

Town of Plainfield Select Board Special Meeting
April 11, 2024
149 Main St. 2nd floor and Via Zoom
Minutes - Draft

Agenda:

- Changes to Agenda
- Announcements
- Public Comment
- Town Clerk's Report (Bram Towbin)
 - Notice of need for Town Maintenance Person
 - Request approval of mowing contracts - general and roadside
- Discussion of the Childcare Payroll Tax
- Approve amended Town Budget FY 24/25
- Schedule Town Meeting
- Update on 79 Bean Rd. zoning violations
- Follow-up on issue of muddy sidewalks on School St.
- Define expectations of Constable position
- Designate Select Board Liaison to the Emergency Management Director
- Approve Review Committee to work with VTrans on the US2/Main St Project
- Approve Alice Merrill to work on grant application to the Vermont Community Foundation
- Approve Road Foreman Michael Bingham to hire Mike Nolan as needed for road maintenance during the two weeks of Shawn Codling's paternity leave in April or May of 2024
- Approve Highway Department to hire G. M. Bowen Excavating Contractor INC, at an expense of \$5,309.38, to replace failing catch basin at the corner of Creamery and Main Streets.
- Appoint Maureen Lynch to the Conservation Commission
- Appoint Tom Molteni to the Hazard Mitigation Committee
- Approval of Warrants and Liquor Licenses:
 - Accounts Payable: February 7, March 26, and April 4, and two dated April 9, 2024
 - Payroll: March 28, April 4 and 11, 2024
 - Liquor Licenses:
 - BAS, LLC. - First Class, Third Class, and Outside Consumption
 - Positive Pie - First Class Bar, Third Class Bar, and Outside Consumption
 - Winooski Valley Coop - Second Class
- Approval of Draft Minutes: March 25, 2024
- Adjourn

Present: Select Board members Jim Volz (Chair), Tim Davis, and Patti Jamele. Also present were Town Clerk/Treasurer Bram Towbin, Emergency Management Director Michael Billingsley, Charlie Cogbill, Maureen Lynch, Road Foreman Michael Bingham, Kim Nolan, Sean Ward, Michael Raymond, Chris Ditmeyer, Zoning Administrator Karen Storey, Town Moderator Donny Osman, and Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus.

Chair Volz called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

Changes to Agenda:

There were no changes to the agenda.

Announcements:

There were no announcements.

Public Comment:

Volz recognized Emergency Management Director Michael Billingsley who reported on the total solar eclipse that occurred on April 8, 2024. He shared that 80,000-150,000 visitors were reported in northern Vermont to view the eclipse. He shared that about 40 people used the services at the Plainfield Emergency Operations Center. He thanked volunteers Lori Stratton, Jodi Vilardi, Maggie Baird, Jen Guarino, and Mike Polowasky for helping that day.

Volz recognized Charlie Cogbill who inquired about the nature of former Town Clerk/Treasurer Linda Wells current position in town government and the decision making process that brought her back and determined her compensation. He also asked about the FY 24/25 budgeted compensation for Town Clerk and Town Office positions. Towbin addressed Cogbill's questions explaining that Wells had been hired as an advisor at a rate of \$35/hr., with the agreement that she would be paid out of the FY 24/25 budget, to assist in rectifying the Town's financial records. Davis added that the FY 24/25 budget line item for Wells compensation was approved by the Select Board at their special meeting on April 4, 2024. Cogbill encouraged the Select Board to formalize the position held by Wells with documentation regarding her compensation and who she is responsible to. **Davis moved to approve the appointment of Linda Wells as a consultant to the Plainfield Town Clerk up to the amount of 400 hours paid at \$35/hr. with the understanding that if further hours are needed new approval would be sought from the Select Board.** Maureen Lynch asked whether the motion needed to reflect that Wells' work will be completed in FY 23/24 but paid out of the FY 24/25 budget. **The motion carried unanimously.**

Town Clerk's Report (Bram Towbin):

Towbin thanked former Town Clerk/Treasurer Linda Wells for her assistance in compiling needed documents for the proposed amended budget for FY 24/25. He suggested that ARPA funds could be used to fund an external audit of the Town financials, but otherwise encouraged the Select Board to approve a \$28,000 addition to the FY24/25 budget to cover the expense. Volz encouraged Towbin to share this information later in the meeting during discussion of “Approve amended Town Budget FY 24/25”.

Notice of need for Town Maintenance Person –

Towbin shared that five candidates are interested in the Town Maintenance Person position. He shared that insurance requirements must be met. He shared that the job entails on-call work for the Municipal Building and the Town Hall Opera house for cleaning and maintenance work. He suggested that interviews include a member of the Select Board. He stated that \$4,500 is proposed in the budgeted for the position. Davis requested the candidates submit a letter of interest. Volz suggested Towbin speak with the candidates and recommend a candidate to the Select Board.

