

Town of Plainfield Select Board Meeting
Monday, January 27, 2025, 6:00 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
- Discuss request for Select Board support for a grant application for weather station to monitor Great Brook (George Springston and Rose Paul)
- Grants Group Update (Karen Hatcher)
- Discuss proposal to add Town Bond to finance Village Expansion Project to Town Meeting Warning (Arion Thiboumery)
- Discuss negotiation of Purchase & Sale Agreement for Village Expansion pending ballot measure approval
- Discussion and final approval of the Articles for the Town Meeting Warning
- Discuss temporary Town Office help and compensation
- Discuss and adopt Municipal Ethics Policy
- Designate a Select Board liaison to the State Ethics Commission
- Designate a Select Board liaison to the Hazard Mitigation Committee
- Appoint Laura Brill to the Hazard Mitigation Committee
- Update appointment of Lydia Vitale to a 2-year term as Cemetery Commissioner
- Update appointment of Scott Bennett to a 1-year term as Cemetery Commissioner
- Approval of Draft Minutes: January 13, 2025
- Approval of Warrants:
 - Accounts Payable: two warrants dated January 10th, one dated January 13th, one dated January 17th, one dated January 22nd, and two dated January 23, 2025
 - Payroll: January 16 and 23, 2025
- Announce date for next Select Board Meeting: Public Hearing January 31, 2025 and regular meeting February 10, 2025
- Adjourn

Present: Select Board members Karl Bissex (Chair), Frances Rose Subbiondo, Patti Jamele, and Peter Youngbaer. Select Board member Dan Fingas was not in attendance. Also present were

Conservation Commission Chair Rose Paul, George Springston, Town Grants Administrator Karen Hatcher, Program Manager Brian Voigt of Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, Charlie Cogbill, Anne Van Couvering, Paula Emery, Arion Thiboumery of the Village Expansion Project Steering Committee, Richard Rubin, Jon Hosford, Doug Weinrich, Alicia Weiss, Dave Perreault, Alana Norway, Glenda Bissex, Dawn Fancher, Hazard Mitigation Committee Chair Maggie Baird, and Town Treasurer Josh Pitts.

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

Changes to Agenda:

There were no changes to the agenda.

Announcements:

Bissex announced a Select Board hosted Public Hearing and Special Meeting on January 31, 2025 at 6:00 pm to go over the proposed changes to the Zoning Regulations. He also announced that Town Meeting would be held on time this year. He made a plea for interested parties to step forward as the Town is in need of two Town Auditors.

Public Comment:

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

Discuss request for Select Board support for a grant application for weather station to monitor Great Brook (George Springston and Rose Paul):

Bissex recognized Conservation Commission Chair Rose Paul who explained that she is seeking a letter of support from the Select Board for submission of a grant application George Springston has assisted the Commission in writing. She shared that submission of the grant application was approved unanimously at the January 15, 2025 Conservation Commission meeting. She explained that the grant would be for \$1,200 to purchase a continuous recording weather station to be installed by Springston high up in the Great Brook watershed. This rain gauge would automatically upload data to Weather Underground and would serve as an early warning system for potential flooding due to heavy rain. Springston clarified that the device would be Wi-Fi based and they would be seeking to work with residents of Gore Rd to support the weather station.

Subbiondo moved to support the grant application for the weather station in the upper Great Brook headwaters. Jamele seconded. The motion carried with the four present members of the Select Board voting in favor.

Grants Group Update (Karen Hatcher):

Bissex recognized Town Grants Administrator Karen Hatcher who reminded the board that she has been working with a group of volunteers to secure funding for flood recovery. She reviewed the funding sources that the group is working on which includes FEMA Public Assistance, assistance from the Federal Highway Administration to address Brook Rd. damage, and the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Grant. Program Manager Brian Voigt of Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) joined the meeting to discuss the steps involved in the EWP grant process and the assistance CVRPC can offer in the process. He explained that the next step would involve the Select Board authorizing the preparation of the application packet which does not obligate the Town to spend money but rather is an expression of interest. Youngbaer clarified that, although four sites had been identified as eligible, two may be disqualified as they may be approved for FEMA buyout; he pointed out the Town would be responsible for covering 25% of the cost. Charlie Cogbill suggested that the co-applicants be included in discussion of the costs and the evaluation. Voight estimated that work could begin as early as autumn 2025. The issue of the need to budget for Town grant matches was raised. Hatcher stated that the Town's match is 7.5% because the State will cover 17.5% and FEMA will cover 75% of approved expenses.

