

Town of Plainfield Select Board Meeting
June 10, 2024
149 Main St. 2nd floor and Via Zoom
Minutes - Draft

Agenda:

- Changes to Agenda
- Announcements
- Public Comment
- Town Clerk's Report (Bram Towbin)
- Approve Driveway Culvert Policy
- Update on 79 Bean Road Zoning Violations
- Emergency Management Director Update (Michael Billingsley):
 - Request Select Board Signature on Documents for FEMA Buyout of School St Property
 - Discuss Community Resilience Buyout for Mill St Property
- Approve Establishment of Town Committee to Formulate Job Descriptions for Town Clerk/Town Treasurer Appointments and Appoint Sarah O'Brien to the Committee
- Review of Community Concerns Regarding Goddard College and Possible Actions by Select Board
- Appoint Andrew Hebert to 1-year Term as Town Forest Fire Warden
- Approve Proposed Mosaic Project on Mill St. Bridge
- Approve Aronson/Eddy Access Permit
- Approve and Sign Washington County Sheriff's Department Contract for 2024/2025
- Approval of Warrants:
 - Accounts Payable - May 6, 24, 29, 30, and 31, 2024
 - Payroll - May 29 and June 5, 2024
- Approval of Draft Minutes: May 20 and 30, 2024
- Set Date for Next Select Board Meeting
- Adjourn

Present: Select Board members Jim Volz (Chair), Karl Bissex, and Patti Jamele. Also present were Town Clerk/Treasurer Bram Towbin, Emergency Management Director Michael Billingsley, Penny Bullard, Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus newspaper, Kim Nolan, Adam Hochschild, Lisa Gauthier, Sarah O'Brien, Debra Stoleroff, Elsa Engstrom, Ren Lanskey, Erik Gillard, and Janet and Ray Steward.

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

Changes to Agenda:

There were no changes to the agenda.

Announcements:

There were no announcements.

Public Comment:

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

Town Clerk's Report (Bram Towbin):

Volz recognized Town Clerk/Treasurer Bram Towbin. Towbin updated the Select Board on the Town's progress toward receiving FEMA Flood relief funds.

Towbin reported that a resident has been dumping food in areas around town, posing a threat to wildlife and domestic dogs. He further explained that the State Police had been contacted today when this person had become belligerent when confronted by other residents about the food dumping. Emergency Management Director Michael Billingsley suggested Washington County Mental Health should also be contacted.

Towbin then gave an update on Town finances, stating that July 1, 2024 will be one year since the last time the Town books have been reconciled. He explained this reconciliation should be done monthly. He made recommendations for the new fiscal year, requesting an audit be completed. He stated that he has met with Penny Bullard, who has experience working with NEMRC (the municipal accounting software) in a municipal setting in Barre. He requested that Bullard be hired at a rate of \$60/hr. to assist in reconciling the Town's finances and to provide input regarding the role of Town Treasurer. Volz addressed Bullard asking her background and plan to assist the Town. Bullard explained that she had worked for the City of Bare for over 20 years, ending as a Senior Accountant, later having worked for a local CPA firm auditing municipalities, schools, and non-profits while also doing bookkeeping work and tax preparation, and now owns her own business. She stated that if hired by the Town she would start by reviewing the Town books starting with June 30, 2023 to make sure the numbers are correct going forward and would reconcile the bank statements. Towbin gave his opinion that Bullard would be a great help to the Town and urged the Select Board to approve hiring her. Bissex pointed out that hiring Bullard is not in the budget; he requested that, if hired, Bullard agree to provide progress reports to the Select Board. Bullard agreed. Volz suggested Bullard be hired to survey the financial situation and provide feedback in a week or two to the Select Board regarding her informed estimate of the scope of work. Bullard agreed to be hired without contract temporarily for this purpose. Bissex and Jamele voiced their support for hiring Bullard. Volz asked if Linda Wells' services would be helpful in this endeavor. Towbin stated that Wells wants to take a break from the work. Volz recognized Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus

newspaper who pointed out that this topic wasn't warned. Towbin explained that this topic is covered within the context of the Town Clerk's Report. Volz expressed his opinion that the Clerk has the authority to hire Bullard without the approval of the Select Board and stated he has no objection to Towbin doing so.

Approve Driveway Culvert Policy:

Towbin stated that Road Foreman Michael Bingham was unable to attend tonight's meeting and is in support of the Driveway Culvert Policy. Towbin shared that this update to the Town Driveway Culvert Policy would shift responsibility for the cost of a culvert under the end of a driveway to the homeowner. Bissex pointed out that the proposed policy states that the Road Foreman would advise homeowners about the needed culvert size and questioned whether this opened the Town to liability. Select Board members agreed to postpone approval of the policy until Bingham can attend a Select Board meeting to join the discussion on the proposed change.

