

2025 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF ATHENS, VERMONT

March 3, 2025 at 6:00pm at the Athens Community Center

50 voters attending

Called to order at 6:05 pm

The moderator reads the warning and reviews the rules of order for the meeting.

Article 1: To act on the town report

Don Capponcelli moves to accept the town report; Sherry Maher 2nds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 2: To see if the Town shall vote to authorize the Selectboard to borrow money, if necessary, for current expenses in anticipation of collection of taxes

Motion by Mike Perry; Carol Bingham seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 3: To see if the Town shall vote to collect taxes on the 10th of September 2025

Motion by Mike Perry moves; Carol Bingham seconds.

Discussion: Ellen Mirante asks if the calendar year could be changed to a fiscal year. She says there are eight benefits to switching. David suggests she bring it up at the end of the meeting during further business, but it cannot be voted on at this meeting because it has not been warned.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 4: To see if the Town shall vote to publish a list of delinquent taxpayers in the Town Report

Motion by Mike Perry; Carol Bingham seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 5: To see if the Town shall vote to approve a budget of \$754,729.42, with \$580,729.42 to be raised by taxes, and \$75,000 of the 2024 surplus being used to defray Town expenditures

Denise moves to add \$5,000 to the equipment fund, bringing the total budget to \$759,729.42, with \$585,729.42 to be raised in taxes, and \$75,000 of the 2024 surplus being used to defray Town expenditures. David Jacobson seconds.

A voter asks for the \$75,000 surplus to be explained. The treasurer says that there was a surplus of ~\$77,000 from 2024, due to a variety of reasons, including not having a second highway employee for

several months. There was also some extra unexpected revenue from the state. She directs voters to look through the budget to see the line items that didn't spend the entirety of their budget.

Linda Taylor asks where the extra \$2,896 of 2024 surplus, is going. The selectboard has not voted on that remaining surplus. Linda asks if the extra, or the whole \$77,896.51, could be put towards the Community Center maintenance and renovation, to meet the needs of the whole community. Tina White asks if the article could be amended to have the \$75,000 go towards the Community Center. David says it can but points out that then that much more would need to be raised in taxes.

Dennis Mirante says his calculations are that the proposed taxes to be raised are 17% higher than the 2024 budget and 27% higher than the 2024 "actual budget." He wants the town to operate more efficiently. Denise Randall says that the expenses do go up and invites Dennis to join the budget committee.

Tom Taylor asks if the money that's being voted on includes the funds needed for the new truck. David says that it includes some of it. There will be a 5-year loan for about \$60,000. The current truck's transmission is gone so it is not known what the trade in value will be.

Linda Taylor asks if the new truck went out to bid. David says it was off of the state bid. Janet says that they did look at different prices but didn't get sealed bids.

Ellen Mirante shares ideas for alternatives for trash pickup where residents would pay for their own. She asks if the voters agree to stop curbside pickup and put the ~\$39,000 towards something else. Denise says that the question was put to voters last year and people voted to keep trash pickup.

Candace Damon observes that the single largest budget difference from last year is health insurance for the road crew. Janet says that the cost has gone up and there is a new hire who has full coverage, as opposed to the last highway employee who declined coverage and opted for a stipend.

Don Capponcelli asks where the 27% increase comes from. He gets an 11.2% increase in expenditures. And the increase for taxes to be raised is nowhere near 27%. [Treasurer's note: Dennis Mirante had given that figure as the difference of the current budget from the 2024 actual tax collected, but that figure doesn't include the full tax revenue figures.] Janet says that besides health insurance, most stuff has stayed the same, except for the items that have incremental increases each year. There are also more funds going to the Grant Matching fund in anticipation of some large highway projects. The Town Office maintenance has gone up because the building needs a roof. There is \$15,000 budgeted for repairs for the small truck that will cover the first loan payment on the new truck.

Linda Taylor requests a paper ballot. 7 people support a paper ballot.

Ellen Mirante asks if the figure for the health insurance is the town's 90%. It is. She asks if the town could go back to 80% match on employee insurance. She also says that Athens pays \$7.00/hr more than the average in the state. Krista responds that other towns around here offer really good health insurance and it's hard for Athens to compete if the insurance isn't comparable. She says the average salary is spread over all the years of experience of employees. The new highway laborer in Athens has over 30 years of experience which equates to a higher wage than someone who is just starting out. Ellen suggests that additional employee benefits be cut, for the benefit of taxpayers, and says that Athens can't and shouldn't compete as one of the three smallest towns in the state.

David calls the amended budget question.

Put to a vote by paper ballot: In favor: 26 Opposed: 23

Article 6: To see if the Town shall vote to raise and appropriate \$15,000 to replenish emergency highway material reserves for future environmental events impacting infrastructure.

Motion by Don Capponcelli; David Jacobson seconds.

Don says he had asked for this several years ago when a stockpile was depleted in response to a flood in 2021. The stockpile wasn't replaced when the FEMA grant came in. He says the stockpile was estimated in excess of \$58,000. Don says that when the grant came in 18 months later, the budget committee and treasurer weren't asked to put some of the funds in the 2021 or 2022 budget to replace the stockpile. The extra funds went back to the taxpayers as a surplus. Don says that Matt has wanted to replace the stockpile, but the funds haven't been budgeted. Don says that the town hasn't been able to respond to storms as quickly as when there was a stockpile. The \$15,000 would replenish about a quarter of the original stockpile.

