

Athens Selectboard Meeting Minutes
November 21, 2024
7:00pm at the Athens Town Office

In attendance: David Bemis, Sandi Capponcelli, Janet Perry, Krista Gay, Denise Randall, Hannah Regier, April Lyman, Amber Stevens, Heather Chaudoir, Don Capponcelli, Sherry Maher, Mike McConnell (WRC), FACT TV (Ginger), Meg Staloff (BDCC)

Called to order at 7:00

Adjustments to Agenda

None

Minutes of Prior Meeting

Sandi makes a motion to accept the minutes. Krista seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Public Comments

Denise reads comments from townspeople who sent her messages. Ben Picz wants to know when his road is going to get gravel, and why there is a beaver dam in front of the box culvert. He wants to know why there are no stone headers on the new culvert at the end of the beaver pond, and says no clean up has been done. He says the stones are at the town garage but haven't been installed. He also wants to know why the chipper is at a local garage for repairs.

Another anonymous townspeople mentioned to Denise that they heard Duane is on call for plowing, and Denise wants to know if it's true. David says that the board had talked about Duane helping if Matt was overwhelmed. Someone else in town thought that Dylan Perry has been working for the town and driving town equipment. Janet says that isn't true. Dylan is not currently working for Ivor Stevens either.

David says he hasn't seen the culvert that Ben is talking about but he thinks the headers will be done. They have been wanting to get the chipper fixed for a long time. Sandi says that the headers on the culvert were part of the job that A.S. Clark was supposed to do. It's possible that Matt was going to move the stones but can't do it by himself.

Sherry says it's good to see FACT TV here and she also congratulates Hannah for a successful event with Bull Creek Common Lands and Roger Haydock at the Community Center.

Krista wants to address Ben's questions more. Denise says that Ben has been asking for gravel on his road for a very long time. David didn't know it hadn't been done. Hannah says she thinks Whitney Rd. has been graded up to Ben's house as of a couple days ago.

Boards and Officials / Treasurer Report

Hannah says the town has received \$95,000 from FEMA for last year's damage on Reed Rd. And the Grants in Aid stormwater ditch work from this year has also been reimbursed. She wants to know what the process will be for submitting receipts for the other two road projects that have been done – the paving on Brookline Rd and the culvert past the beaver pond. Hannah doesn't know who is handling those grants, but the town has paid out a lot and it would be good to have that money come back in this fiscal year. Janet says Matt has talked with Mark Pickering and he will need all the receipts and timecards. Hannah asks for Matt to come and talk to her so they can pull out the documents that Mark needs. Janet says the guardrails are also part of the paving/bank reinforcement on Brookline Rd. Hannah has not been part of any of the conversations with Mark Pickering, so she needs someone to communicate with her on the specific needs.

Janet makes a motion that when Hannah gets the bill from Bazin Bros. For the tarring, she pays it immediately so it can be sent to the state for reimbursement. Krista seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Denise says she knows people have busy lives, but it would be nice if the road foreman could come to the selectboard meetings to present road information himself. Hannah agrees it would be critical to have him, especially at this time of year. David says it wouldn't be unreasonable. Denise also suggests that Matt set up a monthly meeting with Hannah to talk face to face on these grant processes. David says that the board should ask that Matt come in when he is needed, at least once a month.

Hannah says that there is now a complete design and cost estimate for the Community Center renovations from Jon Saccoccio. There are just a couple outstanding deliverables, including presentation size drawings that can be placed in the Community Center for people to see. She reiterates that there is currently not any funding lined up for moving forward on the project.

Amber says that FEMA reimbursement has been increased from 75% to 90% so some more funds should be coming in.

Don -- Cemetery Commission meeting on December 4th will be to set their budget.

Sherry – Meetinghouse – She and Ginger went to a conference in Grand Isle that was about handicapped access on historic buildings. She is waiting to hear back from Jon Saccoccio on cost estimates and options for handicapped access solutions for the Meetinghouse. She expects that not to be before January. There might be a VT Arts Council facilities grant that could be a fit for the project. This is a matching, reimbursable grant up to \$30,000, so the project would need to be \$60,000.