Update on 79 Bean Road Zoning Violations:

Volz recognized Kim Nolan who asked for a copy of the complaint that was filed by the Town. Adam Hochschild also requested a copy of the complaint. Volz stated he will provide them with copies. Towbin stated that a Zoning Permit Application filed by those living at 79 Bean Rd. had been filled out incorrectly and had been returned to the applicant by the Zoning Administrator. Towbin urged the Select Board to consider approving a change to the Zoning Ordinance that states that applicants must be in compliance with all Town regulations. Bissex asked who is paying the taxes on the property at 79 Bean Rd. Towbin shared that the taxes are up to date but pointed out that the property is taxed as land without a house. Towbin encouraged Lisa Gauthier, the sister of the late owner of 79 Bean Rd, to share her views on the situation. Gauthier shared her understanding that it was her sister's dying wish that the property at 79 Bean Rd. be a memorial to her and was not to be lived on. She shared that currently living on the property is Devon Lynch, son of the deceased owner, and Kelly Lynch. She stated that there is a dispute in the family over Devon living at the property and notes that the deceased owner has two other children as well, Ashley and Seth. Nolan stated that an 11 year old boy, the son of Devon, is also living at the property. Gauthier stated she has no interest in owning the land. She stated that if there was a last will and testament the owner's children would have a copy but stated that neither she nor the probate court have a copy. Hochschild asked who from the Town has contacted Devon Lynch. Towbin stated Zoning Administrator Karen Storey has had contact with Lynch. Towbin stated that Town officials are reluctant to approach Lynch. Bissex shared that the State Police had been called to 79 Bean Rd the previous weekend regarding acts of vandalism at a nearby farm. Towbin encouraged the concerned neighbors in attendance to continue to document activity at 79 Bean Rd. Gauthier provided her contact information and Towbin stated he would reach out to her to follow up.

Emergency Management Director Update (Michael Billingsley):

Request Select Board Signature on Documents for FEMA Buyout of School St Property – Volz recognized Billingsley. Billingsley reviewed the FEMA Buyout program process and shared that property owners of 98 School St. have requested to opt in to the FEMA Buyout program. He requested that the Select Board sign consent for the Town to support this property's participation. **Bissex moved to support the participation of 98 School Street in the FEMA Buyout program and to authorize Chair Volz to sign the document. Jamele seconded. The motion carried unanimously.** Volz signed the document.

Discuss Community Resilience Buyout for Mill St Property –

Billingsley shared that he has worked with the Mill St. property owner to determine that the property is not in the flood plain so therefore is disqualified from participation in the FEMA Buyout Program. He shared that the property does qualify for the Community Resilience Buyout program which the Town had not opted in to last year due to the program's requirement that the Town front all costs. Because of this he recommended that the Town not opt in. Towbin lamented that the Mill St. property wouldn't be able to find assistance if the Town doesn't opt in. Billingsley pointed out that if the Town opted in they would need to hire someone to manage the buyout as he would be unable. Towbin pointed out that the Mill St. house is in a place where water runoff from Barre Hill Rd. also causes damage to the property and stated that repairs to the curve of the road may need to be made in the future.

Billingsley shared that the Town had received a grant for \$39,053 from the Vermont Community Foundation. He confirmed with Towbin that \$4,000 will be returned to the Revolving Loan Fund. He stated that the generator installation at the Town Hall Opera House will be completed on August 1, 2024 and the first floor air conditioner installed on July 21, 2024. He noted that unforeseen expenses had arisen in the need to hire Alana Norway to wire the old generator at the Town Municipal Building, a cost which will be covered by the grant. He shared that there also has arisen the need to pay about \$400 for propane piping at the Town Hall Opera House and \$1600 for purchase of two propane tanks from Alco which would hold a 10 day supply of fuel for the Municipal Offices, the expense of which would fall to the Town. Towbin stated that there is a mold problem in the basement of the Municipal Building which requires purchase of an industrial dehumidifier. He asked if these expenses could be discussed at a future Select Board meeting, to which Volz agreed.

Approve Establishment of Town Committee to Formulate Job Descriptions for Town Clerk/Town Treasurer Appointments and Appoint Sarah O'Brien to the Committee:

Towbin explained that the offices he holds currently, Town Clerk and Town Treasurer, which for five decades have been held by individuals performing both roles, will be split and will be held by two people in the future. He suggested these may be part-time positions. Sarah O'Brien shared that she has worked for a non-profit for the past five years. Bissex asked for clarity on the

focus of the proposed committee. O'Brien stated that the need to correct the Town's bookkeeping will be considered. Towbin stated the committee will delineate the roles of each office. **Bissex moved to approve establishment of a Town committee to formulate job descriptions for Town Clerk and Town Treasurer appointments. The motion carried unanimously. Bissex moved to appoint Sarah O'Brien to help organize the committee. The motion carried unanimously.**

