

Plainfield Special Select Board Meeting
July 28, 2021
Minutes – Approved

The site visit to the Old Fire House started at 5:30 PM. In addition to select board members Jim Volz and Tammy Farnham, the following people were present: Betsy Zeigler, Jay Southgate, Sue Mackegey.

Following the site visit, the meeting convened at the shelter at the Recreation Field and Jim Volz started the meeting at 6:15 PM. Present were select board members Jim Volz (chair), Tammy Farnham, and Sasha Thayer. Also present were Melinda Vieux, Baylen Sky, Betsy Zeigler, Eric Blaisdell (Times Argus), Jay Southgate (Southgate Steeple Jacks) and Sue Mackegey.

Jim explained that there was a site visit to the old Fire House at 5:30 PM. He said that since the last visit to the Fire House there's been some leakage on the back wall. Tammy noted that the back wall is very wet.

Jay Southgate said he proposes to make a dwelling. He said he'd lived in Plainfield previously and cares about the town. He stated that one of his objectives is to make money; and another objective is to turn around blight on Rte 2. Jay noted that you don't remove blight by throwing a coat of paint onto a building no one wants to use, instead you remove blight by bringing in people who want to be there.

Jay's plan is to demolish the existing old Fire House building and replace it with a replica of how the building used to look. So he would not be using any part of the existing building. He intends for the building to be affordable housing. Jay stated that another goal is "lets celebrate our rivers." Jay said that he knows that respecting historic preservation is important and he is committed to respecting the building's historic appearance. He made clear that his plan is to tear down the existing building and replace it with a new building that would have the look of the old Fire House; because of the challenges of renovating old buildings, in no way is Jay willing to commit to using any part of the existing building.

Jay brought a scale model of the building to assist in explaining his plan and a large bag of sand. He stated that he thinks that a lot of the concrete work at the old Fire House was done by the Army Corps of Engineers after the flooding in 1927, based on the appearance of that concrete and other concrete bridges made at the same time. At some time, fill was added blocking the access into the cellar area of the building from the east side.

Jay explained that what he intends to do is to make a new building with 100% new materials, because then what he builds is going to last 150 years. Jay also said he will nail it on appearance based on the old Fire House building. On the river side where you can't see it, he stated he'll add a dormer for window and to make the upstairs space more usable. In order to make the building big enough for housing, he will come up an additional 8 feet in height. In Jay's view this is the height of the original building before soil was added in and covered a portion of the building. This is confirmed by the reduced height of the access on the east of the building to the concrete floor,

Jay stated that he'll take a derelict building from which there's no current income in taxes and make it useful, taxpaying housing. For off-street parking, he will make parking under the building accessible from the east side of the building. He will tear down the existing building, then

construct the building in parts over the winter and bring in a crane to put the building in place, like he does with steeples.

Jay says that the concrete at the bottom of the building shows the angle of the old boards. Jay stated that he hasn't figured out where the entrance will be, but it would not be on the side of the house facing Rte 2. Instead there would be a faux door, possibly with a balcony coming out. Melinda View suggested that having a balcony on the front isn't a good idea because it's loud and scary next to route 2. Re a possible location of an entry door, Jay stated that he was unsure of that, but that it appears there is enough width to the building to add an entry door on the east side of the building where access to parking will be.

Jay also stated that the building will be handicapped accessible as he plans to put a lift in inside. When queried about using the basement area of the building, Jay said he would be using the basement area/bottom level as that's the nicest part of the building.

Jay stated that If the town is interested in his proposal, then he needs to nail the design. He would be coming up with a design and sharing that with the town.

Sasha Thayer expressed her view that the town should sell the building to Jay Jay for \$1 so that building can proceed.

Betsy Zeigler said that she thinks that not everyone in town is aware that the sale of this building is being considered. She also raised the question of whether there needs to be a town vote and stated that she doesn't know that there needs to be a town vote.

Tammy Farnham expressed concern about the condition of the building. She stated that Jay has the knowledge, and is aware of the historical piece relating to the building. Farnham stated that she thinks this is a great opportunity for the town. She stated that she thinks that Southgare's proposal represents the historical design of the building and to ask anyone to go in and make something historical of this building isn't likely. Farnham noted that "we need housing" and said she likes the idea.

Betsy Zeigler stated that she loves Jay's replica and the mockup. She wishes we could have saved the Old Fire House. She also noted that it is in a very difficult location..

Jay said that the town may find someone to do a renovation, but that it won't be him. Zeigler noted that we haven't found anyone who is willing to buy the building and restore it, so we're not in the position she'd like us to be in. Zeigler noted that the way the building sits and its small size present difficulties.

Jay said it had been his expectation to find resistance to his proposal. He expected the town to say, "we like your idea, let's see your design." Regarding how proceed, Jay said that he would almost rather just a receive a verbal commitment from the Select Board at this time, and come up with his design before the building us sold to him. Tammy Farnham state that she thinks that the proper way to do it is to present this sale proposal at a regular meeting,

Jim Volz stated that he agrees with Sasha and Tammy that this is a great idea, but thinks the order should be different and that Jay should be asked to come up with a design. Jay said said he could live with the sequence that Jim laid out, but once the Select Board says "yes," and after that,

if anyone has an issue, he'll want that person to speak with the town, not with him. Once the project has started, he'll need to be focusing on completing the project.

Tammy stated that Jay's willingness to work with us and his asking for our feedback regarding the design is generous. Tammy stated that once Jay owns the property, if Jay has to do tweaking it, then the town would not be in a position to require further approval from the town. Jay concurred, stating that once it's his, he won't have to answer to the town; as long as he executes the design, it's no longer an town-owner negotiation.

Jay also stated that he can't take the building down by October, he'll walk away. He said that he's in the process of lining up his winter work and needs to know what to plan on.

Jim stated that we don't need to decide tonight and can schedule a meeting once Jay gets the board a design.

Sasha recommended that taking into consideration the statutory requirements relating to the sale of town property, requiring an announcement and allowing 30 days for the filing of a petition for a town meeting voter, and taking into consideration that cold weather is coming and Jay's needing to take the building down by October, the Board make a decision regarding this proposal soon, at the next Select Board meeting.

All agreed that this will be added to the Select Board agenda for its next meeting on August 3rd.

Tammy said that the other thing we can do, because the details are still coming, is to present it immediately. She thinks making the building eight feet higher to make the building usable is a good idea. Tammy stated that she thinks this is a great opportunity; Jim and Sasha agreed.

Jay Jay said he will produce drawings showing the building design, and if someone wants to scan that and add to it to show how it would sit on the lot, that would be fine, but that won't be part of his design. Regarding collaboration during the design process, Jay explained that he does his designing by hand and when he's at his drafting board, he shuts himself away until he completes the design.

Jim Volz reinforced that that Jay should do what he wants relating to the designing.

Eric Blaisdell of the Times Argus asked about whether there are limitations relating to this being an historical building. Tammy said her understanding is that for a building in private hands, this doesn't add restrictions, and that it's different for a town-owned building. Sasha said that it makes sense for the town to do some research to find what restrictions there may be for historical buildings.

Sasha moved to adjourn at 6:59 PM and the motion was approved unanimously.