

Town of Plainfield, Vermont
Town Meeting Minutes
March 7 and April 15, 2023

Town Moderator Donny Osman called the meeting to order at 10:03 am on March 7, 2023.

Moderator Osman reminded attendees that the polls were open. Moderator Osman then recognized Select Board Chair Jim Volz.

Chairman Volz rose and addressed the meeting, explaining that this meeting had not been properly warned and would therefore need to be rescheduled to a later date. He further explained that at the February 22, 2023 Select Board meeting Town Clerk Robin Miller had informed the Select Board of problems putting together the Town Report and had stated that the report would go out on February 27, 2023. Chairman Volz noted that the reports had gone out on that date and at that time the Select Board hadn't realized that the reports would not be delivered to residents in time for Town Meeting. He shared that the Town Report is available on the Town website.

Chairman Volz acknowledged retired Town Clerk Linda Wells for her 27 years of service. He then acknowledged Select Board member Sasha Thayer for her service on the Select Board over the past six years as she has decided not to run again. He expressed appreciation for Thayer's help putting together and posting meeting agendas and researching issues important to the Town. He presented Thayer with a gift certificate to Sarducci's Restaurant and a flower arrangement, to which meeting participants responded with applause.

Peter Youngbaer made a motion that attendees properly thank Linda Wells with a round of applause. Chairman Volz agreed and meeting participants offered a standing ovation in honor of Wells' service to the Town. Wells stated her appreciation.

Andrea Gould made a motion to recognize past Moderator Charlie Barasch for 40 years of service as Town Moderator. Meeting participants offered Barasch a standing ovation.

Sasha Thayer explained that the Select Board will research how the rescheduling of Town Meeting will affect the ballots. She stated that ballots already cast will not be thrown away. She further clarified that the Town Meeting had been warned on time but that the statute stating the Town Report needed to be mailed out ten days prior to Town Meeting had not been met.

The motion was made Linda Wells, and seconded, that the Town Meeting for the Town of Plainfield and all articles on the Town Meeting warning, including the election of town
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officers, be adjourned from March 7, 2023 to April 25, 2023 at 9 am and that all articles be voted on by Australian ballot. Debra Stoleroff asked on what day of the week April 25, 2023 falls and expressed concern about community member's ability to attend the rescheduled Town Meeting if they will need to take time off from work. Sasha Thayer responded that the motion included taking up all items by Australian ballot.

The motion was made by Sasha Thayer, and seconded, to amend the motion to adjourn the meeting to April 18, 2023 at 9 am rather than April 25, 2023. Michael Billingsley noted that April 18, 2023 is a Tuesday. Betsy Zeigler stated that more people could probably attend Town Meeting if it were held on a Saturday, noting that many towns in Vermont are currently changing their Town Meeting to a Saturday. Peter Youngbaer asked if the portion of the motion regarding the use of Australian ballot for all items is being done under the temporary legislation allowing this during the pandemic and asked for clarification on the legality of that part of the motion. Sasha Thayer responded that the state law currently reads that there can't be a switch to all future meetings being by Australian ballot except at an in-person Town Meeting. She clarified that there was legislation passed in January 2023 allowing Town Meeting use of Australian ballot until January 2024. Jamie Spector asked for clarification on the original motion and stated her support for Town Meeting being held on a Saturday and with a Zoom option for greater participation. Moderator Osman reminded participants that the discussion was currently to address the amendment proposing a change from April 25, 2023 to April 18, 2023. Owen Bradley asked for clarification about whether the original motion had included mention of Australian ballot. Moderator Osman responded that the original motion did address the change to voting by Australian ballot. Bradley then asked for clarification about who is responsible for the meeting not being able to be held today. Moderator Osman ruled the question out of order. Bradley asked if Charlie Barasch was going to read a poem at today's meeting and requested that respectful language be used regarding deafness as a disability. Moderator Osman encouraged discussion to remain focused on the amendment to the motion.