Review of Community Concerns Regarding Goddard College and Possible Actions by Select Board:

Volz recognized Debra Stoleroff who stated she had requested this agenda item. Stoleroff read aloud a letter she had sent to the Town requesting that the Town's attorney send a letter on behalf of the Select Board to the Vermont Attorney General's office, cc'ing the Governor's office and the Vermont Secretary of State's office, to investigate issues of malfeasance by the Goddard College Incorporated Board of Trustees and the college president. She elaborated on the ways in which the recent actions of the Goddard College board and president will negatively impact the Town. Billingsley shared that he had attended the emotional final commencement ceremony at Goddard the prior week. Stoleroff suggested that the campus could be used to provide housing and childcare facilities. She pointed out the issues of Goddard campus being a "gateway" to the Town as well as the role it plays in the Winooski watershed. Bissex pointed out that the Plainfield Water and Wastewater Department would potentially also be impacted by changed use at the Goddard campus. Towbin stated he had encouraged the Goddard Board of Trustees to hold a public meeting. Elsa Engstrom pointed out that no members of the Goddard Board of Trustees live in town. Ren Lanskey stated their understanding that Goddard's bylaws prevent the sale of the majority of the assets of the college from executive session, noting that the executive committee has met in executive session for over a year. They encouraged the Town to reach out to the Vermont Secretary of State. Bissex clarified that the purpose of the requested action is to ensure that the deal is legitimate. Volz requested that attendees provide a draft of the requested letter, Stoleroff agreed. Billingsley asked if the alumni association at Goddard would also join in the requested action. There was discussion amongst meeting attendees regarding the history of the Goddard campus. Volz stated he will send the draft letter provided by Stoleroff to the Town's attorney and stated the possibility that the Select Board will call a special meeting to approve and sign the letter. Stoleroff stated they will also provide the Select Board with the Goddard College bylaws and a letter written to the Board of Trustees by ReMake Goddard. Erik Gillard stated that April 1, 2024 was the date Goddard announced it was closed.

Appoint Andrew Hebert to 1-year Term as Town Forest Fire Warden:

Bissex moved to appoint Andrew Hebert to a 1-year term as Town Forest Fire Warden. The motion carried unanimously.

Approve Proposed Mosaic Project on Mill St. Bridge:

Volz explained that the railing of the Mill St. bridge is deteriorating and artist Janice Walrafen, who is also the Chair of the Plainfield DRB, has proposed a tiled mosaic be installed on that railing. He shared that a grant has been secured to fund the work. Volz recognized Billingsley who reminded the Select Board that the Town had hired a study of the action of the Great Brook as it passes under the Mill St. bridge. He noted that the recommendation following that study had been that the concrete rails of the bridge be replaced with an aluminum railing for improved safety during a flooding event. Volz stated he would speak with Town Grant Administrator Alice Merrill and Janice Walrafen about this information prior to the Select Board considering the proposal for approval. Bissex stated his support for installation of art around Town and his concern that the mosaic art would need to be removed if the bridge railing is replaced.

Approve Aronson/Eddy Access Permit:

Towbin stated that Michael Bingham had signed off on the access permit application. **Bissex moved to approve the Aronson/Eddy access permit. The motion carried unanimously.**

Approve and Sign Washington County Sheriff's Department Contract for 2024/2025:

Towbin stated this item should be discussed at a future meeting. Volz agreed.

Approval of Warrants and Fleet Permits:

Accounts Payable - May 6, 24, 29, 30, and 31, 2024

Bissex moved to approve accounts payable warrants dated May 6, 24, 29, 30, and 31, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.

Payroll - May 29 and June 5, 2024

Bissex moved to approve payroll warrants dated May 29 and June 5, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Draft Minutes – May 20 and 30, 2024:

Bissex moved to approve draft minutes dated May 20 and 30, 2024. The motion carried unanimously.

Set Date for Next Select Board Meeting:

Volz stated that the next regular Select Board meeting will be held on June 24, 2024 at 6 pm.

Towbin stated that the local election for the two open Select Board seats will be held August 13, 2024 and interested parties must submit a petition and consent by July 3, 2024. He stated that these forms are available on the Town website.

Volz recognized Janet Steward, former Select Board Chair, who informed the Select Board of incidents on East Hill Rd. in which her cattle were endangered by children tampering with her electric fence. She shared the State Police have been notified. Steward stressed that this is a public safety issue if her large one-ton steer are allowed to enter the road. Jamele stated that the children should be supervised and stated that the Town should do something. Bissex stated he had spoken with the State Police. Ray Steward shared his concern that the children will hurt the steer with their BB gun. Janet Steward pointed out that their Farm-stay guests bring revenue to the Town. Ray Steward expressed his concern for the children.

Adjourn:

Bissex moved to adjourn at 7:55 pm. The motion carried unanimously.

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