

**Town of Plainfield, Vermont
Special Select Board Meeting
December 3, 2020
Remote-Only Meeting Via Zoom
Approved Minutes**

Electronic Participants: Tammy Farnham (select board member), Jim Volz (select board member), Sasha Thayer (select board member - chair), Mike Nolan (Road Foreman), Stephanie Smith (Vermont Emergency Management - FEMA grant coordinator), Alice Merrill (community member and town grant writer), George Springston (community member), Grace Vinson (Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission), Linda Wells (Town Clerk and Treasurer), Betsy Zeigler (community member), Chris Martin (Marshfield select board member)

The meeting began at 8:04 am.

Approval of/changes to agenda:

No changes.

Public Comment:

No public comment.

Sidewalk Snow Plowing Contract:

Linda stated that Kevin Hudson provided an estimate of \$300/storm, in the instance of a bid storm Kevin charges \$100/hour. Linda iterated that Kevin has been a reliable contractor for the past several years.

Jim moved to approve the contract, with a unanimous approval of the select board.

Tammy mentioned outlining the expectations for vendors. Sasha suggested looking at the bid Kevin sent to the town to formulate a contract and provide some clarity for payment. Sasha recommended to revisit this on December 14th.

Health Insurance Updates:

The select board received information on MVP & BCBS coverage plans from the Vermont League. Linda suggested to stay with BCBS, despite the increase of 11%, employees are currently paying 7% but it will be increased to 10%, which will increase the towns portion by 7%. Linda requested for a decision made by the next regular meeting so that everything can be submitted by year end. The plan is CDHP Gold, which is under the Vermont Select Plans. Last year the town contributed 50% upfront. Linda inquired with MVP regarding Medicare supplemental, as 4 employees are eligible. HRA accounts have been created for employees, and Linda is uncertain on whether that would be transferrable to MVP. Sasha iterated that we have familiarity with BCBS, and it would be time consuming to switch over to MVP and get better acquainted with the plan and utilizing it to its fullest potential. Tammy mentioned that neither one of the plans offered substantial change or savings. This topic will be further discussed on December 8^h.

Budget Considerations for 2021/2022 and what an 11% increase for health insurance would look like on a budget consideration. Linda indicated that the potential 9% increase in education taxes will be a huge hit for tax payers, and suggested reducing some of the reserve funds to level fund the budget. Tammy stated that reserves are helpful in cushioning and fears that decreasing those funds will create a tax burden down the road. Sasha requested for Linda to outline the various reserve funds and what some annual allocations are and the final balance, and reconvene on the next budget meeting scheduled for December 8th.

Website Updates:

Jim indicated that it appears updates were made to the Town Clerk page. Linda requested for the updates to be made on the front page. Jim suggested for an “Announcements from Town Clerk” section to be made for these updates to be clear and organized. Sasha iterated the importance of using the material provided by committees and the town office rather than rewriting material to ensure it is correct. Jim said that he would explore this further with Kathy. Linda has directly contacted Kathy, and she has expressed concern for punctuality and accuracy. Jim said that he would request Kathy to post exactly what Linda requests, as she is currently changing/deleting the language provided. If changes are made to the material Linda provided, changes should be sent back to Linda for approval prior to posting on the website. Sasha requested for the back and forth to be kept to a minimum. Jim agreed and said that he would talk with Kathy regarding these concerns.

Town Meeting Logistics:

Town meeting will look a lot differently this coming year and it does not seem feasible to have the meeting at the Town Hall, but instead will require Australian ballots. Linda will forward the email from the Vermont League to the select board regarding the logistics. Bobby (the Town Clerk for Marshfield) reached out to Linda regarding absentee balloting and the possibility of meeting with the Marshfield select board pertaining to the logistics of Town Meeting (due to the school system). Despite the use of the Australian ballot, informational meetings will need to be held – Tammy suggested to hold several meetings and post them for people to watch them if they are unable to attend. This will be further discussed on December 14th to allow for input from community members and proper warranting.

Brook Road Bridge Project:

The town’s share- cost portion of the funding would be 25%. Tammy inquired about moving forward, as there are two significant projects underway. The deadline for the FEMA grant is January 6th. \$1.4 million-dollar project Stephanie indicated that funding is distributed annually so it would be something that the town could apply for down the road and table the project for now. Stephanie reminded that FEMA takes a while to distribute funding, so it likely would take a year after applying to receive funding. There are no concrete opportunities for match, Grace mentioned that tabling the project for now would allow time to search for match funding. 5% would be allocated for management costs for managing the grants, RFP’s, or hire out a project manager (approx. \$70,000), this 5% would be covered 100% by FEMA. Stephanie indicated that construction costs tend to go up, so that might be a pitfall of delaying the project. Susan asked about how much it costs the town when the road gets washed out – Stephanie said that if the town meets the threshold then FEMA pays 75% of the project costs to repair the project in-kind, if the down does not meet the thresholds then the town is responsible for 100%. George and

