

All Boards and Committees Meeting October 23rd, 2023

6:30 p.m. Public Safety Complex

The Town Moderator states that the objective of the meeting was for each committee to answer two questions: What major projects is your group working on this year? AND What are the major issues facing the town your group thinks should be town priorities in the next 3-5 years? Stated that this meeting is an opportunity for each committee to learn from one another.

Board of Health: Ellen Dupont

Handles transfer station, well, and septic permits by state laws. Ellen said that the Transfer Station is a priority, and that certain things are getting more difficult to dispose of such as hazardous waste, batteries, and electronics. It would be helpful to make new people in the town aware of state laws and to make sure that new people are following the laws as well. Claude from the Board of Assessors suggests that each new person in the town be given a copy of the bylaws.

Board of Assessors: Claude DuPont

Claude said that the biggest complaint from people in town are “Why are taxes so high?” He lets them know that they should speak to the Finance Committee about the budget. The moderator points out that the first two committees to speak suggest that new people in town need information on bylaws specifically, and a booklet would be helpful for new citizens to know what they’re getting into. He also reminded everyone that we’re not here to solve the problems at this particular meeting.

Police Department: Police Chief Justin Litchfield

Howard stated that there are four issues that the department is currently focusing on: Vehicle planning, adding additional officers, updating the policies and procedures manual, and obtaining more administrative assistance. The police cruisers should have a five-year plan that involves shrinking the current fleet. Newer vehicles have better computer systems and radio, and should have safer and better access to Narcan, weapons, etc. Cruisers should be replaced every 3-5 years ideally. The policies and procedures manual also needs to be updated. Policies should be easy to copy from nearby towns as they are not copyrighted. Additional new officers are also needed. The town currently has one full time Police Chief and one full time Officer but partnering with surrounding towns as needed could be one option. Chief Litchfield further added that officer safety is number one and that the average for backup from State Police is 53 minutes which is unacceptable. Lastly, more admin assistance is needed and the current \$250 a month budget is not sufficient.

Energy Committee: Conrad Liebenow

Main purpose for being is the Green Community Program designated in 2017 with a Grant for Energy Conservation projects. The grant was for \$137,575 which took six years to spend. It was used to light up buildings, 35% went to weatherization of Town Hall and Police Station; basement seal and insulation, as well as 50% going toward heat pumps installed at the highway garage office, outbuildings, police department, and town offices. \$5K was also spent on energy audits and structural analyses. 13% energy savings compared to baseline in 2015. DOER helps keep track of energy usage. Haven’t gone through a

season yet, the cost of electric will go up but the cost of oil will go down. We are now eligible to apply for competitive grants. There were pandemic supply chain issues-we could have used the original grant for Town Hall heat pumps if it weren't for that. Another goal of the Energy Committee is choosing a greener electrical supplier and further discussing municipal solar. PV could offset town usage. A 75KW system would be necessary. How to get funding would be a concern. The Town of Williamsburg received a \$1.8 million dollar grant. We could talk to them about this as well.

Building Committee: Peter Lapointe

Peter spoke to what the Building Committee does, which is primarily taking care of the town's building stock and to anticipate any expenditures that they might encounter to help offset the need for emergency spending. There have been some issues with the town's aging stock of buildings. There was recently a response to the highway garage's septic as well as a heating system failing last winter. The current town offices have been identified as being an inadequate infrastructure. The Building Committee suggested that the offices be relocated to the basement of the library as there is space available there for offices and meeting rooms. The Building Committee is committed to working with the Energy Committee on conservation measures. Peter said that if the state has a net-zero goal, then we should focus on being a net-energy community.

Planning Board: Peter Lapointe

"All Boards Task Force" regarding the Conway School's Climate Resilience Plan. Suggested that the town needs to develop a Master Plan. A holistic overview of the plan could develop momentum within the town to figure out a vision going forward. The "Village Green" project around Town Hall is an infrastructure project that they are working on that involves an undocumented septic system that was repaired, a spring fed water system that should be switched to a well, and parking issues that have also been identified. The planning board is hoping to create a public space that is more like a town common while also remediating these issues. They are hoping to use some ARPA funds for this project. They are also working on compiling a list of town roads, which ones are the most used, abandoned, etc. The final piece that they are working on is looking at the zoning by-laws again and strengthening the approval process.

