

2023 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF ATHENS, VERMONT

March 6, 2023 at 6:00pm at the Athens Community Center (Former Elementary School)

Called to order at 6:00

David Bemis, Moderator, reviews Roberts Rules of order.

Representative Heather Chase and Senator Wendy Harrison introduce themselves and speak to the voters about what they are working on in the state legislature.

Article 1: To see if the Town shall vote to authorize the Selectboard to borrow money, respectively, if necessary, for current expenses in anticipation of collection of taxes

Denise Randall makes a motion in favor. Amanda Alsvig seconds. Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 2: To see if the Town shall vote to collect taxes on the 10th of September 2023

Sandi Capponcelli makes a motion in favor. Denise Randall seconds. Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 3: To see if the Town shall vote to publish a list of delinquent taxpayers in the Town Report

Harold Noyes makes a motion in favor. Steve Oakes seconds.

Discussion: Kate Bova notes that there are properties on the list that are 6 years delinquent. Hannah says she thinks Darlene's policy is if people are paying on their delinquent taxes, she won't put the property up for tax sale.

Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 4: To see if the Town shall vote to approve \$632,621.95, with \$513,214.95 to be raised by Taxes, to defray Town expenditures

Denise Randall makes a motion in favor. Janet Perry seconds.

Discussion: Kate Bova asks why there is such a big difference between last year's amount to be raised and this year's. Janet and Denise answer that some factors are changing fire and rescue services from Saxtons River to Grafton and not having the surplus that the town did last year.

Don Capponcelli says the municipal tax rate is going from 1.04 last year - 1.40 this year. The school tax rate estimated by Harvey Merrill could be down as much as .08, or up by .02 as a worst case scenario. Don says if the budget is approved as is, the town tax rate would go up 10%. Linda Taylor says it will be hard for people who are already struggling financially. Sherry Maher says her calculations are that this budget is 37% higher than last year and asks some questions about revenues listed in the town report. Hannah Regier answers the revenue line-item questions. Sherry says she sees the highway workers are

getting 8% pay raises that the selectboard approved before the town gets to vote on the budget. She would like to see the budget voted down, or wants to see the amount amended.

Put to a vote by paper ballot: 40 no. 14 yes. The article is defeated. The moderator says the budget committee and the selectboard will put together a new budget and there will be a meeting called to vote on it.

Article 5: To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,140.00 for the support of Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS) to provide workforce and economic coordination services to the Windham Region

Don Capponcelli makes a motion to allocate \$650.00. Janet Perry seconds.

Discussion: Meg Stalloff talks about SeVEDS services and leaves some handouts. They are currently helping the Town of Athens work towards USDA grants for the Town Garage and Community Center. They also do workforce training for high school students and support businesses with lending and other services. The amount they asked for on the warning equals \$3.00 per person from the town of Athens.

Put to a vote: The amended article passes.

Article 6: To see if the Town shall vote to raise, appropriate, and expend the sum of \$500.00 (\$1.31 per Athens resident) for the support of Grace Cottage Family Health & Hospital

Tom Taylor makes a motion in favor. Amanda Alsvig seconds.

Discussion: Kate Bova asks if there is a specific program that this money goes to at the hospital. The moderator doesn't think it is for the hospital in general. Jay Maciejowski asks what the town has given to Grace Cottage in the past. The moderator says this is the first time they have asked the town for money.

Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 7: To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate the sum of \$250.00 to support the Womens' Freedom Center to provide quality advocacy and support to the women of Athens

Tim Stevenson makes a motion in favor. Sherry Maher seconds. Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 8: To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate the sum of \$330.00 to support Youth Services to serve the needs of youth and families in and around Windham County

Beth Ann Agostini makes a motion in favor. Denise Randall seconds. Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 9: To see if the Town shall vote to raise and appropriate \$1,000.00 to Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) to assist Athens in responding to the emergency needs of the community and providing all available and applicable services

Denise Randall makes a motion in favor. Heather Chaudoir seconds. Lynn Morgan asks if there any duplications to the services SEVCA provides with other agencies like Senior Solutions. Matthew Shea says that SEVCA does a lot of weatherization and family services. There are separate services for seniors.

