

Minutes of Plainfield Town Meeting
March 4, 2025
Plainfield Town Hall Opera House
18 High Street
Voting 9AM - 7PM
Meeting 10AM - 2:30 PM

The 2025 Plainfield town meeting began with a poem by Charlie Barasch and procedural instructions from Donny Osman. Marc Mihaly highlighted Plainfield's unique approach to flood recovery and emphasized the importance of affordable housing. The town clerk's and treasurer's reports were accepted, with concerns raised about financial transparency. The library reported a recent grant for building improvements. The wastewater system was praised for its efficiency. The town approved \$6,833 for rural transportation and \$14,950 for social services. Reserve funds for disaster preparedness, sidewalks, and other projects were established, with debates on their fiscal impact. The town meeting discussed several articles, including establishing reserve funds for bridge, culvert, and village expansion projects. Article 10 was passed, Article 11 and 12 were approved with initial funding of \$5,000 and \$10,000 respectively. Article 13 proposed a village expansion reserve fund, initially for the east side, which was amended to remove this specificity. The amendment passed, allowing flexibility for the Select Board, but then Article 13 was RE-amended to be specific to land between East Hill and Main Street, making the Article more specific, after significant discussion of what a yes vote would mean. The select board stated that they would be taking a yes vote on Article 13 to mean that conversation on expansion would continue, and the the Select Board would appoint a committee to steer this discussion. Testimonies from residents supported the project, highlighting the need for affordable housing and community revitalization. Concerns were raised about population growth and the impact on the town's character and the carrying capacity of the particular parcel in question. The Select Board emphasized the importance of addressing housing needs and community vitality.

Members of the Board of Civil Authority, the body charged with overseeing the meeting, were all in attendance

Karl Bissex - Chair Selectboard

Frances Rose Subbiondo - Selectboard Member

Peter Youngbaer - Selectboard Member/ Justice of the Peace

Dan Fingas - Selectboard Member

Patti Jamele - Selectboard Member

Dale Bartlett - Justice of the Peace

Charlie Cogbill - Justice of the Peace

Steven Farnham - Justice of the Peace

Anne Van Couvering - Justice of the Peace
Becky Atchison - Justice of the Peace
Bram Towbin - Town Clerk

Action Items

- Establish a recreation and public arts project reserve fund.
- Establish a disaster reserve fund.
- Establish a sidewalk and pedestrian reserve fund.
- Establish a bridges reserve fund.
- Establish a culverts reserve fund.
- Establish a village expansion reserve fund.
- Explore alternative development options and designs that address community concerns about density.
- Pursue grant funding and other resources to support the village expansion project.
- Establish a formal committee to oversee the village expansion project and engage the broader community.
- Provide updates to the community on the progress of the village expansion project and opportunities for input.

Outline

Opening Remarks and Poem by Charlie Barasch

- Donny Osman opens the 2025 town meeting at 1001, gavel the meeting into order, and introduces the Plainfield Poet Laureate and moderator Emeritus, Charlie Barasch.
- Charlie Barasch reads a poem titled "The Tidewater Motel," describing a nostalgic and humorous scene at a motel in Ellsworth, Maine.
- Donny Osman thanks Charlie for his years of service and explains the basic procedural rules for speaking at the meeting.
- Donny emphasizes the importance of using microphones for clear communication and mentions the presence of a state representative, Mark Mihaly, who will give a legislative report.

Legislative Report by Marc Mihaly

- Marc Mihaly begins his report, acknowledging the town's unique approach to dealing with flooding and recovery.
- He highlights the town's proactive stance on addressing future flooding, contrasting it with other towns that focus solely on immediate recovery.

- Marc discusses the broader housing crisis in Vermont, emphasizing the need for affordable housing to address issues like healthcare and education.
- He mentions ongoing efforts to make it easier to permit and finance housing, as well as training more people in the trades to build affordable housing.

Town Clerk's and Treasurer's Reports

- Donny Osman calls for a motion on the town clerk's report, which is moved by Janice Walrafent and seconded by Steven Farnham, and accepted without discussion.
- The treasurer's report is moved by Janice Walrafen and seconded by Steven Farnham. Charlie Cogbill criticizes the lack of detailed financial information in the narrative.
- Josh Pitts, the treasurer, explains the delay in providing the balance sheet due to errors in recording highway assets and the need for an outside CPA to reset the system.
- Josh offers to provide additional copies of the balance sheet and emphasizes that there are no urgent or intentional errors in the finances.
- The report is accepted on a voice vote.

