

Town of Plainfield, Vermont
Select Board Meeting
August 3, 2021
Minutes - Approved

Present:

Jim Volz, Select Board Chair
Tammy Farnham, Select Board
Sasha Thayer, Select Board
Linda Wells, Town Clerk and Treasurer
Representative Janet Ancell
Eric Blaisdell, Times Argus
Liz Bicknell
Lucy Blue
Charlie Cogbill
Senator Ann Cummings
George Cushing
Paula Emery, Select Board Administrative Assistant
Kathy and Bob Fancher
Susan Grimaldi
Yoko Kishishita
Alice Merrill
George Springston
Keith Swann, Friend of the Opera House
Drew Sy
Arion Thiboumery
Laurie Veach
Melinda Vieux
Peter Young
Betsy Zeigler

Agenda:

Executive Session – Employee Compensation
Changes to Agenda
Town Clerk/Town Treasurer Report - Linda Wells

- ♦ Re-Roofing Municipal Building Update
- ♦ August 18 Tax Due Date
- ♦ Update on Town Finances & Requirements for Loans Exceeding Five Years Duration
- ♦ Approval of Warrants
- ♦ Approval of Minutes Inc. July 6 PM, July 20, July 27, And July 28

Brook Road Bridge Replacement Project Including Community Input

- Financial Cost to Town (25% Of Cost, Estimated At \$310,000)
- Implications of Delay re Project Cost
- Payment Options for the Town
- Should There be Town Vote to Authorize Going Forward?
- Community Input re Pros and Cons of Going Forward
- State's Responsibility for Maintaining Rivers/Waterways Free of Debris
- Alternate Approaches
- Timing of Project
- Timing of Application for FEMA Funding (Covers 75% Of Cost)

Old Firehouse Update and Possible Decision on Sale
Additional Public Comment
Other Business

The meeting was called to order at 7:05PM.

Executive Session – Employee Compensation

This item was moved to the end of the meeting.

Changes to Agenda

SB discussed and decided to move the Executive Session to the end of the meeting and to add the Contract with Friends of the Opera House Approval to the agenda – before the Executive Session.

Town Clerk/Town Treasurer Report - Linda Wells

- ♦ Re-Roofing Municipal Building Update
The re-roofing job is underway and going well.
- ♦ August 18 Tax Due Date
Municipal taxes are due on August 18th. They must be postmarked or delivered by hand on the 18th. If you are interested in arranging for automatic payment for your municipal taxes contact the town office or email Linda Wells at plainfieldtc@gmail.com. You will need your bank's routing number and your account number.
Please note that if you are already using auto-pay you don't need to do anything. You don't need to contact the Town Clerk's office. If you change your bank account you should contact them. Auto-pay cannot be used for the August 18 payment.
- ♦ Update on Town Finances & Requirements for Loans Exceeding Five Years Duration
Wells reminded the SB that voter approval is needed before taking out a loan that has a five year or more repayment duration.
- ♦ Approval of Warrants
There were warrants for accounts payable for July 28 and payroll for July 30.. **Thayer moved to approve. The motion was approved unanimously.**
- ♦ **Approval of Minutes for July 6, July 20, July 27, and July 28**
Thayer moved to approve the meeting minutes for July 6, 20, 28 and the July 23 emergency meeting. The motion was approved unanimously.

Pedestrian Bridge Project update - Farnham reported on the **Pedestrian Bridge project**, noting that the traffic control plan was approved. Emery asked about the project starting date and noted that Daniels Company is blocking most prime parking spots in the village. Farnham said that the project will begin soon, but there's no set date. Daniels told Farnham that they put the traffic lights up early so that people will be prepared for the alteration to traffic patterns when they do begin the project.

Alice Merrill asked about the electric vehicle charging station, which is blocked by Daniels' equipment. Thayer stated that this was a part of the original plan and that it can't be changed. Merrill requested that this information be put on the town website.

Brook Road Bridge Replacement Project Including Community Input

- Financial Cost to Town (25% Of Cost, Estimated At \$310,000)
- Implications of Delay
- Project Cost
- Payment Options for the Town
- Town Vote to Authorize Going Forward
- Community Input on Pros and Cons of Going Forward
- State's Responsibility for Maintaining Rivers/Waterways Free of Debris
- Alternate Approaches
- Timing of Project
- Timing of Application for FEMA Funding (Covers 75% Of Cost)

Linda Wells began the discussion by requesting that people consider the tax burden on the town and that they look for ways to make the bridge safer at lower cost.

