Town of Plainfield Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Nov 10, 2025 6:00 PM

In-person at Plainfield Town Hall Opera House, 18 Main St • Remote via Zoom

Attendees: Selectboard members Karl Bissex, Frances Rose Subbiondo, Patti Jamele, Dan Fingas, (absent: Peter Youngbaer); Bram Towbin, Karen Hatcher, Josh Pitts, Michael Billingsley, Arion Thiboumery, David Scheckman, Michael Birnbaum, Alana Norway, Charlie Cogbill, Jake McBride, John Broderick, Cil Relland, Denise Wheeler (via Zoom), Sasha Thayer, Rose Paul, Eli Barlow, Kirstie Grant, Tammy Farnham, Genese Grill, Jared Birchmore, and others via Zoom

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Motions at a glance

- Plainfield Housing Advisory Committee is created
- Local Hazard Mitigation Plan is adopted
- Selectboard holds an executive session in accordance with statute to discuss real estate transactions with the town's attorney

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Meeting Minutes

Call Meeting to Order

- Selectboard chair Karl Bissex calls the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Changes to Agenda

- Agenda as published: 2025-11-10_Plainfield Selectboard Meeting Agenda
- Frances Rose notes that the East Hill Expansion Next Steps agenda item will be moved after the proposed executive session.

Announcements

- Patti Jamele offers a seasonal joke
- Frances Rose shares vacancies across town committees and commissions.

Public Comment

- No comment is put forth.

(R) Town Clerk's Report

- **Bram Towbin, Town Clerk, shares an update about the previous week's election.** In particular, he notes that there were two absentee ballots that did not arrive in the mail, even when sent in ample time. He describes this unreliability of the mail as "the new normal" and advises people to act with this in mind. He recommends voters who wish to vote absentee log onto the Vermont Voter Portal at the beginning of the new calendar year and submit an absentee ballot request for the entire calendar year.
    - Dan Fingas clarifies which elections in Vermont require every voter to be sent an absentee ballot, and which elections voters would need to request one for.
- **Bram shares that there will likely be a Board of Civil Authority (BCA) meeting** preceding the next selectboard meeting to purge challenged voters from the town's voter checklist in accordance with statute.
- **Bram also suggests that the selectboard form a subcommittee to discuss Listers versus Assessors**, as he notes that the town will be losing one of its three valued listers. He notes that
- **He proposes the selectboard also consider which town roles might be better served as appointed positions**, rather than elected, noting that it would provide flexibility to work with people who don't necessarily live within the town lines of Plainfield.

(R) Town Constable's Report

- Constable Dan Caddy is absent, so the meeting continues on.

(R) Grant Administrator's Report

- **Karen Hatcher shares that the grant for the study of the Great Brook is moving forward.** There will be a meeting with consultants and the small grants team, date to be determined.
- **Michael Billingsley notes that the overhead helicopter flights to survey the area have been repeatedly postponed due to weather conditions**, so it is still possible they may happen by the end of the week.

(R) East Village Expansion Advisory Committee (EVEAC) Report

- **Arion Thiboumery, a co-chair of the committee, speaks to the scope of the committee's work and where each area of work stands currently.** Much of the work is contained within the CDBG-DR grant submitted by the town. Thus, the scope of work

largely has been accomplished, but other areas remain open and ongoing, such as lot sales.

(V) Plainfield Housing Advisory Committee formation

- **Frances Rose speaks to a shared interest to explore other strategies the town has to create housing**—liveable properties that will add to the grand list and thereby reduce tax burdens. The selectboard wants to bring strong ideas to the stage in the form of a proposal. She notes that one of the strengths of the EVEAC was that they turned an idea into an actionable proposal. She hopes that a Plainfield Housing Advisory Committee will be voted into being, and envisions five to nine seats, with a structure similar to EVEAC. Working groups and subcommittees (which can include those not formally on the committee) can enrich the committee's efforts. The charge for the committee can be found on the town's website and on Front Porch Forum.[1]
- Karl notes that Mike Davidson, the owner of Goddard, is interested in renting apartments, but will likely not be one to supply new housing, so other ideas will need to be explored.
- **David Scheckman asks about the relationship between the Plainfield Housing Advisory Committee and the housing-related committee emerging from Plainfield Forward.** He brings up a meeting scheduled for November 20th.
    - Frances Rose shares that she spoke with Laura Cavin Bailey who noted that Plainfield is unusual in its organization, and that the VCRD is accustomed to supporting ad hoc community groups in their work. This merging this with the selectboard's intention to create a formal advisory body is what makes this situation unique. The meeting on the 20th, she explains, is for anyone who was at Plainfield Forward, or who was interested in attending but didn't. VCRD will facilitate that moment. Frances Rose believes that meeting will also help to identify those who would like to serve on the formal committee, as well as those interested in supporting in a less time-consuming role, such as on a working group communicating with the committee. Her sense is that Laura from VCRD knows this effort will feed or flow into the committee.
- **Michael Birnbaum expresses confusion about the timing for committee membership selection—will that be after the 20th and the VCRD meeting, not tonight?**
    - Frances Rose affirms this understanding, though welcomes anyone to give their name and interest to the board tonight.

