

Plainfield Rises: Recovery and Revitalization V2, Regional Priority List Submission

Project Description:

Plainfield was devastated during the July 2024 flood, with more than 30 housing units (including multi-family buildings) destroyed or declared uninhabitable. This flooding event was preceded by a similarly destructive flood in July 2023. With the increasing frequency of such destructive events, forecasted to be more frequent and more extreme in the level of destruction, it is imperative that high hazard areas of human development in Plainfield need to be moved away from the river to enable our community to have a resilient and constructive future.

While it has only been a short time since the 2024 flood, our community is hard at work imagining what this next phase of evolution will look like for Plainfield. We are working on plans through public-private-academic partnerships to build new housing in several areas of town including development planned for the Goddard College Campus. These efforts would replace lost housing, help meet Plainfield's goal of attracting new residents, and also meet anticipated growth in demand for housing into the future. While these efforts will expand housing, we are also exploring pathways to bolster entrepreneurial opportunities in Plainfield that will both provide employment and enhance our tax base.

Plainfield is fortunate to have a remarkably strong community. Though we've faced significant challenges in recent years with our major flooding events, the people of our town have responded with creativity, dedication, and optimism as we look to build a more sustainable future. The waters may continue to rise, and so will the people of Plainfield.

Specifically, Plainfield seeks to secure funding to support 3 PRIORITY AREAS:

1. HOUSING:

ADD 50 HOUSING UNITS, ~20 net new units by CYE2027, to replace what was lost during the flooding event, and to add more housing stock of energy efficient, sustainable, mixed use and affordable units to meet the needs of current residents, while also attracting new residents to our town, which would result in the following:

- Grow the Grand List: 20 new houses valued at an average of \$250,000 will increase Plainfield's Grand List by \$5,000,000 by the end of CYE2027.

- Grow our Population: Increase population by 200 people by CYE2027, with a focus on attracting a diverse group of residents representing a mix of ages, families and socio-economic levels.

2. HAZARD MITIGATION

- Infrastructure: Repair damaged infrastructure to build back better and mitigate future flooding risks by relocating utilities, roads and bridges to more suitable locations. The majority of the damage incurred during the July 2024 flooding event happened in the Great Brook watershed, along Brook Road from the top of the road down into the village washing out or damaging nine bridges, a number of culverts and much of the roadway. Thirty homes in the floodplain have applied for FEMA buyout. Temporary emergency repair of the roadway and bridges has been underway for many weeks with a goal toward making the road serviceable for emergency vehicles, school buses and residents who still live along Brook Rd. for the coming winter. The long term plan for adaptation of the road to accommodate the Great Brook in anticipated future events is yet to come.
- We anticipate creating new Green Space, Parks and Recreation in flood affected areas with a focus on walkability, bike-ability, and four season recreation, outdoor activities, trails and recreation spaces, improve recreation area for youth and families in the village, and amplify opportunities for recreation throughout new development. Create a modern village green space, with a view toward restoring floodplains, building climate resiliency and enhancing the natural environment and native species.

3. COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION:

Community Revitalization and Economic Development: Explore how the Village of Plainfield, the Goddard Campus, and the surrounding area can become a more cohesive community, complete with transportation links, health services, businesses, cultural, recreational and educational opportunities. Create an urban core in town connected by sidewalks and additional public parking.

- Arts: Celebrate Plainfield's arts culture: The Opera House, The Hay Barn at Goddard Campus, craft workspaces and galleries, performance spaces, children's art programs, public art, community projects throughout all redevelopment opportunities.
- Community Services: Explore child care and adult care facilities within new development areas.

MASTER RECOVERY PLAN

The specifics of what is included in the above priority areas will be developed through a comprehensive master recovery planning process to be completed in 2025. This plan would be built from feedback collected from community-wide engagement strategies. It would address both current recovery projects, and also the creation of a strong foundation for the revitalization of our town well into the future.