Put to a vote: the article passes

Article 10: To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate the sum of \$250.00 for the Bellows Falls Senior Center

Denise Randall makes a motion in favor. Sherry Maher seconds. Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 11: To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,350.00 to help support the home health, maternal and child health, and hospice care provided in patient's homes and in community settings by the Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice of Vermont and New Hampshire

Tim Stevenson makes a motion in favor. Denise Randall seconds. Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 12: To see if the Town shall vote to raise and appropriate \$1,000.00 to assist Grafton Cares in providing a variety of assistance to the people of Athens

Sherry Maher makes a motion in favor. Tim Stevenson seconds. Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 13: To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate the sum of \$356.00 to help support outpatient, mental health, and substance abuse service by the staff of Health Care & Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) in accordance with 24 V. S. A. § 2691

Denise Randall makes a motion in favor. Amanda Alsvig seconds. Put to a vote: the motion passes.

Article 14: To see if the Town shall vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$300.00 to assist Senior Solutions

Harold Noyes makes a motion in favor. Cheree Alsvig seconds. Put to a vote: the article passes.

Article 15: To set the time of future town meetings

Tom Taylor makes a motion for it to be the first Tuesday in March at 10:00am.

Discussion: Darlene Wyman says that even though town meeting is at night this year, the numbers are about the same as when it was held on a Tuesday morning. Heather Chaudoir says she appreciates having the meeting in the evening — she wouldn't be able to attend otherwise. Krista Gay says the most popular time from the survey that was done was Saturday morning, second most popular was a weekday evening, and the third most popular time was Saturday afternoon. She says she isn't advocating for a particular time, she just wants to report to voters the result of the survey. David Bemis reiterates that the statute says the meeting can be held on Town Meeting Day or the three days prior to it. Sherry Maher clarifies the days and times that the survey had as choices. She says that the most important thing the survey asked was what would make people more likely to attend town meeting; and the most popular choice was "if they felt their voices mattered." She wants to know how the town can address that. The second most important point was moving the meeting to a different time and day.

Sherry amends the motion to have Town Meeting at 6:00pm on the Monday prior to Town Meeting Day. Amanda Alsvig seconded.

Discussion: Sherry sees a lot of the same faces at town meeting and a few new faces which she is happy to see. She says given the answers from the survey, moving back to Tuesday morning would eliminate a lot of people who have to work. She encourages people to support the amended motion.

There is some discussion on the rules of voting for an amendment.

Put to a vote by paper ballot: yes: 36, no: 22. The amendment passed.

Returning to vote on the amended article: Shall Town Meeting be held at 6:00pm on the Monday before Town Meeting Day.

Discussion: Linda Taylor asks if the meeting could be on a Tuesday so people could do all their voting on the same day. David says it could complicate counting the ballots.

Krista Gay amends the motion for the meeting to be held at 6:00pm on Town Meeting Day Tuesday. Sherry Maher seconds.

Discussion: Krista says that other feedback the survey committee got was that it's hard for some people to vote on two separate days or have to remember to mail in their ballot. She thinks it makes it easier for people to just come out once. Denise points out that regardless of what time town meeting is held, the polls would still close at 7:00. Hannah Regier says that having town meeting on the same day as voting would be very difficult for the election officials because there would be multiple checklists to manage and counting the ballots couldn't begin until the town meeting was over.

Put to a vote: The amendment is defeated.

Voting on the original amended article: The amended article passes.

The next regular Town meeting will be 6:00pm on the Monday preceding traditional Town Meeting Day.

Article 16: To transact any further business proper to come before said meeting

Jack Bryar, chair of the Athens Grafton school board, talks to the school budget and articles.

Lynn Morgan asks if people are able to help out on Green Up Day, there is a sign up in the back of the room.

Sherry Maher and Ginger Maciejowski ask people to sign up for the Athenian email list.

Sherry says the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend will be the 6th annual plant sale at the Meetinghouse

Krista Gay says the bake sale benefits the Community Center.

Hannah Regier says the Rabies vaccination clinic on Saturday, March 11th from 1:30 – 3:30pm.

Harold Moves to adjourn. Beth Ann seconds. Adjourned at 7:25pm

Respectfully submitted

Hannah Regier, Town Clerk