

Athens Selectboard Meeting Minutes
September 21, 2023
7:00pm at the Athens Town Office

In attendance: Sandi Capponcelli, Hannah Regier, Janet Perry, David Bemis, Denise Randall, Krista Gay, FACT TV (Cody), Don Capponcelli, Anna Warn, William Borsi, Maggie Foley, Dennis Mirante, Linda Taylor, Thomas Taylor, Carmen Dresser, Don Capponcelli, April Lyman

Called to order at 7:00

Adjustments to Agenda

Krista wanted to follow up on Anna Warn's comments from last meeting. David says they can do that in boards and officials.

Minutes of Prior Meeting

Denise makes a motion to accept the minutes as they are. Krista seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Public Comments

David says that the court issued a ruling in the suit that the town has been involved in. It was in favor of the town and the commissioners report. He says he knows it's been hard for people in the community, and he hopes people can get back to being neighbors. Hannah has a copy of the order from the court and anyone can have a copy of it.

Dennis Mirante says he watched the recording of the selectboard meeting last month and heard two concerned citizens bringing up the issue of town workers getting coffee at the Harmonyville store. He says the practice has been going on for 25-30 years and it's only now being brought up. He thinks it's time for the selectboard to make a policy that addresses the issue.

William Borsi wants a follow up from the last meeting. David says they won't talk about any disciplinary actions taken with an employee in a public meeting. William thinks it's costing the town \$12,500/year.

Anna Warn says she read the personnel policy and says there is nothing written about employee breaks. Krista says that Vermont doesn't have a law about breaks. She wants to propose a policy later about timekeeping and breaks. Krista says that since there isn't a policy currently, employees could not be in trouble for violating anything. Anna brings up section 13 of the employee policy, saying the use of town equipment for personal use is prohibited. She thinks taking town equipment 16 miles out of town to get a cup of coffee is improper use of town property. Anna asks why town vehicles don't have any signage on them. David thinks it would be a good idea to have that. Tom Taylor says it costs \$250 per vehicle to have signage put on a Vermont Tees.

Denise makes a motion to look into getting signage on the town vehicles. David seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Linda Taylor says David didn't come by to look at the culvert on her property. He says he did stop by once but no one was there. Linda says to come on the weekend. David agrees to.

Tom Taylor wants to know what they are going to do about the grader coming across their yard every time it comes down Mill Hill. Tom says he paid for the damage the first time and it's happened again. He says the road has been washed out for over 70 days and the crew goes up and down the hill frequently but haven't fixed it, but they do cut into his yard every time they go by.

Tom also says 10 years ago the town agreed to buy a backhoe. He wants to know why the town has outside backhoes putting in a regular culvert on the road. David thinks it had to do with the number of people who were able to work for the town at that time.

Anna Warn wants to know if a GPS monitor could be put in the truck. She says insurance companies love them. David says he doesn't know.

Tom says he heard about someone who died from black mold. He asks if that's been tested in the garage and why the workers are still in there. David says that will be brought up later.

Anna says that she heard a proposal for an addition on the town garage that would include an office. She wonders why that is necessary. She says that the garage is already plumbed for a bathroom. Tom says it is and describes where the pipes are.

Tom offers to pay for the signage for the small town truck. He says he'll go to Vermont Tees and bring back a picture of what the design will look like.

Dennis Mirante says he brought up a lot of these issues in 2014 when he was on the selectboard and they were brushed aside. He wants to know what has changed now to make it such a big issue. Tom says that since the selectboard signed the personnel policy, it hasn't been enforced. David says it's not technically an ordinance, it's a policy, and it is what the town follows.

WRC – MTAP Scope / USDA CF Grant

Maggie Foley introduces herself as a subcontractor for WRC who will be working with Athens for the Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP). She goes through their scope of work. It's to help smaller towns access state and federal dollars. There are four phases: needs assessment, opportunity assessment, application assistance, project management for implementation.

Maggie understands that Athens has already identified two projects, being the town garage and the community center building. She says there could be further prioritizing within those two projects.

Her opportunity assessment (identifying grants) can build on the work that's already been done by VLCT and others.

Maggie brings up that the town is no longer eligible for the USDA CF grants. Hannah says that Mike McConnell told her that with the 2020 census data that the USDA just received, the town's median household income had gone up by about \$24,000 which makes the town ineligible for the grant. The board asks a lot of questions on the census data. Maggie says she will look into the details of it. She says other towns have received this news as well and been very surprised. Mike McConnell was also going to look into it. Hannah says it's very unfortunate right now because the town just engaged an architect to do scoping work specific to the USDA CF grant.

