

**Town of Plainfield Select Board Special Meeting
Monday, January 13, 2025, 5:00 PM
Plainfield Town Hall Opera House, 18 High St., and Via Zoom
Minutes - Draft**

Agenda:

- Call Meeting to Order
- Changes to Agenda
- Announcements
- Public Comment
- Address Notice of Zoning Violation at 3814 East Hill Rd (Karen Storey)
- Finalize the 2025-2026 Town Budget Proposal
- Discuss date of Town Meeting
- Sign East Montpelier Ambulance Services Contract
- Appoint Scott Bennett and Lydia Vitale to the Cemetery Commission
- Approval of Draft Minutes: January 6, 2025
- Approval of Warrants:
 - Accounts Payable: January 3 and 9, 2025
 - Payroll: January 9, 2025
- Announce date for next Select Board Meeting: January 27, 2025
- Adjourn

Present: Select Board members Karl Bissex (Chair), Frances Rose Subbiondo, Patti Jamele, Dan Fingas and Peter Youngbaer. Also present were Tracy Hobbs-Johnson, Lauren Geiger, Kayle Hope, Aaron Fuller, Kim Nolan, Michael Morlan, Town Treasurer Josh Pitts, Lister Sandy Ross, Lydia Vitale, Plainfield Planning Commission Chair Will Colgan, and Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus.

Chair Karl Bissex called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

Changes to Agenda:

There were no changes to the agenda.

Announcements:

There were no announcements.

Public Comment:

Bissex opened the floor to public comment. Bissex recognized Tracy Hobbs-Johnson who suggested forming a community liaison committee to inform the public about the Plainfield Expansion Project. Subbiondo mentioned that the working group for the Village Expansion Project recently unveiled their vision and is responding to community feedback. Lauren Geiger shared that information sessions with Q&A links were posted online for public access.

Address Notice of Zoning Violation at 3814 East Hill Rd (Karen Storey):

Plainfield Zoning Administrator Karen Storey provided a timeline of actions taken regarding a zoning violation related to outdoor lighting at the property. The violation pertains to outdoor lighting not being shielded and illuminating adjacent properties, violating Section 3.8 of the Plainfield Zoning Regulations. The board discussed issuing a letter to the property owner requiring corrective action by March 1, 2025, or face daily fines. There was a proposal to set a shorter deadline of February 1, 2025, with retroactive fines starting from the first violation date. The zoning regulation specifies fines for light violations, with discussions suggesting a fine of \$50 per day retroactively from September 3rd, 2024, if not corrected by February 1st.

Fingas moved to send a letter to the owner of 3814 East Hill Rd for lighting violation with a fix by date of February 1, 2025 with a violation amount of \$50 a day from September 3, 2024 if not fixed and ongoing until fixed sent and signed by Select Board Chair Karl Bissex. Jamele seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Finalize the 2025-2026 Town Budget Proposal:

Members of the Select Board discussed the final budget proposal with Town Treasurer Josh Pitts. The budget includes the creation of new funds for specific projects, which will be presented to taxpayers at Town Meeting. These include a Disaster Reserve Fund of \$10,000, Recreation and Public Art Projects Reserve fund of \$2500 (\$500 new money and placing \$2000 of money that should have been placed in previous years but wasn't), Culvert Reserve Fund of \$10,000, Bridge Reserve Fund of \$5,000, and a Sidewalk Reserve Fund of \$500. There was discussion of increasing the Town Grants Administrator's stipend from \$4000 in the past budget to \$8000 in the current budget. The group discussed the need to offer competitive compensation to attract skilled volunteers for grant work.

The Town's past expenditures were analyzed, revealing unexpected costs related to storm drain maintenance. The proposed budget is \$1.364 million, which is expected to be raised through taxes, with an increase of about \$47,000 compared to last year. Expected revenues, including federal reimbursements from emergency responses, may reduce the tax burden significantly. The budget includes provisions for potential cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) and pay raises for employees, with a discussion on the appropriateness of the proposed increases. The budget accounts for increased healthcare and benefit costs, which have risen significantly impacting

overall expenditures. The addition of separate Town Clerk and Town Treasurer positions has also contributed to the budget increase. The Town has a permissive article allowing the use of any general fund surplus to reduce taxes in the following year. A rough estimate suggests a surplus of around \$236,000 could be available for tax reduction, although no specific number is officially assigned. The Select Board discussed authorizing the application of surplus funds from the current fiscal year to reduce taxes for the next fiscal year. A proposed tax reduction of 14.3% was noted, but concerns were raised about an 11% loss in the grand list affecting expectations. The board discussed Goddard's potential tax liability, noting that they would not be taxed until after April 1st due to their status as a non-operating educational institution. Lister Sandy Ross confirmed that Goddard would be fully taxed starting April 1, 2024, regardless of ownership changes. The board acknowledged the need for clarity regarding Goddard's tax status and its implications for the Town's budget. The board discussed a proposal to use \$10,000 from the Plainfield Area Community Trust for the Disaster Reserve Fund, which would help avoid taxpayer burden.

Youngbaer moved to approve the passage of the FY 2026 budget with amendments to the stipend for the Grant Administrator and the initial amount for the Recreation and Public Art lines. Jamele seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Discuss date of Town Meeting:

It was noted that there has been the suggestion from Town Office staff and others to change the date of Town Meeting. Legal advice confirmed that the Town Meeting date cannot be changed from March 4th, but it can be held the day before or up to three days prior. Concerns were raised about processing absentee ballot requests and the need for additional volunteers to assist the office staff. The potential for hiring a retired Town Clerk to help organize the Town Meeting was discussed to alleviate pressure on current staff. It was noted that Town Meeting could convene on March 4th and then recess to a further date. Youngbaer is heading up the effort to put together the Town Report in the Town Clerk's absence. There was discussion on updating the Town Report to reflect current officeholders rather than those in office at the end of the fiscal year.

Sign East Montpelier Ambulance Services Contract:

Fingas moved to approve Chair Bissex to sign the East Montpelier Ambulance Services contract for the Town. Jamele seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Appoint Scott Bennett and Lydia Vitale to the Cemetery Commission:

Fingas moved to appoint Scott Bennett and Lydia Vitale to the Cemetery Commission. Subbiondo seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Vitale expressed their excitement about joining the commission.

Approval of Draft Minutes: January 6, 2025:

Subbiondo moved to approve the draft minutes dated January 6, 2025. Fingas seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Warrants:

Accounts Payable: January 3 and 9, 2025

Payroll: January 9, 2025

Fingas moved to approve the accounts payable warrants dated January 3 and 9, 2025 and the payroll warrant dated January 9, 2025. Subbiondo seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Announce date for next Select Board Meeting: January 27, 2025:

Bissex announced the next regular Select Board meeting will be held on Monday, January 27, 2025.

Select Board members and Plainfield Planning Commission Chair Will Colgan discussed the timeline for warning a public hearing regarding the proposed changes to the Zoning Regulations to ensure the issue may be included on the Town Meeting Australian ballot.

Adjourn:

Fingas moved to adjourn at 7:53 PM. Jamele seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

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