffin for his service.

Meeting adjourned at 10:52 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cindy L. Caveney, Town Clerk.