[1] The PHAC charge can be viewed as a PDF here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pS55LOjErbX8B3RQCANZNfXXPCzPVUhK/view?usp=sharing

- **Michael asks whether co-chairs would be selected by the membership of the committee or by the selectboard.**
    - Karl responds that the membership of the committee selects these positions.
    - Dan explains that in the case of the EVEAC and likely for this committee as well, the selectboard holds the first meeting which includes an election within the committee for its chairs. From then on, the committee chairs take over the responsibility of holding the meetings.
- **Michael asks the selectboard for multiple forms of outreach** before the 20th encouraging people to look at the committee's charge and to be ready to consider membership in this committee. He notes that not everybody knows about this.
    - Dan responds. Using EVEAC as the template, the selectboard announced the committee, and then at a meeting or two later, the board announces that applications are open. Then, a selectboard member speaks to each applicant. And following this, they held a meeting to formally bring people on. He estimates this process will span multiple meetings, and will not happen fast.
    - Frances Rose asks if the selectboard can also bring the committee into being by vote at the present meeting, and begin taking statements of interest. Dan and Karl note the methods used previously for collecting statements of interest so they can happen asynchronously and not be tied to any individual selectboard member or a particular time.
- **Alana Norway asks how the selectboard determined the membership number range (5–9) for the proposed committee.**
    - Frances Rose responds, stating a preference for nine considering the work to be done. Dan adds that the language was flexible to prevent situations where the committee would be limited if it didn't have exactly nine members, for example. He adds that nine was a compromise in effort to have "enough perspectives without having so many people that it [becomes] unruly and hard to deal." Frances Rose notes that the Plainfield Housing Advisory Committee has the option to vote to increase numbers on their committee, if they want.
- **Charlie Cogbill asks for formal discernment about the proposal** before "beginning to plan and go back and forth on what the proposal will be." He requests of the selectboard, "please, if you will, make a motion at some point to open the discussion of it, so that the public can hear what your logic is, what your discernment is, and what your decision is." He notes that the charge for the proposed committee seems to contain some of the same language, even verbatim, as that of the East Village Expansion Advisory Committee., He asks what the relationship is between the proposed Plainfield Housing Advisory Committee (PHAC) and the existing EVEAC.

    - Frances Rose replies that both advisory committees are tasked with creating possibilities for housing. Dan adds that the EVEAC was focused on a specific project, and clarifies that the proposed PHAC would be for any other projects related to housing.
    - Dan draws attention to a document containing the goals, role, scope of work, the term of the committee and of individual members, how co-chairs will be selected, allowance for working groups, and more.
    - Dan also notes that the selectboard is not required to have a motion before debating or discussing the proposal. He adds that there can be discussion after a motion and a second for the motion, but there is not a requirement to formally establish the charter before discussing the proposal.
- **Jake McBride speaks to Michael Birnbaum's request for different ways of getting information out to people.** He asks Michael to name those ways of communicating to get them on record and make sure it does happen across all the requested avenues to reach as many people as possible.
    - Michael responds that he did not have any specific forms of communication in mind, but names Front Porch Forum and Plainfield People (on Facebook) as two internet-based ways people obtain information. He speaks in reference to an idea discussed at Plainfield Forward for a town newsletter, a periodic mailer sent to all residents of the town. He echoes Jake's mention of posters.
    - Dan notes that the town office maintains a list of people who have requested to receive updates (such as those that would be posted on the town website) to be mailed to them, and that they could certainly send mailers to these folks. The selectboard also invited people to contact them or the Accessibility Committee to be added to that list if they would like.
- **Michael asks whether the selectboard was aware of the idea for a town newsletter.** Members of the board say no. Karl "remember[s] the discussion, but didn't remember anyone volunteering to write it." *There is some inaudible dialogue that follows. It's suggested that the discussion of the newsletter will be continued/revisited.* Frances Rose adds that the bulletin board at the municipal office is another place where information is posted.
- **John Broderick shares his assessment that the selectboard does not have to formalize the committee.** He states that the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) has been doing this community facilitation process for decades, where housing often comes up as an issue to focus on. He asserts that an ad hoc committee could do the same thing and may even have more flexibility. "What it's going to come down to is a lot of individual conversations with property owners, and some will be cooperative,

and some will not even pick up the phone. Is that all going to be subject to open meeting law? Because that might inhibit some of those conversations."

