

**Plainfield Special Select Board Meeting  
& Budget Meeting  
January 5, 2021  
Minutes - Approved**

Present were: Select Board members Sasha Thayer (chair), Tammy Farnham, Jim Volz, Town Clerk/Treasurer Linda Wells, Road Foreman Mike Nolan, Sarah Albert (Conservation Commission) Keith Swann (Friends of the Plainfield Town Hall-Opera House)

The meeting commenced at 5:02 PM. Jim Volz moved that the Select Board go into executive session to discuss personnel and litigation. The motion was approved and the Select Board went into executive session at 5:08 PM. The return to public session occurred at 6:02 PM.

**Highway Department 2021-2022 budget**

Discussion of the Highway Budget continued from the previous meeting on January 2<sup>nd</sup> where Road Foreman Mike Nolan expressed the he feels that the Highway Department can pretty much be level funded. Guard rails and signage and was increased to \$7000.

Mike discussed the need for paving upper Main Street due to the deep wheel marks in the road. He doesn't know that it will go for more than a couple years without further re paving.

Sasha asked that Linda get the Select Board an updated version of the budget with changes made and notation of other

**Fire and Rescue 2021-2022 budget**

Fire Chief Greg Light said that he thinks the only increase in the Fire and Rescue budget is a \$1000 increase for dispatch to \$19,000. Ambulance service contract may go up as well. Linda will check on the status of the multi-year contract with East Montpelier ambulance service. Truck repair remains the same at \$2800 and and the Equipment Fund will remain at \$10,000.

There are also repairs needed to the Fire House itself. Greg proposes that the Town use \$45,882 from the building fund which will mean that we'll need to borrow an additional \$34,000 to cover the cost of the repairs. That also includes a \$10,000 contingency amount which may not need to be spent.

That will leave about \$7500 in the building fund in case something that pops up and needs attention during the year. He also suggested that for future budgets it may make sense to put a little less in the building fund for Fire & Rescue and put \$4000 of that towards any building repair loan.

Greg proposed and the Board was supportive of going forward seeking bids for the repairs right off so that the repairs can be done in the Spring.

**Town Hall/Opera House 2021-2022 budget**

Friends of the Town Hall/Opera House President Keith Swann said that there was no change to what had been presented at a prior select board meeting, other than the Friends taking over the \$500 for advertising included in prior budgets. This brings the total expenses to \$17,600, with an increase in management services to \$4000 and an expected reduction in heating costs due to the NEST thermostat. Linda also confirmed that there is a separate fund for capitol improvements \$17,028 for repairs if needed. There was discussion that these funds can be used to refinish the floor upstairs in the Town Hall/Opera House.

The total amount in the Hall/Opera House budgeted of \$17,600 is a reduction from last year's amount. Tammy noted that because there's an increase in the management fees to \$4000, and anticipate that income will go down for the coming fiscal year to \$6000, resulting in greater cost to the town. Jim expressed that he understands Tammy's concerns, but that he thinks the use of the Town Hall/Opera House benefits the community, even for those who don't attend events, and benefits town businesses and increases property values in town, so he's in favor of the TH/OH budget as proposed by the Friends.. The TH/OH budget figures offered by the Friends will go in the budget as presented.

Sasha also noted that the refinishing of the TH/OH floor is on the agenda for the next meeting.

**Recreation Committee 2021-2022 budget**, \$3000 proposed by SB

This \$3000 for Parks and Recreation Maintenance and Equipment is the figure that is in the draft budget prepared by Linda. In a previous year this line item was at \$3200, so there was discussion about level funding or reducing the maintenance and equipment budget to \$3000. The amount budgeted for rec portalet & power in the draft budget is \$1400, nothing for the Rec Department Reserve Fund, and \$100 for the skateboard park. There was discussion about appropriating \$250 for the Reserve Fund and this figure was included in the 2021-2022 budget.

**Energy Conservation 2021-2022 budget**, \$400 proposed by Bob Atchinson,

The \$400 budget for the Energy Committee is the same as the amount appropriated for FY 2020-2021.

