

Athens Selectboard Meeting Minutes
February 16, 2023
7:00pm at the Athens Town Office

In attendance: David Bemis, Sandi Capponcelli, Harold Noyes, Janet Perry, Hannah Regier, Denise Randall, Donald Capponcelli, Steve Oakes, Sherry Maher, Tim Stevenson, Darlene Wyman

Called to order at 7:00

Adjustments to Agenda

None

Minutes of Prior Meeting

David makes a motion to accept the minutes of the prior meeting. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Public Comments

Tim Stevenson: Wants to speak in response to an email Don had sent to some people about the importance of having a planning commission. Bonnie Waninger of VLT says the town isn't eligible for some grants because we don't have a town plan. Tim also mentions that the town can't participate in act 250 hearings and hearings like that about our town. Don has been encouraged to try to get the town to pass a town plan so we can apply for grants. Don pointed out that it might be difficult to find the volunteers again to do the work, but there is already a lot of work in place for a town plan. Tim agrees that it would be great to resurrect the planning commission to work on a town plan. He feels that, in the absence of important support in the past two efforts, that the selectboard make and pass a motion that the selectboard would like to have a town plan and will organize the committee to that end. Tim would be willing to participate with a planning commission if there was genuine interest and support for it. Tim thinks it is also important to have active participants on the commission who are positive about the town plan, including members of the selectboard. David says he attended many of the past meetings as an ex officio member and attempted to help with the town plan. Tim wants an official endorsement from the selectboard in the form of a motion from David to the effect of "I move that we try to get a town plan and that we organize a body of citizens to work on such." Don says he forwarded the email not because we weren't eligible for the grants – BDCC is still offering to help us with the USDA grant planning process -- but because he thought it was his duty to let the members of the planning commission know about the discussion.

Sherry wants to remind folks that the Athenian has invited everyone to put together a brief candidate summary. The deadline for getting those back will be Sunday night so they can get them out to voters next week.

Hannah says she wants to back up what Tim was saying and that the town would be eligible for a lot more grant money if we had a town plan.

Boards and Officials

Sherry / Meetinghouse: They are moving along with the scope of work and hope to have that done this coming week, well before the March 3rd deadline.

Don / Cemetery Commission: their organizational meeting is April 5th. They have spoken to the town treasurer about moving a portion of the cemetery money into CDs because interest rates are higher now.

Don / Community Center: There needs to be a heating service technician to call in an emergency. David says BART is who we buy fuel from and they should respond. Don wants to check with them to make sure.

Don / Grants: He has contacted BDCC and VLCT along with Sandi, Janet and Hannah. He says that the ARPA money can be used as matching funds for other grants. He has been working on a spreadsheet of projects for the town garage and community center that can add up to 400k easily. He has submitted intake forms for the BDCC USDA planning grants for both buildings. Sandi is the contact for the town garage. He put himself as the contact for the Community Center, but wants the board's approval. David says they already authorized Sandi to be a contact. Don says he is already into the weeds with the Community Center planning.

David makes a motion that Don be the contact person for the BDCC/USDA grant application for the Community Center. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: 4 in favor, Sandi abstains.

Don wants an official charge from the selectboard to explore the possibility of moving the town office up to the community center. Because that would be a part of applying for a USDA grant for the Community Center. Denise says it has only been casually discussed, not looking at all the pros and cons. David asks not to make a decision on that tonight and for it to be put on the March agenda and it could also be brought up under other business at town meeting.

Hannah mentions that Don made some extra keys for the town office because Harold needed one and so did the cleaning staff. The new keys don't have the "do not duplicate" inscription on them though. What does the selectboard think about using them? David asks for Don to have WW order the blanks that say "do not duplicate" and get the keys remade. The ones without the inscription can be destroyed.

Hannah says she had NEMRC switch the town's accounting from accrual to cash basis. There will be a line item showing a ~33k negative revenue for the receivables that were cleared out. It will show up in next year's town report.

Harold asks if the copier was a big fix. Hannah says it wasn't, but All Service says it's getting harder to find parts for this copier. They do have a few parts machines at their shop. The copier should last another year or so, and they will likely have another used machine we can replace it with when we're ready.

Sherry / Meetinghouse Committee: They may be going ahead with a grant application for the Windham Foundation. It might be for either the March 3rd or June 3rd deadlines. She wants a motion from the selectboard to apply for that grant.

David makes a motion to authorize the Meetinghouse Committee to apply for the Windham Foundation Grant. Harold seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David says it is good to have the motions for each grant so there is a record of what grants are being applied for. Denise asks if it is a matching funds grant and Sherry says it is not.