WRC has a timeline to work on Phase 1 in quarter 4 2023 and Phase 2 in quarter 1 2024. Maggie understands there is urgency in Athens around the projects, and she will take into account.

There is no cost to the town for the MTAP program. She says that the town just needs to have a point person. She says Hannah has been acting as a point person already.

Denise makes a motion to engage with the MTAP Scope of Work with Windham Regional. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Maggie asks for the board's priorities for moving forward with looking for funding. She wonders if there are any benefits for looking at big picture visioning.

Krista says that the priorities that came up at the ARPA hearing were the roof on the town garage, mold issues, bathroom and storage space; and vault for town records at the Community Center.

Maggie suggests to look at the town garage as one big project with a lot of components instead of a piecemeal project because it may be beneficial to get grants that cover different components as part of a whole project. She says once the scoping study is complete, which may be as early as mid-October, she can start looking into funding sources.

The board reiterates the need for a safe place for the highway crew to work.

Maggie says she will begin to develop the Needs Assessment based on the priorities that the board has just mentioned. She asks how she should communicate with the board. David asks her to report to the board every couple of months in addition to staying in touch with Hannah in between.

Boards and Officials

Don C says the cemetery commission cancelled its September meeting. They will meet the first wednesday in December for their annual budget meeting.

Sandi / Community Center – The chili cookoff is September 30th. First prize is a \$100 gift card to J&H Hardware, second and third prizes are also J&H gift cards. People who want to cook should sign up soon. They will use the town signboard to announce it. There will also be a Halloween party in October.

Krista reads the schoolboard news from Lynn Morgan. Attached here.

Treasurer Report

Hannah says taxes have been collected and there is about \$95,000 delinquent. School taxes are being paid on the warrant at this meeting. She plans to allocate money to the internal funds this month.

The new laptop is all set up and all the town's NEMRC programs are migrated to NEMRC cloud for both Hannah and the listers.

The Dead River repair folks will come to work on the fill pipe in the town office oil tank on October 16th.

David reads some figures from the 2020 census that he looked up on his phone. In 2010, the median income for Athens was \$32,273 for males and \$20,625 for females. In 2020 the average household income now is \$89,660. The difference seems to be over \$30,000 if you add the individual figures together. People laugh. Krista points out that that's the average, so she guesses a couple millionaires moved into town. The guess all around is that a few very high-income individuals moved into town and have thrown off the income data. Or else it is a mistake. David wonders if this is actually 2020 data, or the Covid time of higher property values. Sandi finds it hard to believe, with the older, retired population, that income has risen so dramatically. David says Athens was in a lower bracket for Windham county and the area, and he doesn't think it's true that the town has been lifted out of that lower income level. He would like to look into if there is a way to appeal or argue the census data. Hannah points out that individual income doesn't really have a bearing on how much property taxes people pay to support town projects, because anyone can live in an average valued home. Krista points out that people can be renters too.

Record Keeping Policy

Krista says she thinks the board should consider implementing a record keeping or time keeping policy that informs what is written on a timecard. She says the time allocated to tasks should be listed as well as the tasks themselves. And to track when breaks are taken. She says that she doesn't think it makes sense to dictate when breaks should be taken, because of the nature of the road work. She says it should be clear that they get an hour for lunch and how many other

breaks. David suggests Krista draft a policy. She has several standard examples and can pull a draft together for the next meeting. David suggests she send it out before the next meeting so they can vote on it in October. There is some discussion about the possible burden on the employees of tracking tasks and breaks.

Roads

Sandi says Whitney Hill was done. Matt ordered culverts and gravel. He worked on Sam Farr and graded Brookline Rd. today. Krista asked if Ivor Stevens was helping with Whitney Rd. Sandi says that he was because Eugene is still not able to work. Krista wants to know who approves hiring a contractor. David says the board discussed hiring outside help if needed.

Denise asks if the Whitney Rd. work is being funded by the stormwater grant. The board says yes.

A.S. Clark will be working on Reed Rd. in October. The slide has only been slowly shifting, not too much.

Sandi says that about half of the winter sand has been delivered.

Krista asks whoever talks to Matt to thank him for putting the Valley Cemetery Rd. sign back up so quickly. Sandi suggests to leave a message at the town garage next time anyone notices a sign down.

Janet makes a motion to have a hearing on reclassifying Ober Hill Rd. and discuss Whitney Hill Rd. For reclassifying as well.