**Conservation Commission 2021-2022 budget**, \$375 level funding and \$2,500 to Conservation Fund proposed by Sarah Albert

The Conservation Commission proposed keeping its appropriation level funded at \$375 and appropriating \$2500 to the Conservation Fund. At issue had been increasing the amount appropriated for the Conservation Reserve Fund back to \$2500 from the \$1500 appropriated for 2020-2021 Linda noted that \$20,276.85 is the amount currently in the Conservation Fund.

Sarah Albert confirmed that the Conservation Commission request for operating funds is \$375, level funding this year's amount. Tammy noted that some towns have conservation goals they are pursuing on behalf of the town and asked Sarah whether Plainfield has such goals or is intending to develop them. Sarah explained that having funds in the Conservation Fund means that if an opportunity arises the town is able to go forward to preserve land and that it is difficult to raise money for such a purpose with limited time. Tammy raised the question of what is the maximum amount of money that would be reasonable to set aside in the conservation In the past, Conservation Fund funds have been used to conserve Littlewood Farm and restrictions imposed to keep the property in agricultural use and with the Holtz property on Country Club Road. Further subdivision and development was restricted.

Tammy inquired about what the town funds were put to expressed concern that land is being taken off of the tax rolls Sarah explained that the landowner selling the development rights can make a farm more economic for purchase by a younger farmer and prevents further subdivision.

Sasha asked about whether there are other properties the town has of this nature. Sarah mentioned that there is a cedar swamp which was donated to the town and that it's wet and only aspect of interest is the cedar wood, thus it's not very developable. She stated that there is also a small lot of land adjacent to the Cross Vermont Trail.

Sasha also mentioned that the Conservation Commission webpage is fairly skinny in content and perhaps the Conservation Commission might want to provide additional information for townspeople. Sasha also mentioned that the Town of Colchester has a variety of pieces of land used for various purposes including a swampy area.

Tammy noted that her notes showed that Conservation Commission appropriation being at Jim suggested reducing the \$2500 asked for the Conservation Fund to \$2000. After some discussion that this line item for 2020-2021 being level funded at \$1500 for this year and the Conservation Commission appropriation be level funded at \$375, there was consensus that the appropriation for the Conservation Fund be \$2000 and the Conservation Committee appropriation be \$300. These are the figures that Linda will enter into the 2021-2022 budget.

**Social Concerns 2021-2022** Petition from Washington County Mental Health for \$1500 social concerns budget item

Sasha noted that the Social Concerns Committee had put together a great spread sheet showing the funding for various social concerns agencies over the years. Linda noted that the amount authorized

for Washington County Mental Health was \$600 a year for the past two years. This petition for funding at the amount of \$1500 was submitted because Washington County Mental Health did not get their request for funding in to the Social Concerns Committee within the time frame required. It also represents an addition of \$900 to the appropriation requested by Washington County Mental Health. The petition filed by Washington County Mental Health Services had no signatures. Sasha explained that the Select Board could waive the signatures and approve the petition. In that case, Washington County Mental Health Services request would be a separate article on the Town Meeting warning. Sasha also noted that the Social Concerns Committee didn't consider including the Washington County Mental Health Services request because it didn't have the information about the amount of the request to the Social Concerns Committee.

After some discussion, **Tammy moved that the Select Board deny the request from Washington County Mental Health Services for a waiver of signatures on their petition for funds and the motion passed unanimously.**

There was further discussion about how to proceed with the Social Concerns Committee and letting them know that the Select Board is considering adding \$600 to the Social Concerns budget for Washington Mental Health Services. Since the final budget approval was not going to be made that evening, Sasha will let the Social Concerns Committee know that and ask for its input.

**Cutler Memorial Library** - level funding request.

There was discussion that in the past, the Cutler Memorial Library has filed a petition for funding. This year the Library submitted a written request and asked that the signature requirement be waived for their request. The Board decided to have the library file a regular petition and make a formal request that signatures be waived. Sasha will get this information back to Carla Strait who is now the chair of the board.

**Select Board Budget 2021-2022**

Linda recommended level funding the selectboard salaries at \$3900 auditors stipend at \$3000, the zoning administrator at \$4000 and the listers at \$2200. There were no changes to these figures. The line item for administrative assistant was increased to \$3500 to allow for the possibility of hiring someone to assist Linda in the office. There were no changes to the figures listed in the draft 2021-2022 budget for the Select Board budget that Linda prepared. The building maintenance manager position was lowered to \$2750.

