

Athens Special Selectboard Meeting Minutes
March 23, 2023
7:00pm at the Athens Town Office

In attendance: Sandi Capponcelli, Hannah Regier, Janet Perry, Matt Perry, Harold Noyes, David Bemis, Denise Randall, Amber Stevens, Dennis Mirante, Carol Bingham, Don Capponcelli, Mike Bates

Called to order at 7:00

Adjustments to Agenda

- There is a contract to sign for renting an over the rail mower
- Executive session will move to the end of the meeting

Public Comments

Don Capponcelli said he hadn't understood the revenue page well at Town Meeting. He sees now that the anticipated \$119,407 in non-tax revenue for 2023 is 41.5% lower than 2022, 31.5% lower than 2021, and the lowest since 2019.

Dennis says good luck in trying to get the budget down. He thinks cutting trash pickup is a good place to start. He also wants the town to get more aggressive in collecting delinquent taxes.

Meet with Budget Committee

The selectboard and budget committee review the budget line by line and discuss line item that can be adjusted.

- Salaries

David asks why the constable salary was so high in 2022. Hannah says it's because he submitted time sheets for the past three years in 2022. She has asked him not to do that again. The same situation happened for the Health Officer position salary as well.

David asks if the listers' salaries could be paid out of the reappraisal fund. Amber says that the reappraisal money will be needed for the upcoming townwide reappraisal. Sandi says that money isn't supposed to be used for salaries.

The selectboard asks about the Asst. Clerk's salary and why it was so much higher than budgeted. Hannah says that she can ask Darlene to work fewer hours, but there is enough work to have her working every Monday. The figures may be a bit misleading because Darlene is acting as both assistant Clerk and assistant Treasurer, but is getting paid all under Assistant Clerk because it's impossible to separate out the hours spent on each role. She also gets paid for election work in that category and there were 3-4 elections in 2022.

- Town Office Expenses

Postage: David says committees should limit sending out flyers. Hannah says she thinks the emergency committee paid for their own stamps for their mailing.

Computer Related needs to increase by \$2,800 to accommodate the cybersecurity service that the town's IT vendor forgot to include at a budgeting meeting with them in November.

David makes a motion to increase Computer Related to \$14,500. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Town Office heating oil can be lowered to \$1,350

Sandi makes a motion to lower the Town Office heating oil to \$1,350. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

The board discusses the Town Office building maintenance and if that can be lowered and any repairs expensed to the Town Office Renovation fund. Denise points out that the line item is only \$250. David thinks it's best to keep it and look elsewhere.

- General Expenses

Legal services can't be lowered.

The board discusses trash and recycling removal at length and decides to wait until after looking at the rest of the budget to decide whether to cut it or not. It is a large expense and the town wants to cut the budget. But, the town also receives revenue from trash bag sales and has 10,000 bags in inventory. Some people can't afford their own removal service or can't get out to bring trash to Rockingham. The town would need to hire a service to remove the trash generated by the town buildings and operations. And there is the concern of trash being dumped in the woods.

County Tax has gone up this year. The bill was just received.

David makes a motion to raise the County tax to \$4,250. Denise seconded. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Typo: Tax abatement line should be zero, VLCT insurance should be \$4000. Fixing this mistake will lower the budget by \$2,000.

- Public safety

David makes a motion to eliminate the \$2,900 budgeted for Miscellaneous public safety. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

- School Building / Community Center

Janet thinks the heating oil can be lowered based on a review of the historical costs.

Denise makes a motion to lower the heating oil to \$3,000. Harold seconds. All in favor.

Janet makes a motion to lower building maintenance to \$2500. Sandi seconds. All in favor.

Mowing was discussed. The budget will stay the same but Ivor Stevens Ground Maintenance will try to mow as little as possible.

- Highway Payroll

The town will still need flaggers in 2023 to help during storm damage cleanup.

The raises for the highway crew were about \$4,000 for Matt and \$3,500 for Eugene for the year. Janet says the highway crew hadn't gotten a raise for four years, so the 8% raise amounts to about a cost of living increase. David points out that the crew has to do work in weather situations and times of night that not many people want to do. David says he has to hire people in Rockingham and they get paid considerably more. Other towns are having a hard time hiring.

Health Insurance costs went up \$4,000 total.