- Karl responds, noting that the ad hoc version of the East Village Expansion group was criticized for not being open to everybody. So the selectboard with the EVEAC ensured it was on record and open.
- Frances Rose clarifies a point—if there were nine committee members, then under Open Meeting law four people could be interacting with a landowner outside of the record of Open Meeting. Karl adds that volunteers and working groups can support an organization (or formal committee) that's developed. Frances Rose affirms, "send the working groups out!"
- **Michael Birnbaum refers to an earlier conversation he had with Frances Rose on that topic where it emerged that perhaps a hybrid solution is the best one: where there is the selectboard-sanctioned committee, but the working groups are not subcommittees but rather remain ad hoc working groups**. Dan affirms this, and notes that it's the way EVEAC already works, as he initially had concerns imagining that there would be several subcommittees to manage.
- Karl clarifies that the selectboard is looking for a point person, or a few point people, who can relay information about what the committee is doing so that the selectboard can make informed decisions.
- Michael Birnbaum names that he wants to make a distinction between the ad hoc steering committee for the EVE, and what is being discussed presently. "Even if they are ad hoc groups, they should be truly open." Karl asks whether Michael means minutes and warnings. Dan interjects that these rules take away the ad hoc nature of such a group. Michael asserts that they "should not be exclusive in any way," and "should take any input that anyone offers them." Frances Rose responds that she thinks this question is going to be for the committee writ large to determine.
- **Karen Hatcher shares that a good model of this structure is this grants group.** She describes the structure where she is appointed Grants Administrator, but the grants group is a working group, yet they are open and want people to participate. "We recognize that you need work groups to actually get work done." She notes that the people who have the expertise are coming into the working groups, giving an example of George Springston coming on for the Great Brook study. She affirms that the model works nicely and is not particularly cumbersome, and in fact emerged quite organically from recovery efforts.

- Dan Fingas moves to create a housing advisory committee with the mandate listed in the aforementioned document. Frances Rose seconds. There is no further discussion, and the motion passes unanimously with four yes votes and zero no votes (noting Peter Youngbaer's absence from the meeting).
- The selectboard briefly summarizes their next steps, including creating the process for getting candidates, publicizing, making appointments, and having an organizational meeting. Dan and Frances agree to get a form together and begin promoting it.
- Several attendees put forth their interest in serving on the committee: David Scheckman, Genese Grill, Alana Norway, Vicki McDonald, Tammy Farnham, Liz Bicknell (via Genese Grill).

(V) Better Connections grant study authorization

- **Rose Paul thanks the selectboard for authorizing her to apply for the Better Connections Grant** which she explains is funded by the Agency of Transportation and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. Jointly these agencies fund master plans for village and downtown bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and safety, awarding $67,500 to a successful applicant who comes up with a 10% match, amounting to $7,500.
- Rose confirms that she submitted the grant application on time by October 31. She explains that there had been a question as to whether or not the matching funds could come from the Conservation Commission, and after review the Conservation Commission determined that it was not an appropriate use of funds, so the town would have to come up with the $7,500 if Plainfield is awarded the grant.
- The town will find out on December 1 if it has been selected to receive the award, and the state agencies have requested that grant agreements be signed and sent in by December 5, meaning there is a very narrow window of time for decision and action if Plainfield is selected.
- **Karl Bissex asks for information about the grant.** Rose explains that it funds a consultant who will work with the town to develop a master plan for traffic calming, bicycle and pedestrian safety. They expect the town to form a steering committee and conduct public outreach on this topic. The geographic scope of the project ranges from lower East Hill and Brook Road, where new housing and new greenspace might be created through the lower village and the upper village. Conversations from the Plainfield Forward forum identified a shared interest in an offroad path to reach the co-op, so the scope of the study includes this area, as well as a section of Route 14 to the entrance of the Creative Campus at Goddard (who Rose notes are interested in being a geographic hub for this kind of connectivity). The specific solutions or projects

will be up to the town working with the consultant. She affirms the need for traffic calming, sidewalks on both sides of Route 2, a route to the co-op that does not require traveling on Route 2.

- Rose adds that in consultation with Karl, it was established that the town didn't have the bandwidth to administer the grant financially, so the grant includes a provision for the Regional Planning Commission to provide the necessary administrative support for 10% of the grant. The Regional Planning Commission has agreed to this, should the town receive the award.
- Treasurer Josh Pitts will look into the feasibility of the town providing the match.

(V) LHMP Final Draft Review & Adoption

- **Michael Billingsley, Cil Relland, and Denise Wheeler (via Zoom) are introduced, and Michael speaks about hazard mitigation and the process of creating the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.** He summarizes hazard mitigation as looking ahead toward dangerous events and determining what strategies can be employed to reduce harm. He explains the structure of the plan: a report on recovery efforts of the previous five years of disaster recovery efforts (including those related to flooding, erosion, and wildfires), and then a synthesis of that information and experience into a plan for the next five years. The plan outlines strategies for using our resources, inviting help, and increasing residents' awareness of how they can reduce harm to themselves.
  Forty-three participants offered responses regarding what they thought were the most important hazards. From these responses, along with the experience of the Hazard Mitigation committee, **hazardous events were identified and categorized by probability and/or impact**:
    - Highest probability/highest impact events: flooding, landslides, dam failure, drought, damaging wind, ice storms and ice jams, infectious disease and pandemics, and electric blackouts.
    - Medium probability/medium impact events include extreme heat, extreme cold, wildfires and brush fires, wildfire smoke inhalation, snow and blizzard conditions, cloudburst and hail conditions.
    - Low impact/low probability: invasive species, earthquakes, solar storms, coronal mass ejections (CMEs). He notes that a CME will "hit" on the following day, from a solar storm that happened three days earlier.
- Michael explains the need for impact studies to inform mitigation strategies, and the report contains a section about impact studies organized into categories.

