

Plainfield Special Select Board Meeting Minutes
February 11, 2021
Approved

Present in the Zoom meeting were: Select board members Tammy Farnham, Sasha Thayer (chair). and Jim Volz, Bob Atchinson (resident), Ryan Christiansen (resident), Alice Merrill (resident and Town grant writer), Mary Neibling (resident), Andy Robinson (resident), David Strong (resident & Friends of the Town Hall-Opera House), Peter Youngbaer (resident and Plainfield Coop manager), and Betsy Zeigler (resident and Town representative to CV Solid Waste Management District); also present was Eric Blaisdell (Times Argus reporter).

The meeting commenced at 6:30 PM.

Approval of/changes to agenda - No changes were made

Explanation of the purpose of the meeting - Sasha explained that the purpose of the meeting was to provide residents with an update on the Pedestrian Bridge Project and to hear from community members,

Pedestrian Bridge Project update - Tammy Farnham NOTE: The presentation prepared by Tammy Farnham may be found at https://www.plainfieldvt.us/uploads/8/1/0/6/81063668/ped_bridge_.pdf and the video of the presentation may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIefM11CO5M> .

Tammy provided information of the history of the Pedestrian Bridge project over the years from 2013 to the current time. She described the changes in design required by VTrans from a free-standing pedestrian bridge to an pedestrian bridge attached to the existing bridge, and the resultant need to obtain new design. Tammy reviewed the anticipated costs and grants received from VTrans over the years and the Town expenditures to date for the project, She reviewed that as initially planned, the total project cost was \$392,605 with a 10% Town share of \$39,260 and that with problems identified, an additional grant was sought in 2017 and approved when the total project cost increased to \$541,262, resulting in a Town share of \$68,991 because the 2017 grant was a 20% match from the Town versus the earlier 10% match. At VTrans' direction, in 2018, the design was altered to a pedestrian bridge attached to the existing bridge, rather than a free-standing bridge. It was then anticipated that the cost would total less. The Town received an additional grant of \$47,500 at a 20% match in 2019 to cover additional engineering and permitting costs.. The construction was put out to bid in January 2020. The bids received in February 2020 were considerably higher than funds available for construction, and the Select Board chose to not accept any of the bids.

Tammy also provided information about the decision to rework the project and send it out to bid again in January 2021. Tammy described working with VTrans to have the work done as a phased process in conjunction with the Rte 2-Main Street Intersection Remediation project work. The earlier plan for the Rte. 2 project would have resulted in the removal of the newly-installed sidewalk for the construction of the Rte 2 Intersection Remediation project construction, and then replacing it as part of the completion of this project. As the result of Tammy's negotiations with VTrans, they agreed to a phased construction process with installation of the sidewalk becoming part of the Rte 2 project at no cost to the town.

In 2020, an additional grant of \$332,573, again at a 20% match of \$66,515 from the Town, was awarded by VTrans to provide adequate construction funds for the Pedestrian Bridge project. Tammy explained that the altered project, with a phased process of construction in coordination with the Rte 2 Intersection Remediation project, went out to bid in January 2021. This included the requirement that at least one lane of travel be open

at all times during the Pedestrian Bridge project construction, and took into account that the sidewalk on the north side of the bridge will be constructed as part of the Rte 2 Intersection project, at no cost to the Town. The bids received in February 2021 included a bid of \$649,790, a figure lower than anticipated by the engineers, and another bid of \$1,478,775. Tammy described the current expected total costs for the Pedestrian Bridge Project to be \$918,700 (including a 10% construction contingency amount of \$64,979) with a total Town share of \$147,930. Tammy reported that the Town has already paid a total of \$21,083, resulting in the Town being responsible for an additional \$126,847 to complete the project. The source of these funds may come from in part from the Batchelder Fund and may also need to come from loans.

Tammy also discussed the costs to the Town if the Pedestrian Bridge project were abandoned. The Town would be required to reimburse all Federal and State funds expended on this project. According to the figures provided to Tammy by VTrans, the Town would be required to reimburse a total of \$162,876.82 if the project does not go forward in addition to the \$21,083 the Town has already expended. Tammy noted that the Town would receive nothing for these expenditures.

Re where the Town is now, Tammy stated that bidders on the project are only required to hold their bid price for 30 days, so if the notice of award is not made within 30 days of the bid opening (January 22, 2021), the contractor could raise its price. She stated that there is a potential penalty to not going forward within that time frame. The date that the notice of award should go out to the successful bidder is February 22nd.

Those speaking in favor of going forward with the Pedestrian Bridge project included Bob Atchinson, Ryan Christiansen, Mary Niebling, Andy Robinson, David Strong, Betsy Zeigler.

Reporter Eric Blaisdell inquired as to whether there is any insight as to why there is such a variance between the two bids on the project. Tammy stated that VTrans has reviewed the bids and confirmed that the lower bid meets all the bid requirements. In response to Eric Blaisdell, David Strong noted that a reason for a high bid may be that they don't really want the job, but if no one else bids and they are awarded the contract the firm does very well.

Sasha shared a question raised by Peter Youngbaer on Chat, asking about the timing of the Pedestrian Bridge project construction happening. Tammy said that at this time we don't know that. Peter Youngbaer noted that it would be very helpful to the Coop to know when the construction would occur so that Coop can work with their vendors. Tammy noted that the requirements of the construction contract requires that the contractor must keep one lane open at all times, so deliveries to the Coop should be possible during construction.

Tammy asked for a raise of hands on Zoom of the people who would be in favor of going forward with project without it being voted on at Town Meeting. The number was 7, which was everyone then at the Zoom meeting.

Town meeting Article re Pedestrian Bridge Project - Sasha Thayer

Discussion of whether or not to include an Article on the Town Meeting warning relating to proceeding with the Pedestrian Bridge Project followed. Ryan Christiansen had already stated that he felt that the project should go forward without any further vote from Town voters. Jim stated that he didn't think it needed to be put on the Town Meeting warning for a vote; he thinks that there is general support for it; particularly since that it may cost the town more money if the project doesn't go forward. Tammy concurred, and said that she thinks it's unfortunate for the Town to spend \$188,000 and not get anything for it.

Tammy noted that a decision relating to the bids received needs to be made by February 22nd. Alice Merrill noted that the town is obliged to provide a response to the bids by February 22, 2021 and that notice is to be

sent out by February 22nd. Sasha noted that this is the date of the next Select Board meeting.

Tammy made the motion that we move forward with Neil Daniels' bid of \$649,790 to build our Pedestrian Bridge. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive session pursuant to 3 VSA 313: At 7:31 PM, Jim moved that the Select Board move into executive session to discuss contract or personnel matters and the Board did so with unanimous agreement.

The Select Board returned from Executive Session at 8:05 PM and Jim summarized the executive session stating that they reviewed a contractual matter, that no final decision had been made, and it likely would need to be taken up at a later time as we have a little bit more work to do.

Adjournment: Jim motioned to adjourn and the motion passed unanimously at 8:06 PM