Reports of Town Officers and Boards... DRB, Listers, CVRP & Planning Reports

- The listers' report is moved by Meg Davis and seconded by Anne Van Couvering, and accepted without discussion.
- The Development Review Board report is moved by Mary Niebling and seconded by Janice Walrafen. Janice encourages more people to join the board due to the increased workload from flooding and development needs.
- The Plainfield Planning Commission report is moved by Jesse Cooper, seconded, by Jodi Vilardi and accepted without discussion.
- The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission report is moved by Janice Walrafen, seconded by Jodi Vilardi, and accepted without discussion.

Zoning, Social Concerns, Selectboard & Town Hall Opera House Reports

- The zoning administrator's report is moved by Steven Farnham, seconded by Janice Walrafen, and accepted without discussion.
- The social concerns report is moved by Steven Farnham, seconded by Serena Matt, and accepted without discussion.
- The Select Board report is moved by Steven Farnham and seconded by Janice Walrafen. Karl Bissex correcting a date error and Betsy Zeigler asking about the status of the Route 2 intersection project. The report is accepted on a voice vote.
- The Plainfield Town Hall, Opera House annual report is moved by Karen Hatcher, seconded by Serena Matt and accepted without discussion.

Library, Wastewater & Conservation Reports

- The library report is moved by Leda Schubert and seconded by Mary Niebling. Angela Ogle explaining the current status of the library expansion plans and recent grant funding. Jan Waterman praises the work of the library. The report is accepted.
- The wastewater report is moved by Mary Lane and seconded by Karen Hatcher. Josh Pitts provides details on the system's capacity and recent evaluations. Michael Billingsley highlights the awards and efficiency of the wastewater system, Josh Pitts explains the system's design and flow requirements. The report is accepted
- The Conservation Commission report is moved by Karen Hatcher, seconded by Mo Lynch, and accepted without discussion.

Green Up and Plainfield Area Community Trust, E911, Fire & Rescue Reports

- The Green Up report is moved by Tim Phillips, seconded,by Mo Lynch and accepted without discussion.
- The Plainfield Area Community Trust report is moved by Karen Hatcher, seconded by Jodi Vilardi, and accepted without discussion.
- The E 911 report is moved by Katen Hatcher and seconded by Seran Matt. Meg Davis expressed concern about the need to re-register every 12 months. The report is accepted
- The Fire and Rescue report is moved by Janice Walrafen, seconded by Mary Lane and accepted without discussion.

Emergency Management, Hazard Mitigation, Historical Soc, Public Arts Reports

- The Plainfield Emergency Management report is moved by Steven Farnham and seconded by Meg Davis. Michael Billingsley and Karen Hatcher thanking volunteers and outlining future plans for emergency preparedness. The report is accepted.
- The Plainfield Hazard Mitigation committee report is moved by Anne Van Courvering seconded by Mary Lane, and accepted without discussion.
- The Plainfield Historical Society report is moved by Grace Worcester, seconded by Mary Lane, and accepted without discussion.
- The recreation and Public Arts Committee annual report is moved by Janice Walrafen seconded by Karen Hatcher, and accepted without discussion.

Cemetery Commission, Energy Coordinator Health Officer Reports

- The cemetery commission report is moved by Steven Farnham, seconded by Peter Young, and accepted without discussion.
- The energy coordinator report is moved by Steven Farnham and seconded by Arion Thiboumery. Bob Atchinson emphasized the importance of weatherization and alternative energy sources. Dan Fingas thanks Bob for securing a municipal energy grant, and Bob mentions plans for additional EV chargers. The motion passes.

- The town health officer report is moved by Paula Emery, seconded by Michael Billingsley, and accepted without discussion.

Central Vermont Solid Waste, RC Transportation, CV Fiber Reports

- The Central Vermont solid waste report is moved by Mo Lynch seconded by Mary Lane, Betsy Zeigler announced the upcoming recycling center in Berlin. The motion passes.
- The rural community transportation report is put forward by Peter Young and seconded by Karen Hatcher.. Alex Forbes and other residents expressing support for the bus service and asking about the number of Plainfield riders. The motion passes
- The Central Vermont fiber report is moved by Meg Davis seconded by Mo Lynch, and accepted without discussion.

Articles Four and Five: Transportation and Social Concerns Funding

- Article Four is moved by Bob Atchinson and seconded by Peter Young. Residents expressed support for the rural community transportation funding.
- Article Five is moved by Karen Hatcher and seconded by Mary Lane. Residents asked about the impact of potential changes to Green Mountain Transit services.
- Both articles were accepted without further discussion.