Harold / School Board: They are looking into beginning a pilot program called *We Are Hope* for the middle school and high school. There was a survey done that showed 79% of students had felt nervous, anxious or on edge. It's a program for in-house coaching for anxiety or nervousness. This is the district's own program that is run through Andy's office. There is a three-year plan for the outdated technological stuff in all the schools to be updated.

Community Center

Sandi says there was a request from Josh Ferenc who is the science teacher at the middle school to use the Community Center for a base for a program that he's trying to run out here. It would be an outdoor science and nature program. Denise asks how often he would be using the building. Sandi says he doesn't have everything in place yet. In order to move forward, he needs to have a place for kids to use the restroom, leave their backpacks or go inside if it's rainy. Denise asks if it is summer, or year-round. Sandi thinks it might just be a summer program — she doesn't have all the information yet. Sandi thinks this will be a good direction and will give the town brownie points in grant applications, showing we are already using the building as a Community Center. David agrees with it as a concept but wants more details. He doesn't want the whole building taken over for the duration. Sandi will contact Josh for more information. She says Josh has talked about the location having an inordinate amount of wildlife habitat with the field and stream and everything else that it would be the perfect area for him to conduct his class.

With the lack of snow, the sledding party that was planned is probably not going to happen.

Sam Farr Road

Harold wants to make official as to the fixing of the gate and cleaning of the landing when the logging work is finished. Harold says he wanted to ask Steve to come and say that was his intention. Steve says he called Joshua tonight and asked when he can use the backhoe and it's broken now. Steve will get up there as soon as it's fixed and get the gate back up. Steve says he won't ever be done with the work. David says he is only concerned about having the right-of-way clear. Steve says he isn't going to take the bridge out because he'll be pulling logs out for another ten years. Steve says he should be able to fix the gate withing a couple weeks and will call Harold to let him know when it's done. Steve doesn't know what happened with the lock, but he will get another lock and give the town a key. Hannah points out that there is also a sign that was broken off. Steve says he will fix that also.

Roads

They've used lots of stone on the roads with the mud. A lot has been used on Walker and Reed Roads. A few more loads of gravel were delivered this week. David says it's not even mud season yet, so the town should also be prepared for what will come in March. Don says there's a stretch of Reed Rd that got a lot of stone last year that's looking really good now.

Janet says Matt was working on Brookline Rd today, between Reed and Walker Rd. David says there isn't much frost in the ground. Janet says with the rain tonight and tomorrow it might bring more out. She says we can blame it all on climate change. David says we could have two months of mud season this year.

Harold says there is a new resident in Athens, his great grandchild Joshua Michael. The board digresses about red hair.

Warrants and Mail

Warrants were signed and the mail opened.

Denise had some questions about the invoices. Valley Auto did some welding that was more than what Matt was comfortable doing. They also bought two batteries for the 550. Denise asks why they didn't buy the batteries and put them in themselves. Janet says she thinks it was in the middle of one of the storms. The VTel rates went up a lot. The Community Center bill is \$109. The town office and garage are \$195. Hannah says the town tried two years ago to lower the phone bill for the Community Center, but it needs a dedicated line for the alarm system.

David makes a motion to sign the weight permits. Harold seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Hannah asks if Harold went to the Sheriff's Dept meeting. He says he did, and David also joined on Zoom. It was a meeting for the small towns to maybe get a committee together to get more grant money for policing contracts. He offered to be on that committee.

David signs the standard contract that Plimpton Excavating returned. Hannah explains that the town needs these from all 1099 vendors so that we don't get charged for workers comp insurance for their employees. VLCT does an audit and checks for them. Janet asks if the town has always done 1099s. Hannah says they have. Janet asks what about for the garages. Hannah says that she sends a 1099 to sole proprietors, single member LLCs and partnerships. Not to corporations. Janet asks about Valley Auto. Hannah says that the town hasn't sent him a 1099 in the past, but should have. She just sent him a packet of forms to fill out.

David makes a motion to designate the primary contract for the municipality for Act 172 for the Municipal Energy Resiliency Program (MERP) to be Don Capponcelli. Put to a vote: 4 in favor, Sandi abstains.

Discussion: Janet asks to be copied on everything from that program.

David amends his motion to have both Don and Janet be the points of contact. Harold seconds. Put to a vote: 3 in favor, Sandi and Janet abstains.

Janet says she has more information on the MERP program. For now she says they are only doing one building per municipality. And we need to have an audit to start. She can go over it for whoever wants to be part of it.

