

Plainfield Housing Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
4.8.2026

Attendees: Liz Bicknell, Vicki McDonald, Lydia Vitale, Will Colgan, Betsy Zeigler, Graham Keegan, and Alicia Weiss

Call meeting to order: 5:05

Changes to agenda: Note—skipping David’s report, he’s sick.

- Where are the notes from the last meeting? They were sent out, but maybe not in Drive.

Motion to approve meeting minutes from last time - Will. Passed.

Community agreements: read by Lydia

Public comment: no public.

SKIP David reports on Rose Paul’s presentation

Review and Vote to forward to the select board for the Abandoned and Dilapidated Housing Ordinance:

- The Ordinance and Regulation work group had a meeting (David, Betsy, Will); they decided there could be ways to make the document a little easier and more comprehensive.
- The most recent copy was sent out as a draft with some editing to make it more succinct.
- It was a great effort, but it is not quite ready to send to the select board.
- The group would like more feedback from landowners, townspeople, other interested people, and to make it as cooperative as possible.
- The group discussed creating a resource page and FAQ page.
- A flow chart of how the ordinance works could also be helpful.
- The group would like to do more outreach to the community and possibly hold a separate meeting.
- Farmer’s markets start in June, which might be too long to wait to get feedback.
- There was a question about whether the procedure would be to show it to the Select Board before showing it to the town. It was noted that the Select Board would likely appreciate more public feedback first.

- The group asked whether the town health officer and constable had been informed, and noted that they should be, along with the Fire Chief.
- Liz asked about a Q&A for the ordinance and who the audience would be. It would help the public or landowners or other groups understand the ordinance. It may be useful to divide FAQs into groups (landowners, public, etc.).
- There was discussion about how to notify the town of concerns with a building. This is something that anyone (renter, landowner, etc.) may want to know.
- The group discussed where all of the different pieces of information would live, such as on the town website, or maybe on the outreach/community website, possibly as a landing page without duplicating content.
- Vicki noted that people may have specific questions about related issues such as abandoned cars, and the group should be prepared to answer those.
- The working group emphasized that if a house is vacant but being renovated, there should be a permit or process so the landowner does not get fined unnecessarily.
- Vicki raised questions about quarterly abatement. Because this is a new ordinance, the group discussed whether quarterly is an appropriate timeline or if it should be longer at the start. Monitoring capacity was also a concern, as well as how other towns handle this.
- The Bean Rd trailer was discussed from a recent Select Board meeting. The trailer should not have been there due to zoning, and neighbors brought complaints to the Select Board. This led to Dan Caddy being able to issue tickets, as previously there was no enforcement mechanism despite the activity being against the law. This ordinance would make enforcement clearer.
- The group discussed the feasibility of quarterly abatement and whether it is realistic to check in that frequently. Methods of check-in (in person, email, etc.) were also discussed. It was noted that if quarterly is not feasible, the Select Board could recommend a different timeline, especially for vacant properties.

Discuss the formation of Building Rehab Group:

- Volunteers could help work with homeowners as they rehab properties.
- David knows people in town who are willing to help homeowners rehab and develop plans. PHAC volunteers could serve as a point of contact for homeowners involved in rehab or the ordinance process.

- This would provide more oversight and give PHAC more to bring to the Select Board regarding management of the ordinance.
- The group noted that PHAC is an advisory body and cannot distribute money, but can help direct people to appropriate resources. While many landlords have access to resources, some do not.
- Volunteers could advise, assess buildings, and help identify next steps and resources—essentially providing free guidance.
- This working group would not be codified into the ordinance but would exist separately and could potentially be formalized in the future.
- Outreach could take place at farmer’s markets and through regularly scheduled events focused on specific topics, such as this ordinance.
- Graham noted that offering support alongside the ordinance would give it more impact. Liz agreed that this would make it feel less hostile and could reduce conflict by pairing enforcement with support. The group discussed whether this support could be sustained long term or built into the framework.
- Some of the worst properties are already known, including homes with structural issues or long-term vacancy, particularly on School St, as well as others that are concerning but still occupied.
- FEMA-related properties were discussed, including whether buildings can be secured or closed. There is uncertainty about regulations, and Betsy noted that “Heartbreak” may be closed due to community pressure but may fall outside local control due to FEMA buyout status. The current draft does not include these properties, and it was noted that FEMA buyouts generally cannot be physically altered.
- The example of Susan Grimaldi was discussed, where closing up a home may interfere with FEMA funding. Some buildings may be listed but not acted on, and some occupants delay repairs due to anticipated buyouts.
- The group questioned whether there is clear language about whether these buildings can be touched, noting that this may not have been an issue previously.
- There was discussion about whether FEMA properties should fall under the ordinance. Public safety was emphasized, including securing buildings to prevent injury or vandalism. However, concerns were raised about the financial burden on homeowners already paying for multiple housing costs.

