

The Athenian

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Sponsored by Grafton Cares

MARCH 2021

It's Still Winter, But Things Are Happening

The COVID Virus has made us cautious with being out and about. The need to social distance and to wear masks, along with the terrible death toll, makes for less than normal living.

Yet, life goes on as we saw with our successful, virtual, annual town meeting and subsequent elections in which large numbers of Athenians took part. Also, the issue of the dissolution of the forced school merger is proceeding with a democratic process. Democracy is alive and well.

In addition, the sap is beginning to flow and summer gardens are being planned along with the coming of vaccines that promise a return to normal life is possible. There is hope.

-Dennis Hunt

Select Board Meeting Tidbits

In addition to news in other pieces below, here are a few things from the February Select Board meeting that might be of interest:

- In response to a question during public comments, there was a clarification about the role and responsibilities of the elected Road Commissioner office, and distinguishing it from the hired and paid positions of the road crew.
- Concern was expressed at the tenor of the Board calling into question the professional integrity of Ted Reeves, the engineer hired by Taylor Hill Rd. residents. Concern was also expressed about how long, costly, and contentious this whole process had become. It was also clarified that Taylor Hill residents were not suing the town.
- It was noted that this was James Trimble's last meeting as a member of the Select Board and gratitude was expressed for his service.
- There was a discussion about a possible candidates' forum at or during the informational meeting preceding Town Meeting voting, but David Bemis said no since candidates are not allowed to speak about their candidacy on the floor of a Town Meeting. It was suggested that the Town virtual meeting service could be used if someone wanted to



organize it. It was also suggested that this newsletter could play a role, but due to the nonprofit, apolitical status of Grafton Cares that is not an option.

- Andy Toepfer and Jay Maciejowski asked for a letter from the Board approving the purchase of the James Massey property by the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association (WHPA) for conservation purposes. A discussion followed about public recreation use of the property including possible ATV access. WHPA will consider this request. The Board

approved the request for a letter of support. Sandi Capponcelli stated that she knew Mr. Massey would be glad that his land was passing to WHPA.

- Upcoming school district meetings and voting were discussed.
- Plans and details for the upcoming informational meeting were discussed. Hannah was given permission to digitize the Town Report so it can be accessed from the Town website.
- Matt Perry reported that everything was holding up and going well. A grant application to the state is underway for stone lining on Bemis Hill and Walker Rd. Ordering of gravel for mud season was discussed and Matt will seek quotes from 3 sources. If they are under \$10,000 it will not have to go out to bid. Janet Perry stated that the Freightliner has been inspected and approved for the warranty.
- A brief executive session was called by Denise Randall to discuss a personnel matter. No decisions were made and no motions followed the executive session.

Sherry Maher

Annual Town Meeting Ballot Results

While the attendance at the Virtual Informational Meeting on February 25 was low, the total number of voters casting ballots appears to have been 191, which is a 67% turn out, and we believe a town record. There were so many ballots to complete with many questions for Athens voters to weigh in on, and thus much for the Election Officials to count after the polls closed.

Complete results have been posted on the Athens community [FaceBook page](#) and the town website. Here are the newsworthy highlights: Voters said YES to Article 1 by a margin of 136 to 43 in favor of electing a Road Commissioner. On Article 5 voters said YES to transferring the \$32K earmarked for a bathroom at the Town Garage to the 2021 General Fund to reduce taxes. The Town budget passed by a vote of 120 to 57, and Article 7 on trash pickup passed by a vote of 95 to 81 meaning that we will be moving to an alternating week schedule come April, with trash pick-up one week and recycle the following week. All of the articles for funds to support the usual array of social service agencies passed by overwhelming majorities.

