

Town of Plainfield
Special Select Board Meeting Approved Minutes
April 6, 2020
Remote-Only Meeting by Zoom

PRESENT: Tammy Farnham (Select Board Member), Jim Volz (Select Board), Sasha Thayer (Select Board Chair), Linda Wells (Town Clerk/Treasurer), Deputy Secretary of Agency of Human Services Kerry Sleeper, Principal Assistant to the Secretary of Agency of Human Services Candace Morgan, Baylen Slote (Town Health Officer), Linda Wells (Town Clerk), Bram Towbin (Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission delegate, Road Commissioner and other roles), Vermont Rep. Janet Ancel, Amos Meacham, Joshua Pitts, Louis Prowe, Bruce Johnson (East Montpelier Town Manager), Sam Davis, Dawn Fancher, Karen Janulis, Rhea Wilson, Brice Simon, (Attorney for Karen Janulis and Alan Goldman), Eric Blaisdell (Times Argus reporter) and Michael Bielenkowski (Hardwick Gazette reporter).

Sasha Thayer called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM.

Agenda - times are approximate

7 PM Approval of Agenda and Introductions

7:05 PM Update about the Vermont Agency of Human Services Wellness and Recovery Campus at Goddard College

- Deputy Secretary Agency of Human Services Kerry Sleeper

- Candace Morgan, Principal Assistant to Agency of Human Service Secretary

Followed by:

- Questions from the Select Board

- Questions from the public

8 PM Adjourn

REVIEW AGENDA

No changes were made to the agenda.

UPDATE ABOUT THE VERMONT AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES WELLNESS AND RECOVERY CAMPUS AT GODDARD COLLEGE

Kerry Sleeper, Deputy Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Human Services provided an update and explained changes in plans for the use of the campus. The program will serve those who are recovering from Covid-19 and need to be in isolation, but are not requiring a high level of medical attention. Goddard was the first location identified across the state. Since then there are additional locations in Shelburne, Rutland, White River Junction and Burlington.

Re the question of why having such a facility at the Goddard campus, Dep. Sec. Sleeper explained that Goddard was chosen because of its unique housing capabilities to serve the two groups AHS seeks to place there: youth and families, youth at risk, families at risk, to provide a safe and secure location to for them to be able to recover, then move back to their communities. Dep. Sec. Sleeper explained that the facility at the Goddard campus will serve individuals who are already living in communities and are capable of living in communities, but just because they are sick they need this short-term isolation facility to convalesce until they go back to their communities. Dep. Sec. Sleeper clarified that those placed at the Goddard facility will not be prisoners, or under the supervision of

the Department of Corrections; no criminals, no sex-offenders; they will not be individuals with significant mental health behavioral issues.

Dep. Sec. Sleeper stated that those at the Goddard facility will be well-adjusted, well-behaving individuals who will be at Goddard in order to convalesce. He confirmed that there will be security at the facility with a sheriff on duty in addition to staff. The people placed there will be there on a voluntary basis, and will sign an agreement that are willing to abide by conditions placed on them, including that they will not leave the property. Should they want to leave; AHS will take them where they want to go. But those on the Goddard campus will not be allowed to walk off the campus into the community of Plainfield.

Re the question of why have such a facility at Goddard, Dep. Sec. Sleeper stated that there are 543 confirmed Covid-19 cases in Vermont, and there are hundreds, if not thousands, more Vermonters who are already infected with the virus. Thus, it is just as likely that a person in the community, or in your family, likely to be as significant a concern as this isolated facility at Goddard. Dep. Sec. Sleeper stated that this virus is in every community in this state; this is simply recognition of how this virus spreads. Advanced planning is needed to provide care for those infected with Covid-19

Dep. Sec. Sleeper also stated that the goal for the Goddard facility is to provide those very vulnerable individuals with an opportunity to recover and recuperate in a safe and secure environment, that the community of Plainfield is not burdened by this, as well as having open communication with the community. Dep. Sec. Sleeper clarified that none of these individuals will be going to The Health Center, that The Health Center will be providing "virtual" consultations and tele-medicine.

Both Dep. Sec. Sleeper and Goddard President Bernard Bull confirmed that a contract has not yet been signed, and that the contract is before the Goddard board of trustees at this time.

Candace Morgan, Principal Assistant to Secretary of Human Services Mike Smith, also stated that the Agency of Human Services had recently put out a Frequently Asked Questions that she hopes will answer some question.

Comments and questions were taken from members of the public attending the meeting and from select board members.