- **He urges people to familiarize themselves with the plan, noting that it will be posted on the town website, and available in print at the town clerk's office.** Feedback, input, questions, and comments can be directed to Cil.
- **Sasha Thayer thanks Michael for his work and contributions to the town.** Michael recognizes Cil and her contributions, describing her as indispensable through this process. Karl echoes the acknowledgement of the tremendous work that went into this plan, as well as Michael's "good attitude" despite thinking about disasters all the time.
- The board discusses the importance of the plan for accessing grants and improving the town's resilience to disasters.
- **Cil invites input on the plan, and emphasizes that "this is not a fixed plan, it's a live plan"** that will remain open to edits and updates in yearly installments even after being turned in. She specifically recommends looking at the actual actions that the planning group identified, and contacting her if anything seems to be missing.
- **Karen Hatcher names that by having this plan, Michael and Cil have positioned the town to access grants at a higher level.** She explains that it's a question that's asked often, especially around recovery permits, and she thinks it could affect insurance as well. Michael adds that FEMA funds are also contingent on having this plan.
- Dan moves to adopt the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. Patti Jamele seconds.
    - Sasha Thayer asks if it would make sense to wait until the next meeting to adopt the plan, so that corrections can be made before it's adopted. Cil clarifies that what needs to be adopted by the selectboard is mainly the mitigation actions and the structure of the plan, and that edits can continue to happen after adoption. Michael adds that the state has requested the plan before the Thanksgiving holiday, and so, the timing of requesting adoption tonight is to ensure there is time to get all appendices attached and the entire document stitched together, which would be difficult to do after the next selectboard meeting. Frances Rose asks Denise Wheeler if she has anything to share or add. She says that Cil did a great job and that Michael is amazing, and she's "getting up to speed."
- Karl calls for the vote, having already a motion and a second. The motion passes unanimously (4-0-0).
- Dan moves to allow Selectboard chair Karl Bissex to sign the certificate of adoption on behalf of the Selectboard. Frances Rose seconds the motion, which passes with a unanimous vote.

(R) Town Treasurer's Report

- **Josh refers to a worksheet he shared with the selectboard, and points to the figure representing the town's debt capacity, which is 2.96% with the revenues from FY25.** The Government Finance Officers Association recommends municipalities have a debt ratio below 10%, so Josh states that the town of Plainfield is currently positioned well by those terms. The town's debt capacity, should the town need to borrow one million dollars for a 30-year bond, would shift from 2.96% up to around 5.3% (depending on scenarios). He consulted the Vermont League of Cities and Towns Municipal Finance Group to produce this information.
- He reports that **one of the risks related to Brook Rd projects, should the town not move those projects forward, is the loss of "a fairly large amount of revenue that comes from the state based on highway mileage."** The cost of inaction—of not pursuing reconstruction—would be **at minimum about 20% of our Town Highway Grant Program match**, depending on how roads get classified.

(R) Road Commissioner's Report

- **Josh shares that there will be "a little more headwind trying to get [the process of repairs along the Brook Rd] to move along quickly,"** and names two contributing factors: Federal Highway downplaying viability of any kind of realignment outside of the current right-of-way, which he believes this will likely create a higher cost, and design proposals have higher costs than anticipated. He says that the study of the Great Brook may help inform the process with the design consultant, but there's a return to the "drawing board." Next steps include negotiating with the design firm, which is done with the project management firm. Following that, there will be a public concerns meeting.
- **Dan asks about snow season parking restrictions, and asks Josh to report these on Front Porch Forum and along other modes of communication.**
- **Karen Hatcher provides an update on the Great Brook study and the involvement of consultants in developing solutions for the project.** She explains that the reason for bringing the water people together with the road people is to begin this conversation together. She expects this to be a long process to get agreement on the best solutions and on the number. She describes Josh as a hero for having been in the middle of these negotiations for as long as they've been happening. **She notes that there will be several times where the community will be engaged, as required in the municipal process.** She encourages people to stay tuned: "We're not done. We're going to fight for every dollar and do it right."

(V) Approval of Draft Minutes

- Dan makes a motion to approve draft minutes from the October 27, 2025 Regular Meeting and the November 3, 2025 Informational Meeting. Patti seconds, and the motion passes 4-0-0.

(V) Approval of Warrants:

- Dan moves for the selectboard to approve Accounts Payable for October 31, 2025 and November 3, 2025, along with Payroll for October 30, 2025, and November 6, 2025. Patti seconds the motion, and it passes unanimously, 4-0-0.