The motion was made by Debra Stoleroff, and seconded, to amend the amendment to state that the Town Meeting for the Town of Plainfield and all articles from the Town Meeting warning, including the election of Town Officers, be adjourned until April 15, 2023 and that the meeting be held in-person. Steve Farnham asked if the amendment to the amendment strikes the part of the original motion that stated voting will be by Australian ballot. Moderator Osman stated his belief that it does. Michael Billingsley stated that he didn't think it was legal to vote on a switch to Australian ballot since the issue hadn't been warned.

Moderator Osman called for a vote on the amendment to the amendment. **The motion to amend the amendment was approved.**

There followed a brief discussion among participants and Moderator Osman on the rules of parliamentary procedure.

Moderator Osman called for a vote on the amendment as amended to state the Town of Plainfield and all its articles on the Town Meeting warning, including the election of Town Officers, be adjourned from March 7, 2023 to April 15, 2023 at 9 am and that meeting be an in-person meeting. **The motion to amend the original motion was approved.**

Moderator Osman called for a vote on the original motion to state that the Town Meeting for the Town of Plainfield and all the articles on the Town Meeting warning, including the election of Town Officers, be adjourned from March 7, 2023 to April 15, 2023 at 9 am and that be an in-person meeting. Moderator Osman opened the floor to discussion. Peter Youngbaer asked if the Town Hall will be available on April 15th. Keith Swann of the Friends of the Town Hall Opera House responded that the building would be available that day. Debra Stoleroff asked if a Zoom option for Town Meeting could be discussed at this time. Moderator Osman ruled the question out of order.

The motion to adjourn Town Meeting to April 15, 2023 at 9 am in-person was approved at 10:26 am.

Town Meeting reconvened on April 15, 2023.

Town Moderator Donny Osman called the meeting to order at 9:01 am.

Moderator Osman introduced himself as new Town Moderator and acknowledged his intention to remain impartial and to facilitate the will of the group. He reminded attendees to state their town of residence and their full name when addressing the meeting. He also reminded attendees that should he rule a comment out of order that this could be challenged by a majority vote.

Moderator Osman greeted State Legislators Senator Andrew Perchlik and Representative Marc Mihaly. Hearing no objections from the floor, Moderator Osman recognized the senator and representative.

Representative Mihaly of the House Appropriations Committee spoke regarding bills before the House of Representatives. He spoke in support of the Paid Family Leave Bill, Affordable Heat Act, and shared that the House passed a bill that provides universal school meals.

Senator Perchlik of the Senate Appropriations Committee and Transportation Committee spoke about childcare and climate issues, the deficit in the transportation fund and how this may impact drivers of electric vehicles, noted that the Senate Appropriations Committee still has

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funding available that will likely be put toward one time projects, offered assistance to the Select Board and residents regarding any issues that may arise related to the Rt. 2 paving project, and expressed his support for the childcare bill and Affordable Heat Act.

Moderator Osman recognized Sasha Thayer who thanked the legislative delegation. She shared that the legislature passed a \$3 million appropriation to the Agency of Administration for grants to municipalities for technical assistance for which Plainfield is pre-approved.

Moderator Osman thanked Charlie Barasch for over four decades of service as Town Moderator and welcomed Barasch to address the meeting. In his usual Town Meeting tradition, Barasch read a poem to start the meeting. He received a standing ovation when he read a poem of his own entitled *Early Spring in Vermont*.

*There's only one thing to do when your car sinks to its axles in Vermont
Get out
Close the door
Kneel down and start eating
You will swallow bird seeds, mushroom spores, eggs of millipedes and ladybugs
Soon, Spring will crawl around inside you
Then, get on your bicycle*

Moderator Osman began consideration of the items on the Warning.

Article 1: To elect all necessary officers for the ensuing year: Town Clerk, Treasurer, Selectboard, Lister, Auditor, Collector of Delinquent Taxes, Cemetery Commissioner, and School Director.

