

2026-03-11 PHAC Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Vicki McDonald, Kris Gruen, Liz Bicknell, Will Colgan, Lydia Vitale, Betsy Zeigler, Graham Keegan, and Hazel O'Brien

Others: no public attendees

Motions at a glance:

Call Meeting to Order: Lydia Vitale called the meeting to order at 5:05

Approval of minutes from February 11th and the 25th: Vicky moved to approve the minutes from the 11th and David seconded the motion. The motion was approved. Hazel moved to approve the minutes from the 25th and Kris seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Changes to Agenda: Lydia moved an item about the community outreach group to the end of the meeting

Community Agreements: Read by Lydia Vitale.

Public Comment: None.

Discussion led by Nick Parker and Jessica Savage of the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) spoke about the grant funding for housing

Nick said Jessica Savage, VCRD Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives, would do the presentation. She said it would be good to get information from the members and brainstorm some ideas. She started with some questions. A \$5k grant amount has a time line but not to worry about that for now. Community priorities are the drivers of the program. Funding is through June. Lydia asked if it needs to go through the Select Board.(SB). Jessica said the SB already approved the Plainfield Forward concept. VCRD can contract or just pay an invoice The resilience fund could be spent on a strategic plan or hiring a grant writer or a researcher are possible.

Lydia asked for questions from the committee members. She said possible community surveys or housing and community needs assessments would be good options. Jessica said those were all useful and could be grant options. The funding is to provide technical assistance and that can come from many sources such as the Regional Planning Commission. Lydia asked how that might interact with the Resiliency Hub work in town. Jessica said that would help clarify the town's overall needs. David said the PHAC needs to establish it's priorities which will show the overall direction forward. Lydia said she would start an email chain to get some ideas on priorities.

Jessica reminded the group that the Plainfield Forward report has a great deal of information and can serve as a starting point for action ideas. VCRD has examples of other towns using funds for housing assessments and can help with providing those studies.

She mentioned there is funding for the upcoming VCDA Spring Conferance for 2 members of the committee. Lydia said she would like to go and other members would consider it. Jessica said there might be additional funding for additional members.

Vicky asked about creating an identity for Plainfield, which would include agriculture and the arts that would help generate interest. Lydia said a survey that was accessible to everyone would be useful. David said that some of the village is dilapidated and needs work. He said a plan to fix up the village is an important place to start. He said the village is the foundation of the town and fixing the foundation is the first place to start with building new or renovations.

Lydia asked if the opportunity and needs assessment is similar to a SLOT (Strength-Limitations-Opportunities-Threats) that determine operational improvements. Jessica said those categories are broad and can be tailored to the specific project. The ideal would be to move from idea to planning to implementation in the housing category. The funds can't be used for capital expenses like generators. They can't be used for food or entertainment but can be used for events that generate community feedback.

Everyone thanked Jessica and Nick for coming to the meeting.

Kris said the group has great feedback from the Plainfield Forward process and that would be a good start on priorities. Graham thought it would be good to revisit those ideas. Lydia pointed out that there are a lot of voices that haven't been heard and we should get other community members involved. David thought the outreach would be a good place to spend the grant money.

Lydia asked for a review of the take a ways from the last meeting. Betsy spoke about improving the upper and lower village to improve livability and safety. Forming an identity or image of the town would help inspire involvement. Kris thought the Hardwick group spent the time talking about creative economy while Joe from St J spoke about a range of housing development. No one spoke about free standing owner occupied housing. He said there could be a range of housing on the Creative Campus. He said while working on GDR radio it was hard to get good information on what the audience wanted. Once it had the information it took the step to put a program together and not spin the wheels on getting better and better feedback.

Lydia summarized the discussion to having outreach, improvements to the town like sidewalks, revitalization to the village as in fixing up buildings. David added outreach to people outside of the village also. Another take a way was that being a hub for surrounding towns does fit Plainfield. Betsy pointed out that the residents of Northwood use the village of Plainfield as a commercial center.

Lydia updated the group on the communications work group efforts. They will be at the Farmers Market and Hazel is creating a website that will link to the town website which will consolidate information. Hazel spoke about seeing if there was interest in starting a small scale housing cooperative. The website could help get people involved in that concept. Graham wondered if the hub concept would be good to get out to the local region. Lydia said the prospective sign up sheet at the farmers market and/or an email list would be a start. Using the school to hand out fliers and local businesses.

Kris asked if a town mailer would be worthwhile use of the grant money and that could be used to pay PHAC members for the work is something to think about as well as paying for materials. Betsy suggested a combination of professional help and volunteer work. Various ideas about mailers were discussed and how to get them out to the community.

David wanted to make people aware of accessory dwelling units (ADU) and make people aware of the financial incentives for those. He said the ADU can be a useful option even in the village where they could fit in easily. Fixing up old houses should be included in the survey/pamphlet outreach.

Vicky mention the home share program is also a good option. Haze brought up the idea of a mixer to get people involved in a more informal way. The survey is in the Google Drive at the moment.

Graham asked about a review of the survey and farmers market efforts be an agenda item for next meeting.

Lydia asked about attending the VCDA spring conference. She is planning on attending and other members may also attend. April 15th 9 am to 4 pm.

Tech issues were discussed. Kris said he would get the Owl set up ahead of time.

Other options for the meeting place was discussed but the media room still seems the best.

Will said he would set up some practice Zoom meetings to get the tech details worked out.

Steps moving forward. One item was using Google Drive. Will was happy to just email items out but will try to also put them on Google Drive. Lydia said she, Will and Liz are managers and can delete items. It will still take some time for everyone to be comfortable with it. Lydia said it was important to share the document once it's in the drive. Lydia offered to be the one to enter and delete documents on Google Drive.

Agenda items for next meeting:

- Review farmers market and survey
- Vicky asked about inviting Rose Paul to the next meeting to talk about a new walking path.
- Liz asked about the dilapidated housing ordinance and if it's been sent to the Select Board yet. Will said he has set up a meeting with Joe Kasprzak from St Johnsbury and the ordinance working group to get more details and after that the group will bring it to the committee for a recommendation. That can be an agenda item.

The next meeting is March 25th at 5 pm. It may be in a different room at the Creative Campus but that will be determined before the agenda is sent out.

A motion to adjourn was made by Lydia and seconded by Kris.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30

Discussion of St. Johnsbury Vacant and Dilapidated Housing Ordinance

The ordinance will be presented to the selectboard, though it was noted that broader community conversation is important beforehand. It was observed that early communication about the ordinance may have already prompted at least one absentee landlord to begin addressing neglected units.

Issues with tech

Technology issues will be added to the next agenda.

Items to add to next time:

Discussion of how to spend grant money due to be spent in March.

Discussion of steps moving forward.

Update on use of Google Drive.

Next meeting agenda items.

Announcement of date for next PHAC meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:39 p.m.