Executive Session: Real Estate Discussion with Attorney

- Dan makes a motion to enter Executive Session per 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(2) to discuss real estate transactions. Patti seconds the motion which carries unanimously, 4-0-0.
- Sasha Thayer interjects, then follows up after the vote, urging the selectboard to demonstrate that not going into executive session would cause public harm. Dan in response details the reason for proposing an executive session: to "talk to our real estate attorney about purchase and sale agreements for the properties we have been discussing as aboard, and specifically talk about our options and our ability to negotiate those purchase and sale agreements, given the current situation, and to strategize with the lawyer the best ways for us to interact with these legal documents. I find it would be prejudicial if we had all of those conversations in public, including, potentially, folks who are on the other side of those negotiations."
- Eli Barlow asks for Dan to explain it again, as he didn't understand. Dan explains that having the conversations in public "would allow the folks we may be negotiating with undue information that may not help the town, and may cost the town more money." He acknowledges that "we don't know until we talk through with the attorney. He notes that attorney-client conversations are confidential.
- Following the executive session, Dan makes a motion for the board to exit its executive session, which Frances Rose seconds. The motion passes 4-0-0. Dan shares that no public decisions were made in the executive session.

East Village Expansion: next steps

- **Dan explains that the selectboard is looking at the options available presently, given the vote last week and the real estate contracts they have entered into, and reads a statement from the board regarding EVE**: The town knows that obligating money for the purchase of real estate is not supported by the town, as evidenced by the

vote. The attorney is looking at the legal options. After the selectboard hears back from their attorney, they will discuss next steps publicly. The board is also looking to get a final status report from the EVEAC to help in moving forward with next steps.

- Alana Norway asks why two other people not on the selectboard, Arion Thiboumery and Karen Hatcher, took part in the executive session. Dan explains that they were talking about potential options with the attorney, as the attorney had requested some specific information that these two people had the expertise and knowledge to report on. He notes that a selectboard is allowed to invite participants into their executive sessions.
- Alana expresses concern that the executive session may have involved exploring other funding options for the purchase of real estate. Sasha raises questions of legality. Dan cites statute, which says "no formal or binding action shall be taken in executive session, except for actions related to securing of real estate options."
    - Dan notes, in response to Sasha's earlier comments, that negotiating and securing of real estate is *not* under the section of executive session statute that Sasha cited when urging the board to make the case as to why they proposed an executive session. He says, "you weren't correct in that we had to make the case." Sasha does not address Dan's point, but asks, "Has there been any decision by the board in the executive session to comply with the Vermont Ethics Commission decision of March 5 which specifically ruled that a penny paid more than $374,000 is an ethics violation?" Dan and Karl respond that they are not familiar with the information Sasha has provided. Sasha explains that "a decision" from March 5 is posted on the Vermont Ethics Commission website as well as the EVEAC committee website.[2]
    - Karl responds that since the selectboard didn't know about this specific information, they have acted in accordance with the letter they received from the Ethics Commission. Sasha replies, "all you had to do... there was a formal decision dated March 5th, and they listed the name of the people on the commission, all you had to do was look at the minutes. All you had to do was to say, 'of course an executive director cannot ever make a decision for a commission, just as though some executive director for the selectboard cannot make a decision for the selectboard. This is not rocket science."
    - Sasha restates, "it sounds like there has been no decision on the part of the selectboard and no direct to its attorney that it must comply with the Vermont Ethics decision of March 5, 2025." Karl responds that the selectboard will have to look that up.

[2] The full text of the Advisory Opinion Sasha is referring to can be viewed here: https://ethicscommission.vermont.gov/sites/ethics/files/documents/AO-1-2025_Final.pdf

    - Dan adds that the selectboard "sent a second report that included the assessment, the range and where we saw it in the report, and the $374,000. It included the purchase price. It included that Bram is the clerk. It included all the facts that you just laid out. And we got a decision back from the Ethics Commission that said that we were within the rights. Then, on August 25th, or it might have been early September, we voted to sign the P&Ss on these properties. That is how this went. We did not vote for $495,000 until we had gotten an Ethics decision that said that we could do so. I'm happy to find it for you. It is a document that exists.
    - Sasha asks if this report has been posted on the website, and makes a public records request, providing her email address to the board. She says, "you need to go back and read the August 19, 2025 email. It was not a decision. It was not from the Ethics Commission. It was from the executive director." She states that she has gone through the Ethics Commission meeting minutes since March 5 and that the Commission has not taken this issue up again (meaning their advisory opinion from March 5 would stand).
    - Karl states that the board will look into this issue further.
- **Kirstie Grant acknowledges that this is not a referendum but asks at what point in the process would we want to know definitively whether folks are for or against the EVE project.**
    - Karl responds that he thinks the board has to gather more information. They thought they would have an answer following the vote, and it wasn't the answer the board hoped for. Acknowledging that the town doesn't support the proposed path, Karl sees a need to reassess.
    - Kirstie clarifies that she is asking whether there is a plan or an intention to have a point in the process where the selectboard gleans a yes or no answer on the matter of the EVE—and whether that would be before a purchase & sales agreement was actually executed. "Would we want the town to officially vote yea or nay we're moving forward with this?" She clarifies further, "if a nonprofit is formed to potentially fundraise for this purchase, would that take this project out of the public sphere? Would the EVEAC no longer be working toward this end goal? Would it now be the board of the new nonprofit that decides what happens and how?"
        - Frances Rose responds that it's not for the selectboard to say, and that the vote ostensibly "takes it off of our table."
        - Kirstie responds, "I'll be very clear. I'm worried that a new nonprofit will be formed, and that the folks who purchase the land through the