Linda did not yet have the figures for the fringe benefits for employees. Because of uncertainty relating to the time spent by the zoning administrator, Linda will check with Karen Storey about her hours. There was discussion about the need for employees who have inconsistent hours that they bill for, zoning administrator, constable, town health officer, to get their information for payment in to Linda quarterly, prior to the end of the quarter for her to be able close out each quarter. There was discussion about an email going out, possibly from the select board, to remind them of the need to file their information on a regular quarterly basis.

There was also discussion about the former constable not yet having returned the town laptop. Sasha and Linda have been in contact with her, but the laptop has not yet been returned. Sasha said she may have to go over to her home to pick it up. There will be followup on this.

The lister budget was level funded from last year, as were animal control and the constable. Sasha described her efforts to get ahold of animal control officers in Marshfield and East Montpelier as a possible resource to serve as animal control officer for Plainfield, but she's not yet had success. Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission budget item was set at \$1525. The line item for providing care for animals taken into custody was level funded as was the \$100 line item for GreenUp. The budget line item for energy committee was set at \$400, Hazard Mitigation at \$100. law enforcement at \$10,000 and the state required dam fee for the dam near the Main Street bridge of \$200 even though the dam isn't being used.

The line items for the Development Review Board and Planning Commission had been considered and

OK'd at a previous select board meeting and were confirmed at this meeting. Discussion of other various items relating to the budget will be reflected in the final budget approved for town meeting by the select board.

The line item for municipal building repairs was kept at \$10,000. Linda outlined that the main area of concern is the roof of the municipal building and the porch roofs which need replacing.

There was discussion about the line item for sidewalk plowing. Linda explained that prior to the installation of the new sidewalks with bump-outs, the town has had to expend more money for maintenance like plowing. She is concerned that this is an additional annual cost. There was also discussion about the bumpout areas where there plantings and them going to weeds in the summertime, looking poorly and the difficulty for the road crews to plow the bumpout areas during the winter. Relating to the line item for the website which had been at \$3500, Sasha explained to the board that this was the figure related to developing the website in 2018, but hadn't been reduced after the website was completed. She suggested that this line item be reduced way down to \$1000 in terms of the amount of time administering the website should. Tammy urged that this line item be at least \$2000 because it is unclear at this time how we will be handling assistance with the website. Sasha explained that the select board had messed up previously in level funding this item, rather than looking at what amount it should be once the website was completed. All were comfortable with having this line item be reduced to \$2000.

There was discussion of the Pedestrian Bridge Project. Tammy had spoken with Ross Gouin of Vtrans regarding the Pedestrian Bridge. Now that the town has gotten Tammy explained that the town have received grants totalling \$921,700, with the maximum town match of \$145,040. She said that there had been a cutting of the project so part of the sidewalks will be put in by the state at no cost to the Town as part of the Rte 2 projects, with a likely burden for Plainfield of \$125,000. Tammy advocated for not putting the issue to a vote since the town would be out \$128,000 if the project doesn't go through. The bids will be opened on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. Sasha said that her understanding that the bidding process was to obtain a firm number to provide to the Town for a vote at Town Meeting. She said that we have been telling the people for over a year that we understand that people in town that they are upset that the matter hasn't been put out to a vote. She said she doesn't understand how Tammy said at this time, the issue is do we go with the bridge or not, and since the project has been cut down to be below \$128,000, why would we put the matter out for vote at Town Meeting. Tammy says at this point the town would have to return \$128,000 based on what expenditures have been made to the present time. Sasha expressed confusion and concern as to where the \$128,000 came from since not that long ago, we'd been being told that the cost if we didn't go forward would be \$100,000. Sasha reviewed that the original anticipated cost to the town would be \$39,000, and now it's over \$100,000. She reviewed that we've been hearing from people in town about them being upset and angry at not having an opportunity vote on this. She reminded the select board that we've talked about having a vote at town meeting, but what is being proposed now is to not to put it to a vote. Jim agreed that it should be put to a vote. Tammy reviewed that we're receiving bids in January, and whether we vote in March or April, we have a contractor to move forward with, and if the project got voted down, we'll have a hard time with projects going forward. She reviewed that previous select boards agreed with the project going forward, so if the town can do the project with the money agreed to previously. Jim discussed ways whether or not to go forward with project could be put on the ballot. Sasha reminded the board that as we were preparing for this select board meeting, we were asking ourselves to come up with language to present to the Town to vote on. She said she just doesn't see how we don't put this to a vote without an explosion of anger from the Town. Tammy emphasized that each time a grant was taken, that Select Board was making a commitment on behalf of the Town and at this time, realistically, we're just abiding by previous select board decisions. Sasha expressed that there are so many tangles to this, that perhaps she didn't ask enough questions, one of which would be if the bids came in lower would that mean going forward. Her understanding was that we put this out to bid to obtain a clear figure to present to the Town. She that our previous commitment was to put this to a vote at Town meeting, but now we are saying we aren't going to do so. Tammy's focus at this meeting that

