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PLAINFIELD PLANNING BOARD
Meeting Monday August 17th 2026
Meriden Town Hall/Via Zoom

Members Present

Jane Stephenson	Mike Sutherland	Eric Sutphin
Elise Angelillo	Ross Wood	

Others Present

Stephen Halleran

Norman Berman	Jordan Green-Z	Megan Hueil-Z	Bev Widger-Z
Margaret Drye	Nancy Norwalk-Z	Conrad Schoeffter-Z	

The meeting opened at 7:00 p.m.

Minutes and administrative work were deferred until the end of the meeting.

Public hearing on draft Master Plan Update: Chairwoman Stephenson opened the hearing with a brief synopsis of the work the Planning Board has done over the last two years. The draft Master Plan is posted on the town's website, and resident comments are encouraged. The last Master Plan update work was done in 2015. The Planning Board began this latest effort with the development of a community survey, which was distributed and received just under 300 responses. Most respondents expressed satisfaction with the town's quality of life and services. There is a strong desire to keep Plainfield rural in nature, with a high preference for green open spaces, forests, and fields. The Planning Board enlisted the help of the regional planning commission with the update, including but not limited to updating graphs and charts using the latest available census data.

Respondents also expressed concern about the cost of housing and the lack of affordable housing. Planning Board members acknowledged the paradox in these two issues. Balancing open space with more residential development is the challenge. The lack of widely available public water and sewer makes large-scale development unlikely in Plainfield.

Chair Stephenson led the group through the various chapters and the goals and recommendations of each. Mike Sutherland noted the work of the Plainfield Conservation Commission in hiring a consultant who performed a very detailed natural resource inventory. This new document serves as the Natural Resources Chapter and can also be found in several places on the town's website. Mike encouraged the public to view the document, which in his opinion is very well done.

One of the outcomes from the Master Plan Update is confirmation that, as in New Hampshire in general, Plainfield residents on average are older and having fewer children. Consequently, the school has about 33% fewer students than it did twenty years ago.

Incomes in Plainfield have risen sharply in the last decade. This is largely attributed to the number of medical professionals living in town. The Schell Community Trust Fund has created an opportunity for wealthier residents to contribute additional funds to helping Plainfield's less financially fortunate.

Plainfield's relatively high property tax rate continues and is attributed largely to a community that is mostly made up of single-family homes whose residents prefer a high level of service. It was noted that towns with lower tax rates typically have large numbers of second homes (high value) that are mostly not lived in. This is not the case in Plainfield.

Plainfield, on average, issues about six permits a year for new residential construction. This number used to be closer to ten units; however, increased construction costs have reduced the number of housing starts. Further,

1 Plainfield's ADU ordinance, along with changes to state law, has resulted in about twenty additional housing units
2 being constructed in the last ten years.

3
4 Home rental costs in Plainfield are about \$3,000 per month for a single-family home and approximately \$2,000 for
5 an ADU.

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7 The Planning Board felt that while reducing required lot sizes is a possibility, the Board was not convinced that this
8 would reduce the cost of housing in Plainfield. Halleran noted that septic system requirements and the current use
9 program essentially amount to state-level zoning, resulting in the creation of mostly 5-acre and 11-acre (or larger)
10 lots.

11 Planning Board/Selectboard member Angelillo reported that town facilities are seen as adequate for the future; the
12 replacement of the highway garage is unlikely for the next twenty years. Town offices, the Police Department, the
13 two fire stations, and the libraries are also considered adequate for the future. Solid work has been done in the last
14 ten years to reduce the town's use of fossil fuels. Increased weatherization and heat pumps have been utilized at the
15 school, town office, and both libraries, and work is planned for the highway garage. The addition of a full-time
16 facility manager/water department head has helped the town catch up on deferred maintenance issues.

17
18 While requiring increasing levels of management and attention, Plainfield residents and many others from the Upper
19 Valley express strong support for the town's trail network and other recreational opportunities. Selectboard member
20 Webber noted that the town's Class VI roads are highly valued and provide additional recreation opportunities
21 throughout town.

22
23 **Public comments on the update were as follows:** School Board member Norm Berman noted that the best chance
24 for a reduction in the tax rate for the town is support of the plan to merge the Plainfield and Cornish school systems
25 into a new cooperative district. The school accounts for approximately 70% of the municipal tax rate.
26 Bev Widger has suggested edits and additions to the Historic Resources Chapter that she feels will enhance the
27 likelihood of future grant applications being approved.

28
29 Chair Stephenson thanked those in attendance and closed the public hearing at 9:15 p.m.

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31 The July 20th minutes were approved as amended. Planning Board members requested both paper and digital copies
32 of the new Office of State Planning NH Land Use RSA booklet.

33
34 The Board's next meeting will be September 21st.

35
36 Stephen Halleran

Jane Stephenson, Chair

