

Athens Selectboard Meeting Minutes
November 16, 2023
6:30pm at the Athens Town Office

In attendance: Sandi Capponcelli, Hannah Regier, Janet Perry, David Bemis, Denise Randall, Krista Gay, Amber Stevens, Carol Bingham, Matt Perry, Michael McConnell (WRC), Danny Taylor, Tara Taylor, Maddy Murray (GMP), April Lyman, Carmen Dresser, Don Capponcelli, Sherry Maher, Tim Stevenson, Tom Taylor, Linda Taylor, Tina White, FACT TV (Cody)

Called to order at 6:36

Adjustments to Agenda

Denise makes a motion to move the executive session to before the public comments. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor

Krista asks if this is about the letter and if it will be released. Sandi says it will. David says the motion has already been made regarding the letter at the last meeting.

Minutes of Prior Meeting

Denise makes a motion to accept the minutes from the prior meeting. Krista seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Executive Session

Sandi makes a motion to go into executive session at 6:38 for a personnel matter.

Krista asks to check the statute if this is a proper topic for executive session. Sandi says it is.

Krista seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Matt is asked to stay in the meeting.

Denise makes a motion to exit executive session at 7:40. David seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

No decisions were made in executive session.

Krista makes a motion that in order for the selectboard to consider taking action on a complaint against a town employee or appointed official, that complaint must be in writing, signed, and submitted to the selectboard. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Sandi makes a motion that the town hire an attorney for a legal matter that the selectboard needs to look into. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David makes a motion that Sandi prepare a notice for the selectboard indicating confidence in the town employee and employees in the past. Krista seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Public Comments

Carmen Dresser asks what the policy is for non-employees driving town equipment. She wants to know who authorizes it and what the process is. David says that since the town lost Eugene the town has been contracting with Ivor Stevens and he and his employees have been driving the equipment. Danny Taylor says that anyone would need to be on town insurance policy and have a medical card. David agrees this is true, but Ivor does have his own company insurance and has a certificate on file with the town. Carmen says she saw someone else in a town truck in Saxtons River today. David says it was probably to help when dropping the big truck off at ATG for repair.

Tim Stevenson wants to suggest that the selectboard consider having meetings in the community center so that when executive sessions happen, the public doesn't have to wait outside.

April Lyman says she has spoken with Brandi at the Saxtons River Market about selling trash bags at the store. She says she would. David clarifies that the market wouldn't have to buy the bags from the town, they would simply sell them and collect the money for the town. Hannah says that they couldn't take a commission. Hannah will reach out and arrange for that.

Tina White asks what happens if someone who isn't a town employee has an accident in a town vehicle. David says he will look into that.

Linda Taylor wants to know why the lettering isn't on the town truck. Denise says Matt wasn't able to get to Chester on the day of the appointment.

David makes a motion to have the town truck lettered and the town will pay for it. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Tom Taylor wants an answer on the leaves and ditch in front of his house. David says he suggested to Matt to put a piece on the culvert but Matt said it's on private property. Tom doesn't agree and says Matt drives across what he's calling private property with the grader.

Danny Taylor says that tomorrow morning the culvert that's on private property will be eliminated if the town can't maintain it. He says the state put a bridge sign up posting the weight of the Mill Hill bridge. Now there is no visibility when you need to turn at the bottom of the hill. Danny wants to know what's going on with the letter from the last selectboard meeting. David says it will be added to the minutes from that meeting.

Carmen Dresser asks if the selectboard should be giving the road crew directions on what to do with the roads in town. She also thinks that the road foreman should be at the meeting. David says that the public can address questions to the selectboard and the board talks with the road foreman.

WRC

Mike McConnell and Maddy Murray introduce the Resiliency Zone project that they are working on. Maddy is a project manager for Green Mountain Power and they are partnering with WRC on this project. David says that the town does lose power a lot. GMP and WRC are working to create resiliency zones where critical infrastructure is. There is one in Rochester with a solar array and one in Grafton with backup batteries in homes. She passes out a flyer for their “Zero Outages” program which is trying to make sure customers don’t experience any outages by 2030. They need approval from the state to start but already have the technology. David asks about the Tesla battery lease program. Maddy says it currently costs \$55/month now, or it is \$20k to buy them, but their program is different. The batteries have 27KWh of energy stored on them and can last a while if people take care with usage.

Sandi talks about the energy use in her house and thinks it is too much to run on a battery. Matt says WRC is going to do some community-level outreach to learn what the solutions might be for each household. David talks about how long it has taken in the past to fix one tree that was knocking out power for the whole town. David asks about grants for people who want generators. Maddy says they want to learn more about what those needs are. She says there will be state funding coming available in the spring for battery installations, electric panel and wiring upgrades in homes for certain income levels. The current Resiliency Zone program is also covered by a state grant that WRC has received. Mike and Maddy will send info to Hannah who can distribute it to the board.