Project Purpose and Benefits:

Since July (just a few months ago), two coordinated working groups, one focused on creating new housing and another on infrastructure repair and hazard mitigation, have formed to address the myriad recovery issues facing the town. At the same time, the Goddard College Campus is being sold to an owner who has expressed a commitment to using a number of the buildings on campus for rentals and affordable housing options, and exploring opportunities for economic development, education, culture, cross-generational opportunities, and more. We are embarking on a Recovery Master Planning process that will help to guide us and provide direction as we strengthen our community and prepare to meet the needs of our people for decades to come. We envision our town as a dynamic laboratory for productive change and sustainability. We believe that Plainfield can become a model of resilience and innovation for rural communities across Vermont and the nation.

Goal #1 of the West Central CEDS speaks to the goal of new, “perpetually affordable housing and market rate housing in areas which can support new growth.” The Village Expansion and potential Goddard College location present opportunities to expand the village away from the river in safe areas out of the floodplain and floodway. This meets Goal #5 of the West Central CEDS. New housing will help attract and retain our workforce which assists Goal #4 of the West Central Vermont CEDS.

The Town is examining a “Village Expansion” project on a 23 acre parcel adjacent to our downtown. This will enable new and affordable housing construction in partnership with development organizations both local and national (Habitat for Humanity), and other funding, academic (UPenn Sustainability Program), faith-based (Mennonites and Southern Baptist) and construction partners, who have already come forward with offers to help with design and low cost building options. This is in addition to people being offered to buy a parcel and build their own house in town.

The Village Expansion project is an opportunity to open new locations for housing, recreation, community services, restaurants, food and potential business locations within walking distance to the Plainfield Health Center, Library, Town Hall and more in our downtown. The Goddard campus is also contiguous to the downtown and walking distance to the downtown. Prioritizing pedestrian/cycle/ski access to these resources through good sidewalks and Rt 2 crossing infrastructure will improve every aspect of this proposal. The campus has an existing wood fired heat district which presents opportunities for low cost heat for residential and commercial activities. Plans by the potential purchaser of the Goddard Campus are still under development. The Town will proceed with our planning with both the "Village Expansion" and potential college campus projects included.

The Village Expansion project's initial scope includes:

- At least 30 buildable lots initially to replace/recoup affordable housing lost was lost in the flooding
- Public utilities will be made accessible from every lot
- Locating housing along flood resilient town roads
- Easy walking connection to the (Lower) Village
- Match the character of the existing (Lower) Village in terms of design and density.
- A public town-wide process to develop a final design of the plan layout.
- A new Community Center building (depending on funding available)

Project Timeline, Milestones

Once funding is secured, we believe construction of new housing can happen in the proposed location as early as 2026. Initial planning and design work have already begun. For the Goddard property, town officials have met with the anticipated new campus owner. Plans are still being developed with hopes of greater specificity within months for the future of that specific property. Funding is needed to help us conduct engineering and other studies to develop construction plans.

Housing - Village Expansion:

- Public design process, and engineering - Fall-Winter 2024/25
- Full development proposal from Steering Committee to Town Select Board by Town Meeting March 2025
- Put in roads, water and sewer - 2025
- Install Electrical and communications. Building to commence in 2026*

Housing - Goddard:

Rental housing at Goddard will likely be available early in 2025 as some buildings on the campus will require minimal work to make them available. Other units will be available over time, as renovations are made. Again, this is a private project so the Town doesn't control the timeframe.

* The completion of 20 new units of housing will generate \$5,000,000 additional dollars to the Town Grand List by the end of 2027.

Infrastructure:

- Infrastructure repair began within days of the July 2024 storm and is ongoing.
- Emergency repairs and relocation of utilities will be done prior to winter 2024.
- Long term repair of Brook Road and the Great Brook watershed is a long term project.
- Engineering study to be completed in 2025.

Recovery Master Plan

- October 2024: Initial Presentation by VCRD to Plainfield SB re: planning process
- November-December 2024: Planning Committee work
- January- September 2025: Community Engagement process to include large group, focus group, surveys and other methods to reach the greatest number of community members
- Year End 2025: Completion and Adoption of Recovery Master Plan
- 2026: Formation of Community Advisory Committee
- 2026: Project Prioritization/Timeline/Funding Identification*

*It is expected that our community process will generate a series of projects within the scope of Community Revitalization and Economic Development, Green Spaces, Parks and Recreation, Arts, and more.

