

Town of Plainfield Select Board Meeting and Budget Meeting
December 18, 2023
149 Main St. Plainfield, VT 2nd Floor and via Zoom
Minutes – Approved

Agenda:

- Changes to Agenda
- Announcements
- Public Comment
- Road Foreman's Report (Michael Bingham)
- Water/Wastewater Bond Vote Discussion
- Update from Plainfield Energy Coordinator (Bob Atchinson):
 - MERP grant opportunities
 - Small hydro possibilities at the Mill St. dam
- Approve hiring Ted Nelson as project supervisor and Kathy Bruno as data collector for Townwide reappraisal
- Conservation Commission budget discussion
- Hazard Mitigation Committee budget discussion
- DRB budget discussion
- Approve updated personnel policy
- Town Constable Discussion
- Approval of warrants:
 - Accounts Payable
 - Payroll
- Approval of draft minutes: 11/29/23
- Adjourn

Present: Select Board members Riley Carlson (Chair), Tim Davis, and Jim Volz. Also in attendance were Road Foreman Michael Bingham, Chief System Operator for the Water Wastewater Department Tristan MacGregor-Stewart, Water Wastewater Commissioner Tim Phillips, Engineer Wayne Elliot of Aldrich + Elliot Water Resource Engineers, Plainfield Energy Coordinator Bob Atchinson, Conservation Commission Chair Rose Paul, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission Climate and Energy Planner Sam Lash, Lindsay George of Small Hydro Consulting, Betsy Ziegler, Joe Klein, and Jennifer Guarino of the Hazard Mitigation Committee.

Chair Carlson called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

Changes to Agenda:

Carlson suggested postponing approval of the updated personnel policy noting the need to first discuss the current version with Assistant Town Clerk Carol Smith. At Volz's request Carlson stated he would circulate a copy of the policy to Select Board members in preparation for its approval at a future Select Board meeting. Carlson also suggested the addition of a discussion about the January schedule for Select Board meetings and a short discussion about the Select Board narrative for the Town Report, both added near the end of the meeting. Davis provided an update on the issue of the need to address dead and dying ash trees in town stating he hasn't identified a solution and that residents with suggestions can email him. Select Board members agreed to these changes to the agenda.

Announcements:

There were no announcements.

Public Comment:

Carlson opened the floor to public comment. There was no public comment.

Road Foreman's Report (Michael Bingham):

Bingham stated that a lot of trees and tree limbs had fallen on the roads and that the warmer temperatures and rain had caused the backroads to be muddy and soft. He stated that the road crew will be addressing these problems over the next few days. He noted that, even with the high waters from this most recent storm, none of the town roads had been washed out.

He shared that the cost for dog safe sidewalk salt is nearly four times the amount of regular salt and isn't covered by the salt budget. Carlson shared that Alice Merrill, who had originally raised the issue as a concern, upon learning of the cost difference, had stated that individual use of dog booties might be a better option. Bingham suggested the option of budgeting for dog safe sidewalk salt in the future.

He stated that when the road crew has available time they will be working to remove ash trees along the edges of roads. He notes this will be a difficult task during winter months. Davis suggested continuing the discussion in the Spring of 2024 to try to find creative means for removal of the ash trees, suggesting the idea of selling the wood as a fundraiser for the Fire and Rescue Department.

Water/Wastewater Bond Vote Discussion:

Tristan MacGregor-Stewart informed the Select Board that the Water/Wastewater Department has been investigating replacing one of the oldest sections of water line in town. He stated that they hope to have a bond vote on the issue in March 2024. Wayne Elliot stated that this project isn't slated to go to construction until 2025 and noted that the funding for the project looks very

favorable for the Town. He shared that the line needing replacement is a small diameter cross-country line that runs behind some homes which will require temporary permit easements. He reiterated that the funding package for the Town is very favorable at this time stating that some funding for the project is available from the “drinking water program”, that there is a 50% subsidy available for the total cost, and that for the loan portion the Town qualifies for a 0% interest loan with a 40-year term. He stated that he could offer the Town some suggestions for bond counsel if needed.

Update from Plainfield Energy Coordinator (Bob Atchinson):