the amount the Town will have to match has been reduced with reduction in the scope of the project. Jim asked whether we could delay doing the bids to allow more time to present this to the Town for a vote. Sasha discussed that our homework for this upcoming select board meeting was to come up with language to present this to the Town at Town Meeting. Jim confirmed that the Board had had such a discussion. Tammy urged that the changes in the structure of the project should mean the bids would come in lower, and having this voted on at Town Meeting isn't advisable. Ross had recommended to Tammy that putting it to a vote would be opening a can of worms. Tammy suggested that this doesn't have to be decided tonight. Jim stated that he agreed that the matter has to be put to a town vote. He noted that Ross Gouin's advice re-putting this to a Town vote is reasonable, but he just doesn't understand our time. Jim said that depending on how the article on the warrant it framed, people are likely to support an approach which doesn't mean voting to end the project and get nothing. Sasha reminded the select board members that they need to do their homework to come up with language to put present to the Town at Town Meeting. Jim asked how much time we need to make a decision after the bids have been opened and directed the question to Tammy. Tammy said she doesn't know the answer to the question of when a decision has to be made after receiving the bids.

Sasha reminded the board that the board needed to do the homework for the Select Board meeting for our January 11 meeting on Monday, that this was our homework identified in December.

Tammy proposed that we have a special meeting relating to changing the date for Town Meeting from March to April. Sasha reminded the board that there is not even legislation yet to authorize the postponement of Town Meeting. Tammy proposed that we have a special meeting. Sasha said this would delay things and that Marshfield Town Clerk Bobbi Brimblecomb is championing at the bit to have a decision made. Sasha insisted that it is important to give people in town notice about the possibility of changing the date of town meeting. Sasha noted that we'd already had two special select board meetings this week and we would have needed to make sure that we provided people in town that there is consideration of moving town meeting to April. Sasha was insistent that adequate notice be provided to people in town about the possibility of delay in town meeting. She noted that there has been so much frustration from people in town feeling that they're not being informed about what is being considered, that it's important to provide enough notice to people in town. Sasha was insistent that we owe courtesy to the people in town, not to the Marshfield Select Board or the school board. She confirmed to Jim that we would get out the word that the first item on the agenda for the next meeting would be discussion about delaying town meeting, and various other factors, including whether to mailout ballots to all voters, and encouraging people to get back to the select board at that meeting, or by posting on social meeting.

It was left that this would be on the agenda for Monday, January 11, 2021 and that the Plainfield Select Board would join the Marshfield Select Board and School Board meeting on January 12, 2021 with another budget meeting on Thursday, January 7 at 9 AM

### **Agenda items for future meetings**

*Agenda items for January 7, 2021 Special Select Board Meeting and Budget Meeting*

- Finalize and approve the budget for town meeting

*Agenda items for January 11, 2021 Select Board Meeting*

- Discussion of postponing 2021 Town Meeting

- Set dates and times for Town Meeting informational meetings via Zoom

- Route 2-Main Street Intersection Remediation project

- Pedestrian Bridge Project

- Contract content for sidewalk plowing

- Contract for refinishing Town Hall/Opera House floor

**Adjourn** Tammy Farnham moved to adjourn and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:31 PM