

Athens Selectboard Meeting Minutes
December 19, 2024
7:00pm at the Athens Town Office

In attendance: David Bemis, Sandi Capponcelli, Janet Perry, Krista Gay, Denise Randall, Hannah Regier, FACT TV (Ginger), Carmen Dresser, April Lyman, Don Capponcelli,

Called to order at 7:00

Adjustments to Agenda

Krista asks for an executive session to evaluate applicants for the highway position.

Krista asks to have the board sign the approved sick/safe leave.

Krista brings up the new ethics law that the board needs to take action on within 30 days from January 1st.

Krista has also followed up with VLCT on the best way to have Don Capponcelli help the town as general contractor.

Janet asks to address the meeting: she reads a statement about the reprimand at the last meeting, attached.

David responds by saying he recessed the meeting when he left, and nothing was discussed outside that was on the agenda.

Minutes of Prior Meeting

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

Public Comments

None

Boards and Officials / Treasurer Report

Hannah says the deadline for article petitions for town meeting is January 16th, and the deadline for candidate petitions and consent forms is January 27th. Forms are available at the town office.

Hannah says that there will be one more warrant with the last payroll of the year and any outstanding invoices. An email will be sent to the board to come in and sign the warrant.

David makes a motion for Hannah to prepare the final warrant of 2024 and the board members will stop in individually review and sign it. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Hannah asks the board to approve her applying for the Climate Economy Resilient Communities grant for technical assistance and strategic planning for the Town Office, Community Center and Meetinghouse. Sandi and Sherry have both reviewed the draft application.

Hannah applied for the MERP financial hardship application this week.

David makes a motion to approve the the draft application to VCRD for the Climate Economy Resilient Communities grant. Sandi seconds.

The board reviews the draft application.

Put to a vote: all in favor.

Don – Cemetery Commission – Don asks for a separate article for \$3,500 for the Cemetery 2025 budget to be in the town meeting warrant.

Janet asks where the new gate expense will come from. Don remembered that the selectboard had voted to have the general fund pay for the new gates to prevent vandalism. Hannah asks that an additional amount be put into the Cemetery Fund in 2025 to cover the new gates.

Don says he was sad to hear that Edie Cole had died, who had been the business manager at the supervisory union. Don says she was a great person. David agrees and said she would come to town meeting and explain the school budget.

David makes a motion to sign an extension amendment for the BRIC grant for the local hazard mitigation plan. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Janet -- Planning commission – They are just wating for the final draft of the town plan to present to the selectboard. They are still hoping for it to be ready for a vote at Town Meeting, but there is some procedural stuff that makes it a tight deadline.

David makes a motion to sign an amendment to the Highway Emergency Grant for the undermining of Brookline Rd. On January 10th. Denise seconds.

Hannah explains that the amendment is simply because the date was wrong on the grant.

Put to a vote: all in favor.

Krista – schoolboard – there is going to be a hike in the school taxes this year. It will be between 17% in one town and 22% in the other town. It is because the CLA is low in both towns and there is a multiplier added to the straight tax rate. Krista thinks in Grafton it is partly because of how many houses are being bought as short-term rentals. The school wasn't hit with any penalties for per pupil spending.

David reads an email from Reed Webster acknowledging the outstanding job Matt Perry does to clear the roads for early morning commuters.

Garage Construction

Don has sent an email to the board outlining that the general contractor job would entail. He also broke down all the components of the job. Don wants to meet with Hannah in early January to go over the scope. He talks about having a flow chart to sequence and schedule the work. Don wants to clarify that he would be an hourly employee and asks for the same rate of \$30.00/hr that he gets in Marlboro, and he thinks the job will be ~600 hours. He says he doesn't need to be there every minute a subcontractor is there. Don would stick with the floor plan from the architect. He might bid on the siding himself.

Don has spoken with several contractors and they sound interested. He has mentioned having the town buy the materials and hire contractors as labor only. Don wants to meet with Janet to discuss the existing roof. David wants Don to be working on all of the elements of the garage, including replacing the roof and getting the mold out.

Don and the board discuss some details and options of the construction elements.

Krista shares the feedback from VLCT about hiring a general contractor. They recommend hiring the person as an employee who is covered by the town's worker's comp. The town also has more control if the project doesn't go well. The position can be called "Clerk of the Works." This is what Don's title was with the Meetinghouse projects, but he thinks the garage work is more like a general contractor. VLCT says there is no requirement to post the job, but the town should review their personnel handbook. Krista says she'd like to create a more formal job description before moving forward with hiring anyone. Krista says she thinks it's best practice to post the job, maybe with a short turnaround time.

Krista makes a motion to post the job on the town website as a temporary hourly employee position for Clerk of the Works for the Town Garage renovations. The ad will also go in the Reformer as an in-line classified. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: four in favor, Sandi recuses.

The board reviews the personnel policy but doesn't see any guidelines on posting positions.

Krista says that the board needs to go through policies and update them. She points out sexual harassment, at-will employment and a couple other areas really need to be updated.

Budget 2025

Hannah gives an overview of the budget report. Currently it's looking like a \$133,817 surplus for 2024, but most of that is the FEMA reimbursement for the \$109,416 deficit from 2023 for the Reed Rd. slide. Once the final warrant has been processed, Hannah will be able to determine if there is actually a surplus or deficit for 2024, but it's looking on target for even spending.

The current figure for taxes to raise in 2025 is \$644,398.70. Hannah says this is higher than the town approved last year and asks if the board wants to look through the budget with eye for

where to cut expenses or justify expenses. Janet says the \$40,000 is for the grant matching fund. Hannah says that is in anticipation of the big culvert projects that are in process already.

David asks where the town is at with a reappraisal. It's going to be at least 3 years out.

