

Town of Plainfield Select Board and Budget Meeting
Monday, December 9, 2024, 6:00 PM
Plainfield Town Hall Opera House, 18 High St., and Via Zoom
Minutes – Approved

Agenda:

- Changes to Agenda
- Announcements
- Public Comment
- Town Clerk’s Report (Bram Towbin):
 - Discuss extending Town employee medical coverage to domestic partners
 - Discuss HRA vs HSA in Town employee medical insurance coverage
- Town Treasurer’s Report (Josh Pitts)
- Review and sign Bond Bank loan documents
- Discuss and approve engineering contact for preliminary engineer and conceptualization for the Village Expansion Project area (Arion Thiboumery)
- Discuss Veatch Revolving Loan document to determine the interest rate
- Appointment of Scott Stewart to the Water Commission
- Fire and Rescue Department Budget Review
- Discuss and act on East Montpelier Ambulance Services Contract
- Road Commissioner's Report (Josh Pitts)
- Approval of Warrants:
 - Accounts Payable: November 25 and 27, 2024
 - Payroll: November 27 and December 5, 2024
- Approval of draft minutes: November 25, 2024
- Announce date for next Select Board meeting
- Adjourn

Present: Select Board members Karl Bissex (Chair), Patti Jamele, Frances Rose Subbiondo, Dan Fingas, and Peter Youngbaer. Also present were Town Clerk Bram Towbin, Town Treasurer/Road Commissioner Josh Pitts, Plainfield Planning Commission Chair Will Colgan, Arion Thiboumery of the Village Expansion Project, Fire Chief Jonathan Matthew, Charles Cogbill, Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus, Laurie Veatch, Jean Jacques Maury, George Springston, Phillip Parisi, and Stuart Hancock.

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

Changes to Agenda:

Bissex called for any changes to the agenda. Subbiondo suggested the addition of approval of the Excess Weight Permit for Blair's Forestry Hauling. Fingas suggested the addition of approval of draft minutes from December 2, 2024. Youngbaer suggested the addition of the review of a draft letter to state legislators and the governor regarding the forgiveness of state education property taxes.

Announcements:

There were no announcements.

Public Comment:

Bissex opened the floor to public comment. Plainfield Planning Commission (PC) Chair Will Colgan shared that the PC is working on draft zoning adoption and needs guidance on whether to proceed with Select Board approval or a Town vote. He stated that the State has recommended that small towns adopt zoning through Select Board approval rather than public vote, but the Select Board can choose either method. The Select Board expressed a preference for a public vote to ensure community involvement and transparency.

Town Clerk's Report (Bram Towbin):

Discuss extending Town employee medical coverage to domestic partners – Towbin explained that the current health insurance policy does not cover domestic partners, which differs from coverage for family members. The definition of a domestic partner under Vermont law was discussed to ensure clarity in future coverage decisions.

Subbiondo moved to include spouses, domestic partners, and dependents for health care coverage for all employees. Youngbaer seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Discuss HRA vs HSA in Town employee medical insurance coverage – Towbin explained that the Town is considering switching from health reimbursement accounts (HRAs) to health savings accounts (HSAs) for employee benefits. There are concerns about the complexity and clarity of the current HRA program, with employees expressing a preference for HSAs. The financial implications of switching accounts were discussed, including potential costs and employee expectations regarding benefits. Further investigation is needed to clarify rollover limits and compatibility with existing health plans before making a final decision. Towbin stated that the Select Board can expect a proposal for vote next week.

Town Treasurer’s Report (Josh Pitts):

Pitts explained that the Town has moved ARPA funds to the General Fund to cover ongoing expenses and made the first payment of the S-1 tax. He shared that there was a shortfall of approximately \$200,000 in tax collection compared to the billed amount, prompting a review of billing accuracy. Cash flow remains stable and there are expectations for incoming grants to support financial stability. He shared that he is working on the Town budget with the Social Concerns Committee and Plainfield Fire and Rescue. He has met with the new Town Auditor, Karen Jones, to set procedure for working together.

Review and sign Bond Bank loan documents:

This topic was discussed following “Discuss and approve engineering contact for preliminary engineer and conceptualization for the Village Expansion Project area (Arion Thiboumery)”.

The Select Board reviewed the paperwork pertaining to their November 25, 2024 conversation with attorney Eli Emerson. Pitts explained that the Town will request full funding for FEMA-related work, which will be deposited into the General Fund and used to reimburse outstanding invoices. Approximately \$1.2 million in invoices has been received, and the funding will act as a reset for the Water and Wastewater Departments' finances. 50% of any reimbursement from FEMA or Federal Highway must be used to pay back the Bond Bank. The funding will help stabilize finances affected by recent floods and provide time to adjust financial plans.

Fingas moved to authorize Bissex to sign MRCF Loan Documents to participate in Bond Bank loan. Subbiondo seconded. The motion carried 4-0, as Jamele had left the meeting.

Discuss and approve engineering contact for preliminary engineer and conceptualization for the Village Expansion Project area (Arion Thiboumery):

This topic was discussed before “Review and sign Bond Bank loan documents”.