The Meetinghouse tree lighting is scheduled on December 1st, a Sunday, at 5:00pm.

Krista says that there is a full school board now. She says it's been tough that there have been so many homeschool students who are there for part of the day, but not enough to qualify as

being enrolled. But some homeschool students have really enjoyed the curriculum and joined the school now.

Community Center Committee is growing. There will be an elf coming to the Christmas Shop from the North Pole. Sandi says that they've been talking about cleaning up and fixing up the bathrooms so they are more presentable for all the rentals and activities that are happening. There will be a chowder / soup cookoff and basket raffle in February.

Krista thanks Hannah for election day going smoothly. Hannah thanks all the poll workers.

Janet says the Planning Commission isn't meeting until December 3rd to go over the town plan. Hannah asks if there's anything she can do to facilitate the LHMP. Mike McConnell says he will be contacting her about public meetings soon.

Culvert Butson Circle

Sandi says she has contacted Mark Pickering who wants to look at the situation. David asked Matt to get something in writing from Mark Pickering but hasn't seen that yet. Denise says she is almost embarrassed to be sitting on the board because they say they'll do things and never do. She says it's a joke and she's very frustrated. David says he thinks putting a new culvert in the Butson Circle location will help the town because it sends ice onto Brookline Rd. and makes it unsafe. He thinks if the residents buy the culvert, the town can put it in, but he is going to recuse himself on the vote for the culvert. David says the conflict is that he was on the board and agreed to the project when Tom brought it to the meeting, but he didn't realize it wasn't a town culvert at that point. The board discusses who isn't conflicted and if there are enough board members to vote on it. Krista says Janet shouldn't vote because she has relatives on Taylor hill who she has a personal issue with. Sandi agrees that Janet shouldn't vote on the culvert. Janet refuses to recuse herself.

Denise makes a motion that if the parties involved are still willing to purchase a culvert, the town will put it in. Sandi seconds.

Discussion: Heather Chaudoir says that one person made the offer to buy the culvert, not the whole road. She says she can't verify if the road agrees, but they will have a meeting if the town agrees to put it in.

Put to a vote: Sandi and Denise in favor. Janet opposed. David and Krista recuse themselves.

Krista makes a motion that the board publicly reprimand Janet for not recusing herself. Sandi seconds.

Discussion: Krista says that it is wrong and dirty for Janet to not recuse herself. Sandi says that it isn't appropriate in this case for Janet to vote. Denise also agrees that it is inappropriate. The board discusses process. Krista says that a majority of members need to vote to take any action. Recusals count as a no vote. On a five-member board, regardless of how many board members are present, three votes are needed to pass a motion. Denise points out that either way Janet's vote is a "no," if she recuses herself or if she votes. Denise says that once again the

board is not able to help the townspeople. David says that he agrees with the motion to put in the culvert. Sherry asks him to vote then.

Reprimand put to a vote: Sandi, Denise and Krista in favor. David against. Janet does not vote.

Janet asks what it entails to be reprimanded. Krista says there is a public record that the board thinks Janet has engaged in wrongdoing. She says most people would be embarrassed.

David says they will put the decision off until the next meeting. He will contact VLCT or the SoS office about his recusal. Sandi says she thinks David's recusal is the weakest one of the three. David says he has multiple reasons. He doesn't share what the additional reasons are for his recusal.

Sandi points out that winter is coming and time is of the essence. David says that if the Taylor Hill residents have a meeting in the meantime and agree to purchase the culvert, then the vote will be clearer.

Krista says there is a history of Taylor Hill residents taking on responsibility for stuff and then the town not following through. Heather Chaudoir says she thinks Danny had said he'd buy the culvert, but she isn't sure about materials. She wants to know what the culvert would cost so she can bring that to the Hill. David and Denise suggest they contact suppliers themselves.

David makes a motion to have a special meeting on Sunday December 1st at 3:00pm at the town office. Krista seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Hannah will not be available.

Sherry asks questions about the process. Krista says that the board needs to figure out if they have a quorum and Taylor Hill residents need to decide what they can pay for. Both pieces of information will be gathered for the next meeting.