Volz requested information about use of Federal Emergency Management Act (FEMA) funds for the project. Thayer stated that those funds are not available for this project.

Vermont State Senator Ann Cummings stated that last Friday the Vermont legislature learned that the Vermont US Congressional delegation has worked out an agreement with the federal government to allow for covid relief funds to go to towns. She does not have details at this time.

Representative Janet Ancel concurred with Cummings.

George Cushing stated that it is his understanding that water is owned by the state and that in previous floods the state did nothing to assist the town. He believes that this bridge project should be funded by the state, as the management of the waterway is the state's responsibility if the state owns the water in the waterway.

Farnham noted that she has addressed the issue with the project engineers, who weren't able to clarify whether the water and waterway are state or federal responsibility. She also noted that the town needs a permit to disturb the river.

Thayer requested information from Senator Cummings and Representative Ancel.

Cummings said that she had been through a similar situation in East Barre, wherein she learned that the underlying issue behind flooding of streams is the soil type and geology. She also noted that she is very familiar with the Great Brook and Brook Road.

Thayer, referring to a report titled, "Ongoing and Potential Financial Obligations of the Town: 2021 – 2031 and 2032 – 2042," noted that the town has significant expenses in the future, including, but not limited to road equipment repairs and replacement. The report is not published at this time, but Thayer will email a copy upon request: selectboard23@gmail.com.

George Springston, gave a very thorough report on his ongoing study of the Great Brook, which began in 2001. Springston is a professional geologist who has studied the Great Brook since 2001. Springston explained that the Great Brook has a pattern of landslides and that many of the bridges that cross over it are undersized. It is crowded between steep banks and the Brook Road, which is why it takes out parts of the road during floods. He noted that there are records of bridges being swept away going back as far as the 1850s, stating that the problem is not going to go away.

He stated that he participated in the Flood Committee, which became the [Hazard Mitigation Committee](#) (HMC). The HMC posted a [Flood History](#) on the town's website that contains details of the studies. They requested a formal study of the Great Brook's bridges, which was done by [Malone and McBroom in 2016](#). The study identified the Brook Road bridge in the village as the worst/most in need of replacement. The study was followed by public meetings in which multiple options were presented.

Springston stated that the best thing the town could do would be to put in bridges that pass the flood waters and debris, noting that in major floods the volume of water increases by up to 1,000%. He said that the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) is really responsible for approving channel management.

Springston encouraged the town to move forward with the bridge replacement and encouraged the legislators present to assist the town with FEMA funding.

Volz said that the bottom line is that we need a new, well-designed bridge.

Farnham reminded all that the design has been chosen, so the real question is when the bridge will be replaced, rather than if it will be replaced. She noted the possibility of a new bridge failing in a major flood and that we are taking a chance with the project.

Springston said that FEMA funds would become available if and after the bridge fails entirely.

Thayer stated that Plainfield's FEMA match is .75% because we are up to date in our Hazard Mitigation plans. She then quoted from a letter from Michael Billingsley about the potential installation of a box culvert and asked if there is a better, less expensive solution than installing a new bridge.

Springston replied that the engineers did not think the box culvert was the best option, referring to the 2016 study. He said that at the time everyone on the HMC wanted to know if there was a less expensive option, but there are limitations to all of them and they are all ranked in the study.

Representative Ancel spoke to the expense to the town of replacing the bridge and suggested

that there is a possibility that federal money could be directed to help out, but also noted that the legislators haven't gotten details about the federal funds yet. She noted that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns is a great resource for this and said that she will share information about the federal funds when she gets it.

Thayer noted that the other big expense of the town involves water and sewer lines. That project and the bridge project would be more do-able with federal assistance.

Senator Cummings agreed with Representative Ancel and said that they are working with the Vermont Congressional Delegation to US Congress to get federal covid relief funds to Vermont towns. She said that she understands the position the SB is in and will do all she can to help, noting that we have to start building for the new reality of more rain.