Hannah says that \$10,000 was added to cover part of a new roof for the town office. She wonders if more could be taken from the Building Renovation fund. Don and the board discuss and agree that a roof will probably cost close to \$30,000, so keeping \$10,000 in the budget is reasonable to combine with \$23,000 available for the project in the Bldg Renovation fund.

Hannah says the town's insurance didn't go up significantly. Health insurance did go up. The figures in the budget for highway payroll reflect last year's figures plus a 2.5% COLA increase.

Hannah says there aren't specifics for the \$15,000 budgeted in Highway Contracted Services besides over-the-rail mowing. Janet assumes it will be used for ledge removal.

Gravel, sand and salt are all the same as last year.

The board adds \$2,500 to the Cemetery Commission line item for the new gates.

Hannah says that the budget doesn't address a specific plan for the small truck. There is the regular contribution to the equipment fund and a large R&M figure for the small truck.

Equipment / Truck

Janet says the quote for a new small truck from Ford of Claremont is \$109,000, without counting the trade in. They will do a 5-year commercial lease. There is currently \$38,000 reserved for the small truck replacement in the equipment fund. Janet says it wouldn't take too long to get the truck once it's ordered. The plow will fit the new truck.

Denise wonders if the town could get more for the old truck by selling it instead of trading it in. Trading would be easier for the swapping of equipment. The funds in the equipment fund, plus the \$15,000 in the R&M budget, plus the trade in would be the downpayment, and then funds would need to be raised for annual payments.

David suggests that the replacement truck should go on a separate article in March so the taxpayers aren't encumbered with a lease payment without notice. Others on the board think that waiting three months is risky, especially in winter. The board discusses possibly having a special town meeting for a vote, but that wouldn't happen until the end of January because of warning requirements. Hannah asks when a townwide vote is needed, because past equipment purchases haven't been consistent. The grader was purchased on a capital lease last year without a vote, but the first backhoe the town bought was voted on when it was purchased on a capital lease several years ago.

The board discusses getting other quotes from other dealers. Krista asks what happens if voters vote down getting a new truck. The transmission would need to be replaced in the current truck and the vote would be retaken in 2026.

Krista makes a motion to put replacing the small truck as a article at town meeting in March and not buy the quoted truck from Claremont. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: Krista & Denise in favor. Sandi, David & Janet opposed.

David asks Krista to check with VLCT on the legality of leasing a new truck without a townwide vote, given that the town doesn't have the full amount needed to purchase the truck outright. Once that information is available, there will be a quick special meeting to discuss again. Krista says that the articles are due by January 16th, so a special meeting needs to be before then. Krista asks that Matt to come to a special meeting to discuss the truck once Krista has the info.

April Lyman asks if the truck could be put out to bid to get a better price. David says it's the state bid price that was given to the town which is much less than retail. David encourages Matt and other board members to reach out to other dealers.

Hannah says she will update the budget with the changes from this meeting and present a final version to the meeting in January for the board to approve.

Executive Session

Krista makes a motion to go into executive session at 8:25 to discuss the appointment or employment of an applicant for employment. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Krista makes a motion to exit executive session at 8:41. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David says no decisions were made in executive session.

Krista makes a motion to hire Robert Germon as the new Highway Laborer. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Wages 2025

David makes a motion to pay Robert Germon \$28.00/hr and Matt Perry \$31.00/hr starting January 1, 2025. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: David, Denise and Sandi in favor. Janet abstained. Krista opposed, because she thinks Matt's raise should be accompanied by an evaluation.

David makes a motion to pay all hourly and elected officials, who don't have a different pay rate, \$14.01/hr as of January 1st. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Krista asks if Matt can come to the next selectboard meeting to have an annual evaluation. David says yes, that can be done. The other board members agree. They say the evaluation can be done in executive session at the beginning of the upcoming special meeting.

Krista thinks all employees should have an annual evaluation. She thinks it's important for employees to hear from their employers about what is going well and what needs to be addressed. Also to have an open discussion about both compliments and complaints from townspeople. She recommends that the new employee have an evaluation after his probationary period at 6 months, and then annually thereafter.

Denise and Sandi suggest evaluations happen in November, so raises can be budgeted for.

Krista points out that a cost-of-living increase isn't a raise, so each year a merit increase can be discussed after an evaluation. Denise says that the policies can be updated accordingly.

Health insurance starts on the first day of employment. There is no waiting period mentioned in the personnel policy. Krista brings up again that the personnel policy is inconsistent with regard to probationary period, at-will employment, and disciplinary procedures.

Warrants and Mail

Mail is opened and warrants signed.

The board discusses having an attorney write up a legal document for the Butson Circle culvert agreement.

Further Business

The board signs the sick/safe leave policy that was already approved.

Janet says that Matt is going to be getting a couple loads of gravel for Brookline Rd.

Denise makes a motion to adjourn. All in favor.

Adjourned at 8:57

Respectfully submitted,
Hannah Regier, Town Clerk

On NOV.21 2024 I was reprimanded in an open select board meeting on the charges of Conflict of interest. without due process. I denied those charges because I have no conflict according to our Towns polices. Our Access policy states that the land owners are responsible for culverts and I have no conflict with them or any others and in our Conflict-of-interest policy I still have no conflict. If people took the time to read it. The person that brought this charge was doing it to shut me up for her family's benefit on the discussion at the time.

Then on Dec.1,2024 at a special select board meeting this was a illegal meeting once things got out of control. The resignation of a board member that left then 3 other members went out, so the majority of the board was outside no recordings but when they came back in the motion that couldn't get a seconded before they left was bought up and passed without any disgusting.

I was accused of having a feud with family members I was not aware of this if people think working for majority of the towns people instead of a few is a feud then that is in their minds not mine. I work for the many not the few and what is in the best interest for the town.

Janet Perry