Hatcher informed the Select Board that the Municipal Planning Grant in the amount of \$30,000 opens today and the Town will need to apply before March 31, 2025. She suggested this money could be used to plan for the green space that will open up in Town following FEMA buyouts or to complete a study on infill housing around town. Bissex recognized Anne Van Couvering who encouraged the Select Board to consider using the grant funds to identify a cohesive vision for planning for the Town's future. Subbiondo expressed support for applying for the Municipal Planning Grant to assist in the planning for future green space in town. Bissex and Hatcher agreed to take up further discussion of this issue at a February 2025 Select Board meeting.

Hatcher informed the board that she, George Springston, and Michael Zahner had met with Steve Libby of Vermont Emergency Management to discuss the FEMA Advanced System Funding Grant that would provide funds for scientific mapping and modeling of the Great Brook. Springston explained that such a study would give quantitative information for engineers and river scientists to design the best fixes for the areas surrounding the brook. Hatcher explained that this grant requires a 25% Town match of the estimated \$150,000 to \$200,000 project.

Hatcher informed the board that the Community Development Block grant for disaster relief was issued to Vermont from the federal government with \$55 million allotted to projects in Washington and Lamoille counties. She explained the maximum grant application is \$10 million. She shared that the grants group is meeting the following day with Executive Director of Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation (CVEDC) Melissa Bounty and Central Vermont Recovery Officer Patricia Moulton to discuss the regional priority list for the grant application.

Hatcher stated that she is setting up a meeting with the Agency of Commerce and Community Development Director of Business Support Kristie Farnham to discuss the Northern Borders Grant.

Jamele asked if there is grant monies to help the Town make its match. Hatcher stated there may be State money to assist with the Town's grant matches. She stated her interest in the Town having a bigger conversation to strategize about recovery funding.

Subbiondo moved to support the application for the Emergency Watershed Protection Grant in a non-committal position that the Town is presently in. Jamele seconded. The motion carried with the four present members of the Select Board voting in favor.

Discuss proposal to add Town Bond to finance Village Expansion Project to Town Meeting Warning (Arion Thiboumery):

Bissex recognized Arion Thiboumery of the Village Expansion Project Steering Committee. Bissex requested Thiboumery provide an overview of the committee's request. Thiboumery shared that the committee had held two informational sessions in early January 2025 with approximately 150 people in attendance. He shared the progress of the steering committee's planning work. He stated there will be a community design workshop held on February 8, 2025. He stated that the committee is requesting the Select Board make a resolution supporting the addition of an article to the Town Meeting Australian ballot to approve the Town to borrow up to \$2.5 million to fund the Village Expansion Project, explaining that approval of the article by the voters would give the Select Board authority to borrow the money but would not obligate the board to do so. At Bissex's request Thiboumery read aloud the proposed article: "Shall general obligation bonds or notes in an amount not to exceed Two Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$2,500,000), subject to reduction by the application of federal and state grants-in-aid and reserve funds, be issued for the purpose of expanding the east side of the village by acquiring land and constructing highway and other municipal infrastructure improvements, the estimated cost of such acquisition and improvements being Two Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$2,500,000)?" Bissex recognized Richard Rubin who suggested this language does seem to obligate the Town to approve some bonds and further suggested the addition of a clause that includes "subject to the approval of the Select Board". This language was added by Thiboumery

and Bissex expressed support for the addition of the clause. Youngbaer suggested that statute supports putting in language regarding the period of repayment and the interest rate and suggested 10 year repayment not to exceed 2% interest. Thiboumery stated that would be in line with the terms suggested by the Vermont Community Foundation who has expressed interest in the project. Youngbaer read aloud a necessity resolution provided by attorney Eli Emerson. There was discussion about the need for this at this time.