Dep. Sec. Sleeper provided further information those served at the Goddard facility would be brought to the facility, rather than just turning up there, and would be provided transportation when they are leaving. Dep. Sec. Sleeper also clarified that the plan is to provide care for up to 100 people, with people being moved in a phased manner, perhaps ten at a time. Dep. Sec. Sleeper also clarified in response to a question about why a fence is not being put up around the facility, that this is not a jail, but rather a facility for people who are there voluntarily to heal. Town Health Officer Slote stated that he shares concerns about increasing the density of Covid-19 positive people in the Town of Plainfield, that he's personally spoken with Paul Dragon who is coordinating the facility at Goddard, and that he is impressed that the protocols for taking people in to the Goddard facility have been audited by external physicians who found no fault with them. Dep. Sec. Sleeper also explained that everyone who will be working at the facility is a volunteer, that no one is being forced to work at the facility on the Goddard campus. Amos Meacham also noted that putting together this kind of project normally would take many months and that doing so in a short time frame is very difficult.

Select Board member Tammy Farnham expressed that she appreciates everybody coming and listening and trying to get the correct answers to questions and trying to express their concerns. She stated this is scary, and that us being compassionate and trying to help others is something that we all need to look at as well as how we can work within those boundaries, just as we are asking them to.

Select Board Chair Thayer stated that what we now know is that people who are asymptomatic can transmit this disease, and that the folks who are going to be at Goddard are on the upward trajectory of healing, not people we think may get sicker. Thayer noted that what we are experiencing broadly as a society is that anyone, even our family members. Thayer noted further that it is important to listen to the guidance of medical professionals telling us that we should be doing distancing and not going out to the grocery store unless you need to, and that this is a very difficult time. Thayer stated she is impressed with the people in the state who are working long, long, days, to try to make this and other plans come together to make the response to these needs positive, but that there isn't any way to make these plans perfect, and there are no guarantees.

In response to a question from the Hardwick Gazette, Dep. Sec. Sleeper explained that the State reached out to Goddard first to explore the possibility of establishing a recovery facility there.

In response to the question from the Times Argus regarding whether the Town had a say in the decision to establish the facility at Goddard, could have kept the State from proceeding with establishing a recovery facility at Goddard College, Thayer noted the Town's feeling has been that Plainfield Select Board doesn't have a say in whether the facility at Goddard goes forward, that we are facing that Plainfield is a town of limited means, that we are facing things that have been unprecedented in affecting peoples' liberties and how peoples' lives go, with Executive Orders coming from the Governor's office, and stated that in her view we find that we don't have the resources to get into a battle about this. Dep. Sec. Sleeper confirmed that if the Select Board members voted to oppose this, it would not affect going forward. Dep. Sec. Sleeper stated that we are within a week, a week and a half to two weeks of reaching a peak in Vermont, that a facility is needed to provide care to people in a compassionate environment, so while the Select Board decision would be taken into consideration, but ultimately would not be a confirming factor. Select Board Volz confirmed that this is what he thought and thanked Dep. Sec. Sleeper for coming to the Plainfield Select Board meeting. Volz also stated that he didn't feel that this is as big of a danger as other people seem to feel, and that the steps that the State is taking should be something that works. Dep. Sec. Sleeper stated that when he has sick people who need a place to go, he has to find a place for them. He noted that the state is days away of needing a facility.

Town Health Officer Baylen Slote noted that the vector for this disease, the Goddard project really doesn't change that. To protect yourself need to be very careful about touching surfaces and then touching your face. He also noted that when he spoke with Paul Dragon, he stated that everyone coming to the Goddard facility, will be asked to sign a contract. He reminded us that fundamentally you can still do the things necessary to protect your family and all these things are still valid whether or not the project goes on. In response to a question from Sam Davis whether there would be uniforms for the people at the Goddard facility to identify them and whether there would be a fence put up, Chairperson Thayer answered that there would not, that the proposed facility at Goddard College is not a jail. Mr. Simon, attorney for Karen Janulis and Alan Goldman, also asked whether those at the facility would have some sort of garment to wear which would identify that they are a part of this facility. Thayer responded that the answer is, no, that they are being treated as patients who need care, just the same way patients in a hospital are patients who need care. Dep. Sec. Sleeper stated that he wanted to be very firm that those who would be at the Goddard campus are not second class citizens, that they are our Vermont citizens, we're not going to put a stigma on them to wear a specific type of clothing, there is a history that we don't want to brush up against. Dep. Sec. Sleeper stated clearly that this is not an internment camp

Select Board member Farnham if there is ongoing concerns from the community, is there one person to whom those concerns should be directed. Candace Morgan acknowledged that she would be that person.

Alan Goldman continued to attempt to interrupt the meeting and was ruled out of order by Select Board Chair Thayer repeatedly.

ADJOURNMENT

Jim Volz made a motion to adjourn at 8:15 pm. The motion was approved by roll call vote.