

**Town of Plainfield
Plainfield Select Board
Public Hearing: Closing Out Bridge Study Grant
February 13, 2017
Approved Minutes**

PRESENT: Ross Sneyd (Select Board Member), Bram Towbin (Select Board Chair), Betsy Ziegler (Select Board Member), Linda Wells (Town Clerk/Treasurer), Keith Swann (Videographer), Cindy Wyckoff (Minutes Recorder), Will Colgan (Planning Commission), Daniel Currier (Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission), and David Strong (Friends of the Town Hall Opera House).

PUBLIC HEARING: CLOSING OUT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) FOR BRIDGE STUDY

- Bram Towbin opened the Public Hearing at 7pm.
- Towbin stated the purpose of the Public Hearing, which was to close out the CDBG project that examined the two bridges in the Village. Daniel Currier from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) outlined the \$29,700 grant awarded to the Town of Plainfield. The Town of Plainfield and CVRPC hired Milone and McBroom to conduct an alternatives analysis of the two bridges in the Village. The study included aerial photographs, the mapping of debris, hydrological modeling, and a series of public meetings to discuss the alternatives. The preferred alternative was to replace the bridge on Brook Road to widen it to the width of the channel. Per requirement of the grant, Hartgen Archeological Consultants, Inc. was hired to conduct an archeological resource assessment. Hartgen concluded that there was no further archeological review needed, a finding that was supported by a letter from the State. The Town's match was 10%, or \$3,100, and both the Town and CVRPC shared in the cost of the archeological resource assessment. Ross Sneyd inquired as to what the next steps are. Towbin responded that the Town would begin seeking funding to replace the bridge, a project estimated to cost up to \$1.2 million. Currier noted that the work accomplished thus far is a good stepping stone to advance to the design/construction phase, and recommended possibly moving forward on some preliminary designs, cost estimates, and scheduling to bring the project to the shovel-ready point. He is exploring relevant funding sources and will keep the Select Board apprised. Currier noted that there are a number of other bridges in the region that need design work and he is investigating the possibility of getting multiple bridges designed simultaneously. He stated his appreciation for the Town's involvement, including Grant Administrator Alice Merrill's completion of the final progress reports. The Select Board thanked CVRPC for its work as well. **Betsy Ziegler made a motion to close the grant and accept all the deliverables. Sneyd seconded the motion. The motion was approved.**
- The Public Hearing closed at 7:12pm.

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AGENDA

- Announcements and Public Comment
- Town Clerk's Report
- Road Report
- Planning Commission - Brief Update on Zoning
- Act 174 Survey
- Town Website - Considering "govoffice" as Vendor
- Update on Cameron Road Property
- Update on Creamery Street Auction
- Discussion on Town Meeting Date - Time and Place Set for this Year - Should Future Meetings Be on Weekends or in the Evening to Increase Participation?
- Minutes

Towbin added two topics to the agenda: a presentation by Lori Barg on the possibility of a hydro dam at the Main Street bridge; and, consideration of a Request for Proposals for painting the Town Hall Opera House. **Sneyd made a motion to approve the revised agenda. Ziegler seconded the motion. The motion was approved.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS/PUBLIC COMMENT

- David Strong noted that Towbin will be stepping down from the Select Board and that there are two candidates who have submitted petitions to be on the ballot at Town Meeting for the vacant position: Alexandra Thayer and James Volz. A "Meet the Candidates" night has been organized for voters to learn about their positions on 2/24/17 at 7pm at the Town Hall Opera House. Towbin has asked both candidates to provide a photo, bio, and summary, which he will post on social media prior to the event.
- Ziegler announced a "Be Prepared for (Almost) Anything" meeting by the Resiliency Committee on 2/15/17 at 6:30pm at the Fire Station. Towbin will post information on it tonight. Ziegler noted that information will be provided on dealing with a range of emergencies.
- Sneyd announced that the Blinking Light Gallery will be closing at the end of February and saluted the volunteers who have been running it over the past 20 years.

TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

- Town Clerk/Treasurer Linda Wells announced that there will be a public information meeting on the proposal for purchasing a new fire truck, at a cost of up to \$200,000, at the 2/27/17 Select Board meeting. The item will be on the ballot at Town Meeting.
- Wells announced that the Town annual reports will be mailed out next week.
- Wells stated that the ballots for absentee voting will be available on 2/15/17 for the Australian portion of Town Meeting.
- Wells reported that taxes came in very well and she is waiting to see if any that were postmarked by the due date come in by mail. She will have the warrant to Delinquent Tax Collector George Cushing by the end of the week to follow up with those who have not paid.
- Ziegler noted that the School Board is holding an annual school meeting, which she believes is on 2/28/17, regarding the upcoming school budget that will be voted on at Town Meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: PERMIT APPROVALS

- Towbin presented an access permit requested by Ryan Knapp and Katherine Kreis at 700 Country Club Road, which Road Foreman Mike Nolan has already approved. **Sneyd made a motion to approve the access permit for 700 Country Club Road. Ziegler seconded the motion. The motion was approved.**
- Towbin presented a liquor license renewal application from the Plainfield Co-op. **Ziegler made a motion to approve the liquor license renewal application from the Plainfield Co-op. Sneyd seconded the motion. The motion was approved.**
- Towbin presented a weight access fleet permit for Allen Lumber. **Ziegler made a motion to approve the weight access fleet permit for Allen Lumber. Sneyd seconded the motion. The motion was approved.**
- The Select Board opted to continue with the remaining fleet permit requests later in the meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: DISCUSSION TOWN MEETING DATE - TIME AND PLACE SET FOR THIS YEAR - SHOULD FUTURE MEETINGS BE ON WEEKENDS OR IN THE EVENING TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION?