Bissex recognized Cogbill who pointed out that if this issue is on the ballot that the Town is making a decision about an undefined plan.

Bissex recognized Jon Hosford, an abutting land owner of the proposed village expansion site, who stated his opinion that the details of the \$2.5 million estimate should be shared.

Bissex recognized Paula Emery who requested clarification about future Select Board action on the issue.

Bissex recognized Doug Weinrich who voiced support for Cogbill's comment and stated his opposition to this issue being on the ballot without further detail provided regarding the project costs. He stated his support for the project and asked who the developer will be. Youngbaer expressed his understanding that the Town would be the developer and expounded on his ideas regarding the merits of the proposed project in addition to his concerns. He stated that he would not support putting this measure on the ballot at this time.

Bissex recognized Alicia Weiss, an abutting land owner of the proposed village expansion site, who commended the steering committee for their phenomenal work but noted that the timeline for the project feels rushed.

Bissex recognized Van Couvering who stated her interest in hearing more details of the project and encouraged the ballot measure to include language regarding the requirement of future meetings for the townspeople to discuss the issue. Thiboumery clarified that the request of the steering committee is that the Select Board approve the issue to be included on the Town Meeting ballot. He explained that the value of the proposed site of the project would need to be discussed in a Select Board executive session which has been a reason that more information regarding the potential costs has not been released. He expressed his concern that if the project cannot move forward this year that the Town will miss out on available funding. Subbiondo expressed her ideas regarding the proposed timing of the project and the available grant funding and noted that timing of the need to warn Town Meeting presents a constraint. Jamele inquired about the ethics of the Town buying the proposed property from Town Clerk Towbin. Bissex pointed out that the population of Plainfield has not increased since the 1980s yet the Town costs have increased.

Bissex recognized Dave Perreault who questioned whether voters would understand what they were voting for. Weinrich supported this inquiry.

Bissex recognized Alana Norway who asked if there is a time limit on the available grant money. Hatcher stated she would be looking into that question and suggested rewording of the proposed article that would allow for more time for the Select Board to gather further information on the project. Youngbaer stated his understanding that an advisory vote cannot be done by Australian ballot.

Thiboumery stated he'd heard advice from attorney Eli Emerson referencing the new Municipal Code of Ethics, as well as from Richard Rubin, that as long as the Town Clerk recuses himself and has no decision making authority in the transaction there is not a conflict of interest. Youngbaer stated his disagreement, reading aloud from the Municipal Code of Ethics. Subbiondo pointed out that the Town Clerk could choose to resign which could also resolve the conflict of interest. Weinrich encouraged the board to submit an inquiry to the State Ethics Board.

Bissex expressed his support for exploring planned village expansion and lamented the short time frame. Van Couvering agreed and pointed out that more information will allow people to make an informed vote and voiced support for a special meeting to allow more Town conversation about the issue.

Bissex recognized Glenda Bissex who voiced support for the project and for holding a special meeting to address the issue.

There was continued discussion amongst attendees and Select Board members about the best way to proceed regarding the issue.

Bissex recognized Dawn Fancher who pointed out that the problem with in-person Town Meeting voting is that it isn't accessible to all but noted their understanding that there can be advisory votes from the floor at Town Meeting suggesting this as a possibility for bringing this issue to a vote. Board members discussed this as an option.

Bissex suggested this issue be discussed further at the scheduled Select Board Special Meeting on Friday, January 31, 2025.

Discuss negotiation of Purchase & Sale Agreement for Village Expansion pending ballot measure approval:

This issue was not discussed as the attorney could not be present at the meeting.

Discussion and final approval of the Articles for the Town Meeting Warning:

This was discussed at the end of the meeting prior to adjournment.