- The group also discussed that the ordinance can't target specific buildings but should apply broadly, and the language could reflect that more.
- The group discussed adding language stating that all buildings are included unless restricted by state or federal law (e.g., FEMA buyouts). A general exemption may be more effective than listing specific cases.
- It was suggested that buildings under such programs should at minimum not pose a hazard, aligning with existing ordinance language.
- The group acknowledged that legal review will help refine language and prepare for potential push back. Broad, flexible language was seen as preferable to overly specific provisions.
- Vicki raised concerns about how the ordinance applies to older homes with stone walls or foundations, noting it may not apply to typical homeowner issues.
- The group recognized that while improvements benefit the town, not all homeowners can afford major repairs, and some issues (e.g., weather-related damage) are unavoidable.
- Past issues with raccoons and rodents were discussed, including a case where a property required extermination services. Infestation poses a public safety concern and contributes to declining livability.
- Rodents and infestation are already addressed in the ordinance.
- The group discussed the appeal process and how homeowners could challenge decisions, including potential documentation such as inspections. Transparency about recourse options is important and could be included in FAQs.

Discuss possible grant possibilities:

- The group should continue to monitor and research grant opportunities.
- A grants committee is available to assist with applications, and opportunities should be brought to PHAC for coordination.
- A barn rehabilitation grant was discussed, though it requires upfront funding.
- A historic barn grant reimburses 50% of approved costs for barns over 50 years old; an example project may be underway on Middle Road.

- A planning grant proposal from East Montpelier was shared, focused on revitalizing North Montpelier. Betsy will distribute it. It may be a CDBG grant and could be relevant to Plainfield.
- The proposal takes a comprehensive look at infrastructure and has already secured funding; planners are now being sought. It serves as a useful model for neighboring towns.
- The grant is funded through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and provided approximately \$30,000 for planning efforts.
- Focus areas include housing, mobility, economic revitalization, climate resilience, and aging in place.
- The group questioned whether more housing-specific grants are available, as this one is broad, and discussed the need for more targeted local data.
- Jessica Savage had mentioned those needs assessments that would be helpful for this type of stuff.

TECHNOLOGY ISSUES pause

- Betsy emphasized the importance of mobility and infrastructure, including wastewater, walkability, street planning, bike lanes, trails, parks, schools, and community spaces.

Open meeting law and ethics training video:

- Some members have completed it.
- Will shared that Peter Youngbaer indicated chairs are required to complete it due to open meeting laws.
- Others are encouraged to watch it to understand public requirements.

Steps moving forward:

- Continue outreach and engagement with the community regarding the ordinance.
- Follow up with the working group and receive a report from David at the next meeting.
- Incorporate changes such as exemptions into the ordinance.
- Liz will research FEMA buyout regulations and consult with Michael Billingsly if needed.
- David, Betsy, Vicki, Liz, and Graham plan to visit a property on Route 2; 48 hours notice is required for tenants, and Liz will coordinate. Another property on Main St is back on the market; it was previously converted back to residential but remains zoned commercial.

- Some members will attend a conference next week; confirmation of email details was discussed.

Next meeting agenda items:

- Graham will report on his email to the Select Board regarding prioritization of the Plainfield revolving loan fund. The current balance is unclear, but the cap is \$20,000 per project unless the town is the borrower. Recommendations include increasing the fund and making loan limits more flexible.
- Graham contacted Karl Bissex, who is no longer on the Select Board, and would like to invite a current member to a future PHAC meeting. The fund appears underutilized, but details are unclear.
- The group discussed creating an FAQ to improve understanding of the fund, though financial information is currently difficult to access.
- The fund was originally established through a grant and has grown, but lack of staffing in the town office limits transparency.
- Graham will invite Peter to a future meeting to discuss the fund in more detail.
- The group will also check in on the conference at the next meeting.

Announce date for the next PHAC meeting: April 22nd, 5pm at Clock Tower meeting room.

Adjournment: 6:21pm.