

**Town of Plainfield, Vermont**  
**Special Select Board Meeting**  
**August 4, 2020 Remote-Only Meeting Via Zoom**  
**Approved Minutes**

**Electronic Participants:** Tammy Farnham (Select Board member), Sasha Thayer (Select Board Chair), Jim Volz (Select Board Member), Greg Light (Plainfield Fire & Rescue Chief), Leona Chouinard (Resident), Ryan Christiansen (Resident), Jesse Cooper (Resident), George Cushing (Resident), Bob Fancher (Resident), Holly Leach (Resident), Serena Matt (Resident), Alice Merrill (Resident and Grants Administrator), David Perreault (Resident), Liz Perreault (Resident), Peter Youngbear (Resident and Plainfield Coop General Manager), and Betsy Zeigler (Resident)

In addition, resident David Strong's email to the Select Board was read aloud.

Meeting was called to order at 7:00pm on August 4th, 2020.

**Approval of/changes to the Agenda:**

Agenda approved, no changes.

**Public Announcement:**

No public announcements

**Pedestrian Bridge Project Summary:**

The pedestrian bridge project was started in 2014. The grant initially received was 90% (federal)/10%(town), in 2016 the second grant was received 80% (federal)/20% (town), and in 2017 another grant was received at 80%(federal)/ 20%(town) \$393,000 responsible for 10%, \$79,000 responsible for 20%.

Estimate of \$4,500 to get the project back to bid.

The initial bids came in at \$800,000 & \$900,000, which is significantly higher than anticipated (\$400,000). If we do not move forward with the project the town will owe \$100,000 back to the federal government.

Any additional grants will be at 80% / 20%.

The closure of the bridge would significantly lessen the cost of the project. Tammy discussed the use of bonuses to incentivize less time for the bridge closure. Sasha noted that one of the complexities of the project is that there is a membrane under the bridge, and in order to break down the existing wall to add more pavement and the wall, the existing layers need to be broken down and reconstructed from membrane up, which includes remaking the road bed; which makes it difficult to keep 1 lane open for traffic.

**Greg – Plainfield Fire & Rescue Chief:**

Greg stated that he believes it's not practical to close the bridge entirely and that it would be extremely unsafe to the entire community. He indicated that even shutting the bridge down for 1 day is putting residents at risk. Greg indicated "14 days is out of the question and would be a very unwise decision". He questioned the possibility of shutting the bridge down to the general public but allowing emergency responders in the case of an emergency. Greg said that they get an average of 3-4 emergency calls per week, which are occasionally life threatening. There would be a substantial amount of time added to the response for emergency personnel if they were required to seek alternative routes. Mutual aid will also be delayed as a result of a bridge closure. Greg stated that there is no way to predict when something is going to happen and we need to err on the side of caution. 8-10 minutes would be added to the commute for East Montpelier Aid and in the instance of a heart attack or stroke - every minute counts.

Tammy stated that it might be worth presenting an arrangement for emergency responders to utilize the bridge in the case of an emergency, as the project only consists of construction on one side of the bridge, it is just difficult to manage the traffic due to the narrowness of the bridge.

Greg closed by saying that he "hopes that the Select Board puts the lives and safety of community members in front of saving a few dollars".

Tammy responded to Greg by asking his opinion on how to proceed: by getting the project back out to bid (\$4,500) with a large cost associated with moving forward or scraping the project? Greg indicated that "it's not worth spending the extra amount of money, scrap the project".

**Kathy & Bob Fancher - Resident:**

Shares the same concern as Greg, Bob stated that it is concerning for elderly people who may be someone who experiences a life-threatening emergency.

**Leona Chouinard - Resident:**

Leona highlighted that emergency response is a big concern for her.

**Peter Youngbear - Resident and Plainfield Coop General Manager:**

Peter highlighted some of his concerns for vendors and customers that utilize that bridge, making it difficult to imagine closing the bridge for 14 days. The membership and community is split 50% / 50% on either side of the river, and the Coop would lose a significant amount of business, as folks would go elsewhere. Loss of sales impact would be between \$23,757 & \$51,522 for 2 weeks depending on the timing of the project. Deliveries are received every day of the week, bridge closure would drastically impact this, as there are typically 40 deliveries/week, which doesn't include locals. Alternative travel may not be feasible for various companies, which may result in loss of access to resources. The closure of the bridge would have a very negative impact on the Coop.

