

Town of Plainfield Select Board Special Meeting
February 26, 2024
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)
- Discuss the Floor at the Fire Station (Greg Light)
- Discussion of Plainfield Municipal Office Technology & Infrastructure Needs (Gary Smith)
- Discuss Request for Waiver of Town Hall Opera House Fee for Youth Dance Group
- Discuss April 8, 2024 Eclipse (Michael Billingsley)
- Reappoint Christopher Keast as Constable
- Sign letter requested by Plainfield Co-op for the Rural Economic Development Initiative Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
- Discuss budget for FY 2024/2025
- Approval of Warrants and Fleet Permits:
 - Accounts Payable: 2/16/24
 - Payroll: 2/15/24 and 2/22/24
 - Fleet Permits
- Approval of Draft Minutes: 2/12/24 and 2/15/24
- Adjourn

Present: Select Board members Jim Volz (Chair) and Tim Davis. Also present were Emergency Management Director Michael Billingsley, Bram Towbin, Road Foreman Michael Bingham, Town Lister Gary Smith, Erica DaCosta, Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus, Town Website Administrator Bob Fancher, Fire Chief Greg Light, Plainfield Arts Treasurer/Secretary Keith Swann, Ekaterina Synkova, Town Auditor Dan Fingas,

Chair Volz called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Changes to Agenda:

Volz suggested adding to the agenda at the end of the meeting the reappointment of Betsy Ziegler as Plainfield representative to the Board of Supervisors of Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District (CVSWMD). Davis agreed to this addition.

Michael Billingsley asked who the Plainfield representative is to the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC). Bram Towbin stated that the rep is currently Paula Emery. Billingsley stated that if she isn't seeking reappointment that he would be interested in the position.

Announcements:

Chair Volz shared that Select Board member Riley Carlson had resigned from the Select Board earlier in the day. He shared that Select Board member Davis, although not on the ballot, has agreed to run as a write-in for the open 2-year Select Board seat. He encouraged voters to write in Davis in order to maintain a viable Select Board.

Volz recognized Billingsley who shared that resident Patti Jamele is interested in running as a write-in candidate for the open 3-year Select Board seat. He shared that he has advertised this on Front Porch Forum and expressed willingness to also advertise Davis's campaign in the same manner; Davis accepted this offer.

Public Comment:

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

Road Foreman's Report (Michael Bingham):

Bingham shared that he had received an email from resident Matt Laggner who expressed concern about the muddy condition of the road during the Spring season in front of his residence at 1066 Middle Rd. He shared that Laggner had proposed that the road be lowered one and a half to two feet so the travelled lane would be returned to the grade it was at a couple of decades ago. Bingham shared his opinion that this would be a costly project. Volz stated that the issue had been explored a couple of years ago and the Town had received a quote of approximately \$60,000 at that time. Bingham shared that he would estimate the cost to be closer to \$100,000 and stated he didn't think the Town could spend the majority of its highway budget repairing one stretch of road. Davis inquired about the possibility of the Town assisting the resident by providing fill to raise their driveway closer to road grade. Bingham stated he would propose the idea to Laggner. Bingham acknowledged that that section of Middle Rd. is one of the worst spots on Town roads during mud season. He shared that he had consulted with local contractor Lloyd Farnham who had suggested that for that stretch of road the Town try gravel from Northeast Materials that contains less dirt than gravel from Bickford's Quarry.

Bingham raised the issue of the need to replace the Highway Department's one-ton truck. He reminded the Select Board that the issue had been tabled in the previous fiscal year for lack of

funds. He stated that there's currently a 12 to 18 month turnaround for orders of this type of truck. He shared that the Highway Department had to put a lot of work into the existing one-ton truck for it to be used this winter and he was told by the mechanic that the truck would likely not pass inspection next year due to rust. He stated he would request current prices for replacing the one-ton truck and would bring those estimates to the Select Board.

Volz recognized Bram Towbin. Towbin asked Bingham for his opinion on the reappointment of Christopher Keast as Constable. Volz explained that in the past there was a misunderstanding about the scope of the Constable's work regarding cars parked on-street overnight in winter and stated that this issue could be resolved at a future Select Board meeting. Towbin also asked Bingham if the Highway Department's current one-ton could be traded in and at what price. Bingham stated he did not have a trade-in price. Volz suggested private sale of the truck. Towbin stated he would help with determining what would happen with the existing one-ton truck.

Davis stated that he had received an email regarding a resident's concern about the accumulation of mud on the sidewalk along Rt.2 near Outer Spice Café. Bingham stated that the Highway Department's equipment is too large to use to clear the sidewalk. He explained that traffic control would need to be hired if the road crew were to attempt to clear it with shovels. He further stated that the road crew is busy currently with taking care of snow removal as well as addressing muddy roads. Davis suggested the Town seek an estimate from a private contractor to clear the sidewalk mud. Bingham stated that he would be hiring street sweepers at the beginning of May and that work would include clearing the sidewalks; he acknowledged that may be too long to wait. Volz asked Bingham for his recommendation. Bingham recommended hiring a contractor with a small skid steer who could clear the mud without the need for traffic control. Volz and Davis agreed to contact the contractor who currently clears snow from the Town sidewalks.

