

PHAC 2/11/26

Liz Bicknell, Vickie McDonald, David Schekman, Kris Gruen, Graham Keegan, Will Colgan, betsy Zeigler, Lydia Vitale, hazel Obrian

Karl Bissex, Ellen Selkowitz, Genese Grill, Laurie Veatch, Sam Clark

Meeting called to order – Will Colgan, 5:03 PM

Approval of minutes – Motion made and approved. The time the meeting was called to order needs to be added.

Changes to agenda – None

Community agreements – Lydia reviewed the community agreements. The group agreed this could occur at the beginning of meetings when the meeting is called to order.

Public comments – None

Update of East Hill housing project grant – Liz

- Liz attended the planning meeting and checked in with Karen Hatcher to see if there was anything new since that meeting.
- After the East Hill project was voted down, some members formed a nonprofit corporation, PCDC, and have negotiated to acquire the 23.8 acres at the corner of 68 East Hill Road and West Main Street.
- Current phase of the project is seeking funds to install infrastructure on the land to support 20–24 housing units. All units will be homeownership, not rentals. Approximately 70% will be for low- and moderate-income households.
- Built by development partners: Habitat for Humanity (5 duplexes) and Hone Homes (2–3 condominium buildings, 6 units each).
- Prospective buyers will be supported by homeowner services provided by Downstreet and other community development organizations.
- Funding request is for roads, water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure.
- Specifics of the grant will be available after February 16 from Lauren Geiger.
- A public hearing is required because it is a CDBG grant.
- David noted the committee has not seen the full proposal (for example, whether the road will be public or private). There is a significant amount of missing information. At this time, the town is not being asked to financially support the project.

- Vickie reviewed the hearing notice. It states draft application copies will be available at least 5 days before the public hearing, at 4:00 PM on Wednesday, February 18. It will also be accessible online via Zoom. Lauren Geiger (802-238-2733) can be contacted for information or accommodation requests.
- Graham can obtain a copy and send it to the committee.
- Will noted nothing is on the public town website. Vickie received the notice from another source, and it also appeared in the Times Argus.
- The Selectboard approved a letter of support for the grant.
- Lydia suggested inviting Lauren Geiger or another representative to a future meeting.

Update from working groups

Communications and outreach

- Will asked whether Rural Development funds could be used and suggested getting a price estimate for mailings or flyers.
- Possible contacts include Frances Rose (Rural Development) or representatives from VCRD.
- David said this could help promote ADUs and zoning incentives the public needs to learn about. Automatic permits are allowed up to 1,100 square feet.
- Will noted the new zoning increased the size from 500 to 1,100 square feet.
- Kris will reach out regarding the funding and whether it can be used only for outreach or also for other working groups. Will noted the mapping/inventory group might need funds to print maps. Kris will copy David so that group can learn the process.

Ordinance/zoning

- The group has not yet met but plans to review vacant and abandoned property ordinances in other towns and make a recommendation to the Selectboard.

Mapping/inventory – Betsey, Liz, Graham, David, Sam Clark

- The group reviewed vacant and derelict buildings in the village and examined maps.
- Some homes are known to members, while others require more research.
- Several areas for action were identified. The community may want to begin contacting property owners and consider an appropriate approach. The Creative Campus could potentially be involved.

- The group is looking at community partners to make properties livable.
- State land banks and rehabilitation incentive programs were discussed. Graham has knowledge of what is feasible.
- They also discussed ways to make the Route 2 corridor more livable, including sidewalks, sound mitigation, and building orientation.
- Considered footpaths, sidewalks, and bike trails throughout the entire town, including space up to Maplefields.
- Discussed the effects of dam removal and bridges on the village.
- Identifying ADU and duplex possibilities.
- Maps are being created showing housing locations and possible connections throughout the village.
- Next meeting will include a walk-around and possibly a tour of a house for sale. Liz contacted the real estate agent. The property is in FEMA's highest flood risk category and would require elevating the lowest level and flood insurance. David noted this could change depending on dam removal.
- Betsey visited the site and believes creating a path or sidewalk along Route 2 would be difficult.
- Genese noted Rose Paul submitted a grant proposal for a walkability study on Route 2 and connections to the Creative Campus and the co-op. The first grant was not awarded.

Creative Campus report – Kris

- Better Connections application (Rose Paul): discussed a trail vision from Plainfield to the co-op through the Creative Campus and cemetery, possibly using the Route 2 bridge. Safety concerns require further study. The feasibility grant was not awarded but they plan to reapply. The trail may move away from Route 2 where it is dangerous.
- Plainfield Inn is in the due diligence phase and seeking an architect and project manager. John Broderick is leading the project. Rough estimate is 16 new rental units, with half at or below 80% median income.
- Campus currently offers short-term lodging that sometimes extends to several months.
- Long-term ideas include additional housing in Stokes dorm and possibly near the design building (early concepts only).

- Vermont State University architecture students are studying feasibility of the Pratt Center library for potential housing and other uses.
- Parking at the Plainfield Inn is undecided.
- David noted some units have views of the village and Spruce Mountain.
- Attic space may be usable.
- Lydia raised concerns about speeding on Route 2. The town has been working with VTrans on signage, sidewalks, and speed feedback devices.
- Karl reported radar speed signs have Selectboard approval and will be installed.
- Additional signage is also planned.
- Campus has limited longer-term housing (3–4 months), often used by traveling nurses. Event bookings are increasing.
- Long-term housing discussions include possible tiny homes or small cottages, rentals or ownership, including 99-year leases.
- Betsey discussed land trust models and resources in Washington County.
- A possible third campus location has been discussed, potentially on other land in town (“back 40” area).
- There has also been discussion about relocating buildings from flood zones onto campus land.
- A campus map may be added to the shared folder.
- Lodging information is now available on the Creative Campus website (\$60–\$100 per night).

Steps moving forward

- Genese asked whether building projects could move forward sooner, possibly through a committee statement to Mike Davidson or practical support. Kris noted the Plainfield Inn is the most ready project and has a CDBG timeline.
- David discussed creating an ordinance regarding vacant and derelict buildings and possibly a tax on vacant properties, though state authorization may be required. Encouraging ADUs may be the simplest immediate step.
- Working groups may pursue smaller, immediate projects.

- Vermont Public posted an article about free housing plans that prospective builders could use.
- Betsey expressed the community wants progress but noted the housing problem developed over many years. Lydia added that past projects were rushed and intentional pacing may help.

Google Drive

- Graham noted files cannot be deleted. Lydia will contact the Selectboard about permissions and moving the folder. Meeting notes will be uploaded.

More public comments – None

Next meeting date – 25th at 5:00 PM at the Creative Campus (room booked)

Graham reported researching development funding. Most programs support nonprofit or low-profit affordable housing organizations rather than individuals. The committee discussed potentially recommending the town create an entity to apply for funding and distribute it locally. Lydia noted community support would be important. Partnership with an existing organization such as Plainfield Forward was discussed.

Karl described the town revolving loan fund, which provides low-interest loans (approximately \$10–20k) for building improvements, particularly historic preservation. The committee discussed the need for an entity able to receive and distribute larger funding. A future working group may be formed and outside models reviewed.

Agenda items for next time

- Joe Kasperzak
- Eric Rennick and David Upson (Hardwick), invited by Kristy Farnham
- Housing or land trusts

Meeting adjourned at 6:22 PM