Moderator Osman noted that the polls were open until 7 pm.

Charlie Cogbill raised a parliamentary inquiry. He noted the position of Town Moderator was not included on the Australian ballot and asked how the Town Moderator will be elected. Moderator Osman requested Select Board member Sasha Thayer address the inquiry. She stated that Moderator Osman remains the Town Moderator until polls close and that he serves until a successor is elected. She suggested that voters can write-in their vote for Town Moderator on the ballot.

Moderator Osman addressed a question from Ann Van Covering. He stated that the Australian ballot for Town Officers being voted on this day until 7 pm is the same ballot that had been available since March 7, 2023.

Article 2: Shall the Town vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$6,833.06 for the support of Rural Community Transportation Inc. to provide services to residents of the Town of Plainfield?

- **Steve Farnham made a motion to approve Article 2. Bob Atchinson seconded the motion.** There was no discussion. **The motion was approved.**

Article 3: Shall the Town of Plainfield appropriate the sum of \$1,499.94 as its share of the eleventh year cost of commuter bus service along Route 2 with service into Plainfield. This appropriation funds a portion of the total cost of service which will also be supported by appropriations from other towns, State and Federal funds, and passenger fares?

- **Janna Osman made a motion to approve Article 3. Tim Phillips seconded the motion.** Ann Van Covering stated that the noon bus has been cancelled and asked if the Town of Plainfield has any say in this decision. Bob Atchinson, who serves on the Transportation Advisory Council for the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission as an appointee from the Town, stated that Green Mountain Transportation (GMT) has on-demand service and explained that they also plan to offer Uber-like service with a fleet of electric vehicles. Van Covering stated that this service is only available within certain parameters that don't apply to all. Atchinson stated that he will pass on her feedback. Steven Farnham requested that the Town send a memo to GMT requesting noon service to Plainfield be reinstated. **The motion was approved.**

Article 4: Shall the Town voters authorize expenditures for not-for-profit service agencies in the amount of \$14,461.00 as recommended by the appointed Social Concerns Committee?

- **Mary Neibling made a motion to approve Article 4. John Monahan seconded the motion.** Genese Grill asked why Big Heavy World was rejected from consideration for funds and suggested that art is a social concern. Gail Falk, member of the Social Concerns Committee, responded that the fund is to address local needs of people in need and favors organizations that specifically serve Plainfield residents. She noted that the request was from a Burlington organization and further, that arts had not previously been included in consideration for Social Concerns funding. Jan Waterman thanked the Social Concerns Committee. **The motion was approved.**

Article 5: Shall the Town voters authorize an appropriation of \$45,000.00 to the Cutler Memorial Library to pay for the librarian, a library assistant, and the purchase of materials and services, including those to make the library accessible to the community?

- **Steven Farnham made a motion to approve Article 5. Grace Worcester seconded the motion.** Genese Grill asked the attendees to allow Angela Ogle to speak. Hearing no objections Moderator Osman invited Angela Ogle to address the meeting. Ogle, Director of Cutler Memorial Library for the past two and half years, invited community members to visit the library and to connect with her to discuss ideas for the library. Glenda Bissex spoke in support of appropriating \$45,000 to the library and thanked Ogle and all who support the library. **The motion was approved.**

Article 6: Shall the Town approve \$265,014.00 for the operation of the Water Department for the period of July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024?

- **John Monahan made a motion to approve Article 6. Tim Phillips seconded the motion. Steven Farnham made a motion to amend the article to include “to be paid for by the users of the system”. Tim Philips seconded the motion to amend.** Bram Towbin suggested that in the future the cost of the Town water system may exceed what is being paid by the users of the system. Farnham stated that people with septic systems have their own systems to maintain. Glenda Bissex noted that the Town water system benefits all of us who use facilities in the village. **The motion to amend was approved. The motion was approved.**

Article 7: Shall the Town approve \$380,374.00 for the operation of the Wastewater Department for the period of July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024?