With regard to Town Officials, Janet Perry defeated Dan Taylor 113 to 71 for a 3-yr Select Board seat, and Matt Perry defeated Dan Taylor 128 to 61 for a 1-yr term as Road Commissioner. Newly elected officers who ran unopposed included Angel Squires elected to a 3-yr term as Auditor, Tina White for a 1-yr term as Campbell Fund Trustee, and Ginger Maciejowski as a write in candidate for a 2-yr term on the School Board. All incumbents were overwhelmingly re-elected to their posts. With Janet Perry newly elected to the Select Board, there will be an Auditor post to fill as she cannot hold both offices. If you are interested in filling that post, give your name to the Select Board before their next monthly meeting when they typically make appointments for other posts.

Article 1 to accept the vote of Westminster to pull out of the WNUESD, passed by a vote of 132 to 42. The slate of candidates for the 3 offices of Clerk, Moderator and Treasurer for both the High School and the WNUESD were voted in to their 1-yr terms, and school budgets passed.

- Sherry Maher

Notes from the WNUESD School Board

It has been a busy month full of legal battles to work on understanding. Act 46 was used by the state Dept. of Education last year to force Athens, Grafton and Westminster into a single school district to save money, or so they said. Right now, the only savings is in the stabilizing of the equalized pupil count. This is a number used to determine the maximum we can spend per student without a monetary penalty. However, this merger took the schools out of town control and put it into the control of the WNUESD. This means that the school discussions are done at a WNUESD meeting instead of the individual town meetings. As a result of this lack of town control, the town of Westminster has voted to ask permission from the rest of the union to withdraw from the union. Athens and Grafton have voted on this request and permission has been granted to Westminster to withdraw from the Union. Now the state has to weigh in on the request. We are waiting to see if

the state will allow Westminster and Ath-Graf to become separate districts or must remain as a single district.

This year we have been focusing on Act 173. To the best of my understanding, this act will change the formula the state uses to help fund special education (sp ed). Instead of basing it on a formula that includes the number sp ed students, and a percentage of the actual costs, it will be a block grant based on the school population. Schools with a high number of students with special needs will not get any more than schools with few or no such students. This means that the small schools or poorer districts such of those in Windham Northeast Supervisory Union and Bellows Falls could have to pay out of pocket for these mandated services and wealthier and larger schools, such as those in the greater Burlington area or Stowe, will have excess money. Board members from our area have helped form a 173 Coalition that is lobbying the house and senate to bring to light the disparities in this Act and the inequality of education opportunities it will create. I will keep you up-to-date as more develops regarding the reworking of Act 173.

- Lynn Morgan

Grafton Cares Update

Does one ever tire of spring? We are sure it's going to happen, and every year it does. And though we know it well enough to write a very accurate description of its characteristics, we are always awed by spring's arrival, and inspired by its promise. Such is how we feel at Grafton Cares, and having weathered the worst of winter, we now look forward to attaining herd immunity in the not too distant future so that we can resume the full range of our activities. Considering the past month however, here is what we've been up to: 3 rides to medical appointments; delivery of Meals on Wheels to 10 people; delivery of 3 sunshine baskets; delivery of 1/2 cord of firewood; and distribution of \$185 in gas cards. We facilitated the acquisition of a new stove, coordinating among 3 agencies for financing and installation. We also received the donation of 2 new raised toilet seats.

Happy spring to everyone!

- Bill Toomey

Food News You Can Use

Below is a list of local sites where food assistance is available at no or little cost to you. Please get the word out to your friends and neighbors about these programs as we go through these uncertain times.

Grafton Community Church Food Pantry. The Grafton Community Church is sponsoring free food for pickup at the Church during the week. Staples such as pasta, tomato sauce, jam, oatmeal, and sometimes even frozen meat are available. Contact Mary Feder at graftonchurch@gmail.com or call her at the church at

843-2346 and leave your name and phone number or email to arrange a pickup time. Food can be brought to your car and “social distancing” will be maintained along with wearing a mask. Delivery can also be arranged.

Veggie van Go Leland & Gray Lower Parking Lot

Free food is available each month at the high school. The date this month is Wednesday, March 10th from 12-1. Just drive to the lower parking lot, stay in your car, and a box will be brought out and put into your trunk. The purpose of the program is to help people obtain fresh fruits and vegetables to sustain a healthy lifestyle. All are welcome and no proof of eligibility is required. This is hosted by Grace Cottage Hospital and sponsored by the Vermont Food Bank.