Peter advised the town to look into an alternative design for a foot bridge without affecting the existing bridge structure. Tammy indicated that they did look into such designs, but permitting was not allowed, as there are a lot of obstacles in this area. She stated "this is also why we are over on engineering costs".

**Alice Merrill - Resident and Grants Administrator:**

Alice expressed gratitude toward Ross agreeing to work through this stage with Tammy as the project manager. She believed it would be worth working with the engineer to restructure and get new bids. Alice indicated that one lane of the bridge should remain open. She also stated that the pedestrian bridge will be excellent for community members to access amenities.

**Serena Matt - Resident:**

Agreed with Alice; it is valuable to receive a cost for the bridge to stay open during construction.

**George Cushing - Resident:**

George stated that this project should've been voted on initially, as the acceptance of the initial grant will inherently cost the town hundreds of thousands of dollars. He also indicated that the pedestrian bridge will become more of a hassle for people jumping off the bridge. George believes the money should be raised by the person who started this project.

Tammy indicated that an extension could likely be filed so that the project could be voted on in April, but it then becomes a question of when the project could be put out for bid again. The time of year (typically fall) is imperative for large project bids. If we choose to move forward with this project and the loan will be more than 5 years then we will need to have community members vote in March.

**Betsy Zeigler – Resident:**

Betsy reminded meeting attendees that the purpose of the bridge is to provide safe access for individuals to walk through our own community. A lot of money has been invested this far, she suggested to seek additional grants to support the completion of this project.

Alice stated there is a deadline for the end of September to apply to a grant for the same bicycle pedestrian program through VTrans. For shovel-ready-projects like this it would probably give the town an advantage. Alice suggested that they apply – but don't accept immediately to leave opportunity to deny the funding if the town decides to discontinue the project.

**David & Liz Perreault –Residents:**

Liz agreed with George, any large decisions should go to the voters. Liz suggested since it has been 6 years since the beginning of the project, for the town to research alternative foot bridge locations i.e.: Town Hall Opera House parking lot. Liz states that we need to be fiscally responsible, as there will be a lot of money paid out because of the pandemic. She indicated that it makes more sense for the town to cut loses rather than throw good money at bad money. Getting bids and real numbers and bringing it to vote is important to obtain a general consensus. David included that education is the best method to allowing the community to understand the logistics of the project. They also suggested to make the project a little more accessible to the community by putting the footprint and engineering design on the website. Liz and David suggested to put the project back out to bid (\$4,500) with one lane open throughout the project, to obtain actual numbers to vote on.

**Jesse Cooper - Resident:**

Jesse indicated if the town is responsible for \$150,000, then it makes sense to invest an additional \$4,500 more to get bids for a revised RFP. He suggested to repackage proposals for the members of the town to understand and evaluate to understand how it will actually impact their tax dollars.

**Ryan Christiansen – Resident:**

Ryan emphasized that it's "time for Plainfield to get serious about making progressive upgrades, need to stop thinking about this as an expense but as an investment". He stated that sharing the construction plans would allow for community members to make an educated decision. Ryan believes we should find a way to move forward rather than going back to the drawing board. He believes that the viability to businesses downtown and for emergency responders, as such one lane of the bridge must remain open. Ryan stated "it's time us to get with the times!"

**Holly Leach - Resident:**

Holly questioned the accessibility with only one lane of the bridge open, as school buses or emergency responders may not be able to get through the bridge. Tammy stated this is not something that had been considered and is definitely something that she would need to be assessed before proceeding.

Tammy thanked everyone for participating; as it's important to for the Select Board to hear from the community to make a comprehensive decision on the behalf of the town. During the next Select Board meeting they will discuss how to proceed.

Rte. 2 intersection will also require suggestions and ideas.

\*Sasha read an email provided by David Strong regarding his considerations.

**Adjournment:**

Jim moved to adjourn at 8:34pm, with a unanimous approval of all Select Board members.