nonprofit will not take town feedback, because there's no requirement." Karl affirms this, and responds that that was one of the reasons the selectboard wanted the town to control the project. Kirstie says, "I'm worried that that's what is happening, but not being communicated." Karl assures her that the selectboard isn't doing that. Kirstie provides more information: "Documents were filed to form a new nonprofit by some EVEAC members without communicating with the rest of us. And to me that feels really icky, and I don't like it, and I'm worried that... if, somehow, funds are raised to purchase the land, that we will go down the path that we've been having folks advocate very staunchly against—that we will basically just have a developer that does what they want. They don't have to answer to the town." She continues, "I'm just feeling worried and I'm expressing that to you because I'd like for you all to protect us from that, because I don't feel goo about the way that the folks who filed for this new nonprofit have been communicating with our community members and myself. So I would just like to feel that you all are protecting the rest of us."

        - Karl responds that the selectboard is doing the best they can, but once it leaves the control of the town... Dan explains that it's down to the Planning Commission and Development Review Board and state-sanctioned processes. State law has ultimate control of private building processes. He states clearly that if the town isn't purchasing the property, then "we lose site control." He notes that there are permits and rules, "but we have less control, and that is mostly because of last week's vote."
- **Tammy Farnham asks "if the selectboard is in a position of helping or proceeding with what the community has voted down."** She continues, "that means you're not engaging—so this conversation that we just witnessed, Arion and Karen sitting here using our attorney, isn't identifying or trying to assist with going around what our community is asking for.
    - Karl responds that the community is asking for the town not to borrow money. Tammy asserts that "it wasn't about the loan. I never heard once that it was about us taking on a loan. The debt can be done in multiple ways. Obviously the town taking on responsibility is debt. So you can mislead that and make it seem like it's just the loans. A debt is anything that you have as an obligation. So basically what I heard was, they didn't want the town to be a developer. There's risk associated." She expresses some of the specific concerns and summarizes,

"I don't think the selectboard is in a position of ignoring and overstepping our community to try to help somebody else make that happen, if that's what the intent was." She frames it as a question, "Are you trying to step around what the community asked for, or are you trying to do something to really understand what the community's been saying and is saying? Or are we going to try to skirt around things—and that's what people are uncomfortable with, and I feel it's creating division, and do we really need to do that? Let's be a team."
    - Karl responds, "we have enough on our plates. We don't need to be getting into new projects. We've heard the community in the vote. We don't want to borrow money, we're not going to borrow money. We just formed a new committee who will be looking at options and we will be wanting to see what they come up with for other ideas. And if we want to borrow money for that, we'll have to address that."
- **Sasha Thayer asks "where's the public vote for the new committee, and who's on it?"** Dan informs her that she missed that part of the meeting earlier, and summarizes the steps taken.
- **Tammy expresses concern that "what happened tonight feels like something's being done behind the townspeople's back."** She asks of the selectboard, "be honest and sincere and tell me that you have no engagement or understanding that there's something going on around the voters."
    - Karl responds that the board talked in executive session about the vote, about how to deal with the contracts the town has. Tammy takes this as a "no" in response to her question and that her concern is warranted.
    - Frances Rose asks to respond. "The talk of the blanket referendum on the Project, writ large, was not in the vote. That was placed on the vote by those against the vote, predominantly. I want to acknowledge that there are a lot of aspects that made people uncomfortable about it, and many of those aspects, if not all of those aspects, contributed to the loss of the bond vote. What is clearest to us from the language of the bond vote is that the community is not comfortable with the selectboard going into debt for this project, or managing it. And that is a lot of mitigated risk that is no longer on our table."
    - Tammy thanks Frances Rose for her response. She notes feeling that the process has been difficult or confusing for community members to follow. She expresses hope that the new housing committee will allow people to stop and just listen, instead of just having responses. "As a community, we can't resolve things unless we listen to concerns." She continues, "that's my concern for [the selectboard], is that I haven't felt that I've been heard."