- Highway Garage

Matt thinks General Supplies can be lowered.

Denise makes the motion to reduce General Supplies to \$3,000. Harold seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

Matt says the building maintenance can be lowered. The \$5,000 for the oil tank can be reduced and the town will buy a smaller tank and have someone else install it.

Matt says to remove the \$3,000 for a new chloride tank. They will use up the chloride they have and not get any more this year.

Matt says they are looking into grants that will cover a lot of new work on the garage.

David makes a motion to lower building maintenance to \$2,000. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

Special tools and equipment needs to stay as is to buy chains. The highway dept already bought a cutting blade for the plow out of this line item.

- Highway Equipment

David makes a motion to reduce the Freightliner R&M to \$8,500. Harold seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

David makes a motion to reduce Diesel to \$15,000. Janet seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

- Road Maintenance

Matt asks to reduce salt to \$25,000 and raise stone to \$25,000. This is just moving \$10,000 from one category to another.

David makes a motion to reduce sand to \$21,000. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

David makes a motion to reduce chloride to \$0. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

Contracted services can stay the same and \$300 extra will go towards the mower from the ledge removal.

Matt thinks Road Resealing could be eliminated for the year, but then it will have to happen in 2024. The board thinks the new paved section of Rte. 35 should be done this year. So they will keep one day of work in the budget.

Denise makes the motion to reduce road resealing to \$4,400. David seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

The small culverts that were used during the flood last year will need to be replenished and they are expensive.

Underdrain saves the town money. Matt has some of the materials for it, but they will keep the budget so he can buy fabric and stone for the project.

- Transfers to other funds

David makes a motion to reduce the Athens Meetinghouse allocation to \$600. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

David makes a motion to reduce the Cemetery Commission allocation to \$1,250. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

Matt says they can get rid of the guardrail portion (\$5,000) of the Long Term Highway Projects allocation and reassess after they do guardrail work after the next paving.

David makes the motion to reduce the Long Term Highway Projects allocation to \$4,500. Harold seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

Paving and Equipment fund allocations will stay the same.

David makes a motion to reduce Emergency Preparedness to \$0. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

The Capital Reserve and Grant Matching fund allocations will remain the same.

David asks if the allocation to the Record Preservation fund could be reduced. Hannah says it could, but she would really like to hire someone to get into the safes that are stuck. She recently spoke with someone at the state archives who reminded her that it is her job, and legally required, to preserve town records. In the future, this fund will be supported by recording fee surcharges and shouldn't require taxpayer money unless there is a specific project.

Denise asks to do a running total of what has been cut so far before they decide on cutting anything else.

The total reduced so far is \$34,319.

Trash and recycling removal is discussed again. Getting rid of trash removal this year would reduce an additional \$13,000. In future years it would reduce the budget by about \$28,000 a year. The town would consider buying back unused trash bags. Denise thinks a couple thousand dollars would also need to be added to hire a trash removal service for the town buildings.

Sandi makes a motion to reduce trash to \$16,000 which would take the service through to May 1, 2023; and reduce the revenue line to \$1,000 which should also account for buying back unused bags. Harold seconds. Put to a vote: Harold and Sandi in favor. David, Denise, and Janet opposed. The motion is defeated.

If the voters wish to remove trash and recycling removal to further lower the budget, someone can amend the article on the floor.

Setting the time of the Special Town Meeting

April 27, 2023

David makes a motion to hold a special town meeting on April 27, 2023 at 6:00pm at the Athens Community Center. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

Contract for Over the Rail Mower

Sandi makes a motion to sign the contract for the over the rail mower. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

Executive Session

David makes a motion to go into executive session at 9:08 for a legal matter where premature public knowledge would put the town of Athens at a substantial disadvantage. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Denise makes a motion to leave executive session at 9:15. Harold seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

No decisions were made in executive session.

Further Business

Sandi says Travis Allen asked to use the Community Center for a birthday party. She says they will charge him and they will sign something that they are responsible for damages.

Denise makes the motion to allow Travis Allen to use the Community Center on April 20th. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: All in favor.

*Denise makes a motion to adjourn. Sandi seconds. All in favor.
Adjourned at 9:17*

Respectfully submitted,
Hannah Regier, Town Clerk