Billingsley informed the Select Board that he had shared with Bingham that the Town is eligible for State funding to address any remaining flood related road repairs. He stated that Bingham will be working with Town Grant Administrator Alice Merrill to identify potential projects.

Discuss the Floor at the Fire Station (Greg Light):

Light was not in attendance when this agenda item came up for discussion. Davis encouraged Light to reach out to Select Board members, stating he had been trying to reach Light via email but had received no response. Light later joined the meeting and the issue was discussed, see below.

Discussion of Plainfield Municipal Office Technology & Infrastructure Needs (Gary Smith):

Volz recognized Town Lister Gary Smith. Smith explained the Town Clerk/Treasurer Robin Smith had received an assessment and quote from RB Technologies to address the Municipal

Office technology needs. Volz shared with Smith that Miller's term will end the following week and suggested that this discussion be postponed until a future Select Board meeting with the newly elected Clerk/Treasurer. Smith explained that he had been asked by Miller to speak about the topic. Volz encouraged Smith to continue. Smith stated that he had shared the executive summary report provided by RB Technologies with Select Board members prior to this meeting. He pointed out that there are immediate technology needs that need to be addressed in a timely manner for the Town's security. He explained that there are operating systems and software that are not supported and stated that the existing computers will not function to meet the needs of the Lister during the upcoming Townwide reappraisal. He further explained that the Assistant Town Clerk/Treasurer is unable to complete portions of her workload due to her computer not working. He stated that he had volunteered to help Miller with implementing needed upgrades. He expressed his concern that waiting to begin making the needed changes until after the transition to a new Clerk/Treasurer will postpone the work too long. He stated that he would prefer to step down from his Lister position if the technology needs of the Municipal Office are not met prior to the start of the reappraisal. Smith explained that the Municipal Office used to have a person who maintained the Town's network who has since passed away and was not replaced. Davis stated that he had reviewed the report from RB Technologies and stated that although it was comprehensive it was also very expensive. Billingsley suggested that some of the work identified by RB Technologies might be accomplished by volunteers. Towbin stated that, as he is the only candidate running for Town Clerk/Treasurer, he expects he will be elected and that addressing the Municipal Office's technology needs is a top priority for him. Smith explained that the network would need to be managed over time by a consistent resource. Billingsley suggested the Town hire an IT manager. Towbin asked if ARPA funds could be used to cover some of the expense. Billingsley suggested that there may also be post-flood relief available to assist with administrative infrastructure. Erica DaCosta stated their understanding that best practice for municipalities is to have all documents and archives in a backup drive that is offline to protect documents. Smith stated that RB Technologies had included this in their recommendations. Billingsley stated that a cyber security expert will be giving a talk within the next two months on the subject of how small towns can address their cyber security needs. Davis shared that the RB Technology proposal includes overhauling the whole office suite as well as managing it, including being on call should IT issues arise. He shared that the upfront costs for the needed upgrades are estimated at \$21,264 with ongoing monthly data management services at \$1,000/month. Smith added that not included in the RB Technologies proposal is the installation of needed upgraded wiring in the Municipal Office. Reporter Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus asked Volz to send him copy of the proposal from RB Technologies, Volz agreed to do so. Town Website Administrator Bob Fancher shared that he was an IT director for 15 years before his retirement and offered his assistance in reviewing the proposal. Volz and Davis stated they would like Fancher's input; Volz stated he would send a copy of the report to Fancher. Smith added that replacement of Assistant Town Clerk/Treasurer Smith's computer and the Lister computer are a top priority.

Discuss the Floor at the Fire Station (Greg Light):

Fire Chief Greg Light joined the meeting. He shared that he had been informed by the Town Clerk/Treasurer that the Fire Department has \$15,000 in its Building Fund. He shared that the floor in the Fire Station needs to be stabilized as its sinking. He stated he had shared the quote from Northern Basement Systems with Select Board members ahead of this meeting. **Davis moved to approve the Fire Department to accept the proposal from Northern Basements to stabilize the firehouse slab. The motion carried unanimously.** Light explained that the Select Board would need to sign the documents he'd provided. Davis stated he would email the documents to Administrative Assistant Kristin Brosky and Assistant Town Clerk/Treasurer Carol Smith for printing.

