



Reconnecting Northfield

This year the Town of Northfield will celebrate its 350th year. Established in 1673, the Town has had a long history of continuous settle-

ment first by native people along the East and West banks, the tributaries and the upland forests along the Connecticut River. The anniversary theme and logo, Re-Connecting Northfield, refers in one sense to the 21st Century project of Friends of Schell Bridge to re-establish Schell Bridge as a connector between East and West. The design of the logo is a rendering of the gothic-style Schell Bridge entries on the East and West sides of the river. While the new Schell Bridge will not (as hoped) be finished by the anniversary celebration, Friends of Schell Bridge hopes that a new crossing will be uppermost in everyone's minds as we celebrate this year.

— Sue Ross



Thanks to Jerry

Pictured is Jerry Wagener with his scale model of the old and new bridges joined. Jerry, along with others, started the Friends of Schell Bridge in 2004. He has retired from the Board of Directors but will continue as Treasurer. Thanks to Jerry for his untiring commitment to the cause and the organization.



Newsletter - Winter 2023

Annual Meeting Draws Crowd to The Brewery

NORTHFIELD — The theme of “Reconnecting Northfield” resonated with friends and supporters who turned out for the Friends of Schell Bridge 2022 Annual Meeting on Dec. 10, 2022, at The Brewery at Four Star Farms. A buffet of breakfast items helped make the pre-holiday event as festive as it was informational. Approximately 50 people attended.



Chairwoman Barbara Richardson reviewed the status of the proposed pedestrian and bicycle bridge across the Connecticut River linking East and West Northfield and an interstate trail system and the role of Mass. Department of Transportation in the project.

Treasurer Jerry Wagener was feted for his longstanding service, since 2004, as he stepped down from the board. He will continue in his role as Treasurer for the organization. Wagener brought with him the scale model he made of the proposed replacement bridge. The model will be the centerpiece of the group's float to be pulled on a trailer in the town's upcoming 350th anniversary parade set for Sept. 30.

Three members were voted to the Board of Directors: Elizabeth Bonney, Barbara Richardson and Jean Wagener.

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New Board Members



Elizabeth Bonney

Currently working for Amerian Benefits Group Managing Information Systems. Elizabeth enjoys bike-riding and to date has completed three century rides and is looking forward to riding over the Schell Bridge and beyond.



Christine Harris

Chris, recently retired as an editor and staff writer for the Greenfield Recorder, grew up in Northfield and remembers riding her single-speed American bicycle across Schell Bridge to visit classmates in West Northfield.



David Kelly

With a background in industrial technology and educational technology, David's background includes research, computer training and, most recently as a technical writer at an international energy management company. (David's grandfather was the family doctor in Montague.)



Debby Wiesen Kelly

After five years in business research, Debby moved to the nonprofit sector and served as Vice President at the New England Center and Home for Veterans, a Director of Adult Education and Workforce Initiatives in Chinatown, and a Senior Program Coordinator at Bunker Hill Community College.

Friends of Schell Bridge remains dedicated to the goal of a new pedestrian/bike pathway across the CT River and will remain proactive while the Town, the Advisory Committee, MassDOT, and state representatives develop ways to move forward. Members, near and far, help to keep us engaged, enthusiastic, and committed. Your continued support is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

— Barbara Richardson



State Sen. Jo Comerford, D-Northampton, shared her efforts to make the dream of a new Schell Bridge — officially known as the Pauchaug-Schell Bridge Greenway — come true, and congratulated the Friends on the progress achieved thus far. “Your advocacy has been unmatched,” Comerford told those gathered at The Brewery. She noted that the efforts of the Friends have made elected legislators including U.S. Sen. Ed Markey and Congressman Jim McGovern advocate at all levels on behalf of the new bridge. Comerford said she considers the bridge to be a key response to regional problems that Franklin County faces by increasing tourism and promoting economic development in the region. Comerford took questions following her presentation.

— Christine Harris

Our New Massachusetts Representatives

Governor Maura Healey

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Bridge Project Takes Funding Hit

The Recorder

Published, January 17, 2023

Of course the news about Schell Bridge not receiving a RURAL grant is hugely disappointing, after the tremendous participation of Northfield residents in the planning process not to mention the decades of efforts by the Friends of Schell Bridge on behalf of the river crossing, but I feel sure this project will continue. The combined history and practical purpose of this bridge makes it a compelling resource to pursue. We hope to meet soon with both local and state people who can help us assess our options. We are tremendously grateful to Sen. Comerford for her support and leadership. We should remember that the bidding process for this project was held at the crux of unprecedented factors: pandemic supply chain and labor issues, inflation due to pandemic and international war disruptions, and others. We are eager to figure out the next best steps to help this project come to reality.