- While Wells was still present, a brief discussion followed on the idea of holding Town Meeting on a weekend day rather than during a weekday to increase participation. Wells noted that in addition to the extra effort it would require, residents would have to come out twice because Australian ballot voting has to be held on the first Tuesday in March. Further discussion on the topic will continue later in the meeting.

PLANNING COMMISSION - BRIEF UPDATE ON ZONING

- Will Colgan, chair of the Plainfield Planning Commission, introduced himself and gave an overview of the process currently underway of rewriting the Town's Zoning Regulations. He noted that the Development Review Board had recommended unifying the separate zoning, subdivision, and flood regulations into one document. The Planning Commission has also inserted additional River Hazard Zone regulations that include both inundation and erosion hazards. Colgan noted that zoning is driven by the Town Plan, and the current version of the Town Plan talks a lot about connectivity of natural resources. A recent natural resources inventory and State mapping that shows the locations of significant wildlife habitats and connectivity areas have provided the basis from which the Conservation Commission has made recommendations regarding impact regulations. The Planning

and Conservation Commissions have been discussing what are legitimate regulatory needs for these natural resource requirements and will soon come up with a set of fact-based, standard guidelines to use in an advisory capacity rather than mandating regulations. Once the document is finalized, hearings will take place for public and Select Board input and approval. Towbin noted that statistically in Vermont, the flood zones themselves are not necessarily where flood damage occurs, but rather where things fall off cliffs. He stated that many grant applications specifically ask if a town has adopted favorable river corridor language in its zoning, which can affect whether the project will be funded. Colgan added that the percentage of government monetary compensation to a town after a flood event goes down if a municipality has not adopted such language. Towbin noted that he would like to have Plainfield's Energy Coordinator along with representatives from the Select Board, Planning Commission, and Conservation Commission engage in upcoming Act 174 discussions regarding the siting of renewable energy projects, and will be in contact to set up a meeting. In response to Ziegler's question about a public hearing on the draft Zoning Regulations, Colgan stated that he hopes the document will be ready in a month, then it needs to be warned for 30 days, then the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing, then the Select Board will hold a public hearing, and then it will be put to a Town-wide vote.

CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR PAINTING THE TOWN HALL OPERA HOUSE

- David Strong from the Friends of the Town Hall Opera House briefly reviewed work completed this fiscal year as part of the capital improvement plan for the building, which included putting on a new roof. Painting of the exterior of the building is scheduled for the upcoming fiscal year starting in July 2017, and Strong has come up with specifications for a Request for Proposals (RFP) to put the work out to bid. He noted that the proposed schedule is to advertise the RFP in a week or so with the requirement that bids be submitted no later than 4pm on 3/24/17. Towbin read aloud the language of the advertisement, which included painting the clapboard-sided front and sides of the building using three colors, and specifying that the work commence after 7/1/17 and be completed by 11/30/17. Strong noted that the work would be paid for by money in the Reserve Fund for the Town Hall Opera House. He estimated the cost to be approximately \$10,000. Strong has been in discussions with the State's Historic Preservation regarding a recommended color scheme along with others with whom he is consulting. Wells will advertise the RFP on Front Porch Forum and in the Times Argus. A brief discussion ensued regarding window replacement in the front and repair of a balcony window on the second floor. **Sneyd made a motion to approve advertising the Request for Proposals to paint the Town Hall Opera House. Ziegler seconded the motion. The motion was approved.**

PRESENTATION BY LORI BARG ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A HYDRO DAM AT THE MAIN STREET BRIDGE

- Towbin noted that Act 174 is asking towns to develop energy plans. He is on the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's Act 174 Committee, and while discussions have included mainly solar and wind projects, Towbin has invited Plainfield resident Lori Barg, an expert on hydro power, to speak on her work and specifically the possibility of placing a hydro project in Plainfield. Barg introduced herself, stating that she owns and operates two hydroelectric power plants in southern New Hampshire and has a patent application for an environmentally friendly hydroelectric power system, called Go Hydro, designed to be delivered, constructed, and producing power at existing dams within four-to-six weeks with no digging in the river and very little civil work. Studies have

