

Town of Plainfield Select Board Special and Budget Meeting
Monday, December 16, 2024, 6:00 PM
Plainfield Town Hall Opera House, 18 High St., and Via Zoom
Minutes - Approved

Agenda:

- Call Meeting to Order
- Changes to Agenda
- Announcements
- Public Comment
- Town Grants Administrator Report (Karen Hatcher)
 - Discuss Municipal Planning Grant
 - Discuss budget item for Flood Recovery Planning
- Social Concerns Committee Budget Review
- Cutler Memorial Library Budget Review (Angela Ogle)
- Recreation and Public Arts Committee Budget Review (Jamie Spector)
- Hazard Mitigation Committee Budget Review (Michael Billingsley/Maggie Baird)
- Discuss and act on Planning Commission (PC) request to change the size of the PC
- Review of budgets for other Town Committees and Commissions not appearing in person
- Discuss Rural Community Transport request for Town appropriation
- Finalize Town employee health care plan details
- Approve 2024 Town Meeting Minutes
- Approve of Draft Minutes: December 9, 2024
- Amend Approval of Excess Weight Permit for Blairs Forestry Hauling
- 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 Charlie Cogbill, Town Grants Administrator Karen Hatcher, Treasurer of the Trustees of the Cutler Memorial Library Mary Niebling, Town Treasurer Josh Pitts, Judy Cyprian and Marcy Hale of the Social Concerns Committee, Chair of the Trustees of the Cutler Memorial Library Grace Worcester, Cutler Memorial Library Director Angela Ogle, Chair of the Recreation and Public Arts Committee Jamie Spector, and Town Clerk Bram Towbin.

Chair Karl Bissex called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm.

Changes to Agenda:

Bissex called for any changes to the agenda. Fingas stated that the Hazard Mitigation Committee Budget Review would be removed from the agenda and instead discussed on January 6, 2025. He explained that the discussion on changing the size of the Planning Commission would be removed from the agenda after confirming it is not required by State law. Subbiondo stated that the agenda item under Karen Hatcher's reports would be renamed to 'Disaster Contingency Stipends'.

Announcements:

There were no announcements.

Public Comment:

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

Town Grants Administrator Report (Karen Hatcher):

Discuss Municipal Planning Grant – Hatcher shared that the upcoming round of municipal planning grants will be available for application starting in early January with a deadline of March 31, 2025. The grant amount is expected to be \$60,000, as confirmed by discussions with the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. She explained that the process moving forward is to apply with specific needs and recommended the funding be used to hire a consultant to work with the Town on a plan. She stated the Grants Group could then identify three to five priorities focusing on housing and infrastructure needs to bring to the Select Board for their consideration. She further explained that there would be a public hearing as part of the grant application.

Discuss Disaster Contingency Stipends – Hatcher presented a proposal to establish stipends for volunteers who have contributed significantly during the disaster recovery efforts. The proposal includes three levels of stipends for eight different positions based on the scope and duration of the positions involved in recovery work. Town Treasurer Josh Pitts suggested looking at making the Town Grants Administrator a temporary staff position. Hatcher stated that funds are available from the \$30,000 grant from the VT community Foundation, from reimbursement by FEMA to the Town for overtime hours, and FEMA funds coming back as reimbursement after the Town pays the Bond Bank. A proposal was made to seed a reserve account with an initial amount and add \$10,000 annually to build it over time. The fund would allow for reimbursement for volunteer efforts during disasters, ensuring they are compensated for their contributions. The current budget does not include stipends for volunteers unless a disaster occurs, which would activate the stipends. Proposed stipends for specific roles were discussed, with the understanding that they would only be paid if activated during a disaster. Concerns were raised about the

financial implications of stipends amidst rising healthcare costs and other budgetary pressures. There was agreement on the need to focus more on revenue generation rather than solely on expenditures. The role of Town Grants Administrator was highlighted as critical for securing funding and managing grants effectively. It was noted that grants often include administrative funding, which could alleviate some budgetary pressures.

Social Concerns Committee Budget Review:

Judy Cyprian and Marcy Hale of the Social Concerns Committee gave a report on funding for social service organizations, with all 15 applicants receiving level funding except for two organizations. The funding process was based on previous allocations, community impact, and the uniqueness of services provided. The committee emphasized the importance of ensuring that funded organizations address social concerns within the community. At Fingas' request Hale read aloud the list of organizations.

Cutler Memorial Library Budget Review (Angela Ogle):

The proposed Cutler Memorial Library budget was presented by Grace Worcester, Angela Ogle, and Mary Niebling. They presented a budget requesting a \$54,000 town appropriation which is a \$4000, or 3%, increase from the previous year. They shared that their total 2025/2026 budget is \$82,400. They shared that the library has been actively involved in community support, including providing free lunches and Covid tests. Ogle highlighted that the library operates on less funding compared to other towns but serves a comparable number of patrons. It was shared that the library is a nonprofit, which allows it to save the Town money on building repairs and utilities.

Recreation and Public Arts Committee Budget Review (Jamie Spector):

Chair of the Recreation and Public Arts Committee Jamie Spector discussed the Recreation and Public Arts Committee budget, which remains largely unchanged from the previous year. The mowing contract has been separated from the maintenance and equipment account for clearer budgeting. The proposed budget for the Recreation and Public Arts Committee totals \$8,750, covering various expenses including mowing, trash, and power bills. A request was made to allocate an additional \$500 to the recreation reserve fund, which currently has about \$1,900. There is a need to establish a clear reserve fund for the Recreation and Public Arts Committee, as previous allocations could not be located in the accounts. It was proposed that the Old Home Day budget be increased from \$900 to \$1,800 to better support the event. Spector agreed to review the Old Home Day proposal and finalize the budget request by January 6, 2025. Subbiondo raised concerns about the frequency of mowing at the Recreation Field, suggesting it could be reduced to save costs. Spector acknowledged that mowing has traditionally not been managed by the Recreation and Public Arts Committee and agreed to follow up on the mowing schedule.