Linda asks what happened with the \$27,000 grant that was supposed to come in to reimburse 2024 highway work. It is fairly certain it will come in when the snow melts and someone is able to take photos of the work that was done. The treasurer directs voters to page 16 in the town report for the accounting of the 2024 grants that are still awaiting reimbursement. The emergency grant for the Brookline Rd undermining has now come in.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 7: To see if the Town shall vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$3,500.00 for the annual maintenance of its cemeteries

Motion by Don Capponcelli; Denise seconds.

Krista asks about the funds for the gates. That is already in the budget and has been approved.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 8: Shall the voters of Athens approve the sum of \$2,500.00 for the purpose of maintaining the Athens Brick Meetinghouse

Motion by Sherry Maher. Sandi Capponcelli seconds.

Dennis Mirante asks about the \$11,000 in the Town Office maintenance line item for the roof. Dennis thinks that the Building Renovation Fund should be used for this. The \$10,000 extra in the maintenance line item is in addition to some of the funds in the Building Renovation fund. There is discussion about the name and purpose of the fund. David says the conversation is off topic from the article at hand.

Dennis asks if the Meetinghouse allocation could be increased and asks Sherry how much she needs. Sherry says that the committee had discussed that it was most likely going to be a difficult tax year. They don't have clear plans at this time for projects, so they don't have a specific figure of what they need from the town to complete them. The committee is hoping to make a plan for ADA access soon. Sherry says there is hopefully a \$50,000 grant that can be applied for when they are ready. Dennis says that the Meetinghouse Committee does a great job and he'd be willing to give them a little extra to help them out.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 9: 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

Motion by Denise Randall; Krista seconds.

Don says BDCC has helped in the past with grants for the town. Don asks if Rachel Shields Ebersole can speak on behalf of BDCC, which SeVEDS contracts with to do economic and workforce development. Rachel reviews their programs: Southern Vt Young Professionals, commercial lending, small business support, high school counseling, community development, etc. The funding request is calculated at \$3/person. 80% of Athens workers commute outside of town, so she thinks their regional perspective is valuable. She directs voters to the report in the social services packet.

Krista speaks in support of Rachel and her support and commitment to Athens and showing up for many events in town.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 10: To see if the Town shall vote to raise, appropriate, and expend the sum of \$500.00 for the support of Grace Cottage Family Health & Hospital

Motion by Denise Randall; Sandi Capponcelli seconds.

Susan Ahn asks if it's known how the money will be used by Grace Cottage. It is not. Hannah says that their budget should be available on their website.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 11: To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate the sum of \$250.00 to support the Women's Freedom Center to provide quality advocacy and support to the women of Athens

Motion by Denise Randall; Sandi Capponcelli seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 12: 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

Motion by Denise Randall; Sandi Capponcelli seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 13: 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

Motion by Denise Randall; Sandi Capponcelli seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 14: To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate the sum of \$250.00 for the Bellows Falls Senior Center

Motion by Denise Randall; Krista Gay seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 15: 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

Motion by Denise Randall; Sherry Maher seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 16: 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

Motion by Sherry Maher; Denise Randall seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 17: 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

Motion by Denise Randall; David Jacobson seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 18: To see if the Town shall vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$300.00 to assist Senior Solutions

Motion by Denise Randall; Carol Bingham seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 19: To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate the sum of \$250.00 to Bull Creek Common Lands to support local land conservation and public access in the Bull Creek watershed

Motion by Denise Randall; Krista Gay seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Article 20: To set the time of future town meetings

Don Capponcelli moves that net year's meeting on the Monday prior to the first Tuesday in March at 6:00pm; Eric Alsvig seconds.

Sherry asks if the town can amend the article to say this day and time is being set for all future Town Meetings and not have to vote on it each year. David thinks that it's required to vote on each year. Sherry says she has spoken to people in Rockingham and they never vote on the time of the next Town Meeting because it is already set. David says that in Athens it has been voted on every year for over 50 years. This question can be looked into.

Emily Amana asks what the turnout was this year compared to other years. It is down from 80 last year. Krista says that it's articles that get people to come out more than the time.

Susan Ahn asks what the contentious articles were last year. Krista reviews the articles for alcohol, and Australian ballot voting.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

David invites Tom Charlton to address the body.

Article 21: To transact any further business proper to come before said meeting

Don Capponcelli thanks Hannah for her work in applying for the MERP grant for the town garage renovation and addition and other grants.

Lynn Morgan points people to the Green Up Day sign up materials.

Hannah announces the rabies vaccination clinic on March 8th from 1:30 – 3:00 at the town office.

Hannah thanks the Auditors who put the town report together. They work as volunteers and do a great job auditing and creating the town report.

Motion to adjourn by Sandi Capponcelli; Denise Randall seconds.

Put to a voice vote: Approved

Adjourned at: 7:25

Respectfully submitted

Hannah Regier, Town Clerk

Date

Approved by:

Signature

Office

Date

Signature

Office

Date