Articles Six to Ten: Social Concerns, Cutler Library, Rec & Art and Disaster Reserve

- Article Six (Social Concerns) is moved by Karen Hatcher and seconded by Serena Matt. The social concerns committee explaining the funding allocations and inviting new members. The article is accepted.
- Article Seven (Culter Library) is moved by Steven Farnham, seconded by Karen Hatcher and accepted without discussion.
- Article Eight (Reserve for Rec & Art) is moved by Debra Skaloff and seconded by Michael Moreland. Karl Bissex and Francis Rose Subbiondo explain the purpose and benefits of reserve funds. The article is accepted
- Article Nine (Disaster Reserve) is moved by Karen Hatcher and seconded by Arion Thimbourmery. Sasha Thayer expressed concerns about the impact on the town's budget. The article is accepted.

Article Ten: Sidewalk and Pedestrian Reserve Fund

- Article Ten is moved by Meg Davis and seconded by Grace Worcester. Josh Pitts explained the purpose of the reserve fund and the potential for matching grants.
- Liz Perrault raises concerns about the fiscal impact of reserve funds, while other residents support the idea of securing additional funding.
- Donny Osman calls for a vote on Article 10, which is passed unanimously.

Articles 11 & 12 Bridges Reserve Fund

- Article 11 is introduced, proposing a reserve fund called the "bridges reserve fund" for bridge construction and maintenance, initially funded by \$5,000 from the general fund. The motion to accept Article 11 is moved by Karen Hatcher and seconded by Steven Farnham. It passes unanimously.
- Article 12 is introduced by Steven Farnham and seconded by Meg Davis. The reserve fund is called the "culverts reserve fund" for culvert construction and maintenance, initially funded by \$10,000 from the general fund. The motion to accept Article 12 is passed unanimously.

Article 13 Introductions Village Expansion Reserve Fund

- Article 13 is moved by Janice Walrafen and seconded by Steven Farnham. A reserve fund called the "village expansion reserve fund" to be created for expanding the east side of the village by acquiring land and making municipal infrastructure improvements.

Amendment to Article 13

- Michael Birnbaum moves to amend Article 13 by deleting the words "the east side of" from the article. The amendment is moved and seconded, and the discussion focuses on the amendment.
- Michelle Clark supports the amendment, stating that it is a good idea.
- Ben Graham asks about the intent behind the amendment, and Michael Birnbaum explains that it provides flexibility for the Select Board to determine the best course of action.

Further Discussion on Amendment

- Linda Waslagen questions the changes brought by the amendment, and Donny Osman calls for a vote on the amendment. The amendment is passed unanimously.
- The amended Article 13 is read again, and further discussion is allowed.
- David Schechtman asks about the relationship of the amended article to the original purpose of the reserve fund, and Karl Bissex explains the Select Board's intention to form a committee to look at all options.

Testimonies from Residents

- Peter Young reads comments from displaced residents in support of the Plainfield village expansion project.
- Leda Schubert expresses confusion about the amendment and urges people to vote against the reserve fund.
- Karl Bissex discusses the aging population in Plainfield and the need for more housing to bring vitality to the community.

- Peter Young reported Mike Davidson, the buyer of Goddard's campus, supports the project and is open to other ideas for revitalizing the town.

Discussion on Motion Ambiguity and Select Board's Role

- Charlie Cogbill highlights the ambiguity in the motion, suggesting it could be interpreted as a vote on a reserve fund, a specific expansion project, or a referendum.
- Charlie Cogbill proposes amending the motion to clarify its intent, either by changing the language or explicitly stating the Select Board's view.
- Genese Grill expresses concern about the high number of units in the expansion project, suggesting a more inclusive process to consider different voices and perspectives.
- Genese proposes a more flexible approach to the project, considering the land's capacity and the needs of affected families.

Volunteer Efforts and Reserve Fund Proposal

- Jared Birchmore, emphasizes the volunteer efforts put into the project and the need for a reserve fund to receive external funds for village expansion.
- Jared Birchmore urges the community to vote yes on the article to create a space for receiving funds and building the town's future.
- Rae Carter supports the need for adaptable planning processes and the importance of forming a more inclusive committee to consider various viewpoints.
- Rae Carter highlights the potential benefits of the Plainfield farmers market and the need for a diverse community to support it.

Concerns About Project Specificity and Voting Intent

- Steven Farhharm questions whether voting yes or no on the article would stop the project or just create a temperature check in the community.
- Jesse Cooper clarifies that the original article asked two questions: setting up a reserve fund and taking the temperature on a specific project.
- Jesse Cooper proposes an amendment to reintroduce language specifying the property between East Hill Road and Main Street for the vote.
- Jesse Cooper, Charlie Cogbill and Dan Fingas discuss the technicalities of the amendment and its implications for the project's specificity.
- Jesse moves, John Broderick seconds amendment.. Amendment passes 110 yea, 28 no.