Susan mentioned their concern about the washout around the bridge and the continuous degrading of the land around the bridge. George requested for the town to keep this project as a “high-priority”. Susan enquired about bonding for the project and how long it would take for the project to be paid off, terms can be upward of 25 years at a fixed rate, bonds have not yet been considered for this project. Susan asked about the liability from the town in the instance of a calamity, Sasha indicated that in the instance of a natural disaster the town may not be liable. There are limited resources of the town and Tammy added that she doesn’t know how the town could be held liable for a natural disaster. Betsy requested for this project not to be completed at the same time as the route-2 intersection project. Sasha indicated that the project might be more feasible with the possibility of a bond, as it will not be a huge upfront cost. Tammy reminded that the town does not have any match funding, and the grant comes up annually which might allow more time to find match funding and pursue the grant at a later timeframe to ensure the timeframe does not interfere with the RT-2 & pedestrian bridge project so that the projects are staggered. Stephanie stated that the amount of funding may fluctuate from year-to-year and the grant is extremely competitive so it is not guaranteed. She said that it will be easier to receive funding when the “pot of funding” is larger. Alice asked about looking into bonding and what the role of Grace would be in finding funding and getting answers, Grace replied that she would look into various possibilities and get them back to the town in the next few weeks. Susan enquired about how the town would be funding the pedestrian bridge project and the RT-2 intersection project. Tammy stated that the town has money set aside for funding on the pedestrian bridge project, but the final cost is still unknown. The cost to the town for the RT-2 project is for the utilities under RT-2, the current cost is anticipated to be \$200,000-250,000 and the town will pursue grants to help cover funding for those costs. Betsy requested for Grace to help the town think strategically about how to make the three upcoming projects affordable for the town. Alice suggested for the town to invite Grace back once she has done some research on funding to ensure the project keeps moving along. Tammy suggested to not move forward with grant application, as prolonging the project will not jeopardize funding and will help to stagger upcoming projects for the town of Plainfield.

Tammy moved to not proceed with the FEMA grants for this year’s grant process for the Brook Road Bridge project.

Sasha changed Tammy’s motion include not proceed with the FEMA grants for this year’s grant process for the Brook Road Bridge project **today** with an approval from Tammy & Jim. Sasha chose to abstain.

Jim added that the town will not find out if they have received funding until August. Stephanie suggested that if there is potential for moving forward with the grant project then Alice should start the grant process. Tammy added that working on 3 projects does not seem realistic and is premature. Jim suggested applying for the grant and at town meeting voting on the project, Tammy stated that it might make sense to vote at town meeting, then proceed with the grant the following year. Stephanie assured that it would be unlikely for the grant to change drastically. Sasha reminded that the hazard of the bridge continues. Tammy added that doing next year’s grant seems much more feasible to figure out financing for the project and help to stagger the current projects. Alice suggested allowing her to acquaint herself with the FEMA grant software, which may help to ease the process. Tammy reminded that proceeding with the grant before

putting this before voters spends town money before getting the approval from the voters. This will be further discussed on December 14th.

Jim moved to authorize Alice to get familiar with the FEMA software in order to move forward with the grant, with an approval from Jim & Sasha. Tammy opposed.

Road Crew Mutual Aid:

Chris from the Marshfield select board joined the meeting to talk about a mutual aid scenario for the instance for employees needing to quarantine. Chris has also talked to the Cabot select board to see if it was something that they were interested in and intend to hold a meeting regarding a mutual aid on Monday December 3rd at 7am at the Cabot Town Garage (Walden will also be invited). Mike stated that he may be unable to attend in person due to quarantine. Chris stated that if it snows the meeting will be rescheduled. Tammy thanked Chris for being proactive. Chris stated that Marshfield and Plainfield have a good working relationship. Tammy asked about sub-drivers if needed, Chris mentioned that Marshfield has a sub-driver (retired road foreman – Dan) that might be willing to help out in Plainfield. Sasha volunteered to attend the meeting at the Cabot Town Garage.

Chris mentioned Town Meeting and school voting via ballot. Chris suggested to proceed with a meeting including Plainfield & Marshfield select boards to finalize the logistics. Tammy suggested to warrant a special meeting to join the Marshfield Select Board meeting on Tuesday December 15th (time TBD) to discuss further. Chris will ask Bobby to send the details that Marshfield has discussed to bring the Plainfield select board up to speed, and discuss at the December 14th meeting.

Road Crew Update:

Tammy enquired about why an employee is quarantining as she was unaware. Tammy urged communicating these things to the select board. Mike stated that another employee got out of quarantine yesterday. Sasha said that she was aware of both situations but did not communicate the news to the rest of the select board. Tammy requested to talk about this further in executive session as she is very concerned about not being aware of employees quarantining. Tammy stated that it's difficult for the select board to manage problems if select board members are unaware of problems at hand. Tammy requested to be aware of employees who are quarantining, and if Sasha is being notified then Tammy would like the remaining select board members to be aware of the situation. Jim stated that he does not believe that the select board needs to be involved unless it becomes a problem. Tammy iterated that she and the remaining select board should be proactive, and being aware of these circumstances is extremely important. Jim stated Linda needs to be aware that if one person has a conversation with her that it should not be assumed that the remaining select board members are aware. Sasha stated that she does her best to vet her conversations with Linda and pass along the important information. Mike stated that it takes three guys to manage a foot of snow, two employees can manage the snow if it is less than a foot. Sasha stated that she will be proactive in positing on FPF & FB requesting for people to do their errands before the storm, as it may take longer to clear the roads throughout the storm. Sasha mentioned that she can do this for the road crew going forward if needed (for big storms, equipment breakdowns, etc.) and make the select board aware of these circumstances so that everyone is aware of these broad issues.

Upcoming Meetings:

December 8 – Budget Meeting:

Health Insurance Updates & Decision

Litigation – Executive Session (schedule in accordance to attorney)

December 14th:

Contracts for Town Vendors i.e.: Sidewalk Snow Plowing, Webmaster

Town Meeting Logistics

Brook Road Bridge Project Grant

December 15 – Special Meeting w/ Marshfield:

Mutual Aid

Town Meeting – Voting

December 16 – Budget Meeting:

December 28th:

No Select Board meeting due to Christmas

January 25th:

Establish date for Town Plan hearing

Adjourn:

Jim moved to adjourn at 11:15 am, with a unanimous approval of the Select Board.