Discuss temporary Town Office help and compensation:

Youngbaer shared that the Town Office staff has requested temporary help. He shared that former Barre City Clerk Carol Dawes is available to consult with the Town at \$40/hr. as an independent contractor not to exceed 90 hrs. to assist with the handling of the Town Meeting Day preparation, warning, and elections.

Youngbaer moved to authorize Bissex to sign the letter of agreement with the terms as described. Jamele seconded. The motion carried with the four present members of the Select Board voting in favor.

Discuss and adopt Municipal Ethics Policy:

Youngbaer moved to adopt the State Ethics Policy and replace our current policy and approve Bissex as the liaison to the State Ethics Committee. Jamele seconded. The motion carried with the four present members of the Select Board voting in favor.

Designate a Select Board liaison to the State Ethics Commission:

Bissex volunteered to be the liaison to the State Ethics Committee. Subbiondo spoke in support of this and stated that the State Ethics Policy must be formally adopted by the Town.

Designate a Select Board liaison to the Hazard Mitigation Committee:

Bissex recognized Hazard Mitigation Committee Chair Maggie Baird who stated that Towbin had previously been the liaison when he was on the Select Board. Jamele and Subbiondo stated their interest in sharing the position.

Subbiondo moved to designate herself and Jamele as liaisons from the Select Board to the Hazard Mitigation Committee. There was no vote.

Appoint Laura Brill to the Hazard Mitigation Committee:

Subbiondo moved to appoint Laura Brill to the Hazard Mitigation Committee. Youngbaer asked if this position has a term. Baird stated that the Hazard Mitigation Committee doesn't have terms. Jamele seconded. The motion carried with the four present members of the Select Board voting in favor.

Update appointment of Lydia Vitale to a 2-year term as Cemetery Commissioner:
See below.

Update appointment of Scott Bennett to a 1-year term as Cemetery Commissioner:
Youngbaer explained that the appointment of Vitale and Bennett to the Cemetery Commission had been made at the previous Select Board meeting without stating specific terms and that tonight's appointment was to correct that.

Subbiondo moved to appoint Lydia Vitale to a two-year term as Cemetery Commissioner and Scott Bennett to a one-year term as Cemetery Commissioner. Jamele seconded. The motion carried with the four present members of the Select Board voting in favor.

Youngbaer offered a point of information that these appointments are only good through Town Meeting Day and both individuals have submitted petitions to be on the ballot.

Approval of Draft Minutes: January 13, 2025:
Bissex suggested this item be moved to the next regular Select Board meeting.

Approval of Warrants:
Accounts Payable: two warrants dated January 10th, one dated January 13th, one dated January 17th, one dated January 22nd, and two dated January 23, 2025. Payroll: January 16 and 23, 2025.

Subbiondo moved to approve Accounts Payable: two warrants dated January 10th, one dated January 13th, one dated January 17th, one dated January 22nd, and two dated January 23, 2025 as well as Payroll: January 16 and 23, 2025. Youngbaer noted that all nine of these warrants had been signed by the Select Board. **Jamele seconded. The motion carried with the four present members of the Select Board voting in favor.**

Announce date for next Select Board Meeting: Public Hearing January 31, 2025 and regular meeting February 10, 2025:
Bissex announced that the next meeting is January 31, 2025 and the next regular meeting is February 10, 2025.

Subbiondo pointed out that the board still needed to discuss agenda item "Discussion and final approval of the Articles for the Town Meeting Warning". Youngbaer presented a working

document that will be finalized and submitted for printing in the Town Report. He noted that possible articles related to the zoning amendments and the village expansion bond vote will still need to be discussed at the Select Board Special Meeting on Friday, January 31st. He stated he is also waiting to receive dates for collection of 2025 taxes from Town Treasurer Josh Pitts for completion of Article 18. He noted there are five articles that seek to create reserve funds and requested board members review the language of these. Town Treasurer Josh Pitts stated that he would supply the tax due dates before January 31st.

Jamele shared that Twinfield School would be closed the following day due to illness.

Adjourn:

Subbiondo moved to adjourn at 8:38 PM. Bissex seconded. The motion carried with the four present members of the Select Board voting in favor.

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