

Town of Plainfield Select Board Meeting
March 25, 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)
- Town Clerk's Report (Bram Towbin)
 - Discuss progress on budget
 - Discuss funding considerations for next year's budget
 - Update on Scheduling Town Meeting
 - Discuss plan for public forum to discuss Town government
- Revolving Loan Fund Committee Report (Karl Bissex)
- Emergency Management Director (EMD) Report (Michael Billingsley):
 - Request for signatures for two FEMA house buy-outs
 - Request for authorization regarding EMD legal responsibilities
 - Update on funding for projects at Town Hall Opera House
- Designate Select Board liaison to the Emergency Management Director
- Define expectations of Constable position
- Approve Review Committee to work with VTrans on the US2/Main St Project
- Follow-up on issue of muddy sidewalks on School St.
- Approval of Warrants and Fleet Permits:
 - Accounts Payable: March 15 and 20, 2024
 - Payroll: March 14 and 21, 2024
 - Fleet Permits: Amerigas, K. Bellavance, Camp Precast, Connecticut Valley Trucking, Dead River Company, Lajeunesse Construction, Limlaw, Packard Fuels, Pike Industries, S.D. Ireland, Suburban Propane, Swan Sitework
- Approval of Draft Minutes: March 11 and 15, 2024
- Adjourn

Present: Select Board members Jim Volz (Chair), Tim Davis, and Patti Jamele. Also present were Emergency Management Director Michael Billingsley, Town Clerk/Treasurer Bram Towbin, Kristine Schilling-Bioteau, Road Foreman Michael Bingham, Revolving Loan Fund Committee Chair Karl Bissex, Melinda Vieux, and Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus.

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

Changes to Agenda:

Volz suggested the addition of the appointment of Tom Molteni to the Hazard Mitigation Committee which will be discussed following the Emergency Management Update. Davis suggested the addition of discussion of the Town paying the Childcare Payroll Tax for Town employees as the Water/Wastewater Department does for their employees. Volz suggested this item should be added to a future agenda so that Town Clerk/Treasurer Bram Towbin can participate in the conversation. All Select Board members agreed to these changes.

Announcements:

There were no announcements.

Public Comment:

Volz opened the floor to public comment and recognized Emergency Management Director Michael Billingsley. Billingsley offered the reminder that there will be a full solar eclipse on Monday, April 8, 2024 which may cause disruptions in traffic along major corridors and encouraged residents to stay off the roads. He stated he expects the most traffic disruption will occur immediately following the eclipse around 3:30 pm that day. Volz voiced agreement and thanked Billingsley for his announcement.

Volz recognized Kristine Schilling-Bioteau who voiced their concern about speeding on Rte. 2. They shared that they've discussed the issue with Towbin and Washington County Sheriff Bret Meyer who had suggested the Town install speed monitoring signs. They expressed their support for Bill S184 which is being considered in the Vermont Senate which would allow for remote ticketing of speeders. They voiced their concern for the safety of pedestrians crossing at the Town Hall Opera House and at the Main St. intersection near the blind curve on Rte. 2. They stated that they plan to start an email campaign to raise the issue with State legislators. They asked for support from the Select Board in approving installation of speed monitoring signs. They shared also that Sherriff Meyer had suggested the Town install speed tape to obtain a record of speed violations. Towbin shared that today he had observed a Washington County Sheriff enforcing speed limits through traffic stops on Rte. 2. He mentioned he continues to advocate for speed control on the Towns unpaved roads as well.

Road Foreman's Report (Michael Bingham):

Bingham shared that a catch basin has failed across from the Fire Department on Main St. He stated that there is money in the budget to make the repair and he's awaiting an estimate on replacement of that structure. He shared that the Cameron Rd. sign has been stolen for the third time this year noting that replacement of the sign with signpost costs \$275. He suggested a game camera be installed to monitor activity at the sign. Towbin agreed this is a good idea.

Bingham requested permission to temporarily hire former Road Foreman Mike Nolan during the time road crew member Shawn Codling is out on paternity leave for two weeks starting at the end of April or early May. He acknowledged that the Highway Department is already over budget for the year on salaries and overtime due to the July 2023 flood as well as the changeable winter weather this season. **Davis moved to approve the Road Commissioner to hire extra help to cover during mud season if needed for paternity leave. The motion carried unanimously.**

Bingham shared that he has learned of an upcoming grant opportunity for reimbursement of up to 30% which could assist the Town in replacing the one-ton truck with a more efficient diesel truck. Towbin added that the grant program will likely open in late May 2024 and would cover 30% of the cost of a truck, excluding the cost of the additional snow equipment needed for the truck. He pointed out a disadvantage of the Town seeking the grant is that it would delay the purchase of the needed replacement truck as the grant cannot be used retrospectively. He advised that the Town apply for the grant. Towbin stated that he has discussed the grant opportunity with Town Grant Administrator Alice Merrill. Volz encouraged Towbin and Bingham to prepare a recommendation to bring to a future Select Board meeting.