Project Principal Experience

Currently the group working on this project is made up of very talented community volunteers with wide ranging professional backgrounds. Plainfield is blessed with many retired and current professionals who have stepped up to assist. These folks

are former state employees, entrepreneurs, developers and other professions which can and are assisting with developing implementable plans.

Arion Thiboumery, Project Lead, Housing

Arion Thiboumery has started and run multiple businesses in the food and energy sectors, overseeing multi-million dollar capital projects, both greenfield construction and renovation projects. He currently owns and operates a small portfolio of hydroelectric and solar sites, and owns two residential multi-unit rental buildings. He holds a PhD in Rural Sociology from Iowa State University.

Members of the Village Expansion Steering Committee (relevant expertise noted):

- Dan Fingas - Plainfield Select Board Member
- Eli Barlow
- Erica Da Costa - Owner of the 23 acre parcel under consideration
- Jake McBride
- Jared Birchmore
- George Springston - Geologist and resident expert on streambank erosion
- Kim Madalinski
- Lauren Geiger
- Mary Trerice- Plainfield Conservation Committee
- Michael Billingsley - Plainfield Hazard Mitigation Coordinator
- Paula Emery - Plainfield Representative to CVRPC
- Peter Young
- Rick Burroughs - Retired architect and planner
- Sandy Ross - Plainfield Lister
- Sandy Vitzthum - Pro bono architect and planner leading project design work
- Will Colgan - Plainfield Planning Commission Chair

Karen Hatcher, Project Lead, Master Recovery Plan and Community Revitalization

Karen is currently the Town Grants Administrator and leader of the volunteer grants committee that coalesced following the flooding event. She is an experienced nonprofit leader, has managed multi-million dollar budgets, has founded several community organizations and initiatives, and led a variety of community engagement processes in New Jersey and New Hampshire where she lived and worked previously. She is an experienced grant writer and fundraiser.

Michael Zahner, Hazard Mitigation Grant Specialist

Michael Zahner worked in the Act 250 program for 28 years becoming Executive Director of the Vermont Natural Resources Board in 1995. Major responsibilities for

the overall administration of the Act 250 program including quasi-judicial and administrative functions. Strategic planning, program evaluation, statistical tracking and analysis. Responsible for implementation of appropriate change in statewide land use policy and organizational structure - author of numerous major policy initiatives, and legislation including major work on the Permit Reform Bill of 2004 and Growth Center legislation, Act 183 of 2006. Retired in 2009, starting an Act 250 consulting business. Worked as a legislative liaison and environmental consultant for the Vermont Chamber of Commerce. Also served as chair of the Marshfield Planning Commission, the Marshfield Conservation Commission and the Twinfield Union School Board

Josh Pitts, Project Lead, Infrastructure

Josh Pitts has lived in Plainfield Vermont for 16 years, is the Road Commissioner and a Water and Wastewater Commissioner for the Town of Plainfield. He's worked for Caledonia Spirits for seven years and is their Quality Assurance Engineer. In his free time he enjoys playing music, building instruments, and spending time with his parrot and two cats.

Gary Smith, Public Assistance Coordinator

Gary has worked for public and private organizations as a School Superintendent, Chief Operating Officer, and consultant. He has extensive experience in leading organizations, fiscal management, strategic plan development and implementation and leading and developing staff. He serves as the Town's Public Assistance Coordinator helping the town secure federal and state funding for town infrastructure flood damages, and also serves as a Lister for the town since 2022. He also is a Board member and Treasurer for the Twin Valley Senior Center.

Karl Bissex, Select Board Chair

Karl has been a resident of Plainfield for 45 years and raised his two sons here. He started several businesses focused on fabrication, machining and contracting work for New England industries. Karl served as a Plainfield Selectboard member from 2001 to 2007 and again from April 2024 to present as chair. He has served on numerous committees in the arts, creative economy training, music venues and town events.