Community Concerns and Support for the Project

- Christiana Athena Blackwell, emphasizes the need for affordable housing and the importance of keeping the community intact.
- Alicia Weiss expresses discomfort with the current expansion plan's density and pace, suggesting a more inclusive and transparent process.

- Mary Lane, addresses misinformation about the water and wastewater system's capacity and the financial impact of adding new users.
- Karen Hatcher, highlights the support from state and federal representatives and the urgency of taking advantage of available grants.

Financial and Logistical Considerations

- Doug Weinrich raises concerns about clarity of SB as he felt there are opposing messages from the board.. Also concerns about the town's financial responsibility for borrowing \$2.5 million and the potential risks involved.
- Dan Fingas & Frances Rose Subbiondo clarify the thought process of the Select Board in regard to this measure. Liz Perrault emphasizes the need for a formal committee to oversee the project and ensure long-term community sustainability.
- Mary Lane addresses concerns regarding new users and the impact on the wastewater system.

Final Vote on the Reserve Fund Establishment

- Lauren Cleary calls for a vote to continue the conversation productively and move forward with the project.
- Donny Osman calls for a division of the house to count the votes on Article 13.
- The motion to establish the reserve fund passes 130 in favor, 30 opposed.

Approval of Article 14 (Water)

- Tim Phillips moves Article 14 and is seconded by Karen Hatcher. The article passes unanimously without discussion.

Approval of Article 15 (Wastewater)

- Tim Phillips moves Article 15 and is seconded by Karen Hatcher. The article passes unanimously without discussion.

Discussion on Town Officer Compensation

- Charlie Cogbill explains that the town meeting can only vote on the bottom line of the budget, with the exception of setting the compensation of town officers.
- Dan Fingas clarifies that last year's budget included a single full-time position for the clerk and treasurer, which was split into two full-time positions, resulting in a 12% increase split between two people.
- Karen Hatcher argues that the workload on town officials has increased significantly due to the ongoing recovery efforts, and the current salaries are insufficient given the amount of work they are doing.

- Peter Youngbaer mentions the expansion of the Select Board to five members and the difficulty in keeping the town office open due to staff shortages, emphasizing the need to consider the capacity of the staff and volunteers for future projects.

Approval of Article 16

- Donny Osman calls for a vote on Article 16, which proposes a total fund expenditure of \$1,662,695.50 for administrative operations, the Fire and Rescue Department, and the highway department for the fiscal year 2025-2026.
- The proposed expenditure includes \$1,356,002.25 to be raised by taxes and \$306,450 by non-tax revenue.
- The motion to approve Article 16 is moved by Steven Farnham, seconded by Karen Hatcher, and passed by the town meeting.

Article 17 Surplus Funds

- Jake McBride moves article 17 it is seconded by Tim Phillips. The article passes unanimously.

Article 18 Collection of Taxes

- Donny Osman calls for a motion on Article 18, which concerns the collection of town taxes.
- The motion to accept the provisions of public statutes relating to the collection of town taxes is moved by Meg Davis, seconded by Arion Thibourmery, and passed unanimously.

Article 19 Other Business

- Donny Osman calls for a motion on Article 19 to transact any other non-binding business that may properly come before the meeting.
- The motion is put forward by Mary Niebling and seconded by Debra Stoleroff

Proposal for an Apartheid-Free Community Pledge

- Deborah Stoleroff proposes a resolution for Plainfield to become an apartheid-free community, providing context on the plight of Palestinians and the financial support from the US to Israel.
- The pledge commits to freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people and opposes all forms of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and oppression.
- The pledge also commits to ending support for Israel's apartheid regime, settler colonialism, and military occupation.
- Donny Osman reads the pledge and calls for a motion to adopt it, which is moved by Meg Davis, seconded by Bob Atichson.

Support for the Apartheid-Free Community Pledge

- Dana Woodruff and Jamie Specter express their support for the pledge, highlighting the financial impact of US support for Israel and the importance of standing up for human rights.
- Dawn Fancher adds that the apartheid regime in Palestine is maintained through displacement, using the example of the Gaza Strip.
- Speaker 16 emphasizes the importance of standing up for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, suggesting that the safety of any community is linked to the safety of its most vulnerable members.
- The motion to adopt the apartheid-free community pledge is passed unanimously by the town meeting.

Adjournment of the Meeting

- Donny Osman calls for a motion to adjourn the meeting, which is moved by Steven Farnham, seconded, by Meg Davis. The motion passes unanimously.
- The meeting is adjourned, and the chair closes the meeting.