

Athens Special Selectboard Meeting Minutes  
December 12, 2023  
7:00 pm at the Athens Town Office

In attendance: Sandi Capponcelli, Hannah Regier, Janet Perry, David Bemis, Denise Randall, Krista Gay (by Facetime), Amber Stevens, Carol Bingham, Dennis Mirante, Anna Warn, William Borsi, Mike Bates, April Lyman, Don Capponcelli,

**Called to order at 7:00**

**Adjustments to Agenda**

*David makes a motion to add signing the Municipal Assistance Bureau conflict of interest disclosure form for locally managed projects to the agenda. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all five in favor.*

**Public Comments**

William Borsi asks if anything has been done about putting a sign on the truck yet. The board doesn't know. William asks if the truck is still being used outside of town. Denise says the truck shouldn't be going out of town for personal use. David says he doesn't know the exact movement of the truck between the last meeting and this meeting.

Anna Warn says she presented a problem in August about the truck being at the Harmonyville store three days in a row. She says she hasn't had a response. David says that the selectboard has been dealing with the issue.

Dennis Mirante asks if the meeting agenda could have the topics that will be discussed on it. David and Denise say that this meeting is to meet with the budget committee and point out that is #4 on the agenda. David says after the budget meeting, there will be a compensation review and executive session. Dennis wants to know the purpose of the executive session. Sandi says that it's for the hiring of a new employee and the compensation package for him.

Don Capponcelli says the MERP building assessments were yesterday. There were a couple surprises in the community center. A cast iron waste pipe is split in the boiler room. Don can fix the split pipe himself. There is also a leak where the vent pipe goes through the roof and is leaking into the bathroom. A truss is starting to rot out where the leak is which is going to become a structural issue. Don has an idea for how it could be fixed. David suggests having three roofing companies come to look at it and give the town quotes. Denise asks how serious the structural issue is and Don says they caught it in time, but it does need to be addressed.

*David makes a motion to get some estimates from three roofing companies and discuss by email or phone to make a decision on that. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all five in favor.*

*Denise makes a motion that Don replace the split pipe in the boiler room. Put to a vote: Janet, David, Denise and Krista in favor. Sandi abstains.*

### **Meeting with Budget Committee**

#### Grant matching fund

- Ober Hill bridge won't be done in 2024
- The bridge scoping study will be done with a \$50,000 grant
  - o \$5,000 would be 10% if it needs a match
- \$8,000 for 30% of Community Center scoping
- In the future, matching will possibly be needed for the culvert project above Reed Rd.
- The board suggests putting \$13,000 in the grant matching fund

#### Grant revenue

- FEMA grant revenue isn't known yet and Amber doesn't know when it will be known
  - o Some amount will need to be put into the grant revenue side of the budget by the time the town report goes to print – might have to be an estimate
- The unused MERP mini grant funds will be put in surplus to be used in January for the final bill for the garage scoping work

#### Equipment Fund

##### Large truck plan:

- Hannah says there is a huge bill for repairs on the large truck that will put it about \$6,000 over budget for this year.
- David asks if anyone has looked into what a lease would cost. No one has. Janet has been looking online for used trucks but they are the same age as the current truck.
- There is \$58,300 in the equipment fund earmarked for the large truck replacement. David says that might be close to buying a used truck, which could still have issues. Possibly get a warranty if the truck isn't too old.
- Mike Bates offers to get some figures on available trucks, but probably not before January 25<sup>th</sup>. He says the big truck was supposed to be replaced this year according to the schedule.
- Mike says the selectboard should get some prices and then ask the taxpayers if they want to borrow to make up the difference. Mike and the board discuss leasing versus buying, and how long trucks should be kept. He says it will cost the town a lot of money to buy and keep a new 6-wheeler. Janet says it would be at least \$200,000. Amber says that most of the work could be done by the one-ton truck, and a ten-wheeler could actually fit on most of the town's roads. Used 10-wheelers are easier to find. The board asks Mike Bates to look into prices for used 6- and 10-wheelers.
- Recalculating the entire schedule: David asks if Mike can look into where we're at with the schedule and come up with new, realistic figures and replacement dates for all the equipment. The town would be looking at a smaller sized used grader for the next one.

Hannah will get Mike the paperwork on the current grader. The board expresses appreciation for Mike's work.

#### Tablet for Listers and Highway

- Amber is looking into prices. There's a program that VLCT uses that can calculate road materials from a photo. For the listers it would just be for taking photos and notes.
- iPad prices are from \$329 - \$1000. Amber will ask VLCT which model is needed to run the highway app.
- The copier in the office is still ok according to the company that services it.
- The Listers computer is off of warranty, but they say it's fine for the remote work they do with it.

#### Chloride tank

- Still need quotes on this – Sandi will look into it.

Hannah asks for quotes to be in by the January 9<sup>th</sup> budget committee meeting. The selectboard will also meet with the budget committee at that meeting.

