

Athens Special Selectboard Meeting Minutes
December 13, 2022
7:00pm at the Athens Town Office
Joint meeting with the Budget Committee

In attendance: Sandi Capponcelli, Hannah Regier, Janet Perry, Harold Noyes, David Bemis, Amber Stevens, Denise Randall, Mike Bates, Keith Hermiz (Grafton Rescue), Robbie Sprague (SR Fire Dept)

Called to order at 7:00

Adjustments to Agenda

Moving emergency services contract up to after public comments.

Public Comments

Amber says the Grafton selectboard has approved a traffic ordinance to change the stop sign at the intersection in Cambridgeport. The stop sign will be moving to the bridge side (121 E) and there will not be a stop sign from the Athens side anymore. The yield sign will stay the same from the Grafton side of the intersection.

Fire and Emergency Services Contract

David says they were contacted by Saxtons River that they are cancelling the contract with Athens. Sandi has been talking with Grafton about fire and emergency services. Sandi has contracts with Grafton Fire and Grafton Rescue in hand for the board to sign.

Sandi makes a motion that David sign the Grafton Fire Department contract and the EMS contract as representative of the selectboard. Denise seconds.

Discussion: The contract will start on January 1st. Rob will check with Keene mutual aid if anything needs to be changed for them. The Grafton entities will send invoices to the town quarterly.

Put to a vote: all in favor.

David signs the contracts.

David asks if there are email contacts for the forest fire warden to give information about fire permits. Rob will email contact info to the town email. David also wants to be signed up to get text alerts from KMA when there are reports for forest fires or any fire or rescue call.

Grafton will bring a rescue truck up to one of the Athens community dinners and have someone on hand to answer questions.

David says that he will respond to the email from the Saxtons River trustees and decline their proposal for services. The selectboard will send a letter thanking the Saxtons River fire and rescue chiefs for their years of service. The contract change was not due to any lack of their quality service. Sandi will draft that letter and have it by the Thursday selectboard meeting.

Amber says Grafton Fire and Rescue has a social media person who puts stuff in the Grafton News and he will start sending fire prevention information and other news to the Athenian as well.

Meeting with Budget Committee

Fire contract will be \$9,400.00

Rescue contract will be \$9,305.80

We will make a new line in the budget to separate the two services.

Question about if Golden Cross will stay in the area if Rockingham drops them. Rescue Inc. would cost \$26/per resident which would come to almost \$10,000. The selectboard wants to put \$2,900 in a miscellaneous category under Public Safety in case the town is forced to change contracts.

David makes a motion to raise the wage for hourly employees to minimum wage, \$13.18/hour. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

The selectboard reviews the VLCT municipal benefits report to see what other towns pay highway employees.

David suggests an 8% raise for both employees to match inflation.

David makes a motion for Eugene's pay to go up to \$22.19 and Matt's pay to \$25.92. Sandi seconds. Eugene's pay put to a vote: all in favor. Matt's pay put to a vote: 4 in favor, Janet abstains.

Budgeting for grant funded projects:

How can the town budget better for projects that the town is applying for grants for? We need to pay out of pocket one year and then budget for reimbursement revenues that come in the year following the work that the town paid for.

Sandi says it's hard to predict if the town will even get a grant that is applied for, so the expenses can't be budgeted for. The matching amounts vary, and can sometimes be in kind. The Grant Matching Fund can be used for upfront matching expenses.

Sandi says that an issue is that paperwork for grant reimbursement isn't getting done in a timely manner which creates a lag time for the reimbursement. Like Hedgehog was completed in July, but the paperwork just went in today. It's because she is learning how to do this work, the highway foreman doesn't have the wherewithal for it, and the town doesn't have a grant administrator.

Amber points out that the highway workers need to be more specific when filling out their timesheets for grant reimbursement purposes. Denise and Sandi agree to this point.

Janet asks about a voice dictation program, like Dragon, for Matt. Hannah says that he should contact All-Access Infotech directly and ask for what he needs. They have offered to set him up with that, he just needs to schedule it.

We know the town has a \$200,000 grant for the culvert at the beaver pond. The bid was for ~\$149,000. It took three years to actually get that grant. If we get that reimbursement next year, it can offset the out-of-pocket expenses, but if not it will get added to the grant revenue for 2024.

We will put in \$20,000 as state grant revenue for the hedgehog gulf project that will come in in 2023.

The Ober Hill bridge replacement work isn't ready to be budgeted for yet. There is a first grant to do a scoping study for the actual project. The town can replace the deck for \$130,000 now if they want, but that doesn't mean the bridge will meet the specs it needs to. The goal is to replace the bridge.

Town records preservation fund: It is required by statute (32 VSA 1671) to put the \$4.00 surcharge per page from recordings into a fund for records preservation. The town has not been doing this. Hannah suggests creating the fund and placing \$5,000 in it, an amount equal to the last 5 years of surcharges. That \$5,000 can be used right away for scanning the 5 records books that have not been backed up yet, and getting someone to look at the unopenable safes and maintain the locks on the usable safes. From now on, with the surcharges going into the fund, there can be more regular maintenance of the records. Denise asks where the \$4.00 has been going. It has been general revenue to offset the general fund expenses. David asks how long the law has been in effect. Hannah doesn't know exactly, but for a while. The fund can be used for preservation of any public records.

David asks about microfilming of land records. Hannah says we should still be doing that and the state archives will store them for free. She has a quote from Good-Way Document Service for scanning, microfilming and digitizing the 5 books. For \$2,700. It is good to do the digitizing for both backup reasons and so they can be made available online eventually. There are platforms that allow the town to still be paid for record copies when researchers are accessing them online. Janet wants to make sure the service would be secure.

David makes a motion to create a new fund for records preservation and put \$5,000 into it and the \$4.00 surcharges moving forward. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Hannah points out that the statute says additional allocations can be made to the fund in the case of larger projects.

Matt doesn't have quotes for the chloride tank, truck, radios or grader yet. Amber has been reminding him on those things. He's supposed to look into options for the chloride tank – either a new one or a lease from the place he buys the material from.

Hannah will try to contact Russell Brown again about the garage oil tank.

Janet has contacted Bonnie at VLCT about grants for the town garage and is waiting for a reply. She has included an emergency command center as part of the addition, in order to possibly qualify for some additional grant money.

Next budget committee meeting is January 10th.

Executive Session

David makes a motion to go into executive session at 8:11 for a legal matter where premature public knowledge would put the town of Athens at a substantial disadvantage. Harold seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David makes a motion to leave executive session at 8:31. Sandi seconded. Put to a vote: all in favor.

No decisions were made in executive session.

Further Business

Sandi has the agreement with the Bialy property settled and would like it to be signed. A small adjustment was made to say that the stone wall would be repaired when the town crew leaves. Janet says that the town doesn't have a wood splitter and the wood that is left for Grafton Cares will be blocked, not split.

Denise makes a motion that David signs the Bialy agreement. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David signs the agreement.

Janet wonders why the Meetinghouse Committee meetings aren't recorded. David thinks it's a requirement to have Zoom recorded. Hannah says it isn't a requirement, the committee just needs to have minutes. David wants to instruct the committee to record online meetings and host them on the town website. Hannah says there are not any meeting recordings hosted on the town website, just minutes.

Janet took the webinar for supervisors of CDL drivers.

The selectboard fills out candidate petitions and consent forms.

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

Adjourned at 8:46

Respectfully submitted,
Hannah Regier, Town Clerk