Michael Billingsley, Emergency Manager

Michael Cerulli Billingsley directed community-based non-profit arts organizations in Vermont and Massachusetts for 30 years, while exhibiting and teaching media arts. His post academic career has involved hazard mitigation and sustainable community projects in Brattleboro, Putney and Plainfield VT as well as volunteering for NASA's space weather outreach team. For two decades he also worked as a lay

archaeologist, researching an egalitarian Bronze Age culture in Ireland and its predecessors in ancient eastern Europe. He has served as Plainfield's Emergency Management Director for four years.

Denise Wheeler, Administrative Support

Denise is a retired Vermont State Employee having served as Act 250's Business Manager (including Human Resources) for 32 years retiring in 2014. She served on the Calais Selectboard since 1999 and has been Chair since 2012 (including Board of Abatement and Board of Civil Authority; Calais Emergency Management; Town Hall Renovation Committee and Curtis Pond Dam Committee). She was also an alternate member of the Calais Development Review Board and was Vice Chair of the Planning Commission from 2002 to 2006. She was a founding member of the East Calais Community Trust in 2019.

Project Support and Regional Need

We are coordinating with a range of state, regional and federal agencies to bring financial and technical resources to the project. We are working with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, the Central Vermont Flood Recovery Officer Patricia Moulton, Central Vermont Regional Development Corporation, Ledgeworks, Greatwood Project, and Downstreet Housing and Community Development as we develop plans and seek to implement. FEMA is offering resources to assist with planning as well as talent to assist. As stated above, our plans meet several goals of the West Central Vermont CEDS.

Plainfield and the region are in desperate need of more affordable and market rate housing. The housing lost in the July 2024 flood included rental and owner-occupied housing. Displaced residents have few to no alternatives to relocate. This needs immediate attention, and we are working hard to determine how best to move forward. Funding for planning and engineering are immediate needs. With construction funding following soon after.

Project Cost, etc

These are early days, but we have big dreams for our recovery and future. We estimate that the total cost of the overall range of projects under this umbrella will be approximately \$50 Million. We anticipate that there will be FEMA Public Assistance reimbursement to cover some of the repair costs, however how much is unknown at this time.

Recovery Master Plan	Facilitation, Meetings, Administration	\$500,000
Village Expansion Housing	Land Acquisition, Infrastructure, Community Center, Sidewalks	\$5,000,000
Infrastructure Repair and Relocation	Water Lines, Sewer Lines, Fire Suppression Lines Roads, Bridges, Culverts	\$25,000,000
Green Space, Parks and Recreation	Great Brook Watershed Area, Village Recreation Area	\$5,000,000
Community Revitalization and Economic Development	New Child Day Care Center, Adult Day Care Center, other services as determined by community	\$10,000,000
Study to Relocate Town Services, Emergency Services, Entrance and Egress to Town	Road Department, Water Department, Fire and Emergency Department	\$1,500,000
Professional Staffing, Consultants, Personnel	5 year period to manage projects and workload	\$3,000,000
TOTAL		\$50,000,000

Job Creation

We anticipate that transitional and permanent employment opportunities will be created in the following fields based on this list of projects:

- Construction and Infrastructure related to new housing in the Village Expansion area- estimate 5-8 jobs
- Teaching and Education at Twinfield Union School to accommodate new families - estimate 2 jobs
- Restaurants and Lodging opportunities in the village and at Goddard Campus- estimate 3-5 jobs
- Security and Law Enforcement- estimate 1-2 jobs
- Town Water System and Road Crew- estimate increase by 1-2 staff members in each department
- Agricultural Producers- estimate 4 new seasonal jobs
- Town Professional Staff - estimate new FTE Town Administrator, increase Town Grants Administrator hours to .75 FTE
- Health Care- estimate 2 new positions at health center

- Child Care-estimate 2-4 child care educators at new facility
- Adult Care- estimate 2-4 service providers at new facility

Additionally economic development is anticipated through commercial enterprises and incubator spaces (to be developed) both at Goddard Campus and along Rt 2 and in the village.