Discuss Request for Waiver of Town Hall Opera House Fee for Youth Dance Group:

Ekaterina Synkova explained that they would like to organize a community dance for 13-19 year old youth at the Town Hall Opera House. They expressed their belief that youth might like the opportunity to gather in person, not just online. They requested that the rental fee be waived for a youth dance and stated their hope that there would be enough interest that eventually the event would make money to be able to pay future rental fees. Plainfield Arts Treasurer/Secretary Keith Swann expressed his support for this idea and stated that the group would need to take responsibility for cleaning the space after the dance. Synkova stated they would be responsible for the cleaning. Swann stated that a \$150 security deposit would be required which would be returned as long as there was no damage and the cleaning was done. Synkova shared that they expected approximately 15 attendees. **Davis moved to approve waiving the rental fee for the Town Hall Opera House for the youth dance group, other than the security deposit. The motion carried unanimously.** Synkova stated they would fill out the online rental application for the Town Hall Opera House.

Discuss April 8, 2024 Eclipse (Michael Billingsley):

Billingsley announced that he had been informed that the Town should expect that there may be extra stress on emergency services, increased traffic, and related issues on April 7 and 8, 2024 for the total eclipse of the sun. He shared that some Vermont schools are closing early that day. He stated that Plainfield is not hosting any public events for the eclipse but noted that Marshfield is having an event at the Old Schoolhouse Commons which may lead to increased traffic on Rt. 2 with the potential for traffic jams. He recommended the Town rent one standard and one disabled port-a-let for the Recreation Field and organize a group of volunteers to assist in case of an emergency. He stated the Emergency Operations Center will be open all day on April 8th. He encouraged residents to be kind to visitors who may need assistance that day. Select Board members encouraged Billingsley to look into the cost of renting port-a-lets.

Billingsley shared that he's been working with Town Grant Administrator Alice Merrill to identify funding for a generator for the Town Hall Opera House. He noted that the lack of a

generator is holding the Town back from having an emergency shelter. He shared that the Town had been rejected for a Homeland Security grant because there was concern that a generator would impact the historical appearance of the building. He shared that the Town could have reapplied but instead is working with Vermont Community Foundation which has offered to fund the \$20,000-\$25,000 it will cost to install a generator. He stated he's currently seeking estimates for installation of the new generator as well as potentially moving the old generator to the Fire Station. He stated that he's also seeking estimates for a sign for in front of the Town Hall Opera House that will match the style of the one in front of the Municipal Building, the cost of which will not be covered under the grant. Towbin asked if a new propane tank will be needed to support the new generator. Billingsley explained that the 500 gallon propane tank currently in place buried under the front lawn of the Town Hall Opera House will be sufficient for both the Town Hall Opera House heating needs and for the generator. He shared that the new generator will be installed toward the rear of the building on the Harvey Hill side. He explained that there will be a small cost to the Town for installation of a three-foot tall wooden storm fence that will prevent snow from Harvey Hill Rd from being plowed near the generator. Keith Swann voiced his approval of the project and noted that the preservation trust also approves the project. Billingsley stated he will contact Zoning Administrator Karen Storey to find out if a building permit will be required for the installation.

Reappoint Christopher Keast as Constable:

This agenda item was not discussed.

Sign letter requested by Plainfield Co-op for the Rural Economic Development Initiative Vermont Housing and Conservation Board:

Davis moved to approve signing the letter for the Rural Economic Development Initiative Vermont Housing and Conservation Board expressing support for the relocation and expansion of the Plainfield Co-op to the site of the Plainfield Hardware and General Store.

The motion carried unanimously. Both Davis and Volz expressed concern that the Town center is losing the Co-op while also acknowledging that the Co-op needs to do what is necessary to allow it to continue serving the community. Davis stated that he would be willing to work with anyone who may be interested in helping identify funds to support a satellite store that would remain in the village.

Discuss budget for FY 2024/2025:

Volz stated that the budget had been developed over a series of Select Board meetings at the end of 2023 and beginning of 2024. Towbin asked if the budget includes the estimated \$25,000-\$30,000 for external audit which will be required once the Town accepts federal funding for the replacement of the village Brook Rd. bridge. He also asked if the cost of legal fees associated with zoning enforcement for offenses at 79 Bean Rd. has been included in the proposed budget.

Davis moved to approve the budget as written as submitted by the Town Clerk/Treasurer's office. The motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Warrants and Fleet Permits:

Accounts Payable: 2/16/24 – Davis moved to approve the accounts payable warrant dated February 16, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.

Payroll: 2/15/24 and 2/22/24 – Davis moved to approve the payroll warrants dated February 15 and 22, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.

Fleet Permits – Davis moved to approve fleet permits for Bethel Mills, Champlain Construction, Chevalier Drilling Company, Curtis Lumber Company, Gillespie Fuels, Irving Oil Terminals, McCullough Crushing, N.A. Manash Incorporated, Structures RBR, and Toronto Oil. The motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Draft Minutes - 2/12/24 and 2/15/24:

Davis moved to approve draft minutes dated February 12 and 15, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.

Reappoint Betsy Ziegler as Plainfield representative to the Board of Supervisors of Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District (CVSWMD):

This agenda item was not discussed.

Adjourn

Davis moved to adjourn at 6:57 pm. The motion carried unanimously.

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