Jerry spoke about the resiliency project that The Conway school did. This project identified a lot of the problems within the town of Plainfield and the book that they created contains a lot of helpful information. Jerry would like for each committee to have a copy. Judy spoke about the cost to produce each book, which is about \$25 each. This resource could help the town rank how to prioritize things. The town can afford 25 copies. The moderator said that it is available online as a PDF and that we could let people know that it's available. Each department and committee would get a copy. Judy feels that it will give everyone a common language. There are currently two copies at the library that can be checked out.

Conservation Commission: Purpose is to enforce the Wetland Protection Act and to make new people in town aware of wetlands. Wetlands are important, especially with all of the recent rain. Making regular site visits to help people determine the best place to build so as not to affect wetlands. The Conservation Commission is willing to help in any way that they can.

Zoning Board: Peg Keller

Peg said that all permit granting authority used to be the zoning board but now it is more the responsibility of the planning board. The scope of the zoning board is now narrower. There are two people on the zoning board. Joan and Peg are usually available but Peg has more flexibility. Will try to get where recommendations make sense and to take a local but global perspective. Professional staffing is a priority. The Swift River Inn transition has been somewhat of an issue. They told us that they wouldn't impact the EMS system. They have Peg called for her grandmother recently and an EMS took an hour to get there. We need to somehow figure out the EMS. Swift River may have a special permit for their EMS.

Broadband Manager: Kimberly Longey

As Broadband manager, Kimberly is overseeing the \$2 Million municipally owned internet network and managing a budget of about \$330,000 a year. Currently we are serving 282 customers in Plainfield. High priority projects are an upgrade that was just completed to the telecommunications hub at the safety complex that can remotely monitor temperature, burglaries, water infiltration, etc. This was a two-year project. Once this is complete, emergency response procedures will be updated. We are about to begin interconnecting with surrounding towns, which will be great for broadband resiliency. Areas of town that go down for any reason will get re-routed to other towns. Kim expects that this project will be completed by mid-December. Kim is stewarding the operating budget and hopes to have at least 2-3 new subscribers per year. A priority is the use of the town website. She believes a packet is also necessary to let new people know about it. Kim is also working with the Finance Committee, Amelia, and Paula on long term debt planning. It will take 3-5 years to produce revenue to pay off debt. It would be helpful for community members to send Kim notes about their Whip City Fiber user experience. Kimberley has been working with several people on "What could an upgrade to the town website look like?" The moderator says that the website has been great in the past with dial up, but now 10-12 years later, it's not as accessible on phone and with high speed internet. Someone suggest a "Thinking about moving to Plainfield?" section on the website to let them know what they're getting into.

Fire Department: Fire Chief David Alvord

David spoke about the Safety Complex Building and gave credit to everyone during 2008 for making good decisions to have the building built. A \$750K grant partially paid for the \$1.1 Million facility that we are having a meeting in. Facility is used by the town...David oversees 15 volunteer fire fighters, 4 EMTs, and an administrative assistant. Soon the town will be tasked with looking for a new Fire Chief but there will be people to choose from with all of the great staff. The biggest item this year was the town purchasing a new fire truck. Last year the truck committee got info out and made a strong presentation. All volunteers of the fire department are tax payers, too. The costs of a volunteer fire fighter are astronomical. \$4K per person on gear and uniforms alone. The tank is over \$8K Total cost is about \$12K per volunteer. It's challenging but the Fire Department is currently in pretty good shape. Things have changed in the past 40 years. The number of volunteers fluctuates. MA state mandates currently that there are no requirements for training. Only CPR and and First Responder training requirements. The volunteers do an amazing job. Mutual Aid to Ashfield and the tree breaking...2022 stuff happens. Mutual Aid to Savoy. It's a challenge when things happen in the middle of the day when things are challenging to get to. Recently a person in Savoy lost everything because volunteers could not get there in time.

Council on Aging: Polly Ryan

Polly is the coordinator for the Council on Aging. Their responsibility is to make sure that people 60 and over are not isolated and that they are cared for. Medical services, directing people to the right services, etc. They are working with 10 individuals currently. Polly also works on bringing money in: they received a \$23K grant for transportation as well as a \$10K grant for a vaccine initiative. Currently working on getting a grant to improve nutrition and education around nutrition. There is money available from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs as well as the MA Council on Aging for these kinds of initiatives. Polly also got a \$300K grant for hooking up people to the internet and getting people hooked up to phones and tablets. Polly also runs a Memory Support Group and a monthly exercise class at Town Hall. Polly is also becoming a Board member of Highland Elder Services.