Thiboumery explained that the Village Expansion Project requires engineering services to develop design criteria for land layouts and access points. Funding of \$35,000 from the Vermont Community Foundation has been secured for preliminary engineering, with no taxpayer dollars involved. He shared that an RFP had resulted in a proposal from Engineering Ventures for \$30,000 for the engineering scoping for the Village Expansion Project group’s work. A design workshop is planned for February, and a proposal will be presented for a vote at Town Meeting, with a deadline for submission by January 20th.

It was suggested by Thiboumery, and reiterated by Fingas, that an official committee should be formed once the Town votes on the proposal to support the project. The current steering

committee is ad hoc and does not have official status. George Springston advocated for community members to be allowed to listen in on steering committee meetings to foster transparency and engagement. He emphasized the importance of conducting the project process openly, with public access to steering committee meetings and documentation.

Fingas moved to approve using \$30,000 of grant funds for engineering services from Engineering Ventures. Subbiondo seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Youngbaer moved to authorize Bissex to sign on behalf of the Select Board. Subbiondo seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Discuss Veatch Revolving Loan document to determine the interest rate:

Towbin explained that the Town has a Revolving Loan Fund that allows lending at a modest interest rate, which was approved for a property improvement loan of \$16,280 to Laurie Veatch. It was agreed that the loan would be paid back in a lump sum upon the sale of the property. Bissex explained that traditionally the committee offered 1% under prime. He stated that the Select Board had approved the loan but it had not been issued yet. Bissex proposed the interest rate be set at 2.5% to alleviate costs incurred due to delays. Veatch stated her gratitude for the Select Board moving forward regarding the loan.

Subbiondo moved to set a 2.5% interest rate for the Revolving Loan to Laurie Veatch. Youngbaer seconded. The motion carried 4-0.

Appointment of Scott Stewart to the Water Commission:

Fingas moved to appoint Scott Stewart to the Water Commission. Bissex seconded. The motion carried 4-0.

Fire and Rescue Department Budget Review:

Fire Chief Jonathan Matthew presented the Fire and Rescue Department budget with a small increase over last year that had been worked on by himself and Pitts. Adjustments include raising the budget for truck repairs and small item repairs, totaling an increase of approximately \$4,500 from the previous year. A proposal was made to categorize certain expenses more clearly to enhance financial transparency for the citizens. The Select Board plans to add this proposal to the 2025-2026 Town budget.

Select Board members discussed plans for meeting with the remaining Town committee and commission representatives regarding budgets.

Discuss and act on East Montpelier Ambulance Services Contract:

Chief Matthew will work with East Montpelier to get a one year contract. There is a need for clarity on how the ambulance service calculates costs and the number of calls attributed to each town. The group agreed to gather more information to ensure budgetary provisions are made for the ambulance service.

Road Commissioner's Report (Josh Pitts):

Pitts reported frustrations among residents regarding new traffic patterns due to flood related road closures, particularly on Brook Road. He shared that The Integrity Group has completed a survey and will present findings to the working group for grants. Bissex stated a Townwide meeting should be held after that emphasizing the need for data to understand the impact on taxpayers before making decisions.

Pitts reminded attendees that there is an online form on the Town website to report road issues.

Pitts stated that he and Road Foreman, Michael Bingham, have concluded that purchasing a new small tractor for sidewalk snow removal would be more efficient than outsourcing as the Town has received no response to the RFP. He noted the tractor would also benefit the Water Department by improving snow removal around hydrants. He shared that the equipment is on order and financing options are available to manage costs.

Letter to State regarding holding Town harmless for flood-related tax abatements:

Youngbaer presented a draft letter regarding flood-related tax exemptions, which affects approximately 11% of the grand list.

Youngbaer moved to have Bissex sign and send a Letter to State regarding holding the Town harmless for flood-related tax abatements. Subbiondo seconded. The motion carried 4-0.

Approve Excess Weight Permit for Blair's Forestry Hauling:

Fingas moved to approve issuing an Excess Weight Permit to Blair's Forestry Hauling until the end of December 2024. Subbiondo seconded. The motion carried 4-0.

Approval of Warrants:

Accounts Payable: November 25 and 27, 2024 and Payroll: November 27 and December 5, 2024
Fingas moved to approve Accounts Payable for November 25 and 27, 2024 and Payroll for November 27 and December 5, 2024. Youngbaer seconded. The motion carried 4-0.

Approval of draft minutes - November 25, 2024 and December 2, 2024:

Subbiondo moved to approve minutes of November 25 and December 2, 2024. Youngbaer seconded. The motion carried 4-0.

Announce date for next Select Board meeting:

Bissex announced that the next Select Board meeting is a special budget meeting scheduled to take place Monday, December 16, 2024 at 6 pm.

Adjourn:

Fingas moved to adjourn at 8:13 pm. Subbiondo seconded. The motion carried 4-0.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Kristin Brosky, Plainfield Town Administrative Assistant.
Minutes created with AI assistance from the Sembly app.