#### Water for the town garage

- The water hasn't been tested at the town garage so the board is looking into a cooler and 5 gallon jugs. Quotes from W.B. Mason. It would be about ~\$600 for the cooler and water for the year. Amber will look into prices for a porta potty or Rich Earth unit. Hannah passes on an email from Sherry Maher with some info on the Rich Earth solutions. It sounds like there is some cost to construction and then just a service fee.
- Krista asks about a coffee pot. Janet says Matt already has a Keurig machine but needs good water and a container to keep the mice out of the coffee supplies. Sandi says there's a small refrigerator in the town garage. Hannah suggests \$100 to get the garage set up for making coffee.

*David makes a motion to sign the Municipal Assistance Bureau conflict of interest disclosure form for locally managed projects. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: four in favor, Krista abstains. [David leaves the meeting at 7:54.]*

Sandi will get with Matt and try to fill in the outstanding highway line items.

- Need to get those items filled in by January 9th
- Also need to ask Matt what the need is regarding the sander

*Sandi makes a motion to raise the minimum wage for employees to the new state minimum wage of \$13.67/hr. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all four present in favor.*

#### Fire and Rescue contracts

- Fire will stay the same at \$9,400. So far, the call numbers are down from the estimated 4-5.
- For Rescue, it looks like the new contract amount is dropping to \$5,300.

#### Planning Commission

- Janet says they met and John Oberling will check with WRC for another grant. She doesn't think there are matching funds needed.

#### Community Center building maintenance

- \$2500, knowing there is a leaking roof, boiler maintenance and a pipe to replace

Members of the public comment about the amount of taxes they are going to have to pay and how many people in town are on Social Security. Sandi says the board understands, and the prices of services are always going up. There are concerns that the education taxes are going to go up next year. Denise says the selectboard has no control over what the state does for education taxes. Carol Bingham suggests Anna Warn talk to a school board member about the school taxes. Krista says she isn't on the district wide budget committee. Krista says this is a good faith proposal for what it takes to operate the town in an ethical and fair manner, and the taxpayers have the ability to adjust it or vote it down at town meeting. Hannah says that hopefully it's beneficial for members of the public to see the budgeting process in action and how much care is put into it. The numbers are based on real quotes for what it takes to run the town.

There is discussion on whether the compensation review should be in executive session or not. Krista thinks the discussion should be in open session. She asks, given the public's view on the overuse of executive sessions, what the benefit would be of having the discussion in executive session. Amber asks if there was a hiring committee put in place and if that committee could also be a personnel committee and present a compensation package proposal to the selectboard so the board doesn't have to go into executive session about it. Denise points out that on the agenda, the compensation review is a separate item from executive session. The board agrees to discuss it in open session.

#### **Compensation Review**

Krista says that especially as a government employer, common benefits are dental, life insurance, short and long term disability ,and vision. They are usually offered and aren't that expensive. She says that when hiring people, the town claims to have a robust benefit package, but it isn't in line with other towns.

Sandi doesn't have the disability quotes yet because the town needs to have a second employee hired in order to fill out the VLCT quote form. The coverage is for employers of 2-9 employees. Sandi hasn't looked into dental and vision yet but will get quotes from VSP and

Delta Dental. For the dental, Krista suggests getting rates for a plan that at least covers a crown. Sandi also considers setting up an HSA account for employees.

Clerk / Treasurer compensation and benefits: Hannah says that the board has been talking about making salaries more competitive for the highway employees, and she has also been thinking about how her roles could be restructured. Currently she is doing four jobs in about 10 hours a week and she does the minimum needed for all those jobs. Hannah proposes that she could work about twice as many hours, open the town office another day, and be able to help the selectboard with more admin stuff that she isn't able to currently because she is swamped with the other jobs. She has looked at VLCT salary data for Clerk / Treasurers and has some ideas about how to restructure how she's compensated so it's more functional for both the town and for herself. Krista says that she's noticed Hannah has been doing extra work beyond her job descriptions and thinks a higher wage and/or more hours sounds reasonable. Hannah gives the board a proposal, on paper, to read and consider.

### **Executive Session**

*At 8:22, Sandi makes a motion to go into executive session to make an employment decision. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all four in favor.*

*Janet steps out at 8:55*

*Sandi makes a motion to exit executive session at 9:02. Put to a vote: Sandi, Krista and Denise in favor.*

No decisions were made in executive session.

*Sandi makes a motion to offer the most qualified candidate, subject to him passing a CDL license check, the job of road crew, with a starting wage of \$25.19/hour. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all four in favor.*

*Sandi makes a motion to give the road foreman a \$3.60/hr pay increase to reflect the median wage paid by other towns across the state of Vermont, bringing his wage to \$28.83/hr. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: three in favor. Janet abstains.*

Dennis Mirante asks for public comments. Sandi says it's not on the agenda but she'll make an exception. Dennis comments that the town should look at different ways of doing what its been doing. He says people are speaking up that the taxes are too high and they can't afford it. He says sometimes people have to give up things. He says the town either needs to cut spending or find more revenue, and without any businesses in town, he doesn't know where more revenue would come from. Dennis asks if the benefits package was taken into account when

they looked at the wages. Sandi says they looked into all of it. The majority of towns pay 90-100% of health insurance.

*Denise makes a motion to adjourn. Sandi seconds. All four in favor.  
Adjourned at 9:08*

Respectfully submitted,  
Hannah Regier, Town Clerk