Request approval of mowing contracts - general and roadside –

Towbin shared that two mowing contracts have been submitted for consideration. He shared Mr. Dexter’s estimate of \$7,500 to mow the back roadsides and stated he has done good mowing work for the Town in the past. Road Foreman Michael Bingham shared that Mr. Dexter has mowed for the Town for the past three years. Davis shared that Mr. Dexter is offering the Town a two-year contract. **Davis moved to approve the proposal from Donald Dexter for roadside mowing in the amount of \$7,500 per year for a two-year agreement. The motion carried unanimously.**

Towbin shared that Jason Cushing has submitted a proposal for mowing the common areas in Town, including the Recreation Field, priced at \$275 per mow. He stated his opinion that Cushing has done a good job with this mowing for the past two years and encouraged the Select Board to approve a multi-year mowing contract. He stated that he will bring a multi-year contract from Cushing as well as the past year’s budgeted amount for mowing to the next Select Board meeting for their consideration. Select Board members voiced support for re-hiring Cushing to do the mowing citing his good past work and fair pricing.

Discussion of the Childcare Payroll Tax:

Towbin explained that the Childcare Contribution Tax is a new payroll tax that will likely cost the Town \$1,500 in the coming year. Davis explained that the Water/Wastewater Department has already approved covering the expense for their employees and voiced his support for the Town also covering the tax for its employees. **Davis moved to approve the Town covering the new Childcare payroll tax as a benefit to Town employees. The motion carried unanimously.**

Towbin provided the Select Board with printed information regarding the Childcare Contribution Tax.

Approve amended Town Budget FY24/25:

Towbin stated that he encourages the Select Board to approve the addition to the FY24/25 budget of funding for a Town external audit and a new truck for the highway department. He shared that the truck would cost approximately \$70,000 plus another \$70,000 for needed additional equipment for the truck, for a total of \$140,000. He shared that there is a low-emission diesel vehicle program opening in June that the Town can apply for that may offer a 30% discount on the price of the truck. Bingham shared that the truck in need of replacement is nine years old and is used to salt roads in the village. He shared that the truck inspection runs out in February 2025 and that he doesn't expect that it will pass inspection without expensive repairs. Towbin stated that a new truck could be financed over a number of years. Towbin encouraged the Select Board to approve increasing the proposed Highway Department Equipment Fund from \$80,000 to \$100,000. In answer to a question from Davis, Bingham stated his belief that no part of the existing truck would be able to be salvaged or resold. Lynch asked if the proposed budget amount was a one-time allocation or a recurring allocation. Towbin expressed his belief that the Highway Department should have an ongoing larger allocation but acknowledged that it can be revisited the next year. Lynch asked if the Town could develop a long term plan for truck replacement. Towbin expressed his belief that a long term planning approach should also be applied to Town Building maintenance and road maintenance. Davis requested Bingham provide the Select Board with a report on the state of the Highway Department's equipment including projected replacement costs and timeframe for replacement.

Volz asked if the budgeted salary for the Zoning Administrator position should be increased, noting that long-time Zoning Administrator Karen Storey is planning to retire in June 2024. Volz recognized Karen Storey who shared that she has been in her position since 2010 and plans to retire at the end of June 2024. She expressed her willingness to train the next person. Volz thanked her for her great service. Davis suggested that the position be advertised on the Town website.

Billingsley asked if the budget reflected what was decided during the earlier budget meetings. Davis stated that the Emergency Management budget was still entered as discussed.

Storey asked what type of audit Towbin was recommending. He suggested a traditional external audit. Davis stated that the Select Board had previously discussed hiring for an external audit in the following fiscal year as it will then be required due to the Town receiving federal funds. Towbin recommended doing the audit as soon as possible. Volz stated his interest in avoiding having to pay for two audits in consecutive years.

Volz recognized Cogbill who asked what the compensation is for the Town Office and Town Clerk as well as the total amount expected to be expended in FY24/25. Volz shared that for FY 24/25 the compensation for the Town Clerk/Treasurer position is budgeted at \$56,511 and the Assistant Town Clerk/Treasurer position is budgeted at \$56,000. Volz shared that the FY24/25 budget total is \$1,464,936.86.

Towbin requested the Select Board consider the use of ARPA funds to pay for an external audit and stated if not then he would like to add the cost of an audit to the budget. Davis voiced his opinion that the audit should wait until the Town records are organized and be budgeted for the next fiscal year. Volz stated that the Select Board needs more information about the current ARPA funds available and would need to review the previously made commitments of the funds.