MERP grant opportunities – Atchinson pointed out that the flood in July and the current heavy rains are indicative of climate catastrophe. He stated that as Energy Coordinator for the Town he tries to find ways for the Town to save energy, decrease the Town’s carbon footprint, and help make resident’s homes and the municipal buildings more energy efficient and comfortable. He explained that MERP (Municipal Energy Resilience Program) is a State program based on energy burden reports, noting that in Plainfield the energy burden is estimated to be 14.3% per household which is higher than the State average of 11%. He stated that the Town was awarded a \$4,000 mini-grant to be used to promote weatherization of households and small businesses in Town. He indicated this could fund informational community gatherings and enhance the energy coordinator toolkit which he stated already contains an infrared camera and a heat measuring device. He stated that the Town also qualified for free level two energy audits for the five municipal buildings which includes the Municipal Offices at 149 Main St., the Town Garage on Cameron Rd., the Wastewater Treatment Plant on Recreation Field Rd., the Town Hall Opera House, and the Firehouse at 169 Main St. The audits for the Municipal Building, Town Garage, and Wastewater Plant will be on January 17, 2024 and he will work to schedule the audits for the Town Hall Opera House and the Firehouse. He stated that ahead of these audits he needs information from the Town Office regarding the mandatory electricity use and fuel use for the past five years, a vehicle inventory and replacement schedule, mechanical and electrical plans, maintenance manuals, architectural drawings, and lighting schedules. He stated that he has been coordinating with Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) to investigate funding opportunities to help the Town implement energy efficient measures. He notes that the return on investment for weatherization is generally less than 10 years. Davis asked where residents might access a list of resources for learning about funding for individual weatherization programs. Atchinson stated he would look into updating the Town Energy webpage. Sam Lash added that the scheduled audits allow Towns to become eligible to apply for up to \$500,000 in implementation funds and also for the State’s Revolving Loan Fund for future energy projects at a low interest rate. She shared that Efficiency Vermont is a good resource for residents for fuel assistance and weatherization programs. Atchinson stated that the MERP program can also help fund energy switching and alternative energy installations.

Small hydro possibilities at the Mill St. Dam – Atchinson shared that he's seeking the documentation from a study done around 2010 to investigate the possibility of a small hydro project at the Mill St. Park Dam. He shared that at that time Select Board member Claudia Clark had sought a grant to fund the study but the project had stalled when the grant funding was insufficient to cover the cost of the needed technology. He shared that he and Lindsay George had compared photos of the dam at present with historical photos of the Batchelder Mill which had existed on that site. He noted that there are two penstocks that come out of the bottom of the dam because the old mill had two functions, grist mill and saw mill. He further explained that the Marshfield Dam up river has switched to running a more consistent baseload resulting in a more steady flow of water at the Plainfield Mill St. Dam which is more ideal for a small hydro setup. He stated that George had shared with him that the U.S. Department of Energy and National Renewable Research Laboratories are providing some consulting for projects such as this. Carlson suggested Atchinson reach out to Friends of the Winooski to collaborate. Betsy Ziegler stated that in the past Lori Barg had proposed a hydro project for the Town and suggested Atchinson contact Barg. Lindsay George shared that the grants available through the Infrastructure Bill could also make looking at the possibility of a small hydro project again a good idea for the Town and offered her consulting services to the Town. Atchinson closed his remarks stating that it's time that we seek alternatives to fossil fuel which is killing our civilization and make wise choices every day to help the planet.

Approve hiring Ted Nelson as project supervisor and Kathy Bruno as data collector for Townwide reappraisal:

Carlson shared that Kathy Bruno's fee is \$45 per parcel with an additional \$10 inspection fee for interior inspections. He indicated that the funds available in the reappraisal fund are expected to cover the expense of hiring Bruno and Nelson. He further shared that Ted Nelson's fee is \$9,500 for five days and an additional \$2,250 per day beyond that. He shared that Lister Sandy Ross had stated that Nelson expects that five days should be enough time to complete the project. **Volz moved to approve hiring Ted Nelson as project supervisor and Kathy Bruno as data collector for Townwide reappraisal consistent with their proposal as outlined by Carlson. The motion carried unanimously.**

Conservation Commission Budget Discussion:

Conservation Commission Chair Rose Paul proposed \$375 for the Conservation Commission budget to cover expenses such as printing, which she notes is consistent with the Commission's budget over the past number of years. She also requested \$2,000 be allocated from the Town General Fund to the Conservation Fund, which is the same as the previous year. Select Board members agreed that this request looks good.

Carlson recognized Betsy Ziegler who asked that \$100 be added to the Conservation Committee budget to improve the Town Garden which is near the stop sign at the corner of Mill St. and

Main St. Carlson stated that there is also a Town property landscaping fund which may be able to be used for this purpose. Ziegler suggested that the Town also consider making a donation to Laura Ziegler who maintains many of the Town gardens, such as the garden in front of the Municipal Office, out her own pocket. Joey Klein stated the Town should consult with plant nurseries regarding what type of plants would be best in the Town garden, considering its proximity to traffic and lack of a watering source. Carlson stated the proposed budget for the Conservation Commission would be upped to \$475 to include Ziegler's request. Paul stated that she is not able to get accurate balances and a timely response from the Town Clerk on the Conservation Fund, the Street Tree Reserve Fund, and the Town Forest Fund. She explained that the Town Clerk had stated to Paul that \$10,000 had been donated to the Vermont Land Trust for help with conservation of the Brickey Farm. Paul explained that this money was supposed to have been drawn from the Conservation Fund but is not being reflected in the current balance. She further explained that \$600 had been raised in a fundraiser and did not appear to have been deposited in any of the three fund accounts. She explained that the Conservation Commission report which was due November 17th will be incomplete because she has not been able to get accurate numbers from the Town Clerk. Carlson asked that Paul email him the information about the discrepancies so that he may discuss it with Miller.