Meeting with Budget Committee

Amber asks questions from the budget committee.

Trash and Recycling: The board suggests a separate article with an amount for returning to an every-other-week level of service. David says to have quotes for both levels of service available.

Large Truck Replacement: There is currently \$58,304 in the equipment fund reserved to replace the large truck. David thinks the schedule needs to be revisited. No decisions for next year.

Equipment fund: Prices are going up and should the town add 3% to the fund? David thinks the schedule should be reevaluated. Hannah suggests that the selectboard work with Mike Bates on that project so that the schedule will get followed.

Reclassification of Roads: Does anything need to be added to legal services for that? The board suggests \$7,500 as a total for the year.

Highway wages and hiring a laborer: Denise suggests the selectboard meet with the budget committee at another meeting.

Matching funds for projects: Separate contributions for Ober Hill bridge work, Community Center scoping, and other projects. Still need more info on the projects.

Planning commission: David thinks there are grants from the state for that work, but he thinks some money from the town is needed. He doesn’t know the amount needed. Need to ask the planning commission.

Community Center Fund: Hannah says that in order to keep moving forward with grant applications for the Community Center, some funds should be allocated for the scoping study.

Maggie Foley suggests 30% or more, which is \$8,000+. David suggests using the grant matching fund for this.

Questions for Matt: Amber will email Sandi who will talk to Matt about them.

Krista wants the budget committee to look into getting a porta-potty for the garage and water and a coffee making station. Sherry Maher suggests to look into the options that Rich Earth Institute has. She says there are two different options they have at the Brattleboro Farmers Market.

The selectboard will plan to come to the December 12th Budget Committee meeting and warn it as a special meeting. The final budget needs to be voted on by mid January.

Employment Notice

David says that Eugene passed away. Janet has an employment ad. It needs contact information. David asks Hannah to get a standard employment application from VLCT. David reads the ad. Tina White asks if the town is going to require the 5 years experience that is in the personnel policy. The board reviews the policy and doesn't see that requirement in there. Tina says she thinks that experience would be good.

Denise makes a motion to post the ad on the bulletin boards, the town website, with VLCT and in the Vermont Journal paper as a help wanted ad. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Boards and Officials, Treasurer Report

Hannah says she can skip the treasurer report in the interest of time.

Krista reads the School Board report, attached.

Don / Cemetery Commission — The 1st Wednesday in Dec will be their next meeting which will be about their budget request. Krista asks if he found out who was taking the flags. Don says they haven't.

Tim Stevenson / Emergency Committee — Suggests there needs to be a meeting between Tim, Hannah, Don and David to discuss how to handle communications during an emergency. He wants to make sure everyone is staying in communication and knows who is doing what. Tim says he has sent a copy of the Emergency Committee protocols to both David and Hannah.

Sherry / Meetinghouse Committee — They are still in a holding pattern finishing up the moisture mitigation work. The Division for Historic Preservation is ok with that. Farnham Insulation is waiting for the other contractors to do their work. They had a request to have an outreach event from Senior Solutions and in retrospect they think that should have been at the community center. Hannah says they've done those events in the town office before. Sherry clarifies that the Athens Historic Society paid off the Meetinghouse Committee's Housing Rehab loan, not the Meetinghouse Committee. She says she was dismayed to hear some statements in the recording from the last meeting that inferred some recklessness on the part of the Meetinghouse Committee in how the spending happened back in 2016, and she is disappointed that David let those comments stand. Sherry says that she was being responsible and keeping the board apprised at that time. David agrees that was what happened, and the board voted to approve the money being used for that purpose. Sherry asks if the selectboard could hold off from having conversations that should involve committee representatives who aren't present at a meeting.

There will be a tree lighting at the Meetinghouse on Sunday, Dec 3rd at 5:00pm. She thanks Jay and Ginger for the tree.

Sandi / Community Center — There is another rental on Dec 8th. On Dec 2nd, there will be a cookie exchange and children's Christmas gift shop.

Tim asks if the Planning Commission has met yet. David says it would be a good idea for them to meet. Janet says that they haven't met yet and there are scheduling issues. Tim is concerned that the commission isn't meeting yet. Krista asks that Janet let the selectboard know by the next meeting when their first meeting will be.

Policy / Delinquent Tax, Driveway and Development Standards

David says there is an updated Delinquent Tax policy for the board to read and then it will be voted on at the next meeting.