determined that in over 77,000 dams in the country, 75,000 don't have power. She will be building and installing the first pilot project this year in Peterborough, New Hampshire. Barg noted New England's history of hydro being its traditional power source. The Town of Plainfield owns the dam on the Winooski River at Main Street, which the State dam safety inspector had previously determined to be a great dam. Barg reviewed efforts in the past 10 years to build a small hydro system at that location, noting impediments encountered such as potentially expensive studies required by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), costly ongoing system maintenance, interaction and interconnectivity issues with utility companies, and high site-specific engineering costs, all of which her system has surmounted. Barg noted her company is looking for additional pilot sites where systems will be installed at cost. Discussion followed regarding typical power generation levels, potential sources of income for a municipality with a hydro system, regulatory requirements, fish safety measures, and noise issues. Barg estimated equipment costs for the system at under \$250,000 and noted that next steps would be to get support from the Governor and Historic Preservation to make it easier to get the project through ANR. Towbin suggested that Barg talk in front of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's Act 174 Committee, which he will raise at the next meeting, to help spur the State as well as the possibility of identifying a centralized person who might manage this and other local hydro projects. Barg noted enabling legislation that was passed by the State Legislature four or five years ago calling to expedite five-to-seven pilot hydro sites, which has never happened. Discussion ensued on dam failures, the amount of power that could be generated from untapped dam sites in the State, and co-ownership/operation options with utilities. The Select Board thanked Barg for providing the information.

OTHER BUSINESS: CONTINUATION OF PERMIT APPROVALS

- Towbin presented the following fleet permit requests for approval:
 - Hillcrest Trucking
 - John Bogie-JFB Trucking
 - Kingsbury Companies
 - McCullough Crushing

Sneyd made a motion to approve the fleet permit requests for Hillcrest Trucking, John Bogie-JFB Trucking, Kingsbury Companies, and McCullough Crushing. Ziegler seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

TOWN WEBSITE - CONSIDERING "GOVOFFICE" AS VENDOR

- Towbin explained that GovOffice is a nationwide website design service for municipalities. Sneyd noted that he has sent an email to the company regarding cost, but has not yet heard back. Towbin recommended having a transactional-based site where people can fill out forms online. Sneyd stated that GovOffice provides site design and hosting that would be populated locally. Towbin noted that Plainfield residents Andy Robinson and Jan Waterman have generously offered to pay for the start-up costs. Sneyd suggested having a local webmaster to help guide the Town and interface with GovOffice. Ziegler noted the need for easy posting and maintaining up-to date information. It was agreed to keep the topic on the agenda for the next Select Board meeting and, in the meantime, Sneyd will follow up with additional information and costs.

UPDATE ON CAMERON ROAD PROPERTY

- Towbin briefly reviewed the situation of the house and garage on Cameron Road that are in danger of falling into the Great Brook, noting that he has been working with the owner and the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission to purchase the property and raze the buildings. Towbin noted that the no-to-minimum cost to the Town regarding the process would prevent a potentially catastrophic situation that would cost the Town dearly in dollars and the safety of first-responders if no action were to be taken. Despite the various difficulties involved, the process is progressing. Sneyd and Ziegler thanked Towbin for his perseverance in the matter.

UPDATE ON CREAMERY STREET AUCTION

- Towbin reported on the auction that was scheduled last week for the house at 13 Creamery Street, noting that despite the attendance of two people interested putting in serious bids on the property, the auctioneer informed them that the bank had cancelled the auction. Another auction date has been set up for 2/15/17 at 11am, when hopefully the process will advance. Towbin noted that while there is nothing illegal involved, the process of selling such “zombie houses” is very flawed. He gave a brief background on what has transpired over the past two years regarding the property as well as steps that the State Legislature might take to incentivize institutions to help hasten the process. Towbin added that in addition to the blight in the community, the Town has incurred roughly \$4-6,000 in emergency repairs to prevent flooding on Creamery Street and in dealing with a vermin infestation. The Town has a lien on the property and those funds will be recovered when the property is sold. Ziegler thanked Towbin for his follow-up on the issue.

CONTINUATION OF THE DISCUSSION REGARDING TOWN MEETING

- Towbin noted complaints by some residents who are not able to make Town Meeting and asked if it might be held at night or on a weekend day. He repeated reasons cited by Wells earlier regarding the additional effort involved as well as residents having to come out twice due to requirements that Australian voting be held on the first Tuesday in March. It was unclear if the Select Board could change the date or if it needs a town-wide vote. It was decided that the issue could be raised during “Other Business” at Town Meeting, although Sneyd noted that those who cannot make a weekday Town Meeting would not be present for the discussion. A brief discussion ensued on the practice of beginning Town Meeting with a list of delinquent taxpayers. Noting feedback received on the petition to make Plainfield a sanctuary city, Towbin reported the Select Board’s decision to move the item to “Other Business” to prevent a binding vote because of the question of how sanctuary city status might affect the Town in terms of government funding. A group will make a presentation examining the issues at the next Select Board meeting.

MINUTES

- Sneyd noted a minor correction to the minutes from the 1/23/17 Select Board meeting. **Sneyd made a motion to approve the minutes from the 1/23/17 Select Board meeting as amended. Ziegler seconded the motion. The motion was approved.**

OTHER BUSINESS

- A brief discussion took place on the final budget to ensure that a mathematical error had been corrected. Towbin will check in with Wells to make sure.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05pm on a motion by Ziegler. Sneyd seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Respectfully submitted by Cindy Wyckoff