April says the town already did a driveway culvert in town without voting on it. Heather says it's going to be hard to get people together if there isn't something solid that they are discussing. She also doesn't know if Butson Circle owners will need to be involved.

The board and attendees discuss where the water comes from for the culvert, where the ice effects, and who is responsible for it. Sandi offers to read through old minutes to find what the board said in 2019.

BDCC / SeVeds

Meg Staloff says SeVeds, their partner nonprofit, sends a funding request each year. BDCC implements the programs that SeVeds develops. She explains that BDCC does business support and workforce development. She works with Community Programs and has worked with Hannah on Community Center funding ideas. She tries to make sure towns know what

resources are available for them. Last year 86% of towns supported them financially. Krista speaks in support of the Young Professionals program.

MERP Grant

Hannah says the town was awarded \$375,410.41 from the grant to be used for the Town Garage. A small amount for the Community Center was included in the application also. Mike McConnell thinks that if the Garage work takes all the funds, the town isn't required to use any on the Community Center. There aren't any amounts attached to specific line items in the grant's scope of work.

Sandi makes a motion that David sign the MERP grant agreement. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Don recommends the town work with the plans Jon Saccoccio created. Don offers to take those plans and come up with construction drawings from them and reduce some costs by changing elements like reducing the amount of concrete. He also wants to inquire with local contractors about what makes sense to them for getting the construction done. Specifically, is it better to bid it out as one big project or have Don be the general contractor and piece it out to the specialized contractors. David thinks that is reasonable but points out that everything will need to be put out to bid. Sandi clarifies that they want to find out how to make this appealing for contractors in town to bid on -- most of the local projects are too small for local contractors to bother with.

Don seems to be available to be the general contractor if the town goes that route. Mike says there is ~\$58,000 in the grant award for soft costs including construction management and other support roles. Krista wants to make sure that Don is paid fairly, and the insurance is in order. David suggests Don could be hired as an employee of the town to do the construction management so he would be under VLCT insurance and get an hourly wage. Don says there would be potential cost savings, like the town could purchase materials directly. Mike McConnell suggests the town consult the procurement policy as this decision is being made.

Hannah says that some of the "soft costs" could go towards Mike or someone at WRC to help with project management and grant admin.

David asks Don to first ask the local contractors what their preference is for modeling the project and come back to the board. If Don ends up taking on the role of general contractor, the board wants to make sure the job description and expectations are clear, and that Don is available to follow through with the job.

Don says he is interested in having the town take on the role of general contractor and having local contractors pick up the parts of the job. Sandi says again that they will need to bid. Krista asks if Don is licensed and insured. VT doesn't have licensing, but Don says he has a contractor liability insurance policy. David again says that Don could be on the town's workers comp if he is hired. If he is hired, it would be a temporary or per diem position.

Don will come back to the December meeting with a plan for moving forward. Hannah asks if he could put together a plan and a timeline for how the project would unfold, with specific milestones. Don says he can do that. Hannah says the grant funds need to be used by the end of 2026.

Hannah says that there are enough funds to have Jon Saccoccio continue with the construction drawings. Don doesn't think it's a good use of the money.

Hannah says that MERP is a reimbursement grant. There is a financial hardship application which could get 20% of funds to the town in advance. Hannah says she can work with Mike to do that application. She thinks it would be helpful to have that so that paying for the work isn't a burden on the town. Mike says that BGS is being very inclusive in this grant and they are willing to accept the hardship documentation to get funds available sooner.

Krista makes a motion that Hannah submits the financial hardship application. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David makes a motion to authorize Don to investigate a scenario where the town would be the general contractor for the project and bring information back to the December meeting. Krista seconds. Put to a vote: Four in favor, Sandi abstains.

Hannah asks Mike if the town will need to contract with WRC for his continued support. Mike says not yet.

David makes a motion to sign the letter of support for Colin Bratton, as an expert with Windham Regional, to assist the TAP grant for the large Brookline Rd. Box culvert. Krista seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

FEMA Mitigation Program Grant

Hannah explains that Colin Bratton and she had submitted a pre-application for the state's Hazard Mitigation fund program that has ~90mil available for towns. The town has now been invited to apply for the full grant. This could possibly cover the entire cost of the Ober Rd. flood mitigation work that is currently being scoped. Alyssa Sabetto has put in \$1.8 mil as a potential ask for the town, which can be adjusted.