Townshend Community Food Shelf. The long-time food shelf is open and providing food to those who need it. They have limited fruit, vegetables, milk, frozen meat, and fresh bread. They also have canned food, pasta, rice, and shelf stable proteins.

They are located in the Townshend Church and are open every Monday from 6pm to 7pm. Line up with your car and you will be given a number and let into the pantry as a group and out a separate exit. Be sure to wear your mask. If you have questions please call 365-4348. Their mailing address is P.O. Box 542, Townshend, VT 05353.

Meals On Wheels. Senior Solutions in Springfield, VT sponsors a Meals on Wheels program for seniors and those with disabilities. Grafton Cares provides pickup and delivery three times a week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday. The meals are prepared in the kitchen of Valley Cares Assisted Living in Townshend. Sign up is straight forward. Call Senior Solutions Senior Help Line at 1-800-642-5119 for all the particulars and enjoy having meals delivered to your door in Athens and Grafton.

Quadruple Your EBT Benefits at the Brattleboro Winter Farmers Market – Do you have 3SquaresVT/SNAP benefits? Now through March, when you use 3SquaresVT/ SNAP or P/EBT benefits for a curbside pickup order at the Brattleboro Winter Farmers Market, you'll get up to \$30 extra in Crop Cash and Food Boost to purchase fruits, veggies and more. That means \$10 in EBT buys \$40 of local food! Orders can be made online from 9AM Monday morning to 9 AM Thursday morning for pick up the following Saturday. You First Coupons are also accepted. Call Sherry at 869-2141 to find out more or go to www.brattleborowinterfarmersmarket.org.

-Dennis Hunt



Meetinghouse Prepares for Annual Plant Sale and More

Gardening season really is just around the corner! So mark your calendar now for the Annual Meetinghouse Plant Sale set for Saturday, May 29 from 10AM to 12 NOON.

Just as we did last year, everything will be safely set up on the Meetinghouse Lawn, with plenty of space for safe social distancing. Masks are required. We'd love to hear from area gardeners who have plant division work to do come the spring. We'd love to help

those plant babies find a new home, while you are helping us in our efforts to care for the Meetinghouse! It's all about community.

And stay tuned for more exciting news regarding caring for the Meetinghouse. We can't divulge too much as yet, but let's just say that you'll definitely start seeing a difference as the next phase gets underway. Watch for updates at the [Meethighouse Facebook page](#).

- Sherry Maher

Nature Museum Update

Coming up soon: An Evening with Carolyn Finney, author of Black Faces, White Faces. Hosted by the Nature Museum, an online event March 18 at 7pm with a sliding scale beginning at \$5. Learn more and register at nature-museum.org.

-Valerie Barry

March Library Corner

Smiles and Gratitude

We are honored to receive a donation in memory of Jack Q. Robinson for our annual appeal. Support for the library during this time has been unprecedented and we are very grateful for the many contributions. Grafton Public Library volunteer David Ross kept our book return box from overflowing while we were closed for staff vacation—thank you! Once again we owe a debt of gratitude to Bill Toomey for donating his time and talents for a second Zoom event. We had nearly sixty attendees reveling in “Tavern Tales” and enjoying a memorable night of storytelling. Thank you for the gift of stories, Bill!

Upcoming Programs

Spanish conversation (intermediate level) continues weekly on Zoom. Newcomers are always welcome to join this enthusiastic group. Our final session of the winter Nature and Books Discussion Series, co-sponsored with the Nature Museum, culminates in March, as the sap begins to rise and the natural world catches the attention more forcefully again, with the essays in Vesper Flights by Helen MacDonald: “She

notices things, the magic and the wonder and the consolation of nature, and she mines what those things have to teach us about being better humans and stewards of this planet. Her exquisite prose will get you to pay attention too.” Join us for an enriching curated book discussion.