- **Tim Phillips made a motion to approve Article 7. Bob Rosenfeld seconded the motion. Tim Philips, Water/Wastewater Commissioner, made a motion to amend the article to include “to be paid for by the users of the system”. Steven Farnham seconded the motion to amend.** Strat Douthat asked how many users are on the Water/Wastewater system. Tim Phillips responded that there are approximately 340 wastewater and 400 water users but noted that accounts are based on allocations. Sasha Thayer stated that the Town Clerks Office, Fire Department, and Town Hall are all on the Town water system. Bob Atchinson advocated for payment adjustments for users of water saving devices. Bram Towbin reiterated his concern that the users of the water system may not be able to support potential future repairs to the water system. Steven Farnham noted that services provided by Town buildings are paid for by taxes. Alice Sky asked if the Water/Wastewater payment can be based on usage. Sasha Thayer stated that there is a Water/Wastewater Commission which holds regular warned meetings where these concerns can be addressed and encouraged residents to contact the Water/Wastewater Commission. Tim Philips stated he would be available to discuss concerns with people after the meeting. **Bob Atchinson made a motion to call the question. The motion to**

call the question was approved. The motion to amend was approved. The motion was approved.

Article 8: Shall the Town approve \$1,223,471.90 to operate the Administrative Operations, Fire and Rescue Department, and Highway Department of the Town of Plainfield for the period of July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024?

- **Steven Farnham made a motion to approve Article 8. Tim Phillips seconded the motion.** Andy Robinson thanked Town Clerk/Treasurer Robin Miller, Assistant Town Clerk Carol Smith, and the Select Board for their work putting the Town budget together. Michael Billingsley acknowledged Bram Towbin was appointed Road Commissioner and thanked him. Steven Farnham noted that the appropriation of this money helps pay for water/wastewater to the facilities mentioned in the article. **The motion was approved.**

Article 9: Shall the Town of Plainfield authorize the Select Board to apply any surplus from the current fiscal year to reduce Taxes in the next fiscal year?

- **Sasha Thayer made a motion to approve Article 9. Tim Phillips seconded the motion.** There was no discussion. **The motion was approved.**

Article 10: Shall the Town vote to accept the provisions of public statutes relating to the collection of taxes by the Town Treasurer, (VSA 32 Section 4791) and vote to collect municipal taxes thirty days from mailing and not prior to August 16, 2023 and collect taxes on November 15, 2023 and February 07, 2024, collecting half of the total school taxes on each of those dates?

- **Tim Phillips made a motion to approve Article 10. Bob Atchinson seconded the motion.** There was no discussion. **The motion was approved.**

Other Business:

Paula Emery asked for an update on the ARPA Committee's work and an explanation of what ARPA is. Select Board member Sasha Thayer stated that the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) report is on the Town website. She shared that the Town had been authorized to allocate approximately \$360,000 in ARPA funds and stated that there have been two allocations that have been approved and paid, one to CVFiber and one to purchase land to protect the water system. Riley Carlson, Select Board member, stated that the Select Board has also approved \$3,000 for the Plainfield Community Trust and \$30,300 for the Cutler Memorial Library. He shared that it's the Select Board's intention to also use ARPA funds toward the Town match for the Brook Rd. Bridge 21 replacement project should the Town receive the FEMA grant that was applied for. Emery asked who sits on the ARPA Committee and how often they meet. Thayer

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shared that the ARPA Committee, which is no longer meeting as they've already made their report to the Select Board, was comprised of George Cushing, Jane Bradley, and Arion Thiboumery. She also shared that the ARPA Committee will be on the agenda for a future Select Board meeting.

Ann Van Covering spoke on behalf of the Plainfield Community Trust, stating that the trust is considering establishing a nonprofit to support individuals and entities that need assistance with applying for grant funding.

Alice Merrill extended a welcome to new Town Clerk and Treasurer Robin Miller.

Mary Neibling reminded attendees of the pies for sale at the back of the room.