Town Clerk's Report (Bram Towbin) - Discuss progress on budget; Discuss funding considerations for next year's budget; Update on Scheduling Town Meeting:

Towbin shared that new computer work stations were set up in the Town Clerk's Office the previous week for the Town Listers as well as for the use of former Town Clerk/Treasurer Linda Wells as she assists in auditing work for the Town Report. He stated that there will be further technology updates made in the coming weeks.

He shared that he and Wells continue to work on the needed budget documentation for the Town Report. He stated that he anticipates that Town Meeting will likely be scheduled for mid-May but will wait until the budget amendments are completed and approved to set a firm date. He stated he may request a special Select Board meeting to review and approve the amendments to the budget for FY 24/25. Volz suggested that Town Meeting be scheduled for a Saturday or Sunday and suggested using social media to facilitate an informal poll of public opinion on the matter.

He reported that there may be a revote of the Twinfield School District budget.

Towbin pointed out some proposed amendments to the approved budget for FY 24/25. He noted that the Town Administrative Assistant position had been omitted from the approved budget and should be funded. He added that fringe retirement costs need to be adjusted as the costs are higher than had been budgeted for, the need to replace a Highway Department truck needs to be addressed, the budget for legal fees may need to be increased to address the need for zoning

enforcement, and gravel costs need to be adjusted due to the increase in “mud seasons” necessitating increased use of gravel.

He commended the road crew for their good work maintaining the roads and encouraged concerned citizens to reach out to the Clerk’s office. Davis shared he is also impressed with the quality of Plainfield’s roads in comparison to other towns.

Volz stated that he’s in favor of holding a Special Select Board meeting to review and approve the budget amendments. Davis agreed.

Discuss plan for public forum to discuss Town government – This issue was not discussed.

Revolving Loan Fund Committee Report (Karl Bissex):

Revolving Loan Fund Committee Chair Karl Bissex shared that the purpose of the committee is to review taxpayer applications for use of the Revolving Loan Fund and to make recommendations to the Select Board which then makes the final decision whether to fund the request. He shared that the committee has received an application from Laurie Veatch of Gore Rd. He explained that she has a two-acre house lot with a two bedroom, one bathroom house for which she has invested in a new sill and foundation. He stated that she is looking for assistance to finish the house to sell for approximately \$200,000. He shared that her request is for a loan for \$16,280. He stated that a lien would be placed on the property until the loan is paid off. He shared that Veatch has requested to make a balloon payment at the time the house is sold rather than making monthly payments. He stated that the committee is in support of this repayment schedule and recommends the Select Board approve the application. He stated that the interest rate is 1% below market and Veatch requests a year term. He stated that Veatch has informed the committee that the property is valued at \$80,000 in its current condition, which Bissex stated allows the Town protection. He stated Veatch’s project would add much needed affordable housing to the market. **Volz moved to approve the request for a loan. The motion carried unanimously.** Bissex stated he would discuss the decision with the Town Clerk/Treasurer.

Emergency Management Director (EMD) Report (Michael Billingsley):

Request for signatures for two FEMA house buy-outs – Billingsley asked the Select Board to sign the previously approved Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Town and the state agency administering the FEMA buy-out program. He provided background information regarding the program for the benefit of new Select Board member Jamele. He shared that within the program the property owner agrees to sell their property to the Town following an appraisal to assess the pre-flood value. He explained that following this the Town has 90 days to destroy the house once the deed is exchanged, both of which will be paid for by the State, and the site will then be graded and remain an open area. He stated that the only expense to the Town is to grade and seed the area. He stated that there can then be no development on that land; the only

approved future uses for the graded area are a public restroom, a boat launch, or installation of fencing. He stated that the Town would also be responsible for reporting on the site's maintenance every three years and explained that the Select Board is requested to sign a maintenance agreement for each of the two properties that are participating in the buy-out program. Volz stated that the Select Board would review the documents prior to approving signature at a future Select Board meeting. Jamele asked for clarification regarding how the properties pursuing buyout had been identified. Billingsley stated that following the flood in July 2023 residents who had requested FEMA assistance were offered buyout by FEMA if the properties met the program requirements.

