

Town of Plainfield East Village Expansion Advisory Committee

April 24th, 2025 / 5:00 PM / Plainfield Opera House (18 High St) & Zoom/ taken by Kirstie Grant

Committee members attending:

- **In Person:** Kirstie Grant (Secretary), Jon Hosford, Lauren Geiger (Co-chair), Liz Perreault, Rick Burroughs, Walker Blackwell
- **Zoom:** Arion Thiboumery (Co-chair), Kim Madalinski
- **Planned absence:** Donny Osman (Co-chair), Jared Birchmore, Vicki McDonald

Call to order: Lauren Geiger called the meeting to order at approximately 5:00 pm.

Changes to agenda: The attendance policy conversation was moved to the next meeting so that it's author may be in attendance during the conversation.

Motion to approve edited minutes of April 17, 2025 meeting: Minutes approved unanimously.

Goals of work Groups:

- **As a review, here are the goals of the EVEAC as charged by the select board:**
 - Re-house those affected by the floods of July 2023 and July 2024;
 - Provide additional, affordable housing amidst Vermont's housing crisis;
 - Include a mix of single-family homes, multi-plexes, tiny houses and apartments;
 - Revitalize the town, prioritizing flood-displaced and other Plainfield residents and those who have made significant contributions to the town;
 - Restore lost tax base;
 - Expand the Water and Wastewater user base;
 - Determine a timeline according to what makes the most sense logistically, ecologically, and financially;
 - Place infrastructure as early as possible, so that buyers can design and construct homes as early as possible;
 - Be cost-neutral to the Town;
 - Create public, common, and open space and paths that enrich the lives of Plainfield residents.

Construction update - Rick, Liz, Jon:

- The Construction Committee convened to review previous work and discuss potential **cost-saving measures** for the project, including:
 - Construction Duration: Acknowledged a discrepancy in construction duration estimates we have received, ranging between 4 and 10 months. The committee

recognized that shortening the construction timeline would likely result in greater financial efficiency.

- Volunteer Labor: Exploration of an Owners Project Manager and clerk as potential volunteer roles.
- Sewer and Water Lines: Currently, we are planning for sewer and water lines to be stubbed to individual lots, requiring individual connections for each. The committee discussed the allocation of costs for these individual connections, considering whether it should be a cost borne by the individual lot owner or a town expense. It was noted that individual costs could increase lot prices but potentially offer a better overall price to the buyer.
- Lot Reconfiguration: Exploration of lot reconfiguration, including the potential for additional lot placement.
- Site Balance: Discussion on strategies to improve site balance by utilizing on-site waste fill and materials within the project whenever feasible.
- Path and Lighting Costs: The committee acknowledged the need to determine the cost of the path and the associated cost for lighting.
- Need more direction from the larger group before taking next steps.
- **Info needed from town:**
 - Project insurance cost, specifically builders risk insurance.
 - Cost of sewer and pipe materials.
 - Hydrant and flow test results (including residual pressure assessment and the need for larger pipes for fire safety).
 - Plan for managing the town-owned public space (presumably the town's purchase of the current lot and its retention of some open land). The committee questioned if lot costs would cover the purchase of this land.
 - The construction work group raised concerns regarding the payment of taxes during the lot sales process, including clarification on the responsible party and potential impacts on the grand list.
 - The construction work group raised concerns regarding the payment of taxes during the lot sales process, including clarification on the responsible party and potential impacts on the grand list. The current tax bill for 68 East Hill Rd. property is ~\$4500 annually. 266 Main St. is ~\$1,300 annually.
 - The construction work group noted that the estimated complete legal costs for the project (as a real estate project) and the listed surveying costs appeared low. Clarification on the scope of work included in these estimates is needed. **Arion** to forward breakdown of legal and survey estimates to **construction working group (Jon, Liz, and Rick)**.
 - The construction work group discussed the need to establish a process for addressing cost issues efficiently and at the appropriate project stage to avoid duplication of effort.
 - The development and presentation of a sales plan to the Select Board (SB) is required. This includes determining who will list and value the lots.

- Wetland Update and Engineering Support: Paul Boisvert (Engineering Ventures) provided map coordinates for the revised wetland update and expressed willingness to continue providing support on an hourly basis for the initial phase of engineering work.
- **Rick** will Reach out to Michael Bingham about curb cuts.

Prospective Buyers group update (Walker, Jared, Kim):

- The Prospective Buyers Group (Walker, Jared, Kim) has not yet met but will provide an update at the next meeting. The following items were raised during this agenda item.
- Arion has sent emails to individuals who expressed interest, inviting them to participate in the Prospective Buyers Working Group.
- **Defining Affordability:**
 - The group needs to establish a clear definition of affordability, determining realistic price points.
 - The fairness of pricing based on cost per square foot versus overall size will be evaluated, including how to value wetland square footage.
 - The committee will consider what percentage of the lots should be designated as affordable.
 - The potential requirement for 30% affordability if applying for the Community Development Block Grant will be investigated (Karen Hatcher to be consulted). This requirement may be best met by working with Downstreet and Habitat for Humanity, who have each already expressed interest in up to 5 lots to build affordable, owner-occupied housing.
- **Property Cost Assessments:**
 - Two cost assessments for the property have been conducted, with one indicating a value of \$375,000 for the entire property.
 - The need for price breakdowns per potential lot layout was identified.
 - It was noted that property prices are fluctuating, with the last prospective lot sales pricing occurring in late February/early March.
- **Building Affordability:**
 - While land costs can be minimized, the inherent cost of building remains a challenge unless alternative, cost-effective construction methods are identified.
 - Builders Fair:
 - Sandy V previously proposed organizing a fair for prospective buyers to connect with builders focused on decreasing construction costs.
 - The potential for a streamlined and cost-effective building process to make lots more attractive and approachable will be explored, recognizing that building a home can be a daunting process.
 - Public Comment: Sam Clark noted the significant wealth of knowledge within the community regarding affordable housing.
- The potential benefit of opening up resources from this subcommittee to the larger community regarding creating affordable, resilient, and efficient homes was raised.
- **Lot Attractiveness and Demand:** Recognizing the need to sell a significant number of lots, the importance of making them attractive and the sales process easy was emphasized.