Krista asks what reclassification would do. David says that depending on how they were classified, it means the town would or wouldn't have to fix them.

Denise asks what they are classified as now. Both are Class 3. David says parts of Ober Hill shouldn't be classified as Class 3. With Ober Hill, the town would have to involve Westminster and maybe Rockingham as well because the road goes through both towns.

Krista asks what it would mean to reclassify Whitney Rd. Janet says that there isn't a turnaround on for trucks and the grader can't make it all the way up. Krista asks isn't that true for a lot of roads? She thinks it looks bad that residents ask for help and the selectboard responds by suggesting the road be reclassified.

Carmen Dresser says that Whitney Rd. wasn't repaired completely recently. She says that in the winter the town only plows to just beyond their driveway. She says the highway crew has asked and they have agreed to let them turn around in their driveway and keep it clear for the road crew. She says the house at the end of the road does access their house in the winter by foot, but emergency vehicles couldn't make it up there if they needed to.

Krista asks if reclassification would be brought up if the residents hadn't asked for help. Janet says it's been mentioned several times, but not at meetings.

David says that the other towns would have to attend the hearing if there was one. Tom Taylor asks how a road could be thrown up if there's a house on it and the owner has paid taxes for over 100 years. David says they might not, but Ober Hill could be a good candidate for reclassification to a town trail. He says they should get some council from an attorney before they move towards a hearing. Reclassifying might not need input from the other towns, but discontinuing definitely would. Tom Taylor asks if there are barricades on Ober Hill by the second bridge. Hannah says there are not. There is concern that there is a large drop and that some GPS direct people to go that way to get to Athens.

Krista asks if there is a legal fees line in the budget. There is.

Sandi says the DOT map shows Ober Hill being Class 3 the whole way. Tom Taylor remembers meeting with Westminster, Rockingham and the state and them saying it was a class 4 road. David wants to get the current class clarified.

Executive Session

David makes a motion to go into Executive session at 8:02 to reference a personnel matter and a legal matter, for which premature public knowledge would put the town at a substantial disadvantage. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David makes a motion to exit executive session at 8:30. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

No decisions were made in executive session.

David makes a motion that the town pay the employee contribution of one employee's BCBS health insurance for the next six months, starting in the next pay period. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Warrants and Mail

The warrant was signed and mail opened.

David makes a motion to sign the scoping agreement between WRC and Town of Athens. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David makes a motion to sign the amended grant agreement for Grants in Aid. Janet seconds; Put to a vote: all in favor.

David opens a notice from Cargill Salt that quotes \$86/ton. Accepting the quote does not mean the town has to buy their sand. David asks if there is a quote for the new type of salt. Janet says she called them today and will talk to them this week.

David makes a motion to accept the Cargill quote. Sandi seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

David reads the flyer for an Aging Successfully Health and Benefits fair on September 22nd at the Waypoint Center in Bellows Falls.

Krista reads an ACLU bulletin regarding the rights of unhoused individuals.

Further Business

Sandi says Michael Marquis needs to be paid by October if the town wants the septic plans. The plans will be good forever and the permit doesn't have to be filed for immediately.

David asks if the payment is coming out of the ARPA funds. He wants to know if they are good with everything they need to do for ARPA.

Sandi makes a motion to sign the contract and pay for it from the ARPA funds before October 1st. Denise seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor.

Sandi says they had a medical emergency on Reed Rd. and the 911 numbering was wrong. Holmes is 154 and Lentz is 152 which isn't sequential and the emergency responders couldn't find them. David says the numbers go by the location of the houses not the driveways, so it could be thrown off. Krista asks who does the numbering. David says initially it was done by a contractor. Now Hannah is the coordinator. There is discussion about the issue.

Tom Taylor also says there are road signs missing and emergency vehicles can't find the roads.

Sandi says they need to find out what the numbering system is supposed to be. Hannah offers to give her the 911 manual. Hannah says she will fix any obvious problems, but is not going to renumber every house in town.

Tom Taylor says someone on the board or the health officer should take a look at what is going on by Tenny's bridge. There is a new house trailer moved in that the town had made them move out once before, and there's a bunch of trash on the edge of the brook, there's a new bridge across the brook, and a second camper trailer as well that isn't fit to live in and hangs over the brook. He says it's an awful mess on the side of the road.

*David makes a motion to adjourn. Krista seconds. All in favor.
Adjourned at 9:01*

Respectfully submitted,
Hannah Regier, Town Clerk