Hazard Mitigation Committee Budget Review (Michael Billingsley/Maggie Baird):

The item will be discussed at the January 6, 2025 Select Board Special Meeting.

Discuss and act on Planning Commission (PC) request to change the size of the PC:

This item was removed from the agenda.

Review of budgets for other Town Committees and Commissions not appearing in person:

Development Review Board (DRB) – The DRB is requesting \$2550, with no increase over the previous year.

Zoning Administrator - Pitts suggested a 10% increase in the Zoning Administrator's stipend due to increased workload. There was discussion about the Zoning Administrator's residency and whether it affects their position with a consensus that it should be permissible since it is an appointed role.

Planning Commission – The Planning Commission would be budgeted at \$2750 with no increase over the previous year.

Town Hall Opera House – The Town Hall Opera House would have a proposed budget of \$15,000 with a \$3500 increase for electric, phone, and internet.

Conservation Commission – The Conservation Commission requested \$2300 which is a reduction of \$2275.

Municipal Building, Utility, and Misc. Expenses – The Town is proposing a \$75,450 budget for these items, a 14% increase over the previous year.

There was discussion of Town personnel salaries, benefits, taxes, and insurance. Pitts made a proposal to increase the Select Board budget to accommodate a five-person board, with a total of \$6,500 suggested. The Auditor's salary is proposed to increase by 10% due to a lack of previous adjustments, with a discussion on the number of auditors needed. The Health Officer position is budgeted at \$1,000, and a new Hazard Mitigation specialist position was proposed due to increased activity in the Hazard Mitigation Committee. The Grants Administrator and Emergency Management Director positions were discussed, with the AmeriCorps Coordinator position being confirmed as part of the budget. Health insurance costs are projected at \$87,000 for a 90% match on the Blue Cross Blue Shield Gold plan, which will cover five individuals. There is concern about potential rate increases in health insurance premiums, with a suggestion to budget for a 12-13% increase. A recommendation was made to adopt a health savings account (HSA) with a 50% contribution from the Town, which would cost approximately \$14,750. Long-term employees (20-25 years) may receive 100% coverage for their deductible as an incentive to

remain with the Town. A proposal was made to increase the compensation for the Clerk and Treasurer positions to \$60,000 each, totaling \$120,000, which is a significant increase from the previous year's budget. Concerns were raised about the need for community awareness regarding these proposed salary increases before the Town vote.

There was discussion of revenue and how it will bring down the needed amount to raise by taxes. The non-tax income for the previous fiscal year was reported at \$346,412.60, with a conservative estimate of \$286,450 for the upcoming year. The proposed municipal tax to be raised is \$1,316,845.86, with adjustments expected based on the budget discussions. The current budget request is \$1,294,961.44, reflecting a decrease of approximately \$20,000 from the previous year. Expected increased revenues may allow for a lower tax request, potentially resulting in a stable or reduced tax rate.

All budget numbers need to be finalized by January 6th for discussion on January 14, 2025. The goal is to have all necessary parties scheduled for the January 6th meeting to ensure comprehensive budget discussions.

Discuss Rural Community Transport request for Town appropriation:

Rural Community Transport, Inc. requested \$6,833.06 for services to Plainfield residents, which is the same amount as last year. Fingas read aloud the proposed article, "Shall the Town of Plainfield vote to raise, appropriate and expend the sum of \$6,833.06 for the support of Rural Community Transportation Inc. to provide services to residents of the Town of Plainfield".

Youngbaer moved to approve the article as written by Rural Community Transportation. Jamele seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Finalize Town employee health care plan details:

The Town will transition from health reimbursement accounts (HRAs) to health savings accounts (HSAs), contributing 50% of the deductible for all employees. Employees with 20 years or more of service will receive 100% coverage of their deductible.

Youngbaer moved for the Town of Plainfield to cease to pay into the HRA and begin to pay into a Health Savings Account for all employees paying for coverage at 50% of their deductible and raising to 100% of their deductible for employees with 20 years or more of service. Jamele seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Approve 2024 Town Meeting Minutes:

Subbiondo moved to approve the minutes of Town Meeting held on May 22, 2024. Jamele seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Approve of Draft Minutes: December 9, 2024:

Fingas moved to approve minutes of the December 9, 2024 Plainfield Select Board meeting. Youngbaer seconded. Youngbaer suggested an amendment to the December 9, 2024 minutes with the section on the Bond Bank amended to “used to pay back the Bond Bank” in the place of “returned to the fund immediately”. The motion to approve the amended minutes carried unanimously.

Amend Approval of Excess Weight Permit for Blairs Forestry Hauling:

Subbiondo moved to remove qualifications on the excess weight permit for Blairs Forestry Hauling as reflected in their excess weight permit filed with the Town. Jamele seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Announce date for next Select Board meeting:

Bissex announced that the next Select Board meeting is scheduled to take place Monday, January 6, 2025 at 6 pm.

Adjourn:

Jamele moved to adjourn at 8:40 pm. Subbiondo seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

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