Hazard Mitigation Committee Budget Discussion:

Jennifer Guarino joined the meeting to present the Hazard Mitigation Committee budget which she shared was prepared by Hazard Mitigation Chair Maggie Baird who was unable to attend this meeting. Guarino stated she had shared the committee report with the Select Board via email and described the work of the committee explaining that their work preparing for potential hazards is currently focused on flood resiliency issues. She shared that a site visit in October from the USDA identified one possible site on Great Brook for assistance. She shared that the committee continues to work with residents interested in the FEMA buy-out program, is in communication with Green Mountain Power regarding the Molly's Falls reservoir Dam, is preparing a hazard priority listing, and is hoping to bring back a public forum format for discussion of hazard mitigation issues. She explained that the proposed budget is based on the plan to host such a forum. She explained that the committee is requesting \$500 be budgeted for speaker stipends, plus \$173.60 for mileage, as they have identified speakers from the Red Cross who could come and speak about disaster preparedness for disabled, elderly, and health impaired persons. She stated the proposed budget also includes \$50 for office supplies and \$150 for printing for a total Hazard Mitigation Committee budget request of \$874. Select Board members voiced support for this proposed Hazard Mitigation Committee budget.

DRB Budget Discussion:

Volz spoke on behalf of the Development Review Board as he is a member of that board. He explained that the previous year's DRB budget was \$1000 but almost \$1300 was spent due to the

hourly salary of the Zoning Administrator and advertising and warning various meetings and hearings. He stated that the 2021 DRB budget had been \$1,800 but over \$2,000 was spent. He expressed his belief that, with the impact of Covid closures behind us, the committee can expect that building and development will pick back up and therefore is requesting funding similar to 2021. He broke this out as \$2,000 for DRB admin salaries, \$300 for advertising, \$75 for postage, \$100 for trainings, and \$75 for office supplies. Select Board members voiced their support for this proposed DRB budget.

Approve Updated Personnel Policy:

This agenda item was postponed.

Town Constable Discussion:

Carlson explained that this discussion would focus on a recent invoice from Town Constable Chris Keast as well as the issue of parking enforcement. He proposed that the Town Constable should work with the Road Foreman, and potentially a Select Board member, to create a strategy for enforcement of the Town parking regulations. He noted that Bingham had previously brought to the attention of the Select Board his concerns about winter overnight street parking and its impact on the road crew's ability to plow the roads. Davis suggested empowering Town Clerk Miller and Bingham to write tickets for parking violations or the option of deputizing a village resident who might be willing to work late nights to enforce parking regulations.

Carlson explained that at a previous Select Board meeting it had been suggested that the Town would not pay the cell phone usage portion of the Town Constables' invoice and would request that he compile an estimate of mileage. He stated that Keast had not been able to provide mileage but had expressed a willingness to invoice the Town in the requested manner going forward.

Carlson recommended paying the current invoice in full while also acknowledging that the Select Board had not provided prior guidance on expectations for the position. He stated he had emailed the expectations to Keast and had suggested that he bring any questions to Assistant Town Clerk Carol Smith in the future. Select Board members agreed that the current invoice should be paid and that in the future the Town Office phone would be used for constable issues.

Volz moved to approve paying the Town Constable invoice totaling \$519.14. The motion carried unanimously. Carlson stated he would ensure that expectations going forward are clearly communicated to Keast. He also suggested that he would work with Town Administrative Assistant Kristin Brosky to create a standard orientation packet for Town officials that includes information about the reimbursement process.

Create Select Board Meeting Schedule for January and February 2024:

Select Board members agreed that the Select Board will meet the 2nd and 4th Mondays in January and February. This would be January 8th and 22nd and February 12th and 26th.

Carlson stated he would compose a rough draft of the Select Board Town Report and circulate it amongst Select Board members for review.

Approval of Warrants:

Accounts Payable – Carlson presented for approval an accounts payable warrant dated December 8, 2023. **Carlson moved to approve the presented accounts payable warrant. The motion carried unanimously.**

Payroll – Carlson presented for approval payroll warrants dated December 7 and 14, 2023. **Carlson moved to approve the presented payroll warrants. The motion carried unanimously.**

Approval of draft minutes - 11/29/23:

Carlson moved to approve draft minutes dated November 29, 2023. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjourn:

Volz moved to adjourn at 7:19 pm. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Kristin Brosky, Plainfield Town Administrative Assistant.