    - Dan adds that any vagueness coming from the selectboard on the property sale and what's going to happen in the next week, next month... the attorney has advised that "the vaguer you are, the better," until the board actually works out what's going on. He stresses, "that's attorney advice we're getting because of the situation we're in with the real estate contracts, et cetera." He clarifies that the attorney is not working for another group. "He's working for us." Dan adds that the attorney has been working pro bono, so no town finances have been going toward his salary.
- **Alana Norway asks whether the selectboard already knew about the new nonprofit Kirstie spoke of.** Karl responds with a no. Tammy asks "why were those two people sitting here? What town information were they providing to you?" She asks if the selectboard is discussing withdrawing the grant application. Dan responds that they have not made a decision regarding the grant since the one made publicly to submit the grant application. Karl adds that the grant isn't just for the East Village Expansion, but is also for river repair and other projects.
- **Tammy asks about earlier impressions of the grant not being all or nothing**, reporting that she wants the selectboard to know that information.
- **Genese Grill asks, "if the town is not buying the land, why have a meeting with the lawyer about buying the land?"**
    - Dan responds that they didn't have a meeting about buying the land, rather, they had a meeting about the real estate contracts they have already entered into.
    - Genese asks why those contracts would be relevant, "except insofar as somebody else, perhaps this nonprofit, might be buying the land." She acknowledges that everybody is suspicious and apologizes for that, saying, "there's a reason for that, and I hope you understand. I just don't understand why Karen, Lauren, Donny Osman, Arian, and Kim are creating this new nonprofit. It seems pretty clear that they want to raise money to buy the land. Was the town lawyer advising you and them how to do this? And if that is so, I agree that this is inappropriate."
- **Liz Perreault speaks about site control**, and asks about the selectboard's expectation from the EVEAC for Thursday's meeting.
- **Jared Birchmore speaks to Tammy's question about the grant being parceled out.** His recollection is that Karen confirmed that the grant can be parceled, but the town won't have any say on how that happens. It is the committee who is reviewing and approving those grants who get to decide which projects get funded.
- **Jared offers a response to Kirstie's comments.** "It's valid to have concerns if there's another group forming to try to buy this land, but the entire reason for the development

of the EVEAC, and the project as a town project, was so that there was town control over how it went, and the design, and all of that. I was on the EVEAC at the very start, and I was on the ad hoc committee before that. But we have known and shared all along, very transparently, that there is a risk of other actors coming and purchasing the land and taking the control of whatever happens there away from the town and the community.

- **Alana Norway shares that "There's a lot of people that don't feel like they have any control over what's going on."** She expresses feeling that the EVEAC hasn't been listening to people and what they want. "So it doesn't feel like, just because it's in the town's control, that we have any control over it, honestly." She explains, "we asked for a referendum vote and we couldn't get one because it wouldn't be binding. And then we came up with the bond vote, and that to me, was a referendum vote on the project." She reports that she knows a lot of people, and like Tammy, went door-to-door. and knows that people want development, "but they don't want that 40-unit development on that property. And they have no control over it. So voting no was the only control they had. And they were hoping that then the town was gonna come together, and work together for the best for the whole community." She says, "it's like a steamroller, that EVEAC."
    - Karl responds. "As a board member, selectboard chair, I apologize to you if that committee that we were responsible for weren't listening. We get reports from them, they would tell us what was happening, and so on. But we had expected also that they would listen to your ideas."
    - **Frances Rose also responds, acknowledging that this "giant" grant coming along derailed opportunity for public input.** The stipulations of the grant made it of greater benefit *not* to include the cost of the land in the grant application. So, the bond vote. "And so in this open window after the grant application, where public comment, the design process could have been reopened—it didn't. Because all of a sudden it was all about the bond vote. And the campaigning against it. And for it. But that has filled the last six months. So there's a ton of town commentary flying into not exactly a void, but a maelstrom of wind that is ongoing. And there's been no opportunity to reopen the design process to receive those comments and allow the plan to grow smarter."
    - Dan responds as well. "I think it is true that [the EVEAC] did not do everything that people pushed for. But I don't think you can say that nothing about the project has changed based on public comment. The easiest example is from 40 lots to 40 units." He continues, "I don't know is the reality sinks in that when you go from 40 lots to 40 units—immediately, because Habitat for Humanity was gonna make duplexes—that actually takes the project from 40 lots to 35 lots.

That one little tweak that still met what the grant was looking for, literally can change the lot number."

- **Tammy responds that she was in the meeting where that decision was made, but the map did not change.** Dan replies that it was so late in the process, but that the map can still change. He illustrates with a hypothetical example: "they really quickly, in one day, change the map, and then what we would probably hear is 'you've just changed the map and the way you've done it, you've actually hurt the wetlands more,' or something else. 'Why didn't you go with that lot on this side, instead of cutting this lot?'" He emphasizes: "it was a time thing. This means the next time we draw the map, which is after the grant process, it's going to be 35 lots. Maybe smaller—maybe we can Downstreet doing duplexes, and now this 35 lot project is a 30 lot project. These are all conversations that we can have if we were the ones doing it." He continues, "I am fine with saying the EVEAC did not take every recommendation and did not listen to everything, but to say that they didn't change, that the project hasn't changed over time based on feedback, based on things that folks have been saying, based on things George and Rose said, things that Genese said—it is changing. Maybe not enough, maybe not fast enough for people. But I think it's really disingenuous to say that nothing has changed about the project based on feedback."
- Alana clarified that she didn't say the project hadn't changed, and Dan acknowledged that she had expressed feeling that she wasn't being listened to. Dan argues that the committee was listening, but they might not have always agreed. Alana asserts that the town did not get an opportunity to say whether they want this project or not, saying, "as far as I'm concerned, that's what this vote told us."
- Dan acknowledges that in town meetings, everyone comes into the room and votes on most things. But that is not advisable in this case, as stated by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns legal counsel, because the town, in its charter, is allowed only certain kinds of votes. He explains that Plainfield's town meeting is an in-person meeting in March that decides a lot of the fate of the town. Because of that, VLCT advised against conducting a referendum-type vote by Australian ballot in November.