Yoko Kishishita explained how the flooding of the Great Brook and the wash-out of the bridge next to her home affected her family. She urged the town to replace the bridge.

Susan Grimaldi also spoke about living next to the Great Brook and how the flooding has impacted her. She recommended that the town explore what the actual tax rate will be if the bridge is replaced, noting that it will cost more in the long run if we don't fix it.

Thayer requested that Wells provide the tax information.

Farnham reiterated that it's not whether we do it, it's when we do it. Will it be this year or next? Do we apply for FEMA grant now or next year?

Alice Merrill, who does grant writing for the town, stated that she is coordinating with Stephanie Smith, who coordinates between FEMA and the state. The next FEMA grant application deadline is in January of 2022. Grant determinations come out in August, and then the projects start the following year. Merrill asked whether the towns want the option of jumping on it this year and whether the SB stand behind the project enough to put the grant application in. She said that there is no penalty for withdrawing an application. The application deadline of January allows for a town vote in March at Town Meeting. The program will release factual information in mid-August (2021) and she will follow up with the SB with an update. **Merrill requested that this item be revisited at each meeting. Merrill will alert the SB about the FEMA program information when she gets it.**

Old Firehouse Update and Possible Decision on Sale

Thayer read 24 V.S.A. § 1061 (Conveyance of real estate) and reviewed the outcome of the SB's meeting with Jay Southgate.

Volz stated that Southgate's plan is not for an exact replica. The building is currently lower than the road, because the road has been built up. Southgate plans to raise the building by eight feet to make it meet the road.

The SB agreed that Thayer will draft a notice for a special meeting per VSA 1061 so that the building can be sold to Southgate. Volz suggested that the sale agreement include language about the conditions of the sale and a deadline/time frame. Thayer will draft a sale agreement. The SB will meet at 1:30PM on August 5 via Zoom to review and approve the notice of sale and sale agreement.

Additional Public Comment

Merrill requested an update about the trash container that was removed from the Mill Street Park. It has not been replaced. She recommended that the container be modified to have a lid like the one in the Recreation Field. **Farnham offered to reach out to Mike Nolan, Road Commissioner, to ask if a lid can be put on the bin and the bin can be replaced.**

Town Hall and Opera House Contract

Thayer opened this item by noting that it wasn't on the agenda and stated that it has to be warned. Keith Swann of the Friends of the Town Hall and Opera House (THOH) said that this year's contract ended on July 1 and the only change for the coming year is the payment.

Swann said that the Friends of the THOH are ready to open the Opera House but don't feel comfortable doing so without a contract. He offered to adjust the new contract to have the same payment amount as last year.

Farnham noted that the funds are in the town budget but the discussion of the contract has to be warned at a meeting.

Volz requested that this item, if it is brief, be taken up at the special meeting being held at 1:30 PM on August 5. Thayer agreed, but Farnham was not able to commit to the meeting time due to work obligations. **The SB agreed to try to approve the THOH contract on the 5th and if that isn't possible it will be added to the next meeting's agenda.**

Other Business

Tammy Farnham informed the SB that she is unable to attend the August 17 meeting due to her daughter's imminent wedding. Thayer offered to move the meeting to August 24 so that Farnham can attend. Volz and Farnham agreed. **The August 17 SB meeting will take place on August 24.**

Thayer moved to adjourn at 8:56PM. The motion was approved unanimously.

Executive Session

This portion of the agenda was moved to a future meeting.

Respectfully Submitted by Paula Emery

Agenda Items for August 24 Select Board Meeting

Note that the August 17 meeting has been moved to August 24

- ♦ Report from Road Foreman Mike Nolan
- ♦ Continuity of Operations Planning, Grace Vinson, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission

Agenda Items for September 7, 2021 Select Board Meeting

- ♦ One hour of meeting is scheduled to discuss and hear from the community about the use of American Rescue Plan Act/Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery funds
- ♦ Review of anticipated amount of funds coming to Plainfield: \$132,116 (half 2021 and half 2022)
- ♦ Review of restrictions on use of funds and time frame for using funds
- ♦ Input from community members, organizations, town departments about best use of funds
- ♦ Schedule special Select Board meeting to continue review of required agreements with VTrans to continue Route 2 intersection project