New Books

We’ve FINALLY got some brand-new books on the shelf—hurrah for our book distributor in Pennsylvania, where things must be turning a corner! Look for the newest by bestselling authors, Jodi Picoult, John Hart, Kristin Hannah, Michael Koryta, Lee Child, and Sue Miller, among others. For a full list of new titles, ask to be placed on our mailing list or contact the library. We are open by appointment (drop-ins welcome, when the library is free) or you may take advantage of curbside service. Please see our hours of operation below.

March Programs:

Spanish Conversation on Zoom, Tuesdays 11am, intermediate level

Nature & Books Winter Series on Zoom: March 24, 6-7:30pm, Vesper Flights by Helen MacDonald. Contact the library to register and for more information.

Library Hours of Operation

Open by Appointment: Monday 10-1, 2-4, Thursday 2-5, Friday 2-5 and Saturday 9-12

Open for Curbside Service Only: Tuesday 10-1, 2-5 and Wednesday 10-1, 2-5. Phone - 843-2404

- Michelle Dufort

Chester Tree & Shrub Sale 2021

Tired of snow? Think Spring! Chester Townscape’s annual Tree and Shrub Sale helps landowners prepare for the growing season by offering them good-size, proven trees and shrubs at below regular retail prices so people can beautify their properties while supporting a nonprofit’s civic beautification projects. The five specimens offered in 2021 are a Korean Dogwood tree and four shrubs: compact Red Osier Dogwood ‘Artic Fire,’ Dwarf Sweet Pepperbush ‘Hummingbird,’ Azalea ‘Ribbon Candy,’ and Doublefile Viburnum ‘Summer Snowflake.’ All specimens are hardy and low maintenance, sport colorful blossoms, and offer multi-season interest. Most are native, and all appeal to pollinators and/or birds. Any one of these plants would make a wonderful present for Mother’s or Father’s Day, birthdays, anniversaries, housewarming celebrations or other special events.

Buyers do not have to be Chester residents; but they do have to preorder and pay before March 29 and then pick up the plants, likely in the first week of May, from

Sunshine Acres Nursery on Route 11 in Chester. For an informative and colorful order form that gives details about the plants, their prices, and where to send the check and order, please visit www.ourchester.org or www.chestervt.gov/chester-townscape.html to download the form. For more information or an order form, please contact Lillian Willis at 802-875-1340 or lbwillisct@comcast.net.

- Lillian Willis

Entries From A Weather Journal

As the saying goes, “March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb.” Oh yeah?? To say that March is unpredictable is an understatement. Look what happened in 2017.

March 1, 2017. “Once again, incredibly warm. Not near freezing at night. What happened to winter? Temps: 53 to 41.”

March 31, 2017. “Winter Storm Warning in effect for all of today and most of tomorrow. Snow, maybe sleet. A wet snow. Temps: 34 to 31.” -Dennis Hunt



Thoughts To Ponder

What can we say about March! The winter has been long and challenging and we are anxious for spring to appear. Below are three quotes to help get us through.

(1) “March is the month God created to show people who can’t drink what a hangover is like.

-Garrison Keillor

(2) “The first day of spring is one thing, and the first spring day is another. The difference between them is sometimes as great as a month.” -Henry Van Dyke

(3) “A cloud comes over the sunlit arch, a wind comes off a frozen peak, and you’re two months back in the middle of March.” -Robert Frost

All quotes selected by Dennis Hunt

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Select Board Meetings: 3rd Thursday 7:00 PM

Budget Committee: 2nd & 4th Tuesday 7:00 PM

Meeting House Committee: 2nd Monday 10:00 AM

School Board: 2nd Thursday 6:30 Grafton School

Do you have a news item for The Athenian or would you like to be on our email list and get the newsletter in your inbox?

CONTACT US at theathenianvt@gmail.com.



MARCH RECYCLING DATES:

MARCH 15 & 29

WATCH FOR THE NEW TRASH SCHEDULE IN APRIL