- **Eli Barlow speaks, naming that he, like many in the room, are very frustrated.** He shares his understanding of the progression: that the 40-unit plan with the sitemap was

created by public process in the town hall. The public process had the constraint of being self-funded, which drove the number of lots up. 40 units were proposed in one of those publicly designed sitemaps. 70 units were proposed in another. He asks for confirmation from the board, and receives nods of affirmation. He continues: “Correct me if I’m wrong but Sandra Vitzthum met with the abutters and concerned folks afterwards and negotiated getting the lot number of 40 units. More public input has happened since then. The grant was applied for with this sitemap that was drawn. In the meeting where the EVEAC voted to put this forward, I said ‘maybe as the grant negotiations happen, that number will go down.’ And it’s just like you said, Tammy—it’s not all or nothing, But to hear that you went out and went door-to-door and campaigned to get people to come to vote, but also to provide information—”

- Tammy interjects, as does Charlie Cogbill, claiming a point of order that “meetings of the town cannot second-guess the motives of members of this community.” Dan points out that Charlie did not raise this point of order when other speakers were second-guessing the intent of EVEAC members. Tammy asks, “why am I not allowed to talk to my community members?” Dan responds that Eli is not speaking for the selectboard.
- Eli continues, “I’m saying, I’m trying for *me*. I’m just really frustrated that you went out and… did you encourage people to vote no?”
    - Alanna replies, “nope, we did not. We wanted to make sure that everybody knew that there was a vote. That’s how we went to the door. I want to make sure you know there’s a vote. It’s a very important vote. And then some people said they already did vote, so we chit-chatted, whatever. Other people, their shoulders released, and they had questions. They didn’t know. We talked to people earnestly about it. And that’s what I feel like I got the idea that people do not want the project.”
    - Tammy adds, “is it not okay for me to say, ‘I recommend you vote no’?”
    - Dan asks for responses to be directed toward the selectboard, not toward individual speakers (Eli, in this case).
- Eli continues. “I find it really frustrating that members of my community campaigned to encourage a no vote. And that No vote resulted in you, the selectboard, not having the choice to say yes or no to this loan.”
- **Jake McBride asks a question to those still in the room**: “What is the goal at this point? The No vote privatized this. And people are still here yelling at [the selectboard]. *It happened.* It is now not in the town’s control, including ours, as the town’s people. We voted “no.” It is not the town’s project anymore. Why are we still here? Why are we still giving these people [the selectboard] a hard time?”

    - *Many informal responses can be heard from attendees, though none are intelligible on the recording.* Tammy expresses concern that the grant has not been withdrawn or amended to remove the East Village Expansion project.
        - Karl responds with his sense that changing the status of the grant at this stage is likely to throw the grant out, and explains that a project has to be identified to receive funding.
        - Dan clarifies that the CDBG-DR is *not* a planning grant, and that it explicitly a housing and infrastructure grant. It's money that is available that we know has already come from the feds, is for *projects*—not for planning.
        - Jake reiterates, "it's no longer the selectboard or the townspeople's responsibility or ability, frankly. It is now a private decision, and that is the decision that we made as a town. And it's a decision that I have been concerned about the whole time, and I have tried to voice that to people."
- **Michael Birnbaum responds**. "I'm not here to be angry. And although we should be speaking to the board, I do want to address what Jake said. We're all individuals in this group that we call Plainfielders for Responsible Growth. We all have different points of view. Some of us have moderate views about proposed projects, some of us have absolutist views about them. The reason, I think, those of us who are lingering and still want to speak, is not because we want to yell at the board, or yell at opponents of the project. We do have concern that, among other things, that this new nonprofit that's formed that we're all aware of and nobody wants to really acknowledge, could acquire the land and could conceivably donate the land to the town so that the town could start again. But we really want you to understand that despite what the language of the vote was, in terms of the bond article—the reason it was so overwhelmingly defeated was not about $600,000. It was not about whether the town should borrow money. That's not a lot of money compared to $10 million. The people voted no because they didn't think the project deserved to live. Unless it was extremely modified, unless it was more appropriate to that piece of land, and to the neighborhood, and to the town. And unfortunately—well, understandably—the board seems to not want to let go of it quite yet. You're acknowledging that it's out of your control at the moment, but you aren't letting go of it, because you're not dropping out of the grant application, and because you are having conversations that you can't share with us about alternatives, options. It just smacks of something going on that we're worried about, that you may want to pursue something that the voters have told you that they don't want." He wraps up, "11% of town voters voted no."

- Karl briefly recaps the selectboard's current position and next steps, including awaiting information from the newly created Plainfield Housing Advisory Committee.

Announce date for next Selectboard Meeting

- Nov 24, 2025 6:00 PM

Adjourn

- Dan moves to adjourn the meeting at 8:56 PM. Frances Rose seconds. The motion passes with a 4-0-0 vote.