Janet asks if everyone had a chance to review the Driveway and Development Standards. The board looks at it. David says that will also be voted on at the next meeting. Krista asks how many requests there have been for new driveway access. Hannah says there have been two. Danny Taylor says that it's hard to follow the Driveway Access policy because of the way it reads, and then no one came out to look at the work. He says it doesn't make sense to keep making policies if they aren't being followed. He says the new one contradicts the access policy. Krista questions where the 12% grade comes from. David and Janet say it's from the state. Tina White asks what the difference is between a driveway and an access road. Janet says that an access road serves six or more house sites or driveways. Danny asks if the town approves the policy, is it going to bring town roads up to the state standards. Danny says that if work is being done on any segment of a road, the full road needs to be brought up to state standards. David says that when they are working on a road that is washed out, they try to bring the road up to the state standards. The town works with WRC on the grants in aid work. Danny thinks that if the new policy is voted on and enforced, it would mean that there wouldn't be any new development in town. Krista says she knows they are trying to get up to state standards which is hard for a small town. She thinks that after the Taylor Hill court decision, it seems that this policy is trying to stick it to people on Taylor Hill because it's the only road that it would apply to. Danny says that the state doesn't tell towns what to do, the towns are supposed to know what to do and they sign a paper every year. Danny says that the driveway policy is a higher standard than what the state requires.

Warrants and Mail

Warrants were signed and mail opened. The payroll warrant that wasn't here tonight will be left on the table tomorrow for the board to sign.

David asks if Hannah would be ok handing out Narcan at the town office. Hannah is willing to.

Further Business

Tina White asks about the letter that was from the last meeting and asks who it was from and why it wasn't signed. Krista explains that it was because Matt wasn't complaining about himself. Tina asks about the Access Roads Policy and wants to know why it's the same as the driveway policy — with dimensions. She wants to know why those standards are the same. The board says those are the state standards. She wants it explained why a driveway needs to meet the same standards as a housing development. Danny Taylor says that the state doesn't require it. He wants to know when the state said the town had to do this. He thinks it's simply a selectboard member looking into state standards and writing up a policy. He says the town can't even get a town plan. He thinks this policy duplicates the driveway policy and wants to know which would be followed.

Tom Taylor asks when he'll get an answer about the ditch and leaves in front of his house.

Danny asks why the town built a private pull-off by Oakes's pond. Danny says he brought a letter in last year and signed it and handed it to the selectboard, but nothing was ever done. He also wants to know where the minutes are when the board decided to hire Ivor to help with winter work. Krista says she wasn't aware of any meeting. Sandi says said there aren't notes and it wasn't a proper meeting. David says that Ivor is already hired by the town for other things so this is just expanding his contract. Krista says that she understands that the road foreman can make some decisions on his own, and wants to know when the board needs to be consulted as the road commissioner. David says this was an emergency situation. Danny says it was a decision and should have been a vote. David says it was discussed at the next meeting. Amber says that moving forward everything needs to be put out to bid fairly. The board agrees.

*Krista makes a motion to adjourn. Sandi seconds. All in favor.
Adjourned at 9:42*

Respectfully submitted,
Hannah Regier, Town Clerk

NOTES FROM THE SCHOOL BOARD
OCT. 2023

The new septic pumps were installed last month and all is working as it should. We are glad this trial is behind us.

School is off to a good start. The children have been working at earning “panther paws” when they are kind, act safe, persevere, and show care for their community. Once they fill the jar there is an All School Reward. This month it was a tea party, each student choice a tea and were given a honey pop to swirl in their tea. All had a fun time.

Save the date: on Sept 26 there will be an Open House from 5 to 6 pm. Hope many will come meet the staff and see what the students are working on.

Can anyone help? The PTO from the school will have a food booth at the Oct 7th Fall Fire Man’s Sale. They are asking for food donations for their booth. All the proceeds from this go toward special events and other needs of the school. If you can help call the school office and let them know.

A high light in the cafeteria is the new milk program. The SU has rolled out a pilot bulk, organic milk program district wide. All the schools are being provided with bulk organic milk from the Miller Farm to serve the students. So far this is going very well. There is a lot less waist, as the students are not throwing away partial carton fulls of milk. Student fill their cup with what they want and many are coming back for seconds.

An After School Program (ASP) is still being worked on. Since we were unable to get staffing for last year, we lost our 21C grant which is how the program had been paid for in recent years. The SU’s ASP coordinator has been looking into the use of ESSER funds to support two adults from 3 to 5 pm. If this can be pulled together there is still the fact that we are unable to run late busses this year, so parents will need to pick up their children at the school at 4:45. A survey has been sent home with students. It is critical that all parents take the time to fill out this survey and get it back to the school.

On Monday September 18th we had our third Community Forum. Thank you to those who participated in persona and via zoom. There were a number questions and concerns brought up. Some we were able to discuss that night and others we will need to seek advise on or pass onto the Grafton select board. Stay tuned for the next forum date. Until then, if anyone has questions or concerns please contact Krista or myself.

Sincerely,
Lynn Morgan