David gives Janet the highway budget planning packet to give to Matt and to be done with VTrans in March after town meeting. Matt usually takes this down to VTrans and they help fill it out. The selectboard will act on them at the next meeting.

Denise points out that the highway timesheets still don't have enough detail on them. They have listed "shop" as the activity for several whole days. Denise says they have to write down what they are actually doing in the shop. She says if filling out timesheets has to be put in the employee policy, she will go there. She says it will kick us in the butt if that information is needed for something.

Janet says there was another estimate done for the insulation for the town garage, by Vermont Foam Insulation out of Chester, and it was \$17,000 less than the other one.

Sandi wants Don to approach Farnham Insulators and ask for our deposit back for the town office insulating work, because they haven't been responsive in scheduling the work and we paid them back in July. She and Don also got an estimate from Vermont Foam Insulators for \$1600 less than Farnham and they can do it soon. David says that since we agreed to the contract, we should give them a 2-3 week timeframe within which they do the work or give us the money back. Don was thinking on giving them "the opportunity to back out of the contract." David agrees that is a fine approach.

David isn't sure what the letter about posting the roads is for. It has weight limits on it. Janet says Matt hasn't posted the roads. Last year he posted them and the signs got ripped off. David asks Janet to give the letter to Matt.

There is a form from the VT Dept of Health referencing the appointment of a town health officer by March 31st.

David makes a motion to reappoint Steve Oakes as health officer. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Harold says that the meeting he went to with the Sheriff department talked about the role of constable and that they might need to get more training. There is more required of them than just dog officer at this point. Mark suggested that a group of small towns get together on a

committee and go over some of the things that he thinks will be coming down from the state. Harold offered to be on that committee.

The selectboard discusses the CLA/CoD letters from the Vermont Department of Taxes. Athens' CLA is 87.64 and CoD is 19.30. Sandi says the state is considering taking over the appraisal process and doing a statewide reappraisal. David says there is legislation in place looking at the whole situation. They are discussing giving a pass to many towns because so many towns need reappraisals now. They are also discussing having the state doing all the appraisals, which might eliminate the board of listers. David says they are talking about using the \$8/parcel, that currently comes to towns, to pay appraisers. Sandi says the state is trying to turn listers into police because they say that some properties are being racially discriminated against. David says that it's all up in the air, but at least Athens is not going to have to do a reappraisal this year.

Further Business

Community Center: Sandi brings up that Tina White is looking into an EPA grant, and has been talking with Wichie who wants to be paid \$100/hr or 10% of the grant, to be the grant writer. Or he could walk her through some of the grant writing. There are other grant writers out there who don't get \$100/hr. Sandi says the last grant writer she worked with through BDCC cost \$250 for five hours, and BDCC was paying the grant writer. The grants don't pay for grant writers so that 10% or hourly rate would be the town's responsibility. Sandi has told Tina that it's fine for Wichie to walk her through the process free of charge. The town is working through BDCC and VLT to get grant writers. Harold asks if Wichie is back in the area. He is in Puerto Rico. She recommends the town does not hire Wichie as a grant writer. BDCC, VLT and Windham Regional all have lists of grant writers we can talk to. Gary Fox didn't have time to help us anymore. Hannah points out it makes sense to be organized about having a full project plan and know which grants will fit for which pieces and how it will all work together. Don says Bonnie Waninger is going to put together a "map" for us with which grants might work for the town's projects. She knows we are also looking to start a planning process with BDCC for the garage and community center. Don says if we do ADA in the wrong sequence, it can cost extra. Hannah says that the USDA grant requires an architectural or engineering study to start with.

Sandi researched Dragon for Matt's laptop. There is a version for under \$50. Sandi will look at the Windows feature again. Hannah had contacted All Access IT about it after the last meeting and forwarded their reply to Matt, Janet and Sandi. They recommended using the built in voice to text feature in Windows. Denise helps her to find it.

Sandi applauds the auditors for all the hard work they do, but she says the town report doesn't look good. She points out typography and content mistakes on the first page. David says it's not necessarily their job to do that and he thinks they do just fine. She thinks it looks amateurish and unprofessional when handing the reports out to other towns. She doesn't like the hand

numbered pages either. Sandi is willing to help the auditors design the books. It's something she did for a living.

Executive Session

David makes a motion to go into executive session at 8:10 to discuss a contract matter where premature public knowledge would put the town at significant disadvantage. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David makes a motion to leave executive session at 8:18. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Harold makes a motion to adjourn. David seconds. All in favor. Adjourned at 8:19.

Respectfully submitted,
Hannah Regier, Town Clerk