Historical Commission

Currently developing a historic walking trail off of River Road. Signage has been designed and two have been installed. Waiting for the town to take possession of two lots near there that would be part of the trail. The end point of the trail would be the old Plainfield Animal Pound. The Trail will be ½ mile all around. Until the town has possession of land, nothing can happen.

The moderator said if people aren't sure who owns the land, it can be easier to bundle them...look into a local land court attorney. Look on town website, assessor maps, etc. and that developers look for land, so it's better to find them first.

Finance Committee: Bob Baker

The role of the Finance Committee is rewriting and analyzing budgets, and presenting the budget to the Select Board. The budget in Plainfield is developed jointly between the Finance Committee and the Town Accountant. The Finance Committee's responsibilities include receiving budgets by departments, analyzing the budgets, and discussing with stakeholders, conducting public hearings, and submitting the budget to the Select Board for their approval at Town Meeting. The Finance Committee is authorized by Town Bylaw. The Finance Committee is appointed by the Town Moderator. Members are not to exceed four years. The bylaws require that the Finance Committee have at least 5 voters and no more than 9. They have been trying to find a new committee member. The Finance Committee makes decisions on what is essential for the town. Revenue is needed and fiscal restraint is important. Currently they are working on the FY '25 budget. The school budget is the largest expenditure. There is a shrinking student pool. Six towns have approved the proposed amendments and Plainfield and Heath have not. Heath is not going to hold a special town meeting. The school board is trying to negotiate with Boston. The Finance Committee is working with Mohawk Trail. Roberta says that the finance committee might be misunderstood, that they don't "make" the budget. The finance committee tries to be an ambassador of "yes" and that you should ask for what you think you need or the finance committee will not know.

Recreation Committee: Sandy Morann

The Recreation Committee would like to get the park back to where it was 30 years ago. The play structure, ground, beams benches, etc. need to be replaced. They are hoping to do some of it in the spring, including clearing out brush that has grown up. Electrical service should also be expanded to the pavilion. They would like the space to be more functional for picnics, outdoor movies, dances, etc. There could be a permanent place for a grill and parking could be better overall. Sandy commented that in the

past the fire department used the park for BBQ's. The Rec Department is hoping that the park could eventually be more like a Town Common.

Agricultural Commission: Anna Hanchett

The Agricultural Committee installed and takes care of the pollinator garden at the Post Office. Anna explained that the entire town of Plainfield is zoned agricultural. The Agricultural Committee is working with the Tree Alliance to plant "climate change friendly" and salt-tolerant trees. They have a current goal to study the town resiliency plan. Access to food is also a concern with transportation being a main factor during winter weather as the entire food system is reliant on transportation. They are also working on developing growing edible mushroom varieties as a medicinal food source.

Select Board: Ben Gillette, Chair

Ben comments that he is still new to being the Select Board Chair but that he is learning more every week. The Select Board has a few big projects that they've been working on for a while-one is trying to recruit people to volunteer on town items. Hilary commented on how much has happened in the six years that she's been on the Select Board. (Restructuring and rebuilding of the police department, a new highway manager, a new building commissioner, she worked with Howard and they did a new employee manual with updated job descriptions and policy books with procedures, etc.) Hilary is here to hear everyone and how she can support them.

Highway Department: Walter Jennings

Walter gave an emergency management update. He helped obtain an emergency management vehicle for the town. It's still in process with a limited budget, but it can be deployed during an emergency. It's a work in progress but it's getting there. Walter also gave a 116 project update, which took more than initially thought because of some issues. It's been about \$600K more than expected but the town won't have to pay for that. The highway has a long-term goal of making every road beautiful.

Select Board: Judy Cole

Judy talked about current projects, one recent one was working with several town residents to manage the hiring process of an executive assistant. Another is writing a community compact IT grant to help with acquiring equipment to have hybrid meetings at Town Hall. Judy feels that the most important thing that the Select Board can do is to be a clearing house of information as well as a convener of collective gatherings such as this All Boards and Committees Meeting, and suggests having this meeting twice a year. She also suggests that the Finance Committee has a second information session in December where they present the budget (after the town knows how much money they really have, since the information session before the Town Meeting is speculative.) much like the one that happens before the Town Meeting when they present the budget. This would make it easier to all connect with one another.

The Town Moderator finishes up the meeting by saying that he's held many offices in town, but that he enjoys just being the Town Moderator currently. He offers to the town that he is happy to moderate any Boards and Committees meetings that are happening around town. Suggests having a "Moderator's Corner" on the new town website.

A motion to adjourn was approved at 8:29 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Dry