Volz recognized Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus who asked if Linda Wells' compensation and the proposed changes to the gravel and sand line items were included in the budget. Towbin clarified that the gravel line item should be \$110,000 and the sand should be \$50,000. Volz stated this adds \$25,000 to the budget making the total \$1,489,936.86.

Davis moved to approve the amended budget for the total amount of \$1,489,936.86 to be voted on at Town Meeting, The motion carried unanimously.

Volz stated that Towbin should determine the percentage increase of this proposed budget over the previous fiscal year's approved budget.

Schedule Town Meeting:

Volz stated that Towbin had proposed May 21, 2024 as the date for Town Meeting. Volz recognized Lynch who urged the Select Board not to schedule Town Meeting on a weekday during the day. Billingsley added that voting is not allowed by remote attendees. Town Moderator Donny Osman pointed out that attendees can make an amendment and vote on the floor during Town Meeting to move the day Town Meeting is held as they did the previous year.

Davis moved to hold Town Meeting at 5:30 PM on Wednesday, May 22, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.

The Select Board updated the draft Town Meeting warning provided by Towbin to reflect the changes discussed in this meeting. **Davis moved to approve the Town Meeting warning with two changes made during the Select Board meeting, which changes the date to May 22nd at 5:30 PM and also increases the total budget by \$25,000. The motion carried unanimously.**

Update on 79 Bean Rd. zoning violations:

Volz shared that that he has been in contact with the Town attorney and Zoning Administrator Karen Storey regarding 79 Bean Rd. zoning violations. He explained that the Select Board needs

to decide if the Town should proceed with asking the attorney to move forward with bringing a lawsuit against the current residents at an initial cost of approximately \$1,500. He explained that this option could become expensive over time and voiced his opinion that this undertaking should wait until the Town budget is complete. Kim Nolan, neighbor of 79 Bean Rd, provided her understanding of the zoning violations at 79 Bean Rd. and expressed her opinion that the Select Board should move forward with bringing a lawsuit against the current residents. Towbin added that 79 Bean Rd has been taxed as land for five years. He added that the Select Board has proposed tripling the legal budget for the coming year in the hope that the issue can be addressed. **Davis moved to authorize Select Board chair Jim Volz to talk to the lawyer about authorizing him to take the next steps. The motion carried unanimously.** Volz recognized Chris Ditmeyer who thanked the Select Board for moving ahead with addressing this issue.

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

Davis stated that he had reached out to the State of Vermont District 6 and did not receive a follow-up. He suggested the issue be added to a future Select Board meeting agenda.

Define expectations of Constable position:

This issue was not discussed.

Designate Select Board Liaison to the Emergency Management Director:

Volz stated that Emergency Management Director Billingsley should communicate with the whole Select Board rather than a liaison being designated. He stated the Billingsley may also contact him by phone in an emergency.

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

Volz stated that this issue will be discussed at a future Select Board meeting.

Approve Alice Merrill to work on grant application to the Vermont Community Foundation:

Jamele moved to approve Alice Merrill to work on a grant application to the Vermont Community Foundation. The motion carried unanimously.

Approve Road Foreman Michael Bingham to hire Mike Nolan as needed for road maintenance during the two weeks of Shawn Codling's paternity leave in April or May of 2024:

Volz stated that this approval was made at a previous Select Board meeting.

Approve Highway Department to hire G. M. Bowen Excavating Contractor INC, at an expense of \$5,309.38, to replace failing catch basin at the corner of Creamery and Main Streets:

Jamele moved to approve the Highway Department to hire G.M. Bowen Excavating Contractor Inc., at an expense of \$5,309.38, to replace the failing catch basin a the corner of Creamery and Main Streets. The motion carried unanimously.

Appoint Maureen Lynch to the Conservation Commission:

Jamele moved to appoint Maureen Lynch to the Conservation Commission. The motion carried unanimously.

Appoint Tom Molteni to the Hazard Mitigation Committee:

Jamele moved to appoint Tom Molteni to the Hazard Mitigation Committee. The motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Warrants and Liquor Licenses:

Accounts Payable: **Davis moved to approve accounts payable warrants dated February 7, March 26, and April 4, and two dated April 9, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.**

Payroll: **Jamele moved to approve payroll warrants dated March 28, April 4 and 11, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.**

Liquor Licenses:

Davis moved to approve liquor licenses for BAS, LLC. - First Class, Third Class, and Outside Consumption; also Positive Pie - First Class Bar, Third Class Bar, and Outside Consumption; as well as Winooski Valley Coop - Second Class. The motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Draft Minutes:

Davis moved to approve draft minutes dated March 25, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.

Towbin requested the Select Board sign for a structures grant application that he plans to submit for repair of a problem culvert on East Hill Rd. The Select Board members signed the document.

Adjourn:

Davis moved to adjourn at 7:37 pm. The motion carried unanimously.

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