Request for authorization regarding EMD legal responsibilities – Billingsley asked for authorization to carry out his duties as EMD and stated he had circulated a document to the Select Board outlining the duties of the position. Volz shared his opinion that the document grants too much authority to the EMD. Billingsley defended the draft of the EMD duties, reminding the Select Board that he had waited six days following the July 2023 flood for the Select Board to call a meeting to address the emergent needs of the Town, and pointed out that the duties outlined are in line with State and Federal requirements of Emergency Management. He further pointed out that in 2018 the State director of Emergency Management training, Emily Harris, had spoken to the Select Board and had recommended the draft language. Davis and Jamele voiced their support for approving the document as presented by Billingsley. Volz agreed. **Volz moved to approve the Delegation of Authority to the Emergency Management Director for Plainfield. The motion carried unanimously. Volz moved that the Select Board authorize him to sign the agreement on the Select Board's behalf. The motion carried unanimously.**

Davis left the meeting early due to a prior engagement.

Update on funding for projects at Town Hall Opera House – Billingsley reminded the Select Board that in order for the Town Hall Opera House to be approved as an emergency shelter a number of updates need to be made to the building. He shared that the Vermont Community Fund has offered funding to cover all of these modifications. He shared that these funded modifications will include installing a new generator at the Town Hall Opera House, creating a storage area under the existing stage which will be completed by Project Hope, purchase of pet crates, creation of a pet safe area in the garage across the street from the shelter, and installation of an air conditioner for the first floor of the Town Hall Opera House. He stated that the Vermont Community Fund will also cover the cost of removing the smaller existing generator from the Town Hall Opera House and installing it at the Town Municipal Building. Volz and Jamele agreed that the Town is willing to accept the assistance from the Community Fund and stated that an agreement should be brought before the Select Board for formal approval once it is available.

Appoint Tom Molteni to the Hazard Mitigation Committee:

This issue was not discussed.

Designate Select Board liaison to the Emergency Management Director:

This issue was not discussed.

Define expectations of Constable Position:

Volz shared that the Constable had been unhappy with the lack of guidance for his position and had resigned. He stated that the Constable has agreed to be reappointed and that the Select Board needs to define the Constable's role. He suggested this topic be addressed at a future meeting and noted that some of the conversation may be best discussed in executive session. Davis requested that the Constable be present for that future discussion. Volz stated he would make that request of the Constable. All Select Board members agreed to move this issue to a future agenda.

Approve Review Committee to work with VTrans on the US2/Main St Project:

Volz shared that Vermont State Senator Andy Perchlik had reached out to him and shared that AOT has created plans for a simplified version of the upgrade to the Rte. 2/Main St. intersection project that wouldn't require moving water or sewer lines. He pointed out that this could reduce the Town's cost for the project. He stated that representatives from AOT will attend a future Select Board meeting to discuss the proposal. Volz recognized Melinda Vieux who asked for clarification about the need to replace the water lines. Volz stated that the water lines at the Rte. 2/Main St. intersection had not been identified by the Plainfield Water/Wastewater Department as being in need of replacement. Billingsley asked if a turning lane will be included in the intersection proposal. Volz stated that information will need to be gathered during the future discussion with AOT.

The Review Committee was not discussed at this time.

Follow-up on issue of muddy sidewalks on School St.:

Volz stated this issue would be added to the next Select Board meeting agenda when Davis will be in attendance to discuss follow-up actions on the issue.

Approval of Warrants and Fleet Permits:

Accounts Payable March 15 and 20, 2024 – Volz moved to approve the accounts payable warrants dated March 15 and 20, 2024. The motion carried with Volz and Jamele voting in favor.

Payroll March 14 and 21, 2024 – Volz moved to approve the payroll warrants dated March 14 and 21, 2024. The motion carried with Volz and Jamele voting in favor.

***Fleet Permits* – Volz moved to approve fleet permits for Amerigas, K. Bellavance, Camp Precast, Connecticut Valley Trucking, Dead River Company, Lajeunesse Construction, Limlaw, Packard Fuels, Pike Industries, S.D. Ireland, Suburban Propane, and Swan Sitework. The motion carried with Volz and Jamele voting in favor.**

Approval of Draft Minutes: March 11 and 15, 2024:

Volz moved to approve draft minutes dated March 11 and 15, 2024. The motion carried with Volz and Jamele voting in favor.

Adjourn:

Jamele moved to adjourn at 7:17 pm. The motion carried unanimously.

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