- The committee will monitor the list of prospective buyers (currently 50 interested individuals) to assess demand, acknowledging that some individuals may need to withdraw due to timing.

Budget group update (Arion, Lauren, Walker):

- Arion, Lauren, and Walker met to review notes and discuss the significant budget gap that needs to be addressed.
- **Funding Options:**
 - Grant funding is considered essential to move forward with the project.
 - Lot sales will also contribute to funding.
 - The group will develop 3-4 funding scenarios based on the potential amount of grant funding received.
- **Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR):**
 - Karen Hatcher's initial review suggests the town is likely eligible for CDBG-DR funding.
 - The initial reading of the grant guidelines emphasizes housing and infrastructure for housing projects.
 - A discussion needs to occur within the town to determine how the grant application will be framed and if/how this project will be included.
 - The outcome of this process is expected to provide a clearer understanding of the potential grant funding amount for the project.
 - **Grant Application Timeline:**
 - A meeting with the Grants Group, CVRPC (Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission) Council, and State representatives (Pat Moulton and Kristie Farnham) is scheduled for May 6th.
 - A public comment period on the state draft grant guidelines will occur in mid-May.
 - A presentation to the Select Board is scheduled for May 26th.
 - Final grant application guidance is expected in June.
 - The grant application is anticipated to open in July.
 - Funding decisions are expected in the fall.
 - An update from the Grants Group is scheduled for May 5th at 6:00 PM. Arion suggests that members of the EVEAC attend this meeting.
 - **The timeline for when the town needs to vote on approving this project as part of the grant application process needs to be discussed with Karen Hatcher.**
 - **Financial Levers:**
 - The following levers to address the budget gap were discussed:
 - **Increase lot numbers:** This would decrease the amount of common space.
 - **Increase costs of lots:** This would negatively impact affordability.
 - **Tax Increment Financing (TIF):** The legislature is considering TIF, which diverts future property tax increases from new development within a designated district to subsidize that development. Also called CHIP

Community Housing Infrastructure Plan. While it could be useful for funding, it would reduce potential future tax income for the TIF repayment period of 20 years. The impact of FEMA buyouts (11% of the town's grand list, including already abated properties) on the grand list and the time horizon for TIF need to be considered. There is tension around using this mechanism, but it is worth evaluating.

- <https://www.vlct.org/news/testimony-house-commerce-committee-regarding-proposed-chip-41625>
- <https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2026/S.127>
- Walker is working on a project to model financial scenarios.

Property tour date:

- Saturday, May 10th, 10-11 AM: **Arion** will warn this as an official meeting of the group. Please wear boots if possible. This meeting is open to anyone who would like to join.

Public comment conversation:

- The group discussed how to best respond to public comments received, including letters and social media interactions.
- **Responding to Letters:**
 - The group agreed to acknowledge receipt of all letters.
 - The Communications Committee will be responsible for drafting responses, but may seek input from the larger group as needed.
 - A single point of contact will be designated for responding to letters.
- **Social Media Responses:**
 - Social media responses need to be thoughtful and strategic.
- Rather than engaging in extensive discussions on every comment, the approach will be to thank people for voicing their concerns and, when appropriate, ask for resources or information related to the issue raised.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):**
 - The Communications Committee will review the existing FAQ document.
 - Updated numbers and information need to be edited and communicated.
 - Physical copies of the updated FAQ will be printed and made available at the town office.
 - The revised FAQ will be circulated with the whole group for review.
- Tristan MacGregor-Stewart, Chief System Operator clarified concerns relating to well/SPAs
 - “A Source Protection Area (SPA) exists around any well or spring used for a public water supply. The SPA is created to show areas that likely have an impact on the water supply of that source. The SPA is broken down into 3 categories: Zone 1 is the area immediately surrounding the source and any sort of activities or building should not be done in this area, Zone 2 is farther away so it will not have as immediate and effect so some activity and construction can happen in this area particularly the farther it is from Zone 1, Zone 3 is the farthest areas that

may contribute to the water supply and most activities can be done in this area though heavy industrial or other intensive uses should be evaluated and curtailed as needed. The village expansion project location falls into Zone 3 and the parts of Zone 2 farthest from the water source. Construction of residential properties or simple commercial properties that are connected to Town water and sewer in that location represent a low risk for Potential Sources of Contamination (PSOC).”

- Needs to be added to FAQs

Public comment offered:

- N/A

Action items:

- **Arion** will forward legal and surveying (Rick Bell) quotes to the construction committee (Rick, Jon, and Liz).
- **Rick** will reach out to Michael Bingham about curb cuts.
- **The communications committee** will review the previous FAQ.

Calendar items:

- The regular meeting schedule will be the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month at 5:00 PM at the Plainfield Town Hall Opera House.
- The Town's Grants Group update: May 5th at 6:00 PM
- Tour of the property: Saturday, May 10th, 10-11 AM

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:16 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kirstie Grant, 4/25/25