There are a few prerequisites that the town doesn't have in place yet. One is the LHMP needs to be complete and signed off on. The other is that the town won't score very well if they aren't part of the National Flood Insurance Program. Alyssa thinks that if the town commits to working towards getting into the NFIP, and takes some steps, that will help with the grant scoring, even if the town isn't into the program by the time the grant app is due in April. David asks if WRC can help with the process. Hannah says that Alyssa has said she can help some and will also put

her in touch with the state's flood plain coordinator who will have more to do with the work that needs to be done.

David makes a motion to apply for the FEMA HMPG and work toward enrolling in the National Flood Insurance Plan for the town. Denise seconds.

Discussion: Denise asks if the flood maps are up to date and if joining the NFIP would help get them up to date. The maps don't reflect the reality of flooding. Hannah reminds the board that she had shared drafts of new maps a year ago. She doesn't think that being in the program has an effect on getting new maps. David says that when the maps are updated, it will affect residents who want to purchase flood insurance. He says getting new maps isn't anything the town can control.

Hannah says that the NFIP requires that the town have ordinances regarding development in mapped flood plains.

Denise asks if there's a cost. David says there isn't a cost except for time. It will help with grant applications in the future.

Hannah says there is one more piece of the grant application, which is a cost benefit analysis, which is based on past damages to the road. She has looked in the files and the town doesn't have great records on flood events. She asks if anyone can help pull together a list of past floods with the month, year, duration, and cost. Hannah thinks Tom Taylor might have some memory of the floods. David suggests going to the state for information on when the town got flood recovery money. Denise and Janet say that 2006 was a big flood. David also says that town reports could also be a source. Sandi offers to help research the list of flood events for Ober Hill. Hannah thinks that private property damage could be included as well.

Put to a vote: all in favor.

David amends the motion: that a selectboard member be able to sign the grant application if and when needed between meetings. Krista seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Budget 2025

Amber asks the board about the open budget issues:

Small truck – the budget committee put \$15,000 in the R&M line that could be used either for transmission work or be put towards a new truck. The current truck may need repair to either stay in service or be used as a trade in.

Matt is getting an estimate for a new truck. The board discusses options for replacing the small truck. There is \$38,862 in the equipment fund now. Loan through the state's equipment loan program, capital lease, etc.

Legal fees -- \$5,000

The Town Office roof needs to be replaced. David and Don suggest going with standing seam. \$11,000 is put in the budget, incl. furnace maintenance. Additional funds for the roof can be taken from the Building Renovation fund.

Highway employees: put in salary figures and use them towards contracted services if no one is hired. COLA increase: 2.5% on both 2024 salaries.

Health insurance – budget for family plan for a new employee. David suggests looking into MVP. Krista has the opinion that BCBS is a national program and covers you anywhere. David says that MVP partners with Cigna for coverage outside of the MVP area. Both need to have the same coverage according to the VT market. David suggests that Matt could investigate it if he wanted because it's a small savings for him as well.

Warrants and Mail

The warrants are signed and the mail opened.

Krista reached out to VLCT about the oil tank insurance in the case of vandalism and an oil spill. There is coverage for damage for vandalism; no flood coverage; if there is a spill, there is limited pollution coverage. The board wants to know what limited coverage means and if additional coverage could be added.

David says the insurance the town has for fraud requires secondary communication for any change in vendor information.

There is a quote from Eastern Salt Company for \$85.63 ton. Janet will look into it.

Further Business

Sandi wants to make sure that the community center committee can do some painting and get paper towel holders for the Community Center. She wants to take this out of the building maintenance budget, not the CCAC fund.

April asks what size culvert she is trying to price. 18" x 120 ft. plastic + collars. She asks if the town could consider purchasing the culvert and the Taylors put it in. David says that should be discussed at the next meeting. April thinks that the town isn't going to get it put in because Matt doesn't have any help.

Sandi makes a motion to adjourn. David seconds. All in favor.

Adjourned at 9:41

Respectfully submitted,
Hannah Regier, Town Clerk