Glenda Bissex asked for clarification about the roads and noted that it was not included in the Town Report. Sasha Thayer explained that Bram Towbin has been appointed Road Commissioner. Bram Towbin explained that the Road Commissioner's responsibilities include administrative tasks related to the Town roads and shared that they have applied for three structures grants to address two bridges on Brook Rd. and two culverts on East Hill Rd. He explained that the Road Foreman, Michael Bingham, maintains the roads. Towbin stated that his email will be posted on the Town website and encouraged residents to email him with any concerns. Steven Farnham acknowledged that the road crew did an excellent job this year.

Bob Atchinson spoke as Plainfield Energy Coordinator, sharing that he is available as a resource for consultation regarding energy saving information. He acknowledged the climate emergency and noted that conservation and weatherization are effective ways for individuals to have a positive impact. He shared information about the many resources available to residents through Plainfield Energy Management. He encouraged people to visit the energy table display at this meeting for more information.

Keith Swann of the Friends of the Town Hall Opera House pointed out that this is the first Town Meeting at the Town Hall Opera House in four years. He shared that there is a matching grant available from the Vermont Arts Council which could help fund needed audio and video equipment. He noted that this meeting is streaming live on YouTube with borrowed equipment. He shared that an assisted listening system is also needed. He explained that \$7,600 would be the Town match if the grant is approved and asked if this could go to a vote, noting that this expense is not in the current Town budget. Moderator Osman stated that this would have had to have been warned. Sasha Thayer stated it also could have been amended under Article 8, but that now the issue can be brought to the Select Board to see if there are monies available. Thayer thanked the Friends of the Town Hall Opera House. Moderator Osman noted that the Town Hall Opera House has changed its name to Plainfield Arts.

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Debra Stoleroff asked about the possibility of holding future Town Meetings on the Sunday afternoon after Town Meeting Day. She stated that Marshfield has made that decision so that more residents can attend. She requested that this topic be warned for next year's meeting.

Paula Emery requested that committee reports be included in Town Meeting next year. She also requested Green Up Day information. Becky Atchinson shared that Green Up Day is May 6, 2023. She shared that she will post more information regarding availability of Green Up bags and other pertinent information on Front Porch Forum and the Plainfield People Facebook page and that people may also call her for more information. She noted that the Conservation Commission sponsors Green Up Day and requested volunteers to help on Green Up Day.

Brenda Lindeman shared that she has many trees down on her property following the storm in December 2022 and asked for suggestions for resources to assist in funding removal of the trees.

Bram Towbin mentioned that this year the Select Board will be talking about the issue of safety of the Marshfield Dam. He stated he will be posting safety inspection reports of the dam on the Town website. Sasha Thayer voiced her agreement that safety issues related to the dam need to be addressed. Michael Billingsley spoke in support of continued work to address the safety of the Marshfield Dam.

Sasha Thayer shared that there are currently many vacancies in Town government and encouraged residents to serve. She shared that interested parties may contact the Town Clerk for more information. Riley Carlson stated that all Town committees are looking for members.

Steven Farnham expressed an interest in cordless microphones being available for Town Meeting. He also asked if discussion with elected officials could be included in the Town Meeting proceedings. Moderator Osman asked for an informal vote from attendees and there was a show of support for including this at future Town Meetings. Bob Atchinson pointed out that sometimes the representatives don't have time for questions. Sasha Thayer shared alternate ways in which constituents may contact their representatives. Moderator Osman spoke to his experience as a legislator and shared his belief that legislators should be open to hearing from their constituents. Michael Billingsley spoke in support of direct participatory discussion with legislators at Town Meeting. Glenda Bissex shared that it is important to state that one is a constituent when corresponding with legislators.

Sasha Thayer made a motion to adjourn. Tim Philips seconded the motion. The motion was approved. The meeting was adjourned at 10:49 am.

Respectfully submitted by Kristin Brosky, Plainfield Town Administrative Assistant.