Select board Meeting

July 15, 2021

7:00pm

Athens Town Office

Present were Dennis Mirante, David Bemis, Janet Perry, Darlene Wyman, Tina White, Tom Taylor, Fact TV, Krista Gay, Donna Currier, Denise Randall, April Lyman, Wichi Artu, Tim Stevenson, Sherry Maher, Bonnie Hitchcock, Don Capponcelli, and Gordon Pugh.

David called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Adjustments to the Agenda: There were no adjustments.

Minutes of the Prior Meeting: Denise made the motion to accept the minutes of the prior meeting. Janet seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried.

Public Comments: Tina questioned as to why minutes were not taken when the board met at the town garage to view the mailboxes and stone wall. David stated the meeting was recessed and it was for viewing. He also stated no action was taken. Tina asked if this could be checked out to see if minutes are to be taken. Tina also wished to thank Kylee and Tom for trimming the brush at the bottom of Mill Hill. Tom asked what the road crew had done in the last 30 days. The brush was not cut, nothing was done on Bemis Hill and there was a washout on Valley Cemetery Road. David stated he had talked to Matt about Bemis Hill and Matt stated they would take care of it when they do the stone lining on the hill. Tim reported the Emergency committee had a report for boards and officials. Also he had an email that Darlene had forwarded to him concerning a grant from FEMA through VEM for a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Development grant to create or update the LHMP he didn’t know about. David stated he had applied for the grant. Dennis stated he had taken a ride down Brookline Road and saw the where the ledge had been fixed and felt it was a great improvement to that area. The road is wider and appears to be safer. Sherry asked why the floor was wet. It was stated that Sandi had cleaned and mopped the floor and because of the humidity it was still wet. Don stated Sandi did not wash the floor and the dampness was due to rising damp because the crawl space still needs to be attended to. Krista asked if Matt had been spoken to about the mulch at the town garage. David stated he talked to Matt and he said he needed the some of the mulch. David also stated it may be brought up about making a policy as to how the mulch could be distributed.

Boards and Officials: Tim stated the emergency committee had met and he had contacted VLCT about the liability issue around the school. VLCT assured him that since the building is owned by the town coverage would be available for an animal shelter in an emergency. Tim stated the major part of their meeting had to with climate change and what the committee could do to help with this. From this the idea arose as to doing something with the school. It would be ideal for housing animals and people during a heat wave. The committee would like to propose to the select board that a committee be formed for a school restoration committee. The committee would look into repairs that needed to be done as well as looking into air conditioning and a back-up heating system. David commented the committee should have a different name than a school restoration. The committee would be for planning what the school could be used for. Denise mentioned a few months ago the WNESU had asked about renting the school for special education. David stated the board had not received anything more about this. Tim stated the committee would have a lot of things to address. Denise stated that grants may be available for funding. Tim stated possibly COVID funds may be available. He also suggested it could be put in the budget, but would like to use alternative funding. David stated he would make a motion about forming a committee, but would ask people be found that would like to serve on this. Sherry stated she was concerned about the idea of this taking time and if the roof at the school is leaking it should be looked into sooner. Sherry asked if COVID funds could be used and if the money has been requested and if there was a plan for these funds, David there is a plan and would be working on it shortly. David made the motion to put on the next agenda to appoint the committee to deal with issues of the rehabilitation of the school house and uses of it and will discuss what we want the committee to do. Janet seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. Tim read a statement from Lynn about the school matter and wanted to voice her support of the forming of a committee to address the needs of the school and what it could be used for. Tim stated he would be contacting the Athenian and Sandi to put on facebook the needs of forming this committee. Sherry wished to thank Don Capponcelli and the road crew for helping with the trusses at the Meetinghouse. Sherry reported the committee has submitted the documentation for section 106 NEPA review and are waiting on their approval for what can be done on the windows. The Meetinghouse Committee is holding a concert on August 8. Sherry handed out flyers for Darlene to post. From now until August 15th the committee is holding a raffle for a cord+ of firewood and holding a silent auction for some lumber that was donated to the committee. Sherry will bring a box to the office for the auction bids and some raffle tickets. The winners will be chosen on August 15th. Don stated there was not much activity on the Cemetery Commission and they will be meeting in September. He also reported they have collected $500 for cemetery plots.

ARPA/CLFRF: David made the motion the Town of Athens accept its allocation of Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funding (CLFRF) from the US Treasury, along with the Award Terms & Conditions and Assurances of Compliance with the Civil Rights Requirements that are requirements of accepting these funds. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. David moved to appoint Janet Perry to serve as the Town’s Authorized Representative as required by the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funding (CLFRF) from the US Treasury to sign the Award Terms and Conditions and Assurances of Compliance with the Civil Rights Requirements by July 15, 2021 and David moved Janet Perry be the contact person for the Town for the CLFRF award from the US Treasury. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. Tina asked what the appointment was for. David stated it is for accepting the monies from the federal government that Darlene signed up for last month and this is the proclamation for that. Janet will be the one to sign the papers and interact with them. Tina asked if this was the Covid monies Sherry had mentioned. Janet stated we would receive half the money this year and half next year and we have until 2026 to disburse the money. Tina asked if it was earmarked as to what the money had to be spent on. David stated there are conditions. David stated these motions were not on how the money is to be spent, but just on accepting the money. Tina asked that once we get a committee for the restoration if the committee suggest these monies go towards that. Janet stated there are other grants available through covid for municipalities for structures and such. Wichi asked about grants and matching funds. David stated there had been talks about using funds like this as matching funds because we have to get other grants we’ll have to match them. Janet stated it is all in the way the board applies for the funds and how it is worded. Sherry stated she had done some research on the covid funds and was looking at a detailed listing on the kinds of things the fund could be used for she didn’t see where infrastructure in general did not seem to be available to use that money for. Tim asked for clarification as to whether Gary Fox had been asked to help with writing grants. Wichi asked about the process of how the money would be decided to be used for. David stated this has not been discussed yet. The board is going through the process needed to receive the money. Sherry asked if it would be discussed at a board meeting as to how the money would be spent. David stated it would be discussed at a meeting. Denise and Tina were confused as to how we would get the monies and not know what it is for. David stated it would not be just sent to us. We have to say we will take the money.