For background I am a member of the Northfield Town Advisory Committee on Schell Bridge and, while I will not continue in this role into the future, I have been the chair of that group.

— Judy Wagner

Town officials, bridge advocates remain hopeful other grant opportunities will arise

By JULIAN MENDOZA
Staff Writer



NORTHFIELD — Replacement of the Schell Bridge will not be funded under the 2022 Rural Surface Transportation federal grant program, a major blow to the prospective project announced by the office of state Sen. Jo Comerford last Wednesday.

“It’s disappointing. This is a grant we worked hard on to try and get for this bridge,” Selectboard member Alex Meisner said. “That’s just part of the grant game. Sometimes, you just lose.”

The proposed project consists of the complete replacement of Schell Bridge, which carries East Northfield Road

RECORDER FILE PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ
Looking downstream to the Schell Bridge over the Connecticut River in Northfield.

over the Connecticut River and has been closed since 1985 because it deteriorated beyond being safe to use. The existing bridge will be replaced with a pedestrian and bicycle bridge. Construction has been estimated to take up to three years once work begins.

The state Department of

Transportation’s plans to reconstruct the bridge were put on pause in February, however, when bids came in almost twice as high as expected. Carrie Lavallee, deputy administrator and chief engineer with MassDOT’s Highway Division,

Bridge

FROM A1

sent a letter to Northfield Town Administrator Andrea Llamas earlier this month explaining construction bids were too expensive at the time. The department’s estimated construction cost was approximately \$25 million and the lowest bid received was slightly more than \$40 million. Other bids were as high as more than \$50 million.

The Rural Surface Transportation grant program is intended “to help communities around the United States complete transportation projects that will increase connectivity, improve safety and reliability, support regional economic growth, and improve the quality of life for people living in rural areas,” according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. The department announced \$273.9 million in grant funding across 12 transportation infrastructure projects in rural areas nationwide on Dec. 21.

Northfield does not have the money to shoulder such an expense without grant funding, Meisner said. He voiced optimism, however, that other grant opportunities could arise.

“There’s always a chance for things to come up. Sometimes, it’s as simple as our town administrator getting an email,” he said. “All we can do at the moment is just keep (advocacy) active and keep it alive.”

Meisner voiced gratitude that the Selectboard and others advocating for the project “have all been on the same team working toward this goal of getting the bridge built.” Like Meisner, these residents stressed a commitment toward maintaining the course.

“Of course, the news about Schell Bridge not receiving a (Rural Surface Transportation) grant is hugely disappointing after the tremendous participation of Northfield residents in the planning process. I don’t mention the decades of efforts by the Friends of Schell Bridge on behalf of the river

crossing, but I feel sure this project will continue,” Judy Wagner, a member of the Schell Bridge Advisory Committee, wrote in an email. “The combined history and practical purpose of this bridge makes it a compelling resource to pursue.”

“We look forward to meeting with town officials, the town Advisory Committee, MassDOT and state representatives to find a way forward,” Barbara Richardson, who sits on the board of directors for the Friends of Schell Bridge, wrote in an email.

“The town is lucky to have citizens like the Friends of Schell Bridge who long ago created a vision and stayed engaged,” Selectboard Chair Barbara “Boe” Jacque wrote in an email, stressing that “it’s important to take the long view” when considering the “very disappointing” news. “This is a shovel-ready project and we are keeping our Schell Bridge Advisory Committee active.”
Reach Julian Mendoza at 413-330-4231 or jmendoza@recorder.com.

SEE BRIDGE A8



Deterioration of the Schell Bridge

The bridge construction start was in 1901 and completion was in 1903. The town abandoned use of the bridge for structural safety concerns in 1985. These photos were taken in 2014.

TOP LEFT: Heavily corroded steel structure

TOP RIGHT: Overgrown vegetation rotting the bridge surface

BOTTOM LEFT: The underside of the bridge showing gaps in the steel structure

BOTTOM RIGHT: Weathered stone abutment detail

— Photography by Steve Roberto