David made the motion to sign the agreement for the Sheriff’s contract. Janet seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. Tom asked if the board could increase the hours the sheriff’s department patrols the town because people are driving too fast on the roads. David stated he had spoken to the sheriff’s department and they would work on it. Janet seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. Tom asked if the fines were paying for the contract. They are not, but we do get about half.

David made the motion to sign the contract with the Windham County Humane Society. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried.

Town Meeting: Discussion on whether to have some of the articles and elected officials as Australian ballot because there was more voter participation. A vote at a Town Meeting would have to be held. Denise stated she thought any article on Australian ballot could not be discussed at Town meeting. David stated it could be discussed, but could not be amended. David stated that voting Australian ballot may bring in more people. Denise stated that if we vote Australian ballot it would have to be done by the book. Tina stated she loved that we had more participation, but she helped count the ballots and there was a lot of misinformed people that were voting and didn’t have all the information and when we vote in person that people are more informed about what’s going on. She also stated even though there was an online pre town meeting, a lot of people did not have computers or did not know how to attend the meeting. Tina stated she was disappointed we did not have an in person meeting because she felt it was a much uninformed voting for our town. She suggested the possibility of changing to a Saturday or an evening meeting. David agreed that with the pandemic this was a different year and not a great situation all around but hopefully we will be able to have the town meeting next year. But this would be a way for more people to vote. Krista felt the discussion that goes on at an in person town meeting is important and you have actual conversations and the opportunity to amend the articles. David stated if it hadn’t had to be Australian ballot this year we would not be having this discussion. Everyone likes to have town meeting the way it is and it has been tried to have town meeting on Saturday and didn’t get any more people. David stated it’s something to discuss and it’s not something the board can do. It has to be a vote of the town. Wichi stated there are pros and cons and by voting Australian ballot no one knew what his vote was. It was brought up that voting at town meeting can be done by paper ballot. David stated if it was put to a town vote, we would not be eliminating town meeting, but some of the articles would be voted on by Australian ballot. David stated it was just something to consider, but would have to be decided for by the town at a special town meeting or at next year’s town meeting. Denise stated we should look into whether if something is on the Australian ballot if there could be any discussion. April asked how many people show up after town meeting to vote on the school budget. Darlene stated there was a really good turn out, but in the past it has been average. Krista pointed out this was the highest election turnout ever in the history of the United States and didn’t think the number of people that turned out this year should be the basis for this. David stated it wasn’t something to do tonight, but it was something that should be discussed and thought about. Janet stated she would like to see it settled tonight. Denise stated she was not willing to vote on it until she knows for sure we can have discussion on something that’s on an Australian ballot. David stated you can decide on what you want to have for discussion on the Australian ballot. You can have everything or only the officials or budget. Sherry stated that the election of officers this year was a special circumstance and all that was needed was to sign a consent form to put your name on a ballot. In the future it would require petitions. She felt there was a real good argument for putting the select board and other significant positions on an Australian ballot. Tina stated she felt it was already difficult to get people to participate in town and it’s one more step and she felt and it’s handicapping more participation. Krista asked about whether the board would look into the question about discussion on an Australian ballot. Denise will look into this.

Tax Rate: David made the motion to set the municipal tax rate at $1.15. Janet seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. The school homestead tax rate is $1.5750 and the school nonhomestead tax rate is $1.4446.

Warrants and Mail: The warrants were reviewed and signed. The mail was reviewed.

Tom presented the board with the estimates for repairing his stone wall. David contacted VLCT to put a claim in, but has not heard back. David will forward the estimates on to VLCT.

Roads: Darlene reported for Matt the underdrain on Brookline Road is working well and they have two more segments to go. They are working on the grants and aid project for stone lining. Everything is in good order. He is waiting to hear back on prices for a backhoe and for what an extended warranty would cost. Tina asked where the stone lining was being done. David mentioned Bemis Hill and Brookline Road down near hedgehog. Sherry asked about the tree at the Meetinghouse that needs to be cut. Tom mentioned there is a tree on Brookline Road near the trailer park that needs cutting. David will talk to Matt about them. Tom asked if the chipper was for sale. Matt will be asked to the next board meeting to discuss the chipper.

Executive Session: At 8:40pm David made the motion to move into executive session to discuss a legal and personnel matter where premature general public knowledge would clearly place the town of Athens at a substantial disadvantage. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. At 9:05pm David made the motion to move out of executive session. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. No decisions were made. No motions were made.

Further Business: Krista mentioned that executive session was confined to only contract or discipline matters. She asked whether it was a contract of discipline issue. David stated it could be disciplinary. There being no further business, David made the motion to adjourn. Denise seconded. Put to a vote. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 9:06pm.

Respectfully submitted

Darlene Wyman. Town Clerk